
RESEARCH ARTICLE

A Corpus-Assisted Critical Discourse Analysis of Media Framing in Conflict Reporting

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ABSTRACT

Conflicting media frames of Hassan Nasrallah reshape both regional risk calculations and collective memory. This article examines how he is discursively constructed across international (etic) and regional (emic) English-language news reports before and after his death. At the heart of this study is the question: How do emic and etic outlets differently authorize Nasrallah's voice before and after his death? Using a multi-layered framework that integrates Critical Discourse Analysis, Systemic Functional Grammar, quotation studies, framing theory, and corpus-assisted methods, the analysis covers thirteen articles from Reuters, AP, AFP, Al Jazeera English, and Al Mayadeen English. These articles were selected for their comprehensive representation of media perspectives and their influence within their respective media ecosystems, ensuring methodological rigor and sampling validity. Findings show that etic and emic outlets operate within distinct epistemic regimes that allocate agency, legitimacy, and moral meaning in contrasting ways. Pre-death, etic reports strategically amplify Nasrallah through frames of security, threat, and deterrence, while emic outlets emphasize political identity, historical memory, and resistance. Post-death, a discursive rupture occurs: etic outlets enact epistemic erasure, depicting the killing as a technical operational event, whereas emic outlets reassert Nasrallah as a symbolic and moral figure through sacralized naming and communal voice. Ultimately, the study argues that this emic/etic divide is not merely stylistic but political, exposing how Global North media reproduce a 'coloniality of knowledge' that silences resistance figures, while regional narratives function as sites of epistemic counter-memory. The insights from this study could inform newsroom strategies by guiding journalists to navigate these epistemic divides more critically and by helping policymakers recognize the broader impacts of media narratives on international relations and socio-political stability.

KEYWORDS

Critical Discourse Analysis; media framing; emic/etic epistemology; coloniality of knowledge; epistemic violence; corpus-assisted discourse analysis

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1. Introduction

The death of Hassan Nasrallah in an Israeli strike marked one of the most consequential moments of media narration in recent Middle Eastern history. This event benefited Israeli defense strategies by seemingly eliminating a key adversary, and also served Global North media outlets that perpetuate security narratives. Conversely, it disrupted the narratives of resistance upheld by regional actors and media sympathetic to Hezbollah. As the Secretary-General of Hezbollah, Nasrallah held a uniquely polarizing position within regional and international discourse. His assassination, therefore, generated not only an informational event but also a discursive rupture that compelled media organizations to re-stabilize meaning, allocate responsibility, and articulate the symbolic stakes of political death. This is particularly significant for journalists, policymakers, and educators who are grappling with the complexities of media representation in conflict zones, as it underscores the role of media narratives in shaping public understanding and policy formulation. The region had already been tense, with past Hezbollah-Israel conflicts drawing intense media scrutiny and shaping narratives around security and resistance. Past incidents, such as the 2006 Lebanon War, highlighted Hezbollah's influence and the frictions it posed to Israeli defense strategies. These representational acts were far from uniform.

Instead, they reflected the epistemic orientations, institutional histories, and ideological commitments of the media systems producing them.

This article examines how Nasrallah is discursively constructed across international (etic) and regional (emic) English-language reporting before and after his death. Global wire agencies (Reuters, AP, AFP) act as institutional arbiters of news, privileging narratives of security and diplomacy and strictly curating epistemic authority to align with state power. This is characterized by 'etic equals wire-agency distance,' a stance that maintains detachment and focuses on official geopolitical narratives. In contrast, regional broadcasters (Al Jazeera English, Al Mayadeen English) construct political meaning through locally resonant frameworks of cultural memory, grievance, and communal identity, aligning with 'emic equals resistance-oriented proximity.' These outlets emphasize historical and symbolic elements that resonate more closely with local audiences. These contrasting epistemic positions shape not only the interpretation of conflict but also the very right of political actors to speak as historical subjects. For example, an etic clause like 'a strike killed Nasrallah' demonstrates how transitivity choices can naturalize agency, presenting his death as a mere operational fact rather than a deliberate act by human agents. This example helps illustrate the SFG principles later analyzed in the study.

To analyze these dynamics, the study adopts a multi-layered framework that integrates Critical Discourse Analysis, Systemic Functional Grammar, quotation and attribution theory, framing analysis, and corpus-assisted methods. Each of these lenses interlocks to offer a comprehensive methodological approach: Systemic Functional Grammar operationalizes Critical Discourse Analysis's social critique at a clause level, enabling a granular examination of language use. This cohesive framework facilitates a systematic comparison of naming practices, agency distribution, voice construction, epistemic stance, and lexical patterning across thirteen pre-death and post-death news reports. The analysis reveals that Nasrallah's representation is not simply a function of the events reported, but involves active epistemic policing, determining who is permitted to speak as a subject of history versus who is silenced as an object of security.

By juxtaposing etic and emic news narratives, the study demonstrates how media discourse contributes to competing regimes of meaning-making around political violence and leadership in the Middle East. This comparative approach responds to the broader imperative to decolonize critical discourse studies, challenging epistemic hierarchies that privilege Global North security narratives while rendering regional histories of resistance invisible at the very moment of their elimination. It also situates Nasrallah's assassination within broader scholarly debates on ideology, epistemology, and the symbolic construction of conflict.

2. Literature Review

This study uses a multidisciplinary, multi-layered framework. It combines Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG), quotation analysis, emic/etic epistemological framework, and corpus-assisted techniques. The goal is to examine how Hassan Nasrallah is represented discursively in international and regional media before and after his death. This approach aligns with recent advancements in decolonial media scholarship, particularly in how media narratives from the Global South challenge dominant epistemological hierarchies. Building on the work of Resende (2021), which links Critical Discourse Studies with Latin American perspectives, this study situates its analysis within these broader dialogues. Notably, while CDA work on Hezbollah has extensively explored media representations, there remains a critical gap in integrating these findings with newer decolonial critiques that emphasize the epistemic power dynamics between Global North and South narratives. By explicitly bridging these two areas, this study advances the discourse on how media constructs political identities. Furthermore, it addresses the overlooked intersections between critical discourse frameworks and decolonial critiques, thereby making a novel contribution to understanding the media's role in shaping political identities across cultural and geopolitical divides.

2.1. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

One of CDA's main objectives is to highlight the relationship among language, society, and ideology in media discourse. It also seeks to critically examine social inequality as it is expressed through language (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Linguistic choices are linked to broader sociopolitical structures. CDA states that language is interconnected with other elements of social life (Fairclough, 2003).

Society and discourse are indirectly connected. Their relationship is mediated by shared mental representations of social actors as group members (van Dijk, 1995). Language and discourse provide structural possibilities for emphasizing and de-emphasizing information and for conveying ideological opinions about ingroups and outgroups (van Dijk, 2006).

This interplay between language and discourse is crucial for understanding how Nasrallah is positioned across media systems in this study. CDA research on Middle Eastern media strengthens this framework's relevance. Barkho's work (Barkho, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2010) shows that global news organizations develop distinct discursive profiles. These profiles reflect institutional ideologies and geopolitical alignments. Western wire agencies tend to privilege official Western and Israeli sources. In contrast, regional broadcasters often foreground local memory, cultural belonging, and normative commitments to resistance. The analysis also draws on ethnographic perspectives (Blommaert, 2005; Krzyżanowski, 2018). These perspectives show how knowledge about political actors is produced, authorized, and contested across different institutional and social fields. To illustrate this, consider a brief vignette from a newsroom in Beirut, where editors routinely debate the framing of Nasrallah's

image before publication. This process often involves balancing the narrative of resistance with international perceptions, highlighting the nuanced editorial decisions that embody broader geopolitical tensions. Together, these CDA traditions provide a coherent and integrated foundation for analyzing how media outlets construct political identity, authority, and legitimacy across competing regional and international contexts.

2.2. Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG)

Halliday (1994) states that linguistic analysis helps in understanding a text by showing how and why it conveys its meaning. It also helps evaluate whether the text is effective for its purpose. Halliday's metafunctions are components of meaning in language that correspond to three grammatical components. These grammatical patterns, such as theme, transitivity, and clause logic, are crucial in conflict reporting. They reveal how texts distribute roles such as actors, goals, and affected participants (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Lukin (2017) explains that these patterns are linked to ideology and enable texts to construct a specific worldview. She (2005, p. 144) suggests that through 'this set of grammatical options, it is possible to track a number of features in these texts, which will help us to see the kind of point of view on the war which each provides.'

Appraisal Theory (Martin & White, 2005) supplements this framework. It offers a system for analyzing affect, judgment, and appreciation. These evaluative resources are key to diagnosing how news reports position audiences with or against Nasrallah. They help explain how emic and etic outlets construct legitimacy, risk, heroism, and threat. Fenton-Smith's (2007) analysis of political death discourse supports this study's framework. It shows how transitivity and appraisal work together to construct meaning.

Through this combined approach, SFG in this study enables the examination of how responsibility for Nasrallah's death and his symbolic legacy are linguistically framed.

2.3. Quotation Analysis

Quotations are a crucial element of news articles. Through them, media systems construct narrative stance and epistemic authority. Quotations serve as tools for so-called objective reporting (Barkho, 2010). They allow news producers to maintain distance between their voices and 'the person reported' (Fairclough, 1995, p. 81). However, quotations are not neutral reproductions of speech. They are mediated representations shaped by attribution, the form of quotation, the reporting verb, and the reporters' evaluative stance (Thompson, 1996). Chen's (2005) categorization of verbal processes shows how a particular process can reveal the reporter's attitude or opinion. Kuo (2007) argues that the choice of quotation type, whether direct or indirect, is ideological.

2.4. Framing and Ideological Selectivity

Framing theory offers an essential perspective on how news guides interpretation during political crises. Framing is defined as the selective emphasis on specific aspects of reality. This helps diagnose causes, define problems, and evaluate actions. Framing also draws on longer intertextual and cultural trajectories. The Discourse Historical Approach notes that news representations reactivate sedimented topoi, narrative templates, and historical analogies (Wodak & Meyer, 2009).

CDA research on regional political communication shows that media organizations foreground or suppress agency, victimhood, and legitimacy depending on their institutional and geopolitical orientations (Barkho, 2008; Yaghoobi, 2009). This study builds on these insights by tracing how etic outlets reproduce dominant security narratives. Emic sources, by contrast, emphasize historical grievances, local identity, and symbolic resistance.

2.5. Emic and Etic Epistemic Positionality

Comparing insider and outsider perspectives is a major contribution of ethnography to cultural studies (Chen, 2010; Xia, 2011). Emic and etic terms originated in anthropology. The emic approach 'analyzes particulars of concepts and phenomena in specific cultural settings.' In contrast, the etic approach 'focuses on universal of psychological process and human behavior' (Chen, 2010, p. 364).

Rampton et al. (2004, p. 2) suggest that using ethnography's 'accountable analytic procedures' helps CDA researchers limit their own personal biases. Studies using ethnography and CDA show that knowledge production is deeply rooted in institutional histories (Blommaert, 2006) and 'depend on institutional practices in which their members originate' (Krzyżanowski, 2018, p. 187). Emic outlets focus on interpretive continuity, symbolic meaning, and the moral positioning of political actors. Etic outlets, in contrast, construct legitimacy through professionalism, pluralisation of sources, and verification of events.

The emic/etic distinction is critical for challenging the coloniality of knowledge in discourse studies. Resende (2021) notes that the field has historically centred Global North epistemologies. Western perspectives are treated as objective universals, while Southern perspectives are marginalized as specific or ideological. By using the emic/etic distinction, this study aligns with decolonising CDS. It treats regional (emic) narratives as legitimate forms of knowledge that challenge the dominant framing of political violence.

2.6. Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies (CADS)

CDA analysis 'can be usefully supplemented by the quantitative analysis' provided by CADS (Fairclough, 2003, p. 6). Corpus linguistics alone cannot explain why text producers use specific linguistic patterns. Baker et al. (2008) warn that such methods are unable to contextualize findings within their specific social, political, and historical frameworks. Corpus linguistics findings help triangulate and strengthen insights from other analytical tools used here.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design and Analytical Framework

Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional analytical method is used to examine the interplay among textual form, discursive practice, and sociopolitical context. Building on this model, SFG and quotation analysis are integrated to extend textual analysis.

Discursive practice is examined through source selection, quotation patterns, and epistemic authority, while the sociopolitical dimension is addressed by considering regional conflict dynamics and media power structures.

The news articles are grouped into four clusters rather than treated as isolated texts, enabling both comparative and contrastive analysis. Articles were identified using specific search terms such as '*Hassan Nasrallah*,' '*Hezbollah*,' '*Israel*,' '*assassination*,' and '*strike*,' within the period from January 2024 to February 2025. To ensure methodological rigor and reduce bias, the coding process followed a structured analytical protocol based on explicit theoretical criteria. Articles were systematically categorized as either etic or emic by evaluating their epistemic sourcing and narrative perspective against the study's framework. The first dataset comprises etic news articles published before Nasrallah's death, with one article each from Reuters, Associated Press (AP), and Agence France-Presse (AFP). The second dataset consists of emic news articles published before his death, including one from Al Jazeera English and another from Al Mayadeen English. The third dataset features post-death news articles, with two articles each from Reuters, AP, and AFP. The emic post-death dataset includes one article each from Al Jazeera English and Al Mayadeen English.

3.2. Data Selection

The dataset comprises thirteen English-language news articles published between 2024 and 2025, selected to facilitate comparative analysis of Nasrallah's discursive framing before and after his death across etic and emic media perspectives.

Reuters, Associated Press (AP), and Agence France-Presse (AFP) serve as etic sources, while Al Jazeera English (AJE) and Al Mayadeen English represent emic sources.

Article selection is based on the following criteria:

Representativeness: all media outlets are international, widely cited, and central within their media ecosystems.

Balance: emic and etic news articles are equal for both the pre-death and post-death periods.

Analytical suitability: the selected news articles feature clear naming practices, explicit source attribution, and sufficient quoting patterns to be analyzed using CDA, SFG, and quotation analysis.

Thematic relevance: all the selected news articles cover the developments in Hezbollah-Israel dynamics, Nasrallah's leadership, and regional political responses.

All news articles were retrieved from official online websites. The articles range from approximately 400 to 1000 words and adhere to hard-news reporting conventions.

3.3. Justifying the Emic and Etic Categorization

International news agencies are classified as etic sources because they report from an external perspective and adhere to global news conventions that emphasize geopolitical risk, diplomatic narratives, and security discourse.

Al Jazeera English is treated as an emic source due to its institutional epistemology. Barkho (2006, p. 3) notes that Al Jazeera was established to counter reliance on 'other cultures (mainly Western) interpretations of battles' in the Middle East and to allow Arab audiences 'to view their own culture with their own eyes.' Its editorial orientation is shaped by regional narrative positioning, functioning as a conduit of insider perspectives to external audiences rather than as an external observer, as Reuters or AFP do. However, the global reach of Al Jazeera English introduces nuances that complicate the insider-outsider binary, as it bridges local perspectives with a worldwide audience and occasionally adopts global frameworks itself. Al Mayadeen English employs an explicit resistance-oriented framework and serves as a clear emic perspective. Media source categorization is based on epistemic alignment rather than linguistic form.

3.4. Analytical Framework

Five analytical lenses are adopted to connect micro-linguistic choices to broader ideological patterns across the selected news articles.

3.4.1. Naming and Referential Strategies

The analysis applies Fairclough's (1995) analytical method to connect the textual form, discursive practices, and sociocultural context in the analyzed news articles. Van Dijk's (1998, 2006) ideological polarization framework is also used further to examine actor representation, presupposition, and evaluative implicature.

3.4.2. Transitivity and Appraisal Analysis

SFG is used to identify how agency, causation, and moral accountability are realized in news articles. Transitivity mapping uncovers whether Nasrallah, Israel, and Hezbollah are presented as agentive or backgrounded participants. Appraisal analysis traces evaluative meaning through Judgement and Affect (Martin & White, 2005). Together, SFG, transitivity, and appraisal analysis reveal how responsibility, heroism, or martyrdom are linguistically constructed.

3.4.3. Quotation and Attribution Analysis

Quotation and attribution analysis draws primarily from Thompson (1996), Chen (2005), and Barkho (2007). This analysis is conducted through three interrelated features to demonstrate how epistemic hierarchy and institutional stance are constructed in news reporting:

Source Hierarchy: maps the distribution of direct and indirect quotation, and reported speech across key actors in the news reporting (Israeli/US officials, Hezbollah/Iranian officials, Lebanese citizens).

Reporting Verbs: identifies the reporting verbs used to examine their ideological function. The analysis assesses the credibility of competing statements using the verbal processes: neutral (said), negative (claimed), and positive (asserted).

Institutional Stance: identifies the balance of quotation, paraphrasing, backgrounding, and editorial evaluation to determine how institutional stance is embedded in the news reporting.

3.4.4. Emic/Etic Epistemic Framing

The emic/etic distinction, as argued by Morris et al. (1999), is utilized in this study as a comparative system across three dimensions:

Epistemic Authority: identifies what each media outlet treats as credible and newsworthy.

Narrative Logic: determines whether the reporting foregrounds security, threat, resistance, or martyrdom.

Cultural-Symbolic Positioning: traces how shared history, collective memory, and communal identity are used to inform the representation of Nasrallah in the news articles.

3.4.5. Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies (CADS)

Partington et al. (2013) CADS techniques are adopted to identify systematic linguistic regularities and to support and complement the qualitative analysis. The news articles were processed using AntConc (Version 4.3.1) to generate initial word frequency lists and keyword-in-context (KWIC) concordances. CADS provides an additional analytical layer, enabling the identification of consistent discursive tendencies that may not be apparent through close qualitative analysis.

4. Analysis and Discussion

4.1. Naming and Referential Strategies

The emic and etic representations of Nasrallah as a political identity before and after his death exhibit a systematic divergence. These naming divergences pre-shape moral legibility for global audiences by framing Nasrallah as either a martyr or a militant. His death precipitated a significant shift in lexical usage between emic and etic sources. Notably, a stark contrast emerges in the portrayal of Nasrallah as a 'martyr' in emic sources versus a 'militant' in etic sources, illustrating the ideological divide. Etic news articles consolidate a security-bureaucratic identity, whereas emic articles shift from political-institutional labels to a sacralized identity grounded in martyrdom, resistance, and collective belonging. Table 1 shows the contrasting naming choices revealed by the CADS-derived keyword and collocation patterns across the pre- and post-death articles.

Table 1 - CADS Keyword and Collocation Patterns for Naming Nasrallah

Naming Term / Collocate	Pre-Death Etic	Pre-Death Emic	Post-Death Etic	Post-Death Emic	Ideological Effect
Hezbollah leader	11	0	9	0	Institutionalises identity; removes charisma or religious legitimacy
Nasrallah (bare surname)	18	6	15	4	De-personalises; flattens symbolic identity; typical in etic reporting
Secretary-General	3	4	0	2	Functional leadership frame; disappears from etic post-death corpus
Sayyed	0	12	0	15	Religious honorific; confers spiritual legitimacy (emic only)
Resistance leader / Axis of Resistance	0	9	0	13	Locates Nasrallah within regional, ideological narrative (emic)

Naming Term / Collocate	Pre-Death Etic	Pre-Death Emic	Post-Death Etic	Post-Death Emic	Ideological Effect
<i>Martyr / Martyrdom</i>	0	0	0	14	Sacralised post-death identity; exclusive to emic reporting
<i>Militant / militant group</i>	7	0	10	0	Frames Hezbollah as security threat; delegitimising function
<i>Iran-backed</i>	5	0	8	0	Geopolitical framing; externalises agency; situates identity through Iran
<i>Crowds / supporters</i>	1	3	4	11	Etic: demographic labels; Emic: collective belonging and loyalty
<i>Assassinated</i>	0	0	0	6	Moral agency attribution; emic linguistic choice for causality

Etic news articles rely on a specific set of institutional labels, such as ‘*Hezbollah leader*,’ ‘*Hezbollah chief*,’ and ‘*Iran-backed group’s head*.’ This tendency to use functional and geopolitical descriptors, as reflected in CADS frequencies, aims to reduce Nasrallah to the head of an armed organization rather than a religious or ideological symbol.

This representation is achieved through two main strategic patterns. Etic reporting tends to strip away any connotations of leadership and construct a neutral, depersonalized figure. The CADS shows that Nasrallah has been introduced without a title and merely by his name 18 times in pre-death reports and 15 times post-death. The second strategy is the constant linking of Nasrallah with terrorism by etic sources, presenting him with words like ‘*militant*,’ ‘*Iran-backed*,’ ‘*fugitive*,’ and ‘*mastermind*.’ These words are linked to threat, escalation, and regional tensions to strengthen his out-group identity.

In contrast to pre-death emic sources, post-death emic sources present Nasrallah with political-religious titles, such as ‘*Sayyed*,’ ‘*Secretary-General*,’ and ‘*Resistance leader*.’ These naming patterns are rooted in the discourse of resistance. CADS analysis shows that post-death emic sources increase the use of titles such as ‘*martyr*,’ ‘*martyred leader*,’ and ‘*Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah*,’ transforming Nasrallah from a political figure into a historical figure and a symbol of resistance.

The contrast demonstrates that naming is not a neutral descriptive act but an ideological one: etic outlets construct a security ontology in which Nasrallah is portrayed within narratives of threat, risk, and regional instability, whereas emic outlets construct a memory-resistance ontology that situates his identity within a historical lineage of struggle, sacrifice, and communal belonging.

4.2. Transitivity and Appraisal Analysis

Analysis of transitivity patterns in the post-death dataset demonstrates a significant intensification of ideological divergence between etic and emic outlets. Although the pre-death corpus revealed asymmetrical distributions of agency, the assassination of Nasrallah further amplifies these tendencies and establishes two distinct causal narratives. Etic sources maintain a framing characterized by institutional distance, operational vocabulary, and grammatical choices that minimize intentionality. In contrast, emic sources foreground human actors, assign explicit responsibility, and emphasize moral causality. These divergent configurations illustrate how the killing is rendered intelligible within competing epistemic frameworks. While ideological preferences play a role, it is also important to consider practical factors such as editorial deadlines and the length constraints typical of wire-service reporting, which may contribute to agency suppression by necessitating concise formulations. CADS of the material processes associated with the assassination further clarify this contrast. Etic reports predominantly employ structures that obscure or diffuse agency, whereas emic reports consistently foreground Israel as the deliberate actor responsible for Nasrallah’s death. Table 2 displays the frequency distribution of the principal material process patterns across the etic and emic articles.

Table 2 - Material Process Reporting of the Assassination (Etic vs Emic)

Process Realisation	Etic Frequency	Emic Frequency	Ideological Effect
Actor = Abstract or Weapon (a strike killed, the explosion levelled)	9	1	Conceals human intention and reframes violence as technical action.
Actor = Israel or IDF (Israel killed, Israeli army struck)	5	6	Assigns direct responsibility and constructs the event as deliberate aggression.
Passive Voice with Nasrallah as Goal (Nasrallah was killed)	7	0	Removes the Actor and foregrounds the victim while obscuring agency.
Nominalisation of death event (the killing, the assassination)	4	2	Converts action into abstract nouns, reducing immediacy and accountability.

These distributions demonstrate two fundamentally distinct approaches to narrating the same event. In etic reports, abstract or non-human actors are predominantly employed. For example, clauses such as *'a strike killed Nasrallah'* or *'the explosion levelled the building'* shift agency from human decision-makers to technical instruments. Selecting a weapon or an action as the Actor frames the killing as an operational occurrence rather than a morally significant act. The construction *'Nasrallah was killed'* omits the acting entity, causing the event to appear as an occurrence rather than an action performed by someone. Additionally, nominalisations such as *'the killing'* or *'his death'* further abstract the event by converting processes into nouns, which distances the action from the immediacy of violent causation.

The emic articles present a contrasting pattern. Israel is consistently cast as the Actor in six explicit material clauses describing the killing, using formulations such as *'Israel assassinated the Resistance leader'* and *'the Israeli forces struck the building.'* These choices assign clear responsibility and situate the death within a defined moral and political narrative. The absence of passive constructions regarding Nasrallah's death further reinforces this explicit attribution of agency. None of the emic texts use formulations equivalent to *'Nasrallah was killed.'* Instead, they consistently employ active clauses that emphasize human agency and intentionality.

Nominalization is present in emic texts but serves a distinct function. Terms such as *'the assassination'* or *'the killing'* typically appear in subsequent references, following a full clause that has already established Israel as the acting participant.

Consequently, the use of abstract forms does not obscure agency but instead condenses an event whose causal relationships have already been clearly articulated.

In addition to representing Israel, emic outlets distribute agency more broadly across the social field. Civilians, mourners, and community groups are depicted as both materially and symbolically active through clauses such as *'crowds filled the streets,'* *'supporters carried his image,'* and *'mourners vowed to continue his path.'* These patterns position the Lebanese public as active participants.

4.3. Quotation and Attribution Analysis

Quotation and attribution function as central mechanisms through which media narratives establish epistemic authority and position readers within competing interpretive frameworks. In the Nasrallah corpus, the allocation of voice diverges sharply between etic and emic outlets, and the post-death context intensifies these differences. Corpus-assisted findings highlight systematic contrasts in the distribution of quoted actors, the reporting verbs that introduce their statements, and the ideological hierarchies embedded in patterns of direct and indirect speech.

A frequency-based review of the dataset reveals a distinct asymmetry in voice volume. As shown in Table 3, Etic outlets in the post-death period produce the highest volume of distinct quotations, with 48 direct quotes and 73 indirect quotes, creating a multi-vocal environment dominated by competing claims. Israeli officials receive three times as many direct quotes post-death as before death, highlighting a marked shift in voice allocation. In contrast, Emic outlets, particularly in the pre-death period, rely on a monologic structure in which a single authoritative voice (Nasrallah) speaks at length, with 22 direct quotes, effectively narrating the event without interruption. To illustrate this contrast further, a quote from a Lebanese mourner expresses deep personal sacrifice, stating, *'Wish it was our kids, not you, Sayyid!'* On the other hand, the Israeli perspective is voiced exclusively through state officials, who frame the death as a security triumph, with Prime Minister Netanyahu declaring, *'He wasn't another terrorist. He was the terrorist.'* These concrete voices foreground affective divergence and animate the statistical shifts reported.

Table 3 - Distribution of Quotation Types

Analyzed Sub-Corpus	Direct Quotation (Count)	Indirect Quotation (Count)	Dominant Voice Feature
Emic Pre-Death	22	32	Monologic: Nasrallah is the primary narrator; few competing voices.
Etic Pre-Death	14	16	Threat-Focused: Nasrallah quoted only on escalation; Israel voiceless.
Emic Post-Death	13	17	Archival: Nasrallah's past voice is foregrounded; Israel silenced.
Etic Post-Death	48	73	Polyvocal: High volume of Israeli officialdom vs. anonymous Hezbollah sources.

The etic pattern reveals a structural reversal in epistemic authority. In Pre-Death reporting, Israeli officials are voiceless; they are represented as agents of action *'Israel killed,'* *'strike targeted'* but are rarely granted direct speech. In this phase, Nasrallah is the sole quoted actor, though his voice is strictly framed around threats and vows of retaliation. However, in Post-Death reporting,

the hierarchy flips: Israeli officials (Netanyahu, Gallant, Halevi) become the primary narrators, accounting for the majority of authoritative direct quotes. Hezbollah’s voice is simultaneously demoted to anonymous sources or summarized statements. This shift validates Chen’s (2007) observation that reporting verbs shape credibility. As Table 4 demonstrates, the specific choice of reporting verbs serves as an ideological filter.

Table 4 - Distribution of Reporting Verbs by Ideological Function

Reporting Verb Category	Verb Examples from Corpus	Etic Usage (Freq)	Emic Usage (Freq)	Ideological Function
Neutral (Verbal Process)	<i>said, added, announced, told, reported</i>	High (~85)	Moderate (~25)	Maintains wire service objectivity; used for all actors in Etic texts. Emic: Used to construct Nasrallah as a truth-teller (e.g., <i>explained, debunked</i>). Etic: Reserved for factual confirmation of death.
Positive (Assertive/Factive)	<i>confirmed, stressed, explained, affirmed, pointed out, debunked</i>	Low (~8)	High (~20)	Etic: Used to distance the outlet from Hezbollah's justifications. Emic: Used to frame Israeli narratives as false (e.g., <i>claims full of lies</i>).
Negative (Distancing)	<i>claimed, alleged, accused, blamed</i>	High (~15)	Low (~3)	Etic: Frames Hezbollah as militant (vowed) or emotional (wailed).
Ideological / Illocutionary	<i>vowed, warned, threatened, wailed, mourned</i>	High (~20)	Moderate (~5)	

In the Etic corpus, the most frequent collocates for Hezbollah involve illocutionary verbs such as ‘vowed,’ ‘threatened,’ and ‘warned’. Even when neutral verbs like ‘said’ are used, the propositions are often framed as allegations (‘accused Israel,’ ‘claimed responsibility’). Conversely, in the Post-Death Etic texts, Israeli military statements are introduced with high-certainty verbs like ‘confirmed’ and ‘announced’, positioning the IDF as the verifier of reality.

Emic outlets construct an inverse epistemic regime. Verbs such as ‘stressed,’ ‘explained,’ and ‘debunked’ are frequently attributed to Nasrallah, granting his speech factual status. Notably, Al Mayadeen uses the verb ‘debunked’ to introduce Nasrallah’s rejection of Israeli claims, explicitly positioning his voice as superior to Israeli intelligence. Furthermore, Emic texts elevate civilian and communal voices in the post-death period, using direct quotation to articulate grief and loyalty (‘we are at your service,’ ‘revered him’), whereas etic texts largely restrict civilian voice to background noise or brief expressions of shock (‘wish it was our kids’). Ultimately, these quotation patterns demonstrate how the coloniality of knowledge operates in news discourse. Etic reporting privileges the institutional view of the state, silencing Israel when it acts covertly (pre-death) and amplifying it when it claims victory (post-death). Emic reporting, conversely, insists on the validity of the situated, historical view, using direct quotation to maintain Nasrallah’s presence as a narrator even after his physical elimination.

4.4. Emic/Etic Epistemic Framing

Appraisal resources consolidate their ideological positions on Nasrallah’s death. While the earlier analyses established differences in naming practices, agency assignment, and quotation hierarchies, Appraisal reveals how moral stance and emotional framing complete these divergent narrative worlds. Through patterns of Judgement (ethical evaluation) and Affect (emotional tone), each media ecosystem constructs a distinct moral universe in which Nasrallah’s life, death, and legacy acquire meaning. By integrating Judgement and Affect within the broader frame of moral and security narratives, the study highlights how these appraisal patterns function as both reflections of and catalysts for the underlying ideological dichotomy. This bridging perspective reveals how the emotional and ethical evaluations work to reinforce and distinguish the competing emic and etic frameworks earlier discussed.

4.4.1. Judgement: Epistemic Authority and the Moral Construction of Leadership

As the distributions in Table 5 illustrate, Judgement resources operate in opposite ideological directions. Etic outlets rely predominantly on negative Propriety, presenting Nasrallah as a destabilising, criminal, and morally illegitimate actor. Emic outlets deploy positive Propriety and Capacity, portraying him as a principled, strategic, and morally grounded leader.

Table 5 - Judgement Patterns in Descriptions of Nasrallah

Judgement Type	Etic Focus	Emic Focus	Ideological Function
Capacity (competence, skill)	‘mastermind,’ ‘shrewd,’ ‘elusive,’ ‘military chief’	‘master strategist,’ ‘steadfast commander,’ ‘visionary’	Etic frames competence as threat; emic frames competence as heroic ability.

Judgement Type	Etic Focus	Emic Focus	Ideological Function
Propriety (ethics, morality)	'terrorist leader,' 'deadly foe,' 'fugitive,' 'destabilizing force'	'Martyr,' 'Sayyed,' 'revered leader,' 'icon of steadfastness'	Etic criminalizes and delegitimizes; emic sacralizes and moralizes.

Etic reports use Judgement to embed Nasrallah within a security and counterterrorism discourse. Labels such as '*terrorist leader*' and '*deadly foe*' do ideological work by situating him outside legitimate political agency and stripping him of epistemic credibility. Even ostensibly positive terms like '*shrewd*' or '*mastermind*' operate as threat intensifiers, reinforcing the narrative that his strategic capacity is a danger requiring containment. This aligns directly with van Dijk's (1998) ideological square, foregrounding the out-group's negative attributes while backgrounding its own. By framing strategic capacity solely as a '*threat*', the etic gaze refuses to acknowledge the intellectual agency of the Global South subject, reducing complex political leadership to mere criminal cunning, a move that effectively revokes his right to be treated as a reliable narrator of the conflict. Emic reports invert this evaluative pattern. Nasrallah's positive Propriety is highlighted through honorifics such as '*Sayyed*' and the widespread post-death adoption of '*Martyr*,' which elevates his moral standing and embeds him within a lineage of sacrifice. Positive Capacity ('*steadfast*,' '*visionary*') reinforces his authority as a leader whose actions are framed not as aggression but as principled resistance. The density of such evaluations intensifies in the immediate post-death reports, especially in Al Mayadeen English, where Judgement functions as a tool of communal identification and ideological mobilization.

4.4.2. Affect: Cultural-Symbolic Positioning through the Politics of Grief

Differences in Affect reinforce the contrasting moral evaluations. Etic outlets foreground Insecurity and Concern, framing the assassination primarily as a trigger for geopolitical instability. Emotional references cluster around anxiety ('*fears of escalation*,' '*regional tensions rising*') rather than grief. Even civilian voices, when quoted, tend to express apprehension about broader conflict rather than personal loss.

Emic outlets instead center Grief, Anger, and Resolve. Mourners' voices convey emotional rupture ('*a broken heart*,' '*an irreplaceable loss*'), and this grief is channelled into collective determination ('*we will continue his path*,' '*the resistance will not falter*'). The emotional trajectory moves from sorrow to commitment, functioning as an affective mechanism that binds community memory to political action.

Where etic Affect distances the event from lived experience, presenting it as a source of abstract instability, emic Affect intensifies proximity, situating the assassination within a shared emotional and historical space. This affective alignment serves a Cultural-Symbolic function, binding the reader to the in-group and validating the resistance narrative not just as a political stance, but as a shared historical reality.

5. Discussion

The corpus-assisted findings confirm that conflict reporting is a systematized ideological practice, where linguistic choices pre-determine the interpretive framework available to the reader. The assassination of Hassan Nasrallah served as a critical moment of discursive rupture, solidifying pre-existing ideological differences, for making political violence intelligible. This section synthesizes the findings to examine the theoretical contributions of the resulting Etic (Security-Operational) and Emic (Moral-Resistance) regimes to the study of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and conflict journalism.

5.1. Findings Synthesis: The Ideological Construction of Two Competing Ontologies

As summarised in Table 6, the synthesis of Naming, Agency, Quotation, and Appraisal patterns produces two sharply contrasting macro-frames: an Etic Security-Operational ontology and an Emic Moral-Resistance ontology. These oppositional frames reflect the systematic operation of van Dijk's (2006) ideological square, which structures the consistent ingroup/outgroup management found across both sub-corpora.

Table 6 - Contrasting Macro-Frames: Etic Security-Operational vs Emic Moral-Resistance Ontologies

Linguistic Dimension	Etic (Security-Operational) Ontology	Emic (Moral-Resistance) Ontology	Resulting Discursive Function
Naming	Functional/Security labels (e.g., 'Hezbollah chief')	Sacral/Historical labels (e.g., 'Martyr Sayyed')	De-legitimation vs. Sacralization
Agency (Transitivity)	Obscured Actor (Passive Voice, Abstract/Weapon Actor)	Explicit Actor (Active Voice, Israel/Zionist Entity)	Mitigation vs. Explicit Accountability
Quotation	Conditional Authority: Privileges 'Threat' voice (Nasrallah) pre-death;	Monologic Authority: Privileges 'Truth' voice (Nasrallah) throughout; delegitimizes 'Enemy' voice (Israel).	Strategic Amplification vs. Moral Witnessing

Linguistic Dimension	Etic (Security-Operational) Ontology	Emic (Moral-Resistance) Ontology	Resulting Discursive Function
Appraisal	Privileges 'State' voice (Israel) post-death. Negative Propriety (Threat) and Affect (Anxiety)	Positive Propriety (Heroism) and Affect (Grief/Resolve)	Securitization vs. Mobilization

The Etic Ontology prioritizes technical, geopolitical consequence over moral causality. The composite linguistic effect is to present the assassination as a necessary and justified operational outcome. This is achieved through a strategic voice reversal: etic reporting amplifies the target's voice prior to death to establish the immediacy of the threat (via illocutionary verbs like 'vowed'), then systematically transfers epistemic authority to the state (Israel) immediately post-death to validate the operation. This strips the victim of political legitimacy while reproducing a colonial security logic. In contrast, the Emic Ontology privileges history, community, and moral continuity. The combined linguistic effect is to transform the killing into an act of aggression that reaffirms the community's commitment to resistance. By sacralizing the victim and explicitly naming the perpetrator, the frame functions to mobilize collective grief into political action.

5.2. Theoretical Contribution: Emic/Etic as Incompatible Epistemic Regimes

The findings extend the emic/etic distinction from anthropological observation (Morris et al., 1999) to a framework for diagnosing epistemic conflict in global news. The difference between the two systems is not merely ideological bias but fundamentally different criteria for what constitutes legitimate knowledge and credible truth. Etic outlets adhere to a model of procedural journalism rooted in Western epistemologies, valuing official state sources, verifiable facts, and neutrality achieved through linguistic distancing. This results in a clear epistemic hierarchy where authority is granted to those who possess institutional power (*military/government officials*), while moral claims and culturally embedded terms (like 'Sayyed' or 'Martyrdom') are excluded or treated with suspicion. Emic outlets operate within an alternative epistemic regime that values historical memory, communal consensus, and moral proximity. Legitimacy is constructed by amplifying voices of local resistance and grief, anchoring the event in culturally shared meaning. This system treats Western security narratives as inherently suspect, often reversing the etic reporting verbs (e.g., using *claimed* for Israeli statements) to perform a rhetorical reversal of credibility. In doing so, these outlets perform what Resende (2021) identifies as epistemic resistance, challenging the 'coloniality of knowledge' that seeks to render non-Western political rationalities invisible or irrational. For news consumers, understanding these dynamics can enhance critical engagement with news media, while regulators and journalists might consider these insights to ensure more equitable representation in global news reporting, highlighting the necessity of diversifying perspectives to address inherent biases and foster more balanced narratives. This contrast demonstrates that the emic/etic distinction maps directly onto competing definitions of truth. The etic world seeks truth via the state and bureaucracy; the emic world finds truth via the community and historical struggle.

5.3. Discursive Rupture and the Construction of the Martyr

A unique contribution of this study is the analysis of the pre-death vs. post-death shift. The assassination did not merely trigger new reporting; it produced a moment of discursive rupture, intensifying existing trajectories into their most polarized forms. The primary shift is the linguistic mechanism of sacralization. Etic reports maintained their focus on Capacity (e.g., 'mastermind') up to the moment of death, reinforcing the threat assessment. Emic reports, however, performed a swift conversion from a functional political identity (*Secretary-General*) to a symbolic, moral identity (*Martyr Sayyed*). This transformation is reinforced by immediate Positive Propriety and Affect (*grief/resolve*). Parallel to this symbolic transformation is a rupture in epistemic agency. The analysis reveals a stark silencing in etic coverage: whereas Nasrallah was the primary narrator of the conflict in pre-death reporting (represented as the active voice of escalation), his death marks the immediate transfer of narrative control to Israeli officialdom. In the etic frame, the rupture is the moment the subaltern subject loses the right to speak, replaced entirely by the verified voice of the state. Conversely, emic media resists this rupture by maintaining Nasrallah's voice as a present, historical authority even after his physical elimination. This discursive conversion demonstrates the power of resistance media to manage political trauma by transforming physical loss into ideological continuity. The construction of the martyr through linguistic means by associating death with virtue and not failure is the ultimate act of rhetorical mobilization, ensuring the figure's political efficacy endures beyond his life.

6. Conclusion

This study used a corpus-assisted discourse approach to demonstrate the systematic ideological divergence between etic and emic reporting on the assassination of Hassan Nasrallah. The analysis reveals two incompatible ontologies: a Security-

Operational frame that strategically manages voice to legitimate state violence, and a Moral-Resistance frame that foregrounds explicit causality, communal voice, and symbolic continuity.

Theoretically, the study shows how the emic–etic distinction operates as an epistemic construct, with each media system authorizing knowledge through different principles of proximity, institutionality, and moral authority. Crucially, the findings expose the dynamic nature of the etic gaze: it does not merely observe, but actively transfers epistemic agency, amplifying the subaltern voice when it serves as a threat, and silencing it immediately upon elimination to restore state authority. By rendering these hierarchies visible, the analysis contributes to the broader project of decolonising critical discourse studies, exposing how journalistic neutrality can function as a mechanism of epistemic erasure.

Editors, taking note of these findings, could apply decolonial insights practically by assessing for passive voice usage in articles, which often obscures the agency of perpetrators. Such actionable guidance not only bridges theory with practice but also potentially widens the impact of discourse analysis for better-informed newsroom practices. To further assist practitioners, editors and journalists might consider diversifying their sources to include a broader range of perspectives, thereby enriching news narratives and offering a more balanced view. Additionally, explicit agency attribution can ensure that readers are aware of who is responsible for actions described in reports, strengthening the overall transparency and accountability of news stories. Several limitations must be noted. The dataset is restricted to a small number of English-language articles and a defined temporal window. This limited dataset size may affect the validity of the findings, as it does not allow for a comprehensive analysis that includes a broader spectrum of media narratives. Future research should extend the corpus to Arabic-language material and incorporate multimodal data to examine how visual communication reinforces these competing ontologies. Furthermore, the language scope being restricted to English could limit the generalizability of the findings, as linguistic nuances in other languages might lead to different discourse interpretations. Assessing media narratives in different geopolitical regions could reveal variations in emic and etic dynamics not captured here. Translating this framework to other languages entails considering linguistic nuances that may significantly influence discourse interpretation. To enhance generalizability, future studies could incorporate diverse linguistic and cultural settings, broadening the understanding of how media framing operates across different environments.

Another potential avenue of research is to explore how the emic/etic framing typology established in this study might guide future coverage of other leaders who occupy similarly contentious positions within regional and global contexts. Such an exploration could uncover the potential for media outlets to shift or reinforce established narratives and could broaden the study's applicability in understanding the dynamic role of media in shaping political leadership across different cultural and geopolitical divides.

Overall, the findings highlight how news discourse participates in geopolitical and cultural struggles over whose knowledge is validated, whose grief is acknowledged, and whose vision of the region becomes thinkable.

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