
RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Representation of the Moroccan Sahara in El Moudjahid Discourse: A Critical Study

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ABSTRACT

This study employs Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) to analyse the news discourse of El Moudjahid and explore how political narratives and legitimacy are embedded within the deep structure of news discourse, specifically to legitimize Algeria's support for the Polisario Front's territorial claims against Morocco's sovereignty over Western Sahara. The research investigates how media discourse remains a powerful tool for propaganda under the control of the Algerian government. The study emphasises the imperial hubris of Algerian political and military elites, who utilize media as an extension of state power to obscure the motives behind separatism and expansionism. In this context, El Moudjahid functions not only as an information source but also as an instrument for ideological manipulation, ensuring that the Polisario Front's claims are portrayed as historically and naturally legitimate, while systematically delegitimizing Morocco's sovereignty. The research examines a key article from El Moudjahid that reports on France's recent policy shift regarding the Western Sahara issue and Algeria's subsequent reaction. To deepen the analysis, the study incorporates additional sources, including the International Court of Justice's advisory opinion on Morocco's historical ties with the Sahrawi population. This approach provides access to the universe of discourse related to a geopolitical controversy that has persisted for 50 years. The combination of sources highlights how discourse in news stories or legal statements is not an unquestionable truth or fact; rather, it can be corrupted, distorted, or manipulated, with facts, events, and history undergoing similar illegitimate processes. Thus, as power intersects with discourse, language ceases to function merely as a communicative tool and instead becomes a mechanism of control, manipulation, and power abuse.

KEYWORDS

Critical Discourse Studies - Ideological State Apparatus – News discourse - Imperial hubris – Geopolitical conflict – Imagined communities

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1. Introduction

As events unfold, they impact our understanding of the world, motivating researchers to seek explanations and insights. In the context of the Moroccan Sahara conflict, language and discourse are weaponized, on one hand, to promote and legitimize the "Polisario Front" and the "struggle" for an "independent Sahrawi state," and on the other hand, to delegitimize Moroccan sovereignty and reject any initiative and proposal - the Moroccan autonomy plan- as opposed to Algeria's foreign policy. The controversy, in general, and the controversy in media discourse, are evident and worthy of in-depth analysis and investigation, providing researchers with a rich area for critical exploration.

The Algerian media is no exception: news stories, either editorials or hard news, always report events that go beyond the Algerian citizen's immediate interests and the principle of geographical proximity. From a critical perspective, this raises questions and hypotheses about the "Why" of such special and exceptional focus on the *Western* Sahara issue, curiously extended

to reporting whatever political, social, and economic events are taking place in or related to Morocco. It is from this initial observation and as a result of a large investigation into the Algerian e-news outlets' published news coverage that this research originated.

Thus, one of the major aims and challenges of this research is to explore how Algerian e-press outlets, such as *El Moudjahid*, construct and legitimize the symbolic reality of the "Sahrawi state" under the "Polisario Front". It examines how media, operating as powerful apparatuses of socialization under the influence of Algeria's military-dominated regime, use discourse to present the ideas of self-determination and the existence of a distinct "Sahrawi people" as natural and self-evident, despite the contested nature of both concepts.

In other words, the research investigates news discourse, going beyond traditional linguistic descriptions to question how and under which contextual conditions, the language of news discourse is produced and consumed. Our perspective is based on the assumption that whenever and wherever there is controversy, contention, or a challenge to power, language and discourse are involved.

2. Context and objectives of the study

The Algerian government, a major and influential actor in the *Western Sahara* conflict, mobilizes media to construct a collective identity under the label "Sahrawi people" and to support the "Polisario Front."¹ Drawing on Benedict Anderson's (1991, cited in Kanon and Norton, 2003) concept of imagined communities, where "*imagined ties extend both spatially and temporally*," the role of news discourse is critical in constructing the legitimacy of the Polisario Front, particularly through Algerian e-press outlets such as *El Moudjahid*.

Before delving into the critical study of the collected data and news discourse, it is important to note that the use of 'Western' to qualify the Sahara is neither neutral nor innocent. Historically, the territories and populations under the sovereignty of the Cherifian Empire included the Atlantic Sahara, Seguia el-Hamra, and Oued-Eddahab—territories that were later referred to as the 'Spanish Sahara' and subsequently 'Western Sahara'. In terms of collocation and concordance, the token 'Western' frequently collocates with the node 'Sahara' in Algerian discourse. This pattern, through both collocation and repetition, forms a highly abstracted and ideologically driven discursive formation (IDF), which becomes increasingly naturalized. As Fairclough (1985: 751) notes, such a formation can become "*most opaque, and may come to be seen as the norms of the institution itself*"—in this case, the Algerian state apparatus and its related ideological institutions.

Thus, the collocation and its network (Brezina, McEnery and Wattam 2015; Brezina, 2018) can be described as a phraseological and co-textual phenomenon in which a deliberate semantic transition occurs—from geographical denotation to ideological connotation. The aim of this shift is to "*naturalize ideological representations—representations that eventually come to be perceived as non-ideological or 'common sense'*" (Fairclough, 1985, p. 739).

The collocation represents the Sahara as a territory in discontinuity or rupture with the rest of Morocco's territory. The shift from denotative to connotative meaning becomes evident, particularly since the Sahara region has undergone significant linguistic changes throughout history. These transformations were initially influenced by colonialism and, more later, by Algeria's expansionist agenda, with separatism serving as a tool to advance this agenda.

Generally speaking, the context of this research is characterized by a recent diplomatic turning point concerning an issue that dates back 50 years. France 24, AFP, and Reuters,² reported that France revised its long-standing position when President Emmanuel Macron recognized Morocco's autonomy plan as the basis for settling the *Western Sahara* conflict under the Kingdom's sovereignty. This shift was outlined as a significant diplomatic event, nevertheless, triggering strong condemnation from Algeria and leading to the downgrading of its diplomatic relations with France.

In this context, we believe that, as long as, Algeria continues to support the Polisario Front's claims of legitimacy, the media outlets such as *El Moudjahid* will play a crucial role in influencing public opinion. By constructing symbolic geographies,

¹ Our investigation into the Algerian orders of discourse reveals that the Algerian military regime has consistently attempted to devalue, undermine, delegitimize, and ridicule Morocco's autonomy plan. These political strategies aim to discredit Morocco's proposal, despite its international recognition as a credible and realistic solution by countries worldwide. Cherkaoui (2007) contextualizes Morocco's autonomy plan within a broader framework of significant reforms—what can be described as Morocco's quiet revolution, initiated more than a decade ago. This revolution has opened new political opportunities, not only for regions within the Kingdom but also for neighbouring countries, encouraging them to adopt a path of confederal democracy rather than militaristic rule (stratocracy). For a more detailed explanation of Algeria's stance on the Moroccan Sahara, see Cherkaoui (2007).

² <https://www.france24.com/en/france/20240730-france-backs-morocco-s-autonomy-plan-for-disputed-western-sahara>. (Accessed April 24, 2025)

media represents the Polisario Front's authority as historical, natural, and rightful. This framing serves to normalize and legitimize the Polisario's territorial claims, while simultaneously undermining Morocco's position and the growing international recognition of its sovereignty over the region.

3. Statement of the Problem

The role of the media in constructing political narratives and influencing public perception remains a critical area of research in the context of the Moroccan Sahara conflict. Despite a growing body of literature on political communication and media manipulation, the specific role of Algerian e-press outlets, particularly *El Moudjahid*, in constructing, legitimizing, and normalizing the imaginary existence of a Sahrawi state under the Polisario remains largely unexplored, with the limits of similar studies being evident in both topic and subject matter. For instance, Mliles's (2020) main recommendation was: "*Investigating more media outlets using different approaches and methods could provide greater insights into the political inclinations of Algeria, particularly concerning the Moroccan Sahara issue.*"

Algerian media, under the control of governmental, military, and dominant political actors, act as instruments of ideological warfare by transcending mere information transmission to create alternative realities. Through framing and sustained propaganda, *El Moudjahid* constructs symbolic geographies that portray the Polisario's authority as natural, historical, and legitimate. This narrative manipulation complicates the political landscape by obscuring geopolitical realities and fabricating narratives that reinforce specific political agendas.

This raises crucial questions regarding the mechanisms by which news discourse shifts from the informational to the ideological. How do media outlets like *El Moudjahid* construct imaginary representations of territorial claims and political entities to legitimize them? Moreover, how do these media outlets, under the control of military-political institutions, become active agents in constructing political legitimacy, not only domestically but also on an international scale?

4. Methodology:

This research is grounded in the Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) framework to critically analyze a news article published by *El Moudjahid* (electronic version). The article discusses France's recent recognition of Morocco's autonomy plan as the sole basis for resolving the *Western* Sahara conflict and the Algerian government's first reaction to France's official declaration.

To enrich the investigation of the discourse, additional data is included, primarily consisting of the International Court of Justice's advisory opinion regarding the status of the Moroccan Kingdom and its historical ties with the Sahrawi population. Additionally, a quote from a speech by Ahmed Attaf, Algeria's Minister of Foreign Affairs and the National Community Abroad, as reported by *Echourok Online*, is incorporated.

5. Review of literature

The theoretical and conceptual foundation of this study is fundamentally critical (see, for instance, Wodak and Meyer, 2015). The primary motivation for this approach stems from two factors: first, the growing exposure to media content, where disinformation, misinformation, and deceptive narratives increasingly challenge facts and reality; and second, the benefits of critical thinking in detecting and thus preventing bias-related to ideology and other forms of illegitimate manipulation (van Dijk, 2006b), particularly those involving the abuse of power through language and discourse.

Due to time and space constraints, this review does not aim to provide an exhaustive exploration of all the theoretical tools used to address the research problem and related questions. These theoretical approaches have been extensively discussed in various CDS handbooks and are well-established in the field, particularly Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional CDA of media discourse, van Dijk's sociocognitive approach (1980; 1988; 2017), and Wodak's Discourse-Historical Approach (Wodak and Meyer, 2015).

Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) is an eclectic and transdisciplinary scholarly movement (Fairclough, 2013) whose roots lie in Critical Linguistics, particularly through the work of Fowler *et al.* (1979) and Fowler (1991), as well as the Frankfurt School's critical theory. CDS is a well-established and powerful framework for conducting a systematic and methodological investigation into the links between language, ideology, power, and power abuse in a given historical, social, and political context, allowing for flexibility and synergy between different schools and approaches—from linguistics to other areas of the social sciences.

Other theoretical resources for this research include Allan Bell's (1991) sociolinguistic perspective on news discourse structures, particularly "*media miscommunication*"—i.e., misrepresentation, misunderstanding, inaccuracy, distortion, and misreporting (Bell, 1991b, cited in Bell, 1991). Bell's framework expands on concepts such as "*error, distortion, omission, and bias,*" drawing from the Glasgow University Media Group (1976: xi; 1980). Critical media studies focus on "*questions of language: the*

structuring of information, the imputation of causes, the pattern of interviewers" (Glasgow University Media Group, 1980: xv), emphasizing the impact of television news on constructing reality, often distorting it and introducing bias that tends to favour those in power (see also Hall, 1973).

By applying van Dijk's macrostructure theory (van Dijk, 1980), which describes discourse production, particularly in terms of processing and comprehension, this research aims to describe how readers, intuitively, tacitly, and unconsciously rely on cognitive strategies that help them better process and comprehend what a given talk or text is about.

Additionally, the sociocognitive approach to discourse analysis predicts how working memory, when failing to grasp the semantic and pragmatic aspects of complex and abstract discourse, relies on long-term memory for inference. This is particularly evident in news discourse, especially when the communicated event is geopolitical and involves power dynamics, often conveyed through highly abstract patterns of talk and text.

Discourse in Critical Discourse Studies (CDS), as a social practice, involves not only the manipulation of minds and beliefs but also the dissemination of specific political views and attitudes of political actors. The reader, in this context, is a passive recipient, as their worldview and understanding are continuously updated and framed, influencing her knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, opinions, and, consequently, their social, political, and ideological stance on the selected issue.

In the case of Algerian news coverage, the aim is to explore how news narratives align with the political views of the Algerian military regime. The polarization within this discourse can also be examined through van Dijk's model (2000), which allows for an exploration of how polarization in discourse—a deliberate division of social actors into "Us" vs. "Them" categories—serves to legitimize the positions of in-group actors while delegitimizing opposing out-group actors.

This analysis further engages with Fairclough's (1995) notion of media as discourse, particularly his adaptation of Foucault's orders of discourse. It operationalizes the dialectical relationship between discourse, ideology, and society, as developed in Fairclough's (2013) dialectical account of discourse and social structures. The purpose is to provide evidence demonstrating how news discourse is not neutral, but actively constructs societal norms and power relations, while simultaneously undermining the very processes of construction. Fairclough (2013: 3) explains: "*It is not analysis of discourse 'in itself' as one might take it to be, but analysis of dialectical relations between discourse and other objects, elements, or moments, as well as analysis of the 'internal relations' of discourse.*"

This study also adopts Althusser's distinction between 'state apparatuses' and 'ideological state apparatuses' (see Althusser, 1970), focusing on examining how the media functions as a tool for maintaining political and social control. By applying his critical review of ideology and relying on his distinction between distorted representations of reality and imaginary distorted representations, the study investigates how news discourse is not merely a communicative act but rather significant material for in-depth analysis. This analysis explores how governments, in the case of the Algerian military regime, rely not only on hard power but also on soft power through control of media institutions, thus gaining control over discourse and narratives for strategic purposes. The regime's control of ideological state apparatuses is seen as a way to ensure hegemony and sustain its power. Ideology, in this sense, "*has the function (which defines it) of 'constituting' concrete individuals as subjects*" (Althusser in Tallack, 1995:208)..

Since language is often viewed as '*doing things with words*,' rewording Austin's original study in the philosophy of language, this research integrates numerous theoretical tools from pragmatics and speech act theory, applied to discourse and articulated with critical discourse analysis. The aim is to provide evidence of how language use in media coverage goes beyond merely transmitting the speaker's or writer's ideas and interactions to performing actions. In this context, news discourse, apart from informing the public about a selected event, may also contain illocutionary speech acts, where it is not simply "*what is said*" that matters, but rather the embedded power of action and intention that is being performed and targeted. The main theoretical tools relevant to this study include Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principles and his four maxims.

Fundamentally, it is both theoretically and methodologically important to refer to the context of the discursive practice of all relevant social actors involved, either directly or indirectly, in talk and text. This aligns particularly with Wodak's (2015: 27-28) Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA), which, based on *triangulation* (original emphasis), "*investigates intertextual and interdiscursive relationships between utterances, texts, genres, and discourses, as well as extra-linguistic social/sociological variables, the history of an organization or institution, and situational frames.*"

Accordingly, reviewing some research and studies closely related to our main issue is recommended. In the case of the Algerian political regime, the literature reflects the emergence of a significant number of studies and research, drawing from various theoretical backgrounds and historical perspectives, which examine the foundation and structure of the Algerian political regime. The concept of the nation is fundamental and central to the construction of Algeria's political and ideological identity. Based on this identity, Algeria is portrayed as more symbolic and ideologically charged than elsewhere, extending to defining how

citizens “should be” and according to which ideological variables. This creates a tension between the lived experiences of Algerians and the ideological frameworks imposed by political elites, perpetuating a sense of crisis. The nation, as a constructed ideal, fosters divisions over national identity, leading to cultural, political, and economic struggles (Addi, 1999).

He explains:

« *Entre la collectivité et la Nation, il y a l'armée, véhicule d'un imaginaire politique où l'Armée est Nationale et Populaire (ANP) parce qu'elle incarne la Nation et possède les prérogatives de la souveraineté Populaire. C'est à ce double titre qu'elle est le pouvoir réel déléguant à l'État l'autorité dont les fonctionnaires abusent en raison de l'asservissement des fonctions judiciaire et législative, ce qui donne à l'État un caractère prédateur. Source de richesses privées, l'État est incapable d'assurer la paix sociale en raison même de la nature du système politique qui lui impose des limites et qui, surtout, en fait un enjeu de luttes dans la compétition pour plus de richesses* ». (Addi, 1999: 45)

To conclude, due to time and space constraints, it is not possible to provide a deeper and more extensive analysis of the literature at hand. As a result of these limitations, other theoretical resources will be referenced and applied in the data analysis and interpretation. Readers may refer to these resources, either those developed within the CDS tradition or from social sciences in general, for further exploration.

6. Data analysis and findings

6.1. Cognitive strategies for news discourse processing and comprehension

In a news story titled “**Paris Supports the So-Called ‘Autonomy Plan’ for Western Sahara: The Algerian Government Withdraws Its Ambassador to France**”³ (Source: *EL Moudjahid*, Date: 30-07-2024, Local Time: 6 p.m.), it is reported, citing a press release from the Algerian government, that the decision to recall its ambassador to the French Republic followed Paris’s support of the Moroccan autonomy plan as the basis for the settlement of the *Western Sahara* under the Moroccan sovereignty.

Following Grice’s (1975) Cooperative Principle (CP), additional context is required for full understanding—not only of the explicit content of ‘*what is said*’ but also of the implicit content of ‘*what is not said*’ and ‘*implied*.’ In other words, this involves the “*hidden, opaque, and visible structures of dominance, discrimination, power, and control as manifested in language*” (Wodak and Mayer, 2015:12).

From the reader’s position, apart from the requirement of being a competent English speaker (either native or non-native), one must also be familiar with the issue introduced in the headline, and respectively in the news’s narrative reported events and related attitudes and opinions—this represents the ‘*common ground*’. Rephrasing van Dijk’s statement (2014: 5): “*the many ways old and new knowledge or Common Ground is implied, presupposed, signaled, and expressed*.” In other words, for efficient comprehension of the target news discourse, we assume that the reader is not only a competent language user, with the linguistic competence to understand grammatical utterances, but also sociolinguistically competent to capture the relevant contextual information from the news discourse.

Let’s consider the two following assumptions. The first is that written texts are inherently interactive, engaging both the writer and the reader. However, the nature of the medium (see McLuhan 1994) —written text—means that while the writer is present during the composition stage, her direct interaction with the reader is only mediated through the text itself. This separation complicates the interpretative process for both parties, as the reader must infer the writer’s intentions without immediate feedback. The assumption here aligns, on the one hand with McLuhan’s (1994:24) dichotomy ‘Hot’ vs. ‘Cold’ media, emphasising that: “*Hot media are, therefore, low in participation, and cool media are high in participation or completion by the audience*;” on the other hand with Halliday and Hasan’s (1976: 1) statement that “*if a speaker of English hears or reads a passage of the language which is more than one sentence in length, he can normally decide without difficulty whether it forms a unified whole or is just a collection of unrelated sentences*.”

6.2. Linguistics and ideological analysis

From the outset, it is clear that the news story focuses on a diplomatic response, directly addressing France’s positive stance on Morocco’s autonomy plan for *Western Sahara*. The headline expresses not only the main topic of the story but also its broader global theme, which van Dijk (1980) refers to as the ‘macroproposition’ — the central idea or gist of the news.

³ <https://www.elmoudjahid.dz/en/nation/paris-supports-the-so-called-autonomy-plan-for-western-sahara-the-algerian-government-withdraws-its-ambassador-to-france-8004>. (Accessed April 5, 2025)

However, regardless of the linguistic, stylistic, and grammatical constraints related to the headline structure, as emphasized by Fairclough (1995: 21), citing Mardh (1980) and Straumann (1935), *"newspaper headlines have distinctive syntactic properties which make them a grammatical oddity, and have long attracted the attention of linguists"* (see also van Dijk 1988). The headline:

"Paris Supports the So-Called 'Autonomy Plan' for Western Sahara: The Algerian Government Withdraws Its Ambassador to France"

can be subdivided into its constituents in terms of micropropositions (van Dijk, 1980; 1988):

The proposition (P1): **"Paris Supports the So-Called 'Autonomy Plan' for Western Sahara,"** and

The proposition (P2): **"The Algerian Government Withdraws Its Ambassador to France"**

This presents a challenge, as the reader may intuitively question what kind of relationship exists between P1 and P2. On the one hand, the decision can be interpreted as an act of opposition, protest, and objection by Algerian diplomacy against France's recognition of the autonomy plan. On the other hand, it could be seen as a broader expression of opposition to the autonomy plan as the sole basis for resolving the *Western Sahara* conflict. This is particularly evident in the use of the utterance 'so-called' and the quotation marks around 'Autonomy Plan.' In other words, the P1 and P2 challenge the reader's prediction, by disturbing her *"activity of guessing or anticipating what will come in the text, an activity based on the reader's common-sense knowledge of the world, of content, and formal schemata"* (Carrell 1983; Swales 1986; cited in Tadros's 2004: 69).

The role of punctuation markers in discourse structure in the case of the news story's headline is crucial and highlights the controversial issue of the use of punctuation markers, mainly whether this is rule-governed or not. Any attempt in this respect has been objected to under the argument that *"there are no rules, and that the evidence for this is that we all use punctuation marks differently"* (Dale 1991:101). Accordingly, the colon between P1 and P2 can have three implications for the meaning of the headline: (1) the P2 can be interpreted as an elaboration of P1, that is, Paris decision to support the autonomy plan; (2) the punctuation marker can be interpreted as a colon-expansion, that is, a clausal adjunct; or (3) as marking *"a step forward, from introduction to main theme, from cause to effect, premiss to conclusion, etc."* (Hart, 1983: 41).

The ambiguity in this case is evident and mainly arises from the flexibility of punctuation marks, like the colon, which can be assigned different roles in connecting ideas. Unlike other punctuation marks, the colon does not always define a strict semantic relationship between the clauses. Instead, it allows for various interpretations depending on how the writer wants the reader to understand the connection. Depending on the context, we can view the relation expressed here as one of elaboration or one of antithesis. This suggests that the use of specific punctuation markers, such as the colon, may not always have a fixed conventional meaning and function.

For Dale (1991: 14), *"one possibility is that the punctuation markers correspond purely to syntactic structural relations in discourse"*. For example, the colon might serve a function similar to Grosz and Sidner's (1987, cited in Dale 1991: 14) Dominance and Satisfaction Precedes relations, marking the hierarchical structure of the discourse without necessarily specifying the semantic content of the relationship. In the case of this headline, the colon could be seen as simply organizing the syntactic structure of the information, indicating a shift in focus from one proposition to another without clarifying the underlying semantic connection.

Accordingly, in the headline, the colon could be interpreted as continuing the idea from P1, making P2 a further explanation of P1. Alternatively, it could signal a shift in focus, highlighting a contrast or opposition, as seen with the token 'so-called,' which suggests a critique or contradiction between France's position and Algeria's reaction.

Moreover, the colon in this headline likely serves a rhetorical function—it connects the two ideas in a way that helps the reader understand how the second proposition (P2) provides context or further explanation for the first (P1). Rather than simply separating two independent propositions, the colon links them to guide the reader's comprehension of the relationship between them. In this case, it directs the reader to consider how Algeria's diplomatic action (withdrawing its ambassador) relates to France's support for the autonomy plan.

From discourse comprehension and processing perspective, if the ambiguity of the colon's use and function is apparent, this varies depending on the context and the reader's familiarity with the political situation. In news discourse, where clarity and brevity are paramount, the colon can sometimes be both helpful and confusing, as the reader must fill in the gaps based on her own knowledge. So, coherence between P1 and P2 is controversial while it is also ambiguous, mainly the colon between the two propositions is significant. To avoid ambiguity and to understand the relation between P1 and P2 van Dijk (2000: 40) explains that: *"coherence is not based on the facts of a model, but rather on functional relations between the meanings of sentences themselves."*

Thus, while punctuation marks like the colon are meant to signal a certain connection between ideas, their meaning is not always clear-cut. They are part of a broader strategy of communication that depends on the political and cultural context in which the text is read, as well as the reader's prior knowledge. This ambiguity in interpretation highlights the complexity of discourse, where even small elements like punctuation can carry significant meaning.

Respectively, the complex relationship between P1 and P2 presents a barrier for the reader to engage cognitively with the headline's discourse and propositions. This failure to access the semantic and pragmatic structure of the headline's discourse prevents the reader from identifying the topic that is supposed to be "*expressed and signaled by headlines, which apparently act as summaries of the news text*" (van Dijk 1988: 35-36).

In this sample, the headline expresses a macroproposition: it has an explicit predicate (*to support*), an Agent (*Paris*), and a Patient (*the autonomy plan*) for its sub-component P1; and a second explicit predicate (*to withdraw*), with an Agent (*the Algerian government*) and a Patient (*ambassador*) for the sub-component P2.

6.3. Application of Grice's Maxims of Quality and Quantity and their implications for news discourse

At this point, we can move on to analysing the headline's news story from a pragmatic approach. One useful framework for this is Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle, which helps explain how readers interpret the connection between the two propositions.

From a pragmatic perspective, the investigation of the headline and its constituents (P1 and P2) through Grice's four maxims is helpful in this case. The headline meets the requirement of the 'Maxim of Quality', as it provides informative content, which is generally expected from any news story, especially from its headline. The 'Maxim of Quantity', however, is more questionable. Specifically, the breakdown of the headline into two propositions (P1 and P2) brings up concerns. Each proposition presents a separate piece of information: P1 reports France's support for the autonomy plan, while P2 reports Algeria's decision to withdraw its ambassador. These two propositions provide distinct pieces of information, which can lead to over-informativeness (Grice, 1975).

The over-informativeness is amplified by confusion about the possible relationship between P1 and P2, in terms of the reader's prediction (Tadros, 2004). Thus, comprehending propositions requires appealing to long-term memory. Specifically, the reader's common-sense knowledge of the world, content, and formal schemata come into play, as working memory engaged to process the complexity of both the explicit and implicit meanings implied through the combination of the two propositions. Van Dijk (1980: 96) explains the limits of working memory in discourse comprehension, stating: "*this is a result of the constraints resulting from the limited capacity of short-term (semantic) working memory.*"

In other words, although the propositions are syntactically accessible (following the SVO structure), they are semantically and pragmatically inaccessible without referencing long-term memory or introducing new knowledge about an issue for which the reader may lack sufficient background.

6.4. Presupposition and ideological framing in news discourse: the role of punctuation

The propositions P1 and P2 can be analysed in terms of presupposition. At a micro level, P1 and P2 are semantically intelligible, meaning each proposition's meaning is generated independently, without direct reference to the other. However, at a macro level, beyond individual propositions and considering the overall text and discourse, we can assume that P1 presupposes a given semantic relationship with P2. Specifically, a cause-and-effect relationship seems intuitively the most likely, given the linear co-occurrence of P1 followed by P2.

The colon implicitly establishes a cause-and-effect relationship or logical connection between the two propositions, even though this connection is not explicitly stated. It suggests that France's support for the autonomy plan is directly linked to the Algerian government's decision to withdraw its ambassador. This creates an underlying implication that Algeria's response is a direct consequence of France's recognition of the autonomy plan.

In a *reductio ad absurdum* sense (Freeman, 1991), the reader may interpret the headline by observing that the colon as implying a relationship between the two propositions that, if taken to its logical extreme, would suggest that France's support for the autonomy plan is so provocative that it leads to such a radical diplomatic move by Algeria. As Freeman (1991: 203) notes, "*In arguments involving suppositions, the fact that we may argue from one statement to another, that we may derive certain consequences from a certain statement, is offered to support the conclusion.*"

In this case, the colon may be assigned a cause-and-effect function: France's support for the autonomy plan (P1) is followed by Algeria's reaction (P2), implying that the recognition of the plan directly causes Algeria's decision to withdraw its

ambassador. This progression of thought suggests that France's support is not only politically significant but could be seen as so provocative that it leads to a diplomatic consequence—a drastic measure from the Algerian government. By using the colon to connect these propositions, the headline subtly guides the reader to infer a causal link, suggesting that the French recognition of the autonomy plan has broader, potentially absurd consequences.

Additionally, presupposition in the headline does not refer to entailment or to the semantic implication of one proposition on another (see Dahlman, 2022). Rather, it refers to the way in which the relationship between P1 and P2 is implicitly understood within the broader discourse. From the journalist's perspective, the headline is locally coherent. However, from the reader's position, this coherence is subjective. Evidence for this subjectivity comes from van Dijk's (1988) qualification of cohesion, which is recognized as subjective. While P1 and P2 appear coherent at the local level, the relationship between them is more implicit than explicit.

Presupposition in this context acts as a strategic discourse practice that shifts from intentional meaning to extensional meaning (see van Dijk 1988), that is from sentence or literal meaning to speaker meaning (Dahlman 2022). This shift is crucial in decoding the hidden and implicit messages in the headline. Following this, it can be safely to argue that French recognition of the Moroccan autonomy plan, introduced by the predicate *'to support'* in the headline, is conveyed as the cause of Algeria's reaction. i.e. the withdrawal of its ambassador to France.

This cause-and-effect relationship is not merely presupposed to inform; rather, it is ideologically based. It reflects the political stance of Algeria in response to France's recognition. The discursive strategy following the presupposed semantic relationship between P1 and P2 is an example of strategic argumentation manoeuvring. This aligns with van Dijk's (1988:64) idea that: *"Examination of local coherence links between propositions enables us to make explicit the tacit assumptions and beliefs of the speaker/writer. This provides us with a subtle instrument for the ideological analysis of news discourse."*

6.5. News discourse: From reporting facts to ideological representation of facts

The shift from information to ideology is evident in the headline of the news story, which implicitly highlights the dichotomy between "illegitimacy" and "legitimacy" (see also Van Leeuwen, 2008). On one hand, it challenges the legitimacy of France's recognition of the Moroccan autonomy plan. The expression 'the so-called' and the use of quotation marks around 'the autonomy plan' implicitly convey Algeria's rejection of the autonomy plan as a political process and option led by Morocco.

Moreover, these discursive patterns offer a clear insight into *El Moudjahid's* engagement with the dominant Algerian orders of discourse. This alignment with Algerian official narratives is evident: the headline is designed to foreground the political position of the Algerian government and its refusal to recognize the autonomy plan.

In this respect, Fairclough (2010: 59) was correct in discussing the dialectical relationship between structure/event and discursive practices, noting that: *"discourse is shaped by structures, but also contributes to shaping and reshaping them, to reproducing and transforming them. These structures are most immediately of a discursual/ideological nature – orders of discourse, codes and their elements such as vocabularies or turn-taking conventions."*

Accordingly, the headline advocates for the legitimacy of the Algerian government's decision to withdraw its ambassador to France, presenting this action as sound and *"recognized as right and just"* (Habermas, 1996: 248, cited in Iețcu-Fairclough, 2008: 2).

Further materials from the target news discourse provide more evidence of the ideological shift, moving the discourse toward a more polarized language. This shift is apparent in the way the news story represents the social actors involved.

Let's consider the following example:

"The Algerian government has decided to immediately recall its ambassador to the French Republic, and Algerian diplomatic representation in France will henceforth be the responsibility of a chargé d'affaires, following France's recognition of the Moroccan autonomy plan as the "sole basis" for settling the Western Sahara conflict within the framework of Morocco's alleged sovereignty, according to a press release issued on Tuesday by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the National Community Abroad."

This paragraph is intended to be the lead paragraph of the news story, though it is not graphically marked (e.g., not bolded), regarding the literature on journalism news production and related training courses (see Allan Bell, 1991 for a detailed step-by-step analysis of news making and its implications for discourse analysis from a sociolinguistic perspective).

The lead paragraph is supposed to provide information about the *'What'* and the *'Who.'* So, let's answer the questions based on the lead paragraph:

The 'What': The Algerian government's decision to immediately recall its ambassador to the French Republic and assign a chargé d'affaires to take over diplomatic responsibilities, in response to France's recognition of the Moroccan autonomy plan as the sole basis for settling the *Western* Sahara conflict.

The 'Who': The Algerian government as the active actor, the Algerian ambassador as the patient, and France and Morocco as the other involved parties. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the National Community Abroad serves as the source of the news story, providing the press release.

From identifying the 'What' and 'Who' as the key components of the lead paragraph, this provides a summary of the news story's global theme (van Dijk, 1988), which can be constructed as follows:

"The Algerian government immediately recalls its ambassador to France **due** to the French recognition of the Moroccan autonomy plan as the sole basis for settling the *Western* Sahara conflict."

If the lead paragraph is commonly supposed to report the main theme and providing exhaustive but relevant information to meet the news story's informative requirements, certain patterns are questionable, such as the use of 'immediately' and 'alleged sovereignty'. These patterns if omitted would have no significant impact on either the news story's quality from informative and reporting point of view—that is, in terms of relevance, or for the global theme of the news discourse.

From a syntactic perspective, 'immediately' is an adverb of time that occupies a preverbal position. It is a relative-time adverbial used to indicate that the action following it is to occur without delay, at the reference moment of speaking (i.e., "right now").

From a pragmatic perspective, the decision, which functions as a performative speech act, indirectly emphasises the urgency and immediacy of the action while directly signalling the recalling of the Algerian ambassador. The verb 'recall' is an action and an order that has to be performed immediately — in the moment of decision-making. Modality in discourse is implicit, expressing external authority from the reader's position (the Ambassador has immediately to leave France) and internal authority from the speaker's position (you must immediately leave France).

Moreover, while the decision is discursively represented as an action, from a pragmatic perspective, it appears more as a reaction triggered by the French government's announcement recognizing the Moroccan autonomy plan.. This is marked by a lexicogrammatical shift from 'to support' (as a predicate of P1 in the headline) to 'recognition' (i.e., nominalization in the lead paragraph). (For further discussion of transformations, mainly nominalization and passivization in news discourse from a critical linguistics perspective, see Fowler 1991).

6.6. News discourse and ideological state apparatuses: when reporting is 'doing things with words'

From a critical discourse perspective, the act of recalling the Algerian Ambassador to France is a discursive practice that implies power. The illocutionary force of the act not only demonstrates the power of words in '*doing things*'—that is, the power of language and discourse—but also emphasizes the power of those who have access to discourse and power. Van Dijk (2008: viii), citing Fowler et al. (1979), explains that since "*the crucial theoretical notion of power and domination is 'control,' in this case example, one 'must ask who has access to the fundamental power resource of public discourse, who has access to political discourse, to media discourse, educational discourse, and scholarly discourse. Who is able to control the production of such discourse, as is the case for press conferences and press releases and other ways of influencing journalists and media? Because once you control part of the production of public discourse, you also control part of its contents, and hence, indirectly, the public mind – maybe not exactly what people will think, but at least what they will think about.*"

Van Dijk's (2008) questions and argumentation are highly relevant and helpful for deconstructing the complex process of access to discourse as a form of power and control. In this example, it is not the power of discourse itself that manifested in news discourse, but rather the power of the Algerian government over discourse, political instructions, the media, and its Ambassador to France. This power also extends to the chargé d'affaires, who assumes the responsibilities of the recalled diplomat.

The withdrawal of the ambassador is both a reactive and symbolic action, where power and control over discursive practice are used to communicate Algeria's protest against France's position. More than being a declarative or informative statement—it is a diplomatic move that embodies Algeria's opposition to the autonomy plan and the recognition of Moroccan sovereignty.

In addition to the performative act involved in the decision, the Algerian response is not merely an explicit expression of protest, but also an implicit rejection of France's official stance on the Moroccan Sahara issue. Algeria fundamentally opposes Morocco's autonomy plan, particularly because it is proposed within the framework of Moroccan sovereignty, contrasting with

Algeria's advocacy for the self-determination option through a referendum. This position directly questions and seeks to delegitimize Morocco's sovereignty over the Sahara territories. This opposition is explicitly expressed in the article through the phrase:

"settling the Western Sahara conflict within the framework of Morocco's alleged sovereignty."

The adjective 'alleged,' placed before 'sovereignty,' significantly reflects Algeria's stance, suggesting that Morocco's claim to sovereignty is *false*. In this context, 'alleged' semantically implies lies, fabrication, and the distortion of an asserted '*fact*.' From the perspective of ideological discourse analysis, the news discourse can be interpreted according to the potential values inherent in ideology. The use of the adjective 'alleged' falls under the evaluation of Moroccan sovereignty, which is presented as contested, questioned, and ultimately deemed illegitimate (see also Martin and White's Appraisal Theory, 2005).

Van Dijk (1995: 248) explains that: *"ideologies are systems of social cognition that are essentially evaluative: they provide the basis for judgments about what is good or bad, right or wrong, and thus also provide basic guidelines for social perception and interaction. It is therefore assumed that the basic building blocks of ideologies are sociocultural values, such as Equality, Justice, Truth, or Efficiency."* Accordingly, news discourse in the lead paragraph is about a judgment, an attitude, and an evaluation of Moroccan sovereignty represented as 'bad', 'wrong', and 'unjust.'

The ideological function of news discourse here is evident, going beyond mere reporting to evaluation, taking a stance, and expressing the news outlet's ideology, beliefs, attitudes, and views on events and reality. This aligns closely with van Dijk's (2000:36) argument that *"the power of the media is primarily discursive and symbolic. Media discourse is the main source of people's knowledge, attitudes, and ideologies."*

In this example, it is important to note that the cognitive and abstract roots of ideology might appear as individual, that is the journalist's stance, opinion, and attitude actualized by means of linguistic and discursive patterns in the news story. However van Dijk (1995: 248) asserts that: *"Ideologies are basic frameworks of social cognition, shared by members of social groups, constituted by relevant selections of sociocultural values, and organized by an ideological schema that represents the self-definition of a group. Besides their social function of sustaining the interests of groups, ideologies have the cognitive function of organizing the social representations (attitudes, knowledge) of the group, and thus indirectly monitor the group-related social practices, and hence also the text and talk of members."*

In other words, ideology is collective. It extends beyond the individual to a social group whose interests are ideologically defended and legitimized.

In this context, the ideology embedded in news discourse serves interests that extend beyond the *El Moudjahid* outlet, defending and legitimizing the Algerian government's stance. This includes supporting the separatist claim of self-determination and strongly opposing any attempt or initiative that threatens these political and economic interests, such as France's foreign policy, which explicitly and officially recognized Morocco's autonomy plan as the sole basis for resolving the *Western Sahara* conflict, with the emphasis that the process should take place under Moroccan sovereignty.

Algeria's support for the separatist proposal of self-determination is not an isolated political stance, nor is it an ahistorical attitude; rather, it is rooted in the cultural background of this policy, which is framed within a polarization between '*good*' and '*bad*'. According to the Algerian foreign policy discourse as reported in the news story, the autonomy plan is irrelevant, unequal, and unjust, and Morocco's sovereignty over its territory is described as 'alleged', pretended—it is neither true nor legitimate. This characterization refers to the '*bad*' side of Morocco, while Algerian foreign policy is portrayed as the '*good*' side: soft, just, and fair, with its ideal task being the struggle for the self-determination of peoples and the promotion of human rights.

The Algerian ideology, disseminated and emphasised through the dominant orders of discourse—both political and apolitical—is portrayed as fair and just. However, as Van Dijk (1995) explains: *"many ideologies—particularly those underlying social conflict, domination, and resistance—are organized around a polarization that defines ingroups and outgroups"*. This concept is further developed by Fairclough and Wodak (1995), who argue that: *"describing discourse as social practice implies a dialectical relationship between a particular discursive event and the situation(s), institution(s), and social structure(s) that frame it: the discursive event is shaped by them, but it also shapes them. That is, discourse is socially constitutive as well as socially conditioned—it constitutes situations, objects of knowledge, and the social identities of and relationships between people and groups of people."*

In this context, media discourse in the case of *El Moudjahid* provides a prime example of how news discourse, far from being purely informative, is moulded and framed by power dynamics maintained by those in control of the state apparatus. Specifically, the Algerian military regime operates through both repressive apparatuses and ideological state apparatuses, as exemplified by *El Moudjahid*. This creates a blurred boundary between the public and private spheres, with the former representing the governor, the ruling group (state) and the latter being governed (media institutions). The dialectical and *deterministic*

relationship between power, ideology, and discourse—and the way discourse, in turn, relates to power—may be one of the key philosophical issues that driven Althusser to raise the following question: “*Is it necessary to add that this determination of the double ‘functioning’ (predominantly, secondarily) by repression and by ideology, according to whether it is a matter of the (Repressive) State Apparatus or the Ideological State Apparatuses, makes it clear that very subtle explicit or tacit combinations may be woven from the interplay of the (Repressive) State Apparatus and the Ideological State Apparatuses?*”

Accordingly, *El Moudjahid*’s news story, along with the related Algerian press release, serves as a concrete example of the imaginary distortion of the ideological representation of the real world, as described by Althusser. The news reporting involves a significant process of decontextualization and recontextualization, where the information from the original source—the Algerian government—is transformed and framed. This transformation is mediated through a press release that primarily emphasises the immediacy of the decision, indicated by terms like ‘immediately,’ while omitting important details about the meeting. These omitted details include the location and time of the meeting, the political and military officials invited, the sequence of events during the meeting, the identities of those urging the meeting, how the press release was debated before being drafted and handed to the media, whether the meeting actually took place, and who prepared the press release. All of these aspects are silenced in the news report, with the focus being exclusively on the Algerian decision as a reaction to the French government’s decision.

Furthermore, the news report implicitly accuses both France and Morocco of violating international law and UN resolutions. It also delegitimizes the French and Moroccan positions on the Sahara issue, particularly Morocco’s proposal for autonomy under its sovereignty. In doing so, Morocco is portrayed as a colonial power imposing colonialism, while the press release, as echoed by *El Moudjahid*, emphasizes the right of the Sahrawi people to self-determination.

The ideological polarization within the news discourse of *El Moudjahid* and the associated values can be evidenced through further stylistic, linguistic, and discursive patterns found within the text. These patterns substantiate our assumption that the discourse is neither balanced nor objective. (see also Van Dijk’s model 2000)

For example:

“The French government has eventually given its frank and categorical backing to the colonial fact imposed on Western Sahara. The current government has taken this step, which no other French government before it thought was necessary, in a very light-hearted and casual manner, without lucidly measuring all the potential repercussions,” says the same source”.

First, the use of direct quotations from the press release raises questions about the authenticity of the news story’s content and the neutrality of its reporting process—specifically, the boundary between the news outlet’s editorial line and the Algerian ruling orders of discourse. From the perspective of Critical Discourse Studies (CDS), it is legitimate to investigate the sources of news discourse through Bernstein’s (2003) concept of recontextualization, which has recently been integrated into CDS (Van Leeuwen, 2008). This approach allows us to critically examine how the source and framing of the news report evolve from the primary context (press release) to the secondary context (i.e., *El Moudjahid*’s newsroom), where the report is decontextualized and then recontextualized in the published news story.

In this context, the direct quote from the primary source—the press release—along with the exclusive reliance on a single source (the press release from an Algerian authority), goes beyond mere framing. It represents a *framing within a framing*, with *El Moudjahid*’s discursive practice clearly aligning with the dominant orders of discourse set by the Algerian government. This can be explained as control of the communicative situation by the Algerian government, through which control extends beyond shaping the news narrative structure and strategies. It also highlights how the power of the Algerian state apparatus extends over the communicative situation and its categories, including the “*setting (time, place); ongoing actions (including discourses and discourse genres); and the participants in various communicative, social, or institutional roles and identities, as well as their goals, knowledge, opinions, attitudes, and ideologies*” (van Dijk, 2015:470-471).

Now, considering:

“frank and categorical backing to the colonial fact imposed on Western Sahara,” from both lexical and semantic perspectives, the reference to colonialism—universally condemned as an unacceptable act—is strategically used within the news discourse. This recontextualizes a condemned phenomenon by linking it explicitly to Morocco’s sovereignty over the Sahara. Through the use of quotation marks, the discourse portrays Morocco as a colonial power and ‘Western Sahara’ as the victim of the act of colonialism. The term ‘imposed’ suggests that this colonial act was neither voluntary nor peaceful, but rather coercive, repressive, and violent.

Furthermore, this description implicitly conveys an extensional meaning, representing Morocco as violating international law, including human rights. However, the news discourse is lexically and semantically framed through the selection of terms that simplify a complex geopolitical issue. The reference to international authorities such as the UN and the international legal framework serves to support the Algerian stance on the right of self-determination, as legitimized under relevant UN resolutions.

Notably, the article does not mention the right of states recognized by the UN, according to international law, to protect its sovereignty, security, and territorial integrity by legitimate and legal means.⁴ This selective representation of international law serves to justify the narrative of self-determination while excluding other relevant legal aspects that support Morocco's sovereignty over the *Western Sahara*.

Similarly, the stance of the French government is inferred as unexpected, even strange and incomprehensible, in:

"no other French government before it thought was necessary."

This statement stimulates critical analysis and paves the way for further explanation. First, decontextualization and entextualization strategies are at play here. The statement '*no other French government before*' recalls history but lacks any specific time indicators, leaving the reader **uncertain** about which government or period the article refers to. The recontextualization effect is evident in the direct quote from the press release. What is controversial in the statement is decontextualization, entextualization and their effects on the main news discourse.

In terms of decontextualization, the inference to previous French governments, with their inferred positions on the Moroccan Sahara over an indefinite period, removes political and diplomatic practices from their historical context and shifts them to the current moment. This period is marked by radical changes and transformations, including globalization, shifting power dynamics, and internationally framed issues.

The entextualization strategy also emerges in the press release. This strategy essentially involves "*the entextualization of some stretch of discourse, selecting it, shaping it, and delimiting its boundaries against the larger ongoing flow of talk or text, and the movement of this entextualized stretch to a new context, for instance, some present narrative*" (Cramer, 2011: 140).

In the context of our case study, the entextualization strategy involves recalling the actions and stances of past governments and comparing them with those of the current government. The results of this entextualization reveal bias in the news discourse and narrative, mainly because what is referred to as '*previous governments*' is not identified in terms of ideological or political backgrounds, thus blurring the distinctions between left and right, liberal and conservative—distinctions that have historically characterized French political discourse. By stating, '*no other French government before it thought was necessary*,' the comparison shifts the event from a singular, isolated act to one with broader historical implications. This elevates the previous undefined French governments' decision to a more general, absolute level, making it appear timeless and even eternal.

Another key speech act in the press release, as recontextualized in *El Moudjahid's* news discourse, is the implicit threat of "potential repercussions" resulting from an underestimation of the consequences of France's recognition of the autonomy plan. Here, we encounter an implicit threat, which is a performative act extending the discourse to justify and argue for further actions. This discursive strategy is based on referencing potential consequences, with the term '*potential*' strategically used to suggest the strength and scale of inevitable repercussions. Morphologically, the prefix '*re-*' in '*repercussions*' suggests a repeated or reverberating effect as a consequence of France's recognition, creating a cause-and-effect dynamic—a response to the initial action.

The illocutionary act of threat in the news report involves multiple layers of power—power over discourse, the power inherent in discourse itself, and the power of the Algerian government's foreign affairs apparatus in challenging and debating another power, both symbolically and materially.

Moreover, the French government's position is portrayed as unmeasured, inadequately assessed, and irrational, particularly concerning the potential consequences. The description of France's stance as informal, with terms like '*casual manner*' and the amplification '*very light-hearted*,' further paints the decision as irresponsible and poorly considered. This lack of rationality and seriousness, combined with the amplification of the decision, suggests that the repercussions of such a stance must inevitably be pervasive. The vague nature of this expression invites readers to speculate about the potential outcomes—whether military action, diplomatic consequences, or economic repercussions, such as a boycott of French trade, especially gas imports.

⁴ For instance, in the Charter of the United Nations: Chapter I — Purposes and Principles, Article 2(1)– (5), we read: "*All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations*"

These uncertainties lead readers to engage critically with both the implicit and explicit aspects of the discourse, utilising their background knowledge and cognitive strategies to decode the underlying meanings. The intertwined and reinforced discourses, as presented by *El Moudjahid*, act as a relay for the dominant orders of discourse about the Moroccan Sahara issue. Illocutionary acts, such as implicit threats and the implied certainty of future repercussions, are strategically embedded in the news discourse, elevating the news from mere reporting to a medium for exhibiting and reinforcing power. This practice is dialectically intersected by power dynamics, potentially leading to power abuse within the communicative event.

Step by step, as we analyse the structure of the target news narrative, we observe a shift from purely informative content to a more ideologically charged discourse. This shift does not conform to the standard conventions of news discourse design, nor does it align with the content and hierarchy of the inverted pyramid principle. This deviation becomes evident when we examine the following statement:

"By recognizing the Moroccan autonomy plan as the only basis for settling the Western Sahara conflict within the framework of Morocco's alleged sovereignty, the French government is flouting international legality, taking up the cause of denying the Saharawi people's right to self-determination, distancing itself from all the patient and persevering efforts made by the United Nations to complete the decolonization of Western Sahara, and abdicating the particular responsibilities it must assume, in all circumstances, as a permanent member of the Security Council."

To better understand this shift and its implications, we must consider some typical linguistic and stylistic features of news production. The passage uses long, complex sentences combined with simple phrases. These are linked through cohesion devices like conjunctions (e.g., 'and') and pronouns (e.g., 'it'), referring back to preceding nouns.

What stands out in this passage is the implicit cause-and-effect relationship that is discursively actualized. The recognition of the Moroccan autonomy plan is portrayed as leading to the following negative consequences:

"flouting international legality"

"taking up the cause of denying the Saharawi people's right to self-determination"

"distancing itself (France) from all the patient and persevering efforts made by the United Nations to complete the decolonization of Western Sahara"

"abdicating the particular responsibilities it must assume, in all circumstances, as a permanent member of the Security Council"

This rhetorical use of language draws attention not to the act of recognition itself but to its perceived broader and negative impacts, which are framed at multiple levels. These include non-compliance with international law, denial of self-determination, distancing from international consensus (the UN's efforts), and abandoning the responsibilities assigned to France as a permanent member of the Security Council.

However, this is not the entire story. The passage also introduces a proposition regarding the impact of French recognition:

"to complete the decolonization of Western Sahara."

To understand the role of this phrase from critical discourse optic, we must question: if the linguistic features typically used in news discourse were not problematic, what is the function of the infinitival phrase within the main clause, reported in progressive tense, as seen in: ***"distancing itself from all the patient and persevering efforts made by the United Nations to complete the decolonization of Western Sahara"***?

To address this, we first note that the passive voice here emphasises the UN's efforts, described as "patient" and "persevering." The sentence originally undertakes a move alpha (Haegeman, 1994), that is from D-structure active to S-Structure passive form impacting the syntactic structure of the utterance with an emphasis on special issue and meaning:

Active voice: ***"The United Nations make patient and persevering efforts."***

Passive voice: ***"Efforts are made by the United Nations."***

The agent (the United Nations) remains in the sentence, but the focus shifts to "efforts." In this passive construction, "efforts" represents the instrument through which the goal is achieved, rather than the patient that undergoes the action. Thus, "efforts" functions as an instrument argument, not a patient argument.

To complete the sentence's meaning, a goal argument is required, which is provided by the infinitival phrase "**to complete the decolonization of Western Sahara**." This phrase functions as a goal argument, representing the intended outcome of the UN's efforts.

Accordingly, the infinitival, while consistent with Van Dijk's (1988) microproposition component of news discourse macroproposition, does not constitute a relevant component of the overall news narrative. Its omission would not significantly alter the core news values (see also Bednarek and Caple, 2014; 2019). Although the phrase fits within the broader thematic context, its ideological implications and relevance to the story are evident and questionable.

Additionally, the infinitival phrase weakens the standard of newsworthiness. It distracts from the central event—France's recognition of the autonomy plan—introducing unnecessary complexity. Additionally, the use of passive voice as it was demonstrated shifts the focus to the UN's efforts, subtly downplaying France's active role in the recognition process. This rhetorical shift can be interpreted as constructing a contrast between the French position and the UN's stance. The implication is that the French government undermines the UN's efforts, while the UN, in reality, is facilitating a political settlement through negotiations (e.g., roundtables) rather than engaging in direct decolonization.

The phrase is also politically charged, suggesting a perspective that aligns with the Algerian dominant orders of discourse. *El Moudjahid*, serving as a conduit for this discourse, is observed as neither neutral nor objective. Its content is shaped by the political agenda it upholds. The term "decolonization" carries clear political connotations, reinforcing this ideological stance and shaping the reader's interpretation of the conflict. This renders the phrase problematic from a critical discourse analysis standpoint, as it distorts factual reporting and aligns with Algerian discourse, undermining the objective journalistic framework required.

Furthermore, the shift between topics is logically valid since both are interconnected; however, the spatiotemporal context of each differs. The main topic addresses the significant event—the French recognition of the Moroccan autonomy plan as the sole basis for settling the *Western Sahara* conflict—whereas the notion that the UN is making '*patient and persevering*' efforts to achieve decolonization is questionable in this context.

The verb '*to complete*' is not merely a lexical category but carries ideological weight. Understanding its use in this context is crucial not just for interpreting the action but for understanding the social actors involved, those included, excluded, imposed upon, and silenced. In other words, the focus is not only on the verb's action, but also on how the verb is discursively rule-governed in terms of syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic.

From the Algerian standpoint—including South Africa—'*Western Sahara is the last colony of Africa*,' a statement that remains unquestionable and carries the implication of the UN's duty to '*complete the decolonization of Western Sahara*,' as it is implicitly reported and inferred to in news discourse. This narrative however is framed and even represents a distorted interpretation of history and deliberate manipulation of facts and events, as it affirmed from a legal point of views:

« Le Sahara a été inscrit sur la liste des Territoires non-autonomes, à la demande du Maroc, dès 1963, soit dix ans avant la création du *polisario* (1973) et ce, dans le contexte de la décolonisation des territoires occupés par l'Espagne » (Royal Institute for Strategic Studies, March, 2021).

Let's analyse this in depth: if the process of decolonization is historically and legally documented, involving Spain (the colonizer/occupier, the agent and doer of the action), the Kingdom of Morocco (the colonized/occupied, the patient argument impacted by the act of occupation), and *Western Sahara* (given that occupation and colonization historically imply the occupation of a territory and a target geography for military or economic interests, as attested throughout human history, with *Western Sahara* being the target territory of Spanish occupation), what is striking is that, in the news discourse and, more generally, in the ruling Algerian orders of discourse, the process is decontextualized through drastic manipulation.

This manipulation not only distorts historically attested facts and events but also results in a transformation in which the original source of colonization—Spain—is removed, while the Moroccan Kingdom, initially the patient argument, is discursively assigned the role of the agent. This shift relocates Morocco from being the colonized and the occupied to the colonizer and occupier position, while *Western Sahara*, the territory once occupied by Spain, is now represented as the Moroccan's colony.

Ironically, this representation results from a deliberate distortion of history and facts, aligning with Algerian expansionist and separatist agenda and ideology.

This ideological construction of the Moroccan Sahara as being colonized by Morocco goes beyond merely promoting expansionism and separatism; it also fosters the myth of the existence of a supposed '*Sahrawi people*.' As Strenski (2014) notes, "*myths do not have intrinsic meaning; their meaning is given by their home context of situation.*" The term "*Sahrawi people*,"

therefore, is not a factual or isolated piece of information referring to reality. Instead, it refers to a constructed, possible world. Far from being a mere fiction, it is a mythical concept whose facticity remains confined to the realm of discourse and is shaped by its contexts.

Further evidences can be also provided from the analysis of the Algerian claim that *Western Sahara* is the “*last colony of Africa*.” (For further examples of points of divergence and opposition in countries and NGOs highlighting the dichotomy for or against Moroccan sovereignty over the Sahara territories, see the UN press release about the 2023 Session, 5th & 6th Meetings.)⁵

For instance, the news outlet *Echoroukonline.com* reported that the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the National Community Abroad, Ahmed Attaf, stated:

“We must stand by the struggle of the brotherly Sahrawi people in the last African colony, which expects support and assistance from all of us and from all the free people of the world to exercise their inalienable and imprescriptible right to self-determination.”⁶

Thus, it is evident that the discourse in the target news story is politically and ideologically biased under the control of the hegemonic Algerian military regime. This aligns with Cherkaoui's (2007) concept of imperial hubris of the Algerian masters in his investigation after the socio-anthropological bonds of the Cherifian Empire with the Sahraoui population. In this respect he (2007: 3) emphasises that: “*It sets (My essay) the issue of Sahara in its regional and international context and sheds thereby some light on the strategies of the masters of Algiers. Their desire for power, this imperial hubris that haunts them and of which they have become prisoners, takes them away from the new realities of their country, of the region and of the world*”.

The speaker's utterances (the Algerian Minister of Foreign Affairs) contain emotional patterns, which, if not recontextualized, could be seen as moulded slogans, such as “brotherly” and “free.” In addition, other discursive patterns and their intonation amplify engagement and militant sentiment, particularly with the term “struggle” for self-determination, which is emphasized as the *raison d'être* of free people. The textual structure of the discourse can also be described as “voicing,” where the voice of another (the Algerian minister) is selected and presented to strengthen the ideological agenda of the speaker's discourse. When reported and covered, this voice becomes further amplified.

6.7. Extended exploration and investigation of the universe of discourse about the Moroccan Sahara issue

Investigating and delving deeper into the universe of discourse, from the local to the global level, is not an easy task, though it is an exciting theoretical and practical experience. Despite the complexity of discursive networks and their interconnection with global political, economic, and cultural structures, the effort proves advantageous. On one hand, it allows for the verification of the relevance and strength of the theoretical tools at play, along with related knowledge; on the other, it explores the intricacies of discourse.

From this ambitious perspective, we are convinced that it is crucial to examine one of the primary bases of the Algerian claim using Grice's four maxims and argumentation from CDS perspective. That is, “*We see them (activities, i.e. ‘pre-genres’ and ‘macro-speech acts’) as generally subsumed or subordinated to argumentation, in the sense that, ultimately, they are supposed to give people reasons for what to believe and how to act.*” (Iețcu-Fairclough and Fairclough, 2013: 337). For further application see also (Iețcu-Fairclough, 2008).

This approach is guided to detect fallacies through the careful investigation of speech acts and their coherence within the discourse. With this framework in mind, we now turn to the International Court of Justice's advisory opinion on *Western Sahara*, issued in response to a request made by Morocco and Mauritania on 16 October 1975, as outlined in UN Resolution 3292 (XXIX) of December 1973:

“The materials and information presented to it do not establish any tie of territorial sovereignty between the territory of Western Sahara and the Kingdom of Morocco or the Mauritanian entity. Thus, the Court has not found legal ties of such a nature as might affect the application of General Assembly Resolution 1514 (XV) in the decolonisation of Western Sahara and, in particular, of the principle of self-determination through the free and genuine expression of the will of the peoples of the Territory.”

Although the Court's opinion acknowledges the existence of legal ties of allegiance between the Sultan of Morocco and *Western Sahara* population, however it concludes that these ties are insufficient to establish territorial sovereignty over the region.

⁵ <https://press.un.org/en/2023/gacol3370.doc.htm>. (Accessed April 28, 2025).

⁶ <https://www.echoroukonline.com/ahmed-attaf-africa-will-turn-the-page-on-colonialism-after-western-sahara-independence>. (Accessed April 28, 2025).

As the Court states, '*the materials and information presented to it do not establish any tie of territorial sovereignty between the territory of Western Sahara and the Kingdom of Morocco or the Mauritanian entity.*' This contradictory stance is problematic and can be viewed as biased and fallacious in the Court's reasoning.

This contradiction raises the question of whether the Sahrawi population—legally recognised and historically linked to the Cherifian empire through Islamic traditions and laws, and by allegiance (al-Bay'ah), as symbolic and legal ties—can be considered part of the Cherifian empire. This question makes sense only if we overlook the fact that the Sahrawi population is a Muslim community, ethnically Arab or Amazigh, and historically nomadic, constantly adapting to climate and agricultural conditions. The Moroccan Sultans never had representatives or military presence in the Sahara, either before or after Spanish colonization, nor did they assist the Sahrawi population in resisting colonial powers.

Evidence of the Moroccan-Sahrawi relationship can be found in Cherkaoui (2007), who explains that Spain's colonization of *Western Sahara* faced significant resistance, particularly from *Ma El Ainain*, who was supported by the King of Morocco. *Ma El Ainain* led military actions against the Spanish colonizers from Smara. This further supports the idea that the historical ties between Morocco and *Western Sahara* extend beyond mere political allegiance, with a deeper foundation in resistance to foreign colonization.

Moreover, Cherkaoui (2007) discusses the strong cultural, economic, and social connections between Morocco and *Western Sahara*. He argues that these ties were vital for the survival of the Sahrawi people, whose history, culture, and religious practices are more closely connected to Morocco than to any other neighbouring region. He also notes that the Sahrawi people, descended from the *Sanhadja Berbers* who ruled North Africa in the 11th and 12th centuries, share a rich history with Morocco. Cherkaoui concludes that "*without the Sahara, Morocco's history would be incomprehensible, and without Morocco, the Sahara would be no more than desert*" (Cherkaoui, 2007: 3).

Accordingly, the Court omits important historical evidence and facts while failing to explain key details in its statement, thus not meeting Grice's maxim of maximally effective information exchange. In other words, while the Court recognizes the legal ties as an important historical factor, it simultaneously denies their relevance to the issue of Moroccan sovereignty over *Western Sahara*. This creates a contradiction because if the legal ties are acknowledged, the self-determination process would no longer apply. Acknowledging these legal ties would imply that territorial sovereignty over *Western Sahara* belongs to Morocco, thus invalidating the basis for self-determination.

From this perspective, the Court's reasoning presents a logical fallacy, as it fails to recognize the direct connection between legal ties and territorial sovereignty, rendering the argument incomplete and irrelevant to the core issue. The use of the passive voice further obscures the agency behind these legal ties, diminishing Morocco's role and rights.

Recent studies in social, political, and legal philosophy have highlighted the complexities involving the use of the term 'self-determination'. As Dahbour (2003) notes, self-determination is a multi-faceted issue, often conflated with demands for ethnic nationalism, cultural rights, and regional autonomy. This confusion is particularly evident in the case of *Western Sahara*, where nationalist movements justify self-determination in their quest for statehood, without considering the broader political and cultural context. He also emphasizes the importance of distinguishing between genuine self-determination claims and nationalist aspirations, which he describes as the "illusion of the peoples."

This conceptual distinction is crucial for understanding the Algerian discourse, where self-determination is framed as a political and ideological tool to justify the separatist agenda. Algerian media outlets like *El Moudjahid* serve as conduits for this narrative, manipulating the concept of self-determination to fit the political interests of the Algerian regime.

Following Dahbour's analysis, it becomes evident that the Algerian military regime, alongside its imperial hubris, uses the rhetoric of self-determination to deliberately decontextualize, entextualize, and recontextualize the concept within the ruling Algerian orders of discourse. This strategy seeks to replace a metropolitan democratic government—such as the Moroccan kingdom—with a group of local autocrats, undermining any genuine progress toward self-determination. (Etzioni 1991)

Although several scholars provide evidence not only about the self-determination principle but also related concepts such as 'people' and their controversial status both theoretically and practically, the Algerian standpoint, along with the positions of other countries and NGOs (such as *Human Rights Watch*), continue to foreground self-determination within a deterministic ideology. This persists despite the evolution and dynamics of international relations and their geopolitical implications. To cite Etzioni (1992: 21), he urges that self-determination movements, "*while they long served to destroy empires and force governments to be more responsive to the governed, with rare exceptions, self-determination movements now undermine the potential for democratic development in nondemocratic countries and threaten the foundations of democracy in democratic ones.*"

Etzioni's critique is particularly relevant here, as he highlights the dangers of supporting self-determination movements. The creation of small, dependent states, as he calls them 'toy state' like the *Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic* (SADR), heavily supported by Algeria, raises critical questions about the true meaning of self-determination. Etzioni (1991:28) argues that "*while the world may survive the creation of increasingly smaller states, what true self-determination can these countries have when they are economically and militarily dependent on larger states—states in which they have no political representation?*" In the case of the "SADR", despite its claim to independence and self-determination, it remains at the economic and military mercy of Algeria. This leads to question whether the RASD's self-determination is truly independent or simply a dependency under the guise of sovereignty.

Etzioni's (1991) critique underlines that the call for self-determination should no longer be met with reflexive moral support. Instead, political and moral support should be withheld unless the movement in question genuinely enhances democracy, rather than undermining it. This is especially pertinent in *Western Sahara*, where Algeria's support for the Polisario Front may not be facilitating true democratic development for the 'Sahrawi people', but rather perpetuating a dependency that retards democratic progress.

7. Limitations and recommendations

From a theoretical perspective, it is crucial to recognize how a piece of news discourse—regardless of its length or complexity—can be critically controversial and challenging, especially when analysed through the lens of CDS. The analysis of news discourse, from micro to macro level, necessitates the use of a broad range of approaches, including sociocognitive theories, pragmatics, philosophy of language, critical linguistics, general linguistics, sociology, anthropology, history, political science, international relations, and legal frameworks.

However, the study cannot claim to be exhaustive or entirely consistent, as many aspects of news discourse require further examination. To address this, an improvement in methodology is needed, focusing on the triangulation and synergy between CDS and Corpus Assisted Critical Discourse Studies (for introduction, see Gillings, Mautner and Baker, 2023). Extending the corpus to larger samples of news stories—whether collected synchronically or diachronically—and employing computational data analysis tools would help to explore collocations, concordances, and repetitions. This approach would also facilitate the analysis of both co-text and the social, historical, and political context, with a systemic move from the 'context of situation' to the 'context of culture'.

8. Conclusion

The news story in *El Moudjahid* and the Algerian government's press are significant examples of how media discourse constructs an ideological representation of reality, controlled by political agendas. This process involves the distortion of reality through manipulation of information, framing it to serve the interests of the Algerian government. Far from being neutral or objective, the news reporting undertakes significant processes of decontextualization, entextualization, and recontextualization. The original message from the Algerian government is transformed, focusing solely on portraying Algeria's reaction to the French government's recognition of Morocco's autonomy plan, while omitting key details about the decision-making process—such as the location, time, participants in key meetings, and the nature of the press release's creation and distribution. This omission clearly demonstrates how information is selectively presented to foreground Algeria's response, emphasizing protest and opposition while backgrounding France's recognition of the Moroccan autonomy plan.

This ideological framing is further reinforced through the strategic use of illocutionary speech acts, which invoke both action and threat. Additionally, the polarization of social actors—activated or passivated according to the discursive strategies employed—serves to legitimize Algeria's position while delegitimizing both Moroccan sovereignty and France's support for the autonomy plan because it threatens self-determination discourse and related narratives of 'Sahraoui people's right to independence'.

Moreover, the appeal to authority, such as the UN, functions as a strategic argumentative manoeuvre, attempting to mislead by selectively recontextualizing patterns of UN international law—specifically the case of self-determination—without considering the right of states to safeguard their territorial integrity and sovereignty, as recognized by the UN.

The news narrative can be further interpreted as a deceptive narrative. Further studies may classify it either as a deliberate manipulation of facts and events, thus constituting disinformation, or as a strategic distortion of news discourse that weakens and damages the ethical roles of media institutions by failing to report events without political or ideological bias, all within a weaponizing strategy of language and discourse amplified by the power of the media. By presenting Algeria's actions as justified and Morocco's sovereignty as illegitimate, this narrative not only misleads but also legitimizes Algeria's position as fair and just. Discourse becomes a tool for propaganda within a stratocracy, strategically designed to confuse and obscure facts and

events—portraying Moroccan sovereignty and its historical ties with the Sahrawi population as acts of colonization, while separatism, with slogans like the rights of people to self-determination, decolonization, and human rights, is framed as rooted in moral virtue. It functions as a camera obscura, inverting facts and reality upside down.

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