

Gender and Patterns of Access to Media Discourse



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Summary:

Power is a central concept in critical discourse studies. Researchers in this field tend to focus on the negative uses of power that are articulated through and within discourses, and that result in dominance and oppression. Power may be linked to access to discourse. The patterns of access depend on social domains, institutions, professions, situations, and genres. In mass media, those who have access to journalists—those who are interviewed, quoted, and described in news reports—are those whose opinions are more likely to influence the public's opinion. This study aims at investigating the relation between gender and access to discourse. It employs Van Dijk's (1996) suggested patterns of access to discourse to measure women's' and men's involvement as subjects and actors in the news. This study has significant implications for understanding how the media empowers or disempowers women.

Keywords: discourse; gender; media discourse; power relations; critical discourse analysis.

1. INTRODUCTION

Many attempts have been made at the governmental and scholarly levels over the past decades to promote gender equality in all aspects of society. The influence of the media in shaping public views and ideas on important political and social issues was one of the primary topics that attracted the attention of researchers, particularly in the discipline of critical discourse studies. In this regard, it is essential to investigate how men and women are involved in the media as actors and subjects. Several studies have shown that despite advancements in the sphere of women's freedom, their participation in news production and their access to media discourse remain restricted. In many parts of the world, women remain underrepresented, and gender stereotypes continue in the media.

The project launched by the Finnish presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers (2016) offers probably the most comprehensive study on gender equality and the media. The investigation of how men and women are portrayed and presented in the media and related practices in Nordic nations shows that women are still underrepresented in the news media, both as story subjects and as information and opinion providers, according to the project's findings (Mannila, 2017). A recent study by Mateos de Cabo et al. (2014) involved women's representation in Spanish national online newspapers, focusing on three journalistic routines: one at the individual level of the reporter (gender) and two at the media routine level (parts, publication day, and article length). The findings show that women are still linked to traditionally "female" topics such as people, society, and culture, as indicated by the calculated multivariate models. The analysis of article length and publication day revealed that women featured more frequently in shorter articles and on Sundays, which the researchers interpreted as evidence of male affiliation with newsworthiness. Mateos de Cabo et al. (2014) also found disparities in gender reporting, as female journalists prefer to feature more women in their news coverage than their male counterparts. Overall, their study demonstrates that online newspapers continue to perpetuate the underrepresentation, stereotyping, and discrimination of women in web news, thus promoting gender inequality.

The International Women's Industry Foundation published its first global survey on women in the news media in 2011. The findings of this two-year study provide the most comprehensive picture to date of women's standing in news media ownership, publishing, governance, reporting, editing, photography, broadcast production, and other media jobs worldwide. According to the report, there is abundant evidence of the underrepresentation of women as subjects of coverage, but until now there was no reliable, comprehensive data to make a clear determination of women's current position in the news-making process or in the decision-making or ownership structure of their companies (Byerly, 2011).

This study investigates the connection between gender and discourse access. It employs Van Dijk's (1996) model of patterns of access to discourse to examine women's and men's representation as news subjects and actors. The study's major focus is on patterns of access to news discourse as well as how inequality and dominance are produced through exclusion from media discourse. The study's final section offers some examples to illustrate the dimensions of access to discourse.

This work has therefore attempted to address the following research questions:

- What is the connection between power and access to discourse?
- What are the patterns of access to discourse?

- Do men and women have equal access to media discourse?

2. Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a field that seeks to challenge the status quo by identifying, analysing, and also resisting and counteracting enactments of power abuse in private and public discourse. CDA is critical in that it seeks to demystify texts ideologically shaped by power relations by focusing on the opaque relationship between discourse and societal structure, and it does so through open interpretation and explanation, relying on systematic scientific procedures, i.e., by achieving distance from the data and placing them in context. Reflection is required regarding the research process.

In general, researchers in CDA are viewed as activists who aim to bridge the gap between their academic interests and socio-political engagement. They analyse society and take the side of the powerless and oppressed. According to Wodak (1989), the true function of critical discourse analyzers is to unearth the subtle linguistic configurations of injustice, racism, and inequality. In the same vein, Coulthard and Coulthard (1996) argue that CDA researchers' task is to actively engage in social investigations with the purpose of discovering and explaining how power and discriminatory ideas are encoded and mediated through language. According to Coulthard and Coulthard (1996), the responsibility of scholars in subjects such as critical discourse analysis, sociology, and anthropology is to "help build a world in which people are not discriminated against on the basis of sex, colour, creed, age, or socioeconomic class" (p. xi).

CDA has offered theory and a number of instruments and methodologies for broad investigations of contextualised language use in visual, written, and spoken texts. A great deal of study has been conducted over the past few decades, expanding on disciplines such as linguistics, anthropology, psychology, sociology, and cultural studies, among others. Equipped with a strong theory and analytical toolkit, CDA researchers took particular interest in media discourse because it plays a crucial role in the development of views, prejudice, and social dominance. For instance, researchers are concerned with the way media discourse excludes social actors and misinterprets events. Since CDA has acquired popularity in discourse studies, an increasing number of researchers have used CDA to examine the stereotypes, presuppositions, hegemony, power, and ideological viewpoints in media.

3. Power and Access to Discourse

According to Rogers (2004), "power" is a central concept in critical discourse studies. Within this framework, researchers tend to focus on the negative uses of power that are articulated through and within discourses and that result in dominance and oppression. For Wodak (2001), power is

about relations of difference and particularly about the effects of differences in society. According to Blommaert (2005), the most profound impact of power everywhere is inequality because power distinguishes and selects, includes and excludes. Blommaert (2005) adds that critical discourse studies should offer an analysis of the effects of power, the outcomes of power, what power does to people, groups, and societies, and how this impact comes about.

In the Foucauldian view (1972, 1980), discourse analysis may examine, for instance, how authoritative figures use language to assert their dominance and demand obedience and respect from those under them. For instance, a research project might look at how instructors speak to their students or how military officers speak to recruits. This methodology could also be used to investigate the use of language as a form of resistance against those in power. In this way, we can argue that power and knowledge are related; teachers are more knowledgeable than students, and doctors are more knowledgeable than patients. Foucault (1980) maintains that power cannot be exercised without knowledge, and knowledge cannot be generated without power. Jager (2001), on the other hand, emphasises the significance of connecting power and society in order to examine the impact of one over the other. To further highlight the dilemma of power and knowledge, Jager (2001) argues that it is necessary to examine the relationship between discourse and societal reality and to inquire more specifically how power is rooted in this reality, who exercises it over whom and by what means, etc.

Power may be linked to access to discourse. The patterns of access depend on social domains, institutions, professions, situations, and genres. For instance, the teacher, in education, has a certain control over educational discourse. If we take mass media as another example, those who have access to journalists, those who are interviewed, quoted, and described in news reports, are those whose opinions are more likely to influence the public opinion. Central to CDA is the understanding that discourse is an integral aspect of power and control. Power is held by both institutions and individuals in contemporary society, and "any challenge to the status quo challenges those who hold power" (Bloor and Bloor, 2007, p. 4). According to Teubert (2010), in any society, all the individuals should have a voice in the discourse, but in reality, the discourse is monopolised by certain categories of people. He notes that people are divided "into those who are commissioned to produce texts for the media and the rest of us who consume them" (Teubert, 2010, p. 1). It seems that whatever each of us may say carries less weight than what we are told by the discourse, by our authorities, by instruction manuals, and even by those old-fashioned things called books. (Teubert, 2010)

According to Van Dijk (1996), "A critical analysis of the properties of access to public discourse and communication presupposes insight into more general political, sociocultural, and economic aspects of dominance." (P.84) Van Dijk (1996) believes that readers or listeners should have access to alternative information or mental resources to oppose such persuasive messages. The manipulative nature of the messages readers and listeners are constantly bombarded with can contribute to the formation of preferred models of specific situations, such as race riots, which can then be generalised to more general, preferred knowledge, attitudes, or ideologies, such as the ideology that links race riots to blacks. According to Van Dijk (1996, 2008), access to discourse and communicative events is a key component in the discursive reproduction of power and dominance. The fact that certain discourses, such as those of TV, religion, medicine, and print media, are not accessible to everyone may lead to the production of asymmetrical power relations. For Van Dijk (1996, 2008), there is a need to explore the implications of the complex questions of who may speak or write to whom, about what, when, and in what context, or who may participate in such communicative events in various recipient roles, for instance as addressees, audience members, bystanders, and overhearers. Similarly, Ridgeway (2011) refers to social institutions as having more rights over discourse. Because members of dominant groups hold relatively privileged positions in organisations and institutions such as government, the media, and educational institutions, stereotypical gender representations that correspond to their own group experiences tend to become culturally hegemonic in society.

4. Gender and Access to Media Discourse

The term "discourse" has been used for a long time in several schools of sociolinguistic study, as well as discourse analysis and critical discourse analysis. Different researchers have assigned it a variety of meanings. Mills (1997) claims that the term "discourse" has been employed in a wide range of disciplines, including critical theory, sociology, linguistics, philosophy, social psychology, and many others. It is now a popular currency and "is routinely left unexplained, as if its usage were just common knowledge" (Mills, 1997, p.1). She adds, "Discourse is often employed to signal a certain theoretical sophistication in ways that are vague and sometimes obfuscatory" (P, 4).

Critical Discourse Analysis sees discourse as a "social practice," which means that there is a two-way relationship between a specific discursive event and the environment, institution, and social structure that frames it (Fairclough, 1995). As a result, discourse is both socially formed and socially conditioned. Individual and collective experiences, realities, situations, knowledge, identities, and relationships are all part of discourse, according

to Wodak (1997). It is fundamental in that it contributes to the preservation, replication, and modification of the social status quo (Wodak, 1997).

Several studies have been carried out to analyse media discourse in terms of representation, access, and control (e.g., Shor&Miltsov, 2019; Munnik, 2018; Dekavalla& Sanchez, 2017; Sahu&Alam, 2013; Hanitzsch&Hanusch, 2012; Grizzle, 2012; Llanos & Nina, 2011; White, 2009; Myers, 2009). While the number of women working in the media has increased globally, the highest positions (producers, executives, chief editors, and publishers) continue to be dominated by men (White, 2009). This distinction is especially obvious in Africa, where cultural constraints hinder women from pursuing careers as journalists. Traveling away from home, undertaking late work, and covering topics such as politics and sports are all considered masculine spheres (Myers, 2009).

Gallagher's investigation (1995) shows that only 12% of top management jobs in 239 countries are held by women. Byrely's report (2011) on the status of women in the news media demonstrates that overall women hold only a third of the jobs in reporting and a fourth of the jobs in top management. Women also hold only about a fourth of the jobs in governance (i.e., on boards of directors) globally. The same study also declares that women have little access to technical jobs (e.g., camera work, lighting, and sound). The same is true in developed nations like the United States. According to the Women's Media Center's report of 2014, women in the U.S. still have a long way to go to reach parity in newsrooms. In this nation, women make up less than a fourth of those in top management and only a third of those in governance-level roles.

The situation is significantly worse in Africa. According to Lubisi-Nkosinkulu (2022), despite the fact that women make up slightly more than half of the population, their voices are drastically underrepresented in the media, particularly at crucial periods in a democracy, such as elections, or even crisis periods, such as the COVID-19 epidemic. Lubisi-Nkosinkulu(2022) notes that the marginalisation of women is a continuous social problem, and while the media's portrayal of women remains a concern, this problem has not been rectified. Using the media's coverage of elections as an example, a report on media coverage of municipal and national elections in South Africa from 1994 reveals that, despite fluctuations in number, the issues and voices in media coverage of elections tend to reflect similar power dynamics. The effect of this trend is that crucial topics and the voices of women are routinely ignored (Lubisi-Nkosinkulu, 2022).

In terms of how women are treated in the news, Arab countries are like Africa and other developing countries. Women continue to seek a larger role and better media representation in these parts of the world. The results about the Middle East and North Africa in Byrely's report (2011)

show that men outnumber women and that the marginalisation of women is especially serious in Jordan. According to Mahadeen's (2022) recent study, despite major legislative, legal, and technological advancements in Jordanian media over the years, the business as a whole is considered to be especially hostile to women. Mahadeen's (2022) maintains that the number of women in Jordanian media, both as employees and decision-makers, was shown to be much lower than in other industries. It was also observed that men hold virtually all positions of control in the sector and make up 77% of the total media workforce. Furthermore, the poll found that women account for only about 23% of all media workers in Jordan, and women own virtually no media firms. Regarding Algeria, there are 3500 identified journalists in print media, but only 33% are women, despite the fact that women's enrolment in university journalism programmes surpasses men's. The women's media industry, according to Simoud (2021), requires more qualified executives to assume leadership roles, as a relatively tiny number of female journalists have attained the post of department head, editor-in-chief, or director. This has significant implications for the efficiency and participation of women in decision-making. (Simoud, 2021).

Women's access to media discourse and the extent of their participation and influence in the media have ramifications for media content as well. In the view of Hanitzsch and Hanusch (2012), female media professionals are more likely than their male counterparts to represent other women's demands and viewpoints. Having women on radio, television, and in print is more likely to create positive role models for women and girls, acquire the trust of women as sources and interviewees, and attract a female audience (Hanitzsch&Hanusch, 2012).

5.Methodology

This study attempts to measure how involved men and women are as subjects and actors in the news using Van Dijk's (1996) suggested discourse access patterns.

Van Dijk (1996, P.87) discusses three dimensions of access. 1/The planning of the communicative event implies decisions about the setting, the participants, the roles allocated to each participant, and so on. 2/ The controlling of the setting of the communicative event is a very important initiative that can be taken by powerful agents. 3/ Controlling the communicative event consists of the power to control the production of the text itself, be it verbal, written, or visual. The decisions made at this level may concern the choice of the channel of distribution (TV, radio, newspaper), the language, the genres, and even the speech acts, the topics, the interruptions, and the style. 4/ Controlling the audience is another type of access to discourse. Those who can control and plan the communicative events may as well allow participants to be present in, for example,

meetings and debates. In addition to this, journalists should have access to powerful newspaper or television networks in order to attract audiences. Therefore, the patterns of access to discourse, according to Van Dijk, include the following:

- The topics or referents of discourse (who is written or spoken about).
- The way people take the initiative for communicative events.
- The modalities of their participation,
- The ways they control the various other properties of discourse (such as turn taking, sequencing...)
- The ways they are being represented, as referent or topics, in discourse.

To illustrate some of the indicators set out by Van Dijk and to measure the involvement of women (and men) in the decision-making structures, I have chosen an Algerian daily newspaper, Echorouk¹ (3/8/2022).

6. Data Interpretation

While tracking the proportion of women and men in executive decision-making posts, I have noticed that men have always controlled chief positions.

The study of the content of one edition has allowed me to make the following remarks:

- Male newsagents and correspondents outnumber the females.
- 38 headlines include masculine names or refer to actions associated with male participants. Many of these headlines are mentioned on the front page.
- Four headlines include feminine names or refer to actions associated with female participants.
- Men produce longer articles.
- The political columnists are all male.
- Most of the correspondents are men.

In terms of topicality, men produce more texts on political and social issues than women. So, they have more chances to be in charge of the communication event by choosing who to talk to and what news to share. Table 1 shows very clearly how men and women are involved in shaping public opinion in different ways. Surprisingly, not a single woman is assigned to cover sports in this issue of Echorouk. This brings to mind the difficulties that female sports journalists face.

¹<https://www.echoroukonline.com/echorouk-yawmi?search=3+%D9%81%D9%8A%D9%81%D8%B1%D9%8A+2022>

Table1: Topics covered by Men and Women Journalists

	politics	SOCIETY	ECONOMY	CULTURE	HEALTH	INTERVIEW	LOCAL NEWS	SPORTS
Men	7	28	3	6	2	1	30	17
Women	2	8	1	2	1	0	8	0

Table 2 shows that women are not frequently quoted or interviewed. The study of the articles demonstrates that men are more likely to be quoted in stories about politics, history, religion, and science. The presence of women in the news as news sources or experts is very low.

Table2: Source Selection

	Written about	Mentioned	Quoted	Interviewed
Women	3	4	1	0
Men	22	20	19	5

Byrely and Ross (2006) point out that when the under-representation of women in terms of resourcing is put into question, journalists will often say that they do not cover stories focused on women politicians because there are not many women in positions of authority. They argue that such a claim is just "an excuse for marginalising women's voices." (Byrely& Ross, p. 47) In fact, journalists will tend to use people like themselves who share the same opinions and will not select quotes with which they disagree in their own reports (Manning 2001). Source selection, then, can be considered an indicator of access to discourse. If ever one manages to get mentioned, quoted, interviewed, or referred to, then he/she can contribute to the production of discourse.

Photographs and caricatures are also vital indications of visibility, control, and access. The examined version features 28 images of male politicians, ministers, and historical personalities, but only four photographs of female people, including a well-known actress, a fashion model, and two ordinary females. BakiBoukhalfa, well-known for his frequent contributions to Echourouk, drew the lone caricature in the publication.

7. Discussion

Using the Van Dijk model, I analysed an issue of the Echourouk

newspaper that revealed a significant difference between male and female writers and information sources. This may give us a comprehensive comprehension of the connection between gender and journalistic work and media discourse in general. It is essential to conduct such research in order to rectify the situation and seek solutions to the problems of marginalisation, prejudice, misrepresentation, and exploitation of women.

Women have historically been underrepresented in media, both in terms of the number of women employed in media and the volume of coverage they receive. Due to this, media discourse lacks a diversity of viewpoints and voices. The research's findings and the conclusions drawn from the discourse's critical analysis are in line with the results of numerous recent studies on gender and access to media discourse, which have demonstrated that women are frequently portrayed in stereotypical and constrained roles in the media and are frequently the targets of gender-based violence and harassment online. Additionally, there may be additional barriers to access and media representation for women from marginalised communities, such as women of colour and women with disabilities. Women continue to be underrepresented in the news media, both as sources and as journalists, according to certain research on gender and access to media discourse. For instance, according to a recent report (2021) by the Women's Media Centre on the status of women in American media, women made up 39.9% of the workforce in local radio news, down from 44.4% in 2018. White people made up 84.6% of the population, down from 85.5% over the same period.

Other research has examined how women's access to media discourse is influenced by their racial, ethnic, sexual, and other identities, focusing on the intersectional experiences of women in media. For instance, a study by UNESCO (2022) revealed that women of colour frequently experience intersecting types of discrimination in the media, including sexism and racism at work. Overall, these studies show how important it is for media to be more diverse and equitable, both in terms of representation and how women and other underrepresented groups are treated.

In Algeria, Women still have a little presence in media sector, and they are frequently underrepresented in positions of power. Due to institutional and cultural conventions that restrict women in Algeria's engagement in public and political life, they frequently confront barriers to accessing media discourse. Their voices are consequently frequently ignored or omitted from media debate. However, there are also initiatives being taken, such as training programmes and awareness campaigns, to promote gender equality in the media. For instance, the Algerian government, the United Nations Development programme (UNDP), and the European Union all worked together to develop the "Women in Media"

campaign in 2016. The curriculum offers female journalists chances for training and capacity building with an emphasis on encouraging gender-sensitive reporting and raising women's participation in media leadership roles. The "Algerian Women in Media" network is another project that was started in 2015 to give female journalists and media professionals a place to connect and encourage one another in their professions. The network also plans conferences, seminars, and training sessions to advance gender equality in Algerian media. Overall, there is still work to be done to guarantee that women have equal access to media discourse in Algeria, but progress is being made. These activities and campaigns are significant milestones towards fostering gender equality and empowering women in the media business in Algeria.

8. CONCLUSION

When men and women have equal access to media discourse, they have the same chance to influence elements of communicative events such as the audience, participants, objectives, language, genre, themes, style, and overall discourse schema.

Despite continued efforts on the part of governments, associations, and NGOs to promote gender parity, the findings reported in the numerous reports on the involvement of women in the communication industry reveal that media discourse is still monopolised by men. Increased participation and access by women to expression and decision-making in and through the media and new communication technologies were the first strategic goals of the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995. Promoting a fair and non-stereotypical representation of women in the media was the second goal. The Beijing Declaration (1995) is still being put into practice, and the commission set up to determine the successes, gaps, and obstacles is still working. In the meantime, women continue to fight for visibility, voice, and influence worldwide.

Future research on gender and access to media discourse has a wide range of potential topics. It will take a lot more research to determine how gender affects how people engage with and consume media content, as well as how media sources may produce more inclusive and diverse content that reflects the experiences of men and women. The constraints that restrict women from accessing media discourse can be further investigated, as well as how these barriers can be overcome through grassroots organising or policy initiatives. Additional investigation could be made into the role that media literacy education plays in empowering people to engage with media critically and confront gender biases and stereotypes.

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