



COGNITIVE-MODUS MODELING IN MEDIA DISCOURSE: A LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF EVENT INTERPRETATION

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Abstract

Contemporary media discourse has evolved into a complex cognitive system that not only transmits information but also actively constructs social reality through linguistic mechanisms. This study explores the interaction between dictum and modus components in proposition predicates, focusing on how global events are variatively interpreted across different media systems. Using the 2026 Middle East conflict as a case study, the research applies a cognitive-discursive framework to analyze linguistic strategies in Western, Middle Eastern, and Uzbek media. The findings demonstrate that while dictum provides referential stability, modus functions as a strategic tool for subjective evaluation and ideological framing. The study further introduces the concept of a monocentric interpretative field, revealing how media texts organize meaning around a central semantic core. These results contribute to media linguistics and cognitive discourse analysis by highlighting the role of language in shaping public perception.

Introduction

In the modern information landscape, media discourse has transcended its traditional role as a neutral channel of information and has become a powerful



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instrument for constructing and modeling social cognition. As emphasized by Teun A. van Dijk, discourse structures are deeply embedded in cognitive frameworks that influence how individuals perceive and interpret events. In this regard, linguistic choices are not neutral; rather, they play a decisive role in shaping ideological meaning and guiding audience perception.

A key mechanism underlying this process is the structure of the proposition predicate, which consists of two interrelated components: dictum and modus. Dictum represents the objective, referential core of an event, while modus reflects the speaker's subjective stance, evaluation, and epistemic positioning. This duality enables media discourse to operate simultaneously as a source of information and as a tool of interpretation.

The 2026 Middle East conflict provides a particularly revealing case study, as it generated widespread global coverage with significant interpretative divergence. Despite referring to the same factual reality, different media outlets constructed distinct narratives through specific linguistic strategies. This raises important questions about the relationship between language, cognition, and ideology in media discourse.

Accordingly, this study seeks to investigate how dictum and modus interact within media texts, what linguistic mechanisms produce interpretative variability, and how meaning is structured through a monocentric interpretative field. By addressing these issues, the research contributes to a deeper understanding of how media discourse shapes social reality.

Methods

This study adopts a multi-layered cognitive-discursive methodology that integrates qualitative discourse analysis with semantic and pragmatic examination of linguistic structures. The primary objective is to explore how proposition predicates function within the dictum–modus framework and how they contribute to the construction of meaning in media discourse.

The empirical data consist of a comparative corpus of media texts covering the 2026 Middle East conflict. The corpus includes Western sources such as The New York Times and The Guardian, Middle Eastern outlets such as Tehran Times and The Times of Israel, and Uzbek media platforms including Kun.uz, Daryo.uz, and



Qalampir.uz. These sources were selected to represent diverse ideological and cultural perspectives, thereby enabling a comprehensive comparative analysis.

The theoretical foundation of the study is based on the works of Charles Bally and Nina Arutyunova, who developed the concept of dictum and modus, as well as the cognitive discourse framework proposed by Teun A. van Dijk. Additional insights are drawn from media linguistics, particularly the work of Elena Kubryakova, which emphasizes the role of language in structuring knowledge and interpretation.

The analysis proceeds in three stages. First, key proposition predicates are identified within the texts, focusing on verbs, modal constructions, and evaluative expressions. Second, a functional-semantic analysis distinguishes between dictum and modus components, allowing for systematic classification. Third, a comparative analysis examines variations across media systems, revealing patterns of ideological framing and cognitive modeling.

Special attention is given to modal verbs, evaluative lexicon, metaphorical predicates, and syntactic structures such as passive constructions, as these elements play a crucial role in shaping interpretation. Through this integrated methodological approach, the study ensures both analytical rigor and cross-cultural validity.

Results

The findings reveal that media discourse operates through a structured interaction between dictum and modus, resulting in systematic interpretative variability across different media systems.

First, modus emerges as the primary mechanism of subjective evaluation and ideological framing. Western media frequently employ deontic modality, using expressions such as “had to intervene” or “must act,” which frame actions as necessary and justified. In contrast, Middle Eastern media, particularly Iranian sources, rely on assertive constructions such as “will respond” or “will crush,” emphasizing determination and resistance. Uzbek media, meanwhile, tend to foreground consequences through evaluative and metaphorical predicates, focusing on economic and regional implications rather than direct agency.



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Second, dictum functions as the referential backbone of discourse, providing factual information about the event. However, the analysis shows that even this seemingly objective layer is subject to variation. Differences in lexical choice, such as “strike,” “attack,” or “operation,” subtly alter the perceived nature of the event. Similarly, passive constructions obscure agency, shifting attention from actors to outcomes and thereby influencing interpretation.

Third, the study identifies the presence of a monocentric interpretative field in all examined media systems. Each outlet organizes its discourse around a central semantic core that shapes the overall narrative. Western media emphasize legality and humanitarian concerns, Israeli media focus on national security, Iranian media highlight resistance and sovereignty, and Uzbek media prioritize regional stability and economic impact.

These findings demonstrate that interpretative variability is not random but structured through consistent linguistic and cognitive mechanisms that reflect broader ideological frameworks.

Discussion

The results confirm that media discourse functions as a constructive system that actively shapes reality rather than merely reflecting it. As noted by Niklas Luhmann, mass media reconstruct events through selective communication processes, thereby influencing public perception.

The interaction between dictum and modus constitutes the core of this process. Dictum provides a foundation of factual credibility, ensuring that discourse appears grounded in reality. However, modus introduces evaluative elements that guide interpretation and align the narrative with specific ideological perspectives. This dual structure allows media texts to balance objectivity and persuasion, creating an illusion of neutrality.

The study also highlights the importance of subtle linguistic strategies in shaping meaning. Modal verbs, evaluative adjectives, metaphorical expressions, and syntactic constructions operate as tools of cognitive influence, often without explicit ideological statements. These mechanisms enable media discourse to guide interpretation in a nuanced and indirect manner.



Furthermore, the concept of a monocentric interpretative field explains how coherence is achieved within media texts. By organizing all elements around a central theme, media outlets create consistent and persuasive narratives that limit alternative interpretations. This helps explain why different audiences develop divergent understandings of the same event depending on the media they consume.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that media discourse is fundamentally shaped by the interaction between dictum and modus within proposition predicates. Dictum ensures referential stability and factual coherence, while modus functions as a strategic mechanism of evaluation and ideological framing. The analysis of the 2026 Middle East conflict shows that interpretative variability across media systems is systematically structured through linguistic choices and cognitive models. The introduction of the monocentric interpretative framework provides a new perspective on how media texts organize meaning and maintain narrative coherence.

Overall, the findings underscore the crucial role of language in constructing social reality and shaping public perception. Media discourse does not simply report events but actively participates in their interpretation, influencing how they are understood and remembered. Future research may further explore these processes across different cultural and linguistic contexts, as well as in multimodal media environments.

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