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### RESEARCH ARTICLE

## Media Representation of the Iraqi Kurdistan Region during the Referendum: A Linguistic Analysis

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### Abstract

This study conducted a linguistic analysis of the media representation of the Iraqi Kurdistan Region during the Kurdistan Referendum on September 25, 2017. The research aimed to bridge two methodologies: corpus linguistics and critical discourse analysis. By examining how the media portrayed the Iraqi Kurdistan Region during the referendum, this study shed light on the linguistic dimensions of media coverage and the issues surrounding the referendum. Data were collected from six different news sites worldwide and analysed using corpus tools through AntConc. The findings showed that Western media outlets in the United Kingdom and the United States, including BBC News, CNN, Fox News, and Sky News, represented the Iraqi Kurdistan Region Referendum negatively. In contrast, Rudaw, a local media channel in Iraq's Kurdistan Region, provided a completely positive portrayal, while Al Jazeera maintained an unbiased attitude.

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### Introduction:-

#### Background of the Study

In today's technological age, the media is a potent weapon for depicting, representing, and shaping perceptions toward a particular viewpoint. In today's environment, the media has a major influence on people and their cognitive processes. As a result, in the last few decades, this region has sparked a lot of interest in literature and research. The media's emphasis on diverse features of any group of people affects the public's opinion of them and strengthens the link between concerns of ethnic existence, race, and political identity (Bucy & Holbert, 2013).

Today, mass media influence global public opinion by publishing and conveying news and information. It is information and communication that draws the attention of today's generation towards predetermined goals and creates a media image of the surrounding world. The media, including written, visual, and audio, publish millions of news stories about various events around the world every day, and news releases are one of the most important tasks of mass communication devices, which make them a powerful tool in public opinion and direction to attitudes.

Lippmann (1922) in his book "public opinion" focuses on mass communication in describing the world around us. In Lippmann's opinion for getting information on various relevant topics, characters and situations that are related, we feel positively or negatively about them, we depend on the media. We get a lot of information from the surrounding world from the media and news sites. American satirist Will Rogers has rightly pointed out the importance of the media, saying in one of his satirical materials that all I know is just what I read in the newspapers (Rogers, 1923).

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Protest and McCombs (2016) highlight the media's significant influence in shaping public opinion and directing political decisions. In today's interconnected world, media is not just a platform for disseminating information but also serves as a powerful instrument for governments to advance political propaganda, validate policy decisions, and sway both national and international perspectives. Media outlets, by carefully crafting their narratives, can either support or challenge political stances, often aligning their messaging with the interests of media owners, political entities, or governments. This alignment allows the media to not only inform the public but also influence how critical global issues are perceived. In the global public sphere, media coverage of international events has an even greater impact, as it frames these events in ways that can either legitimize or discredit specific governmental actions. Consequently, media becomes a tool of strategic communication, embedding particular political agendas and propaganda within its reports. The public, in turn, absorbs these narratives, which may shape their opinions and perceptions, especially on issues related to foreign policy and international relations. The role of the media, therefore, extends beyond simply providing information; it actively participates in the construction of public discourse, playing a pivotal role in shaping global perspectives and political landscapes, reflecting the priorities of those in power.

Both domestic and Western global media often engage in stereotypical portrayals, presenting a selective image of their societies. This image is shaped to fit their desired narrative, ensuring that their audience lacks alternative perspectives. Following ISIS's capture of parts of Iraq, and Massoud Barzani's call for a decisive Kurdish stance on independence, the Kurdistan Parliament's resolution on the matter has become a significant topic in media and analytical circles. The independence of the Kurdistan Region and the potential disintegration of Iraq have dominated discussions. In this context, the collected articles on the 2017 Kurdistan referendum will be analysed using AntConc corpus tools.

### **Problem Statement**

Even though media representation has been a part of media studies for decades, it has only recently begun to change the ways in which the media packages their products during times of national emergency (Carr, 1999; Heyboer, 2000). In general, people want information during times of crisis. They turn to news sources to learn what is going on and to help them predict what might happen. Media studies should pay close attention to how news media present national crises, especially in the Middle East, in order to understand violent and security-related events. This is because understanding these events is becoming increasingly important as brutal acts escalate. On September 25, 2017, Iraqi Kurdistan Region Referendum, for instance, the media represented Kurdistan Region around the world. This can help to understand how the media covers the crisis and events unprecedented size.

### **Research Aims and Objectives:-**

The study intends to conduct a linguistic analysis of the media representation of Iraqi Kurdistan Region. The present study aims to bring together two seemingly opposed approaches: corpus linguistics and critical discourse analysis. The aim of this research is to examine, from a linguistic perspective, how the media portrayed Iraqi Kurdistan Region during September 25, 2017, Kurdistan Region Referendum. The objectives include:

1. To collect data from different news sites around the world.
2. To create a corpus of news sites articles that will form our database.
3. To show how Iraqi Kurdistan Region is represented in the media and to perform a linguistic analysis of news sites articles.

### **Research Questions**

The presence of frames in media representations of Iraqi Kurdistan, according to the literature, has the power to affect how viewers interpret and respond to such events. To that goal, the following research questions are proposed:

#### **Main questions:**

1. What was the reflection of the news about the Iraqi Kurdistan Region referendum?
2. How are linguistic features employed to represent Kurdistan in the media?

#### **Sub-questions:**

1. What was the main focus of the news?
2. What have been the most important news values highlighted in the news?
3. Has the news published on the newspapers supported the referendum or not?
4. Has the news published on the news papers criticized the referendum?

### **Significance of the Study**

The significance of this paper is that it will help readers grasp the linguistic style utilized by the media to some extent and it will present a clear picture of Iraqi Kurdistan Region in the media during the time of referendum in September 2017. Furthermore, the paper serves as a bridge to help Kurdish speakers comprehend how they are portrayed in the media.

### **Structure of the Study**

The research documentation was organized using a five-chapter outline. As such, the first chapter offers a background insight into the media representation of Iraqi Kurdistan Region. The related literature review and concepts are presented in the second chapter, while the research methodology followed to carry out this study are described in the third chapter. In addition, a report of the established results is provided in chapter four, and chapter six closes the study by providing recommendations and suggestions for further research.

## **Literature Review:-**

### **Introduction**

The following section will discuss past research that is relevant to the current topic because there is limited research on media representation of Kurdistan in particular, and because it is significant, some studies on media representations of Kurdistan are included in general before focusing on studies on a specific topic for my research. Furthermore, it might be claimed that evaluating research in a broader context makes it simpler to find recurrent patterns of representation.

This overview may provide a thorough understanding of how Kurdistan is covered in the media and how researchers approach the subject. We investigate the most discussed topics in the literature. Furthermore, we conduct a systematic review of the published studies' geographic focus, methods, theories, and timeframes. As a result, this study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by offering an overview of how the media represents Kurdistan. These concepts can serve as a springboard for future research.

Researchers have explored media representation of Kurdistan globally using different scientific approaches, but a comprehensive analysis is still awaited. In recent years, several studies have taken a broader time frame and offered more in-depth insights, highlighting key historical periods and the presence of Kurds during those times. While some articles address how the media portrayed Kurdistan, many have focused on the influence of Western media on the region (Ali, 2018; Sabah, 2011).

In their study, Mohamadpur et al. (2016) examined how Newroz TV, one of Iranian Kurds' most popular news channel, represented Kurdish nationalism in relation to social identities. Their study revealed that the idea of Kurdish nationalism is defined in opposition to Arabic (Syria), Persian or Turkish nationalism. These different perspectives can be understood in the sense that Iran, Turkey and Syria have some fragments of Kurdish population and territories. It is therefore evident that Kurdish nationalism is an issue that is not always accepted.

Ali (2018) analysed the Islamic State's portrayal of Kurds in its prominent publication, **Dabiq Magazine**, revealing a highly negative depiction. The Kurds are characterized with hostility, labeled as "unbelievers," "devil worshippers," and often referred to as "Christians." This negative portrayal stems from the Kurds' non-Arab identity, positioning them as outsiders in the eyes of the Islamic State. The study highlights the media's role in reinforcing ethnic and religious divides.

Western media only covers underdeveloped countries during crises or natural disasters (Riffe & Shaw, 1982). In his master thesis, Sabah (2011) clarified that it is important for the Kurdish people to know whether the coverage of the U.S. newspapers about the Kurdistan Region is positive or negative. It is also crucial for the American academic community to determine if the coverage of Kurdistan in American publications reflects U.S. foreign policy.

Recent trends in media portrayal of Kurdistan over the past decade call for a thorough review. This research aims to provide a comprehensive examination of the literature surrounding the time of the Kurdistan referendum. Through linguistic analysis, it will contribute to the existing body of knowledge and highlight key factors that can be investigated further to enhance the media's depiction of Kurdistan. In this context, introducing the fields of corpus linguistics and critical discourse analysis is essential.

**Corpus Linguistics and Critical Discourse Analysis**

What is corpus linguistics? It is undoubtedly distinct from most other linguistics topics in that it is not explicitly concerned with the study of any single component of language. Rather, it is a discipline that focuses on a set of techniques or methods for learning languages (McEnery and Hardie, 2012).

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is defined as “discourse analysis with critical attitudes,” focusing on “actual and frequently extended examples of social interaction that take the form of linguistic or partly linguistic form” (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). This approach has proven effective in studying media discourse (Fairclough, 1995), offering valuable insights into how language shapes social interactions and ideologies.

This research aims to merge two seemingly opposing approaches: corpus linguistics and critical discourse analysis (CDA). The concept of corpus-assisted CDA has led to extensive research that employs corpus methods to explore discourses of interest to critical analysts. This approach's popularity is reflected in the diverse techniques and themes studied, ranging from simple concordance analysis to advanced research on lexical bundles and automatically tagged semantic categories (Prentice, 2010).

Baker (2010) has begun to advocate for an integrated strategy that combines corpus linguistics and critical discourse analysis while also encouraging a dialogue between quantitative and qualitative methodologies. As a result, this article uses a corpus-based CDA-informed approach to investigate how news media discursive practices contribute to the formation of social structures.

Although corpus-based methodology is not limited to a quantitative approach, it helps achieve agreement on findings by using statistical data from a larger corpus. Corpus analysis software processes multiple texts simultaneously, allowing for quick identification of patterns and occurrences that would be manually unmanageable (Stubbs and Gerbig, 1993).

**The Concept of Framework**

Erving Goffman a sociologist who believed that individuals actively organized and labelled the world around them using frameworks that determine, receive, identify, and label information introduced the concept of framework in 1974, and Gitlin describes Goffman's view that we need to understand and manage reality or discuss it. We set up or select a set and a list of cognitions and actions. In other words, a framework, opinion, or design gives meaning (Gamson and Modigliani, 1987).

In recent decades, communication researchers have widely used the concept of framework and framework methods to investigate the hidden complexities and meanings of different forms of news. Pan and Kosicki see the framework analysis as a system of organized elements that both support specific opinions and provide tools to encourage the audience to process media texts (Pan and Kosicki, 1993).

Framing is the process by which media professionals selectively shape media content. This theory explains how specific parts of content or meanings are structured and presented in a particular format, encouraging favorable interpretations while excluding others. In essence, the media not only tells audiences what to think about but also shapes how they should think about it, all within a predefined framework. Framing suggests that the way topics and events are portrayed in news reports influences the audience's understanding of those subjects and events (Scheufele and Tewksbury, 2007).

**Representation theory**

The Dictionary of Media and Communication defines representation as follows: representation is the realities of the external world to the audience and our knowledge and understanding of the world is often created through the media, and newspapers and television mediate our understanding of reality.

The media presents the world to us by selectively interpreting events, acting as gatekeepers influenced by ideologically saturated factors. Since it is impossible to capture the full complexity of the world, media representations are shaped by news values, propagandistic pressures, and various technical and content-related factors. These elements impose meaning and simplify reality. As such, representation becomes a crucial mechanism through which the media defines and portrays reality (Hill and Watson, 2006).

Media content is always structured, never serving as a transparent window to reality. Representation in media goes beyond mere word choice and raises critical questions about how different groups are portrayed. This applies across various media genres and often carries underlying political meanings. Representation acts as a signifier, reflecting external reality, as seen in art, language, and media—each offering copies of reality. Language, whether through sound, image, or text, serves as a tool to convey these representations. The media, with its multilingual character, shapes and presents these representations of reality. However, achieving successful representation is not straightforward; it involves a complex and dynamic process (Stafford, 2003).

## **Research Methodology:-**

### **Introduction**

This chapter outlines the techniques and approaches used to achieve the objectives of this study, detailing the methodological procedures employed to examine the media representation of the Iraqi Kurdistan Region during the September 25, 2017 referendum. It focuses on the research approach, data collection methods and tools, data analysis programs, and ethical considerations implemented throughout the study.

### **Research Approach**

This study employs a blend of both qualitative and quantitative research methods to analyze media representation of the Iraqi Kurdistan Region during the pivotal period leading up to the 2017 referendum. The first phase is quantitative, utilizing AntConc corpus tools to process acquired data effectively. The second phase adopts a qualitative approach, employing critical discourse analysis to examine articles that discuss topics both broadly and contextually. The selection of the referendum as a focal point is driven by the significant interest in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region, as evidenced by the substantial number of press articles published on the topic. This research is both descriptive and analytical, focusing on several linguistic characteristics present in the media narratives.

The corpus for this study consists of 16,375 words, derived from articles extracted from various news sites in electronic format, which were then converted into text files for analysis. In this respect, it is essential to introduce the field of corpus linguistics, the tools employed in corpus analysis, and the overall structure of the corpus used in this study. This comprehensive approach allows for a nuanced understanding of media portrayals and their implications, ultimately contributing to the broader discourse on how media influences public perception in politically sensitive contexts.

### **The Study Corpus**

The corpus for this study consists of 30 news articles featured in BBC News, CNN, Sky News, Fox News, Al Jazeera and Rudaw that include information about Iraqi Kurdistan Region Referendum in 2017 and were published between September 2017 and October 2017. The corpus as a whole consists of 16375 tokens and 2592 types. The corpus is designed to include different types of media and five articles from each media. The size of the corpus is relatively small because of the difficulties to have access to more articles in the English language.

### **The Corpus Toolkit (AntConc)**

The computer software tool "AntConc," developed by Laurence Anthony, is widely recognized and utilized in the field of corpus linguistics for concordance and text analysis. This powerful tool allows researchers to efficiently examine large datasets with a specialized corpus, significantly saving time compared to traditional manual analysis methods. Supporting analytical findings with evidence derived from the corpus tool is crucial for conducting primary analysis effectively. AntConc's main function is to generate concordance, or Key Word In Context (KWIC), which lists frequently occurring terms along with their respective contexts (Anthony, 2016). In addition to generating concordances, AntConc identifies specific lexical and syntactic structures and collects data on their frequency. This functionality enables researchers to gain deeper insights into language use within a given corpus. Furthermore, users can create a personalized wordlist based on their interests, allowing for tailored analysis that addresses specific research questions. This versatility makes AntConc an invaluable resource in linguistic research, facilitating a comprehensive understanding of the text being studied and enhancing the overall quality of linguistic analyses.

### **Data Collection and Selection**

The data consisted of thirty news articles on the Kurdistan Region Referendum 2017 randomly selected from BBC News, CNN, Sky News, Fox News, Al Jazeera and Rudaw (5 from each). The selected articles were published during September 2017, covering the major news events of the Iraqi Kurdistan Region Referendum. The table below provides the data collected from different news sites as follows:

**Table 3.1:-**Data collection table.

Newssites	Country	Number ofarticles
BBC News	UK	5
CNN	USA	5
Sky News	UK	5
Fox News	USA	5
Al Jazeera	Qatar	5
Rudaw	KRI	5
<b>Total</b>	6	30

The reason behind choosing different news sites from different countries is to find out how media from different countries portrayed Iraqi Kurdistan Region during the referendum period in 2017. The researcher chose two British news sites for this study: BBC News and Sky News, both of which were selected news sites because of their extensive reporting on international news as well as the highest viewership in the world. Cable News Network (CNN) and Fox News are both well-known news media in the United States and are the most popular daily newspapers in the United States of America covering a variety of topics, so the quality of their articles can be guaranteed. Al Jazeera has been selected because of its popularity, and it is a great source that so many people rely on it in the Middle East. Finally, Rudaw has been chosen because it is a local news site, and it was one of the media outlets that paid most attention to this event. These news sites are chosen based on their high circulation and focus on international coverage.

### Data Analysis

The software package used for data analysis "AntConc" as an integrated suite of tools includes several functions for examining the behavior of words in a text. Its three major functionalities are Concordance or Key Words In Context, Collocate and Keyword, all of which were created to help researchers undertake linguistic analysis.

The Concord function generates a list of collocates related with the search word or expression, which can be used as a starting point for linguistic analysis. However, the result must be modified and complemented with other types of analysis. First and foremost, function items such as articles (e.g. 'a', 'an', 'the') and pronouns (e.g. 'he', 'she', 'they', 'we'), as well as possessive forms (e.g. 'hers', 'his', 'their', 'our') and coordinating conjunctions (e.g. 'and', 'but', 'then'), are removed from the list. This is because they are at the top of the list even if they do not fit into any significant patterns. Using unrefined collocate lists to analyse news articles is problematic because news articles frequently include elements such as headers, including dates that include the days of the week, which push these items up higher on the collocate list than their contribution to elaborating the meaning of the main text deserves (Kim, 2014).

The data analysis of the corpora included four stages. First, with the application of AntConc, top five lexical frequency lists of the corpora were generated (see Table 4.1). In the second stage the word "referendum" was entered in the concordance of AntConc (see figure 4.1). In the next stage, the lexical words that associated with lexeme "Referendum" carried out in more depth. In the final, stage some linguistic features analysed by using CDA.

## Results and Discussions:-

### Introduction

This section provides details of the analysed results that answered the main research questions of this research, which aimed at finding out how the Kurdish referendum was reflected in the media and how the linguistic features employed to represent Kurdistan in the media. This was accomplished using a corpus-based approach and by the help of the software tool AntConc.

### Results of the lexical frequency analysis

Table 4.1 shows the top five content lexemes of the Corpus that related to Kurdistan after removing function items such as articles, pronouns, possessive forms and coordinating conjunctions. It is crystal clear that the lexemes' results appear differently in different news outlets. As shown in the table below, the lexical word "Kurdistan" appears 105 times in the Corpus, with "Rudaw" having the largest proportion of use at 44 times, and this media is from the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. On the other hand, "Fox News" did not use the term "Kurdistan" in any coverage.

In this section, we will focus on the lexeme “referendum” because the data collected related to the 2017 Kurdistan Region referendum and in the following stage, we will insert this word into the concordance line to gain further results on how the media portrays the Kurdistan Region referendum. The lexeme “referendum” is the second most frequent occurrence in the Corpus at 194 times, the highest value goes again to the local media “Rudaw” which is 45 times, and the lowest value goes to the Western media “Sky News” which is 14 times.

**Table 4.1:** Top five content lexemes in the Corpus.

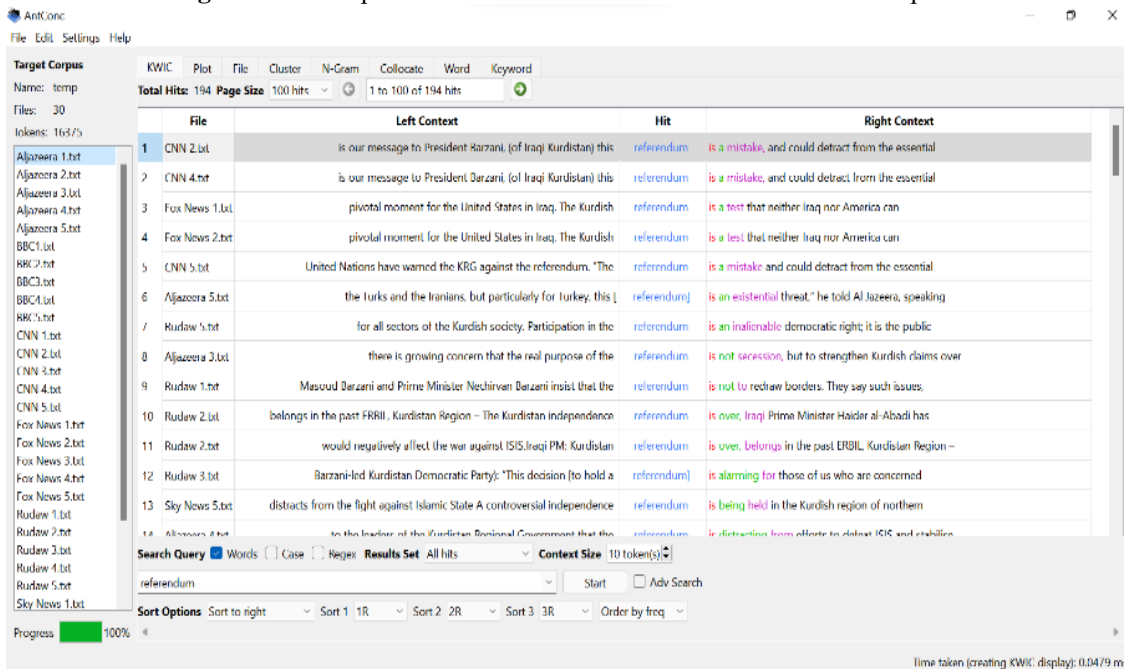
Rank	Keyword	Frequency	BBC News	CNN	Sky News	Fox News	Al Jazeera	Rudaw
1	Kurdish	235	(27) 11%	(39) 17%	(33) 14%	(38) 16%	(51) 22%	(47) 20%
2	referendum	194	(30) 15%	(44) 23%	(14) 7%	(25) 13%	(36) 19%	(45) 23%
3	Kurds	112	(24) 21%	(18) 16%	(20) 18%	(20) 18%	(15) 13%	(15) 13%
4	Kurdistan	105	(22) 21%	(15) 14%	(9) 9%	(0) 0%	15( 14%	(44) 42%
5	independence	92	(13) 14%	(21) 23%	(10) 11%	(11) 12%	(17) 18%	(20) 22%

**Results of the concordance lines (KWIC)**

The examination of concordance lines is important for describing repeated patterns while also investigating particular lines that have intriguing uses for a single search query (Hunston, 2002). In this section, the analysis of KWIC that is associated with Referendum and Kurdistan will be carried out in more depth.

AntConc's concordance lines were used to conduct a key word analysis. The term "referendum" was entered into AntConc's concordance, which yielded 194 hits, as shown in (figure 4.1) below and discussed in the previous section (see table 4.1)

**Figure 4.1:-** Sample Collocation Lines of “referendum” from the corpus.



When we look at the word "referendum," we can see that it has both negative and positive lexical connotations (see table 4.2). We will analyse most frequent lexical words that associated with referendum and will give example from the articles and explain the linguistic features and why they use this kind of grammatical usage.

As stated in table 4.2, the first negative word "violence" appears 14 times in the corpus, 11 times occurring in western news media, as indicated in the table below, with CNN 5 times, Fox News 3 times, and Sky News 3 times. Because the central government in Iraq and neighboring countries such as Turkey, Iran, and Syria were against the referendum and threatened the Kurdish government with using force against them if they continued to hold the

referendum, Western news media portrayed it as a form of violence against the people. The fact that the media see the referendum as a kind of violence could indicate that they are attempting to build a negative image in the public's mind in order to prevent the referendum from taking place.

**Table 4.2:-** Negative and positive lexical words associated with “referendum” in the corpus.

Lexical words	Frequency	BBC News	CNN	Sky News	Fox News	Al Jazeera	Rudaw
violence	14	-	5	3	3	1	2
threat	7	2	1	2	-	2	-
mistake	5	1	3	1	-	-	-
distracting	4	-	3	-	-	1	-
danger	3	1	-	2	-	-	-
inalienable	2	-	-	-	-	-	2

The lexemes "threat" and "danger" appear ten times in the corpus and are frequently utilized by western media. The Kurdish referendum that leads to Kurdish independence is perceived as a threat and danger by Western media because they believe that independence will resuscitate Daesh (ISIS).

Most Western media, including BBC News, CNN, and Sky News, strive to portray the referendum as a mistake and a distraction, claiming that it is a mistake that will distract from the critical effort to combat Daesh (ISIS).

There are only a few positive key words used with the referendum throughout the corpus, and one of these words is "inalienable", which is used by local news media Rudaw, in favor of the referendum to the total support for the succession, this news site demonstrated that the referendum is a democratic right for the Kurdish people.

The findings in the previous table show that all the negative lexical words associated with the “referendum” are used by the Western media, as they do not support the referendum. This tells us that Western media outlets in UK and USA portrayed the Kurdistan referendum in the media in a negative way. On the other hand, Rudaw's position as local media from the Kurdistan Region of Iraq was fully supportive of the referendum while Al Jazeera from Qatar was neutral.

**Further interpretation of key word in context**

The word "referendum" is picked as the hit for the KWIC analysis and to verify the objectivity of news articles' trustworthiness, based on collocation studies. (See figure 2)

**Figure 4.2:** Collocation analysis of “referendum” in the corpus.

File	Left Context	Hit	Right Context
1 CNN 2.txt	is our message to President Barzani, (of Iraqi Kurdistan) this	referendum	is a mistake, and could detract from the essential
2 CNN 5.txt	United Nations have warned the KRG against the referendum. "The	referendum	is a mistake and could detract from the essential
3 Aljazeera 5.txt	the Turks and the Iranians, but particularly for Turkey, this [	referendum]	is an existential threat," he told Al Jazeera, speaking
4 Rudaw 5.txt	for all sectors of the Kurdish society. Participation in the	referendum	is an inalienable democratic right; it is the public
5 Aljazeera 4.txt	to the leaders of the Kurdistan Regional Government that the	referendum	is distracting from efforts to defeat ISIS and stabilise
6 Sky News 5.txt	Kurd's will look elsewhere, and why not?Kurdish independence	referendum	in Iraq fuels violence fears The US and Britain
7 CNN 2.txt	of the poll as "unconstitutional," according to court documents. The	referendum	has been criticized by the United Nations, as well
8 Aljazeera 4.txt	urges Kurds to call off independence vote Washington officials fear	referendum	will disrupt war against ISIL and hurt Iraqi PM
9 Sky News 5.txt	in their allegiances and there is a concern that the	referendum	will spark violence here. If it does, Baghdad has
10 Fox News 1.txt	to intervene militarily if the Kurdish region's planned independence	referendum	results in violence, Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi told
11 CNN 3.txt	their ballots Monday, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan described the	referendum	as "illegal" and suggested Turkey could cut off oil
12 BBC2.txt	Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi warned on Sunday that the	referendum "	threatens Iraq, peaceful co-existence among Iraqis, and is

In support of the previous findings, we can clearly see that the Western media critically portrayed the Kurdistan referendum, while other media in a positive way. To substantiate this claim, we shall examine the text of articles from various linguistic perspectives. For instance:

Kurdish independence referendum in Iraq fuels violence fears, the US and Britain are both opposed to the "destabilizing" vote, arguing it distracts from the fight against Islamic State. (Sky News)

The statement from "Sky News," a British news organization, plainly identified that the Kurdish referendum would lead to violence by using the adjective "destabilizing." Both the US and the UK governments argued that the referendum would divert attention away from the fight against Daesh (ISIS). It is apparent that these countries' attitude was sarcastic, and they wanted to show the world that now is not the time for a referendum, so they portrayed the event unfavorably in order to discourage Kurdish people from voting.

The author's use of plain tone and attitude while describing the facts creates doubts about the referendum. As we can see from the following example.

Feisal al-Istrabadi, former Iraqi ambassador to the UN, said the Kurdish government risks throwing the region into turmoil for no clear gain. "For the Turks and the Iranians, but particularly for Turkey, this [referendum] is an existential threat," he told Al Jazeera, speaking from Bloomington, Indiana. (Al-Jazeera)

It is obvious from the direct speech employed in this example and the author's attitude that this threat is real by utilizing the word "existential," in which the author argued that this referendum poses an existential threat to neighboring countries, particularly Turkey. To demonstrate that the Kurdish government is risking having this referendum, the author utilized active voice and the determiner "this" rather than using Kurdish or Kurdistan with the word referendum.

Another collocation associated with the Kurdistan referendum is "mistake," as illustrated by the following CNN example: "The referendum is a mistake and could detract from the essential campaign of defeating Daesh (ISIS)," stated the UK's Defence Secretary Fallon to reporters in Baghdad last Monday. The use of the adjective "essential" emphasizes that conducting the referendum at this critical juncture is a mistake, suggesting that both the Kurdish and Iraqi governments should focus on defeating Daesh instead. This reflects a negative portrayal by Western media, as the phrasing "referendum is a mistake" conveys the message that it is not the right time for such an event.

In contrast, only a few positive collocations are found in the corpus regarding the referendum. One example asserts that the referendum represents a democratic right for the Kurdish people: "Participation in the referendum is an inalienable democratic right; it is the public display of the Kurdish will. The referendum is the voice of the century-old Kurdish liberation movement to exercise the long-denied right to self-determination against borders that have crossed them" (Rudaw). This statement highlights the referendum as a legitimate expression of the Kurdish people's aspirations.

The author used two adjectives together to empower the Kurdish people, one "inalienable" and the other "democratic," to underline that referendum participation and conduct is a fundamental right of every nation. By using the active voice and direct communication, the author attempting to convince the audience that the referendum is the only way to acquire your right and establish a state. The sole local media used in this study was Rudaw, which reflected the voice of the Kurdish government and Kurdish people outside of Kurdistan.

The discoveries within the past results appear that Western media outlets in UK and USA such as BBC News, CNN, Fox News and Sky News represented the Kurdistan submission within the media in a negative way. On the other side, Rudaw's position as a local media from the Kurdistan Region of Iraq was completely positive whereas Al Jazeera from Qatar was impartial.

In conclusion, while the current study's data is limited in scope, the data analysis approach clearly demonstrates the possibility of using corpus linguistics methods in CDA to disclose how important textual devices are used in media texts to reflect various or even competing ideological views. The current study's findings have methodological implications for future studies on media representation that use a quantitative methodology.

**Conclusion and Recommendation:-**

This study has explored the complex landscape of media representation concerning the Iraqi Kurdistan Region during the pivotal referendum held on September 25, 2017. As media continues to evolve in its reach and influence, particularly with the rise of digital platforms, understanding how it shapes public perceptions is crucial for researchers and policymakers alike. The findings reveal significant disparities in how local and Western media outlets depict the referendum. Specifically, local media tended to present a more supportive narrative, employing positive language that resonates with the Kurdish populace, while Western media often focused on negative aspects, highlighting concerns and criticisms that align with their political agendas. This divergence underscores the inherent biases that exist within media reporting, reflecting broader political ideologies and agendas, and emphasizes the need for critical media literacy in analyzing such representations.

Despite the limitations of this study, particularly in the scope of data analyzed, the insights garnered provide a foundational understanding of the linguistic patterns that contribute to media bias. By examining word choices, phrases, and the framing of the referendum, this research illustrates how language plays a critical role in shaping public discourse and influencing opinions. The distinct linguistic features identified in the corpus analysis, particularly the usage of the term "referendum," indicate how media narratives are constructed and the implications these narratives have for public perception. These findings suggest that the language employed by media outlets not only reflects their biases but also actively shapes the audience's understanding of complex political issues, highlighting the necessity for ongoing research in this area.

Moving forward, it is essential to build upon these findings through more comprehensive and rigorous research. Future studies should aim to include a broader range of texts and media formats, exploring not only the immediate coverage of the referendum but also its longer-term implications for Kurdish identity and regional politics. Longitudinal studies could offer valuable insights into how media framing evolves in response to shifting geopolitical contexts, crises, and changes in public sentiment over time. Moreover, employing a more extensive Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach that evaluates entire texts rather than merely fragments could address some of the critiques leveled against existing methodologies, thus enriching the understanding of media narratives and enhancing the validity of the findings. This holistic approach could significantly contribute to the field of media studies and provide deeper insights into the intricate relationship between language, media, and politics.

Additionally, investigating the role of social media in shaping perceptions around the Kurdistan referendum warrants attention. With the rise of digital platforms as influential sources of information, understanding how these platforms challenge or reinforce traditional media narratives could provide a more holistic view of contemporary media representation. This exploration could also involve examining the ways in which user-generated content and grassroots movements utilize social media to influence narratives, thereby democratizing information dissemination.

Recommendations also extend to media practitioners and policymakers, emphasizing the need for ethical journalism in today's complex landscape. For media organizations, fostering balanced reporting that acknowledges diverse perspectives is imperative, particularly in politically sensitive contexts. This can be achieved by integrating voices from various political backgrounds and facilitating dialogue among different communities. Training journalists to be aware of the implications of their language choices will promote more responsible reporting that avoids reinforcing stereotypes or biases. By implementing these strategies, media practitioners can enhance the quality of reporting and contribute to a more informed public, ultimately fostering a more inclusive media environment.

Kurdish media outlets, in particular, should prioritize enhancing the quality and reach of their reporting. By engaging with international media and utilizing advanced analytical tools, they can effectively convey their narratives to a global audience. Collaborating with researchers to analyse their media representation will also aid in crafting more nuanced and impactful communication strategies.

In summary, this study highlights the critical role media plays in shaping narratives surrounding significant political events like the Kurdistan referendum. While it underscores existing biases in media representation, it also opens avenues for further inquiry into how these biases can be addressed. By advocating for balanced and inclusive media practices, stakeholders can contribute to a more informed public discourse, ultimately supporting democratic processes and fostering justice in politically complex regions. Through ongoing research and collaboration, the potential for a more equitable representation of diverse voices in the media can be realized, enriching the global conversation around Kurdish identity and aspirations.

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