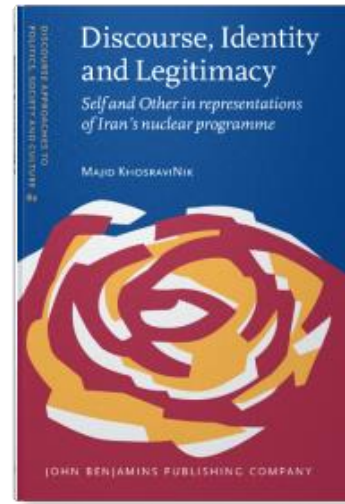


Majid KhosraviNik, **Discourse, Identity and Legitimacy: Self and Other in Representations of Iran's Nuclear Programme**, Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2015, 312 pp., \$149.00 (hardcover).

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Majid KhosraviNik's timely book, **Discourse, Identity, and Legitimacy: Self and Other in Representations of Iran's Nuclear Programme**, opens up a new space for discussion of Iran's nuclear program from a perspective less focused on discursive representations in newspapers. It is nothing new that newspapers or other mainstream media, for that matter, can act as the Althusserian ideological state apparatus, especially in nations where the press is owned, controlled, and/or operated by the state. The brilliance of this book lies in the fact that it is one of the few studies taking a multicontextual position and approaching the same topic from two different and strikingly contrasting contexts. On the one hand, there is the Iranian state-owned propagandist newspaper *Kayhan* shown against the historically revolutionary and politically right-wing backdrop of the Islamic Revolution of Iran. On the other hand, there are the British newspapers, with their own version of the same issue.



Although one can find a large number of studies done on newspapers from a critical discourse analytical point of enquiry, most often these research endeavors focus on a specific context: that of a country, a community, or a political party. KhosraviNik's book is one of the few studies that investigates a singular topic from two different contexts.

Being a critical discourse analysis study, the book

combines socio-political contextual explanations with extensive textual analyses on both sides of the fence with a view to finding answers to specific questions, such as how Iranian and British newspapers discursively construct and (de)legitimate the position of Self and Other and how different British and Iranian newspapers may be similar or different in their Self/Other legitimation and identity construction. (p. 4)

In this regard, this book is a useful source for two groups of readers. First, those generally interested in the issues regarding the Iranian nuclear program can find valuable data, contextual information, and interpretations in this book. Second, this book is extremely useful for researchers who want to see critical discourse studies (CDS) in action. The multidisciplinary nature of CDS and its deep reading of texts and discourses often forces researchers publishing their work in academic journals to resort to a level of brevity that a novice reader might find confusing. In fact, one of the criticisms of CDS is that very often CDS scholars do not provide clear and detailed descriptions of their analytical process.

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Although that might be true for some scholars, more often than not it is the result of the word and page number limits of journals where such works are published. Therefore, researchers looking for a source where they can see how to actually do CDS should not overlook this book. Finally, the unprecedented approach of KhosraviNik—investigating two contexts at the same time—provides new and valuable angles for doing CDS. This is particularly important since the increasing readership of online news and discussion has faded traditional contextual and geographical boundaries. Therefore, new CDS studies will inevitably need to deal with texts and discourses that exist in several contexts at the same time and will thus need to have a multicontextual investigation similar to the one in this book.

Structurally, the book starts with an introduction of the research project, providing readers with a brief background of the research focus and topic. In the second chapter, the reader is given a detailed contextual history of Iran's sociopolitical setting, in which KhosraviNik does not report only on the present state of affairs. Rather, he offers a detailed historical report of the sociopolitical discourses in Iran dating back about a century. Later in the book, one can see the significance of this decision by witnessing how interdiscursivity invokes texts, discourses, and ideologies rooted in a culture's history.

Chapter 3 is dedicated to the theoretical background of the study, where the author provides a thorough description of CDS, its specific terminology, and, more important, the various mainstream approaches to CDS, along with their similarities and differences. A researcher looking for a thorough and detailed description of CDS will find this chapter priceless.

The book continues with a historical review of the Iranian and British press in chapter 4 and a detailed presentation of the analytical process in chapter 5. Finally, the subsequent four chapters are dedicated to the findings of the study on the Iranian and British newspapers.

The type of CDS employed in this book is that of the discourse-historical approach, with its classic eight-step methodology. KhosraviNik remains loyal to this approach and investigates the five discursive strategies that form the focus of interest for the discourse-historical approach. For each newspaper, the referential/nomination, predication/attribution, argumentation, intensification/mitigation, and perspectivization/framing strategies are analyzed. In the level of argumentation analysis, KhosraviNik provides an interesting data-derived and data-driven interpretation of the presuppositions and topoi employed in the paper being studied.

In terms of analysis, KhosraviNik showcases an excellent example of how a critical discourse study should be done. The researcher provides considerable detail in his levels of analyses, approaching the three classical questions in CDS: "what?", "how?", and "why"? Given that the discourse-historical approach to CDS has been used here, one can find a high degree of emphasis on linguistic analysis focusing on words, phrases, collocates, and so on.

Chapter 3 plays a major role in justifying the rationale(s) for selection of data and describes contextual, historical, and linguistic considerations, in addition to offering a review of the different theories of discourse in general and approaches to CDS specifically. Regarding the selection of the Iranian data, we read:

Two major Iranian daily newspapers of the time, which can be considered serious, "quality" papers, were selected for this study. The two are seen as presenting two different ideological/political perspectives within the official limits of the Islamic Republic of Iran. . . . *Kayhan* is considered to be a hard-line, revolutionary newspaper, representing the perspective of the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran. (p. 133)

More important, significant attention has been paid to the syntactical, grammatical, and lexical differences between English and Persian languages. Differences regarding genderless pronouns or the structure of active/passive voice in Persian are particularly significant here, since ignoring such subtleties can lead to a large chunk of information being overlooked.

A point that should not be overlooked here is the common criticism posed against CDS. It is argued that often CDS researchers "cherry-pick" their data, only focusing on the data that answer their research questions and intensify their political position, without regarding a larger data set, or a different one, that could point to other, even contrasting, findings. KhosraviNik is well aware of this fact in his study and provides a self-reflexive and explicit rationale for his choice of data sources.

As KhosraviNik also points out, within the Iranian media sphere *Kayhan* is notorious for being highly partial, hard-line, and revolutionary. The paper can be considered as a megaphone for the conservative elite in Iran, through which one can find explicit expression of the ideologies and agendas of the political leaders. Therefore, the choice of this paper must not be seen as an act of "cherry picking." Rather, *Kayhan* plays the role of a comparison point in this study. This becomes clearer considering the comparative nature of the study in the book.

Nevertheless, this choice can be seen as a limitation of the study as well. Although *Kayhan* is an important newspaper with explicit political orientation and partisan nature, it cannot be considered an influential Iranian paper in the sense of having an impact on formation or transformation of public opinion; it is a paper with its own set of loyal readers, which acts as an echo chamber in the Iranian political public sphere. What would further strengthen the findings of KhosraviNik would be an investigation of an Iranian "middle-ground" newspaper with a large circulation that adheres more to professional journalism standards and less to agenda setting. In this way, the third paper would act as a balance between the two investigated in this study.

In a nutshell, CDS has become well-established within the academic community and has moved beyond being merely a linguistic approach. The assumptions and approaches proposed by CDS are now being used in various fields, from linguistics to communications research, political science, and media studies. There are still gaps to be filled in this discipline, and quite often one can find reasonable criticisms of CDS. Issues such as accusations of cherry-picking, lack of academic rigor, and stereotypical research topics, questions, and objects have been raised more than one would expect. However, KhosraviNik's book does a good job addressing these issues, both from a theoretical and a practical point of view.

The study showcases a detailed and thorough example of an actual analytical procedure in CDS. By providing rationales for each step of the analysis, from selection of research objects to instrumentalization and data collection, KhosraviNik does a great job avoiding criticism of cherry-picking and lack of rigor. The study is unprecedented and timely. It is in line with the general tradition of CDS being problem oriented, yet it is novel in its selection of two contexts related to a single problem. By focusing on a newspaper belonging to the political elite in Iran and examining the discourse of the powerful—or the way language is used by those in power—the book clearly answers its research questions. However, given that the problem under investigation is a global, multicontextual, and highly political issue, more research is needed. Within the Iranian political sphere, questions remain regarding the language use and discursive strategies of the more professional and impartial papers such as *Hamshahri*. On a global scale, the Iranian nuclear fiasco has been a matter of debate and interest in at least three contextually distinctive camps: Iran, the Western world, and the Arab world. Researchers interested in the issue could build on this excellent study by doing comparative investigations between these contexts, adding to the findings of this book by adopting triangulatory approaches and incorporating other data sources such as social media, interviews, and longitudinal studies that track changes in the discourses on the Iranian nuclear program. Undoubtedly, one book cannot cover all these aspects, and it is the role of others to use this study as a starting point, building up and adding to its findings.