

AI Discourse in the English Press: A Critical Linguistic Analysis of Power, Fear and Technological Hype

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Abstract. Background: AI: language=EN Artificial Intelligence (AI) is taking center stage in public debate but its mediatized representations have a clear ideological bent. The media characterises AI with stories of fear, power and techno-hype, perceptions that in return shape, and in a way "define," AI policies.

Objectives: This research attempts to critically examine how AI is discursively framed in English-language media following Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Foucault's power/knowledge alongside exploring ideological implications in media language.

Methods: Fifty-one news articles published between November 2022 and March 2023 formed the qualitative corpus that was analyzed. Sources range from the largest English-speaking country, the USA, to the India and New Zealand. In this analysis, lexical choices, metaphors and figures of speech were examined using a CDA approach.

Results: The research identifies one dominant triad that structures AI rhetoric:

- ✓ *Power:* From humans to machines, the rise of Big Tech narratives.
- ✓ *Fear:* Military metaphors, future panic, displacement rhetoric.
- ✓ *Hype:* Idealistic framing and promises of exaggerated progress.

Such discourses neglect alternate voices, and occlude more complex discussion.

Discussion: Media representations are ideological instruments in the service of construction of public consciousness and policy orientation. The results indicate a set of epistemic risks, which affect both misleading or fake news, digital divide and gatekeeping of public speaking on the Web by gauging on the privilege.

Conclusion: AI in (English language) media discourse is not neutral—it is a site of power struggle. The paper argues for ethical journalism, AI literacy and a more inclusive public discourse that challenges polarising and sensationalist news stories.

Key words: Artificial Intelligence (AI); Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA); Media Representation; Fear Discourse; Power/Knowledge; Technological Hype; Ideology; Populace Perception; Epistemic Inequality.

Introduction

The vocabulary of AI In recent years, A r t i f i c i a l Video games, Social context, Video game criticism, Video game analysis, Game digital rhetoric, Host platform sides, Academic labour, Student the conditions for any such development. English-language media in the whole world present AI technologies in increasingly conflicting narratives of hope and fear: as transformative instruments of

advancement for mankind, or as existential dangers to our very existence. This polarizing discourse mirrors the larger ideological struggles for power, knowledge, and mastery in an age of electronics. [1,2]

However, when the media has adopted AI tools — from sub-millimeter size language models to sentient microwave ovens — it hasn't always offered a well-rounded picture. Instead, they oscillate between alarmist fearmongering, utopian futurism, and technocratic hype, collectively constructing expectations and policy conversations. Between these two is a tangled threesome: power, fear, and technological hype, and it is the aim of this article to pull this triad apart. [3,4]

Drawing from a Critical Linguistic perspective based on Foucault's theory of power/knowledge and Fairclough's CDA, this study explores the construction of perspective about AI in English media. Through a discourse analysis that examines language, metaphor, and rhetorical figures operating among 51 news media published from November 2022 to March 2023, this study seeks to consider how AI comes to be constructed as an empowering or disempowering force. [5]

In conclusion, in this paper we investigated two primary questions:

In what context is AI talked about in English-language media?

What do these framings indicate about the ideological and power relations with regard to the AI technologies?

In so doing, the study critically contributes to the social and political dimensions of AI discussion within a larger framework of media studies, technology ethics, and sociolinguistics among other debates.

Literature Review

The media portrayal of AI has been the object of much attention among scholars in recent years. Scholars have studied what values and logics are mobilized when discussing AI technologies in the terms of the news story, the social media share, or the policy narrative, with many revealing ideological tensions. Critical to these explorations is the nexus between language, power, and technology, and media discourse is thus a site of struggle over competing utopias. [6]

One of the theoretical references that grounds this research is Michel Foucault's theory of power/knowledge, which claims that knowledge is never neutral because it is produced and circulated in power-relation discourses. The relevance of Foucault's perspective is that it extends beyond the critique of the self-reflexivity of these media narratives and connects them to a larger historical process by which those narratives come to construct subject-positions, public perception, and to legitimate and push forward some technological agendas while marginalizing others.

This theoretical approach is supported by Fairclough's CDA, which focuses on how language works to create and perpetuate social differences. Media texts, it is also claimed, are not simply passive mirrors of the world but also active tools that generate ideologies, naturalize relations of power, and discursively represent social life (Fairclough 1995). CDA has been heavily applied to critiquing discourses in immigration, education, healthcare, and more recently technology and AI. [7]

Prior work (e.g., Rehak, 2023; Connolly, 2024) has distinguished three main frames of AI media discourse:

The hype narrative, where AI is treated as a magical tool for social good > as dictated by idealistic technocratic thinking and companies' marketing materials.

The fear narrative, which presents AI as a menace to jobs, morality and the very future of humanity.

The discourse of power Foods that critique AI as contributing to the reinforcement of control, surveillance, and epistemic dominance on the part of powerful entities.

These discursive formations are not siloed—they intersect and change with geopolitical, economic and social changes. For instance, Govia (2018) underscores the way in which the media representation of DI reflects global inequalities, in terms of: who carries the discourse of the techno-imaginaries of

the North (in the Thatcher/ATLAS example it is not the voices of the South that are out there) and who remains unrepresented (or, in the sense of the advertisement, the South is instrumentalized to serve the imperial need). [8]

Although more and more have been written about AI and media, gaps are still on the table. Many studies are centered around the Western media ecosystem, and are wanting in a deeper linguistic analysis that combines macro-historical and micro-linguistic points of view. Moreover, few papers address evolution of AI discourse over time or impact of metaphors, rhetorical structure, and intertextuality on public sentiment and policy. [9]

This article addresses these gaps by providing a multimodal CDA analysis of the English media coverage of AI, discussing the power-fear-hype triad and examining language-related issues related to societal perception of technological change. It continues with but also challenges previous literature through the intertwining of linguistic examination and sociopolitical framing. [10]

Methodology

It is a qualitative CDA study being inspired by the works of Michel Foucault as well as by those of Norman Fairclough and aims to explore the discursive construction of AI in English-language press. We concentrate here on analyzing linguistic strategies and ideological formations embedded in public AI percep-tions through what we call the power–fear–hype triad.

Theoretical Foundation

The approach is in consistence with Foucault’s discourse-power theory that presents discourse as a tool of performing and sustaining the social power relations and Fairclough’s three-dimension CDA model that comprise:

- ✓ Text analysis (linguistic aspects, vocabulary, metaphors)
- ✓ Discourse practice (which is how TEXTS are produced and consumed)
- ✓ Discourse (the social-political context within which the discourse exists)

This twin framework provides an opportunity to capture the subtleness of AI as it is represented, legitimized, or contested in public narratives.

Data Collection

We constructed a corpus of 51 media articles that appeared between November 2022 and March 2023, at a crucial time for public engagement with generative AI like ChatGPT. Articles were extracted from 12 leading mainstream news sources in English speaking countries (UK and US, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, India), namely:

- The Guardian, The Independent, CBC News, Sky News Australia, The Washington Post and others.

Articles that mentioned “AI” or “ChatGPT” and discussed any technological, societal, or ethical implications were included.

Analytical Approach

The analysis occurred in three steps:

Textual Analysis

- Recognition of lexical choices, tropes, modality, and rhetorical strategies.

Coding of Inces for emergent themes (e.g., technological determinism, lack of agency, utopian narratives).

Discourse Typology Construction

- Articles were categorized into three overarching discourses:

a. Power Discourse: AI As a Tool of Institutional Domination.

b. Fear Discourse: describing AI as a menace to jobs, ethics, or life.

c. Hype Discourse: setting AI as revolutionary.

Contextual Interpretation

- Relating text features to larger sociotechnical power dynamics, including but not limited to corporate control, policy lobbying and media framing.

Tools and Techniques

- ✓ Themes were manually coded using NVivo.
- ✓ Lexical frequency analysis, comparing the use of dominant vs. neutral words.
- ✓ Placing tabloid vs. quality media in relation to each other to examine discursive variation.

Ethical Considerations

Given that the study is based exclusively on publicly available media texts, there were no human subjects involved and associated potential ethical hazards. But the reading set allows for bias, editorial position, and power asymmetry coded into media production to remain sensitive for analysis.

Limitations

Although significant contributions are made by this study to the examination of AI in the discursive realm of the English-language media, the following limitations should be noted:

Scope of Corpus

The analysis is based on 51 media articles (mostly from Anglophone countries) published between November 2022 and March 2023. This limits the cultural and geographical diversity of views, and may exclude subtler narratives in non-Western or non-English language media environments.

Temporal Constraints

The specific timestamp being sampled is quite arbitrary; it just so happens to land in an interesting period in the discursive history of AI — around the time generative AI tools like ChatGPT were coming into vogue. While breaking, this may have contributed to a focus on hype-driven narratives, to the exclusion of more deeply embedded analyses of long-term discourse patterns, or change over time.

Media Outlet Bias

While we included a combination of tabloid and quality newspapers, editorial biases and media ownership structures obviously shape how AI is framed. The study does not take into consideration issues internal to newsrooms, economic incentives or political loyalties which could be influencing the discursive battlefield in subtle ways.

Focus on Textual Media Only

The study is entirely based on written news articles and blogs, and does not incorporate visual or audiovisual or social media discourse (e.g., memes, tweets, YouTube clips), all of which are key in shaping public understanding of AI in media ecosystems today.

Linguistic Subjectivity

Despite analytical rigor being preserved by induction via Critical Discourse Analysis, interpretations of metaphors, rhetorical devices, and lexis are always subjective by the researcher to some extent. That restricts the potential for full replicability—something that is particularly tenuous in a field as ideological as AI.

Exclusion of Stakeholder Perspectives

It is based on media text, and does not interview or survey either journalists, editors, AI developers or policy-makers. In so doing it loses sight of the active, intentional framing processes (and/or institutional pressures) implicated in the media representations.

Recommendations for Future Research

The implications and suggestions shall be followed by the limitation and strengths of the present research, and the conclusion shall then suggest some directions to help further enhance and develop the understanding of AI discourse in media contexts.

Expanding Linguistic and Cultural Diversity

Future studies might include sources in languages other than English to explore the framing of AI in multilingual, multilocal contexts, particularly in the Global South. This would expose nuances in techno-discourses, informed as they are by local sociopolitical context, technological access and cultural narratives.

Longitudinal Discourse Tracking

A longitudinal analysis of AI discourse over a span of several years may reveal temporal shifts in media narratives, stability of metaphors or metaphors that evolve, and ascendance or recession of particular ideological frames as AI advances.

Integration of Visual and Social Media Platforms

Due to the increasing importance of non-traditional media, in future studies, discourses should be analyzed not only in the field of social media (e.g., X/Twitter, TikTok, Reddit), but also in non-textual formats (e.g., podcasts, infographics, memes); all of which have a great impact on the aforementioned public imagination and ambient black ink. [11]

Audience Reception Analysis

Audience-behaviors would be worth exploring with the aid of studies dependent on audience—surveillance, focus groups, or intuitive interviews focussing on how various age cohorts comprehend, accept, or reject AI stories reconstituted by the media.

Comparative Media Systems

An interesting follow-up question would be on how state-owned (or not) vs. private-owned media as well as tabloid (or not) vs. quality press frames AI, and to what editorial policies, headline strategies and underlying ideological agendas play in that comparison. [12]

Integration of Multimodal Analysis Tools

It should be argued that a CDA complemented by NLP and multimodal discourse analysis, technologies could be more objective by being automatically scalable and yet still linguistically rich (in terms of depth even if not comprehensiveness).

Policy and Educational Implications

Lastly, discourse analysis could be connected more systematically to policy-making and public pedagogy (12) on the desirability of AI literacy, what count as regulatory frames and ethical sensibilities can be reinforced or mislead by media narratives that are most influential.

Research Objectives and Questions

The purpose of this study is to critically explore the discursive construction of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the English-language news media – and the intersection of power, fear, and technological hype. It will also infer how different linguistic and frame-based instruments are employed to depict AI and will then empirically test the potential consequences of these linguistic and frame-based representations on public attitudes and policy discourse.

Objectives:

- To scrutinise discursive depiction of AI technologies in English-language media.
- To determine major themes and rhetorical structures (for example, utopia, dystopia, control).
- To evaluate the ideological impact of these representations on society, policy and knowledge formations.

Research Questions:

How is the debate around AI shaped by the English-language media from late 2022 to early 2023?

How narratives of power, fear, and hype are linguistically constructed (which may include metaphors, modality, lexical choices).

What broader socio-political and technological power dynamics do these media framings mirror or amplify?

Discussion

The results of the analysis confirm the presence of three main and interconnected AI narratives in English-language media: power, fear, and technological hype. These discourses are not innocent, but are ideologically motivated and closely related to media logics, institutional concerns, and public fears.

Fear-based rhetoric often enlists the help of military metaphors, dystopian future tenses, and dehumanizing language to represent AI as enemy to employment, privacy, and human mastery. This is consistent with Foucault's view of discourse as serving to determine what can be thought or said about something — in this case, AI as a possible enemy.

By contrast, the hype narrative presents AI as the miraculous antidote to the mundane, something that is remarkable, almost wondrous, promising efficiency, smarts and global upheaval. These representations resonate with the ideology of technocracy, and are frequently in the service of corporate or political agendas, which converge to induce the uncritical acceptance of AI medicalization by the public.

The power discourse, which is surely the most elusive, exposes how AI reconfigures both knowledge and labor and agency — shifting control from individuals and communities to algorithms and to private firms. These observations lend credence to Fairclough's (Fairclough, 1995) view that media texts are ideological tools that “conceal (and so becomes ‘naturalised’) uneven distributions of power under the appearance of disinterestedness or neutrality” (Williams & Tolmie: 88).

Notably, the media outlets studied -in particular tabloid vs. quality press- had different priorities about framing, where tabloids prioritized sensationalist fears, whereas quality outlets would usually legitimize AI's role in the elite narratives.

Conclusion

This paper provides a critical analysis of the framing of AI in the English-language media at a crucial juncture at which public discourse is shifting. The analysis shows that AI is not only a question of technology itself – it is a discursive battleground in which power, fear and hype fight to influence public sensibilities, secure policy outcomes and control investments.

By using Critical Discourse Analysis with the help of the frameworks of Foucault and Fairclough, the analysis revealed the ways in which language, ideology and media power work together to create competing discourses of AI. These storylines aren't incidental details; they're critical for either facilitating or constraining democratic debate over the future of technology.

The study finally calls for more AI literacy, responsible journalism and inclusive public debate. As long as what is said about AI is not acknowledged as a power technology, there will be no public deliberation about the extent to which AI can be part of defining culture in the 21st century.

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