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# *Adab Al-Rafidayn Journal*

**A refereed journal concerned with the publishing of scientific researches  
in the field of arts and humanities both in Arabic and English**

Supplement Vol. ninety-one / year Fifty- Second/Jumada al-Thani - 1444 AH / December 2022 AD

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**Editor-in-chief**

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# ***Naming and Describing as an Ideological Representation in Chris Kyle's American Sniper :***

## ***A Critical Stylistic Analysis***

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### **Abstract**

The paper attempts to study the ideology in selected extracts from Chris Kyle's American Sniper (2013). A critical stylistic analysis is used to realize the objective of this research. The writer presents his experience as an American sniper during his military service after the American invasion of Iraq in 2003. The aim is to examine the way of describing parts of Iraqi and American societies and study samples of their individual members and investigate the conceptual meaning of the components of the nominal groups (henceforth NGs) to reveal the hidden ideology. One of the ten tools from Jeffries' approach (2010) which is naming and describing is used. The denotative and connotative meanings of the components of NGs are examined. They have either positive or negative connotations. The results expose ideology and the political, social, and psychological impact of such description on the American readership .

**Keywords:** Textual, conceptual, function, nominal, group.

### **1.1. Introduction**

After the American invasion, Iraqi society has gone through numerous changes. The Iraqi immigrants duplicated in number due to certain social problems such as poverty, loss of security, social chaos, disorder among so many others. The brutal war caused mass destruction and thousands of casualties of the Iraqi people. Writing

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novels is a strategy used by America to justify its action after receiving biting criticism. In fact, writing a literary text is one of the strategies of politics to seek justifications for staging wars out of the boundaries of the country. Kyle is one of the novelists who talk about the brutality of the war in his novel *American Sniper*, describing both Iraqi and American societies in a way that may reflect ideology (Bailes, 2003).

Ideology is a set of beliefs and ideas that influence one's view of the world. The writers make ideology operative in the actual construction of meaning in their novels (Farrell, 2002). The writers may reflect ideologies through the choice of words and structures of the text. For example, an ideology might be conveyed through words when the two sides of the battle are described by using contrasting images positively or negatively. A political ideology may be perceived in a literary text through the descriptions of the environment around the characters of the novel. Beliefs and thoughts of a specific group of people may be seen in the novel as well for some reasons. To unearth the layers of a text, critical stylistics serves to uncover the deep-structured ideologies of literary and non-literary texts (Jeffries, 2010).

## **2.1. Critical Stylistics**

The study of language and ideology in a given text is one of the jobs of some tools or models in critical stylistics. Its aim is directed towards textual conceptual function. Texts may conceptualize ideas by studying linguistic structure that shapes the meaning of the texts and by focusing on the terms of linguistic and conceptual features. A critical stylistic tool may help detect the ideological aspects of a written or spoken text. This tool attempts to show the way language users combine their ideologies with other social concepts (Evans & Schuller, 2015). The readers of a text negotiate meanings and language. Ideology may take place in relation to issues that are raised in the text. The text may have political, social, and psychological impacts when items are used to justify some acts to the readers about their society, which may lead to socio-political changes. In *American Sniper*, the ideology is embedded in describing places in Iraqi and American societies and



the selected samples show the characterization of their inhabitants (Jeffries, 2010).

Ideology-directed texts adopted from critical stylistics, is a social tool that propagates ideas and creates convictions by inciting and justifying action. It tries to convince that a group that is described by using language is right to be what it is. It is a network that defines a comprehensive view of specific group and their history anywhere in the world. This effective method of dealing with ideology is linked to its justifying function, but the ability to change the readers' mind depends on the transformation of the ideas it propagates into opinions and beliefs in order to increase the social and political impacts. In this way, everything turns into ideology, and this transformation from a system of thought to a belief system is the essence of the ideological phenomenon (Recoeur, 2008).

Halliday's systemic functional linguistics (henceforth SFL) is the focus of the analysis. SFL considers language as a social semiotic system and that the functional signifiers serve the language system and engenders meaning. It shows how language creates the views of the world (Jeffries, 2016).

## **2.2. SFL as a Critical Stylistic Perspective**

Halliday (1985) theorizes the functional perspective on grammar on which the current study is grounded. SFL is based on the fact that the central features of language is form as well as function (Nieto Cruz, 2019).

Jeffries (2009) adopts the well-known Halliday's three metafunctions to analyze texts. Halliday (1994) classifies these metafunctions into ideational and interpersonal leading to the textual function that gives way for the former. Ideational meaning nurtures the world experience by actions, events, and processes. Interpersonal sense happens in the language used by a speaker or writer to perform something such as offers, commands, or suggestions in order to interact with the reader or the listener respectively, and to maintain relations between them. The textual metafunction represents the textual meaning that relates the preceding context with the following one as well as the context of the situation (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013). Thus, the textual conceptual function is the basis for critical stylistic analysis. It is the

combination of two concepts, textual features and ideational functions. In this sense, if there is an idea to be conveyed, elements are gathered to constitute a group within a sentence, whether nominal, verbal, or adverbial group. This group has a prototypical form, which is considered as an obligatory element and supports the conceptual effect. The group might have a set of more or less peripheral forms, which are considered as optional elements. The prototypical form and the peripheral forms enhance the conceptual effect and represent stylistic indicators (Halliday, 1985).

The analysis of a NG in language has its significant role in SFL. Halliday (1994) states that the study of NGs is the core of investigating two linguistic features: naming and describing, in the sense that NG is a unit of analysis that describes an entity. Its structure is that of the "head" and its modifier(s). Nouns, adjectives, numerals, and determiners may be used as modifier(s) of the "head." The latter is an obligatory element and has a semantic core. It may be a common noun, a proper noun, or a personal pronoun. It can be used instead of the group without changing the grammatical structure of the words. The modifiers whether precede or follow the "head" are optional elements and omitting them do not affect the grammatical structure.

Halliday & Matthiessen (2014) argue that it is necessary to split the ideational metafunction of the NG into two dimensions: the logical, and experiential. The logical function of the group has a modifier as a dependent element. It is subclassified as premodifier or postmodifier according to its position before or after the "head." The relationship among ideas operates to specify the logical function. The experiential function can be analyzed according to the content or ideas.

Halliday (1985) identifies the following functions as pre-modifiers of the head:

- "Deictic" is a term used to spot the intended head. It indicates whether or not a specific subset of the thing is referred to. It functions as the identifier of a particular head, or indicates that the hearer or reader does not need to be familiar with the specific identity of the head at that point.

- "Epithet" is usually represented by an adjective. It conveys some qualities of the head. This functional element hence answers two main questions: "What do you think of the head?" and "What is the head like?"
- "Classifier" functions to put the head into its subclass or to classify it, so that to contrast one thing with other things. The same word can function as an epithet or a classifier.
- "Numerative" refers to the number or quantity of the head, either in exact terms, 'three', 'twenty', or in inexact terms, 'many', 'much'; or it specifies order, 'first', 'fifth'.

The elements that follow the head or its postmodifiers are considered as qualifiers. The post-modifier is the most complicated part of NG. It can be a phrase or a clause or extremely complex component(s). The following example shows the components of NG as presented by Halliday & Matthiessen (2014):

<b>Those</b>	<b>Two</b>	<b>Splendid</b>	<b>Old</b>	<b>Electric</b>	<b>Trains</b>	<b>With pantographs</b>
<b>Deictic</b>	<b>Numerative</b>	<b>Subjective epithet</b>	<b>Objective epithet</b>	<b>Classifier</b>	<b>Noun headword</b>	<b>Quantifier</b>

Table (1) The Experiential Functions of NG

This is an experiential structure, which has a class of things (trains). The preceded and the followed items of the headword characterize the (trains). The construction of the style of the NGs to convey an attractive message needs knowledge about the lexical meanings of the chosen terms. Critical stylistics cannot be well described without reference to the form when as far as meaning is concerned. The chosen term has evaluative denotation as well as connotation, which are useful, even decisive in reflecting ideology (Oseni & Odebiyi, 2021).

### 2.3. Denotative Vs. Connotative Meanings

Geoff Thompson (2013) states that denotation is a logical meaning, as it is the dictionary and the literal meaning of the term. It is the central aspect of word meaning, on which everybody generally agrees. It is the basic meaning of a visual sign, which has explicit meaning. It may be a sensory meaning that is based on the

result of sight, smell, hearing, feeling, or even tasting experience. It is also known as conceptual meaning, which deals with the core meaning of expression or literal meaning.

Whereas connotation is a feeling or idea that is suggested by a particular word rather than or in addition to its denotative meaning. It is an indirect or implied meaning or feeling. Further, it is an explicit meaning that is obtained from readers' cultures and it is associated with the function of the word. Moreover, the connotative meaning of an expression may be derived from qualities added to the word such as its symbolic, allusive, oxymoronic, ironic, cultural, historical, religious, or any other rhetorical as pejorative implications created by the virtue of the context. It is considered as the emotional and mental suggestions of a word, and it could convey obvious ideological potential that might be good or bad. It is not just a reference but it shows the writer's opinion of that reference. Therefore, it is a means of investigating the type of naming practices employed in a text. This meaning of naming is experiential, which is expressed negatively or positively (Jeffries, 2009).

To explore ideology behind the selected passages, the constituents of NGs used in the novel for the description under investigation would be analyzed. Their denotational meanings would be examined. The negative and positive connotational meanings may carry ideological oriented purpose. The following section highlights the practical part of the current research.

### **3.1 Methodology**

#### **3.1.1. Data Collection**

Investigating ideology as conveyed through the choice of words is the aim of this research. The focus falls on the description of Iraqi and American societies and their inhabitants. The selected extracts from Kyle's *American Sniper*, which talk about the Iraqi war, is analyzed in the following section.

#### **3.2. Tool of Analysis: Naming and describing**

A term may be said to name an entity in the world. Naming a thing may have a cluster of meanings that can convey an ideology. These linguistic terms are used to refer to things or people around

us. The choices can express the attitude of the speaker or the writer towards the referent. They also colour the hearer's or reader's view of the people or things, which are being referred to (Richardson, 2006).

When a particular noun is chosen, as a stylistic indicator, to refer to someone or something, the speaker or the writer in this case unavoidably presents that person or thing in a certain light. Such naming entails textual choices to help provide opportunities for its producers to integrate ideological content. In this respect, it may be less evident than in a more literal use of naming practices (Jeffries, 2010).

If some of the information about the referent has been presented in NG, then the receiver of this NG would be able to argue that the head is described. The process of providing additional information about the thing being referred to is called describing (Jeffries, 2007).

### **3.3.1. Nominal Groups in *American Sniper***

#### **3.3.1.1. Negative Description**

The following passages selected from the novel reflect how a city in Iraq is described

We were on the roof of an old rundown building at the edge of a town the Marines were going to pass through. The wind kicked dirt and papers across the battered road below us. The place smelled like a sewer—the stench of Iraq was one thing I'd never get used to (p.2).

There were dead bodies everywhere. We saw one guy who'd literally had his ass blown off. He'd bled to death, but not before he tried to drag himself away from the planes. You could see the blood trail in the dirt. While we were sorting things out, I spotted a Toyota pickup in the distance. It drove up on the road and stopped a little more than a mile away. White civilian pickup trucks were used by the Iraqis as military vehicles throughout the war (p. 78).

The passages from the novel under investigation describe the case of an Iraqi city named Fallujah in Al-Anbar. The tool of naming and describing with reference to Halliday's ideational

meatafunction (2004) is useful to detect ideology. This extract has a number of NGs, and each group will be analyzed into their own functional elements shown in the tables below. Certain contractions are used to mark the functional elements of the nominal groups: (D=deictic; N=numerative; E=epithet; C=classifier H=head; Q=qualifier). Using *Oxford Dictionary*, a denotation can be mentioned for each of the NGs under investigation. The following table views NGs with their denotations, which reflect negative descriptions about Fallujah.

NG	Experiential Function	Denotation
the roof of an old rundown building at the edge of a town	DHQ	the building is being in a bad repair. It stands on the border of the town.
the Marines	DH	A branch of the US Armed Forces
the wind	DH	a natural movement of air
dirt and papers across the battered road below us	HQ	a filthy or soiling substance and thin sheets exist on the damaged road
the place	DH	the area
a sewer	DH	a cesspit
the stench of Iraq	DHQ	the stink of Iraq
dead bodies	EH	the remaining individual members of the city who have lost their lives.
one guy	NH	a male member of the city
his ass	DH	the buttock of that guy
Death	H	loss of life
the blood trail in the dirt	DH	the red fluid that spreads on the road of the city with dirt
a Toyota pickup	DCH	a vehicle with an open part at the back in which things can be carried.

NG	Experiential Function	Denotation
white civilian pickup trucks	ECCH	a wheeled vehicle for moving heavy goods.
the Iraqis	DH	people in Fallujah
military vehicles	CH	vehicles that are used by armed forces in military operations
the war	DH	the fighting

**Table (1)****NGs' Structures Characterizing Fallujah**

To analyze the logical ideational metafunction, the selected NG such as (an old rundown building at the edge of a town) has the word (building) as a head. It is premodified by (an old rundown) which means that the building is in a bad condition. The postmodifier of the head is (at the edge of a town) means that the borders of the city are ruined. The use of the indefinite article as a deictic before the word (town) provides the inferior impression of the writer towards Fallujah. In addition, the use of the NG such as (the blood trail in the dirt) has the term (trail) as a head. It is premodified by the term (the blood) which reflects the image of death in the city. The head is postmodified by the term (in the dirt) which stands for how this city is full of garbage. Further, the terms such as (a sewer) and (the stench of Iraq) show that this city stinks so badly.

The ideological meaning is created through the information that is included within the boundaries of NGs. The components of the above NGs provide the negative description of Fallujah. They reveal the negative connotational meaning since they reflect the writer's bad attitude towards this Iraqi city. The image of the city represents havoc and corruption. It is also a sign of the situation after war. It is a sad world of grieving, bereavement, and death.

**3.3.1.2. Positive Description**

The following selected extracts show how Texas and California, the two American states, are described:

I want to tell you, this was a beautiful place, with gentle hills, a couple of creeks, and open land that made you feel alive every time you looked at it. The heart of the ranch was an old house that had probably been a way station—an “inn” in Yankee-speak—back in the nineteenth century. It was a majestic building, with screened porches front and back, nice-sized rooms inside, and a big fireplace that warmed the soul as well as the skin (p. 16).

The fourth of July 2005 was a beautiful California day: perfect weather, not a cloud in the sky. My wife and I took our son and drove out to a friend’s house in the foothills outside of town. There we spread a blanket and gathered in the tailgate of my Yukon to watch the fireworks display put on at an Indian reservation in the valley. It was a perfect spot—we could see down as the fireworks came up to us, and the effect was spectacular (p. 210).

The following table views NGs chosen by the writer to describe the two American states:

NG	Experiential Function	Denotation
a beautiful place	DEH	nice land
gentle hills	EH	calm hills
a couple of creeks	DHQ	two streams pass through this land
open land	EH	the land is open to the sky
The heart of the ranch	DHQ	The center of the farm
an old house	DEH	a longstanding house
an “inn” in Yankee-speak	DHQ	Yankee is a native or citizen of the United States
the nineteenth century	DNH	an ancient time
a majestic building	DEH	building that is royal
screened porches	EH	separated verandas
nice-sized rooms	EH	the chambers have a nice size
a big fireplace	DEH	open fire in a chimney inside



NG	Experiential Function	Denotation
		the building
a beautiful California day	DECH	California is a state on the west coast of the US. It is a nice day in that place.
perfect weather	EH	the climate was nice and wonderful.
(not) a cloud in the sky	DHQ	the sky has no cloud
a friend's house in the foothills outside of town	DCHQ	the house is related to a friend that is located outside the town.
a blanket	DH	a bed covering, piece of woven fabric.
the tailgate of my Yukon	DHQ	a board or gate at the rear of a vehicle that can be removed. Yukon is a new car that is used by the writer.
the fireworks display	DCH	a view of colorful explosions in the air planned as a show.
an Indian reservation in the valley	DCHQ	a protected area in the surface of the earth that exists between hills.

**Table (2)**

### **NGs' Structures Characterizing Texas and California**

To analyze the logical ideational metafunction, the selected NG such as (a beautiful place) has the word (place) as a head. It is premodified by (a beautiful) which shows that Texas is livable, and full off normal life. The NG (a beautiful California day) has the word (day) as a head. It is premodified by (a beautiful California) to show how a lovely day was for the writer in California.

The description of the states is supported by other NGs which have identical experiential structure (DEH) such as (an old house), (a majestic building), (a big fireplace) to reflect the positive attitude towards both states. In addition, the writer uses the

experiential structure (EH) more than one time, (gentle hills), (open land), (screened porches), (nice-sized rooms), (perfect weather) which indicate that the two states are characterized by beauty and peace, as well as places to enjoy living in. In addition, the chosen NG such as (the tailgate of my Yukon) signifies the wealth of the writer since he uses a modern car (Yukon) which has tailgate. This tailgate enables the driver to drive dangerously close behind another vehicle.

Portrait of enjoyment is depicted when the writer chooses the NG such as (the fireworks display) which has the term (display) as a head. It is premodified by (the fireworks) which indicates a colorful life in the dark night. They are used as part of the Christmas celebrations and they are used when a victory is achieved. In addition, another NG is highlighted that indicates the two states as safe places. It is (an Indian reservation in the valley) which has the term (reservation) as a head. It is premodified by (an Indian) and it is postmodified by (in the valley). It marks the security and safety one enjoys in California.

These positive attractive images of the two American states are contrasted with the image that is provided by the writer to reflect Fallujah, the Iraqi city where Kyle and his troop were deployed. The ideology reveals that this novel is a "soft power" that influences the readers' minds. Rugh (2017) defines soft power as the ability to influence and attract others in order to share some of one's values. Consequently, its aim is to share some key elements on one's agenda. The main purposes of such power are to achieve international order and global security. Therefore, writing this novel about the invasion is one of the strategies that provide justification about such action. Nevertheless, Kyle describes this part of Iraq as unlivable place and its people suffer from poverty. This view is meant dominate to the readers' minds and thereby to change their impressions concerning the uncivilized country such as Iraq. Hence, the negative description of Fallujah affects others when dealing with the Iraqi people. The images help the American to find justification for the American occupation of Iraq.

#### **4.1. Conclusion**

The writer of this ideologically-oriented novel expresses feelings that aim at propagating pro-war ideas. Kyle uses various linguistic choices of NGs and a variety of techniques to convey his message. Fallujah is described in a negative way by using NGs that have negative connotational meanings. Its image represents the land of Iraq since it is one of the most raging Iraqi cities known for its resistance of the American invasion. The stylistic indicators that describe Fallujah display and identify the writer's beliefs and the negative impression of the Iraqi society and its people in comparison with portraying positive images of the two American states. Moreover, Jeffries (2010) asserts that 'textual conceptual functions' are used to display the implicit ideologies produced by linguistic features. So, the ideology behind these linguistic features, which are observed above, can be summarized through three dimensions, which are the political, social and psychological.

Politically, and through the negative description of the Iraqi city after the attack, the readers find Iraq as a country that lacks the basics of normal life. Further, the images of using old version of cars such as pickups and trucks show that the inhabitants live in poverty and use old means of transportation. These messages are intended to give justifications for the invasion since those people do not take advantage of their wealthy land to develop their livelihood. Socially, the use of NGs that have negative connotational meanings in describing Iraq is a factor that affects the dealing of the societies around the world with Iraqis. Their impressions of a civilized country may be changed in favor of the American politics. Psychologically, the feeling of contempt may dominate the readers' minds and make them hate the Iraqi environment.

On the other hand, the description of the American society is quite positive. The biased ideology dominates the readers' minds and makes them dream to live in such an orderly residence, and wonderful atmosphere in the two described American states.

The novelist's ideology is an impetus to conclude that Iraq needs development. Its people should learn how to live progressively. The novelist implies that the invasion has brought civilization and modernity to a primitive land and hence forgive the occupation.

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## التسمية والوصف تمثيلان مادلجان: دراسة أسلوبية نقدية

في رواية كريس كايل "قناص امريكي"

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### المستخلص

يتناول البحث دراسة أيديولوجية لمقاطع مختارة من رواية القناص الأمريكي للكاتب كريس كايل المنشورة عام 2013. تم استخدام دراسة أسلوبية نقدية لتحقيق الهدف المرجو من هذا البحث، ويعرض الكاتب تجربته بوصفه قناصاً أمريكياً في خدمته العسكرية بعد الاحتلال الأمريكي للعراق عام 2003، ويهدف البحث إلى التحري عن الأسلوب المتبع في وصف أجزاء من المجتمعين العراقي والأمريكي ونماذج مختارة من الأفراد التابعة للمجتمعين، والتحقق من كيفية خلق المعاني في أسلوب استخدام نظام تحليلي قياسي يدعى "المجموعة الاسمية" وذلك من أجل كشف النقاب عن الأيديولوجية المخفية وراء الكلمات، ويستخدم الباحثان أداتي التسمية والوصف، وهي واحدة من الأدوات العشرة الواردة في نظرية الكاتبة لسلي جفريز (2010)، ويتضمن هذا التحليل المعاني الدلالية القاموسية (Denotative) والمعاني الشعرية والبلاغية الأكثر عمقاً (Connotative) إيجابية كانت أو سلبية، ومن ثم تكشف هذه الطريقة النقدية- التحليلية للأسلوب الأيديولوجيا المخفية وكذلك التأثير السياسي والاجتماعي والنفسي لمثل هذا الوصف على القارئ.

الكلمات المفتاحية: نصي، مفاهيمي، وظيفة، اسمي، مجموعة.

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