Representation of President Raisi's Helicopter Crash in Media: A NOW Corpus-Based Discourse Analysis[*]

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Abstract

Following the crash of the Iranian Air Force helicopter near the village of Uzi on 19 May 2024, which caused the decease of the Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi and seven other politicians and crew members, a vast number of news articles, commentaries, and papers were published worldwide, reflecting various reactions to the incident. This event serves as a boundary-making moment both in the surface structure—narrating an event—and in the deep structure—drawing an in-group/out-group divide with the president as the representative of a conservative discourse. The present study attempts to examine how Ebrahim Raisi's helicopter crash has been represented in the NOW corpus (approximately 19.2 billion words). Inspired by Baker's (2004) framework of corpus-assisted analysis, as well as Laclau and Mouffe's Discourse Theory (2001) and Van Dijk's Ideological Square (2009), the analysis of this event's representation was conducted using the Keynes parameter and semantic categorization based on a detailed reading of concordance lines. Corpus-based categorization serves as a tool to articulate the semiotic system of the Western worldview toward this incident. The data ultimately reveal a dual representation of the event. On one hand, it narrates reactions from various actors, including the Islamic Republic's allies and enemies; on the other, at a deeper level, it guides the audience toward an other-making contemplation, producing three types of other-makings based on Raisi's different positions as a judge, president, and religious figure. This discourse revolves around a nodal point of binary representation—good versus evil—centered on the late president, with categories such as alliance, conspiracy theories, transformation from death to salvation, leadership aspirations, hardline stance, public (il)legitimacy, brutal judge, suppressor president, and unconfirmed cleric, which foreground the negative other more than the positive self.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Ebrahim Raisi's Helicopter Crash, In-group & Out-group, NOW Corpus, Semiotic System

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1. Introduction

Politics is a power struggle. The politician always tries to fulfill his demands through language, positively highlighting his identity and negatively rejecting his otherness. Language plays an essential role in this way, as every political action is achieved through the use and influence of language. People not only produce words that contain constructions and grammatical structures, but these constructions form the basis for the implementation of linguistic action. Hence, discourse analysis is a tool that demonstrates how to play such roles; in other words, it is an approach that shows the role of 'language in use' because discourses establish the meaning of their signs in the form of this use.

A defining feature of Iranian politics is its deep-seated antagonism toward global powers, particularly in the West. This friction fuels a reciprocal media cycle, where Iranian and Western outlets amplify each other's every incident. A recent significant event in Iran is President Ebrahim Raisi's helicopter crash, which elicited both negative and positive reactions. Therefore, this study aims to examine how Western media, with a focus on the NOW corpus, has responded to the aforementioned incident, as well as the types of conceptualizations that emerged. This question is addressed through corpus-based discourse analysis.

Critical discourse analysis is an approach that brings the tradition of critical social analysis into language studies and analyzes a specific discourse or the relationship between specific social elements such as power relations, ideologies, social identities, etc. From the perspective of this approach, discourse is a form of social behavior that is both the creator of the social world, and is created by the social world.

Laclau and Mouffe (2001), in their discourse theory and post-structuralist approach, examine meaning-creation as a social process. They discuss the stabilization of meaning, the positioning of signs relative to one another, and their differentiation from other signs. They assert that the stabilization of meaning is contingent, as meaning in a specific context can either be stabilized or marginalized. The key questions are how stabilization occurs and which linguistic choices, cognitive processes, and grammatical interactions contribute to this stabilization. Additionally, how do different discourses employ words, phrases, sentences, and various levels of language to conceptualize their approaches and achieve hegemony in their discursive competitions by framing their signifiers.

The discourse theory of Laclau and Mouffe (2001) analyzes the macro level based on the micro level, with a focus on meaning. However, Laclau and Mouffe (2001) do not specify how this meaning leads to the creation of different situations or how competition between signs occurs. The lack of a detailed micro-level analysis in their theory can be addressed through a corpus-based approach to investigate how word choices influence discursive conceptualizations.

Corpus linguistics examines words and their constituent elements (part by part) and explains their significance in understanding macro-discourse structures. It demonstrates how each discourse carries out the process of meaning stabilization, is articulated, and achieves hegemony. Therefore, this theory should be combined with these tools to explain how meaning is realized in the discourse articulation process.

2. Literature Review

Corpus-based linguistics has experienced a surge in interdisciplinary studies, focusing on critical discourse analysis (CDA), particularly in sociopolitical contexts. As Nartey and Mwinlaaru (2019) argue, corpus-assisted approaches provide empirical grounding to CDA, enhancing its validity by quantitatively identifying patterns across large datasets. Similarly, the study by Sotillo and Wang-Gempp (2004) highlights the significance of corpus linguistics in revealing hidden ideologies within political speeches, demonstrating how specific lexical choices disclose underlying power dynamics. Furthermore, several studies (Baker, 2012; Chen, 2013; Islentyeva, 2020; Zhou, 2022; Rodrigo-Ginés et al., 2024; Elsoufy, 2024) show that corpus tools, when combined with qualitative analysis, can effectively expose subtle biases in media discourse, confirming the potential of corpus-assisted methods for uncovering ideological structures embedded in language.

Moreover, corpus-based CDA has been instrumental in examining the representation of Iran in Western media, particularly post-revolution. For instance, Sameni and Modarres Khiyabani (1394 [2015 A.D.]) highlight how media discourse construction contributes to reinforcing particular sociopolitical narratives about Iran. Their findings resonate with broader sociolinguistic investigations, such as those by Li and Zhang (2022), who explored how corpus methods can reveal stereotyping and polarization in international reporting.

Suhaili et al. (2024) employed corpus-assisted critical discourse analysis (CACDA) to examine Donald Trump's social media posts concerning Iran. This analysis identified keywords such as 'people', 'real', 'brave', 'suffering', and 'killed', revealing a

discourse framing the Iranian people as oppressed, and highlighting Trump's portrayal of certain Iranian individuals as brave figures deserving of support. Their research demonstrate the utility of CACDA in uncovering underlying ideologies and power dynamics within social media discourse.

Rostambeik Tafreshi (1402 [2023 A.D.]) utilized corpus-based discourse analysis to investigate the representation of the COVID-19 pandemic in Iranian news media. This study analyzed a corpus composed of Persian news articles from three main political factions, identifying a dominant 'war with Corona' discourse. This discourse framed the pandemic as an imposed war, employing terms such as 'Sepah', 'Basij', and 'Martyr', and frequently mentioning 'Trump' as an adversary, particularly in fundamentalist media.

Pathomchaiwat (2021) used corpus-based discourse analysis (CBDA) to systematically study the political discourse of three prominent 21st-century US presidents: Obama, Trump, and Biden. The study investigated linguistic features and power dynamics reflected in their inaugural speeches. The quantitative analysis of the corpora provided insights into key linguistic patterns and their implications for understanding political communication.

Shokati Moqarab et al. (1398 [2020 A.D.]) investigated the discourse surrounding Iran-US relations, focusing on the impact of the 1979 Iranian Revolution. Using corpus linguistics and critical discourse analysis, the study examined news articles to reveal underlying ideologies and power dynamics in the representation of 'self' and 'other'. Their analysis considered both micro-level linguistic features and macro-level contextual factors to understand the evolution of this discourse.

Algamde (2019) in her PhD thesis employed a corpus-based contrastive critical discourse analysis to compare the online news coverage of the Syrian revolution by Iranian Fars News and UK Reuters. The study analyzed a large corpus of online reports to identify discursive constructions of pro- and anti-government forces. Findings revealed significant bias in Fars' representation, contrasting with a more balanced portrayal in Reuters, highlighting the influence of political context and ideology on media representation.

3. Theoretical Framework

As mentioned in the previous section, discourse theory is combined with corpus analysis to uncover the hidden discourse of Western media regarding Raisi's helicopter crash. To that end, this section will outline the following key notions: critical discourse analysis (CDA), discourse theory, corpus-based discourse analysis, and the concept of Keyness in corpus analysis.

3.1. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is an analytical approach concerned with examining language use—both spoken and written—to uncover how discourse produces and reinforces power structures, dominance, inequality, and bias (Van Dijk, 1998). Fairclough (1993) considered discourse analysis as systematically exploring possible relationships between discursive practices and broader social structures and how these practices are ideologically shaped by power relations. Van Dijk (2010, p. 4) states that the basic goals of CDA are not merely to better understand text or talk.

Rather, they involve addressing the deeper social issues that discourse either reflects, facilitates, or actively constructs.

Critical discourse analysis focuses on various areas, one of which is public speech containing political or press speeches, power relations, ideology, racism, agonistic relations, etc. Critically examining, CDA investigates the relationship among language, ideology, and power. Wodak and Meyer (2001, p. 6) argue that CDA is the critical linguistic approach for scholars who find the larger discursive unit of text to be the basic unit of communication. It is a study of the relations between discourse, power, dominance, social inequality, and the position of the discourse analyst in such social relationships (Van Dijk, 1993, p. 283). Therefore, CDA is primarily concerned with discourse in shaping and being shaped by social and political practices (Fairclough, 2001); Its central objective is to clarify the relationship between discourse and power (Van Dijk, 2001, p. 363).

3.1.1. Discourse Theory

Laclau and Mouffe (2001) concentrate on the textual dimensions of social practices in their discourse theory. Their theory (2001) is interpreted in three interconnected levels. The first level refers to their concept of social ontology and the position they place between materialism and idealism, between structure and agent. The second level is what Smith (1998) calls Laclau and Mouffe's theory of political identity. The key concepts of this level are antagonism and hegemony. At this level, more attention is paid to how discourses, identities, and nodal points are constructed and stabilized during political processes. Laclau and Mouffe's approach becomes more apparent at the third level, where their aim to

achieve radical democratic politics is situated within the domain of democratic theory. The concept of the discourse domain is significant at the first level because the field of discursivity encompasses numerous elements that are not tied to any specific discourse at a particular time.

Due to the non-infinity of the field of discursivity and the inability of discourses to permanently stabilize their meanings and their elements, discourses are subject to collapse and re-articulate (Carpentier, 2018, pp. 272-274). Since there is no fixed relation between meanings and their elements, decoding meaning occurs through a context-based process. This process begins at the micro level, which in this study is conducted using keynes in corpus analysis. Thus, this is a corpus-based discourse analysis that situates keyword analysis at the micro level, categorizes significant concepts at the mezzo level, and places them within Laclau and Mouffe's (2001) framework of antagonistic relations and semiotic systems at the macro level.

3. 2. Corpus-Based Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis seeks to explain how identity boundaries are drawn between different discourses. The formulation of these borders depends on the nodal points of each discourse, the logic of difference and chain of equivalence, and the antagonisms that distinguish the in-groups from the out-groups. Laclau and Mouffe's (2001) discourse theory is a theoretical approach focusing on the macro level and ignores how to realize its constructive concepts. Since this research analyzes political data linguistically, moving from micro to macro levels—unlike conventional political science—it necessitates a revision of the theoretical framework.

To understand how lexical choices play a role in discourse articulation and the formation of the in-groups and out-groups, linguistic systems that move from the micro components to the macro levels should be placed beside discourse theory. One example of such a system is the corpus-based tool. This tool does not overlook the smallest meaningful components; instead, it allows for a comprehensive understanding of the constructive elements within a discourse. By analyzing these components, relevant concepts can be grouped together to create meaningful categories for each discourse. These categories assist discourse theory in articulating the semiotic system specific to that discourse.

4. Methodology

The focus of the present study lies on the representation of Ebrahim Raisi's decease in the NOW corpus. An attempt was therefore made to extract the most frequent words in the corpus. Related items were found through an automatic search for the word. As it was not feasible to review all the retrieved items, a random sample of approximately 1,000 items was selected for analysis. Instead of random sampling, the final 1,000 news items—representing the most recent reports within a short time frame after the crash—were selected as the corpus of analysis. These reports captured the highest degree of semantic concentration and reflected the dominant discourses of that moment. Although neither random nor stratified sampling was employed, this decision was grounded in an event-oriented discursive logic: in contexts where the rapidity of dissemination, intensity of reactions, and public attention converge within a limited temporal span, analyzing the latest news reports takes analytical precedence. The selected items were analyzed

semantically and categorized based on their conceptualizations. The categories were analyzed in a meso-level to formulate the semiotic system of the articulated discourse in the global media regarding the event. As a result, the keywords lead to identifying the categories that constitute the nodal points and signifiers of the articulated discourse.

This study used an integrative approach, combining quantitative and qualitative methods to analyze media discourse on the helicopter crash. A corpus-based frequency analysis first identified recurrent and salient lexical items, which were then grouped into semantic categories based on co-occurrence and context to represent key discourse themes. Drawing on these categories, Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory was applied to identify and analyze the discourse's nodal signifiers. This integration of methods aligns with the approach endorsed by Laclau and Mouffe.

5. Analysis and Discussion

As described in the sampling section, approximately 1000 cases were selected to be analyzed. This analysis resulted in approximately 400 significant keywords. Table 1 is a sample of the first 100 keywords with the highest frequency. In the studied corpus, Raisi with a frequency rate of 1133 is the most frequent keyword, and president (538), Ebrahim (373), helicopter (304), crash (248), death (198), and funeral (98) follow it in their frequency rate.

Table 1. The Study Keywords with the Highest Keynes

	Freq.	Keyword		Freq.	Keyword
1	1133	Raisi	32	44	Crashed
2	538	President	33	40	Tabriz
3	399	Iran	34	38	mourners
4	373	Ebrahim	35	37	Tuesday
5	304	Helicopter	36	37	Where
6	248	Crash	37	36	Amirabdollahian
7	248	His	38	35	relations
8	198	Death	39	35	Tragic
9	184	Minister	40	34	political
10	162	Foreign	41	34	Pm
11	105	Leader	42	33	thousands
12	98	Funeral	43	33	Wednesday
13	90	Hossein	44	31	ceremony
14	89	Abdollahian	45	31	mourning
15	85	Killed	46	31	Mashhad
16	85	People	47	31	Mohammad
17	85	Amir	48	30	Demise
18	84	khamenei	49	30	Border
19	78	Sunday	50	29	India
20	76	supreme	51	29	Mokhber
21	68	Late	52	29	Prime
22	66	condolences	53	29	successor
23	55	May	54	28	Held
24	55	Monday	55	28	Iranians
25	52	Died	56	26	Lost
26	52	Ali	57	26	Live
27	51	Azerbaijan	58	25	Visit
28	50	City	59	25	entourage
29	50	ayatollah	60	24	announced
30	48	carrying	61	24	Attend
31	47	Pakistan	62	23	Life

	Freq.	Keyword			Freq.	Keyword
63	23	dead		82	17	Early
64	23	procession		83	17	presidential
65	23	expressed		84	17	Site
66	23	expected		85	17	Sharif
67	22	Prayers		86	16	Rescue
68	21	province		87	16	northwestern
69	21	companions		88	16	Home
70	20	Butcher		89	15	contributions
71	20	Shehbaz		90	15	attended
72	19	martyrdom		91	15	conservative
73	19	Fog		92	15	Aliyev
74	19	Search		93	15	Imam
75	19	Election		94	14	Muslim
76	19	Buried		95	14	bilateral
77	19	Mass		96	14	Coffins
78	18	Found		97	14	Gather
79	18	Succeed		98	14	Mourn
80	17	Deaths		99	14	gathered
81	17	Dam		100	14	brutal

Source: Authors

The corpus-based significant keywords, extracted from NOW corpus, are categorized in Table 2 according to their conceptual affinity.

5.1. Key Semantic Categories in the NOW

The concordance lines of approximately 400 keywords have been analyzed to construct a group of categories. These categories help the study reach its semiotic system. In fact, as it was discussed in the framework, each category can be considered as a sign in Laclau and Mouffe's (2001) semiotic system.

Table 2. Frequency-based Categories and Their Related Keywords

Category	Keywords
Alliance	Muslim, relations, bilateral, friend, visit, unity, brotherly, visited, improved
Conspiracy contemplations	Foul, unclear, turn, hand, alive, contest, message, fueled, speculation, uncertainty
Contribution	Contributions, serving, legacy, outstanding, servant, steadfast, served, life, politician, commendable, manifested, Palestinians, contribution, dedicated, dissent, esteemed, improved, praising, Promotion, recalled, reliable, reminisced, leadership, dedication, turn, loss, impact, assumed, partner
From death to salvation	Death, demise, lost, died, dead, martyrdom, killed, sudden, deaths, passing, loss, declared, untimely, disappearance, life, rest, sorrow, drew
Leadership dream	Candidates, elected, election, presidential, elections, candidate, Raisi, Successor, Ali, succeed, expected, protégé, succession, candidate, groomed, widely, anticipated, fueled, introduced, speculation, Successors, uncertainty, candidates, Khamenei, supreme, Ebrahim, Mokhber, son, contest
Event-narration	Helicopter, crash, crashed, Sunday, Carrying, fog, search, dam, may, live, shrouded, Tuesday, mountain, rescue, bell, mountainous, teams, inauguration, Monday, chopper, mountainside, terrain, victims, accident, weather, found, travelling, wreckage, early, afternoon, moments, alive, colleagues, crescent, crews, domestically, events, hopes, inaugurate, locate, traveling, assistance, coverage, announced, investigation, announcement, attends, signs, lost, deaths, prayers, border, turn
Hardlineness	Conservative, hardliner, moderate, ultra, little
Public (Il)legitimacy	Funeral, condolences, mourners, ceremony, prayers, mourning, buried, procession, attend, coffins, gather, mourn, thousands, mass, city, processions, attended, Dhankhar, pictures, rites, square, bodies, celebrating, ceremonies, laid, memorial, truck, farewell, grief, body, gathered, funerals, portraits, lorry, prayer, travelled, people, crowds, Wednesday, draped, thronged, transported, walked, held, Iranians, rest, clad, join, mourned, tens, bidding, coffin, hardliners, portrait, Shafay, visits, clutching, burial, evening, coverage
(un)sympathy	Tribute, expressed, condolence, sorrow, pay, paid, deepest, ummah, respects, Sri Lanka, offering, profound, tributes, deep, drew, partner, termed, message, praising, promotion, recalled, reliable, reminisced, dedication, expresses, visionary, respect
Brutal judge	Butcher, executions, nicknamed, blood, abuses, hands, oversight, participant, unpopular, repression, brutal, Jessica Baker, figure, home, murderer, unbefitting, bloody, record
Suppressor president	Political, lowest, watch, crackdowns, participant, unpopular, repression, brutal, impact, Jessica baker, clerics, little, monumental, polls, reminder, figure, home, elections, affect, assumed, changed, landslide, mentor, murderer, unbefitting, unsettling, yesman, bloody, blow, record, policies, contest, theocratic
Unconfirmed cleric	Theocratic, clerics, hojat-ol-Eslam

Source: Authors

Investigating the keywords based on their related concordance lines and conceptual categorizing them, led to the following twenty conceptual categories: Alliance; conspiracy contemplations; contribution; from death to salvation; leadership dream; event-narration; hardlineness; public (Il)legitimacy; (un)sympathy; brutal judge; suppressor president; (Un)confirmed cleric. The categories contain different positive, negative, and neutral attitudes toward the event. For example, 'allies' form the in-group, whose discourse highlights Raisi's contributions. 'Global reactions' and 'messages' include both positive and negative messages, while 'other-makings' negatively portray Raisi through labels such as 'butcher of Tehra' or a 'brutal figure'.

5.2. Semantic Analysis of Collocates

In this section, the most frequent keywords are analyzed within the context in which they appear in the corpus. Specifically, concordance analysis is used to examine all sentences containing these keywords in depth, revealing the dominant discourse surrounding these semantic categories and their collocates.

5.2.1. Alliance

Based on the definition provided by *Merriam-Webster*, ally is defined as a sovereign or state associated with another by treaty or league. This definition is the basis of identifying the significant keywords of this category. Utterances such as:

Maduro of Venezuela has praised President Raisi as an unconditional friend and an extraordinary leader;

The resolution moved by Senator Sherry Rehman acknowledged

that President Raisi was a great leader of the Muslim World and a true friend of Pakistan, as a true friend to Russia's…Putin's letter, published on the Kremlin's website, reads;

Chinas Xi said Monday that Raisi's death was a great loss to the Iranian people and he Chinese people have lost a good friend;

Aliyev said, our prayers to Allah Almighty are with President Ebrahim Raisi and the accompanying delegation. As a neighbor, friend, and brotherly country;

His contribution to strengthening India-Iran bilateral relationship will always be remembered.

The sample utterances prove the emphasis on the 'Muslim, relations, bilateral, friend, visit, unity, brotherly, visited, improved' keywords by various presidents and movements. This category represents the way in which certain allies, such as the Muslim ummah, Pakistan, India, China, Saudi Arabia, and Russia, reacted to the event. This category represents various in-groups, who send their messages of condolence and regret at Raisi and the seven others' decease. The countries sending these messages, placing themselves in the 'self' position of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and through referring to their great loss, true friend, unconditional friend, and bilateral relationship, foreground their approaches regarding the event.

5.2.2. Conspiracy Contemplations

Conspiracy is defined as something devised to accomplish an evil or treacherous end. (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). This category is

composed of keywords such as Foul, unclear, turn, hand, alive, contest, message, fueled, speculation, and uncertainty. Presenting certain commentaries about the possibility of foul play in the crash, doubting whether his funeral would draw public grieving on the scale of mass funerals, suspecting Israel's hand in Raisi's decease, and quoting the US., saying Raisi had hand on his blood, are affirmations produced by the Western media for making its audience suspect the crash and move toward considering a kind of plot leading to the crash.

Utterances like the following are published in the online news agencies to strengthen the conspiracy contemplations, while not giving clear viewpoints regarding this issue;

Iranian media suggests foul play and conspiracy over Raisi's death;

In recent days, Persian and foreign social media has been awash with speculations from individuals, news agencies, political circles, technical experts, and even several pilots about the possibility that the helicopter crash involving President Raisi and his entourage was the result of a foreign conspiracy;

Although this team has yet to announce its findings, the sheer volume of conspiracy theories has captured the public's attention;

One factor that bolsters the conspiracy theory is the location of the crash; Raisi's death has sparked numerous speculations and conspiracy theories. Was it an accident?.

Foxnews.com, nbcnews.com, intellinews.com, scroll. In, and podcasts.IndiaToday.in are some of these news agencies representing these doubts and uncertainties.

As represented by the corpus and the given samples, some concepts and phrases such as whether Raisi's decease would draw public grieving, numerous speculations and conspiracy theories, great uncertainty in the succession, and fueled speculation negatively spark speculation about the event.

5.2.3. Contribution

Contribution is defined as the act of giving or supplying something that plays a significant role in making something happen (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). This category comprises keywords such as contributions, serving, legacy, outstanding, servant, steadfast, served, life, politician, commendable, manifested, Palestinians, contribution, dedicated, dissent, esteemed, improved, praising, promotion, recalled, reliable, reminisced, leadership, dedication, turn, loss, impact, assumed, and partner. The following utterances illustrate how the signifier is reinforced by the frequent use of these keywords.

> *He credited Raisi with positive contributions to Pakistan's economic and agricultural sectors;*

> *President Raisi's contributions for the unity of Muslim Ummah as well as for the besieged people;*

> *Offered prayers and paid tribute to Raisi's contributions towards the progress and prosperity of the Iranian nation, promotion of Pak-Iran…;*

> *His contribution to strengthening India-Iran bilateral relationship…;*

> *Raisi, a significant contributor to bilateral relations;*

> *Raisi made an invaluable personal contribution to the*

development of the countries relations;

Xi said President Raisi made important contributions toward Iran's security and stability;

Vladimir Putin also extolled Raisi as an outstanding politician whose entire life was devoted to serving his Motherland;

Praising Raisi's legacy and hailing him as a friend.

The data proves that Contribution is a sign or category representing the positive in-group who regret the crash and the lives lost, and is dedicated to recounting Raisi's contributions and legacy.

5.2.6. From Death to Salvation

demise or salvation category contains the significant concepts referring to Raisi's decease, composing a continuum from positive to negative notions including Death, demise, lost, died, dead, martyrdom, killed, sudden, sorrow, deaths, passing, loss, life, rest, declared, untimely, disappearance, and drew. This category contains a wide spectrum of concepts, defining what has happened to Raisi. These concepts are represented in utterances such as the following:

Raisi's tragic death;

Had died in a helicopter crash;

Ayatollah Ebrahim Raisi, has achieved the highest level of martyrdom;

We are deeply saddened by the untimely demise of President Raisi and extend our deepest condolences to the people and government of Iran;

There were apprehensions that the sudden disappearance of President Raisi from the helm; Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi was killed in a helicopter crash;

Raisi's death is a terrible loss.

As represented in the given utterances, a spectrum of in-groups and out-groups react to Raisi's decease. This category includes concepts such as death, losing life, passing, and loss, which are neutral in describing Raisi's death. Concepts such as killed and disappearance represent negative reactions, inducing an idea of conspiracy in the crash. Conversely, the notion of martyrdom is used by in-groups to portray the decease as a form of salvation. The in-group believes that Raisi "has achieved the highest level of martyrdom"; he is defined as "the servant of the Iranian nation".

5.2.7. Leadership Dream

The process in which someone or something that comes after another person or object is defined as Succession. What happened after the crash to Raisi essentially requires a kind of succession. However, it seems that the corpus moves a step forward to another kind; analyzing the significant keywords and their concordance lines would help decode the deep, hidden discourse. This category is composed of the following keywords: Raisi, Ebrahim, Khamenei, supreme, Mokhber, Successor, Ali, succeed, expected, protégé, succession, candidates, candidate, groomed, son, widely, anticipated, fueled, introduced, speculation, Successors, uncertainty, and contest.

Some reactions to the event focus on Iran's leadership succession, portraying Raisi as a determined individual who has

reached this position following his victory in the presidential elections. References to concepts spanning from the pre-election period to the post-election phase form a category that includes terms such as candidates, elected, candidate, election, presidential, and elections. This category encompasses all elections related to Raisi, from the time he was first elected president to the upcoming presidential elections in Iran, which could secure him a second term. The following utterances represent how the keywords play a significant role in strengthening this approach,

> *Thoughts have been turning to who might succeed Khamenei. Raisi had been among the leading candidates to replace him, Raisi, 63, was widely seen as a candidate to succeed 85-year-old Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei;*
>
> *Raisi was seen as a protege to Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei;*
>
> *The late president was being groomed to one day succeed 85-year-old Khamenei;*
>
> *Although the hardline factions have no candidate at this stage, because Raisi was expected to run for a second term;*
>
> *Won his office in the lowest-turnout presidential election.*

This category has 2 sides of conceptualization: on the one side it concerns the succession that took place after the announcement of the decease of the president and the 7 others. The other side is a kind of other-making, talking about speculation that Raisi might be groomed as a potential successor, or Raisi, who was widely anticipated to succeed Khamenei as supreme leader, was 63. The idea of the succession of Raisi as a supreme leader is strengthened by the opposition groups and not confirmed by the in-groups.

The utterances in this category refer to the process of Raisi's election as president and describe him as winning his office in the lowest-turnout election. This other-making category makes the audience think that Raisi was a candidate to succeed Iran's supreme leader. This category represents the out-group's viewpoint, as it backgrounds Raisi from his election to his willingness to win the position of the supreme leader. This is an idea produced to lead to a contemplation that he was killed for the ambitions he had in mind.

5.2.8. Event-narration

One of the main categories of the analyzed corpus is describing what happened to Raisi's helicopter. This category contains concepts such as: Helicopter, crash, crashed, Sunday, Carrying, fog, search, dam, may, live, shrouded, Tuesday, mountain, rescue, bell, mountainous, teams, inauguration, Monday, chopper, mountainside, terrain, victims, accident, weather, found, travelling, wreckage, early, afternoon, moments, alive, colleagues, crescent, crews, domestically, events, hopes, inaugurate, locate, traveling, assistance, announced, investigation, announcement, attends, signs, lost, deaths, prayers, border, and turn. The concordance lines of these concepts are illustrated in Table 9.

> *Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi was confirmed dead after search and rescue teams found his crashed helicopter in May 2024;*

> *The sudden death of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi has plunged the Islamic Republic into a political fog as thick as that enveloping the mountainous Varzeqan region;*

> *Fatal crash;*

In the northwestern city of Tabriz, the site of the chopper crash;

Late President Ebrahim Raisi who was killed in a helicopter crash as authorities have begun investigation into the cause;

Prosecutors have warned people against showing any public signs of celebrating Raisi's death and a heavy security force presence has been seen in Tehran;

Unfortunate turn of events, Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi and several high-ranking officials have tragically died in a helicopter crash on Sunday.

In the given utterances, "political fog" metaphorically represents the unclear and foggy state of a situation. This conceptualization is used to foreground the uncertainty in Iran's politics. This category describes the event from the inauguration of the dam to the crash, as well as the investigation to find the helicopter. This category, as a neutral one, describes the event in the first days of the crash. However, when asking "Was it an accident?" it puts the focus on the conspiracy trick, moving the audience toward feeling that something particular has happened to the helicopter, rather than being a natural accident.

5.2.7. Hardlineness

A Faction is a party or group (as within a government) that is often contentious or self-seeking (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). This category contains concepts such as: Conservative, hardliner, moderate, ultra, and little, all of which demonstrate Raisi's political party. This inclination is evident in the following samples:

In a shocking turn of events, Ebrahim Raisi, Iran's hardline President, met a tragic end;

By the death of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, a hardliner and potential successor to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei;

Iran proclaimed five days of mourning for Raisi, who enacted the hardline policies of his mentor Khamenei;

The death of Iranian President and Islamic hardliner Ebrahim Raisi;

Raisi, a hardline cleric;

Lost one of its bloodiest hardliners;

IRAN'S hardline president Ebrahim Raisi has a bloody history;

Under Raisi, the Iranian government took a conservative twist.

Based on these utterances, this category is representative of the out-groups, showing Raisi as a hardliner and ultra-conservative figure. The other side of this other-making process induce the idea that this hardliner figure planned to be the successor of the supreme leader, an idea that is strengthened through the opposition discourse and not proven by the in-groups.

5.2.8. Public (Il)legitimacy

The public illegitimacy category is formulated by concepts denoting funeral (non)participation by the public, and contains various concepts referring to this ceremony, the participants, and the related dates and times. The most frequent concept of this category is "Funeral", having a rate of 98 repetitions. The other concepts are as follows: condolence, mourners, ceremony, prayers, mourning, buried, procession, attend, coffins, gather, mourn,

thousands, mass, city, processions, attended, Dhankhar, pictures, rites, square, bodies, celebrating, ceremonies, laid, memorial, truck, farewell, grief, body, gathered, funerals, portraits, lorry, prayer, travelled, people, crowds, Wednesday, draped, thronged, transported, walked, held, Iranians, rest, clad, join, mourned, evening, coverage, tens, bidding, coffin, portrait, shafay, visits, clutching, and burial. These keywords have been observed in the following utterances:

> *Today, Iranians are not in mourning. Ebrahim Raisi was a brutal mass-murderer unbefitting of condolences;*
>
> *It is unclear whether any world leaders would attend the funeral;*
>
> *Shehbaz Sharif travelled to Tehran to attend the funeral of President Raisi and others;*
>
> *Thousands of people took part in a funeral procession;*
>
> *Mourners gather around a truck carrying the flag-draped coffins;*
>
> *Tens of thousands gather in Tehran as Raisi's funeral prayers held;*
>
> *The bodies of Raisi and others killed in the helicopter crash are taken to Tehran;*
>
> *It is yet unclear which world leaders will participate;*
>
> *And then millions, literally millions of people attended.*

The funeral (non)attendance idea and the public (Il)legitimacy category contain both positive and negative approaches, from those grieving the loss of the president, to those doubting the participation in his funeral or celebrating his decease. Emphasizing

that millions of people attended or Thousands of mourners massed in central Tehran's Valiasr Square implies that the statistics given by the government are unreal, and the amount is literally announced as millions, and the real number is thousands of mourners.

5.2.9. (Un)sympathy

The (un)sympathetic messages category is part of the reactions given by the allies and global figures. The concepts of this category include Tribute, expressed, condolence, sorrow, pay, paid, deepest, ummah, respects, Sri Lanka, offering, expresses, visionary profound, tributes, deep, drew, partner, termed, praising, promotion, recalled, reliable, reminisced, message, respect, and dedication. The context of these concepts is given in the following utterances:

Vice President Dhankhar pays tribute to Iranian President Raisi;

PM Shehbaz paid rich tribute to Ebrahim Raisi;

Tributes to Raisi are a slap in the face to all those who suffered under his reign;

They're calling Raisi the 'butcher of Iran';

Doustshenas said Raisi, known to many as the butcher of Tehran,

Omar Ayub Khan also expressed deep sorrow and condolences;

Joe Biden's Secretary of State Antony Blinken, defended offering condolences for Raisi during a Senate Foreign Relations Committee;

To express our condolences, Mr. Haniyeh said: The Lebanese armed group issued a statement offering its deepest condolences;

Today, Iranians are not in mourning. Ebrahim Raisi was a brutal mass-murderer unbefitting of condolences, Pahlavi said;

However, National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said Raisi was a man who had a lot of blood on his hands;

Even UK Security Minister Tom Tugendhat wrote on X, President Raisi's regime has murdered thousands at home, and targeted people here in Britain.

The (un)sympathetic messages category represents both the in-group and out-group messages, expressing their feelings toward this event. The in-groups express their condolences and grieve, and the out-groups reject the president and produce an Other-making idea against the hegemonic discourse of Iran among their audience, in words such as "President Raisi's regime has murdered thousands at home".

5.2.10. Brutal Judge

The Western media has three types of other-making conceptualizations, rejecting the president by his judicial, presidential, and religious positions. In the other-making category by judicial position, the following keywords can be identified: Butcher, executions, unpopular, repression, brutal, Jessica, baker, nicknamed, blood, abuses, hands, oversight, participant figure, home, murderer, unbefitting, bloody, and record. The following utterance show how each concept strengthens the other-making process,

Raisi - also known as the Butcher of Tehran for his role in the mass execution;

The world knows that Raisi aka the 'Butcher of Tehran' was widely unpopular as the pitiless hand;

Ebrahim Raisi was known as the 'Butcher of Tehran' for a REASON;

The ultraconservative Raisi -- known as the Butcher of Tehran;

John Kirby said Raisi was a man who had a lot of blood on his hands;

Lost one of its bloodiest hardliners;

Ebrahim Raisi has a bloody history steeped in murder and helped oversee the mass executions of thousands;

Even extensive bloodshed, but no regime change;

We have been quite clear that Ebrahim Raisi was a brutal participant in the repression of the Iranian people for nearly four decades.

Describing Raisi as a mass-murderer, brutal, having hands on his blood, and Butcher of Tehran, this category points to Raisi's judiciary position, both in 1988 and from 2019 to 2021. This is one of the most direct other-making categories detected in the corpus.

5.2.11. Suppressor President

This category foregrounds Raisi by his presidential position. The describing concepts of this category include Political, lowest, watch, crackdowns, participant, unpopular, repression, brutal,

impact, Jessica, baker, clerics, monumental, polls, reminder, contest, figure, home, elections, affect, assumed, changed, landslide, mentor, murderer, unbefitting, unsettling, theocratic, yesman, bloody, blow, record, and policies. These concepts are used in utterances such as the following:

> *We have been quite clear that Ebrahim Raisi was a brutal participant in the repression of the Iranian people for nearly four decades;*

> *Miller said Raisi "has blood on his hands" for his role in suppressing dissent in Iran;*

> *Raisi, the face of repression in the Islamic Republic of Iran;*

> *Crash is an ocular reminder of the socio-cultural and political churning in the country;*

> *Raisi endorsed a severe crackdown on these demonstrations;*

> *Raisi's sudden and unexpected death is a striking reminder of how unpopular politics and unbelievable;*

> *Raisi, who came to power in 2021, was an unpopular leader;*

> *Under Raisi's watch, Iranians saw a bloody crackdown on the allegedly;*

> *President Raisi's regime has murdered thousands at home;*

> *IRAN'S hardline president Ebrahim Raisi has a bloody history steeped in murder and helped oversee the mass executions of thousands.*

This category emphasizes that:

> *Raisi's death may not seriously affect the Islamic Republic's internal and external settings;*

His gaining the lowest-ever turnout in the elections;

Being a yes-man;

And being the face of repression in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Rejecting the president by using these tags and phrases makes the audience feel that his lack of efficiency is to the extent that his decease does not affect Iran's policies.

5.2.12. (Un)confirmed Cleric

This category points to Raisi's religious position; two keywords, clerics and Theocratic, represent this category. The representative utterances of this category are:

Raisi, for example, was not considered an ayatollah by many clerics;

In winning him the support of powerful Iranian theocratic rulers;

Raisi's clerical rank of Hojat-ol-Eslam was below that of an ayatollah.

The keywords and utterances reveal that the refusal of many clerics to recognize Raisi as an ayatollah constitutes a two-sided other-making. He is simultaneously rejected by external out-groups and framed as being unaccepted even by the truly religious community; this implies that those naming him as an ayatollah are not truly religious ones. Mentioning his rank as a 'Hojat-ol-Eslam', which is below that of an ayatollah, is done to reject him by the clerics because his rank is lower than a specific one, which is being an ayatollah. As a result, both positive and negative approaches to

Raisi can be identified in this category through the tags given to him as Ayatollah or Hojat-ol-Eslam.

5.3. Countries and Leaders' Reactions

In addition to the semantic analysis, the study's corpus includes messages and commentaries from world leaders, groups, and movements. These will be emphasized in the following sections.

5.3.1. Political leaders

Referring to various political figures is another category of the study's corpus. This corpus mentions names such as Khamenei, leader, supreme, pm, Shehbaz, Ilham, Dhankhar, Putin, Xi, Sharif, miller, vice, king, & Ayub. The approach of these figures toward the event is illustrated in the following utterances.

Azeri President Ilham Aliyev said he was profoundly troubled by news of Iranian president's helicopter crash;

PM Shehbaz to attend funeral of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi in Tehran;

Chinas Xi said Monday that Raisi's death was a great loss to the Iranian people;

Russian President Vladimir Putin described Raisi as an outstanding politician who rightfully enjoyed high respect from his compatriots;

Omar Ayub Khan also expressed deep sorrow and condolences;

The passing of President Raisi has deprived the Muslim ummah of a great and courageous leader.

On the other side, the out-groups send their messages as follows: "Matthew Miller offered official U.S. condolences following the crash, despite a scathing assessment of Raisi's record. Miller said Raisi has blood on his hands for …".

This category represents two kinds of political leaders, one in-group leaders, such as 'Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif' and 'President Jagdeep Dhankhar' who regret the loss of the president, and the other, the out-group figure 'Miller' who introduces Raisi as a person having a role in suppressing dissent in Iran.

5.3.2. Concerned Countries

This category concerns the countries focusing on the event. Pakistan, India, Turkey, Russia, China, and Azerbaijan are the countries that have a significant meaning in the analyzed corpus. The names can be seen in utterances such as:

Strengthen Russia-Iran ties;

Advancing Pakistan-Iran bilateral relations;

Strengthening India-Iran bilateral relationship;

China and Russia, both of which have been forging closer ties with Iran;

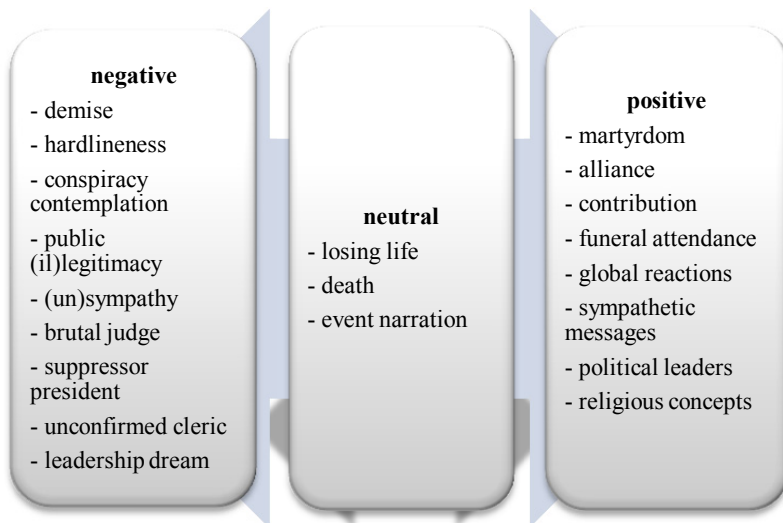*Delhi today to convey our deepest condolences on the tragic passing away of President Ebrahim Raisi.*

The significant countries in this category are those allies that sent their messages of condolence, mentioned Raisi's contributions, and participated in his funeral. The significant countries represent a positive in-group with the hegemon discourse of Iran.

6. Discourse Analysis

Combining the approaches of corpus linguistics and discourse analysis, as highlighted in Baker's (2004) work, offers a novel framework for discourse analysts to enhance quality through quantity. In this section, data drawn from the research corpus is utilized to explore the semiotic system of Western media discourse.

Data analysis identified 18 categories, most of which included perspectives from both in-groups and out-groups. In the majority of these categories, the audience is prompted to consider whether they should feel sadness or celebrate the crash. Within these categories, a spectrum of reactions emerges, ranging from negative to positive. However, some categories simply narrate the event and occupy a neutral position in the middle of this spectrum. This spectrum is displayed in Figure 1 and Figure 2, in which the semiotic system of the Western discourse approach toward the crash will be illustrated.

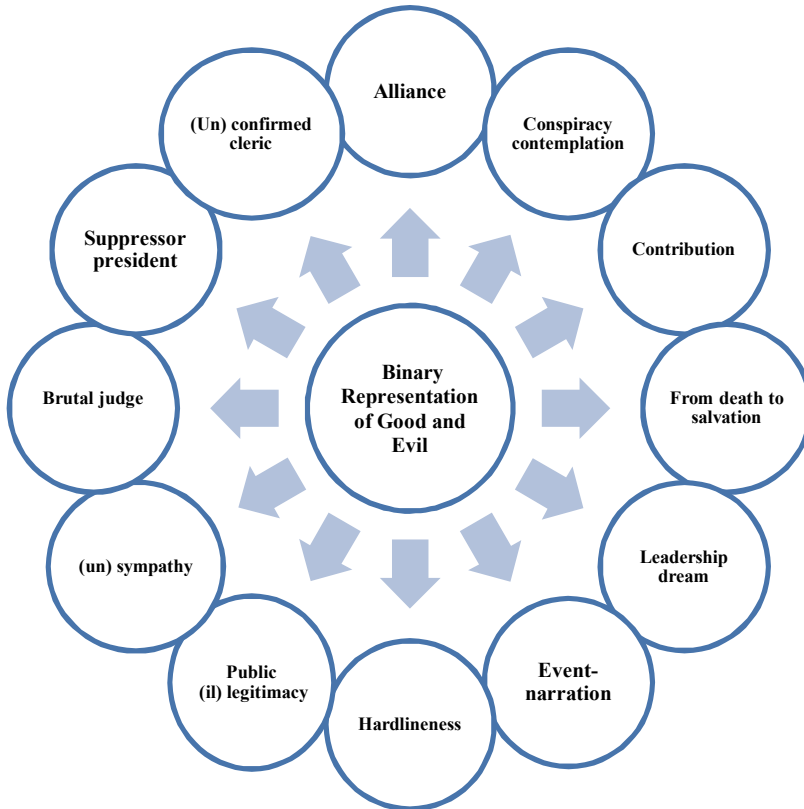**Figure 1.** A Spectrum of Different Approaches Toward Raisi's Decease

negative
- demise
- hardlineness
- conspiracy contemplation
- public (il)legitimacy
- (un)sympathy
- brutal judge
- suppressor president
- unconfirmed cleric
- leadership dream

neutral
- losing life
- death
- event narration

positive
- martyrdom
- alliance
- contribution
- funeral attendance
- global reactions
- sympathetic messages
- political leaders
- religious concepts

Source: Authors

As illustrated in Figure 1, the positive and negative approaches of the in-groups and out-groups move side by side throughout the corpus; an event of grief for the in-group is a reason for celebration for the out-group. Raisi not only has opponents and a Western out-group, but is also is rejected by a group of clerics as an ayatollah. He is defined as a yes-man who has the dream of being the successor of the supreme leader.

Although the media questions the impact of Raisi's decease on the progress of Iran's domestic and foreign policies, others condemn him as a brutal judge and oppressive president. This binary perspective on the late president is evident throughout the discourse; to some, he is a martyr, while to others, he is seen as having been killed or disappeared. Some express sympathy and acknowledge his contributions, whereas others label him the "Butcher of Tehran". Although there is no indication of his desire for succession in the in-group's views, the out-group emphasizes this aspect to suggest a possible conspiracy surrounding the crash.

This data and the semantic analysis of the categories lead the research to the semiotic system (Figure 2), which is articulated around this binary representation of good and evil.

Figure 2. The Semiotic System of the Approach of Western Media Toward Raisi

Source: Authors

According to Figure 2, most signs of this discourse conceptualize a binary representation of the president, simultaneously as an in-group to some and an out-group to some other, an ideal president to some and a suppressor and brutal to others. This binary thinking is exemplified throughout the study, in the semantic analysis of the identified categories.

7. Conclusion

In the present paper, an attempt was made to examine an objective view of press representation in the NOW corpus. The study specifically aimed to uncover how Western media portrayed the event of Ebrahim Raisi's helicopter crash and subsequent decease. The general framework of the study was based on Baker's (2004) approach, which combines corpus linguistics with critical discourse analysis. The analysis of data obtained from the online NOW corpus focused on keywords and their frequency. To address the research question, Raisi's name was searched in the NOW corpus, yielding 6,274 related items. From these, 1,000 items were analyzed using AntConc (Anthony, 2014) software to extract the most frequent keywords.

The study employed a corpus-based discourse analysis. The corpus was analyzed using software to identify the most frequent keywords, which were then categorized semantically. These categories were further examined discursively by identifying in-groups and out-groups and by formulating the resulting semiotic system.

The results demonstrated that the analyzed media presented a binary representation of Raisi, portraying him as good for the in-groups and evil for the out-groups. The media leaves the audience to decide whether to sympathize with the events or to celebrate them, influenced by the negative image it projects of the president. The depiction of Raisi as both an ally's benefactor and an opponent's adversary is simultaneously conveyed, allowing the audience to derive a dual interpretation through the media lens.

Analyzing themes from the corpus reveals that the media significantly influences identity representation. Notably, when

certain events are depicted in the corpus, they tend to reinforce the hegemonic discourse in Iran, particularly regarding the contested figure of President Ebrahim Raisi. A marked shift is evident in how different groups represent him: in-groups refer to the president as their brother and friend, while out-groups associate him with a butcher, executions, unpopularity, repression, brutality, blood, abuse, oversight, murderer, unbefitting, and bloody, frequently used by out-groups to characterize Raisi and his approach during both his executive and presidential tenures. This negative portrayal partly stems from his presidency and partly from his previous role as a judge. This stark contrast serves to emphasize the other-making border of the out-groups, primarily the USA, in relation to Iran. Conversely, in-groups describe him as a lost brother and friend, framing his decease as martyrdom that leads to salvation. The analysis suggests that, despite media claims of impartiality in reporting on Iran's events, the prominence and repetition of certain critical viewpoints reveal a bias that undermines this claim.

The media attempted to reinforce the conspiracy theory to make the audience doubt the claims that what happened to Raisi was merely an accident. This entirely biased and fabricated representation of the event from the out-group's perspective demonstrates a clear intent to manipulate perceptions of the entire political system in Iran. This aligns closely with Van Dijk's (2009) ideological square, which outlines various strategies used to portray the Western world out-group negatively (reflecting hegemonic discourse in Iran). Through the polarization strategy, the media effectively presents a positive image of the in-group, while casting the out-group in a negative light. This polarization is evident in the way the event is depicted from multiple perspectives.

In conclusion, the media's efforts to portray a negative image of Raisi were evident in the analysis of various keywords and themes

derived from the corpus. This study employed a corpus-based discourse analysis to provide an objective and unbiased view of how Raisi's decease is represented in the media. Overall, the portrayal of the deceased president is expressed through a dual representation: he is seen as good by those within Iran and as evil by those outside of it.

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