The historical, religious, cultural, political and ideological background to the Arab-Israeli conflict has placed it at the forefront of international conflicts for decades. It continues to be the subject of major focus in Western and Arab media, as well as one of the most painful and unresolved issues of our time. Yet in spite of widespread coverage by academics, journalists and political analysts there are very few studies about the way language is used to reflect the myriad of representations and stances on the topic. Therefore, Samia Bazzi’s analysis of media language and power in the Arab-Israeli conflict is to be welcomed, especially as she seems to fulfil her promise not to subscribe to ‘a particular ideological perspective’ (p.6).

Through a carefully woven framework of multidisciplinary discourse analysis Bazzi takes the reader on a fascinating journey through written news reports of various incidents and events relating to the conflict. After the introduction (Chapter 1) the book is divided into three parts. Part 1 looks at approaches to media discourse, including an important foundational chapter on its semiotic foundations (Chapter 2), an ideological perspective (Chapter 3), and a critical approach to discourse analysis (Chapter 4). Part 2 presents a model with which to analyze Arab media discourse, focusing on contextual factors (Chapter 5) and analysis of text strategy (Chapter 6). Part 3 deals with translation and the media, and assesses media translation and conflict (Chapter 7).

For her main media sources Bazzi used two Arab satellite channels, al-Manar and al-Jazeera. For journalistic purposes she chose Reuters English and Arabic, AFP, and the newspapers Assafir and al-Mustaqbal (both published in Lebanon). Bazzi states (perhaps belatedly, p.49) that one of her main objectives is to ‘enter the Arab’s communal conceptions of the Arab-Israeli conflict’.

One of the book’s main strengths is the multidisciplinary approach to interpreting data. The range of disciplines from which the author draws is ambitious but impressive, for in other contexts or circumstances the outcome could have been less successful. Pragmatic and functional language models can work very well as foundations for data analysis, but if improperly deployed they can hang there like a misplaced and lame attempt at applying a methodological framework. However, Bazzi makes excellent use of the theories and principles of Halliday, Foucault, Peirce, Saussure, Jakobson, Mey and others.
to give a very solid and interesting relevance to her linguistic data. Those linguistic models serve Bazzi well as she applies her data to a number of them at the lexical, grammatical or syntactic level. I shall highlight just a few examples of how she achieves this in what follows.

In Chapter 2 (semiotics) she notes, for instance, how the signifiers of a particular event can be replaced by Arabic editors to create marked (‘less favorable’) or unmarked (‘favorable or normal’) signs depending on their persuasion. A pertinent example of this is the comparison between a Reuters English Text (henceforth RET) of 15/11/02: ‘The Palestinian Uprising’, with the Reuters Arabic Text (RAT) of the same date: ‘The Palestinian uprising against Israeli Occupation’, where the Arabic version has become ‘the norm in a new categorization system’. (p.39). A similar notion is expanded in Chapter 3 where Bazzi refers to the ‘Ideological State Apparatus’ of the journalistic translator through the following comparison: ‘Israeli-Palestinian violence that has intensified over 18 months’ (RET, 18/4/02) vs. ‘Israeli-Palestinian struggle that has intensified since the outburst of the Palestinian uprising against Israeli occupation over 18 months’ (RAT, 18/4/02) (p.49). Chapter 3 also examines more closely the issue of power relations, which leads Bazzi to draw on the very relevant labels of ‘worthy’ and ‘unworthy’ victims as defined by Herman and Chomsky (1994). The binary notion of ‘victims of terrorism/suicide bombing’ (found predominantly in the Western media) and ‘victims of occupation’ (used in Arab mass media discourse) (p.64) is closely examined in this chapter, culminating in a table that summarizes how worthy and unworthy victims are described in the rhetoric of the media (Table 3.3, p.69). This – and similar – tables provided by Bazzi are extremely helpful to the reader because they present a clear synopsis of binary standpoints, and also serve as a means of accountability to the author to show that she has met her objectives for each chapter.

From a linguistic perspective I found Chapters 4 and 5 to be the most fascinating. In Chapter 4 Bazzi examines such vital elements as modality, as well as other key discourse elements like structure and cohesion. Through careful manipulation of her data Bazzi shows that modality is a key concept in the media language of the Arab-Israeli conflict, not just in the way that main or auxiliary verbs are used but also in the deployment of mood adjuncts and quantifiers (‘Palestinian bombers killed scores of Israelis’ (p.86), for instance). In Chapter 5 Bazzi explores, among other things, contextual factors that legitimize certain concepts for Arab recipients by shifting the emphasis of meaning. Two poignant examples are ‘Palestinian suicide attack’ (RET, 13/4/02) vs. ‘a young Palestinian woman who blew herself up’ (RAT, 13/4/02) (p.107), and ‘Lebanon’s Shiite
Muslim Fundamentalist Movement Hezbollah, a sworn foe for the Jewish state’ (AFPET, 27/6/02) vs. ‘Lebanon’s Hezbollah’ (AFPAT, 27/6/02) (p.110).

Bazzi also attempts (reasonably successfully) to extract some of the key indicative characteristics of the different Arab media producers. She notes (p.131) that Reuter representatives tend to give more details about Palestinian victims, or more information about what Arab leaders actually said (which is of more interest to Arab readers and is also aimed at increasing sales). Al-Manar, on the other hand, emphasizes quite clearly the state of war with Israel and Israel’s ideology (p.132); for example, it will tend towards such descriptions as ‘Zionist usurping entity’ (as opposed to the favored ‘Israel’ of western media), or ‘Lebanese border with occupied Palestine’ (as opposed to the ‘Northern Israeli border with Lebanon’ favored by western sources).

Bazzi’s analysis of textual strategies (Chapter 6) also flags a number of important and fascinating indicators. For example, Western media texts tend to passivize Israeli acts (delaying the actor in linguistic terms) whereas Arab sources, especially al-Manar, will focus on the agent with its attribute (p.143); for instance, ‘The occupying forces [Israelis, parenthesis added] killed [ … ]’ (al-Manar 5/4/03) vs. ‘[ … ] was shot dead by Israeli troops’ (AFPET, 5/04/03).

The above examples are merely a modest representation of the comprehensive nature of Bazzi’s analysis. That being said, the reader might feel that some of the data is too similar and limited, or that it reappears in different chapters under a slightly different guise. The methodological foundations of the book are excellent, but I felt at times that Bazzi was clutching at straws when trying to explain away some of the data within the parameters of her selected linguistic models.

The text is quite dense, and often requires a subsequent reading to gain proper understanding. Publications by Benjamins on Arabic linguistics have traditionally been of a very high standard (and this one is no exception), but the style and presentation sometimes drift into the realms of turgidity. These publications also tend to be expensive to purchase, so if this volume fits that trend it will not be accessible to the average student of Arabic who could learn quite a bit from Bazzi’s work, provided he/she had a reasonable knowledge of linguistics.

Overall, however, this is a book that will appeal to linguists and political analysts, and those with a more general interest in the nexus between language and power. Bazzi demonstrates how journalistic and translation strategies can influence an interpretation or presentation of events in even the most subtle ways, and how ideological and other factors will inevitably come into play in the representation of events with such a highly charged political history. By interpreting her data within a very solid framework of
various discourse strategies Bazzi has succeeded in tackling a topic of immense importance.

Review by Adrian Gully
School of International and Political Studies, Deakin University

REFERENCES