BOOK REVIEW

PAUL Baker, COSTAS Gabrielatos and TONY McEnery
Discourse Analysis and Media Attitudes:
The Representation of Islam in the British Press. Cambridge
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Is this British press prejudiced against Islam and Muslim? And in what ways can prejudiced be explicit or subtle? This book entitled “Discourse Analysis and Media Attitudes: the Representation of Islam in the British Press” uses a detailed analysis of 140 million words of newspaper articles on Muslims and Islam, combining corpus linguistics and discourse analysis methods to produce an objective picture of media attitudes.

The authors, Paul Baker, professor of English Language in the Department of Linguistics and English at Lancaster, Costas Gabrielatos, senior lecturer in English a Language at Edge Hill University and Tony McEnery, a Professor of English Language at Lancaster University, analyse representations around frequently cited topics such as Muslims women who wear “purdah”, a veil which their faces and ‘hate preacher’.

The analysis is multi-disciplinary, incorporating research on journalistic practices, readership patterns and attitude surveys to answer questions including: what do journalist mean when they use phrases such as terrorist and devout Muslim and how did 9/11 and 7/7 attacks affect press reporting?

The articles in this research are cases mostly explicit of British Journalism fanning the flames of conflict between the mostly white, nominally Christian majority of people living in the United Kingdom, and the majority Muslim residents, many of whom were born in the United Kingdom and the minority Muslim residents, many of whom were born in United Kingdom, although their parents or grandparents may have come from countries such as Bangladesh, India or Pakistan.

In general, attitudes towards Muslims in the United Kingdom have not been positive. For example according to the British Social Attitudes survey in 2003, 62 per cent of Britons believed that British Muslims were loyal to Muslims abroad than to British non-Muslims (McLaren and Johnson 2007).

Another survey, carried out by British Exploring Foundation in 2010, found that 40 per cent of British adults (in a sample of 2, 152) felt that Muslims had not
had a positive impact on British society. Half of respondents linked Islam with terrorism, while only 13 per cent and 6 per cent believed that Islam was based on peace and justice, respectively. Sixty per cent said they did not know much about the religion, although, perhaps more encouragingly, a third said they would like to know more.

In this book the authors chosen the printed media because we believe that it plays an important role in shaping opinions as well as setting agendas regarding the importance of certain topics.

In the chapters, it describe the context of their study: the British national press. Then locate their study among others that they have examined the representation of Islam and Muslims in various media around the world.

Following that the authors outline two types of linguistics, which uses computational tools to uncover linguistic patterns across very large amounts of texts. After describing how they collected the articles to be analysed in this book, they consider the limitations of the approach and then give overview of the remainder of the book.

The book focuses on the role that the British national press has play in representing Muslims and Islam, particularly in the years following the 9/11 attacks. We have chosen to focus on the printed media because we believe that it plays an important role in shaping opinions as well as setting agendas regarding the importance of certain topics.

As an indication of the ‘news value’ of the Muslims, between 2000 and 2009 the word Muslim and its plural appeared 121,125 times in the national British press (about thirty-three times a day on average), suggesting that this is a topic that the UK press feels is worthy of considerable focus.

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