NO END IN SIGHT: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF U.S. NATIONAL NEWSPAPER COVERAGE OF THE IRAQ WAR.

ABSTRACT

On May 1, 2003, standing in front of a banner declaring “Mission Accomplished” aboard the warship U.S.S. Abraham Lincoln, President Bush announced an end to major combat in Iraq, referring to the war as “one victory in the war on terror.” Over seven years later, on August 31, 2010, President Obama in a televised speech also announced an end to the combat mission in Iraq. On October 21, 2011, President Obama once again reaffirmed that U.S. military personnel would be leaving Iraq, saluting the troops on their “success” and remarking on the Iraqi government’s readiness for governing. And finally, on December 14, 2011, four days before the last U.S. troops left Iraq, President Obama, once again declared the end of the war and said: “we’re leaving behind a sovereign, stable and self-reliant Iraq.”

The informational battlefront is a salient feature of any war, and understanding the role the mass media play in the production and packaging of information in the form of news offers fertile ground for Library and Information Science scholars. This study examines U.S. national newspapers’ representations of and discursive construction of two of these ‘endings,’ 2003 and 2011. Using the method of critical discourse analysis, news coverage is analyzed in order to understand and explain the discursive constructions of meaning in news reports about the end of the war, with a focus on outcomes, consequences, and responsibility for these. The three-part analysis that follows consists of a contextual analysis, a textual analysis, and a historical-diachronic analysis identifying the dominant discourses, and comparing and contrasting these in the two ‘endings.’ By shedding light on these discursive structures, this study seeks to elevate and make clear the ideological basis to hegemonic news discourses.
The findings showed the media offer a narrow range of discursive possibilities that delimit the parameters of discourse on the Iraq War; however, there is also some variation within these parameters which give the impression of information plurality. A pro-American bias permeates the news discourse that has implications for the democratic and educational function of news as an informational product.