

การวิเคราะห์วาทกรรมเชิงวิพากษ์ในหัวข้อข่าวผ่านคติความ ระหว่างจอห์นนี่ เดปป์ และ แอมเบอร์ เฮิร์ด

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บทคัดย่อ

การศึกษานี้เป็นการศึกษาภาษาที่ใช้ในพาดหัวข่าว 39 หัวข้อจากแพลตฟอร์มออนไลน์ของ The New York Times ตั้งแต่เดือนพฤษภาคม 2016 ถึงเดือนธันวาคม 2023 โดยศึกษากรณีข่าวคติความระหว่างจอห์นนี่ เดปป์ และแอมเบอร์ เฮิร์ด โดยการใช้วาทกรรมวิเคราะห์เชิงวิพากษ์ (Critical Discourse Analysis: CDA) และทฤษฎีไวยากรณ์หน้าที่เชิงระบบ (Systemic Functional Linguistics: SFL) งานวิจัยนี้มีเป้าหมายเพื่อเปิดเผยความสัมพันธ์ของภาษาที่มีต่อโครงสร้างทางสังคม และอุดมการณ์ที่มีอยู่ในวาทกรรมสื่อ ในการสืบค้นพาดหัวข่าวเพื่อการศึกษาครั้งนี้ผู้วิจัยได้สืบค้นผ่านคำหลัก ได้แก่ “Johnny Depp” “Amber Heard” “lawsuits” และ “violence” โดยผู้วิจัยจะใช้หัวข้อข่าวประเภท การให้ข้อมูล การบรรยาย และการสร้างความหือหาว คุณลักษณะของ SFL ที่ตรวจสอบ ได้แก่ Lexical Choice, Framing, Transitivity, Agency, และ Modality โดยแต่ละด้านจะได้รับการวิเคราะห์อย่างรอบคอบ เพื่อเปิดเผยว่าคำและวลีเฉพาะเจาะจงกำหนดความหมายและอาจส่งผลกระทบต่อความคิดเห็นของสาธารณะได้อย่างไร งานวิจัยนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาเกี่ยวกับกลยุทธ์การโต้แย้งที่ใช้ในพาดหัวข่าวของนิวยอร์กไทมส์เกี่ยวกับคติความระหว่างจอห์นนี่ เดปป์กับแอมเบอร์ เฮิร์ด และเพื่อตรวจสอบอุดมการณ์ทางสังคมพื้นฐานที่สะท้อนอยู่ในพาดหัวข่าวที่กำลังตรวจสอบอยู่ ผลการศึกษาแสดงให้เห็นว่าพาดหัวข่าวไม่ได้ทำแค่รายงานเหตุการณ์เท่านั้น แต่ยังสะท้อนและสืบสานพลังอำนาจและโครงสร้างทางสังคมอีกด้วย การประยุกต์ใช้ SFL และ CDA ช่วยให้เข้าใจถึงวิธีที่ซับซ้อนที่วาทกรรมในสื่อกำหนดและเสริมสร้างทัศนคติและพฤติกรรมของสังคม

คำสำคัญ: ทฤษฎีไวยากรณ์หน้าที่เชิงระบบ (SFL) วาทกรรมวิเคราะห์เชิงวิพากษ์ (CDA) จอห์นนี่ เดปป์ แอมเบอร์ เฮิร์ด พาดหัวข่าว

A Critical Discourse Analysis of News Headlines: The Case of Lawsuits Between Johnny Depp and Amber Heard

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Abstract

This study analyzes the language used in 39 news headlines from The New York Times online platform, covering the period from May 2016 to December 2023, with a focus on the legal case between Johnny Depp and Amber Heard. Using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), the research aims to uncover the power dynamics, social structures, and ideologies embedded in media discourse. To maintain objectivity, keyword searches including terms like “Johnny Depp,” “Amber Heard,” “lawsuits,” and “violence” were performed, analyzing informative, descriptive, and sensational headlines. The analysis encompasses key SFL elements, including Lexical Choice, Framing, Transitivity, Agency, and Modality, to understand how specific language choices influence public opinion. The research aims to examine the discursive strategies employed in The New York Times headlines regarding the legal case between Johnny Depp and Amber Heard and to investigate the underlying social ideologies reflected in the news headlines under examination. The findings demonstrate that news headlines do not merely report events but also reinforce societal power structures and ideologies. The combined application of SFL and CDA highlights the subtle ways in which media discourse influences public attitudes and behaviors.

Keywords: Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Johnny Depp, Amber Heard, News headlines

Introduction

News headlines played a crucial role in the media landscape, extending beyond mere summaries of news stories to shape public opinion. They significantly influenced public opinion, captured cultural narratives, and provoked emotional responses (Tewksbury et al., 2001). Headlines, particularly in entertainment news, did more than inform; they shaped how events were perceived and discussed within society (Adams et al., 2017). This study examined how celebrity legal conflicts were portrayed in the media, particularly through the highly publicized legal battles between Johnny Depp and Amber Heard.

In the United States, societal hierarchies and gender roles significantly influence media narratives. These structures, often tied to patriarchal values, positioned men in dominant roles, while women were frequently portrayed as emotionally vulnerable or dependent (Sganga, 2024). Harper et al. (2023) emphasized that in celebrity culture, these power dynamics were even more pronounced. Men like Johnny Depp were often depicted as authoritative or resilient, representing traditional masculine traits. In contrast, women, particularly in legal disputes, were frequently viewed through the lenses of victimhood, fragility, or manipulation, reflecting an ambivalence toward female empowerment (Gee, 2021).

This study integrates Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), and Fairclough's three-dimensional model of CDA to analyze how language in news headlines constructs meaning and reflects societal perceptions. SFL, grounded in Halliday's framework, examines key components such as lexical choice, transitivity, agency, and modality to uncover how language shapes the reader's interpretation. For instance, the use of specific words, sentence structures, and depictions of agency can significantly influence public perception of individuals and events, such as the legal disputes involving Johnny Depp and Amber Heard. The study also utilizes the Corpus of Contemporary



American English (COCA) to systematically analyze word frequency and usage patterns, revealing how specific lexical choices in headlines can either reinforce or challenge societal ideologies.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) complements this linguistic analysis by investigating how language in headlines reflects broader social and power dynamics. In particular, CDA focuses on uncovering biases and ideologies related to gender norms and patriarchal structures. Fairclough's three-dimensional model of CDA deepens this exploration by connecting the micro-level linguistic choices to the broader sociocultural context. The model's three dimensions—text analysis, discourse practice (how the text is produced and consumed), and sociocultural practice (the broader social and cultural context)—work together to reveal how language in headlines both reflects and reinforces power relations.

By integrating SFL, CDA, and Fairclough's model, this study sheds light on the discursive strategies employed in media representations, demonstrating how specific linguistic choices in news headlines can influence public opinion and shape cultural narratives. It highlights how headlines not only inform the public but also subtly perpetuate or challenge existing social ideologies, particularly in the context of celebrity legal disputes. Despite the extensive use of SFL and CDA in political and criminal discourse (Duanprakhon, 2012; Zhang, 2014; Ulum, 2015; Chen, 2018; Hassan, 2018), this study addresses a gap in their application to media portrayals of celebrity legal conflicts. This study aims to address that gap by analyzing the language used in headlines to uncover the underlying power dynamics and ideologies. It examines how discursive strategies shape public opinion and reflect broader societal perspectives. The main objectives of this research are to identify the specific discursive techniques employed by media, particularly The New York Times, in framing the Depp vs. Heard lawsuits and to reveal the embedded social ideologies that influence and are perpetuated by these narratives. Through this analysis, the study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding

of how media discourse influences perceptions of gender, power, and authority, particularly within the context of celebrity culture and high-profile legal conflicts.

The research questions guiding this study are: (1) What discursive strategies are employed in The New York Times headlines to frame the Johnny Depp vs. Amber Heard lawsuits? and (2) What underlying social ideologies are manifested in these headlines? The research aims to examine the discursive strategies employed in The New York Times headlines regarding the legal case between Johnny Depp and Amber Heard and to investigate the underlying social ideologies reflected in the news headlines under examination. By addressing these questions, this study contributed to the broader understanding of discourse analysis and the media's role in shaping public perceptions of high-profile legal disputes.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the discursive strategies employed in The New York Times headlines regarding the legal case between Johnny Depp and Amber Heard and
2. To investigate the underlying social ideologies reflected in the news headlines under examination.

Research Scope

This study uses Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) to analyze news headlines related to the Johnny Depp and Amber Heard lawsuit from May 2016 to December 2023, with The New York Times as the primary data source. A systematic keyword search for terms like "Johnny Depp," "Amber Heard," "lawsuits," and "violence" focused on informative, descriptive, and sensational headlines. The research framework combines SFL, which examines linguistic choices such as word selection, transitivity, and modality, with Fairclough's three-dimensional model of CDA. This

model analyzes how headlines are written (text analysis), produced and interpreted by readers (discursive practice) and how they reflect broader social and cultural issues (sociocultural practice). By integrating SFL and CDA, this study will generate linguistic data on word choices and sentence structures, discursive data on how these headlines are created and perceived, and ideological data on the societal norms and power dynamics they reflect, especially related to gender roles and patriarchal structures. The main goal is to explore the linguistic strategies and ideologies embedded in the headlines. For a list of headlines analyzed, see the appendix.

Research Method

This section outlines a systematic approach to analyzing news headlines related to the Johnny Depp versus Amber Heard lawsuits. The process involves several key steps, each designed to uncover the underlying ideologies and discursive strategies used by media outlets.

The first step involved collecting a comprehensive set of news headlines related to the Depp-Heard case. These headlines were imported into an Excel spreadsheet for organization and initial screening. The researcher focused on selecting headlines that presented factual information rather than opinion-based or speculative content. This selection ensured that the analysis was based on objective reporting, providing a clear foundation for further examination of language and ideology.

In analyzing The New York Times headlines related to the Depp vs. Heard lawsuits, the researcher employed Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) components, supported by the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), to identify underlying biases. First, COCA was used to analyze word frequency and contextual choices, highlighting significant lexical selections that shape public perception. Framing was assessed by examining narrative focus, while transitivity and agency analyses identified

active or passive roles assigned to each party, revealing power dynamics. Modality further clarified certainty levels within the headlines. Together, these SFL elements offered a nuanced view of how language influences audience interpretation and reinforces societal ideologies.

Following the initial examination, the analysis results were reviewed by an interrater—a second analyst who assessed the findings for accuracy and consistency. This step was crucial in eliminating personal biases and ensuring that the identification of discursive strategies was both reliable and reproducible. Once validated, the researcher proceeded to analyze each news topic, identifying multiple themes, including gender roles, power dynamics, victimhood, and credibility within the headlines. These themes were then examined through the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) principles to explore how they reflected or reinforced broader societal ideologies in the United States. For example, the portrayal of Depp as resilient and Heard as manipulative was linked to traditional gender stereotypes, illustrating how media language can shape public opinion and societal norms.

After obtaining confirmation from the interrater, the researcher proceeded to analyze the results for each news topic. Each topic was examined for multiple themes that emerged from the headlines. For example, themes might include gender roles, power dynamics, victimhood, and credibility. By identifying and categorizing these themes, the researcher could systematically explore how different aspects of the lawsuit were represented in the media. This multi-theme approach allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of the various narratives present in the headlines.

The identified themes were then analyzed in the context of broader ideologies within US society using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) principles. This step involved examining how the themes reflected or reinforced societal beliefs, values, and power structures. For instance, the portrayal of Depp as resilient and Heard as manipulative could be



linked to traditional gender stereotypes. By applying CDA, the researcher could uncover the deeper ideological messages embedded in the media coverage, revealing how language in headlines contributes to shaping public opinion and societal norms.

The final step was to summarize the findings from the analysis. This involved consolidating the insights gained from examining discursive strategies, themes, and underlying ideologies. The summary provided an overview of how news headlines influenced public perception of the Depp-Heard lawsuit, highlighting the key linguistic and ideological patterns identified. This synthesis offered a clear understanding of the media's role in framing high-profile legal conflicts and the implications for societal attitudes toward gender, power, and victimhood.

By following these six steps, the research effectively decoded the complex interplay between language, ideology, and societal perceptions in news headlines. The systematic approach ensured a thorough and reliable analysis, revealing how media representations of the Johnny Depp versus Amber Heard lawsuit were constructed and how they influenced public sentiment. This methodology highlights the significance of critical media analysis in revealing the subtle biases and ideological messages that influence our understanding of high-profile legal disputes.

Theoretical Concepts and Research Frameworks

This section presents the theoretical background underpinning the analysis of the Johnny Depp and Amber Heard legal dispute, with a focus on how media portrayals, particularly news headlines, shaped public discourse. Rosenblatt (2022) documented the high-profile nature of this case, which involved mutual allegations of abuse and lawsuits in both the United Kingdom and the United States. This case generated widespread discussion about domestic violence, the influence of celebrity culture, and the media's role in shaping public perception.

The analysis in this study was based on Halliday's (1994) Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), which provided a framework for understanding how journalists constructed meaning in news headlines and how these choices influenced readers. SFL allowed for an in-depth examination of lexical selection (word choice), transitivity (the structure of actions and participants), framing (how information was presented), modality (degrees of certainty), and agency (who or what was acting). By analyzing these elements, the study revealed the ideologies and perspectives embedded in media discourse. For example, headlines that portrayed one party as active and the other as passive suggested a particular viewpoint on the case. Similarly, the use of modality affected how readers interpreted the truthfulness of the claims presented in the headlines.

In addition, Fairclough's (1992, 1995, 2003, 2010, 2013, 2016) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework was employed to examine the sociological and cultural dimensions embedded in the headlines. CDA focused on how language reflected and shaped societal norms, values, and power dynamics. Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) provides a framework to examine how language reflects and shapes societal power structures. The model comprises three interconnected dimensions: textual analysis, discursive practice, and social practice. Textual analysis focuses on the linguistic features of a text, such as vocabulary and sentence structure, to reveal subtle biases or emphasis. Discursive practice examines how texts are produced, distributed, and interpreted, considering the roles of media creators and audiences in shaping messages. Social practice situates these analyses within the broader societal context, exploring how language both mirrors and reinforces cultural norms and power dynamics. Together, these dimensions allow researchers to uncover how specific language choices in texts, like news headlines, uphold or challenge societal ideologies.

Previous studies have emphasized the pivotal role that news headlines play in influencing public discourse, shaping societal attitudes,

and framing particular narratives. Duanprakhon's (2012) analysis of youth crime in Thailand highlighted how news headlines can subtly or explicitly shape societal attitudes towards specific demographic groups. Zhang (2014) employed a critical discourse analysis (CDA) approach, which was a powerful tool for unveiling the intricacies of language and its ability to subtly or explicitly convey ideological positions or reflect social hierarchies. Ulum (2015) explored the intricacies of how discourse and ideology were intertwined in news headlines, particularly in the context of coverage of the Syrian Civil War. Chen's (2018) research showcased the power of a multifaceted linguistic approach, particularly rooted in Halliday's SFL, to delve into the intricate layers of meaning and ideology within news headlines. Hassan (2018) investigated the symbiotic relationship between language, media, and ideology within the sphere of Pakistani news bulletins. Research from Gee (2021) laid the groundwork by using SFL to reveal how linguistic choices in the Depp and Heard case influenced societal norms and shaped public perception. Harper et al. (2023) expanded on this by applying CDA and SFL to examine how media representations of intimate partner violence (IPV) constructed contrasting narratives around Depp and Heard, reflecting broader gender stereotypes. Sganga (2024), in the same case Depp and Heard, predicted how defamation in celebrity culture was framed through discursive strategies, demonstrating that headlines not only reported facts but actively shaped social interpretations. This aligns with the present study's focus on how media representations in high-profile cases can reinforce or challenge societal views.

By combining CDA and SFL, this study provided a comprehensive framework for analyzing news headlines. CDA offered insights into the broader societal context, while SFL broke down specific linguistic choices. Together, these methods helped uncover the underlying ideologies and power structures that news headlines perpetuated, offering a deeper understanding of how language influenced public opinion.

Discussion, Conclusion, and Suggestions

1. Discussion of Findings

Through the application of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), this study revealed how language, particularly in news headlines, shaped public perceptions of the legal conflict between Johnny Depp and Amber Heard. The analysis focused on objective one of key linguistic features such as lexical choices, framing, transitivity, agency, and modality, each of which contributed to the construction of public narratives around the case. The table below provides an example of the analyzed linguistic features in the selected headlines. Each headline was examined for how lexical choices and grammatical structures reinforced certain ideological positions and shaped the framing of both Depp and Heard in public discourse. Due to space limitations, the researchers decided to present only some examples that indicated the functioning of SFL in news headlines, as shown in the table below.

Table 1

An Exemplification of the Discursive Strategies Employed in News Headlines

News headline	Lexical Choice		Framing	Transitivity	Agency	Modality	Theme
	frequency	word					
What Depp v. Heard Means for #MeToo	4	MeToo	Means		Depp v. Heard		- #MeToo Movement - Masculinity - Femininity
Why We Love to Watch a Woman Brought Low	12	woman brought low	Love to Watch	watching			- Public Perception - Gender Role - Media Influence - Femininity
The Depp Conundrum: Who Should Keep Tabs on the Money?	224	Conundrum	Conundrum Money	Keep	Depp	Should	- Financial Consequences - Legal events - Media Influence

News headline	Lexical Choice		Framing	Transitivity	Agency	Modality	Theme
	frequency	word					
TikTok's Amber Heard Hate Machine	2	Hate Machine	Hate		Amber Heard		- Gender Role - Cyberbullying -Public Perception - Media Influence
Johnny Depp, at Libel Trial, Denies Ever Striking 'Any Woman'	114	Any Woman	Denies	Denies	Johnny Depp		- Gender roles - Public Image - Blaming - Legal events -Masculinity
Amber Heard Testifies About a 'Pattern' of Violence by Johnny Depp	2974	Pattern	Testifies Violence	Testifies	Amber Heard		- Gender Role - Domestic Violence - Femininity
Amber Heard Describes Impact of Online Attacks: 'I'm a Human Being'			Online Attacks	Describes	Amber Heard		- Cyberbullying - Media Influence - Gender Role - Femininity

To analyze the discursive strategies in the given news headlines, a step-by-step examination was conducted using the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) framework, focusing on lexical choice, framing, transitivity, agency, modality, and theme. The process began by identifying key lexical choices, such as “MeToo,” “conundrum,” and “hate machine,” which each carry significant cultural or emotional weight, framing the headline’s tone and underlying message. Frequency counts from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) helped underscore the prominence or rarity of these terms, shedding light on their impact within the cultural context. Framing was then examined to understand how the headlines orient the reader’s perspective, such as framing Amber Heard as a recipient of “online attacks” or a “hate machine.” Transitivity analysis involved exploring action verbs like “testifies,” which position subjects as either active or passive participants in the narrative, influencing the perceived agency of figures like Depp or Heard.

Agency analysis followed, identifying who performs the action or receives it, revealing inherent power dynamics, such as Amber Heard often appearing in a passive role. In the analysis of modality within the headlines, “should” stands out as a key example, particularly in the headline “Who Should Keep Tabs on the Money?” This single use of “should” conveys a sense of obligation or recommendation, subtly guiding readers to consider issues of financial control and responsibility as topics worthy of public debate. Modality in these headlines can appear in one or two instances, influencing how the content is framed and suggesting various degrees of certainty, obligation, or authority, depending on the context. Each instance of modality plays a role in shaping the audience’s perception, either reinforcing or questioning the subject’s actions and responsibilities within the narrative. Finally, the thematic analysis identified recurring themes, such as gender roles, public perception, and media influence, which underscore the societal ideologies reflected in these headlines. Through these steps, the analysis reveals how discursive strategies work together to construct narratives that reinforce or challenge existing power structures, particularly within the context of gender and media representation. The findings of this study, analyzed through the lens of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), align with previous research on media discourse and its ideological framing. Duanprakhon (2012) demonstrated how language in headlines could subtly reinforce stereotypes and societal power structures, which was consistent with how this study found headlines shaping gendered perceptions of Johnny Depp and Amber Heard. Similarly, Ulum’s (2015) research on how media constructed ideologies during the Syrian Civil War illustrated how linguistic framing could sway public interpretation, which paralleled the current study’s findings of Depp being framed as authoritative and Heard as vulnerable. This was further supported by Chen’s (2018) SFL analysis, which emphasized the role of linguistic patterns in constructing social identities, reinforcing the patterns found in this study’s depiction of gendered roles. Lastly, Gee’s (2021) research on the application of SFL in analyzing linguistic

choices complemented this study's approach, as it underscored how such choices shaped social perceptions and reinforced or challenged dominant narratives.

The three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), as proposed by Fairclough, offers a framework for examining how media headlines reflect and reinforce societal ideologies, particularly with themes of victimhood, femininity, masculinity, patriarchy, and hierarchy. Through textual analysis, discursive practice, and social practice, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) reveals how language choices in these headlines shape public perceptions and sustain power dynamics rooted in traditional gender roles.

In the textual analysis dimension, CDA examines specific linguistic features, such as vocabulary, syntax, and transitivity, that shape the portrayal of gendered themes. Lexical choices like “pattern of violence” or “hate machine” position Amber Heard within a narrative of victimhood, emphasizing her as a passive recipient of aggression and societal hostility. This aligns with the concept of femininity, where women are stereotypically cast as vulnerable and subject to judgment. Similarly, phrases like “Johnny Depp Denies Ever Striking Any Woman” emphasize masculinity, as Depp is presented as an active, assertive figure defending his honor. This portrayal reflects traditional ideals of male strength and resilience, subtly reinforcing gendered expectations. Discursive practice, the second dimension, considers how these headlines are produced, distributed, and consumed. In headlines about celebrity legal battles, societal fascination with women's struggles and a public judgment of their behavior are often amplified by media outlets. The recurring portrayal of Heard as “brought low” or “testifying” suggests a narrative where women are scrutinized and held accountable to societal standards of femininity, reinforcing hierarchical relationships in which women are seen as subordinate or needing to justify themselves. Conversely, when male figures like Depp are portrayed as assertive agents, the media reinforces societal norms that celebrate male authority and control. This dimension reveals how media practices shape discourse in a way that aligns with

patriarchal values, creating and perpetuating narratives that resonate with audience biases about gender roles.

Lastly, the social practice dimension situates these headlines within broader societal power structures, examining how language both reflects and reinforces patriarchal ideologies. Through CDA, phrases such as “Who Should Keep Tabs on the Money?” invoke issues of control and authority, subtly implying that financial oversight is a male domain, thus perpetuating the power dynamics inherent in patriarchy. By placing women like Heard in passive roles, often depicted as reactive to societal judgment, these headlines maintain a hierarchical structure that aligns with patriarchal values, positioning men as dominant figures while relegating women to roles of vulnerability or subjugation. This dimension shows how media discourse reflects and reinforces societal expectations, embedding themes of masculinity, femininity, and hierarchy into public consciousness.

Together, these three dimensions of CDA reveal the complex ways in which media headlines construct narratives around gender, power, and societal roles. By analyzing the language choices in these headlines, CDA demonstrates how media not only mirrors but also actively shapes ideologies, reinforcing traditional views of masculinity and femininity and sustaining the societal hierarchies embedded within patriarchy.

The consistent framing of Heard as emotionally fragile or manipulative aligned with traditional stereotypes of women as less capable of authority or control, reinforcing patriarchal values. Similarly, Depp’s portrayal as resilient and authoritative echoed masculine ideals of dominance and strength. These findings align with those of Harper et al. (2023) and Sganga (2024), who argue that media discourse often perpetuates existing societal hierarchies.

Moreover, Sganga (2024) argued that the media’s portrayal of intimate partner violence (IPV)—or, in his terms, domestic violence in this context—reflected broader societal attitudes toward gender and power. As the table illustrated, the framing of Depp as defensively postured and Heard through a lens of manipulation influenced



public sympathies and reinforced traditional gender power structures. Similarly, Harper et al. (2023) demonstrated that the media could marginalize certain experiences, as seen in this case, where the framing of Heard’s claims created skepticism about her role as a victim of IPV. This ideological framing aligned with previous studies (e.g., Gee, 2021; Harper et al., 2023; Sganga, 2024) that highlighted the media’s role in shaping societal views on IPV and gender roles.

In conclusion, the findings from the SFL and CDA analysis demonstrated that news headlines did more than report events; they actively shaped public opinion by reinforcing existing power dynamics and societal ideologies. The use of specific linguistic features in the headlines, as presented in the table, played a critical role in how Johnny Depp and Amber Heard were perceived, further highlighting the media’s influence in shaping narratives around high-profile legal disputes.

2. Limitations of the study

This study focused only on news headlines from The New York Times, a prominent news outlet with a specific editorial stance. The study specifically chose The New York Times for its reputation as a prominent, widely read news outlet known for shaping public discourse and influencing cultural narratives. The New York Times maintains a distinct editorial stance and upholds high journalistic standards, making it a trusted source for examining how language choices in headlines reflect and reinforce societal ideologies. This limitation restricted the generalizability of the findings, as headlines from other media outlets, both national and international, might have portrayed the Depp vs. Heard case differently. Furthermore, the qualitative nature of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), while effective in revealing underlying ideologies, carried a degree of subjectivity despite efforts to ensure inter-rater reliability. The analysis also relied on a relatively small dataset of 39 headlines, which might not have captured the full spectrum of media representation throughout the legal dispute.

3. Recommendations for future research

Future research should consider expanding the dataset to include a wider range of news sources, including outlets with differing political affiliations and cultural backgrounds. A comparative study across multiple media platforms could provide deeper insights into how varying editorial policies and cultural contexts impact the portrayal of similar events. Additionally, incorporating audience reception studies would add a valuable layer to understanding how the public interprets and responds to these media representations. Future studies may also explore the long-term effects of media framing on public perceptions of gender roles and power dynamics in legal conflicts. By broadening the scope and employing a mixed-method approach, subsequent research can provide a more comprehensive understanding of media influence.

4. Implications and Conclusion

This study shed light on the strategic construction of news headlines and their role in shaping societal perceptions. By employing Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the research revealed the intricate ways in which language in the media influences public discourse, particularly in the context of high-profile legal disputes. The findings highlighted the power dynamics embedded in news headlines, which reflected and reinforced societal ideologies related to gender roles and authority.

One key implication of this study was the need for greater critical awareness among news consumers. As headlines often shaped initial impressions, they held significant influence over how events and individuals were perceived. Readers needed to be more critical of the language used in news reporting, recognizing how certain lexical choices, framing techniques, and modalities could subtly sway opinions.

From an academic perspective, this research contributed to the fields of discourse analysis and media studies by demonstrating how linguistic frameworks, such as SFL and CDA, can be applied to unpack the power structures in media discourse. It underscored the



importance of examining not only what was being reported but how it was being reported, as language choices could have profound effects on societal attitudes.

In conclusion, the study emphasized that media discourse, particularly through news headlines, was not a neutral conveyor of information. Instead, it was a powerful tool that shaped public opinion and reinforced societal structures. As media literacy became increasingly important in the digital age, both researchers and the general public needed to pay closer attention to the linguistic strategies employed in news reporting to better understand how media shaped reality.

Declaration of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process During the preparation of this work, the researchers used Grammarly and Quillbot to generate the grammar and paraphrase. Another tool is ChatGPT, which can generate words with an academic tone to improve the language fluency and readability of the manuscript. After using this tool, the researchers reviewed and edited the content as needed and took full responsibility for the content of the publication.

Appendix

The news headlines of Johnny Depp and Amber Heard Lawsuit from The New York Times online platform.

1. What Depp v. Heard Means for #MeToo
2. After #MeToo Reckoning, a Fear Hollywood Is Regressing
3. Why We Love to Watch a Woman Brought Low
4. Johnny and Amber: Trouble in Paradise
5. The Depp Conundrum: Who Should Keep Tabs on the Money?
6. In Court, Johnny Depp and Amber Heard Dress to Suggest
7. Through Weeks of Depp v. Heard, Dior Stood By
8. Amber Heard and the Death of #MeToo
9. The Amber Heard Verdict Was a Tragedy. Others Will Follow.
10. TikTok's Amber Heard Hate Machine

11. ‘S.N.L.’ Takes on the Trial of Johnny Depp and Amber Heard
12. #MeToo Cases’ New Legal Battleground: Defamation Lawsuits
13. Johnny Depp and Amber Heard to Face Off in Defamation Trial
14. Johnny Depp, at Libel Trial, Denies Ever Striking ‘Any Woman’
15. Johnny Depp v. Amber Heard: What We Know
16. Jury Reaches Verdict in Johnny Depp-Amber Heard Trial: What to Know
17. Johnny Depp Lost \$22.5 Million ‘Pirates’ Role After Op-Ed, Manager Says
18. Amber Heard Testifies About a ‘Pattern’ of Violence by Johnny Depp
19. Amber Heard Accuses ‘Belligerent’ Johnny Depp of Sexual Assault
20. Amber Heard Recounts Unraveling of Marriage to Johnny Depp
21. Amber Heard Describes Impact of Online Attacks: ‘I’m a Human Being’
22. A judge in Britain found in 2020 that Mr. Depp had assaulted Ms. Heard and put her ‘in fear of her life.’
23. The Johnny Depp vs. Amber Heard Libel Case Is in the Jury’s Hands
24. Early drafts of the op-ed Ms. Heard was sued for were prepared by the American Civil Liberties Union.
25. The two sides clashed over what caused the damage to Mr. Depp’s career.
26. Johnny Depp’s Win in Court Could Embolden Others, Lawyers Say
27. Amber Heard Seeks New Defamation Trial After Losing to Johnny Depp

28. Amber Heard Says She Has Decided to ‘Settle’ Johnny Depp Defamation Case

29. Here’s what has happened in some other prominent #MeToo court cases.

30. Amber Heard says she is ‘heartbroken’ by the verdict.

31. Johnny Depp Jury Finds That Amber Heard Defamed Him in Op-Ed

32. Johnny Depp says Virginia jury ‘gave me my life back.’

33. Key Moments from the Johnny Depp-Amber Heard Verdict

34. The jury found that both Johnny Depp and Amber Heard were defamed, but awarded more money to him.

35. Johnny Depp, Accused of Spousal Abuse, Says Ex-Wife Was the Aggressor

36. Johnny Depp and Amber Heard’s Courtroom Face-Off: An Explainer

37. Johnny Depp Loses Court Case Against Newspaper That Called Him a ‘Wife Beater’

38. The Actual Malice of the Johnny Depp Trial

39. A Wider Lens on the MeToo Backlash: Who Pays for Societal Change?



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