

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The current tension between Israel and Hamas has recently reaped controversy. It is the worst conflict that has ever happened in the history of the conflict between the two regions, Israel and Palestine. Hamas, on October 7, 2023, launched a surprise attack on Israel. It killed about 1,200 Israelis and took more than 240 Israeli hostages (BBC News, 2025; Center for Preventative Action, 2025; The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, 2025). In response to that, Israel sent airstrikes (e.g., drones, helicopters) and ground invasions to the Gaza Strip (BBC News, 2025; Blanchard et al., 2023; Center for Preventative Action, 2025; The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, 2025). This war certainly had fatal results for one or both parties. The former leaders of Hamas, Haniyeh and Sinwar, were killed during this war. Most of the civilians of Palestine had been killed and displaced from their residences (BBC News, 2025; Blanchard et al., 2023; Center for Preventative Action, 2025; GT staff reporters, 2023; The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, 2025; United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2024). On the contrary, the Israeli military claimed that over 400 Israeli soldiers died in battle (BBC News, 2025). According to BBC News (2025), both Israel and Hamas are in charge of deliberate or even unplanned murders against civilians of both countries, the UN Human Rights Council says. As the war between the two countries continues, the way it is covered in the media raises crucial questions about framing or media representation, and bias.

Media representation is how the media depicts people, groups, communities, events, or ideas. It can also involve aspects like gender, age, and race. It can mainly be found in many media types, such as newspapers, magazines, books, television, film, music, and even video games. In news media, representation can influence how individuals construct their minds and perceptions about any crucial topic or event that is happening in the real world. However, if it is seen from its negative side, it can be misused by influential individuals, which can have significant consequences in public social life. For example, in the Datum ONA1/048, clause “*(a country) to attack the people it is occupying*” pointed out that Israel, as an implied actor of ‘*a country*’, has done an action ‘*to attack*’ to its goal ‘*the people it is occupying*’. Meanwhile, in the Datum ONA2/084, clause ‘*and (a Hamas squad) kidnapped the soldier Gilad Shalit*’ showed that a group of Hamas has done an action ‘*kidnapped*’ to its goal ‘*the soldier Gilad Shalit*’. News media, furthermore, can manipulate what happens in the real world by altering words, phrases, clauses, or sentences. If a writer or news agency alters the narrative about what is happening in the real world, then it can be said that they are taking a side or position that is not grounded in reality; in other words, an act of bias.

Speaking of bias, it is discrimination against one thing, person, or group compared with another, basically in a way considered unfair. At one point, this has attracted the attention of researchers who seek the occurrences of bias in the media. Zurriyati et al. (2023) concluded that the media oligarchy of the candidate has changed public viewpoints in the 2019 Indonesian presidential election, depicting Jokowi as their “puppet.” Zurriyati et al. added that Indonesian media has more positive coverage about Jokowi, while Prabowo has more scornful coverage as the opposite leader. As a result, Indonesian media did not take the side of the unnecessary candidate in their coverage,

and many media outlets and oligarchs joined Jokowi and tried to control the media. Based on what happened, it can be said that the media covering the news can also be biased toward what occurs worldwide. They can side with the right or wrong ones in an event. By looking at the example above, this is the controversy that is happening in the Middle East, the Western media's coverage of the current tension between Israel and Hamas.

Controversies against well-known mass media are always deep-rooted in each other. Western media, for instance, is often at the midpoint of controversy. It is so controversial because its news report is not neutral, but biased and too selective, mostly on social and cultural issues, international conflicts, politics, etc. A current relevant example is the coverage of two of the Western media, *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs* and *The New York Times*. *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs* is a magazine analyzing U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East by focusing on the conflict between Israel and Palestine. At the same time, *The New York Times* is an American newspaper that focuses on national and international news coverage, including Middle East affairs.

According to the background presented above, this research emphasized that media, specifically news articles, can be analyzed using the transitivity system within systemic functional linguistics. It focused on how the transitivity system reveals the goal or purpose of the writings of the articles of both media outlets, *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs* and *The New York Times*. This research can: (1) identify linguistic patterns that favor one side over another; (2) assess whether the reporting is considered “neutral” or not; and (3) pointed out the differences in how violences and geopolitical actors are labeled in both selected online news articles. Therefore, this research used the theory of the transitivity system within systemic functional linguistics proposed by

Halliday (1994; 2004, 2014) to see how the two Western media outlets cover the current tension between Israel and Hamas (October 7, 2023–present).

1.2 Research Questions

This research was planned to distinguish the predominant transitivity systems used in both selected online news articles from *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs* and *The New York Times*. Therefore, this research answered the following questions:

1. What are the predominant transitivity systems used in the selected online news articles of *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs* and *The New York Times*?
2. What are the interpretations of the predominant transitivity systems used in the selected online news articles of *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs* and *The New York Times*?

1.3 The Objective of the Research

The objectives of this research are:

1. To identify the predominant transitivity systems used in the selected online news articles of *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs* and *The New York Times*.
2. To determine the interpretations of the predominant transitivity systems used in the selected online news articles of *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs* and *The New York Times*.

1.4 Focus of the Research

After establishing the research questions above, the main goals of this research were to determine the predominant transitivity systems used and their interpretations in the selected online news articles from *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs* and *The New York Times*, regarding the current tension between Israel and Hamas. In addition, this

research utilized the theory of the transitivity system proposed by Halliday (1994; 2004, 2014) within Systemic Functional Linguistics.

1.5 Method of the Research

This research adopted qualitative methods. They mostly depend on the results of descriptive data, such as images, texts, non-digit symbols, individuals' spoken or written words, and apparent data (Creswell, 2014; George, 2008; Taylor et al., 2016). Additionally, this research also employed library research. It draws on the identification and location of data that gives information and opinion based on facts or experts (George, 2008).

Wilkinson & Birmingham (2003) stated that content analysis is a research tool to determine the correct conclusions regarding the speaker or writer's attitude from the content of a message; the techniques used included examining prior writings and a frequency count of nouns or commonly used words to help determine the possibility of authorship. Therefore, this research applied content analysis to analyze the selected online news articles from *Washington Report on Middle East* and *The New York Times* regarding the current tension between Israel and Hamas.

1.5.1 Data Collection

This research utilized the selected online news articles from *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs* and *The New York Times* regarding the ongoing tension between Israel and Hamas. *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs* (WRMEA) is a magazine based in Washington, D.C., United States. It focuses on topics that may not be covered in depth by typical U.S. media, specifically U.S.-Israel policies and Arab American issues, including U.S. foreign policy, the Arab world, human rights, regional conflicts, and Palestinian-Israeli relations. *The Washington Report on Middle East Affairs* was founded

by the American Educational Trust (AET), an independent, non-profit organization. This magazine is published bi-monthly, with six issues released each year, and is funded through subscriptions, donations, and contributions from its readers. *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs* is available in print and online via the official website: www.wrmea.org.

On the contrary, *The New York Times* (NYT) is one of the world's fabulous American newspapers based in Manhattan, New York City, United States of America. It is best known for its wide range of coverage of topics, such as news, politics, business, technology, art, science, health, sports, including opinion articles and investigative journalism. *The New York Times* is owned by The New York Times Company. This newspaper is published daily in print and online. *The New York Times* can be seen through the print edition, mobile app, and the official website: www.nyt.com.

Subsequently, the online news articles that have been selected were focused on the specific topic of current tension between Israel and Hamas. For *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*, the article was collected within the topic "Israel-Palestine". Besides, for *The New York Times*, the article was taken within the topic "Middle East Crisis". These articles can be seen on the table below.

Table 1. Source of Data

No.	Media Outlet	Title	Writer	Date of Publication	Source
1	<i>Washington Report on Middle East Affairs</i>	"War Crimes and Israel's Purported Right to Self-Defense"	Dale Sprusansky	November 15, 2023	WRMEA article
2	<i>The New York Times</i>	"Israel's defense failures may change strategy toward Hamas and Gaza"	Ronen Bergman	October 7, 2023	NYT article

1.5.2 Data Analysis

Afterwards, the two selected online news articles from *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs* and *The New York Times* were analyzed using Halliday's transitivity analysis. The analysis of the narrative content of the selected online news articles was divided into sentence or clause levels. The data, then, answered the first and second research questions regarding the usage of the transitivity system and the coverage of specific topics related to the current Israel-Hamas tension. The percentage of each type of process, participant functions, and circumstantial elements between the two selected online news articles was calculated. The ratio formula is as follows:

$$X = \frac{Y}{Z} \times 100\%$$

Note:

X = percentage of the process occurred

Y = number of the process occurred

Z = total process occurred

The sentences or clauses were divided, and the percentages were calculated for each type of process, participant function, and circumstantial element. These sentences or clauses, then, were analyzed to determine their dominant process, participant, and circumstance that occurred in both selected online news articles. Through systemic functional linguistics proposed by Halliday, this research analyzed how both media outlets, *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs* and *The New York Times*, delivered their goal, purpose, or intention through their writings regarding the current Israel-Hamas tension.

1.6 Definition of Key Terms

(Mass) Media:

Ways of mass communication where any expression delivered to the public, such as

information, entertainment, opinion, propaganda, advocacy, advertising, and so on (Duignan, 2025).

News Article:

It provides information and education to the public readers about phenomena that are currently happening. It is written utilizing a formal style of language (University of Hull, 2024).

News Agency/Media outlet:

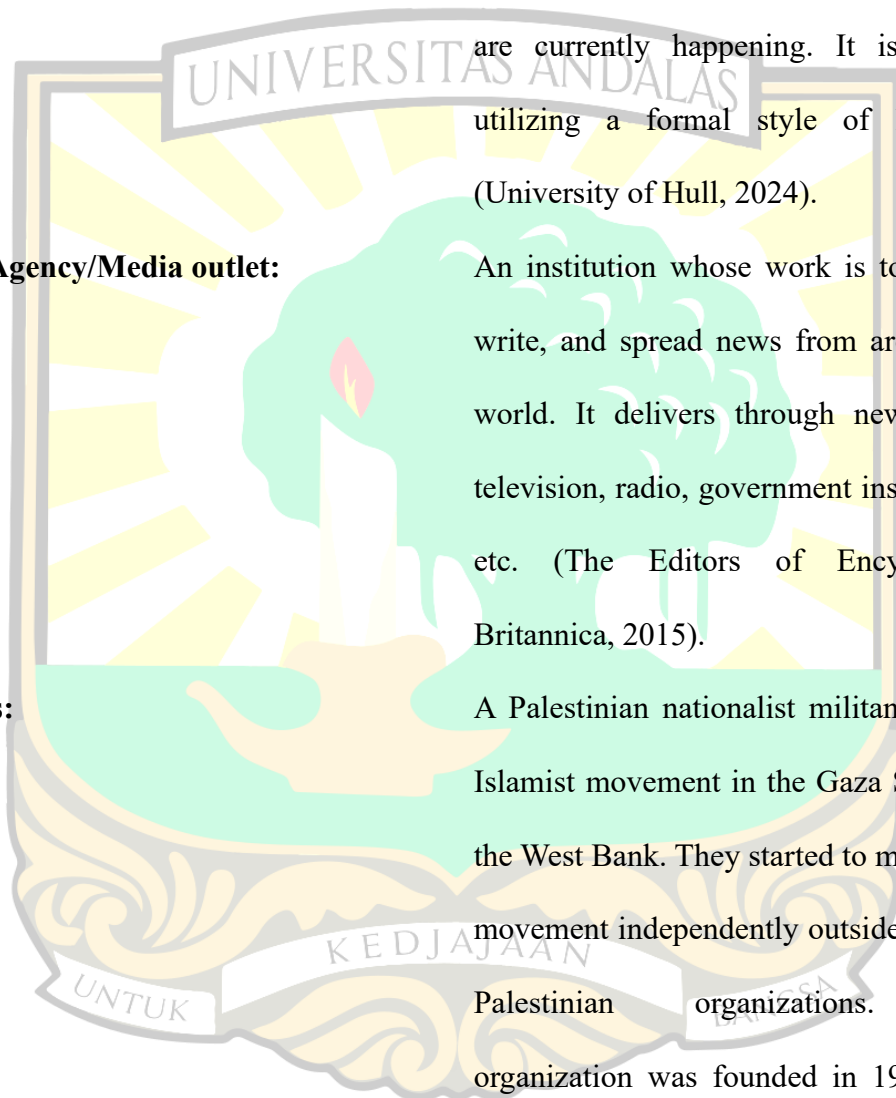
An institution whose work is to collect, write, and spread news from around the world. It delivers through newspapers, television, radio, government institutions, etc. (The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, 2015).

Hamas:

A Palestinian nationalist militant and an Islamist movement in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. They started to make their movement independently outside of other Palestinian organizations. This organization was founded in 1987 (The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, 2024).

Current Israel-Hamas tension:

It started on October 7, 2023, when the Israelis celebrated a Jewish holiday



(Blanchard et al., 2023; The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, 2025). Hamas launched a surprise attack, resulting in approximately 1,200 deaths and 240 people captured by Hamas (BBC News, 2025; Center for Preventative Action, 2025; The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, 2025).

Systemic Functional Linguistics:

When it happened as a 'functional grammar' means that grammar is observed 'from above' as a resource for constructing meaning, but still, the focal point of analysis is on the grammar itself (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004).

Transitivity Analysis:

It seeks to explain the world of experience in a series of process types: material process, behavioral process, mental process, verbal process, relational process, and existential process (Halliday, 1994; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, 2014).