



LEXICAL FRAMING AND IDEOLOGICAL BIAS: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF DEUTSCHE WELLE'S COVERAGE OF TÜRKİYE'S STANCE IN SWEDEN'S NATO MEMBERSHIP

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Abstract

This article analyses how Türkiye's opposition to Sweden's NATO membership is framed in the German media outlet -Deutsche Welle- employing content analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) with a focus on lexicalization—a micro-level strategy conceptualized by van Dijk. Through qualitative analysis of ten English-language news articles published between 2022 and 2023, the study identifies a consistent pattern of negatively connoted language depicting Türkiye and President Erdoğan as authoritarian, obstructionist, and opportunistic. Lexical choices such as '*threaten*', '*stall*', '*u-turn*', and "*so-called terrorist*" contribute to a discourse that delegitimizes Türkiye's security concerns and diplomatic agency. Although occasional neutral or mildly positive phrases appear, they do not substantially alter the dominant critical tone. These findings reflect a broader trend in Western media narratives that problematize non-Western dissent and reinforce dominant geopolitical perspectives. The study underscores the role of language in shaping political narratives and affirms the utility of CDA in revealing ideological bias in international news coverage.

Keywords: Lexicalization, Deutsche Welle, Western media, Türkiye, NATO

SÖZCÜKSEL ÇERÇEVELEME VE İDEOLOJİK ÖNYARGI: DEUTSCHE WELLE'İN TÜRKİYE'NİN İSVEÇ'İN NATO ÜYELİĞİNDEKİ DURUŞUNA İLİŞKİN HABERLERİNİN ELEŞTİREL BİR SÖYLEM ANALİZİ

Öz

Bu makale, Türkiye'nin İsviç'in NATO üyeliğine karşı çıkışının Alman medya kuruluşu Deutsche Welle'de nasıl çerçevelendiğini, içerik analizi ve van Dijk tarafından kavramsallaştırılan mikro düzey bir strateji olan sözcükselleştirmeye odaklanan Eleştirel Söylem Analizi (CDA) kullanarak analiz etmektedir. 2022 ile 2023 yılları arasında yayınlanan on İngilizce haber makalesinin niteliksel içerik analizi yoluyla, bu çalışma Türkiye ve Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan'ı otoriter, engelleyici ve fırsatçı olarak tasvir eden olumsuz çağrımlı bir dilin tutarlı bir örüntüsünü tespit etmektedir. '*Tehdit etmek*', '*oyalamak*', '*u-döntüsü yapmak*' ve '*sözde terrorist*' gibi sözcük seçenekleri, Türkiye'nin güvenlik endişelerinin ve diplomatik faaliyetlerinin meşruiyetini azaltan bir söyleme katkıda bulunmaktadır. Haberlerde tarafsız veya hafif olumlu ifadelere zaman zaman yer verilse de eleştirel tonun daha baskın ve yaygın olduğu görülmektedir. Bu bulgular, Batı medyasının anlatılarında, Batı dışı muhalefeti sorun haline getiren ve baskın geopolitik perspektifleri pekiştiren daha geniş bir eğilimi yansımaktadır. Çalışma, siyasi anlatıları şekillendirmede dilin rolünü vurgulamakta ve uluslararası habercilikte ideolojik önyargıları ortaya çıkarmada ESA'nın önemini ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sözcükselleştirme, Deutsche Welle, Batı medyası, Türkiye, NATO

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Introduction

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was established in the aftermath of World War II as the principal military alliance of the Euro-Atlantic region. One of its primary objectives was to provide collective defense against any potential aggression by the Soviet Union, making it a defining institution of the emerging bipolar world order. As a product of Cold War dynamics, NATO's formation reflected the strategic alignment of Western powers in response to perceived threats from the Eastern Bloc (Haglund, 2025). Since its inception, NATO's expansion has remained a central issue, both symbolically and strategically, as numerous countries have expressed interest in joining the alliance to secure political and military guarantees. However, NATO enlargement has occasionally triggered security concerns for the Soviet Union and, later, the Russian Federation, which has perceived the alliance's eastward expansion as a direct challenge to its sphere of influence and national security interests (NATO, 2024a).

Since its founding in 1949 with 12-member states, NATO has undergone ten rounds of enlargement, expanding to a total of 32 members (NATO, 2024b). The most recent accessions—Finland and Sweden—are particularly significant, as both countries' decisions to join the alliance were prompted by Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 (Reuters, 2024). While Finland's accession progressed with minimal resistance, Sweden's membership became a contentious issue, largely due to Türkiye's pivotal role in the ratification process. As a NATO member with veto power over new entrants, Türkiye initially objected to Sweden's application, citing concerns related to terrorism and national security. These objections became central to diplomatic negotiations and attracted widespread media attention across Europe. Eventually, Türkiye lifted its veto and approved Sweden's accession (LeMonde, 2023).

This article examines how this diplomatic standoff was portrayed by the German international media outlet *Deutsche Welle*, focusing on the use of lexicalization as a micro-level discursive strategy within the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Drawing on a qualitative analysis of ten news articles published between 2022 and 2023, the study investigates how language choices reflect ideological positioning and contribute to the construction of Türkiye's image within Western media narratives surrounding NATO enlargement.

1. Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

1.1. Media, Ideology and Discourse

Media institutions play a crucial role in shaping public opinion, exerting influence through both textual and visual communication. In the current post-truth era—characterized by declining trust in traditional expertise and growing susceptibility to misinformation—it is essential to critically examine how media discourses contribute to ideological framing. Scholars have argued that media ownership and funding structures significantly affect editorial independence and objectivity. For instance, Dragomir (2018) asserts that in countries with weak commercial media markets, state funding of public broadcasters often leads to greater governmental influence over news content. This control may manifest through direct censorship or the subtle promotion of state-aligned narratives.

News organizations are rarely ideologically neutral. As Rubing and Sandaran (2023) demonstrate in their analysis of The Times, news reporting often reflects the institutional and editorial stances of the outlet. Journalists may unconsciously embed their own assumptions and perspectives in coverage, shaping how audiences interpret events. These ideologically informed portrayals are not merely the product of individual bias but are situated within broader organizational and political contexts. As such, understanding how language in media discourse encodes ideological positions is essential for uncovering the mechanisms through which public opinion is constructed.

Understanding the concept of discourse is essential to analyze how media language reflects and reinforces political ideologies. Discourse is a multifaceted term with definitions that vary across disciplines. In linguistics, it typically refers to patterns of language use—spoken or written—within particular social or cultural contexts. It encompasses how individuals communicate meaning through structured forms of language in specific communities. From a sociological or philosophical perspective, discourse extends beyond language to include the systems of meaning and shared assumptions that shape collective understanding. As Pitsoe and Letseka (2013) note, the term derives from the Latin *discursus*, meaning “running to and from” broadly denoting any form of structured communication. In its simplest sense, discourse can be understood as conversation or the process of conveying information (Pitsoe & Letseka, 2013). van Dijk (1988) conceptualizes discourse as a complex communicative act deeply embedded within social structures, emphasizing the interaction between language users and their specific social, cultural, and cognitive contexts. In the context of media studies, discourse is not merely about language use but about how language constructs social reality. Media outlets often develop their own discursive styles, shaped by political stances, institutional values, and target audiences (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 1998). These discourses play a pivotal role in framing events, legitimizing certain viewpoints, and marginalizing others—making discourse analysis a valuable tool for uncovering ideological bias (Richardson, 2007; Wodak & Meyer, 2009).

Political ideology in media and discourse are fundamentally interconnected. van Dijk (2006) argues that political discourse is not merely a reflection of political ideology but also a means of actively constructing and reshaping it. Discourse becomes a tool through which those in power influence public opinion, mobilize support, legitimize their actions, and reinforce dominant ideological frameworks. In this view, language is not neutral but strategically deployed to maintain authority and shape societal values. Bayram (2010) supports this perspective, emphasizing that political language functions as a deliberate strategy to gain approval, justify controversial actions, and address political misconduct. These insights underscore the importance of analyzing political discourse critically, as it often reveals the underlying power structures and ideological orientations embedded in language—a core concern of CDA.

1.2. Critical Discourse Analysis

The development of the social sciences as disciplines distinct from the natural sciences involved a gradual shift toward methodological frameworks that better capture the complexities of human behavior, communication, and power relations. Since the mid-20th century, the dominance of positivism in the social sciences has declined, influenced by post-structuralist and postmodern critiques. These critiques emphasize the constructed nature of knowledge and the role of discourse in shaping social realities. In response, scholars increasingly turned to interpretive and critical methodologies, including Discourse Analysis and, more specifically, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). As Altintop and Bak (2023) note, CDA has become a prominent tool in media and communication studies, offering a means of investigating how language is used to construct meaning, exercise power, and legitimize dominant ideologies.

Discourse analysis emerged as an interdisciplinary approach that draws on insights from linguistics, sociology, anthropology, semiotics, and psychology. Although these disciplines initially developed along separate paths, the late 1960s and early 1970s witnessed a convergence of interest in how language shapes social reality—marking the formal rise of modern discourse analysis. The roots of this field, however, extend further back to classical rhetoric, particularly in the works of Aristotle, who emphasized the persuasive power of language in public discourse. van Dijk (2013) observes that contemporary discourse analysis builds on this rhetorical tradition while integrating modern social theories to explore how language operates within institutional, political, and ideological frameworks.

CDA, on the other hand, is a qualitative methodological approach that examines how language is used to construct, reinforce, and legitimize social inequalities and power asymmetries. Grounded in the premise that language is neither neutral nor accidental, CDA explores how discursive practices serve specific ideological and institutional functions (Mullet, 2018).

Çobanoğulları (2021) observes that the development of CDA has been shaped in part by evolving dynamics in international relations, where discourse increasingly functions as a tool of power, identity construction, and ideological positioning. While CDA is rooted in classical rhetoric and closely aligned with sociolinguistics and the philosophy of language, it should not be viewed as a unified academic discipline with fixed theoretical boundaries. Rather, CDA constitutes a flexible and interdisciplinary research framework that draws on a range of theoretical perspectives, methodological approaches, and epistemological foundations. Its strength lies in this adaptability, enabling scholars to examine diverse issues such as media bias, political rhetoric, institutional discourse, and social inequality through a critical lens.

van Dijk (2001) defines CDA as an interdisciplinary approach concerned with how discourse both reflects and reproduces power relations, dominance, and inequality in society. CDA thus explores the ways in which language is strategically employed to legitimize authority, marginalize dissent, and shape public opinion within political and institutional contexts. This perspective is particularly relevant in media discourse, where linguistic choices are often instrumental in reinforcing or contesting dominant ideologies. Within the framework of CDA, van Dijk (2000) proposes the ideological square as a model for understanding how group identities are discursively constructed and polarized. This model is based on four key principles: "Emphasize the positive aspects of Us, emphasize the negative aspects of Them, downplay the negative aspects of Us, and downplay the positive aspects of Them" (van Dijk, 2000, p.44). Positive self-presentation focuses on accentuating the favorable qualities of one's own group, whether individually or collectively, while negative other-presentation aims to demonize members of the out-group, often by using pejorative language to highlight their negative traits.

The macro-strategies of *positive self-presentation* and *negative other-presentation* are supported by a range of micro-level discursive strategies—van Dijk (2000) identifies 42 in total—which operate at various levels of ideological discourse. Among these, lexicalization plays a particularly prominent role. The choice of vocabulary—whether emotionally charged or seemingly neutral—reflects the writer's or speaker's perspective on a subject. As Mayr (2008) notes, lexical choices are among the most evident and widely examined forms of ideological expression. Fowler (1991) argues that how vocabulary categorizes information is a fundamental means by which media texts reproduce ideology. Odebunmi (2016) supports this view by stating that understanding word meanings is key to interpretation and comprehension.

1.3. Lexicalization as a Discursive Strategy

Linguistic elements are central to the construction of political and ideological discourse. Discursive strategies such as lexical choices, metaphors, presuppositions, irony, and victimization are frequently employed to shape interpretation and influence public perception. Munir and Ahmed (2024) demonstrate that politicians often use these linguistic mechanisms—particularly lexicalization and metaphor—to strategically frame discourse in ways that align with their ideological agendas and resonate with target audiences. Such strategies not only shape how political actors, events, and issues are represented, but also reinforce dominant narratives while marginalizing alternative or dissenting voices. Their analysis underscores the broader function of discourse in sustaining power relations and ideological hegemony.

In CDA, linguistic elements and lexical choices are examined under lexicalization as a discursive strategy. It is argued that lexicalization, or the selection of words, plays a crucial role in how individuals express their views through speech. By selecting the right words, speakers can

effectively capture the attention of their audience. Therefore, it is important for speakers to carefully choose words that align with their objectives, and these choices are often shaped by their ideological beliefs. Word selection not only reflects an individual's personal identity but also signals group affiliation. By examining someone's ideology, researchers can analyze their choice of words and determine whether they carry a positive or negative connotation toward the intended person or group (Fajar & Sulistyowati, 2020).

Furthermore, lexicalization is a central strategy in CDA, particularly in the context of news and media discourse. In journalism, the deliberate selection of words plays a crucial role in shaping the tone of coverage and influencing how events are interpreted. Lexical choices are rarely neutral; they often reflect implicit institutional attitudes toward political actors, social groups, or policy issues. As Cheikh and Mehdi (2023) argue, specific lexical items can signal ideological positioning—conveying approval, disapproval, or skepticism. By examining these patterns, researchers can uncover the assumptions, values, and power relations embedded in media narratives. Lexicalization thus operates not only as a tool for constructing meaning, but also as a mechanism for framing political realities and influencing public perception.

Numerous studies have confirmed that lexicalization is among the most frequently employed strategies for uncovering the ideological dynamics of discourse. For instance, Indriana and Muttaqin (2019) analyze Donald Trump's campaign rhetoric during the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election to explore how political language constructs and manipulates ideological positions. Using a qualitative approach informed by CDA, the study identifies a dominant macro-strategy of positive self-presentation and negative other-representation, supported by a range of micro-strategies including lexicalization, metaphor, presupposition, and numerical argumentation.

The analysis reveals that Trump's discourse was structured around three core ideological themes: combating terrorism, discrediting political opponents, and reinforcing his candidacy. Lexical choices play a critical role in advancing these narratives, framing adversaries in negative terms while portraying himself as a strong and decisive leader. The authors draw on van Dijk's (2004) cognitive model of ideological discourse structures to demonstrate how strategic word selection influences public perception and reinforces dominant ideological positions.

Shakoury and Makarova (2021) examine the official public speeches of Iranian presidents Hassan Rouhani and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad through the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis. Their analysis addresses both micro-level discursive devices—identifying 25 distinct strategies—and macro-level elements, including positive self-representation and negative other-representation. They suggest that both presidents predominantly utilized strategies such as lexicalization, presupposition, implication, and actor description. Among these, lexicalization emerged as a particularly favored micro-strategy, consistent with findings in other political discourse studies, owing to its universal role across temporal and geographical contexts. The authors argue that lexicalization serves as a potent means of expressing underlying ideological positions.

Dezhkameh and Hadidi (2021) investigate ideological differences in COVID-19 news coverage using Van Dijk's ideological square framework. They analyze a representative sample of 56 news articles published between January 2020 and January 2021, drawn from two newspapers: the Tehran Times (Iran) and The New York Times (USA). A total of 2,977 clauses were examined both qualitatively—to explore the motivations behind their use—and quantitatively—to measure the frequency of various micro-strategies. The most frequently employed strategies include evidentiality, hyperbole, metaphor, national self-glorification, negative lexicalization, and the number game. These high-frequency strategies are identified as effective tools for persuading readers to accept the news content as factual.

Munoriyarwa (2020) conducts a comparative analysis of linguistic representations of the 2008 election violence in Zimbabwe, contrasting coverage from the state-controlled Sunday Mail and

the privately-owned British newspaper The Telegraph. Utilizing van Dijk's CDA framework, the study examines sixteen news articles, with a focus on lexical and semantic choices in the reporting. The findings indicate that divergent ideological stances underpin the newspapers' contrasting portrayals of the same event, primarily employing two overarching macro-strategies: positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation. These are articulated through a range of micro-strategies, including lexicalization, consensus building, framing of illegality, and presupposition.

Despite the growing body of research on media discourse and ideological representation in international politics, there remains a notable scarcity of studies that specifically investigate Deutsche Welle's coverage of Türkiye's stance on Sweden's NATO membership. Given Deutsche Welle's role as Germany's international public broadcaster with a wide global audience and its influential position in shaping European and international perspectives, an analysis of its reporting is crucial. Moreover, Türkiye's position on Sweden's NATO accession represents a complex intersection of geopolitical interests, national security concerns, and regional diplomacy, all of which are highly mediated through discourse. This makes the discourse surrounding this issue a fertile ground for critical examination. By focusing on Deutsche Welle's narratives, this study aims to uncover how language is used to frame Türkiye's policies and actions, revealing underlying ideological orientations, power relations, and potentially divergent narratives in comparison to other media outlets. Consequently, this research fills a significant gap by providing an in-depth critical discourse analysis of how one of Europe's leading international broadcasters constructs and communicates a contentious geopolitical issue, thereby contributing to a better understanding of media's role in international political discourse and public opinion formation.

2. Methodology

This study employs both content analysis and van Dijk's CDA to examine the language used in English-language news articles by Deutsche Welle regarding Türkiye's position on Sweden's NATO membership. Content analysis, commonly used across social sciences, communication, and political science, provides a systematic method for identifying and quantifying themes and patterns within media texts (Prasad, 2008). It is particularly effective to explore issues such as social change, media trends, propaganda, and political coverage. Complementing this, van Dijk's CDA offers a critical framework to analyze how language functions ideologically to construct power relations, legitimize perspectives, and marginalize opposing views. This combined approach allows for both a quantitative overview and a qualitative interpretation of Deutsche Welle's discourse.

Deutsche Welle was selected for this study due to its global reach, English-language content, and consistent international coverage, including frequent reporting on Türkiye. These features make it a suitable and relevant source for analyzing how the broadcaster frames Türkiye's stance on Sweden's NATO membership. In the study, ten news articles were selected by screening Deutsche Welle's 2022–2023 publications using the keywords 'Türkiye,' 'Sweden,' and 'NATO,' as the topic was highly prominent during this period, and considering the articles' length and relevance and the analysis was carried out with the qualitative research principles that emphasize context and meaning (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Each article was subjected to detailed analysis using van Dijk's micro-discursive strategies alongside content analysis. The findings were then interpreted qualitatively to identify positive and negative lexical choices and to explore how these choices shape the portrayal of Türkiye. Together, CDA and content analysis provided complementary tools to uncover how language both reflects and reinforces underlying ideological perspectives (Creswell, 2013).

3. Analysis of Data

As previously noted, the primary objective of this study is to investigate lexicalization—one of the core micro-level strategies in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), as proposed by Van Dijk. To

achieve this, ten news articles, selected by screening a German media outlet—Deutsche Welle—that served English newspapers in 2022–2023 relevant to Türkiye's objection to Sweden's membership into NATO, were analyzed using content analysis with a focus on identifying lexicalization patterns. Content analysis, as defined by Simon and Burstein (1985), involves the classification and quantification of spoken or written content, emphasizing the frequency of recurring themes or categories. This method is widely applied in media studies, particularly in examining the influence and representation of media content (Gunter, 2002, p. 220).

This section presents the key patterns of lexicalization identified in the selected Deutsche Welle news articles, illustrating how linguistic choices contribute to constructing Türkiye's portrayal in the discourse surrounding Sweden's NATO membership bid. Table 1 summarizes examples of prominent lexical items used in reference to Türkiye, categorized by the articles' publication dates and headlines.

Table 1: Examples of Lexicalization Strategies with reference to Türkiye in the Selected News

<i>Turkey threatens to stall Sweden, Finland in NATO talks (May, 25, 2022)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Threatens • Stall
<i>Turkey ready to back Sweden, Finland NATO bids (June 28, 2022)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'After weeks of threatening a veto...' • 'Angering partners by insisting it would veto...' • 'Dismissed speculation...' / 'Türkiye did not make the request'
<i>Turkey threatens to 'freeze' NATO bids (July, 18, 2022)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • '..... repeated his threats to blocking the bids.' • '..... raised the possibility of again blocking Finland and Sweden from joining ' • 'Erdogan, however, has renewed his threat of vetoing their accession ' • '..... threw up a roadblock to what many had considered would be a speedy process.' • 'Have ended up in prison often on what are generally considered trumped-up charges.'
<i>Sweden: Turkey wants what we cannot give for NATO membership (January 8, 2023)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Türkiye was asking too much' • 'Ending its obstruction of NATO membership' • 'Leverage concessions' • 'Unilaterally blocked membership' • 'Tense ties' (with Russia and the West) • 'Broker in scenarios tied to the war in Ukraine'
<i>Turkey's blockade makes NATO weaker (March 10, 2023)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Türkiye's blockade' • 'Angering partners' / 'Reluctance' / 'Refusing to ratify' • 'Enigmatic and unreliable partner' / 'Obstructionist' • 'Left in limbo' • 'Turned the promise of a fast-track membership... into empty talk'
<i>Erdogan says anti-Turkish protests hinder Swedish NATO bid (June 14, 2023)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Erdogan believes Sweden should do more to crack down on residents he considers 'terrorists' • 'Frustration is growing with Türkiye's blockade...'
<i>Erdogan: Let Turkey in EU if you want Sweden in NATO (July 10, 2023)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'democratic backsliding' • 'human rights abuses' • 'provocations under Erdogan' • 'added to the list of demands' • 'Erdogan claimed' • 'White House readout... no mention...' • 'stalled EU membership bid'
<i>Erdogan drops opposition to Sweden's NATO bid: Stoltenberg (July 10, 2023)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Erdogan drops opposition' • 'Erdogan added to the list of demands' • 'Democratic backsliding, human rights abuses, and provocations under Erdogan' • 'Surprise announcement'
<i>What is behind Turkish President Erdogan's NATO U-turn? (July 11, 2023)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Managed to stun the West' • 'Türkiye's EU journey is not headed toward a realistic destination' • 'Reinvigorate Türkiye's EU accession process' • 'Biden welcomed Erdogan's decision' • 'Record inflation rates and a rapidly depreciating lira'
<i>NATO summit: No Ukraine entry timeline, Turkey backs Sweden (July 12, 2023)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Erdogan's courage and diplomatic efforts' • 'floundering EU membership bid' • 'on ice' (regarding F-16 deal) • 'ever-growing list of demands' • 'change of tune' • 'Sweden tightened control over the activities of the PKK' • 'insurgency' (describing the PKK) • 'long-frozen Turkish bid to acquire F-16s' • 'Ankara's about-face'

The analysis of the selected news articles indicates that there are notable variations in the frequency and intensity of lexicalization strategies in Deutsche Welle's coverage of Türkiye's objection to Sweden's NATO membership.

In the first report, only two negative lexical choices are used in reference to Türkiye: '*threaten*' and '*stall*.' The term '*threaten*' suggests that Türkiye is acting aggressively and in bad faith, while '*stall*' carries a negative implication that Türkiye is intentionally delaying Sweden's accession. Despite these word choices, the overall tone of the report remains diplomatic and balanced, presenting perspectives from both sides.

While the headline of the second news article appears neutral by presenting Türkiye as cooperative, a closer analysis reveals a more critical underlying discourse. The repeated use of the word '*threaten*' again frames Türkiye as aggressive and unwilling to engage in constructive dialogue. The report further suggests that Türkiye is acting emotionally and rigidly, which contributes to a portrayal of the country as a disruptive actor lacking legitimate concerns. In the second example, the terms '*angering*' and '*insisting*' reflect lexical choices that portray Türkiye as obstructive, unreasonable, provocative, and emotionally driven in its stance on Sweden's membership—despite the fact that its actions may stem from legitimate national security concerns. However, there is a rare instance of lexical balance in favor of Türkiye. In phrases such as '*dismissed speculation*' and '*Türkiye did not make the request*,' the language defends Türkiye against assumptions that it was exploiting the situation to gain leverage for acquiring fighter jets.

In the third news article, the repeated use of the words '*threat*' and '*block*' serves to construct an image of President Erdoğan as an aggressive, coercive, and uncooperative political actor. Similarly, the metaphorical phrase '*throw up a roadblock*' is a deliberate lexical choice that frames Türkiye as a sudden and disruptive obstacle to NATO's objectives, hindering alliance unity and evoking a sense of frustration. Furthermore, the statement '*have ended up in prison often on what are generally considered trumped-up charges*' represents a highly charged example of negative lexicalization, portraying Türkiye as an authoritarian state with a fundamentally unjust legal system that persecutes dissenting voices under false pretenses.

The article titled '*Sweden: Türkiye wants what we cannot give for NATO membership*' adopts a neutral to slightly negative tone toward Türkiye. Lexical choices such as '*Türkiye was asking too much*,' '*ending its obstruction of NATO membership*,' '*leverage concessions*,' and '*unilaterally blocked membership*' portray Türkiye as excessive, uncooperative, and obstructionist. While the phrase '*tense ties*' subtly suggests instability and mistrust, the tone gradually shifts toward neutrality or mild positivity. The description of Türkiye as a '*broker in scenarios tied to the war in Ukraine*' positively frames it as a regional mediator, partly offsetting earlier criticism.

The fifth article, titled '*Türkiye's blockade 'makes NATO weaker'*,' serves as a clear example of how negative lexicalization and discourse framing can influence international perceptions of a country—specifically, Türkiye. A close analysis of the article reveals how particular word choices construct a narrative that portrays Türkiye in a negative light. For instance, the phrase '*Türkiye's blockade*' employs a militaristic term with strong connotations of forceful obstruction. Rather than using more neutral terms such as '*objection*' or '*veto*', which reflect legitimate political mechanisms, the use of '*blockade*' frames Türkiye as acting aggressively and unreasonably to halt progress, thereby reinforcing a hostile image. In this article, several lexical choices contribute to a discourse that frames Türkiye in a highly negative light. Phrases such as '*angering partners*,' '*reluctance*,' and '*refusing to ratify*' introduce emotional undertones that suggest Türkiye is a source of frustration and lacks any willingness to cooperate. These terms imply obstinacy and a disregard for collective goals. Furthermore, the line '*motivated by Erdogan's desire to rally his voters*' represents a speculative and personalized attribution. It shifts the focus from national

security concerns to domestic political manipulation, framing Türkiye's actions as opportunistic rather than strategic or principled.

The narrative further reinforces this image by employing charged lexical choices such as '*enigmatic and unreliable partner*' and '*obstructionist*', which depict Türkiye as an untrustworthy actor deliberately undermining alliance cohesion. The metaphorical phrase '*left in limbo*' is used to characterize Sweden and Finland as passive victims, suggesting that Türkiye, as an external and disruptive force, is unjustly holding them back. Through this framing, Türkiye is positioned not as a negotiating partner but as an antagonist obstructing the rightful progress of other nations.

Finally, the statement '*turned the promise of a fast-track membership... into empty talk*' assigns direct blame to Türkiye for derailing NATO's commitments. This framing suggests that Türkiye is not only opposing Sweden's membership but also actively undermining the credibility and unity of NATO itself. In conclusion, it is possible to note that this news has a more negative discourse towards Türkiye.

In the sixth article, there are two notable instances of lexicalization that contribute to a negative framing of Türkiye. First, the reference to individuals as '*terrorists*' by President Erdoğan is presented in a way that emphasizes subjectivity. By foregrounding that this label comes specifically from Erdoğan, the article subtly casts doubt on the legitimacy of the designation and shifts sympathy toward the individuals labeled as such—framing them as mere *residents* rather than potential security threats. This rhetorical move not only delegitimizes Türkiye's national concerns but also contributes to a portrayal of the country as authoritarian and oppressive. Secondly, the use of emotionally charged terms such as '*frustration*' and '*blockade*' reinforces a narrative of Türkiye as uncooperative and combative. The word '*blockade*' in particular carries militaristic connotations, suggesting forceful obstruction rather than a legitimate political stance or veto. These lexical choices collectively frame Türkiye's position not as a sovereign right to object, but as an aggressive attempt to disrupt international consensus and progress.

The seventh article also employs language that lacks neutrality regarding Türkiye and President Erdoğan. It presents an overall negative portrayal of Türkiye, characterizing it as problematic, uncooperative, and less trustworthy compared to Western officials, as well as not aligning with NATO values. Lexical choices such as '*democratic backsliding*', '*human rights abuses*', and '*provocations under Erdogan*' depict Türkiye's internal affairs in a critical light and frame Erdoğan as authoritarian, undemocratic, and threatening. The phrase '*added to the list of demands*' further reinforces this negative framing by portraying Erdoğan as opportunistic and unreasonable. His credibility is further undermined through word choices like '*claimed*' and references such as '*White House readout... no mention...*', which imply a lack of legitimacy. Finally, the repeated use of the term '*stalled*' emphasizes Türkiye's perceived inability to meet EU membership expectations, reinforcing an image of failure.

In the eighth news article, the discourse takes on a more critical tone toward Türkiye, as reflected in specific lexical choices such as '*Erdogan drops opposition*' and '*Erdogan added to the list of demands*'. The verb '*drop*' implies that Erdogan reluctantly gave in to Sweden's NATO bid, rather than cooperatively agreeing or offering support, framing him as an obstacle. Meanwhile, the phrase '*added to the list of demands*' portrays Erdogan as exploiting the situation for personal or national gain, suggesting opportunism and presenting a contrast to NATO's collective and principled image. Additionally, the use of phrases such as '*democratic backsliding, human rights abuses, and provocations under Erdogan*' involves highly charged language that reinforces a negative portrayal of Türkiye. These terms not only cast the country in a critical light but also suggest interference in its internal affairs. Erdoğan is depicted as an authoritarian figure, reinforcing this critical framing. Furthermore, the phrase '*surprise announcement*' adds a sense of dramatization,

portraying the decision as sudden and unexpected rather than a calculated or timely move. In conclusion, the second report has a more negative and biased discourse towards Türkiye.

The ninth article exhibits a generally neutral to slightly negative discourse toward Türkiye. The headline's use of '*u-turn*' signals a sudden, politically motivated reversal, implying inconsistency. The phrase 'managed to stun the West' employs emotionally charged language, portraying Erdoğan as unpredictable or disruptive. Türkiye faces criticism regarding its EU membership prospects with statements like '*Türkiye's EU journey is not headed toward a realistic destination*' and calls to '*reinvigorate Türkiye's EU accession process*.' Additionally, the description of '*Record inflation rates and a rapidly depreciating lira*' frames Türkiye's economy as crisis-ridden, suggesting strategic desperation.

The last article titled '*NATO summit: No Ukraine entry timeline, Türkiye backs Sweden*' generally adopts a slightly negative tone toward Türkiye, using lexical choices like '*floundering EU membership bid*,' '*on ice*' and '*long-frozen Turkish bid to acquire F-16s*,' and '*ever-growing list of demands*.' Phrases such as '*change of tune*' and '*Ankara's about-face*' suggest inconsistency and opportunism, framing Erdoğan as reactive rather than principled. These choices portray Türkiye as struggling diplomatically and unpredictable. However, there are moments of positive framing, such as praise for '*Erdoğan's courage and diplomatic efforts*,' and neutral-to-positive references like Sweden's crackdown on PKK activity and the use of the term '*insurgency*' to validate Türkiye's security concerns. Over-lexicalization is evident through repeated and excessive labeling, with terms like '*added to the list of demands*', '*change of tune*', and '*about-face*' positioning Türkiye as manipulative and politically unreliable. President Erdoğan becomes the focal point of criticism, with lexical choices such as '*surprise announcement*', '*u-turn*', and '*change of tune*' portraying him as inconsistent and opportunistic. The portrayal of Erdoğan as an authoritarian figure is further strengthened by phrases like '*leverage concessions*' and '*ever-growing list of demands*' framing him as self-serving rather than diplomatically engaged. However, the article also includes a number of positive lexical choices. For example, '*Biden welcomed Erdoğan's decision*' uses diplomatic and favorable language, softening the impression of Erdoğan's prior rigidity. Similarly, '*Consensus reached in Vilnius*' indicates a successful resolution despite earlier disagreements, adding a constructive tone to the coverage.

The findings indicate that Deutsche Welle employs a varied but consistently strategic use of lexical choices to articulate different political and ideological positions regarding Türkiye's objection to Sweden's NATO membership. Although the tone occasionally appears neutral, the overarching discourse tends to be predominantly negative, frequently depicting Türkiye as an obstructive, opportunistic, or authoritarian actor. In particular, the phrase "so-called terrorist" functions ideologically by presenting Türkiye's security claims as exaggerated or unfounded, thereby reaffirming Western assumptions about terrorism, alliance unity, and legitimate security practices. Through such lexical framing, the coverage not only delegitimizes Türkiye's stance but also implicitly validates the perspectives of its Western counterparts.

It is noteworthy that in several reports, the discourse personalizes state-level political decisions by placing Erdoğan at the forefront of the decision-making process. Deutsche Welle emphasizes Erdoğan's personality and leadership style, thereby relegating the state's broader security considerations—such as extradition requests, counterterrorism priorities, and alliance commitments—to a secondary status. This approach highlights a tendency in Western media to individualize foreign policy decisions when the country in question is not part of the Western bloc. Ultimately, this strategy reinforces dominant Western geopolitical narratives and illustrates how language shapes international political discourse while sustaining existing ideological frameworks.

These findings resonate with and reinforce existing scholarship within the field of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and the study of ideological framing in media reporting. Prior research consistently emphasizes lexicalization as a powerful mechanism for constructing social identities and portraying 'others' negatively. In line with the findings of this study, Bilgin and Sarıköse (2025) note that, starting in 2019, Western media outlets appear to have adopted a new strategy specifically targeting Türkiye. The United States' Voice of America, the United Kingdom's BBC, France's France 24, and Germany's Deutsche Welle implemented an approach for Türkiye that had not previously been applied to any other country or language. In that year, these four major Western media organizations collaborated to establish +90, a joint digital channel broadcasting exclusively in Turkish and focusing on issues related to Türkiye. Moreover, from the same period onward, BBC News Turkish and DW Turkish have continued to produce content guided by similar objectives and ideological frameworks. This development is particularly significant in terms of media history, political propaganda, and the broader geopolitical context of the period.

In addition to studies focusing on media framing of states, there is also research that examines lexicalization in other contexts. For example, Al-Saaidi et al. (2016) analyze Osama Bin Laden's speeches and demonstrate how carefully chosen lexical choices ideologically frame the in-group as virtuous and justified while simultaneously portraying the out-group disparagingly at the micro-discursive level. Specifically, war-related and religious lexicons are strategically employed to cast the out-group as violent and morally corrupt, whereas negative lexicalization of the in-group is consciously avoided to preserve a positive collective identity. This discursive tactic operates within politically charged and community-focused ideological frameworks and aligns with van Dijk's Ideological Square theory, which posits that positive self-presentation is often coupled with negative other-presentation.

Similarly, Dibas et al. (2023) identify negative lexical choices as a recurrent sub-strategy for constructing a pejorative image of the 'other,' reinforcing societal divisions and ideological biases. This strategy is particularly salient in contexts of international conflict or political tension, where media narratives significantly influence public opinion and policy discourse. Supporting this perspective, Li (2025) emphasizes that lexical negativity functions as a discursive mechanism to maintain power asymmetries and legitimize dominant political ideologies by marginalizing dissenting voices and alternative viewpoints.

Negative lexicalization also features prominently in the rhetoric of American political leaders such as Donald Trump and Barack Obama. Saadoun (2023) analyzes Trump's speeches and finds a consistent pattern of portraying certain groups—such as immigrants and trade negotiators from Japan and China—in a negative light, reinforcing harmful stereotypes. This approach involves the deliberate use of strongly negative vocabulary—terms like destroy, terrorism, fear, obsession, hatred, and paralyzed—to depict the out-group unfavorably. Such lexical choices align with authoritarian discourse, wherein opponents are discredited through harsh and critical language.

Similarly, Fajar and Sulistyowati (2020) observe that Barack Obama employs negative lexicalization in his speeches, notably during his address in Indonesia. He frequently uses the term 'extremists' to characterize violent groups and emphasize the global threat they pose, thereby drawing a clear distinction between radical actors and the broader Muslim community. This language fosters solidarity between the United States and Indonesia, highlighting a shared responsibility to combat extremism and promote peace. Wang (2023) further identifies lexicalization as one of the most frequent strategies for negatively depicting out-groups.

Taken together, these studies underscore the instrumental role of lexical strategies in mediating ideological conflict and shaping geopolitical discourse. The lexical choices made by Deutsche Welle in representing Türkiye's stance reflect broader media practices that prioritize particular ideological interests, often at the expense of balanced representation. This trend raises critical

questions regarding the ethical responsibilities of media institutions in conflict reporting and underscores the urgent need for enhanced critical media literacy to uncover and challenge the ideological biases embedded within lexical selections as the study's implications suggest that the framing extends beyond mere journalistic representation. It is evident that Deutsche Welle employs a discourse that reflects an asymmetric perception of Türkiye's role within NATO, where political pressure on Türkiye is legitimized while its security concerns are downplayed or dismissed. This discursive approach carries broader implications for geopolitical power relations, reinforcing dominant Western perspectives and marginalizing non-Western actors in international security debates.

4. Limitations and Recommendations

This study has several limitations. By focusing exclusively on Deutsche Welle, the analysis may reflect a singular political or ideological perspective, potentially constraining the diversity of viewpoints represented. The lack of comparative analysis with news sources from other countries limits the ability to capture a broader spectrum of political and cultural perspectives on Türkiye's portrayal. To achieve a more balanced and comprehensive understanding, future research should incorporate a range of media outlets from multiple countries. Such a comparative approach would facilitate more nuanced insights into the use of lexicalization in representing Türkiye across international media and enhance the generalizability of findings across diverse geopolitical contexts.

5. Conclusion

This article centers on the analysis of lexicalization, a micro-level discursive strategy conceptualized by Van Dijk within Critical Discourse Analysis, to investigate how Deutsche Welle represents Türkiye's objection to Sweden's NATO membership. The findings of the analysis on the selected news articles indicate that the intensity of negative lexicalization varies across articles, ranging from relatively neutral to overtly critical tones. Nevertheless, a consistent pattern emerges, with Türkiye repeatedly framed through negatively charged vocabulary. Terms such as '*threaten*', '*stall*', '*blockade*', '*obstructionist*', and '*angering partners*' contribute to portraying Türkiye as combative and disruptive. Similarly, phrases like '*democratic backsliding*', '*human rights abuses*', and '*authoritarian*' reinforce a strongly critical stance.

Moreover, Türkiye's legitimate security concerns are often downplayed or cast into doubt through lexical choices such as '*claim*' and '*so-called terrorist*', which signal skepticism and serve to undermine the validity of its position. The coverage also plays a role in portraying Türkiye as a marginal or secondary player within NATO, rather than as a fully recognized and influential member. By consistently sidelining its perspectives, Western media diminishes the legitimacy of Türkiye's security concerns, framing them as less relevant when measured against established Western norms and security priorities. This discursive strategy not only reinforces Türkiye's peripheral status in the alliance but also reflects a broader tendency in Western narratives to prioritize their own security frameworks while minimizing the agency of non-Western actors. Deutsche Welle is also observed to place Erdoğan at the center of decision-making, presenting Türkiye's foreign policy as a matter of personal preferences. This framing pushes institutional, state-level security concerns into the background.

Although sporadic instances of more balanced or mildly positive language appear—such as references to Türkiye acting as a broker in regional affairs, diplomatic praise from President Biden, or negotiations regarding F-16 sales—these instances are relatively infrequent and insufficient to counterbalance the overall critical framing.

In sum, the study highlights the significance of critically analyzing how media discourse influences global perceptions of state behavior, especially within unequal power relations like those between

Türkiye and Western institutions. Future research could build on these insights by investigating comparative media environments or examining how such discursive practices impact public opinion and inform policy-making processes.

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