Analyzing Transitivity Process: A Corpus-Assisted Critical Discourse Analysis of UK and US Newspaper Headlines

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the representation of the Rohingya crisis in media discourse through the application of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), specifically focusing on the transitivity model to analyze the construction of newspaper headlines. Using a corpus-based approach, this research analyzes 100 headlines from the newspapers of United Kingdom and the United States published in 2017, drawn from the News on the Web (NOW) corpus. The analysis reveals that material processes are predominant in both the US and UK corpora, portraying the Rohingya as passive victims reacting to external aggression, thereby emphasizing the urgency of the crisis. Verbal processes are equally distributed across the corpora, highlighting influential figures such as political leaders and humanitarian organizations, and shaping the narrative through direct speech or reported dialogue. Relational processes, which assign attributes to participants, are more prevalent in the US corpus, where the focus is on the violence and prejudice faced by the Rohingya. In contrast, the UK corpus predominantly emphasizes their victimhood. These findings illustrate distinct media portrayals of the crisis, reflecting differing narrative strategies and political stances in the US and UK media.

Keywords: *Critical Discourse Analysis, Corpus Linguistics, Systemic Functional Linguistics*

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji representasi krisis Rohingya dalam wacana media melalui penerapan Analisis Wacana Kritis (AWK) dan Linguistik Fungsional Sistemik (LFS), dengan fokus khusus pada model transitivity untuk menganalisis konstruksi judul berita. Menggunakan pendekatan berbasis korpus, penelitian ini menganalisis 100 judul berita dari surat kabar Inggris dan Amerika Serikat yang diterbitkan pada tahun 2017, yang diambil dari korpus News on the Web (NOW). Hasil analisis menunjukkan bahwa proses material menjadi yang paling dominan dalam kedua korpus US dan Inggris, menggambarkan Rohingya sebagai korban pasif yang merespons agresi eksternal, serta menekankan urgensi krisis tersebut. Proses verbal yang tersebar merata di kedua korpus menyoroti tokoh-tokoh penting seperti pemimpin politik dan organisasi kemanusiaan dengan membentuk narasi melalui pidato langsung atau laporan dialog. Sementara itu, proses relasional yang digunakan untuk memberikan atribut pada partisipan, lebih sering ditemukan dalam korpus US yang lebih menekankan pada kekerasan dan prasangka terhadap Rohingya. Di sisi lain, korpus Inggris lebih banyak menggambarkan mereka sebagai korban. Temuan ini mencerminkan perbedaan cara media menggambarkan krisis yang dipengaruhi oleh strategi naratif dan perspektif politik masing-masing media di US dan Inggris.

Kata kunci: Analisis Wacana Kritis, Linguistik Korpus, Linguistik Sistemik Fungsional

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1. INTRODUCTION

The use of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) in media studies has gained prominence in recent years as a method to uncover the ideological underpinnings of media representations, especially in reporting on sensitive political and humanitarian issues. One such issue is the plight of the Rohingya, an ethnic minority group that has faced severe persecution in Myanmar. The Rohingya crisis, which began drawing international attention in 2016 due to reports of ethnic cleansing, has since become a focal point for media coverage around the world. Given its global significance, this issue presents a rich case for examining how different media outlets construct narratives around the crisis and how these narratives shape public perception.

CDA studies on the Rohingya issue have been conducted extensively across different regions, employing various frameworks to reveal the ideological underpinnings in media representations. For instance, Isti'anah (2018) explored how newspaper headlines from Myanmar and Bangladesh depicted the Rohingya crisis using SFL's transitivity model. The study highlighted that Myanmar's media focused on government actors and their efforts, presenting the crisis as a manageable state affair, whereas Bangladeshi media framed the Rohingya as active victims in need of protection, emphasizing their agency and struggle. This contrast underscored the ideological division between Myanmar's state-controlled narrative and Bangladesh's positioning of the Rohingya as vulnerable and deserving international attention. Such findings showcase how transitivity processes shape the construction of participants' roles, influencing public perception and reinforcing state ideologies.

Other researchers have similarly used transitivity analysis to investigate media portrayals of sensitive issues, revealing underlying power dynamics and biases. Abbas & Talaat (2019) examined gender-based violence coverage in Pakistani newspapers, finding that women were depicted primarily as victims, with perpetrators often portrayed passively to minimize their agency. Similarly, Akinmusuyi (2020) analyzed Nigerian media's portrayal of gender-based violence, showing a nuanced representation where both victims and perpetrators were framed in complex ways, reflecting broader societal attitudes. These studies collectively demonstrate that the choice of participants and processes in media narratives can illuminate ideological stances, especially in contexts of violence and power relations.

A broader exploration of transitivity in CDA extends to international conflict coverage, as seen in Muwafi et al. (2022). This study analyzed Al-Jazeera Arabic and English's framing of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and

found distinct linguistic choices that signaled ideological biases. While Al-Jazeera Arabic provided a balanced portrayal of both Russian and Ukrainian actors, Al-Jazeera English emphasized Ukraine's victimhood and positioned Russia as the aggressor. This dual analysis revealed how the same media outlet could adapt its narrative depending on the audience, showcasing how transitivity reflects editorial stances and shapes the ideological framing of events.

While these studies primarily employ qualitative CDA methods, the present study diverges by incorporating a corpus-based CDA approach, enabling the analysis of a larger and more diverse dataset. By using corpus linguistics tools, this research allows for the identification of recurring lexical and grammatical patterns that might be overlooked in smaller, manually analyzed datasets. The present study also shifts focus from directly identifying ideologies to providing a structural and grammatical analysis of how action, accountability, and victimhood are constructed in the Rohingya crisis discourse. This methodological may provide a more robust quantitative foundation for the analysis, allowing for a deeper exploration of the roles assigned to various participants in the headlines.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW
2.1. Transitivity Processes

The theory of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), or Systemic Functional Grammar, proposed by Halliday, presents a distinctive approach to grammatical analysis in linguistics. Halliday (2004) asserts that grammar should be understood in functional terms, highlighting its role in articulating experiences and fostering interpersonal relationships rather than just adhering to structural norms. According to Halliday (2004, p.25), "language is structured to make meanings, and these meanings are shaped by the social context in which they are used." This perspective sees grammar as a tool for understanding how language reflects and constructs reality, making it particularly relevant for Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), where the focus is on how language relates to power, ideology, and social structures.

In CDA, Halliday's SFL provides a framework for examining how language encodes particular meanings and reflects ideological positions. Fairclough (2001, p.126; 2003, p.27), a prominent scholar in the field of CDA, integrates SFL into his model of discourse analysis, using it as the core linguistic component to dissect texts. Young and Harrison's (2004) work, Systemic Functional Linguistics and Critical Discourse Analysis, further explores this relationship, presenting a collection of articles that illustrate how SFL can be effectively applied to critical discourse studies. The core of this application is the

transitivity system, which Halliday identifies as a means of representing processes and the participants involved in them. Through transitivity analysis, CDA practitioners can identify how certain actors and actions are framed, revealing power relations and ideological stances embedded in discourse.

Transitivity processes, according to Halliday and Matthiessen (2004), can be categorized into six types: material, mental, relational, verbal, behavioral, and existential. Each process type is associated with specific participant roles, as summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Overview of Transitivity Processes (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004)

Processes	Meaning	Participants
Material	Doing, happening	Actor, Goal
Mental	Perceiving, feeling, thinking	Senser, Phenomenon
Relational	Classifying, identifying	Carrier, Attribute Token, Value
Verbal	Saying	Sayer, Verbiage Receiver
Behavioral	Behaving	Behaver
Existential	Being	Existent

Material processes, which involve doing and happening, assign roles such as Actor and Goal, making them central to discussions about agency and responsibility. Mental processes, involving perceiving, thinking, and feeling, assign roles such as Senser and Phenomenon, thereby providing insight into participants' perceptions and emotions. Relational processes are used to classify and identify, with roles like Carrier and Attribute, or Token and Value, which often serve to define relationships and attributes. Verbal processes, which concern saying, involve Sayer, Verbiage, and Receiver, and are crucial for analyzing reported speech and quoted material. Behavioral processes represent forms of behavior (e.g., breathing, smiling) and typically involve a single participant, the Behaver. Finally, existential processes, which state the existence of something, include a single participant known as the Existent.

The selection of transitivity processes within a text greatly affects the portrayal of events and participants, consequently impacting how readers perceive them. The roles assigned to characters or entities determine whether they are seen as active or passive, dominant or subordinate. For instance, a participant portrayed as the Actor in material processes may be seen as taking action and being in control, while a participant associated with a Goal role might be perceived as receiving or undergoing the effects of those actions. Such distinctions are essential in discourse analysis, particularly when studying how

marginalized groups, such as the Rohingya, are represented in media texts.

Moreover, transitivity analysis has been used to explore various social issues beyond media discourse, including gender representation, political speeches, and educational policies. Each of these studies leverages the power of transitivity to uncover how language choices contribute to broader social narratives. For example, Lazar's (2005) study on gendered discourse highlights how women are often portrayed through relational processes that focus on their attributes rather than their actions, thereby perpetuating stereotypes of passivity.

2.2. Combining Corpus Linguistics and Critical Discourse Analysis

Corpus linguistics primarily emphasizes quantitative analysis, focusing on the specific situational context surrounding language use. This approach includes the examination of concordance, which refers to a compilation of instances where a particular word-form appears, each situated within its unique textual environment (Sinclair, 1991, p. 32). The methodologies derived from corpus linguistics have been effectively employed to investigate phenomena at the discourse level. This encompasses various aspects, such as identifying characteristics linked to the application of certain language features, exploring the realizations of specific functions, characterizing distinct varieties of language, and tracking how particular features manifest throughout an entire text.

By concentrating on the quantitative aspects of language, corpus linguistics allows researchers to discern patterns and trends that may not be immediately apparent through qualitative analysis alone. The application of corpus-based techniques enables linguists to delve into discourse-level issues, offering insights into how language features contribute to broader communicative functions.

Meanwhile, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is more of a qualitative approach. CDA conceptualizes language not just as a set of grammatical rules but as a form of discourse and a vital aspect of social practice (Fairclough, 2001, p. 21). This perspective enables researchers to explore how language functions in relation to ideology, examining how linguistic choices can reflect, reinforce, or challenge social beliefs and power structures (Wodak, 2001). However, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) has faced scrutiny for its methodological shortcomings, particularly due to its qualitative approach to linguistic analysis. Critics argue that this qualitative focus often results in

"fragmentary and exemplificatory" types of texts, which can limit the breadth and depth of the analysis (Fowler, 1996).

To address these criticisms, Stubbs (1997) advocates for the integration of corpus linguistics (CL) methodologies into CDA. By employing techniques such as random sampling, analyzing extensive text collections, and comparing the linguistic features under examination with established language norms found in a corpus, researchers can enhance the robustness of CDA. This approach not only increases the reliability of the findings but also allows for a more comprehensive understanding of how discourse operates within a larger linguistic framework.

One of the significant advantages of using corpus linguistics in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is its ability to enhance objectivity. According to Baker (2006), this approach provides a systematic and empirical foundation for analyzing language, which effectively reduces the potential for researcher bias. By relying on concrete data rather than subjective interpretations, researchers can achieve a more neutral analysis of discourse. This objectivity is crucial in understanding the nuanced ways language can shape societal perceptions and ideologies.

Another key benefit lies in the capacity to analyze large datasets. Utilizing extensive corpora allows researchers to sift through vast amounts of text, enabling the identification of patterns, trends, and linguistic features that might be overlooked in smaller samples. Baker (2008) and Mautner (2009) assert that this comprehensive data not only leads to more robust findings but also facilitates generalizations about language use across different contexts. Consequently, researchers can draw more reliable conclusions regarding discourse practices and their implications.

In short, corpus linguistics enables a quantitative analysis of language use, such as frequency counts of specific words or phrases. Baker (2008) highlights that this quantitative data complements qualitative interpretations, providing a more comprehensive understanding of discourse practices.

3. METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK
3.1. Data

The data of this study comprises newspaper headlines from the United Kingdom and the United States, issued in 2017 and focused on the Rohingya ethnic cleansing. These headlines were gathered using the News on the Web (NOW) corpus, a large, freely accessible collection

of English-language news sources from various countries. According to the latest statistics available on the NOW corpus website, the database contains roughly 15.1 billion words from online newspapers and magazines dating from 2010 to the present. The corpus grows by approximately 180—200 million words per month, adding nearly two billion words annually, which is equivalent to about 300,000 new articles.

The NOW corpus provides numerous analytical tools and functions, making it a valuable resource for linguistic research. Users can conduct searches using specific words or phrases, which can then be analyzed through options like list, chart, collocates, compare, and KWIC (Key Word in Context). For this study, the list function was utilized to identify relevant headlines by searching for the keyword "Rohingya." This allowed the extraction of all articles containing the targeted term for further analysis.

The advanced search feature was utilized to refine the data, focusing on headlines published in a specific year and from selected countries. The timeline was set to January-December 2017 and the countries were limited to the United Kingdom and the United States. This search configuration enabled the collection of newspaper headlines specifically discussing the Rohingya crisis during the selected period and geographic locations. The figure below (figure 1—3) illustrates the process of data extraction, showcasing the use of the keyword "Rohingya" along with the specified time frame and country settings to form the research corpus.
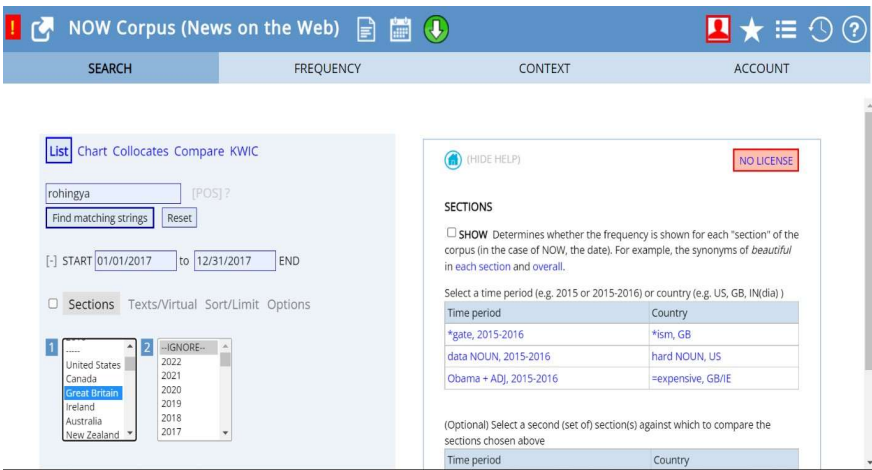
Figure 1. Main Page of the NOW Corpus

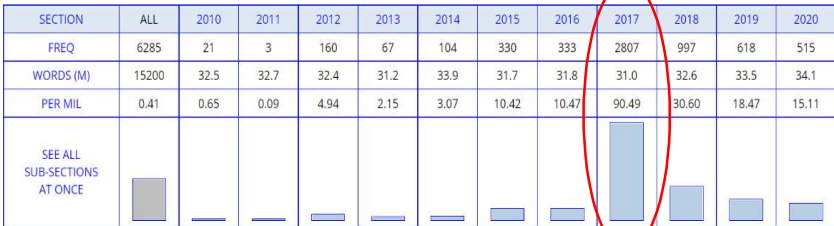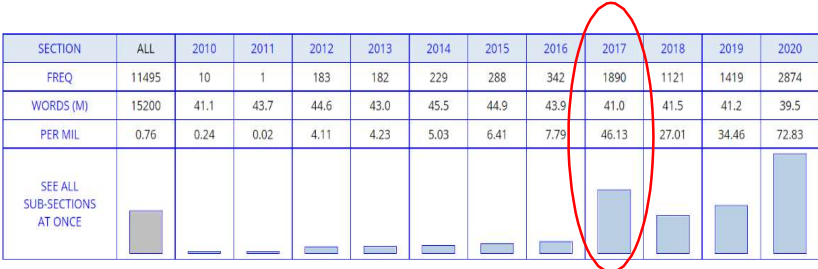Figure 2. Search Results for the Lemma "Rohingya" in the UK

SECTION	ALL	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
FREQ	6285	21	3	160	67	104	330	333	2807	997	618	515
WORDS (M)	15200	32.5	32.7	32.4	31.2	33.9	31.7	31.8	31.0	32.6	33.5	34.1
PER MIL	0.41	0.65	0.09	4.94	2.15	3.07	10.42	10.47	90.49	30.60	18.47	15.11

Figure 3. Search Results for the Lemma "Rohingya" in the US

SECTION	ALL	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
FREQ	11495	10	1	183	182	229	288	342	1890	1121	1419	2874
WORDS (M)	15200	41.1	43.7	44.6	43.0	45.5	44.9	43.9	41.0	41.5	41.2	39.5
PER MIL	0.76	0.24	0.02	4.11	4.23	5.03	6.41	7.79	46.13	27.01	34.46	72.83
SEE ALL SUB-SECTIONS AT ONCE												

The frequency of the lemma "Rohingya" in 2017 within the datasets from the NOW corpus reflects the news content from both the United Kingdom and the United States. It is important to note that the term "Rohingya" may appear multiple times within a single news article. Additionally, while these articles mention the term, they do not always pertain to the specific context of ethnic cleansing, which is the primary focus of this study. Considering that, this research centers on analyzing news headlines, the selection process involved manually reviewing each article listed in the NOW corpus. By clicking on each news article, the relevant headlines were identified. In total, 100 headlines were gathered, with an equal distribution of 50 headlines from each country. The breakdown of the newspapers included in this selection is presented below.

Figure 4. Distribution of Data
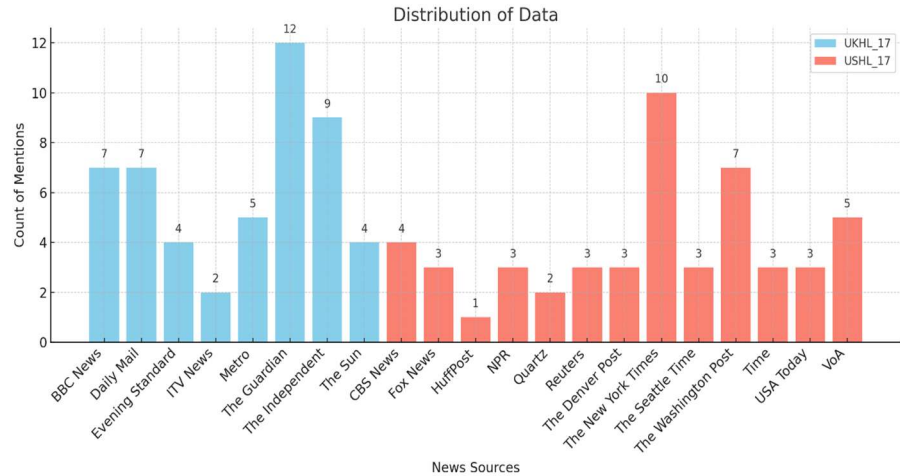
The figure above shows that the corpus is identified with the labels UKHL_17 and USHL_17. These labels are important for distinguishing between the two corpora during the analysis. The initial letters represent the country, "HL" refers to news headlines, and "17" denotes the year 2017. These designations will be consistently used throughout the article.

After collecting the news headline data, each one was individually copied and stored in a 'txt' file format, as this type is necessary for compatibility with the analytical tools utilized in the study. The news headlines were assigned labels that included the country and their respective headline numbers, such as UK_10, UK_20, US_30 and US_40. The corpora details are presented below.

Table 2. Overview of the Corpora

Corpus	Number of Files	Tokens	Types
UKHL_17	50	745	342
USHL_17	50	611	327

3.2. Instruments

This study employs two key instruments: TagAnt and AntConc. TagAnt is a free software tool designed for the automatic annotation or tagging of texts using a Part of Speech (POS) tagger. An example of a news headline annotated with the POS tagger via TagAnt is presented below.

Rohingya_PROPN refugees_NOUN seek_VERB safety_NOUN in_ADP neighboring_ADJ countries_NOUN.

The annotated text above includes the following tags: PROPN signifies proper noun, NOUN denotes noun, VERB indicates verb, ADJ refers to adjective, and ADP represents adposition.

After completing the tagging process, the analysis is performed with AntConc, a free software program designed by Anthony Lawrence for analyzing tagged texts. Initially, the software is utilized to pull out the verbs found in the news headlines. Following this, a manual examination of the transitivity processes and participant types is conducted. At this time, there is no automated tool available that can tag texts specifically for Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) analysis focused on transitivity across different languages. Consequently, it is imperative to manually identify and annotate the processes according to their functional types and associated participant roles.

4. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The findings and discussion are categorized into an analysis of transitivity processes and an examination of the various types of participants involved.

4.1. Transitivity Process

The analysis of transitivity processes in each news headline was conducted using two wildcard expressions, *_V and *_AUX, which can be combined into *_V|AUX. The combination of the wildcard effectively identifies all verbs and auxiliary verbs present in the tagged dataset. The focus on verbs and auxiliary verbs is crucial, as they play a

significant role in determining the transitivity processes within the text.

To extract the relevant verbs, the 'word' function was employed, generating a comprehensive list of verbs utilized in the headlines. The results of this analysis are illustrated in the following figures, which visually represent the identified transitivity processes and highlight the patterns of verb used within the news headlines.

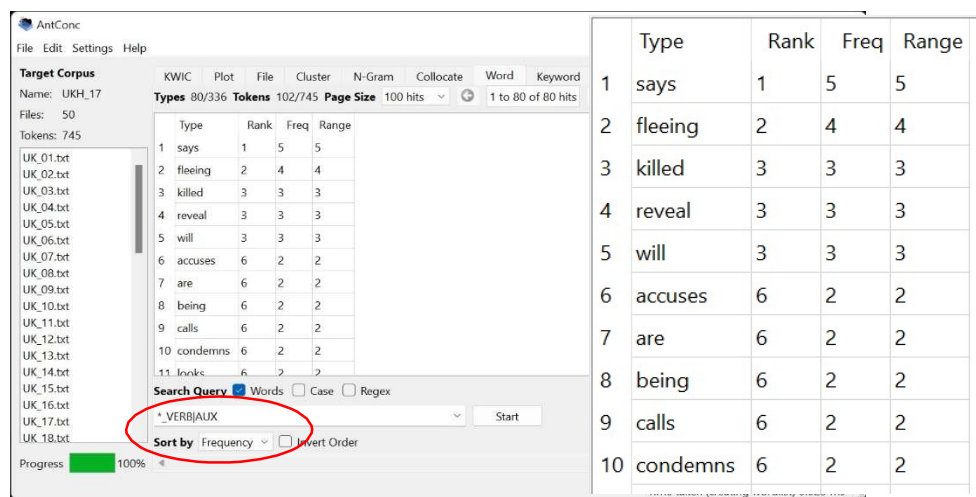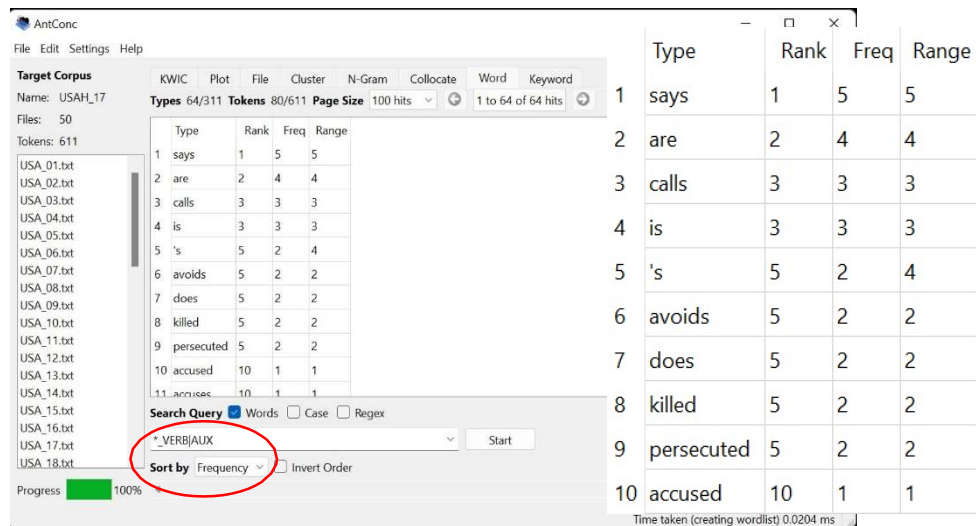Figure 5. Frequency Distribution of Verbs and Auxiliary Verbs in UKHL_17

Figure 6. Frequency Distribution of Verbs and Auxiliary Verbs in USHL_17

Figures 5 and 6 present the results of searches for verbs using the *_VERB|AUX wildcard, with frequency selected as the sorting criterion. Figure 4 reveals that the UKHL_17 corpus contains a total of 80 distinct verb types, resulting in 102 tokens overall. Conversely, Figure 5 indicates that the USH_17 corpus includes 60 tokens corresponding to 64 types of verbs. Notably, both figures highlight that "says" emerges as the most frequently used verb in the news headlines from both the UK and the US. This initial finding suggests that verbal processes may dominate the transitivity processes within both corpora; however, such a conclusion requires further analysis of the individual texts to substantiate it.

Organizing the selected verbs and auxiliary verbs clarifies the context of each instance, enabling a detailed evaluation of their roles in transitivity processes. The results from the tagged data and manual analysis of these verbs are summarized in the table below.

Table 3. Transitivity Process Distribution

Transitivity Processes	UKHL_17	USHL_17
Material	29	27
Mental	4	4
Verbal	16	16
Behavioral	2	2
Relational	5	14

To enhance clarity in the distribution of transitivity processes, the findings have been converted into percentage calculations. The chart below depicts the percentage of each process within both corpora.

Figure 7. Distribution of Transitivity Processes Across Both Corpora
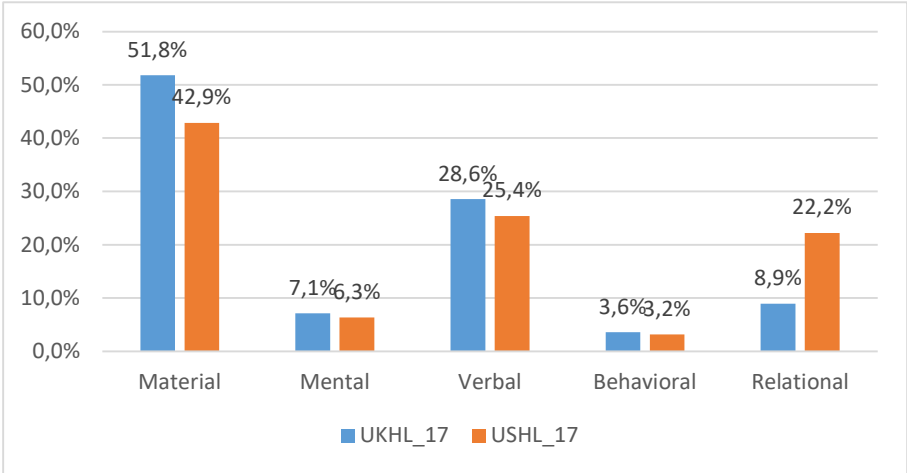
The chart presented above reveals a significant degree of similarity in the transitivity processes across both corpora. Specifically, five primary processes are delineated in Figure 4, with the material process emerging as the most prominent among them. This finding suggests that both corpora share a common focus, prioritizing material processes that depict tangible actions or events. Following the material process in order of occurrence are the verbal, relational, mental, and behavioral. Although the results indicate the presence of five processes in both corpora, the discussion section will focus on four main processes only: material, verbal, relational, and mental.

4.1.1. Material Process

In the UKHL_17 corpus, material processes dominate, accounting for 51.8% of the headlines (29 occurrences), while the USHL_17 corpus contains 42.9% (27 occurrences) headlines that include material processes (see figure 8). This prevalence reflects a shared journalistic preference for reporting events marked by clear actions or occurrences. Both corpora, therefore, prioritize immediacy and direct engagement with events, presenting the Rohingya crisis as an urgent and action-oriented issue, where significant events are portrayed through dynamic actions or reactions.

Figure 8. Distribution of material process in both corpora
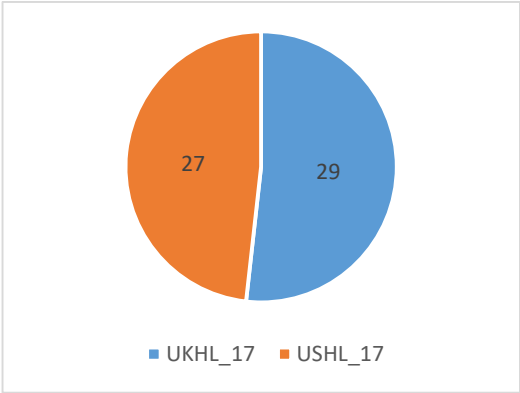
Material processes in news headlines are often marked by verbs that denote actions or changes. In both corpora, these verbs include terms like *drop, cancel, find, flee, ban, march*, and *persecuted* (see table 4). These verbs highlight activities or states that involve movement, conflict, or transformation, reinforcing the perception of a crisis involving active, sometimes violent events. For example, in the headline "*Thousands of Rohingya refugees flee amid claims of 'genocide' of Muslim minority*" (UK_40), the verb *flee* emphasizes the Rohingya's reaction to an imminent threat, underscoring the urgency of the crisis and their dire circumstances.

Table 4. Samples of Material Process

Data		Headline	Process Type	Participants
UKHL_17	UK_8	6,700 Rohingya Muslims killed in one month in Myanmar, MSF says	Material	Actor: Unspecified (implied agents); Goal: 6,700 Rohingya Muslims
	UK_9	Aung San Suu Kyi stripped of the Freedom of Dublin as Burma's Rohingya crisis deepens	Material	Actor: Unspecified (implied authority); Goal: Aung San Suu Kyi, Freedom of Dublin
	UK_10	Eight-months-pregnant woman was gang-raped by soldiers after they decapitated her son: Brave survivors reveal the hell of Myanmar's Rohingya ethnic purge	Material	Actor: Soldiers; Goal: Eight-months-pregnant woman, her son
	UK_20	Rohingya crisis: US suspends official travel to Burma as Rex Tillerson accuses regime of 'ethnic cleansing'	Material	Actor: US (Rex Tillerson); Goal: Official travel, Burma's regime
	UK_32	Oxford college drops Aung San Suu Kyi from common room's name	Material	Actor: Oxford college; Goal: Aung San Suu Kyi
	UK_40	Myanmar violence: Thousands of Rohingya refugees flee amid claims of 'genocide' of Muslim minority	Material	Actor: Thousands of Rohingya refugees; Goal: Fleeing due to 'genocide' of Muslim minority
	UK_41	Mob of Rohingya refugees savagely beat and lynch suspected child snatcher at refugee camp after crossing into Bangladesh	Material	Actor: Mob of Rohingya refugees; Goal: Suspected child snatcher
	UK_45	Rohingya Muslim crisis: Burma cancels UN visit to site of alleged ethnic cleansing 'because of bad weather'	Material	Actor: Burma; Goal: UN visit
	UK_46	Prince Charles and Camilla CANCEL visit to Myanmar amid Rohingya 'ethnic cleansing'	Material	Actor: Prince Charles and Camilla; Goal: Visit to Myanmar
	UK_34	Hundreds of Rohingya Muslims are being 'systematically' killed in Burma, Amnesty International warns	Material	Actor: Implied (likely Myanmar military or government forces); Goal: Hundreds of Rohingya Muslims
USHL_17	US_3	A new wave of Burmese finds refuge in Indiana	Material	Actor: A new wave of Burmese; Goal: Refuge; Circumstance: In Indiana
	US_5	Where Would I Go?' Thousands Of Rohingya Flee Myanmar After A Bloody Week	Material	Actor: Thousands of Rohingya; Goal: Flee; Circumstance: Myanmar, after a bloody week
	US_7	Thousands of Rohingya Muslims Flee Violence in Burma	Material	Actor: Thousands of Rohingya Muslims; Goal: Flee; Circumstance: Violence in Burma
	US_11	Bangladesh ramps up border patrols to deter fresh Rohingya inflow	Material	Actor: Bangladesh; Goal: Ramps up border patrols; Circumstance: To deter fresh Rohingya inflow
	US_20	Myanmar bans special UN envoy from visiting country	Material	Actor: Myanmar; Goal: special UN envoy; Circumstance: from visiting country
	US_25	At least 6,700 Rohingya died in Myanmar crackdown, aid group says	Material	Actor: 6,700 Rohingya
	US_28	Pope Francis meets Suu Kyi in Myanmar, avoids mention of Rohingya	Material	Actor: Pope Francis; Goal: Suu Kyi, mention of Rohingya
	US_32	Thousands march in support of Myanmar military	Material	Actor: Thousands; Circumstance: in support of Myanmar military
	US_39	Aung San Suu Kyi sidesteps atrocity allegations in first address on Rohingya crisis	Material	Actor: Aung San Suu Kyi; Goal: atrocity allegations
	US_44	They've been persecuted by the government for years. Now, some of Myanmar's Rohingya are taking up arms	Material	Actor: government, some of Myanmar's Rohingya; Goal: arms

In the UK corpus, headlines such as "*Hundreds of Rohingya Muslims are being 'systematically' killed in Burma*" (UK_34) and "*Aung San Suu Kyi stripped of the Freedom of Dublin*" (UK_9) present the Rohingya as victims of violence, with little agency or action. These material processes depict the Rohingya as passive recipients of actions taken by external actors, which in this case are implied, rather than explicitly named. The passive construction of "*are being killed*" minimizes the agency of the Rohingya and shifts the focus toward the violence inflicted upon them, thus drawing attention to their victimhood without necessarily identifying the perpetrators. This can be seen as a strategy that amplifies humanitarian concern but avoids direct confrontation with the entities responsible for the violence.

Similarly, the US corpus also emphasizes the Rohingya's victimhood, with headlines like "*Thousands of Rohingya Flee Myanmar After A Bloody Week*" (US_5) and "*At*

least 6,700 Rohingya died in Myanmar crackdown" (US_25). These headlines focus on the Rohingya's suffering, presenting them as passive victims in response to external aggression. These material processes underscore the displacement and death of the Rohingya, once again highlighting their lack of agency in the crisis. The verbs *flee* and *died* further emphasize the reactive nature of the Rohingya's actions, framing them as a people trying to escape violence or surviving in a brutal political environment.

However, there are instances in the US corpus where the Rohingya are depicted as active agents. For instance, the headline "*Now, some of Myanmar's Rohingya are taking up arms*" (US_44) illustrates a shift in agency. Here, the Rohingya are presented not as passive victims but as active participants in their own defense, taking up arms in resistance to their persecution. This example contrasts with the more victimized portrayal seen in other headlines and introduces a more complex narrative, suggesting that the Rohingya are not only responding to external violence but are also fighting back against it. Such instances challenge the dominant narrative of victimhood and offer a more nuanced view of the Rohingya's agency in the face of crisis.

The difference in agency is not limited to the portrayal of the Rohingya. In both corpora, the perpetrators of violence are often implicit or indirect. In the UK corpus, for example, in the headline "*Hundreds of Rohingya Muslims are being 'systematically' killed in Burma*" (UK_34), the perpetrators of the violence are not clearly named. This vagueness could be a rhetorical strategy that shifts the focus away from the Myanmar government or military, potentially diffusing blame and avoiding direct condemnation. This lack of specificity may influence public perception by softening the narrative of responsibility, making the crisis appear more like an unfortunate, faceless conflict rather than one rooted in identifiable, systemic oppression.

In contrast, the US corpus tends to name the perpetrators more directly, such as in "*Myanmar bans special UN envoy from visiting country*" (US_20), where the actor Myanmar is explicitly named. This headline frames Myanmar's actions in a way that foregrounds the state's resistance to international intervention, presenting Myanmar

as an active participant in the conflict who is trying to block external efforts to address the crisis. By directly identifying Myanmar as the actor, this construction adds a layer of political complexity, portraying the crisis as not only a humanitarian issue but also one involving state sovereignty and international diplomacy.

International responses in both corpora are framed in ways that often position external actors as either neutral or defensive. In the UK corpus, for example, the headline "*Amnesty International warns*" (UK_34) presents international organizations as more observers than active participants in the resolution of the crisis. Similarly, "*Pope Francis meets Suu Kyi in Myanmar*" (UK_28) emphasizes a diplomatic engagement that avoids directly addressing the plight of the Rohingya, reflecting the limitations of international intervention in politically sensitive contexts. This framing suggests that while there is awareness of the crisis on the global stage, the actions taken by international actors are often constrained or indirect.

The US corpus, similarly, portrays international actors in a defensive light. For instance, "*Bangladesh ramps up border patrols to deter fresh Rohingya inflow*" (US_11) presents Bangladesh's actions as a measure to protect its borders from the influx of refugees, rather than as part of a broader international humanitarian response. This framing shifts the focus toward the national security concerns of the receiving country, while downplaying the larger humanitarian dimensions of the crisis. This subtle shift reflects the difficulties in mobilizing global action when crises cross international boundaries and involve complex political dynamics.

Lastly, circumstantial details in both corpora add nuance to the reporting of the Rohingya crisis. In the UK, the headline "*Mob of Rohingya refugees savagely beat and lynch suspected child snatcher*" (UK_41) shifts the focus from the violence perpetrated by Myanmar's military to the actions of the refugees themselves. This type of framing risks casting the refugees in a negative light, suggesting that they are perpetrators of violence, even in the context of their displacement. In contrast, the US corpus generally maintains the focus on Myanmar's role in instigating the crisis, with headlines like "*Thousands of Rohingya Muslims Flee Violence*

in Burma" (US_7) that directly attribute the crisis to ongoing violence perpetrated by Myanmar's forces, thus sustaining a clear distinction between the victims and the perpetrators.

Furthermore, the linguistic choices in both corpora play a crucial role in shaping public perceptions of the Rohingya crisis. In both the UK and US corpora, the Rohingya are generally depicted as victims, often stripped of agency and framed as responding to external violence. However, the US corpus sometimes presents a more complex portrayal, depicting the Rohingya as active participants in their struggle, especially during instances of resistance. In contrast, the UK corpus emphasizes the Rohingya as passive sufferers of violence and displacement. The portrayal of perpetrators is vaguer in the UK corpus, often leaving the identity of those responsible for the violence implicit, whereas the US corpus occasionally names Myanmar explicitly as the perpetrator. International responses are similarly framed as neutral or defensive in both corpora, with little indication of meaningful intervention.

4.1.2. Verbal Process

Both the UKHL_17 and USHL_17 corpora exhibit an identical frequency of verbal processes, each recording 16 instances (see figure 9). This equality suggests a shared journalistic tendency in both corpora towards incorporating verbal processes, potentially indicating a balanced approach to reporting through direct speech or reported dialogue. This consistency might highlight a common strategy across both the UK and US headlines in conveying immediacy and capturing the voices of key figures.

Figure 9. Distribution of verbal process in both

corpora
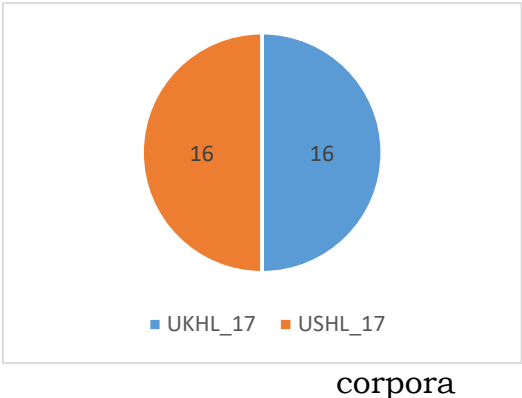
In Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), verbal processes are crucial for conveying speech, thoughts, or expressions, with specific participant roles shaping the interpretation of these processes. The primary roles include the Sayer, Verbiage, and Receiver. The Sayer is the source of communication, often represented by influential figures or institutions, giving weight and credibility to the statements made. Verbiage represents the content or message itself, while the Receiver is the target or audience of the communication, even if not always explicitly mentioned. Through analyzing these participant roles, it is possible to understand how each media outlet constructs its narrative by selecting particular voices, expressions, and perspectives that shape the discourse on events.

The analysis of the verbal processes in the UK and US corpora reveals important insights into how each country's media portrays the events and actors involved, particularly concerning the Rohingya people. Both the UK and US media employ similar rhetorical strategies, but there are key differences in how the narratives are framed and what these frames convey about their respective positions on the crisis. Samples of verbal process occurrences in both corpora are presented in the table below.

Table 5. Samples of Verbal Process

Data		Headline	Process Type	Participants
UKHL_17	UK_13	Pope calls for 'respect of each ethnic group' in Myanmar but fails to mention plight of Rohingya Muslims	Verbal	Sayer: Pope; Verbiage: Calls for 'respect of each ethnic group', fails to mention plight of Rohingya Muslims
	UK_22	US Holocaust Museum says evidence of genocide against Rohingya in Myanmar	Verbal	Sayer: US Holocaust Museum; Verbiage: evidence of genocide against Rohingya in Myanmar
	UK_23	Theresa May condemns 'what looks like ethnic cleansing' of Muslim refugees in Myanmar	Verbal	Sayer: Theresa May; Verbiage: what looks like ethnic cleansing of Muslim refugees in Myanmar
	UK_35	Rohingya crisis: Amnesty accuses Myanmar of crimes against humanity	Verbal	Sayer: Amnesty; Target: Myanmar; Verbiage: crimes against humanity
	UK_37	Burmese government denies ongoing genocide of Rohingya Muslims	Verbal	Sayer: Burmese government; Verbiage: ongoing genocide of Rohingya Muslims
USHL_17	US_1	Myanmar report says no evidence of Rohingya abuses	Verbal	Sayer: Myanmar report; Verbiage: No evidence of Rohingya abuses
	US_9	Myanmar's Aung San Suu Kyi says "huge iceberg of misinformation" around Rohingya crisis	Verbal	Sayer: Myanmar's Aung San Suu Kyi; Verbiage: "Huge iceberg of misinformation" around Rohingya crisis
	US_14	Bangladesh accuses Myanmar of violating airspace as Rohingya crisis grows	Verbal	Sayer: Bangladesh; Target: Myanmar; Verbiage: violating airspace
	US_15	Rohingya militants vow to fight Myanmar despite disastrous cost	Verbal	Sayer: Rohingya militants; Verbiage: to fight Myanmar despite disastrous cost
	US_33	US calls for end of violence in Myanmar	Verbal	Sayer: US; Verbiage: end of violence in Myanmar

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The UKHL_17 corpus tends to use verbal processes involving authoritative figures who make statements with varying degrees of directness. For example, the headline "*Pope calls for 'respect of each ethnic group in Myanmar but fails to mention plight of Rohingya Muslims*" (UK_13) positions the Pope as the Sayer with a general call for respect but does not specifically address the Rohingya. This choice suggests diplomatic caution, reflecting the Vatican's approach to maintain relations without directly confronting Myanmar. Similarly, in "*Theresa May condemns 'what looks like ethnic cleansing' of Muslim refugees in Myanmar*" (UK_23), May's hedged language ("*what looks like*") implies concern without full commitment to labeling the situation as ethnic cleansing. Such wording suggests the careful balance in UK media, showing sympathy without risking political consequences.

The UK corpus also includes headlines like "*Amnesty accuses Myanmar of crimes against humanity*" (UK_35), where the Sayer is Amnesty, and "*Burmese government denies ongoing genocide of Rohingya Muslims*" (UK_37), with Myanmar as the Sayer denying responsibility. These examples highlight the UK media's approach of featuring strong accusations but often through the voices of external organizations, maintaining a layer of distance in their reporting.

On the other hand, the US corpus takes a somewhat more direct approach. Headlines such as "*Bangladesh accuses Myanmar of violating airspace as Rohingya crisis grows*" (US_14) openly frame Bangladesh as the Sayer accusing Myanmar, reflecting a willingness to report explicit criticism from other nations. In contrast, "*Myanmar report says no evidence of Rohingya abuses*" (US_1) shows Myanmar's attempt to downplay the crisis, reinforcing the US media's tendency to present conflicting narratives and highlight Myanmar's denials.

The US headlines also emphasize the agency of the Rohingya. In "*Rohingya militants vow to fight Myanmar despite disastrous cost*" (US_15), the Sayer is the Rohingya militants, indicating an active response to their persecution. The use of "*vow*" portrays a determined stance, offering a complex view of the Rohingya as both victims and agents of

resistance. This portrayal contrasts with the more passive depiction often seen in UK reporting, adding depth to the narrative.

The US media also features calls for action from influential actors, such as in "*US calls for end of violence in Myanmar*" (US_33). While this demonstrates international appeals for peace, the broad nature of such statements may lack the specificity needed to drive impactful change. Still, these headlines position the US as an active observer with a vested interest in addressing the crisis.

In general, the stance of both media outlets reflects broader political dynamics at play in their respective countries. The UK's media approach is more diplomatic, emphasizing global concern while being cautious not to provoke Myanmar directly, whereas the US media is somewhat more direct and confrontational, offering stronger support for international condemnations and recognizing the agency of the Rohingya in the context of resistance. This divergence illustrates how media discourse is shaped by both international power relations and domestic political priorities, with the UK opting for a more diplomatic balance and the US taking a more assertive role in framing the Rohingya crisis.

4.1.3. Relational Process

Relational processes, which classify or identify participants, are used to frame narratives in distinct ways in US and UK news headlines about the Rohingya crisis. The analysis indicates a higher occurrence of relational processes in US headlines:14 instances in the USH_17 corpus, than in UK headlines: 5 instances in the UKHL_17 corpus (see figure 10). Verbs like *mark, are, make up,* and *is* are central to expressing these processes, linking participants to attributes and establishing their roles within the news.

Figure 10. Distribution of relational process in both corpora
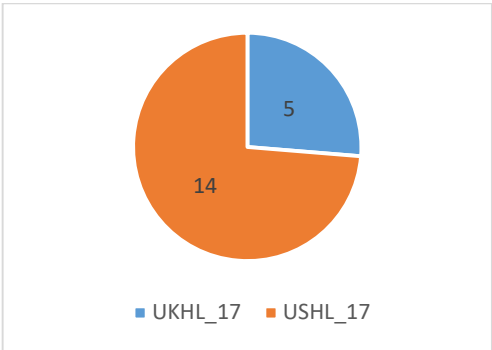
Relational processes, which are used to attribute characteristics or identify participants, are key in shaping the narratives around the Rohingya people and the crisis in Myanmar. The analysis of these relational processes reveals not only how the media represent actors, but also how these representations reflect the broader political and social stances of the UK and US media. The table below showcases samples of occurrences samples of relational processes in both corpora.

Table 6. Samples of Mental Process

Data	Headline	Process Type	Participants
UK_43	Aung San Suu Kyi is not worthy of her Nobel Peace Prize	Relational	Carrier: Aung San Suu Kyi; Attribute: not worthy of her Nobel Peace Prize
UK_4	Today marks four months since the start of the Rohingya refugee crisis and the situation remains dire	Relational (Attributive)	Carrier: The situation; Attribute: Remains dire
UK_19	These are the scars and burns of the Rohingya refugees fleeing	Relational (Attributive)	Carrier: The scars and burns; Attribute: Of the Rohingya refugees fleeing
US_18	Traumatized and needy, Rohingya children make up 60 percent of Myanmar refugees	Relational	Carrier: Rohingya children; Attribute: 60 percent of Myanmar refugees
US_22	Violent rape just one of many disasters for Rohingya refugees	Relational	Carrier: Violent rape; Attribute: one of many disasters for Rohingya refugees
US_12	Why Prejudice Runs Deep Against Rohingya Muslims Of Myanmar	Relational (Attributive)	Carrier: Prejudice; Attribute: Runs deep against Rohingya Muslims of Myanmar

In the UKHL_17, relational processes often provide evaluative commentary on key figures and situations. For instance, "*Aung San Suu Kyi is not worthy of her Nobel Peace Prize*" (UK_43) assigns the attribute "*not worthy*" to Suu Kyi, signaling the UK media's critical stance toward her inaction during the crisis. Similarly, "*Today marks four months since the start of the Rohingya refugee crisis and the situation remains dire*" (UK_4) emphasizes the ongoing nature of the crisis, framing it as a prolonged and urgent issue. These examples showcase how the UK media uses relational processes to highlight the persistence and severity of the situation.

UK headlines also use relational processes to evoke empathy and underscore the suffering of the Rohingya people. The headline, "*These are the scars and burns of the Rohingya refugees fleeing*" (UK_19), links the physical injuries (the Carrier) to the experience of the refugees (the Attribute), symbolizing trauma and hardship. Another headline, "*The Rohingya's plight is a humanitarian crisis that must not be ignored*" (UK_31), uses a relational process to frame the Rohingya situation as an undeniable crisis, urging

international attention. This type of framing illustrates how the UK media portrays the Rohingya as victims, seeking to draw global sympathy and action.

In contrast, USHL_17 use relational processes to highlight the human toll and the scale of violence faced by the Rohingya. The headline, "*Traumatized and needy, Rohingya children make up 60 percent of Myanmar refugees*" (US_18), draws attention to the significant impact on children, presenting them as innocent victims who suffer disproportionately. Another headline, "*Why Prejudice Runs Deep Against Rohingya Muslims of Myanmar*" (US_12), uses a relational process to connect systemic prejudice (the Carrier) with its deep-rooted nature (the Attribute), emphasizing the entrenched discrimination faced by the Rohingya. This approach highlights the broader societal issues fueling the crisis.

US headlines also focus on the brutality of violence through relational processes. The headline "*Violent rape just one of many disasters for Rohingya refugees*" (US_22) connects the act of violence (the Carrier) to a broader pattern of suffering (the Attribute), portraying the crisis as multifaceted and severe. Another example, "*The Rohingya crisis is marked by acts of unspeakable violence*" (US_25), uses relational processes to underline the extreme nature of the conflict and reinforce the urgency for international response.

The differences in the use of relational processes between the UK and US media reflect not just varying degrees of emphasis on certain aspects of the crisis but also a divergence in stance. The UK media tends to frame the crisis through victimhood, focusing on the human suffering of the Rohingya, while the US media, though similarly portraying the Rohingya as victims, takes a more direct and confrontational stance, emphasizing violence, prejudice, and the urgency of intervention. These differences reflect the broader political contexts of each country, with the UK media adopting a more cautious and diplomatic tone and the US media presenting a more explicit condemnation of Myanmar's actions.

4.1.4 Mental Process

In SFL, mental processes involve two primary participants, senser and phenomenon. Senser refers to the participant who experiences the thought, emotion, or

perception. The Senser is typically a conscious entity, often representing individuals or groups with an active mental response. Meanwhile, phenomenon denotes the object or event that is experienced or perceived, often encapsulating the situation or element that triggers the mental response. These processes are crucial for conveying reactions, fears, and emotional responses, thereby influencing public perception and empathy.

Figure 11. Distribution of mental process in both
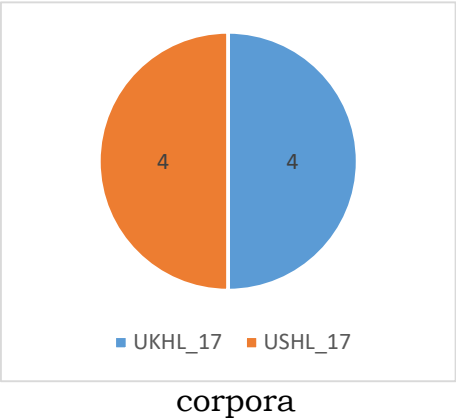
corpora

As observed in Figure 11 above, both the UKHL_17 and USHL_17 corpora contain the same number of occurrences of the mental process, each presenting this process 4 times in the headlines. Mental processes, which pertain to sensing and encompassing feelings, thoughts, and perceptions, are used in news headlines with verbs such as angered, *fear, recall, mourn,* and *enrage* (see table 7). The presence of these verbs highlights how each corpus represents emotional and cognitive reactions, inviting readers to consider the subjective experiences of those involved in or affected by the Rohingya crisis.

Table 7. Samples of Mental Process

Data		Headline	Process Type	Participants
UKHL_17	UK_18	The plight of the Rohingya almost moves Penny Mordaunt to tears as she meets refugees in Bangladesh weeks after taking over from bungling Priti Patel	Mental	Senser: Penny Mordaunt; Phenomenon: The plight of the Rohingya; Circumstance: Almost moves to tears
	UK_47	Myanmar Muslims fear further 'turning of the tide'	Mental	Senser: Myanmar Muslims; Phenomenon: further 'turning of the tide'
	UK_50	Burma angered as EU backs UN investigation into plight of Rohingya Muslims	Mental	Senser: Burma; Phenomenon: EU backs UN investigation
USHL_17	US_2	Burma's Rohingya Muslims mourn the end of the Obama era — and worry about Trump	Mental	Senser: Burma's Rohingya Muslims; Phenomenon: Mourn the end of the Obama era; worry about Trump
	US_4	World's "most persecuted minority" recall the horrors of home	Mental	Senser: World's "most persecuted minority"; Phenomenon: The horrors of home
	US_41	The horror of the Rohingya crisis has enraged Pakistanis, sparking huge protests	Mental	Senser: Pakistanis; Phenomenon: the horror of the Rohingya crisis; Actor: (implied); Goal: protests

In the UKHL_17 corpus, a headline such as *"The plight of the Rohingya almost moves Penny Mordaunt to tears as she meets refugees in Bangladesh weeks after taking over from bungling Priti Patel"* (UK_18) demonstrates a mental process where Penny Mordaunt is the senser, and "the plight of the Rohingya" is the phenomenon. The phrase *"almost moves to tears"* indicates an intense emotional response, illustrating that the severity of the crisis affects even high-profile political figures. This choice of language aims to generate empathy among readers by showing that those in power are emotionally moved, reinforcing the urgency and human cost of the crisis.

Another UK headline, *"Myanmar Muslims fear further 'turning of the tide"* (UK_47), portrays Myanmar Muslims as the senser and *"Further 'turning of the tide"* as the phenomenon. The verb *"fear"* suggests a state of anxiety and anticipation, emphasizing the ongoing danger and instability faced by the Rohingya. This kind of framing underscores the sense of uncertainty and continuous threat, painting a picture of a community under constant pressure.

A politically charged example is *"Burma angered as EU backs UN investigation into plight of Rohingya Muslims"* (UK_50). Here, Burma acts as the senser, with the phenomenon being *"EU backs UN investigation"*. The use of *"angered"* signals a defensive reaction from the Burmese government, portraying its resistance to international scrutiny. This choice of language highlights the tension between domestic responses and global intervention, suggesting a clash of perspectives and interests regarding the crisis.

The USHL_17 corpus similarly emphasizes mental processes but often shifts the focus to the emotional state of the Rohingya themselves. For instance, *"Burma's Rohingya Muslims mourn the end of the Obama era — and worry about Trump"* (US_2) features the Rohingya as the senser and *"mourn the end of the Obama era"* and *"worry about Trump"* as phenomena. This headline reflects how political shifts in the US trigger significant concern among the Rohingya, illustrating their perception of global leadership changes as crucial to their safety and future.

The headline *"World's 'most persecuted minority' recall the horrors of home"* (US_4) underscores the trauma

experienced by the Rohingya. The senser, *"world's 'most persecuted minority'"* and the phenomenon, *"the horrors of home"*, indicate how the memory of past suffering remains vivid. The verb "recall" suggests that these memories are enduring and that their trauma has long-lasting impacts. This portrayal deepens the understanding of the crisis by focusing on its continuous psychological toll.

Lastly, *"The horror of the Rohingya crisis has enraged Pakistanis, sparking huge protests"* (US_41) uses Pakistanis as the senser and *"the horror of the Rohingya crisis"* as the phenomenon. The word *"enraged"* captures a strong, collective emotional reaction, showing how the crisis extends beyond the Rohingya to impact other communities, leading to widespread activism. This depiction underlines the crisis's far-reaching impact and the solidarity it inspires across borders.

Both corpora reflect a stance of solidarity with the Rohingya, using mental processes to humanize their plight and highlight the emotional dimensions of the crisis. However, while the UK media leans towards showcasing external emotional reactions and political commentary, the US media tends to present a more internal perspective, focusing on the fears, anxieties, and memories of the Rohingya themselves. This nuanced difference illustrates the respective media's approaches: the UK emphasizes external humanitarian responsibility, whereas the US underscores the direct impact on the affected population and the global ramifications of political actions.

5. CONCLUSION

This study provides a critical analysis of how the Rohingya crisis was framed in the media through the lens of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), particularly focusing on the transitivity model to examine how is the construction of newspaper headlines from the United Kingdom and the United States in 2017. By employing a corpus-based Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach, this research has contributed to the understanding of how language constructs and reinforces ideological positions in the media portrayal of the Rohingya crisis.

The analysis revealed several important patterns in the representation of the Rohingya crisis. Material processes dominated in both the UK and US corpora, accounting for 51.8% and 42.9% of all

processes, respectively, highlighting the active events or actions involved in the crisis. These processes often emphasized the Rohingya's suffering, presenting them as passive recipients of violence or displacement. Common verbs such as *flee, find,* and *fleeing* were used frequently, positioning the Rohingya as a people reacting to external aggression. This portrayal aligns with the media's tendency to frame the Rohingya as innocent victims of a humanitarian disaster, rather than highlighting their agency or the complexities of the situation.

In both corpora, verbal processes also played a significant role, with 28.6% of processes in the UK corpus and 25.4% in the US corpus representing statements and discussions around the crisis. Relational processes followed, constituting 22% in the UK corpus and 22.2% in the US corpus, reflecting how the identity of the Rohingya and the nature of the crisis were framed. Mental processes, which capture internal states or feelings, accounted for 7.1% in the UK and 6.3% in the US, highlighting the emotional and psychological aspects of the crisis in a limited way.

The study also identified instances where the Rohingya were framed as active agents in the crisis, particularly in the US corpus, where some headlines (though in the minority) depicted the Rohingya as taking up arms in resistance, offering a more complex narrative that included their agency. This contrast between the passive victim and the active resistance serves as an important distinction in the media's framing of the Rohingya's role in the conflict. It suggests a shift in the portrayal of the Rohingya from helpless refugees to a group involved in their own defense, thus challenging the oversimplified victim narrative.

Additionally, the study highlighted the different ways in which the perpetrators of violence were portrayed in both corpora. In the UK headlines, perpetrators were often implied or presented in vague terms, which can serve to diffuse blame or shift the focus away from specific actors like the Myanmar government. In contrast, the US corpus tended to name the perpetrators more directly, with Myanmar frequently identified as the aggressor. This difference in how responsibility is assigned reflects broader geopolitical dynamics and editorial stances within each country, as the UK and US media outlets frame the crisis from different political and humanitarian perspectives.

The use of corpus-based methods in this study allowed for a more objective, data-driven analysis, in contrast to traditional CDA methods that often rely on manual interpretation of smaller datasets. By utilizing tools like TagAnt and AntConc, this research was able to identify linguistic patterns across a large number of headlines, offering a more comprehensive view of the media's role in shaping the discourse around the Rohingya crisis. This approach not only enhances the reliability of the

findings but also allows for the identification of subtle variations and trends that may otherwise go unnoticed.

In conclusion, this study underscores the power of media language in shaping public perceptions of international crises, particularly in relation to victimhood, agency, and responsibility. The findings suggest that media portrayals of the Rohingya crisis often frame the Rohingya as passive victims (with material processes dominating in both corpora), while either obscuring or simplifying the portrayal of the perpetrators. This highlights the need for more detailed and comprehensive coverage of the crisis, one that acknowledges the complexity of the situation and the agency of the affected group. Furthermore, it demonstrates the potential of corpus-based CDA to provide valuable insights into how language shapes the ideological underpinnings of media narratives, offering a robust framework for future research on media representations of global conflicts.

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