

The Impact of Narrativity in Shaping Political Discourse:  
Al-Mulla's TV Show as a Model



أثر السردية في تشكيل الخطاب السياسي: برنامج الملا التلفزيوني أتمودجًا

أ.م.د. وفاء مظفر علي

كلية الآداب جامعة الموصل

[wafa.mudhaffar@uomsul.edu.iq](mailto:wafa.mudhaffar@uomsul.edu.iq)

حسام عبدالجبار محمد جفال

مساعد الطالب. أستاذ في قسم اللغة

الانجليزية كلية الآداب جامعة الموصل

[hussam.23arp33@student.uomosul.edu.iq](mailto:hussam.23arp33@student.uomosul.edu.iq)



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## The Impact of Narrativity in Shaping Political Discourse: Al-Mulla's TV Show as a Model

### The Impact of Narrativity in Shaping Political Discourse: Al-Mulla's TV Show as a Model

**Hussam Abduljabbar Mohammed  
Jaffal: M.A**  
Student Asst. Prof. in the  
Department of English, College of  
Arts, University of Mosul

**Dr. Wafaa Mudhafar Ali**  
College of Arts,  
University of Mosul

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#### المستخلص

يستكشف هذا البحث كيف تعمل السردية بوصفها بُعداً من أبعاد الفاعلين الذين يؤثرون في الخطاب السياسي على نطاق واسع وداخل وسائل الإعلام العامة. وعلى وجه الخصوص، يحلل الاستجابات المتعلقة بكيفية انخراط السرديات في تشكيل تصوّر الجمهور وتشكيل الخطاب العام حول القضايا السياسية، مستخدماً برنامج «مع الملا» التلفزيوني دراسة حالة له. ولتحقيق هذا الهدف، تم تبني منهج متعدد التخصصات بالاستفادة من مجالات الاتصال السياسي، ودراسات الإعلام، ونظرية السرد، لتحليل كيفية توظيف الملا لهذه الاستراتيجيات في صياغة السرديات السياسية والتأثير في موقف المشاهد تجاه الأحداث السياسية، والأيديولوجيات،

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والشخصيات الفردية. ومن خلال دراسة الاستراتيجيات السردية المستخدمة، سيسعى البحث الحالي إلى تحديد آثار السرديات الإعلامية على المشاركة السياسية والرأي العام والإجراءات الديمقراطية. وهكذا، سيوفر البحث مزيداً من الرؤى حول دلالات السرديات الإعلامية في التأثير على مواقف الجمهور والرأي العام.

### Abstract

This paper explores how narrativity works as a dimension of actants that influences political discourse at large and within public media. In particular, it analyzes responses to how narratives are involved in shaping public perception and shaping the public discourse on political issues using Al Mulla TV show as its case study. To this aim, this research has been made interdisciplinary exploiting the field of political communication, media studies and narrative theory to analyze how Al Mulla employs these strategies in crafting political narratives and influencing the viewer attitude towards political events, ideology and individual figures. Through studying the employed narrative strategies, the present paper will identify the effects of media narratives on political involvement and public opinions and democratic procedures. Thus, it will provide more perspectives into the implications of media narratives on influencing public attitudes and public opinion.

### Introduction

The paper looks into how the narrativity works in the mass media political discourse and with focus on Al-Mulla's TV show to understand how the narration has been working to create the public perception. Political commentary plus its narrative technique, which includes interesting characterization of the political figures as heroes or villains and the structured plot development which portrays political events as unfolding dramas are some of the show's blending skills. These strategies convert issues that seem complex into emotionally satisfying and morally framed narratives that they draw individuals to the positions they desire them to adopt politically. In looking into these narrative elements, the study shows how media manages to make storytelling not only inform political beliefs but also political attitudes and engagement of modern democratic societies.

### Literature Review

This section combines a detailed study of works evaluating both narrativity and discourse analysis and their uses in media interviews alongside political communication fields. Researchers use various theoretical methods and analytical strategies to analyze how language shape political discourse through narrative approaches.





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Phelan, S. (2007) wrote the chapter “Irish media, Iraq, and the charge of anti-Americanism” as a part in the book *Media images of the Iraq war*, edited by S. A. Nohrstedt & R. Ottosen. This study establishes fundamental groundwork for the study through its objectives which celebrate the investigation of Iraqi political interviews while generating fresh analysis for both discourse analysis and political communication fields. Political differences are subjected to control through the essentializing device known as anti-Americanism (p. 297).

Høyer, A. B. (2008) accomplished the study titled “*The battle of hearts and minds: An analysis of the Iraq war discourse in politics and newspapers*” It performs an important examination of persuasive communication methods used throughout the Iraq War discourse. It also analyzes how political storytellers along with media organizations shaped public opinion through their representations while advancing larger political goals to secure "hearts and minds" acceptance.\

The study titled “Discourse Analytical Study of Teachers’ Language and Gender with Specific Reference to EFL Classroom in Iraq” by Muna Mohammed Abbas (2010) investigates language dynamics between gender and education through its analysis of a specific academic setting. It focuses on comparing linguistic behavior among EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teachers particularly from both genders who teach at the Department of English within University of Babylon's College of Education.

In her study, *Discourse Analysis into the Classroom of Iraqi EFL Undergraduate Learners* (2010), Nadia Hassun explains the evaluation of written discourse remains a complicated undertaking. This study shows that students can develop writing abilities through discourse analysis by learning to understand theoretical structures along with meaningful text content. She states:

The study proves that written discourse and analyzing it is not an easy task. The reader cannot easily interpret the meaning of what is written because of the many problems present in the text. However, the different approaches employed to identify those problems in the text help to write a text without losing meaningful content. (p. 705)

Dana Štěrbová conducted the diploma thesis “Critical Discourse Analysis of George W. Bush’s Speeches Prior to the War in Iraq” (2016) which investigates former President George W. Bush's discursive approaches built through linguistic methods to validate sending troops to Iraq under the War on Terror framework in 2003. It analyzes how linguistic tools can validate war actions through strategic persuasive communication.

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It is worth mentioning that previous research regarding discourse analysis within the context of the Iraq War serves as an excellent resource for examining various modes of media narratives, political justification, and rhetorical strategies. The findings from these studies are, however, quite evident with regards to the gap regarding narrativity in exploring Iraqi political interviews through discourse analysis, which is otherwise largely neglected with regard to the importance of examining these political interviews as critical to understanding Iraq's political and media contexts.

### Methodology

This study applies William Labov's (1972) Sociolinguistic Narrative Model (SNM) to four episodes of *With Al-Mulla Talal*, focusing on how political and socio-economic narratives are structured and conveyed. Each episode was selected based on thematic relevance—addressing healthcare, fiscal crises, urban collapse, and oil dependency—and translated into English for structured narrative analysis. Labov's six narrative stages (abstract, orientation, complicating action, resolution, evaluation, and coda) provide a framework for analyzing how the show constructs its storytelling arcs.

Unlike traditional political discourse analysis that centers on ideology or rhetoric, this study emphasizes *narrativity as a communicative act*, showing how Al-Mulla serves not just as a host but as a narrative facilitator who emotionally and cognitively orients the audience toward certain interpretations. The analysis privileges linguistic tools such as emotional intensifiers, evaluative paraphrasing, and personal anecdote integration, providing insight into how narrative techniques foster identification and political engagement.

### Analysis and Discussion

#### Episode 1:

<https://youtu.be/DGisTsNFOAc>

#### 1. Abstract:

The abstract in this interview can be identified in the following excerpt from the introduction provided by the interviewer:

*"May Allah not forgive me for this service" – this is the phrase that has gone viral, summarizing the Iraqi Prime Minister's reaction to the state of healthcare in Iraq. Yesterday, during his visit to Al-Kadhimiya Hospital, he was shocked to find that on-call doctors were absent and was appalled by the quality of service. It's so bad that even a healthy person would leave these hospitals feeling sick."* (Lines 1-3, Appendix A)

This interview's abstract, as a highly nuanced framing device, positions itself optimally to elaborate on the Iraqi healthcare crisis. With its structural positioning the narrator plays out the role of the interviewer and





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introduces you to the theme with clarity and urgency. "What was this about?" is the narrative question. it makes it easy for the interviewer to summarize quickly, to make sure the audience realizes from the start just how serious the topic is. This introduces an introductory framework that demonstrates the gravity of the healthcare crisis, elaborating the extent of the problem while announcing that storytelling will be used to bring awareness to these central issues.

### 2. Orientation

The orientation category in this interview establishes a comprehensive context, identifying the key characters, entities, time frame, and location of the healthcare crisis in Iraq. It establishes the tone and an analytical discussion beginning with a minute, but comprehensive look at the issues under study and structure.

The following lines from the interview represent the orientation, as they introduce the key elements of the story (characters, entities, time, and place):

a- Introduction of the Prime Minister and his reaction:

*"May God not forgive me for this service" – this is the phrase that has gone viral, summarizing the Iraqi Prime Minister's reaction to the state of healthcare in Iraq. Yesterday, during his visit to Al-Kadhimiya Hospital, he was shocked to find that on-call doctors were absent and was appalled by the quality of service. It's so bad that even a healthy person would leave these hospitals feeling sick."* (Lines1-3 , Appendix A)

### 3. Complicating Action

In this narrative category, the key question posed in the first interview "Then what happened?" is addressed by referring to the following lines:

Interviewer:

"Despite Iraq having 2,800 health centers by 2021 and around 300 public hospitals under state control, these facilities suffer from chronic shortages of medical supplies, medications, and healthcare staff. Their low service levels shocked the Prime Minister yesterday." (Lines 9-10 , Appendix A)

"Above all, we cannot ignore the politically dominant bloc that monopolizes the slogan of reform and has controlled the ministry's key positions for years. This bloc bears much of the responsibility." (Lines21-22, Appendix A)

Interviewee 2

"What has been allocated in previous budgets for the Iraqi citizen does not exceed, at best, \$125 annually. This amount covers salaries, services,



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and maintenance throughout the year, which means, in reality, only \$10 remains per citizen." (Lines 67-68, Appendix A)

The narrative structure of this interview is demonstrated the stage of "complicating action" vividly, as described in Labov's SNM (1972). This is the stage where the pivotal events and struggles are highlighted and answer the question, "Then what happened?" This is revealed in the interview here, amidst the realities of Iraq's healthcare system, which, during the Prime Minister's visit to a local hospital, are exposed to the very starkness in their mismanagement and systemic failure.

#### 4. Resolution:

Labov's model has a resolution stage in which the core question is answered, 'What finally happened?' It ends the complicating action and presents how challenges are overcome or how circumstances are changed. This interview does not tell you exactly, but implicitly, what this health sector should do to solve the problems that this health sector is facing, such as reformation, ensuring that there is a budget for health care, separating the private and public health sectors completely so corruptions will significantly reduce.

The following lines show the resolution stage:

Interviewee 1:

*"The Minister of Health needs high-level government support, a capable workforce, and even international efforts to help. Rebuilding Iraq's healthcare system requires developing a gap analysis report to identify the existing gaps in the healthcare system and then designing strategic plans for the healthcare institution accordingly."*

(Line 58-59, Appendix A)

Interviewee 2:

*"We must start with the 2023 budget. What has been allocated in previous budgets for the Iraqi citizen does not exceed, at best, \$125 annually. This amount covers salaries, services, and maintenance throughout the year, which means, in reality, only \$10 remains per citizen." (Lines 66-68, Appendix A)*

Interviewer 1:

*"Frankly, it is encouraging that the Prime Minister has prioritized the healthcare system. He is the first Prime Minister to make health one of his top priorities, and his choice of the Minister of Health was a very successful one."*

(Line 85-86, Appendix A)

Interviewee 3:

*"The services in Iraqi hospitals are very weak because, fundamentally, there are no proper services provided to the doctors themselves. If the*





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*Prime Minister is truly committed to the healthcare system in the country, he must allocate a significant budget for it in the federal budget so we can start on the right path."* (Lines 132-135, Appendix A)

The narrative begins its resolution with the Prime Minister's acknowledgment of the healthcare system's deteriorated state and his commitment to reform. The complicating action, highlighting these lack of system failures, leaves little to no resolution and the final move being discussed about how these problems might be addressed. This resolution captures the immediacy of the reaction as well as a long term strategic planning.

### Evaluation

Labov's model (1972) provides a third stage in the evaluation phase and it deals with the question 'what is the emotional, the social, the intellectual importance of these event.' Using internal, external, and mixed evaluation strategies, this section identifies how the speakers emphasize the gravity of the healthcare crisis and the significance of proposed solutions.

The table below outlines the evaluation strategies used in this interview and the grammatical devices applied to convey them:

**Table (1): The Evaluation Linguistic Strategies in Episode No. 1**

Strategy's Type	Grammatical Device	Text	Explanation
<b>Internal Evaluation Strategies</b>	Intensifiers	"He was shocked to find that on-call doctors were absent and was appalled by the quality of service" (Line 2, Appendix A)	Using "shocked" with the Prime Minister's discovery greatly enhances the emotional effect of his discovery and indicates how desperate the situation is, and how urgently there is need for reform.
	Correlatives	"Statistics in this regard show that Iraq today has fewer healthcare workers relative to its population compared to poorer countries."(Line 11, Appendix A)	Statistical evidence is used in the narrative to connect the flaw in the service of the healthcare with the shortcoming of healthcare workers, thus making out the more shallow system.
	Explicative	"While Iraq used to receive patients from neighboring countries in the 1970s, its	This sentence is an explicative evaluation because it







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and the present moment, summarizing the story's developments and conveying their significance.

The lines below represent the coda of the narrative, signaling the transition from past events to the present and providing a final reflection or summary:

*"In conclusion, this is the state of our healthcare institution."* (Line 119, Appendix A)

*"The interviewer asks interviewee 2: A final comment on the state of healthcare services in Iraq. Interviewee 2 responds: The services in Iraqi hospitals are very weak because, fundamentally, there are no proper services provided to the doctors themselves. So, how can they provide services to patients?"* ( Lines 131-133, Appendix A)

Through its forward-looking perspective, the coda not only concludes the narrative but also inspires hope and accountability. It signals the end of the discussion while leaving the audience with a clear understanding of the importance of the issues raised and the urgency of implementing solutions.

### Conclusion

It can be concluded that this paper illustrated that narrativity has a major effect on structuring political discourse in TV shows like *With Al-Mulla Talal*. With the aim of applying William Labov's Sociolinguistic Narrative Model (SNM) to selected episodes of this show, it has revealed that political issues are retrospectively reconstructed into emotionally charged and morally resonant stories that engage the audience in a way that goes beyond surface level information. Combining narrative elements such as abstract, orientation, complicating action, resolution, evaluation and coda, Al-Mulla directs the interpretation of the viewers and their political attitudes in a controlled manner. Al-Mulla brings complex sociopolitical crises – like events that sabotage Iraq's healthcare system – not as static problems but as evolving stories with simple heroes, villains and solutions through detailed narrative structures.

Furthermore, it brings out the fact that the use of emotional and evaluative language enables the audience to become more involved resulting in the formation of public opinion and political alignment. Overall, this analysis helps confirm that narrative is not something that can be found as a stylistic feature only in political media but it is also a powerful tool used for persuasion and meaning making. For these reasons, the mechanism of the media's shaping of public perception, democratic participation, policy reception relies on narrativity in the political discourse.





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