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**Framing the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict**  
A Corpus-Based Critical Discourse Analysis of  
News Articles on the Israeli-Palestinian War

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## Abstract

After Hamas' attack on October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023, the long-lasting conflict between Israel and Palestine tragically escalated, attracting worldwide media attention. Over the first year of war, news outlets have extensively reported on its developments and, influenced by their various ideologies, they produced divergent and even biased narratives.

This study examines the extent to which two Italian online newspapers, *Corriere.it* and *LiberoQuotidiano.it*, portrayed the conflict differently, with the hypothesis that the differences between their discursive choices are attributable to the outlets' ideologies. To do that, two specialized corpora consisting of 200 articles published between October 2023 and October 2024 were compiled and examined using Sketch Engine.

Following the principles of Corpus-Based Discourse Analysis, the comparative analysis of the results combined quantitative methods, such as keywords and collocation analysis, with qualitative insights into discursive strategies.

At the various linguistic levels examined, the analysis highlighted different strategies in the representation of reality, that can be traced back to the ideological positions of the newspapers. The results provide evidence of biased coverage on the Israeli-Palestinian war in the Italian context and suggest the importance of recognizing the role of ideology in the press, to avoid misinformation.

## Abstract

Dopo l'attacco di Hamas del 7 Ottobre 2023, il lungo conflitto tra Israele e Palestina si è intensificato tragicamente, attirando l'attenzione dei media di tutto il mondo. Durante il primo anno di guerra, i notiziari hanno riportato ampiamente ogni sviluppo e, influenzati dalle loro posizioni ideologiche, hanno diffuso versioni divergenti e talvolta distorte degli stessi eventi.

Questo studio confronta il modo in cui Corriere.it e LiberoQuotidiano.it, due testate digitali italiane, hanno rappresentato il conflitto, con l'ipotesi che le differenze tra le loro scelte discorsive siano attribuibili alle loro ideologie. A tal fine, due *corpora* composti da 200 articoli pubblicati tra Ottobre 2023 e Ottobre 2024 sono stati compilati e analizzati, utilizzando Sketch Engine.

Seguendo i principi della *Corpus-based Critical Discourse Analysis*, lo studio ha combinato metodi quantitativi, come l'analisi di parole chiave e delle collocazioni, con approfondimenti di carattere qualitativo nelle strategie discorsive utilizzate dai quotidiani.

L'analisi ha evidenziato diversi metodi di rappresentazione della realtà, che possono essere ricondotte alle posizioni ideologiche delle testate in esame. I risultati costituiscono prova di una copertura mediatica faziosa del conflitto tra Israele e Palestina nel contesto italiano e suggeriscono l'importanza di riconoscere il ruolo dell'ideologia nella stampa, per evitare la disinformazione.

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## Chapter One: Introduction to the Research

### 1.1 Introduction to the Research

All media outlets are expected to uphold the principles of fairness, objectivity, and inclusivity, ensuring diverse voices are heard and facts are transparently presented (Liu, 2024). However, the reality of media production and dissemination often falls short of these ideals. Mainstream media, particularly in contexts of politically charged events, do not merely report events but also shape the surrounding narratives, often reflecting the ideological stances and political interests of the outlets themselves (*Ibid.*).

The way information is framed can significantly alter public perception, creating a divergence in how audiences understand the same event depending on the source. The issue has gained growing importance as dominant media outlets have become so pervasive and influential that many individuals rely on their narratives to acquire knowledge (Amer, 2016: 4). This process happens often implicitly and prompts the public to shape attitudes and make sense of the world according to perspectives provided by the various sources of information (*Ibid.*).

This issue is especially relevant in the context of a war, which is “a high-stakes enterprise” where “public perceptions and public support are never left to chance” (Griffin, 2010: 8). News media function as an instrument of war, as they shape domestic and international public opinion while influencing combat outcomes (Payne, 2005: 81). Governments and political entities recognize the power of the media in this regard and often attempt to control the information flow, to align it with their interests. This is achieved through the regulation, direction, and selective dissemination of news and images (Griffin, 2010: 8). Thus, the media can act as a tool to promote specific narratives, while suppressing or marginalizing others (Hodges, 2015: 1). As a result,

the content that reaches the public is not necessarily a neutral representation of reality; instead, it is shaped by underlying ideologies.

Furthermore, the reciprocal influence between media outlets and their audience contributes to this polarization. On the one hand, news reports are subject to journalists' perspectives and the ideological leanings of the media organizations they work for. On the other hand, news content is often tailored to resonate with the beliefs and expectations of the readers, which influence which stories are reported but also how these are presented (Richardson, 2007: 90). In doing so, media outlets ensure engagement but also perpetuate biases.

In fact, the promotion of “a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation” (Entman, 1993 in Hamborg, 2023: 56) constitutes a media bias, also known as “the effect of framing”, that stems from one or more forms of bias inherent in the process of news production (Hamborg, 2023: 56). News articles are often colored by biases reflecting specific political and ideological affiliations, despite reporters are expected to act as neutral informers. Their readers, who also play a part in this process, form different interpretations and potential misrepresentations on the same issue. To sum up, the media have the ability to present information through representations which reinforce broader social structures, while purportedly reflecting objective reality (Matheson, 2005: 142).

### **1.1.1 Rationale for the Research**

As discussed above, media outlets do not merely report facts but actively shape them to reflect their ideological leanings. The influence they hold on to public opinion is particularly evident in times of conflict, when prevalent media discourses may even impact the political outcomes of conflicts. For this reason, it is necessary to uncover the dominant narratives of war disseminated by the media. This need became conspicuous after the United States' military defeat in Vietnam, which sparked

allegations that media bias had undermined the war effort (Robinson et al., 2005: 951). Since then, the interplay between the media, the military, and the government has remained a persistent focus of academic investigation (*Ibid.*).

Interest on this theme has gained prominence as the scope of contemporary conflicts has expanded, along with the coverage they receive and the potential biases within that coverage. For instance, most media outlets have widely covered the developments of the Israeli-Palestinian war, since its outbreak in October 2023. The conflict has reverberated through the political and social dynamics of many countries, including Italy, where it has been widely reported by all major newspapers.

However, previous research in this field has often overlooked how Italian newspapers employ discursive strategies to shape public attitudes on the issue. Therefore, it is the purpose of the present paper to critically examine how two Italian online newspapers employ different language patterns to convey their ideologies and political stances in the coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian war. More specifically, this study will focus on two corpora of articles retrieved from *Corriere.it* and *LiberoQuotidiano.it* in the period between October 2023 and October 2024.

This study employs a combination of quantitative and qualitative analyses to identify and compare the predominant narratives of each newspaper, aiming to reveal the plausible underlying reasons for these discourses and their consequent implications.

### **1.1.2 Research Questions**

As previously stated, this study seeks to investigate how the online newspapers *Corriere.it* and *LiberoQuotidiano.it* exploit discursive strategies to convey different ideologies on the same topic. Accordingly, the research aims to answer the following research question:

*Do Italian media outlets employ different language patterns to convey their ideologies and political stances in the news reports about the same topic, namely the Israeli-Palestinian war?*

The following secondary questions also guided the analysis:

*What were the main differences shown by LiberoQuotidiano.it and Corriere.it in the discourses surrounding the conflict between Israel and Palestine between October 2023 and October 2024?*

*Were there media bias in these online newspapers reporting? If so, what types of media bias were recognized?*

The analysis of the results obtained from Sketch Engine aims at providing sufficient evidence to provide meaningful and evidence-based answers to these research questions. To understand how the selected newspapers shaped the conflict narrative, it will be necessary to identify the discursive strategies and media biases present in the corpora and hypothesize how these could influence the public perception.

### **1.1.3 Introduction to the Theoretical and Methodological Background**

This section provides a brief overview of the theoretical and methodological background of the study. A more detailed discussion will be presented in the following chapter, where the study's methodological approach is thoroughly examined.

To recognize how discourses on the ongoing conflicts can be used to convey different ideologies, it is crucial to comprehend the strategies employed by journalists to present the related news. In order to do that, the present study employs a Corpus-based Critical

approach, resulting from the combination of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Corpus Linguistics (CL) methods.

CDA is an interdisciplinary form of analysis which mainly focuses on explicitly and systematically describing units of language use called discourse (Van Dijk, 1988: 24). It was deemed a suitable approach for the present analysis, since it reveals implicit mechanisms of discursive dominance, including strategies of manipulation and legitimation, allowing to understand how these shape public consciousness and behavior (Van Dijk, 1995: 18). To do that, CDA scholars analyze the underlying ideologies that sustain or challenge these power dynamics, considering all the dimensions of communicative events and focusing on social factors like class, gender, ethnicity, and race (*Ibid.*).

When combined with CL, CDA allows to connect recurring linguistic patterns in texts with the sociolinguistic elements of the context in which those texts were originally produced, and vice versa (Flowerdew, 2023). CL is, in fact, “the investigation of linguistic research questions based on the complete and systematic analysis of the distribution of linguistic phenomena in a linguistic corpus” (Stefanowitsch, 2020: 55). For this thesis, the corpora were built with the purpose of investigating the research questions specified in the previous section. By employing the Corpus-based Critical approach, it was possible to examine large sets of data, triangulate findings and reduce potential researcher bias. Moreover, the combination of quantitative and qualitative analyses helped identifying explicit and implicit ideologies within discourse, while also allowing for a diachronic analysis to track changes over time.

#### **1.1.4 Outline of the Study**

The above sections presented the rationale for this study, its the research questions and introduced the chosen methodology of investigation. To further contextualize the study, this chapter includes an overview of the conflict history and the narratives

surrounding it, with both Palestinians and Israelis perspectives. Finally, a review of the literature relevant for this research concludes the first chapter by presenting previous studies' methods and findings.

Chapter Two is devoted to the presentation of the theoretical and methodological background. It firstly introduces the frameworks of Corpus Linguistics, Critical Discourse Analysis and Corpus-Based Discourse Analysis, and then illustrates in detail the methodology of the study. The following sections describe the process of data selection to create the study corpora and present the background information of *Corriere.it* and *LiberoQuotidiano.it*, in order to contextualize the results displayed in the third chapter.

Chapter Three consists in the discussion of the results obtained through Sketch Engine, combining quantitative and qualitative analysis, with the purpose of answering the research questions with evidence from the corpora data.

Based on these results, Chapter Four reports the most relevant findings of this study and answers the research questions. Finally, the limitations of the analysis are addressed, providing indications for further investigation.

## **1.2 Background to the Study**

As explained in the outline of the study, this section intends to provide the background information fundamental to understand the present conflict and the ongoing discourse surrounding it. Firstly, an overview of the historical events, starting from the late 19th century to the present time, is presented to offer an objective contextualization rather than a comprehensive historical and political analysis of the conflict, which is “deep and long-standing” (Philo & Berry, 2004).

The main narratives stemming from this conflict, which hold great influence on public perception and provide each party with ideological foundations to justify their actions,

are also analyzed. These discourses are important for the present study because media often embrace and reproduce them in their coverage of the conflict.

Finally, the state of the art contextualizes this analysis by reporting the findings obtained by previous studies on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and on the discourses perpetrated by the media.

### **1.2.1 History of the Conflict between Israel and Palestine**

The origins of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can be traced to the early 20th century. By that time, Jewish associations were widespread across the globe and Zionism encompassed the cultural efforts of the Jewish diaspora and the process of colonization in Palestine, also transforming Judaism into a prominent social and cultural force (Scaini, 2002: 17). Zionism formalized its alliance with the British government on November 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1917, when the latter announced its intention to support the establishment of a national home for the Jewish people in Palestine, in what is known as the Balfour Declaration (Codovini, 2007: 1).

The conflict has been violent from the start (Bar-Tal & Salomon, 2006: 21). After a period of economic boycotts, protests, strikes and scattered violence, Palestinian resentment towards the British governance erupted in 1936 into the Arab revolt. The uprising lasted until 1939 and it exacerbated relations between Jews and Arabs, causing the emergence of a dominant sentiment of nationalism among militants in both Palestinian and Israeli societies (Rotberg, 2006: 4). According to Rotberg (2006:4), the struggle between Palestine and Israel began during this period.

Thirty years later, in 1947, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Partition Plan for Palestine, which proposed the creation of a Jewish state, an Arab state and an internationally administered zone for Jerusalem (Codovini, 2007: 22). Immediately after the announcement, hostilities erupted and quickly escalated into a full-scale war, which claimed many thousands of lives (Codovini, 2007; Bar-Tal & Salomon, 2006).

On May 14<sup>th</sup>, 1948, the leader of the Jewish Agency Gurion proclaimed the establishment of the State of Israel. The following day, the armies of Transjordan, Egypt, and Syria supported by contingents from Lebanon and Iraq invaded Palestine in rejection of the partition plan, marking the start of the first Arab-Israeli war (Codovini, 2007: 23).

Israel repelled the final Egyptian offensive in January 1949 and negotiated separate armistices with the various Arab states, except Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen, which did not share borders with Israel. The latter declared the western part of Jerusalem as the sole capital of the state, installing its parliament there and rejecting the United Nations' decision to internationalize the city. In conclusion of the first Arab-Israeli war, Israel gained a significant military victory and an important diplomatic success, which culminated in its admission as a member of the United Nations (Codovini, 2007: 26).

These early conflicts had severe consequences, such as the expulsion of circa 600,000 Jews from Arab states and the exodus of approximately 650,000 Palestinians, who left the areas that came under Israeli authority (*Ibid.*). This marked the beginning of the crucial issue of Palestinian refugees and their resettlement, while the influx of Arab-Jewish immigrants transformed the cultural character of the State of Israel (*Ibid.*). During the 1967 conflict, commonly known as the Six-Day War, Israel took control of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank including East Jerusalem, which Israel later annexed, causing a second large-scale displacement of Palestinians.

During the Yom Kippur War, Egypt and Syria launched a surprise two-front assault on Israel to reclaim previously lost territories. The character of this conflict changed after the Egyptian President Anwar Sadat visited Jerusalem in 1977, in the attempt of advancing the Israeli-Arab peace process (Bar-Tal & Salomon, 2006: 21). Although the conflict did not result in significant territorial changes, it facilitated negotiations over previously ceded territories, ultimately leading to the signing of the Camp David

Accords in 1979 and the conclusion of the conflict between Egypt and Israel (Council on Foreign Relations, 2024).

These accords facilitated the diplomatic relations between Israel and the neighbouring countries, but the issue of Palestinian self-determination and governance remained unresolved until the First Intifada in 1987. During this popular uprising, hundreds thousands of Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank mobilized against the Israeli occupation and in support of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). This development marked an important turning point in the conflict between Israel and Palestinians (Codovini, 2007: 32).

In 1993, an agreement was reached with the Oslo I Accords, which set up a framework for Palestinian self-governance in the occupied territories and eased mutual recognition between the newly formed Palestinian Authority and the Israeli government. The PLO recognized Israel's right to exist in peace and security and Israel acknowledged the PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people (Codovini, 2007: 32).

The Oslo II Accords, signed in 1995, built upon the foundation of the previous treaty to outline the Israeli withdrawal from six cities and 450 towns within the West Bank (Council on Foreign Relations, 2024).

In 2000, growing Palestinian dissatisfaction with Israeli control over the West Bank coupled with a stalled peace process and former Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's visit to the al-Aqsa Mosque, one of Islam's sacred sites, ignited the Second Intifada (Council on Foreign Relations, 2024). This outbreak of violent confrontations between Israeli Jews and Palestinians hindered the peace process and profoundly affected the nature of intergroup relations between Jews and Arabs in the Middle East. In response to the uprising, which persisted until 2005, the Israeli government endorsed the construction of a barrier wall encircling the West Bank in 2002, despite the opposition

of the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court (Council on Foreign Relations, 2024).

Moreover, internal Palestinian factionalism intensified when Hamas, the Islamic Resistance Movement, won the Palestinian Authority's parliamentary elections in 2006, displacing Fatah, the nationalist and social democratic party, as the majority party and seized control of the Gaza Strip, which had been under the semi-autonomous rule of the Palestinian Authority since 1993 (Council on Foreign Relations, 2024). In this context, Hamas faced criticism from the United States (U.S.) and the European Union (EU), who aligned with Israel in marginalizing the Hamas government and refused to recognize it, designating it as a terrorist organization (Amer, 2016: 11). The subsequent violence between Hamas and Fatah between 2006 and 2011 eventually led to a reconciliation agreement and the formation of a unity government in 2014 (Council on Foreign Relations, 2024).

At the end of 2008, the first notable conflict between Israel and Hamas occurred and hostilities persisted until the summer of 2014, when tensions escalated into a military confrontation between the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) and Hamas (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2024). During this conflict, Hamas launched nearly three thousand rockets into Israel, which responded with a significant offensive in Gaza (Council on Foreign Relations, 2024).

Following a surge of violence between Israelis and Palestinians in 2015, the Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas declared that Palestinians would no longer adhere to the territorial divisions established by the Oslo Accords (Council on Foreign Relations, 2024). In the following years, the tense political climate characterized by recurring episodes of violence led to renewed disunity between Fatah and Hamas and, as a result, Mahmoud Abbas' party of Fatah maintained control of the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank, while Hamas continued to govern the Gaza Strip (*Ibid.*).

In early May 2021, tensions escalated again. Hamas and other Palestinian militant groups launched hundreds of rockets into Israel. In retaliation, Israel conducted artillery and airstrikes, resulting in over 250 Palestinian and 13 Israeli deaths, nearly 2,000 injuries, and the displacement of 72,000 Palestinians. After eleven days, a ceasefire was brokered, with both sides claiming victory (*Ibid.*).

In late December 2022, Israel witnessed the takeover of its most far right and religious government to date, led by Benjamin Netanyahu and his Likud party. This government prioritized the expansion of Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank.

Ultimately, the conflict escalated dramatically on October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (2024) reports:

On 7 October, Israelis and Palestinians awoke to the heaviest barrage of explosive projectiles from Gaza in years. Thousands of members of the Al Qassam Brigades of Hamas, Al Quds Brigades, as well as other armed and unarmed Palestinians, had crossed into Israel. The fighters rampaged into areas inside Israel close to the security fence with Gaza, attacking military bases, small towns, kibbutzim, and a music festival. [...] More than 1,124 people were reportedly killed in the 7 October attacks, including 295 military personnel,<sup>5</sup> and 4,834 injured. Reportedly, some Israeli civilians were killed by fire from Israeli forces in the course of fighting.

The attack prompted a swift and significant military response from Israel, Encyclopædia Britannica (2024) reports:

At 8:23 am on October 7 the IDF announced a state of alert for war and began mobilizing its army reserves (eventually calling up more than 350,000 reservists over the next several days). Two hours later, IDF fighter jets began

conducting air strikes in the Gaza Strip. On October 8 Israel declared itself in a state of war, and Netanyahu told residents of the blockaded enclave to “get out now. We will be everywhere and with all our might.” On October 9 Israel ordered a “complete siege” of the Gaza Strip, cutting off water, electricity, food, and fuel from entering the territory.

This war has led to unprecedented levels of civilian casualties and extensive destruction across the Gaza Strip (OCHA, 2024b: 8). Within three weeks of Hamas’s attack on October 7<sup>th</sup>, over 1,400,000 Palestinians in the Gaza Strip had been internally displaced, and it had already become the deadliest for Palestinians since the 1948 Arab-Israeli war (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2024).

In the timespan of a year, more than 1,200 Israelis and foreign nationals were killed, including children, and nearly 5,500 have been injured (OCHA, 2024a). A significant number of hostages remain in Gaza and is reportedly subjected to inhumane conditions, including acts of violence and restricted access to humanitarian aid.

The Gaza Ministry of Health declared that more than 41,600 Palestinians, including women and children, have been killed during the same time span, while approximately 96,600 have sustained injuries (OCHA, 2024a). Moreover, thousands remain unaccounted for and are believed to be trapped beneath the rubble and nearly the entire population of Gaza has been displaced, often multiple times, with limited or no access to safe refuge.

The displaced population has been increasingly concentrated within the zone of Al-Mawasi, as designated by Israel. The area lacks critical infrastructure, essential services, and there is a shortage of vital resources such as water, sanitation, health services, protection, and shelter because of the extreme overcrowding (*Ibid.*).

Attacks on medical personnel, hospitals, and aid convoys have further exacerbated the crisis.

In addition to this humanitarian crisis, Palestinians are facing heightened coercion due to entrenched Israeli policies and practices. Live ammunition, air and drone strikes, and shoulder-fired missiles are used against Palestinians in densely populated urban areas and refugee camps (OCHA, 2024b: 11). Finally, a range of systematic and discriminatory restrictions has been imposed to the movement of Palestinians across the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, such as roadblocks and curfews (*Ibid.*).

### **1.2.2 Palestinian and Israeli Narratives of the Past**

While the previous chapter described, through an objective lens, the historical process and the recent developments of the conflict, this section presents an overview of the Israeli and Palestinian narratives, with the goal of gaining a deeper understanding of the discourses surrounding the current Israeli-Palestinian war. Given the complexity and length of the conflict, its origins and the historical narratives of specific events are often disputed by the involved parties, who interpret the story from their perspective (Philo & Berry, 2004).

These narratives are not mere historical recounts. On the contrary, they play a key role in shaping public perception and providing ideological foundations, from which media borrow when reporting on the conflict to justify present actions, policies and to frame each side's perspective. For example, newspapers supporting Israeli stances may emphasize themes of security and historical claims, while media supporting the Palestinian stances may focus on motifs of historical dispossession and resistance.

Israeli and Palestinian narratives also rationalize the conflict, beginning from its roots. Their ultimate function is that of legitimizing each side's actions through collective memory, which perpetuates a truth functional to their specific existence. They are closely intertwined to each other, based on a dispute over the same territory where each refused to accept the other's national identity, believing it would negate their own (Rotberg, 2006: 3). According to Rotberg (2006: 3), these stories are also a coping

mechanism, employed to explain the causes and give meaning to the immense pain brought by the war, prompting both Palestinians and Israelis to endure the situation. For the Israeli Jews, the ethos of conflict narrative consisted of various themes of societal belief, the first being the justness of their goal (Bar-Tal & Salomon, 2006: 21). Endorsed by Zionist ideology, Israeli Jews claimed their right of establishing a Jewish state in the ancient homeland of Eretz Israel (*Ibid.*). After the 1967 war, they augmented the territorial dimension of the Israeli scope, retaining the Sinai, the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, and the Golan Heights, substantiating this development with the scarcity of Arab population and their only recent settlement (Bar-Tal & Salomon, 2006: 22).

Secondly, Israel defended the establishment of a Jewish state by claiming the necessity to achieve a sense of security. This ensured “the right and duty to use its armed forces to defend itself against Arab threats and even to initiate military acts, including war, to prevent possible Arab attacks on Israel” (Bar-Tal & Salomon, 2006: 28). Moreover, the belief in their own victimization provided Israeli Jews with the moral need of confronting Arabs and pursuing justice and support from the international community. The delegitimization of the opponent also played a key role in the conflict narrative. For decades, the Israeli narrative referred to Arabs as a single, undifferentiated group and their negative stereotyping was fostered by labeling them as “primitives, uncivilized and savages” (Bar-Tal & Salomon, 2006: 29). These delegitimizing terms were also applied to Palestinians, who were perceived as an enemy of the Jewish people. On the contrary, Israeli Jews perpetuated their own stereotyping as a people devoted to peace who, due to unavoidable circumstances, was compelled to engage in a violent conflict (Bar-Tal & Salomon, 2006: 31). According to this tradition, they were open to negotiations and peace agreements, while Arabs were described as those rejecting peaceful solutions and refusing direct contact with them, thus representing the primary barrier to progress.

On the other hand, Palestinians created their own narrative, sometimes in response to Zionist mythology, sometimes independently from it. The Arab narrative encompasses several key elements, primarily the belief that Palestinians have an ancient and deeply rooted history in the land of Palestine, preceding the arrival of Jews (Abdel Jawad, 2006: 73). It also holds that Palestine was a land where various nations, cultures, and tribes have intermingled over the centuries and, in such melting pot, Jewish presence was minimal and even absent for 2,000 years (Abdel Jawad, 2006: 74). However, the Jews living in Palestine were historically treated with tolerance, unlike their experiences in the West (*Ibid.*). According to this narrative, Palestine was part of the Arab world and Jerusalem was a religious and administrative center, pillar of Palestinian modern identity.

Finally, the Arab tradition argues that, during the Nakba in 1948, massacres were systematic and deliberately aiming at ethnic cleansing. The Israeli claim that Arab leaders ordered Palestinians to leave their villages is refused and Palestinian writers largely agree on the existence of an agreement among global powers, particularly Britain and the United States, favoring Israeli interests (Abdel Jawad, 2006: 75).

As Bar-Tal and Salomon (2006, as cited in Rotberg, 2006: 5) explain, the narratives formed during conflicts have mental consequences so severe that they are rarely altered by new perceptions. In fact, they lead to selective attention and exclusion of information incongruent to the narrative, resulting in what is described as “narrative-driven informational bias” (Bar-Tal & Salomon, 2006: 40). They affect how conflict-related information is processed, guiding individuals to filter information through mental frameworks aligning with these narratives, thereby reinforcing existing beliefs (*Ibid.*).

To this day, Palestinian and Israeli narratives show discrepancies. For example, Israeli spokesmen employ various legitimation strategies to shape the media and public opinion worldwide (Amer, 2024: 212). Israelis frame the conflict as a “war on

terrorism and a war on Hamas”, claiming that their attacks only target terrorist army bases (*Ibid.*) Moreover, Israel attributes the responsibility of the conflicts on Palestinians or Hamas, even when lacking evidence to support such statements (*Ibid.*) Conversely, “in the Palestinian views and mainly Hamas, Palestinians see the events as an Israeli offensive against them” (Amer, 2024: 212).

### **1.2.3 State of the Art**

The coverage of wars and conflicts has been analyzed from various perspectives across multiple disciplines within media and communication studies. In 1997, Liebes critically explored the concept of hegemony in the media reporting of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Gulf War. Liebes (1997) demonstrated that media outlets play a role in reinforcing the dominant political ideology, prompted by shared societal values, the necessity to conform to the general opinion, but also because of the inaccessibility of alternative perspectives. Moreover, the author shows how the audience’s inability to critically decode the press contributes to the perpetuation of media biases, reinforcing the dominant narrative.

Scholars have also investigated the role played by the press in shaping public perceptions of war within the Italian context. Degano (2008) focused on the discourses perpetrated by the Italian and British press prior to the Iraq War. The author combined quantitative and qualitative techniques to determine whether a predominant representation of the Iraqi issue emerged within the study corpora and to identify any tendency towards simplification or ideological portrayal of events. The findings challenge the notion of a uniform and predominant narrative, while highlighting the complex interplay between language, ideology, and power in journalistic discourse (Riboni, 2011).

Among many studies that focus on the conflict between Israel and Palestine and how it is portrayed by the media, a notable work is Philo and Berry’s (2004; 2011), which

examined media coverage of the conflict and its impact on public opinion in the United Kingdom, finding that broadcast media offered a thorough representation of the Israeli perspective, while failing to equally present the Palestinian viewpoint.

Other studies have employed CDA and CL methods to investigate the representation of the conflict between Israel and Palestine in newspaper coverage. Almeida (2011) conducted a discourse analysis of U.S. newspaper coverage of the Israeli Palestinian conflict from 2002 to 2006, combining qualitative and quantitative methods. As in the present study, the author employed both corpus linguistics and discourse analysis techniques to examine a collection of 250 articles. Almeida (2011) shed light on the strategies employed by U.S. news media to frame important actors and events in the Israeli Palestinian conflict. The author found that the main source of information was the Israeli government and negative emotions and expressions of violence characterized both the lexical choices and the conflict narrative. Additionally, journalists of the selected newspapers cited Palestinian and Israeli civilians and authorities differently.

Another important work for this thesis was Amer's (2016) analysis of the representation of social actors in reports on the Gaza war of 2008-09 in four international newspapers. Drawing on three analytical frameworks from CDA models, the study showed similar results among the four selected newspapers: the most represented Israeli actors were governmental officials while the most present Palestinian actors were Hamas members, and such representation suggests that the war was directed against Hamas. Moreover, although Palestinian casualties were higher, civilian suffering was portrayed as balanced while the analysis of quotation patterns suggested that Israeli sources were preferred over Palestinian ones. In conclusion, the study shows that the news reports analyzed were influenced by political orientation, editorial policies and journalistic practices.

Similarly, Kaposi (2017) focused on British broadsheet coverage during the first Gaza war, proposing methodological considerations for analyzing the discourse surrounding the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The author advocated for a reflective multi-methodological approach that captures the complexity of the issue, demonstrating the importance of incorporating quantitative data within a large dataset and contextualizing the interpretation of those data. Thus, he introduced strategies of patterns identification and associations within the numerical data, illustrating how quantitative codes can be integrated and expanded through narratives and arguments. Finally, Liu (2024) published a Corpus-Based Critical Discourse Analysis of News Reports on the 2023 Israel-Hamas War. The research provides a replicable framework for future studies on news reports relating to war topics, which was employed in the present study. The author purposely selected three media outlets with different political stances, which were analyzed comparatively, employing both corpus linguistics and critical discourse analysis. The study revealed how the selected media outlets constructed language differently to depict the war, showing how their political stances and ideologies influenced the discourse around a common topic.

Overall, these studies show how media outlets can report the same events employing different discourses and how social actors are portrayed differently within these narratives. In order to identify their differences, a shared element for these works is their mixed-methods approach, which combines qualitative and quantitative techniques to analyze newspaper language usage. Finally, these publications emphasize the importance of political orientation, the underlying ideologies on the reporting of the conflict and their influence on how events and actors are framed. These assumptions were integrated in the present analysis.

## **Chapter two: Data and Methodology**

### **2.1 Introduction to the Methodological Framework**

For the present thesis, the methodology drew from the Corpus-based critical approach. By combining Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Corpus Linguistics (CL), such approach provides both qualitative and quantitative insights into discourse.

Starting from the exploration of these frameworks, the present chapter provides a comprehensive review of the theoretical background relevant to the study. It then presents a detailed description of the methodology of this study.

Moving to the data section, the process of data selection for the corpora is reported. Finally, the study corpora are thoroughly described and, in order to contextualize the sample, the background of the selected newspapers is presented.

#### **2.1.1 Critical Discourse Analysis**

Discourse analysis encompasses a broad range of topics and is one of the most loosely defined fields in applied linguistics (Flowerdew, 2023: 174). According to Gee and Handford (2013: 1), “discourse analysis is the study of language in use”, that is the study of language as it is employed in real-world contexts, focusing on the meanings attributed to it and the actions performed through it. Rather than analyzing sentences in isolation, discourse analysis considers how sentences combine to produce meaning, provide coherence, and accomplish specific objectives (Gee and Handford, 2013).

There are different forms of discourse analysis. Some are deeply linked with linguistics and aim at examining grammatical functions in relation with different contexts. Other forms, instead, distance themselves from the linguistic and grammatical lens, focusing on how themes or concepts are developed through sentences and utterances in both spoken and written communication. Moreover, forms of analysis can be distinguished according to their purpose: while some primarily seek to describe and explain language

use, others link such language use with socially, politically, or culturally significant issues, often with the goal of critically addressing and intervening on them. The latter are typically referred to as Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Gee and Handford, 2013: 5).

The term critical shows that this form of discourse analysis engages with issues related to social responsibility and ideology, encouraging deeper reflection on these themes (Van Dijk, 1986, as cited in Wodak and Meyer, 2001: 1). Fairclough (2010:7) states that the critique introduces a normative dimension into the analysis as it evaluates current societal structures and considers potential ways to transform them, based on a coherent set of values and notions of a “good society”. The analysis is critical also because it partly distances itself from the data to situate itself within a broader social context, openly acknowledging a political perspective and self-reflection in the research process (Wodak and Meyer, 2001: 7).

Thus, CDA focus is not on purely academic and theoretical issues. It investigates both overt and covert structural relationships of dominance, inequality, power and control, as they manifest through language (Wodak & Meyer, 2001). In other words, CDA seeks to examine and challenge social inequality by exploring how language reflects, constructs, and justifies unequal power relations in society. To do that, it acquires the perspective of marginalized or disadvantaged groups and identifies the language used by individuals and institutions in positions of power, who are deemed responsible for social problems (*Ibid.*).

CDA draws on methods from linguistics, sociology, philosophy, and psychology and it constitutes a valuable tool in the fields of education, cultural studies and communication, among others. Moreover, CDA has never positioned itself as a singular theory with a defining methodology as it integrates diverse theoretical frameworks and employs varied sources of data and methodologies (Wodak & Meyer, 2001). For this reason, the aims, the participants, the context, and the beliefs of those

involved have significant impact on the choice of the research method (Van Dijk, 2001).

Among the various approaches within CDA, Fairclough's *Discourse and Social Change* provides the most elaborate theoretical foundation (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000: 448). Fairclough (1992, as cited in Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000: 448) conceives three degrees of analysis, the first being discourse as a text. In this phase, the analysis focuses on the linguistic features of specific instances of discourse, namely choices in vocabulary, grammar, cohesion, and structure.

Secondly, discourse is understood as a discursive practice, with emphasis on how discourse is produced, distributed, and consumed in society (*Ibid.*). Within this dimension, the linguistic features above described are analyzed in relation to speech acts, coherence, intertextuality and discourse representation, aspects that highlight the link between a text and its surrounding context (Fairclough, 1992, as cited in Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000: 449). This stage also involves the examination of institutional routines, such as news gathering, news selection, writing, and editing, as well as how audiences read and interpret the texts (Sheyholislami, 2001).

Lastly, discourse is considered as a form of social practice, which shapes and is mutually shaped by the social context in which it occurs (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997: 258). As media texts are positioned within their broader sociocultural context, factors such as the economics of media, their politics and cultural issues are considered part and parcel of the analysis. In the present study, for example, the political stances and ideologies of the selected newspapers were taken into consideration for the analysis.

This understanding of discourse infers the reciprocal link between a specific discursive event and the surrounding contexts, implying that discourse does not merely reflect reality but actively constitutes it. According to Gee and Handford (2023: 5):

The main importance of discourse analysis lies in the fact that, through speaking and writing in the world, we make the world meaningful in certain ways and not in others. We shape, produce, and reproduce the world through language in use. In turn, the world we shape and help to create works in certain ways to shape us as humans. This mutual shaping process can have profound consequences for people's lives. In the end, discourse analysis matters because discourse matters.

More specifically, discourse plays a role in constructing social identities and in the establishment of relationships and institutional practices, contributing to the maintenance or transformation of power structures (Fairclough, 2014).

When applied to media discourse, CDA operates on the assumption that media are inherently ideological and, for this reason, they play a significant role in shaping public opinions and propagating dominant ideologies (Sheyholislami, 2001). This characteristic of discourse is closely tied to CDA's purpose, namely that of analyzing how language can both reproduce and challenge power relations and inequalities (Richardson, 2007).

To do that, CDA examines both macrostructures, such as the transcriptions of stereotypes, arguments, rationalized prejudices, and individual words within their broader contextual and pragmatic horizons. This allows to identify their strategic functions and to postulate the social models and beliefs that make them comprehensible and widely shared (Fernández Díaz-Cabal, 2023).

### **2.1.2 Corpus Linguistics**

Similarly to CDA, Corpus Linguistics (CL) is a field of study whose core principles are still debated (Flowerdew, 2023: 174). Despite its century-long practice, CL lacks a unified definition due to its interrupted tradition and ongoing disagreements within

the field of linguistics itself (Stefanowitsch, 2020: 21). However, scholars agree that CL is an umbrella term indicating a methodological framework which can be employed in different studies by researchers to approach linguistic analysis (*Ibid.*).

Cheng (2012: 6) defines CL as “the compilation and analysis of corpora”. This broad definition of the term, as well as the term itself, suggests the importance of the corpus in CL. A corpus serves as a instrument for documenting real-life language use (Stefanowitsch, 2020: 22). While a corpus can be defined as a body of electronically encoded texts, random collections of texts do not qualify as a corpus (Baker, 2023; 56). Instead, corpora are tailored by researchers for specific research objectives. The present study, for example, employed a specialized corpus to investigate aspects of a specific variety or genre of language (*Ibid.*). Given that the interest of this study was in the language of newspaper and restricted to a specific theme, only texts conforming to specialized criteria were collected.

Thus, a corpus can be defined as a “collection of samples of language use” with specific characteristics, the first being that of authenticity (*Ibid.*). In other words, the instances of language use contained in a corpus have to be authentic and produced with the purpose of communication, not of linguistic analysis (Stefanowitsch, 2020: 23). Secondly, the sample has to be representative, hence include different manifestations of the language, in proportions that reflect their occurrence within the relevant speech community (Stefanowitsch, 2020: 28). The corpus representativeness is influenced by its diversity and its size. A corpus should, in fact be “large enough to contain a sample of instances of the phenomenon under investigation that is large enough for analysis” (Stefanowitsch, 2020: 38). To sum up, a linguistic corpus consists of a large and diverse collection of files containing authentic language samples in raw text.

Corpora are then annotated. Annotations may include details about paralinguistic features, such as font style, size, and color, linguistic features like parts of speech, lemmas, and grammatical structures or information about the text's producers and the

context of production, including genre, medium and situation (Stefanowitsch, 2020: 39).

Finally, corpora are analyzed by scholars. The process of analysis is common to both CDA and CL, but the two are fundamentally different in their underlying beliefs and approaches, as Virtanen (2009, as cited in Flowerdew, 2023: 174) highlights. The qualitative approach that characterizes CDA appears to contrast with CL, a discipline which is essentially quantitative, focuses on large corpora and aims to produce objective and unbiased results (McEnery & Wilson, 2001, as cited in Garzone & Santulli, 2004, p. 353).

The most relevant epistemological difference between these two approaches lies in the different ways they treat texts. On the one hand, corpus analysis views the text as a finished product, while discourse analysis sees language as a dynamic, unfolding process and a form of social action. As Widdowson (2000: 4) explains, computers can only analyze the textual traces of language use, rather than the processes through which meaning is actively created (Flowerdew, 2023: 25). Despite these differences, the divide between DA and CL is diminishing (McEnery et al., 2006:11 ), and a growing number of studies combine these frameworks within the Corpus-based Critical approach.

### **2.1.3 Corpus-Based Critical Approach**

Corpus linguists working within Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) aim at identifying links between linguistic patterns recurring in texts and the sociolinguistic characteristics of the surrounding context, examining how language reflects and is shaped by that environment (Flowerdew, 2023: 178). In this context, a distinction can be made between "corpus-driven" and "corpus-based" approaches (Flowerdew, 2023). According to Flowerdew (2023:174), in the "corpus-driven" approach to CL, linguistic data are examined through a phraseological and syntagmatic lens. However, most

studies, including the present research, employ a “corpus-based” approach, which has gained prominence in the last decades, prompted by a turn towards empiricism in linguistic subdisciplines. Post-structuralist thinking, which challenges binary oppositions such as quantitative versus qualitative approaches, encouraged a more integrated or blended approach rather than an exclusive one (Baker, 2023:18).

As argued by Garzone and Santulli (2004: 353), the integration of corpus tools within a CDA framework offers significant potential, as this combined methodology helps addressing CDA’s critical points, such as the representativeness of language samples and the need to validate qualitative hypotheses through empirically verifiable data.

Hence, the Corpus-based critical approach stems from a concept of triangulation, which emphasizes the importance of using multiple methods and forms of data, to enhance the reliability of findings in research (Baker, 2023:18).

In fact, the use of several corpus methods yields to complementary results, as demonstrated by Baker and Egbert (2016, as cited in Baker, 2023). In other words, the combination of a corpus-based analysis with qualitative approaches to DA reveals valuable insights, although it can be time-consuming.

Using large corpora for CDA also helps addressing the claim that the researcher selectively chooses small data samples, which are sometimes unrepresentative. This criticism suggests that the analysis is often guided by the desired outcome and influenced by the researcher’s ideology (Mautner, 2009). However, the use of corpora limits the cognitive biases, such as the confirmation bias, the hostile media effect or the primacy effect, to which all scholars are subject (Baker, 2023: 14). In other words, it is “less easy to be selective about a single newspaper article when we are looking at hundreds or thousands of articles” (Baker, 2023: 14).

Besides being useful in restricting bias, approaching CDA through CL techniques helps dealing with the incremental effect of discourse (Baker, 2023: 15). As already mentioned in the previous chapter, journalists center their narratives around chosen

topics of interest and strengthen their positions by referencing powerful individuals (Baker, 2023: 15). Fairclough (1989: 54, as cited in Baker: 15) states:

The hidden power of media discourse and the capacity of [...] powerholders to exercise this power depend on systematic tendencies in news reporting and other media activities. A single text on its own is quite insignificant: the effects of media power are cumulative, working through the repetition of particular ways of handling causality and agency, particular ways of positioning the reader, and so forth.

When analysing media discourse, the researcher should determine whether individual words or phrases allude to representative or typical patterns that reinforce a given narrative (Baker, 2023: 17). In this regard, corpora are fundamental because they allow the examination of linguistic patterns across numerous examples (*Ibid.*). This type of analysis can also reveal alternative perspectives that may be overlooked or mistaken for hegemonic discourses in smaller studies (*Ibid.*).

Furthermore, corpus analysis can track how discourses shift over time by comparing language use across different periods or analyzing word frequency changes (Baker, 2023: 18).

Finally, Corpus-based Critical studies combine quantitative and qualitative techniques for textual analysis to uncover hidden meaning in discourse (Flowerdew, 2023: 179). The combination of these methods enables the direct comparisons between corpora and, most importantly, the generalization of results to larger populations, which is not possible for purely qualitative studies (McEnery & Wilson, 2001: 76). This process can be fostered by conducting corpus-based analysis with the assistance of recent technologies. Using computer-assisted methods for text and corpus analysis also offers replicable approaches to examine data, so that other researchers can confirm or

challenge the findings in subsequent studies, provided the core terms are clearly defined and the data is thoroughly described (Tannen et al., 2015: 487). For this reason, a description of the methodology of the study, the corpus and its methods of data selection will be provided in the following sections.

A few concerns regarding CL as a method of carrying out DA should be addressed. Firstly, large corpora contain decontextualized language, and they are “semiotically impoverished, reduced to text-only format without any information on accompanying visuals, layout, typography, gesture, facial expression and intonation, all of which can of course contribute crucially to the creation of meaning.” (Mautner, 2009: 25). Conversely, for CDA, linguistic evidence is necessarily paired with a thorough analysis of the extra-linguistic context because, when a text is situated within its social framework, its connections to ideologies are revealed. Yet, when working with corpora totaling millions of words, as is common in corpus linguistics, such detailed exploration of the surrounding context becomes practically unmanageable (*Ibid.*).

According to Mautner (2009: 33), these limitations might explain why critical discourse analysts have been hesitant to fully embrace corpus linguistics, despite its potential benefits.

In order to reply to these concerns, it is necessary to note that, while it is impossible to remove the research bias, corpus methods offer an “extremely fast, accurate and rigorous way of making sense of large amounts of data” (Baker, 2010: 143), enabling discourse-based researchers to counter accusations of bias. In fact, the use of large reference corpora prevents them from overinterpreting specific usages or overlooking socially significant patterns (Mautner, 2009: 35).

Finally, although traditional corpus-based methods show limitations in fully explaining the rationale behind the occurrence of specific linguistic patterns, corpus linguists are not constrained to rely solely on these methods (Baker, 2010: 141). On the contrary, they should integrate the identification of relevant linguistic features with

a comprehensive analysis that delves into the socio-political and historical characteristics of the texts under investigation, as well as the social attitudes reflected in them (*Ibid.*).

## **2.2 Methodology of the Study**

Sketch Engine, a corpus query system which allows the user to explore how language works, was the software of choice for this analysis. It enables users to conduct in-depth corpus analyses by means of corpus methods and data-driven language evidence (Liu, 2024: 74). It also provides several toolkits for linguistic research, such as the word list tool, the keyword list tool, the Key-Word-In-Context (KWIC) tool and the word sketch tool (Kilgarriff et al., 2014).

In order to examine news reports related to the Israel-Palestine war in Italian online newspapers, the research initially focused on the first dimension of CDA which studies the linguistic features, and more specifically, vocabulary choices and patterns (Liu, 2024: 73). Hence, the Sketch Engine wordlist tool was employed to compile two word lists, containing the ten most frequent words from each corpus. A wordlist consists of all the words in a corpus, displayed along with their corresponding frequencies and the percentage each word contributes to the overall corpus (Baker, 2023: 86).

Despite study of frequency is often misconceived as a purely quantitative methodology, whose results can be reductive and generalizing, frequency is a central concept in corpus analysis (Baker, 2023: 81). Frequency lists, as well as other tools of purely quantitative analysis, provide basic insights into areas that may not be easily identified through the examination of a limited text sample (Garzone & Santulli, 2004: 366).

Frequency lists offer an overview of the lexical choices operated in the corpus, which are “ideologically based, consciously and unconsciously principled, and systematic” (Sheyholislami, 2001, as cited in Liu, 2024: 74) and they constitute the first display of

the symbolic world of discourses, as highlighted by computational models of content analysis (Baldi, 2021: 83). In fact, the frequent occurrence of specific words shows the themes of a text and conveys the underlying ideologies (Liu, 2024: 74). Besides conveying ideological meanings, the preference for a term over another promotes a particular perspective on the event described.

Moreover, the lexical choices operated by media outlets can reinforce stereotypes. This is due to the fact that even non-metaphorical terms can generate interpretative effects and refer to events or individuals through meanings which are encoded by dominant semantic systems (Baldi, 2021). On the other hand, if certain words display a low frequency, this could also reflect the attempt of downplaying the importance of other themes (*Ibid.*)

Secondly, keyword lists from the corpora were compiled. Keywords are single words, or tokens, that appear in the focus corpus more frequently than they would in general language, which is represented by the reference corpus (Sketch Engine, 2019). The keyword list tool allows “to compare the frequencies in one word list against another in order to determine which words occur statistically more often in word list A when compared to word list B and vice versa. Then all of the words that do occur more often than expected in one word list when compared to another are compiled together into another list, called keyword list” (Baker, 2023: 165).

By performing a keyword analysis on a collection of texts, the researcher highlights the words occurring with a significantly different frequency compared to the reference corpus (Stefanowitsch, 2020). In this study, this process was employed to extrapolate the lexical items representative of the corpus’ themes. The top 100 keywords from both sources were analyzed and broadly sorted into categories provided by Liu (2024), including participants in the war, political dimensions of the conflict, and military-related aspects.

The analysis considered the keywords shared across the study corpora and the differences between them. Additionally, the KWIC tool provided a list of all instances of a search term in the form of a concordance, displaying the original context of the collocation to the right and left (Sketch Engine, 2018b) and examples of these sentences were reported for detailed demonstration and analysis (Liu, 2024: 75).

Frequency and keywords' analysis proved that linguistic choices are not random, collocations provided further evidence to support this thesis. In fact, words show a tendency of co-occurrence with other words with a high degree of predictability (Baker, 2023: 81). More specifically, “when a word regularly appears near another word, and the relationship is statistically significant in some way, then such co-occurrences are referred to as collocates and the phenomena of certain words frequently occurring next to or near each other is collocation” (Baker, 2023: 136). By combining with other words in various contexts, a word gains meaning. Moreover, a collocation displays the associations, connotations, and therefore the assumptions it carries (*Ibid.*)

In Sketch Engine, the word sketch tool processes the words collocates sorted into grammatical relations, showing the frequency of each collocate, the typicality score, the most frequent representation of each collocation and other words in its surroundings (Sketch Engine, 2018a). In this study, the author focused on the collocations of selected keywords to identify the predominant discourses in *Corriere.it* and *LiberoQuotidiano.it*. As previously mentioned, only lexical items were considered, while grammatical items were excluded.

## 2.3 Data

### 2.3.1 Methods of Data Selection

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, one of the main issues with using corpora as the sole data source is that the texts within them are decontextualized, which hinders the study of relevant aspects in DA, including the context of production and reception. On the other hand, a purely quantitative analysis of the corpus may overlook the relationships between different texts or sentences within the same text. To mitigate these issues, Baker (2023: 55) suggests familiarizing with the corpus before analysis process and, for the present study, this process of familiarization was achieved by building the corpus from scratch. Engaging with the data firsthand through the selection and annotation of the texts, allowed to develop hypotheses based on observed patterns, ensuring a more informed starting point for the analysis (Baker, 2023: 55). Not only did the corpus creation offer a deeper understanding of the data, but it was also necessary to build a specialized corpus that met precise requirements. In this study, the research questions aimed at identifying media outlets' political stances towards the Israel-Hamas war and how their ideologies were reflected in the news report. Accordingly, the corpora were created to align with these objectives. To investigate how discourses on a common topic shift according to political alignment, texts were collected from *Corriere.it* and *LiberoQuotidiano.it*, news outlets representing different political perspectives. *Corriere.it* is considered as a centrist media outlet appealing to both left and right-wing audiences in Italy ("News Media and Political Attitudes in Italy," 2018). In contrast, *LiberoQuotidiano.it* reflects more conservative views and leans towards right-wing audiences, although it is slightly more moderate than its editorial stance. By selecting these two online newspapers, it was possible to conduct a horizontal comparison and investigate whether the ideological discrepancy is reflected in their war discourse.

The news articles were selected from four non-consecutive weeks marked by events that were deemed especially significant for this research, starting from the initial escalation following Hamas' attack on October 7, 2023. Afterwards, the Israeli airstrike on the Al-Ahli Hospital in late October 2023, the second week of May, during which Italy saw widespread pro-Palestinian demonstrations, particularly within universities and, finally, the period marking the first anniversary of the attack were taken into consideration.

The articles were retrieved from *Corriere.it*, official website of the newspaper *Corriere della Sera* and *LiberoQuotidiano.it*, official website of *Libero*. To ensure accurate data collection, the terms “Gaza”, “Hamas”, “Israele” and “Palestina” were chosen as search terms. Each keyword was searched individually, resulting in four rounds of inquiry.

In both websites, the search term that displayed the higher number of results was “Israele”, with 10.000 results for *Libero* and 6.411 for *Corriere*. The search results were then narrowed by including in the corpora only articles published in the weeks of October 7<sup>th</sup> - 13<sup>th</sup>, 2023, October 17<sup>th</sup> - 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2023, May 6<sup>th</sup> - 12<sup>th</sup>, 2023 and October 7<sup>th</sup> - 13<sup>th</sup>, 2024.

Finally, the selected texts were organized chronologically, with older reports at the start of the corpus and more recent ones at the end.

### **2.3.2 Sample Description**

As already mentioned, the primary source for the present study consists of two corpora totaling 200 articles. The corpora are thematic and purpose-built, thus well-suited for a critical discourse analysis that draws on both qualitative and quantitative insights, allowing for an in-depth examination of linguistic patterns (Baker, 2023).

As shown in Table 1, there were 100 news collected from *Corriere.it* and 100 from *LiberoQuotidiano.it* over the same period. In order for the corpora to be balanced, each

week mentioned in the previous section was represented by 25 articles, totaling 100 articles for each source.

**Table 1: General statistics of the Israeli-Hamas war study corpora**

	<i>Corriere.it</i>	<i>LiberoQuotidiano.it</i>
Number of Words	242.945	77.497
Number of news reports	100	100
Number of days collected	28	28
Average report length by words	2.429,45	774,97

Note: Adapted from <http://www.sketchengine.eu>

The corpus selected from *Corriere.it* consists of 242.945 words, drawn from 100 news articles published over a span of 30 nonconsecutive days. The average length of each article was approximately 2.429 words. The *LiberoQuotidiano.it* corpus also includes 100 news articles collected over the same time span. Its total word count is, however, significantly smaller than the previous, counting 77.497 words. The difference in the average report length suggests that, in the *Corriere* corpus, articles are longer on average. On the other hand, *LiberoQuotidiano.it* corpus also featured articles under 100 words, as seen can be seen in Figure 1.

The difference between the number of words in the study corpora constitutes a limitation of the study and might have influenced the results. Future research might benefit from using corpora with a more similar word count to enhance comparability. The articles selected from *Corriere.it* for this thesis were authored by various journalists, such as Davide Frattini, *Corriere's* Middle East correspondent, based in Jerusalem or Lorenzo Cremonesi, war correspondent specializing in the Middle East (*Corriere.it*, n.d.). *LiberoQuotidiano.it*, instead, published both original content,

produced by its own journalists and materials taken from news agencies and, while some articles were authored by the editorial team, others are retrieved as news agencies, such as Adnkronos.

**Figure 1: Article from the *LiberoQuotidiano.it* corpus**



Note: Retrieved from Libero Quotidiano (2023, October 7th). *Israele sotto attacco: migliaia di razzi nel cielo.*

### 2.3.3 Background of the Selected Newspapers

According to Goban-Klas (Dobek-Ostrowska, 2011: p. 26), quoting Paolo Mancini (1991: 139), the Italian media system is characterized by the following features:

1. State control over the media, realized in the direct control over television and indirect control over the press;
2. Political party influence on the selection of topics and the structure of the media organizations;
3. A high degree of integration of the media and political elites;
4. Ethical divisions among journalists and media personnel

These characteristics suggest that the nature of Italian news outlets is inherently political and, as a consequence, polarized. There is a significant ideological divide,

particularly between those identifying with left-wing and right-wing stances (Pew Research Center, 2018). The political polarization has a strong impact on the news outlet of choice, so that Italians with left-leaning views and those with right-leaning views display major differences in the primary news sources they rely on, as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2: Trust levels for news outlets surveyed in Italy**  
**Percentage of adults who generally trust each news outlet**

Outlets in Italy	Total %	Left %	Center %	Right %	Right-Left Difference
<i>La Repubblica</i>	50	68	55	44	-24
<i>Corriere</i>	57	65	62	58	-7
<i>Rai News</i>	65	76	69	62	-14
<i>La7</i>	61	75	66	58	-17
<i>Il Fatto Quotidiano</i>	40	45	38	43	-2
<i>Il Giornale</i>	35	25	34	46	+21
<i>Libero</i>	28	19	26	39	+20
<i>Mediaset News</i>	48	30	48	65	+35

Note: Adapted from "In Western Europe, Public Attitudes Toward News Media More Divided by Populist Views Than Left-Right Ideology," by Pew Research Center, 2018.

Thus, the choice of *Corriere* and *Libero* for this analysis was not random. *Corriere.it* is the most read online newspaper in Italy, as of 2024 (Statista, 2024) and it is considered to keep a moderate editorial stance. On the contrary, *LiberoQuotidiano.it* aligns with right-leaning and conservative Italian audiences.

*Corriere* is a mainstream news outlet. As can be seen in Table 3, 69% of non-populists express trust for this source, which suggests that *Corriere* appeals more to readers that are less inclined towards populist positions.

As far as ideology is concerned, trust in *Corriere* is slightly higher among right-leaning individuals, with 65% expressing trust, than among those on the left, with 58%. These percentages indicate a modest ideological divide.

*Libero* shows a different distribution in the trust level, marked by both low overall trust and a pronounced ideological divide. In fact, while populist orientation does not seem to have significant impact on the trust rate, the ideological divide is more substantial. Only 19% of left-leaning Italians trust *Libero*, as opposed to 39% of right-leaning Italians, creating a 20-point gap.

The data show that *Libero* is more trusted among conservative and right-leaning audiences and this difference can be ascribed to *Libero*'s alignment with issues and perspectives that resonate with conservatives and right supporters.

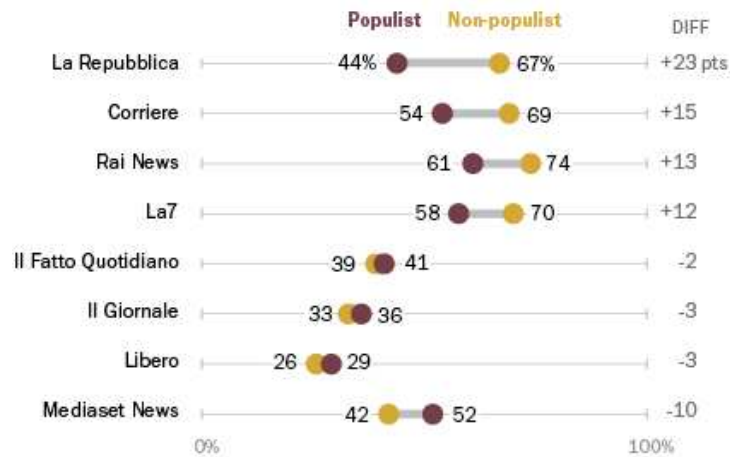
In sum, the results presented above indicate that populist attitudes and ideological leanings shape media preferences in Italy. For this reason, *Corriere.it* and *LiberoQuotidiano.it* appeal to different audiences, demonstrating that the choice of a media outlet over another reflects deeper political and ideological identities.

*Corriere.it* and *LiberoQuotidiano.it* are also characterized by differences in their approach. *Corriere* appeals to a broad audience, because of its ideological position and established role in Italian news sources. For this reason, its journalists may prefer more moderate language. *Libero*, instead, aligns with conservative Italian audiences, who prefer narratives that emphasize Italian and western perspectives on conflict and security (Marzano, 2011). As a consequence, it is known for its conservative editorial stance and its assertive representation of political events regarding national security and international affairs.

**Table 3: Trust in Italian news outlets by populist attitudes and political ideology**

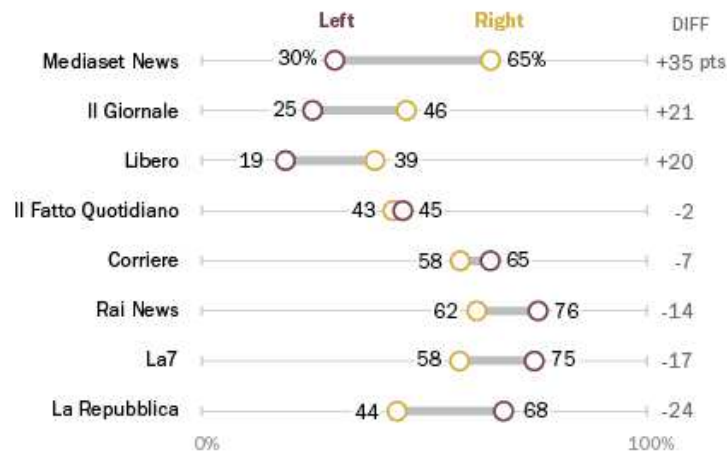
**In Italy, those with populist views are less trusting of some news outlets than those without such views**

*% of adults in Italy who hold \_\_\_ views and generally trust each news outlet*



**Trust is also divided along the left-right spectrum**

*% of adults in each ideological group who generally trust each news outlet*



Note: Respondents are classified as holding populist views if they answered: "Most elected officials don't care what people like me think" and "Ordinary people would do a better job solving the country's problems than elected officials."

Source: Survey of eight Western European countries conducted Oct. 30-Dec. 20, 2017.

\*In Western Europe, Public Attitudes Toward News Media More Divided by Populist Views Than Left-Right Ideology"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Note: Retrieved from "News Media and Political Attitudes in Italy", *Pew Research Center* (2018)

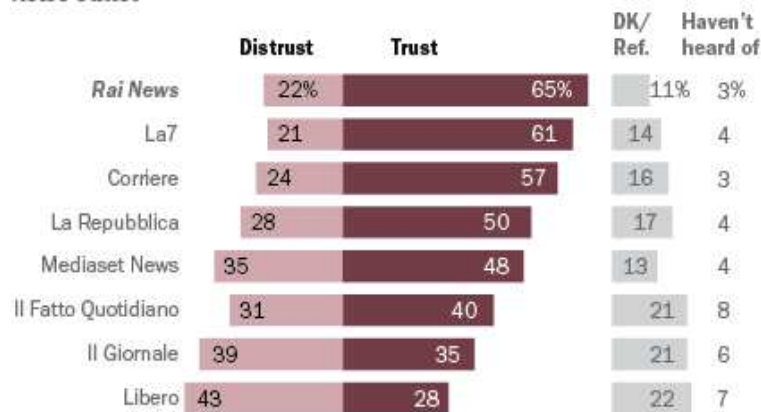
Table 4 focuses the levels of trust in Italian media outlets, graphing the percentages of Italian adults that trust or distrust each news outlet.

*Libero* displays the highest level of distrust among the major news outlets surveyed by the Pew Research Center (2018) study, since 43% of respondents saying they distrust it. Additionally, only 28% of respondents trust *Libero* which makes it the least trusted news agency among the eight surveyed in the study.

**Table 4: Levels of trust in Italian media outlets**

**In Italy, the public displays high levels of trust in their public news organization**

*% of adults in Italy who generally trust or distrust each news outlet*



Note: People who said they had not heard of an outlet or refused to respond to the question about whether they get news from an outlet are grouped under "Haven't heard of" here. Public broadcaster is in **bold**.

Source: Survey of eight Western European countries conducted Oct. 30-Dec. 20, 2017.

"In Western Europe, Public Attitudes Toward News Media More Divided by Populist Views Than Left-Right Ideology"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Note: Retrieved from "News Media and Political Attitudes in Italy", *Pew Research Center* (2018)

*Corriere* is a more trusted source of information compared to *Libero*, given that 57% of respondents trust it while distrust stands at 24%. This outlet also has a high level of familiarity of the Italian public with this outlet and only 3% of respondents declared they had not heard of *Corriere* (Pew Research Center, 2018).

In conclusion, *Corriere* appears to have a stronger reputation and higher trust level among the Italian public compared to *Libero*, which suffers from significantly higher distrust. This suggests that *Corriere* is more widely accepted as a credible source, whereas *Libero* may be seen as more polarizing and controversial. Hence, the selection of the two newspapers was motivated by the distance in their political stances, which was useful for examining different discourse patterns in the coverage of the Israel-Hamas conflict. In fact, this study benefits from the contrasting perspectives of the corpora, which serve as a basis for comparing how linguistic choices and narratives influence and reflect the audience beliefs on foreign conflicts.

### Chapter Three: Results Discussion

In the present chapter, the results of the analysis carried out with Sketch Engine are presented.

Firstly, the most frequently occurring terms are taken into consideration to gain an overview of the study corpora. Two wordlists containing the 10 most recurrent lexical items of each corpus are presented in order of frequency and analyzed, so as to extrapolate the textual themes and the ideologies conveyed through them. Moreover, to reveal how attitudes towards these themes evolved during the first year, the frequency changes of aforementioned terms are examined, allowing for a diachronic analysis. The analysis of the top 100 keywords further reveals the distinguishing themes of each corpus, allowing a better understanding of the lexical choices. The comparison between the keywords lists is also employed to investigate the ideological differences.

However, the analysis of wordlists and keyword lists is not sufficient to confirm the hypothesis that *Corriere* and *Libero* systematically employed different linguistic strategies to convey political stances on the Israel-Palestine war. Hence, selected keywords are further analyzed.

The study discusses the results of the Word Sketch Difference of keywords *palestinese* and *israeliano*, the main actors of the war by comparing their collocational behavior. Moreover, through the study of prepositional phrases containing keywords *razzo* and *attacco*, the analysis investigates whether one of the two actors is predominantly described as the perpetrator of violence, while the other as a victim, exploiting the fundamental concept of agency. These phrases provide useful insights on the distribution of agency in the texts, despite data on the registered casualties do not confirm such attribution of responsibility.

Finally, these results are further developed in the last section of the chapter, which discusses the strongest collocations for the keyword *terrorista*. Its collocational behavior reveals decisive results for the analysis, given the pejorative connotation and the ideological implications brought by labeling a group as terrorist.

### 3.1 Wordlists

Table 5 displays the 10 most frequent words for both corpora, along with their frequency, that is the number of times the word appeared in the corpus (Sketch Engine, 2018c). Highly used items including grammatical terms and modals were not reported, as they do not carry information relevant to analyze the themes of the articles. Only nouns and adjectives were reported in the lists reported below, while verbs, despite being considered for the analysis, did not appear among the 10 most frequent lexical words.

**Table 5: List of the most frequent words in *Corriere.it* and *LiberoQuotidiano.it***

CORRIERE WORDLIST	FREQUENCY	LIBERO WORDLIST	FREQUENCY
Israele	2473	Israele	945
Gaza	1709	Hamas	856
Hamas	1583	Gaza	662
Ore	1157	Ore	553
Ottobre	829	Attacco	345
Stato	749	Israeliano	267
Attacco	680	Stato	262
Israeliano	668	Striscia	238
Guerra	557	Israeliani	218
Palestinesi	556	Stati	196

Note: Adapted from Sketch Engine <http://www.sketchengine.eu>

The majority of the most frequent words listed above are common to both corpora, and they are strictly linked to the description of the war context. *Israele, Gaza, Hamas, Stato, Stati, Striscia* indicate the main countries, places and actors involved in the conflict and, thus, it is not surprising to find them as the most frequent words.

However, it is worth noting the absence of two words from the *LiberoQuotidiano.it* corpus, which are conversely present in the *Corriere.it* corpus, the first being *guerra* ‘war’. The presence of this term among the most recurrent indicates that *Corriere* mainly labels the militant activity between Hamas and Israel as a war, while its absence in the *Libero*’s list suggests the outlet’s preference for other terms over *guerra* to describe it. In fact, *guerra* only ranks as the 58<sup>th</sup> most recurrent term in *Libero*. This lexical choice can have important consequences in the competition over legitimacy and authority, where each party needs to employ “the right names” to gain public support (Hadad, 2021: 934). In this case, it may reflect *Libero*’s cautious attitude in defining the Israeli Palestinian war and indicate a different political stance compared to *Corriere*.

The second term found in the *Corriere*’s list and absent in *Libero*’s list is *Palestinesi* ‘Palestinians’. Despite being the most affected in number of victims, Palestinians are not mentioned as frequently as Israelis by the news outlet, which mentions the term *palestinesi* 172 times, making it the 61<sup>st</sup> most recurrent term in *Libero*’s frequency list. Conversely, adjectives indicating Israelis are found twice in the list, both in the singular form *Israeliano* ‘Israeli’ and in their plural form *Israeliani* ‘Israelis’. This imbalance suggests that *LiberoQuotidiano.it* covers and reports more frequently the Israeli side, taking a stand in its reporting of the war.

In order to understand how discourse around the main topics changed in the timespan of a year, the changing frequency of the 10 most frequent words over time was analyzed. Using timeline function, the relative frequency of the KWIC in each period

was considered. However, the analysis did not produce results relevant for the study, since *Corriere* and *Libero* displayed similar tendencies in the frequency changes.

### **3.2 Keywords Analysis**

Keywords are ranked according to their saliency, demonstrated by their keyness score, which allows to identify the items that are typical of the corpus by comparing the frequencies in the focus corpus with those in the reference corpus (*Sketch Engine*, 2019).

Although any item can potentially qualify as a keyword if its frequency in the focus corpus is higher than in the reference corpus, the list consists almost entirely of nouns and adjectives because the frequencies of other parts of speech tend to remain consistent across different texts (*Sketch Engine*, 2019). As happened in the frequency lists' analysis, grammatical items were not included in the keyword list, since this research focuses on the semantic level of language (Liu, 2024: 74).

Sketch Engine's keywords tool provides insights on the frequency of the focus corpus and of the reference corpus, their relative frequency and the keyness score of each keyword, based on which the keywords are ranked in descending order.

The reference corpus chosen to obtain the keyword list was ItTenTen20, an Italian corpus of texts retrieved from the Internet in 2020 (*Sketch Engine*, 2015). This corpus is part of a collection of web-based corpora, constructed with a standardized methodology and containing more than 10,000,000,000 words (Jakubíček et al., 2013). This reference corpus was chosen to validate interpretations through comparison with evidence drawn from larger, more comprehensive corpora, as argued by Mautner (2009, in Liu, 2024).

The choice of the reference corpus, however, represented a limitation of this study. In fact, "more attention and resources should be emphasized on the contents compiled

**Table 6: Keyword list from *Corriere.it* corpus**

ITEM	KEYNESS SCORE	ITEM	KEYNESS SCORE	ITEM	KEYNESS SCORE
hamas	1033.584	libanese	125.137	ahli	73.417
gaza	724.688	sinwar	119.218	umanitario	73.091
idf	595.371	raid	114.388	scholz	72.105
rafah	486.4	benyamin	111.939	esteri	72.034
biden	449.068	jazeera	111.169	valico	70.629
hezbollah	447.84	haaretz	108.843	kfar	70.469
netanyahu	385.482	jihad	108.249	josep	70.042
gallant	281.796	al-aqsa	107.033	kippur	69.051
israeliano	278.921	palestina	107.005	nakba	68.587
ostaggio	240.568	zaki	105.666	cnn	67.78
israele	233.433	mazen	101.75	wafa	67.267
kibbutz	218.668	guterres	100.939	abbas	67.167
borrell	199.244	riservista	99.859	rave	66.975
blinken	187.956	miliziano	95.993	houthi	66.787
sunak	182.895	al-ahli	94.151	portavoce	65.01
tajani	182.275	leyen	90.521	be"eri	64.089
razzo	181.958	israel	90.154	yahya	63.779
palestinese	179.546	haifa	88.453	intifada	63.525
unifil	178.13	fattah	85.065	iran	62.933
hagari	176.371	bahrein	83.33	anp	62.908
striscia	175.911	ashkelon	82.648	jabalia	62.891
libare	172.203	terroristico	79.04	yom	62.532
aviv	156.046	escalation	76.539	israelo-palestinese	62.528
cisgiordania	134.709	rettorato	76.014	aza	62.431
haniyeh	134.31	unrwa	74.97	benjamin	62.105
yoav	132.754	abdel	74.163		
beirut	125.208	rishi	73.833		

Note: Adapted from Sketch Engine <http://www.sketchengine.eu>

**Table 7: Keyword list from *LiberoQuotidiano.it* corpus**

ITEM	KEYNESS SCORE	ITEM	KEYNESS SCORE	ITEM	KEYNESS SCORE
hamas	1033.584	libanese	125.137	rishi	73.833
gaza	724.688	sinwar	119.218	ahli	73.417
idf	595.371	raid	114.388	umanitario	73.091
rafah	486.4	benyamin	111.939	scholz	72.105
biden	449.068	jazeera	111.169	esteri	72.034
hezbollah	447.84	haaretz	108.843	valico	70.629
netanyahu	385.482	jihad	108.249	kfar	70.469
gallant	281.796	al-aqsa	107.033	josep	70.042
israeliano	278.921	palestina	107.005	kippur	69.051
ostaggio	240.568	zaki	105.666	nakba	68.587
israele	233.433	mazen	101.75	cnr	67.78
kibbutz	218.668	guterres	100.939	wafa	67.267
borrell	199.244	riservista	99.859	abbas	67.167
blincken	187.956	miliziano	95.993	rave	66.975
sunak	182.895	al-ahli	94.151	houthi	66.787
tajani	182.275	leyen	90.521	portavoce	65.01
razzo	181.958	israel	90.154	be"eri	64.089
palestinese	179.546	haifa	88.453	yahya	63.779
unifil	178.13	fattah	85.065	intifada	63.525
hagari	176.371	bahrein	83.33	iran	62.933
striscia	175.911	ashkelon	82.648	anp	62.908
libare	172.203	terroristico	79.04	jabalia	62.891
aviv	156.046	escalation	76.539	yom	62.532
cisgiordania	134.709	rettorato	76.014	israelo-palestinese	62.528
haniyeh	134.31	unrwa	74.97	aza	62.431
yoav	132.754	benjamin	62.105		
beirut	125.208	abdel	74.163		

Note: Adapted from Sketch Engine <http://www.sketchengine.eu>

for the reference corpus” (Liu, 2024: 74). Further research might employ reference corpora containing news reports with similar subjects to the focus corpora and published in the same timespan (*Ibid.*).

Table 5 and Table 6 show the results of the keywords’ extraction from the *Corriere.it* and *LiberoQuotidiano.it* corpora. In particular, Table 5 reports the top 100 keywords from *Corriere.it*, while Table 6 presents those from *LiberoQuotidiano.it*.

The wordlists display both similarities and differences. Firstly, key terms common to both corpora are presented, followed by the differences between them. In order to better analyze the keywords, they were described according to semantic fields broadly drawn from Liu’s (2024) framework.

### 3.2.1 Common Keywords across the Study Corpora

Both keywords’ lists show a prevalence of items linked to the participants of the war, that is, people, organizations and places involved in the conflict. The keyword displaying the highest keyness score in both corpora is *Hamas*, the Palestinian Sunni Islamist group that led the attack on October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023 and has been at war with Israel since. Hamas plays a pivotal role in the narrative of the articles, given its involvement in the war. Similar reasons explain the presence of *Qassam* among the keywords, which refers to Al Qassam, the military wing of Hamas (Example 1 retrieved from *Corriere.it*, published October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023):

- 1) [...] Successi tattici che non hanno inciso però sulle Ezzedine al Qassam organizzate per sopravvivere ad una eventuale decapitazione dei vertici. [...]

Other organizations involved in the war can be found among the keywords, such as *IDF*, ‘Israel Defense Forces’, the national military of the state of Israel, which leads its military operations in this conflict. Additionally, *Hezbollah*, Shiite militant group based in Lebanon, is mentioned for its involvement, which adds to the dynamics of the conflict (Council on Foreign Relations, 2024). After 7<sup>th</sup> October, 2023, clashes

between Hezbollah and Israel intensified, as the first launched attacks along the Israel-Lebanon border in support of Palestine (*Ibid.*) (Example 2 retrieved from *LiberoQuotidiano.it*, published October 13<sup>th</sup>):

- 2) Perché i nostri militari non sono terroristi di Hezbollah e noi siamo amici di Israele.

International organization *UNIFIL*, United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, also appear in the list (Example 3 retrieved from *Corriere.it*, published October 10<sup>th</sup>, 2024) reflecting the role played in this war (UNIFIL, n.d):

- 3) Le forze di peacekeeping dell'UNIFIL sono presenti nel Libano meridionale per supportare un ritorno alla stabilità sotto il mandato del Consiglio di sicurezza.

Finally, some prominent media outlets like *Jazeera*, *CNN*, *Haaretz* appear in both wordlists. These organizations are involved in the conflict because they report news on the conflict, informing the general public on the succession of events while shaping perspectives on it (Examples 4 to 6 retrieved from *Corriere.it*, published October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023):

- 4) Lo riporta Al Jazeera
- 5) Secondo indiscrezioni riportate da Cnn, un annuncio relativo agli aiuti potrebbe arrivare a breve.
- 6) Lo riportano il quotidiano Haaretz che riferisce di una "pesante raffica" di razzi sul sud e il centro di Israele.

Another keyword, *Pro-Palestina* 'Pro-Palestine', refers to the global movements of support for Palestinian rights spread worldwide, which is actively manifesting against the conflict (Examples retrieved from *LiberoQuotidiano.it*, 7 published October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2024 and 8 retrieved from *Corriere.it*, published on May 12<sup>nd</sup>, 2024 ):

- 7) Lo hanno detto gli organizzatori del corteo pro-Palestina radunatisi in piazza Ostiense.

8) [...] Sono gli accampamenti creati dagli studenti pro-Palestina negli atenei italiani.

This keyword can also be associated to global issues because, as the war proceed, European and extra-European nations have undergone several political and social changes, causing the Pro-Palestine movement to spread (Amin et al., 2024). Moreover, the Pro-Palestine movement has raised widespread debates and carried several protests urging diplomatic efforts, influencing global perceptions and policies on the matter.

Beside organizations that are engaged in the war to varying degrees, both keywords' lists display a consistent number of nouns and adjectives relating to people involved in the conflict, spanning from international actors who are shaping its trajectory to direct participants, such as military figures and civilians. A large number of proper names fit in this field; among the Israeli figures, Israel's Prime Minister *Benjamin Netanyahu*, leader of the government's military and political actions, Israel's Defense Minister *Gallant*, who oversees military strategy and operations and IDF spokesperson and military figure *Hagari*, engaged in the communication of war operations (Example 9 retrieved from *LiberoQuotidiano.it*, published October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023 and 10 retrieved from *Corriere.it*, published October 9<sup>th</sup>, 2023):

9) Netanyahu: "Tutti lascino Gaza, la trasformeremo in rovine"

10) Secondo Hagari ci sarebbero, al momento, solo scontri "isolati" tra le truppe Israeliane e quelle di Hamas.

Among the shared keywords, there are only few Palestinian figures listed, namely *Mohammed Deif*, a Palestinian militant and the head of the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades, and President of the Palestinian Authority *Mahmoud Abbas*, also known as *Abu Mazen*. However, *Corriere.it* keywords' list also includes *Haniyeh*, senior Hamas political leader, director of the group's political and militant strategies and *Sinwar*, Hamas leader in Gaza, central to the group's governance and military decisions.

The wordlists then display a number of nouns referring to international figures, such as *Guterres*, UN Secretary-General, who has advocated for ceasefires and humanitarian corridors during this humanitarian crisis. Other personalities include former U.S. President *Biden*, UK Prime Minister *Sunak*, and German Chancellor *Scholz*. There is also an Italian political figure in the list, that is, Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs *Tajani*, who represents the European engagement in the crisis (Example 11 retrieved from *Corriere.it*, published October 9<sup>th</sup>, 2023, 12 retrieved from *Corriere.it*, published October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023, and 13 retrieved from *Corriere.it*, published October 8<sup>th</sup>, 2023):

- 11) Guterres ha manifestato "profonda preoccupazione" per la decisione di Israele di togliere elettricità, acqua, cibo e combustibile alla Striscia di Gaza, "dove la situazione era già difficile prima"
- 12) L'amministrazione Biden ha poi rafforzato la sua forza militare nella regione dall'inizio della guerra a Gaza
- 13) Ore 15:57 - Tajani : "Nessuna vittima italiana in Israele"

Terms referring to general population are also present in both wordlists. The most prominent are *Israeli* 'Israeli' and *Palestinese* 'Palestinian', which will be further analyzed in the following section, devoted to their word sketch difference analysis.

Finally, terms including *miliziano* 'militiaman', *riservista* 'reservist' and *portavoce* 'spokesperson' suggest that attention was devoted to the people involved as well as to the broader militant context (Example 14 retrieved from *Libero.it*, published October 18<sup>th</sup>, 2023 and 15 retrieved from *Libero.it*, published October 11<sup>th</sup>, 2023):

- 14) Un violento scontro a fuoco tra militari Israeliani e miliziani di Hamas è in corso nella città di Magen, nel sud d'Israele vicino al confine con la Striscia di Gaza.
- 15) L'Esercito Israeliano ha richiamato circa 300mila riservisti dopo l'attacco di sabato scorso in Israele di Hamas, che controlla la Striscia.

The countries and places involved are a further aspect of the Israel-Palestine war extensively reported, as shown by the keyword lists. The keywords *Gaza* and *Striscia* indicate the Gaza Strip, which constitutes the focal point of the conflict since it has been subject to Israeli military operations and blockades. Similarly, *Rafah* and *valico* ‘crossing’ refer to the border crossing between Gaza and Egypt, fundamental for humanitarian aid and evacuation efforts because most of its inhabitants are Arab Palestinian refugees, who live in refugee camps established after the forced displacement from the northern part of the Gaza Strip (Renno, 2024). The presence of these places to describe the physical space of the conflict suggests that, among the targets of the attacks, are refugees and civilians (Examples retrieved from *Corriere.it*, 16 published October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023, 17 published October 12<sup>th</sup>, 2023 and 18 published October 19<sup>th</sup>, 2023 ):

- 16) Abbiamo assistito all'inizio dell'aggressione di ritorsione Israeliana che ha preso di mira comunità residenziali in varie aree della striscia di Gaza, che finora ha portato al martirio 313 palestinesi e al ferimento di circa duemila altri, tra cui bambini e donne.
- 17) Droni picchiano duro il nord di Beit Hanoun come il sud di Khan Younis, il centro di Gaza City e il valico di Rafah verso l'Egitto, il campo profughi di Bureij e le serre, le banche e i tunnel.
- 18) L'esplosione è avvenuta nel cortile dell'ospedale Al Ahli, fondato nel 1882 dalla diocesi episcopale di Gerusalemme e dove si sono rifugiati centinaia di civili.

This hypothesis is also supported by the presence of keyword *Al-Ahli*, which refers to the al-Ahli Arab Hospital in Gaza City, where hundreds of casualties were reported, according to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA, 2023). When the facility was bombed, it hosted patients and internally

displaced persons seeking refuge, thus numerous casualties were provoked among civilians (OCHA, 2023).

Additionally, Israeli cities and communities near Gaza such as *Ashkelon*, *Sderot*, and *Be'eri* are frequently mentioned, because they were targeted by Hamas rocket attacks. *Kibbutz*, Israeli agricultural communities, such as *Kfar Aza* are key terms in both corpora, as it was a target in the October 7<sup>th</sup> attack (Example 19 retrieved from *Liberio.it*, published October 9<sup>th</sup>, 2023, and 20 retrieved from *Corriere.it*, published October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023):

19) I combattimenti sono continuati in sei località lungo il confine con Gaza, tra cui Be'eri , Kfar Aza, Nirim e Alumim.

20) Una residente del kibbutz di Nirim al confine con Gaza, contattata dall'Ansa ha fatto sapere che "i terroristi di Hamas sono ancora qui"

Another group of key terms is connected to the semantic field of the militant activity, as it details the actions and tactics of the conflict. For instance, *razzo* indicates the rockets frequently employed by Hamas and IDF to target towns and cities, while *raid* encompasses both Israeli and Hamas airstrikes and incursions. However, the collocational behavior of the term *razzo*, whose study is developed later in this chapter, shows that the term is barely associated with the Israeli army, and indicates Hamas as the attacker in the majority of cases (Example 21 retrieved from *Corriere.it*, published October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023):

21) Pioggia di razzi contro Israele, sirene a Tel Aviv

The keyword *ostaggio* 'hostage' mainly refers to the hostages taken by Hamas during the October 7, 2023, attacks (Example 22 retrieved from *Corriere.it*, published October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023):

22) Le Forze armate confermano che ci sono almeno 50 ostaggi nelle mani di Hamas.

Finally, the term *terroristico* ‘terroristic’ often recurs in concordance with Hamas, to describe its war operations (Example 23 retrieved from *Corriere.it*, published October 9<sup>th</sup>, 2023, and 24 retrieved from *Libero.it*, published October 8<sup>th</sup>, 2023):

23)[...] Il Qatar è in contatto con Hamas per il rilascio degli ostaggi che il gruppo terroristico palestinese ha trasferito da Israele nella Striscia di Gaza

24) Israele è in guerra contro le organizzazioni terroristiche nella Striscia di Gaza

The presence of the terms typically employed in terrorism discourse has important consequences, because of the negative connotation inherently carried by these words, which has grown over the last decades and that can influence the public perception of the conflict. An in-depth examination of the “war on terror” narrative and its influence on the broader war discourse will be presented later in this chapter.

Liu’s (2024) categorization of keywords includes a group of terms related to the peace process and global issues, but the presence of these terms in the keywords lists of the study corpora is scarce compared to the other semantic fields previously identified. This might suggest that few attention was devoted to the peace process and global issues as opposed to the participants of the war or the description of militant activity. For instance, the keyword *intifada* may be connected to global issues as it symbolizes the Palestinian resistance against Israeli control, often manifested in uprisings. By considering this keyword in context, it was evident that it refers to the pro-Palestine movement created by students manifesting against the war in Italian universities, known as *intifada studentesca* (Example 25, retrieved from *Corriere.it*, published May 12<sup>nd</sup>, 2024):

25)I Giovani Palestinesi hanno organizzato la 'acampada' per l'Intifada studentesca, allestendo una tendopoli nel cortile dell'università Statale di Milano, in via Festa del Perdono, a cui hanno aderito diversi studenti.

### 3.2.2 Differences between the Keywords Lists

While those presented above were the keywords found in both *Corriere.it* and *LiberoQuotidiano.it* lists, in the following paragraphs the focus will be on their differences. By confronting the keywords from the corpora, it was possible to identify the terms that are exclusive of each corpus, thus revealing the immediate thematic differences in their conflict coverage.

For example, *umanitario* ‘humanitarian’ is a key term exclusively in *Corriere*’s list, which suggests that the newspaper devoted considerable attention to the ongoing humanitarian crisis and the consequences paid by the civil population, highlighting the human tragedy brought by the war. In the context of the Israel-Hamas war, humanitarian issues include aid, evacuation efforts, access to medical care, and relief for the displaced populations. However, humanitarian aid in Gaza has been persistently restricted, causing severe shortage of food, fuel, medicine, equipment and humanitarian staff, to such an extent that hundreds of thousands of people in northern Gaza are entirely deprived of aid (International Rescue Committee, 2024) (Examples retrieved from *Corriere.it*, 26 published October 19<sup>th</sup>, 2023 and 27 published on October 17<sup>th</sup>, 2023):

26) [...] L’Organizzazione mondiale della sanità chiede che gli aiuti umanitari entrino a Gaza ogni giorno per aiutare la popolazione nella Striscia.

27) Per quanto tempo Israele intende lasciare che la crisi umanitaria si sviluppi nel sud di Gaza?

Moreover, in *Corriere*’s list terms such as ONU, the United Nations, *UNRWA*, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine refugee in the near east, are mentioned, displaying a coverage of international organizations and their intervention in the conflict (Examples retrieved from *Corriere.it*, 28 published on October 10<sup>th</sup>, 2023 and 29 published on October 9<sup>th</sup>, 2023):

28) Ore 10:27 - L' Onu: "L'assedio totale di Gaza viola il diritto internazionale"

29) [...] 187.518 persone a Gaza sono fuggite dalle loro case, con l'Unrwa che ne ospita 137.427 in 83 scuole, alcune delle quali fungevano da rifugi di emergenza

*UNRWA* does not only seek to provide primary health care, relief and social services in situations of armed conflict (*UNRWA*, n.d.) but also aims to avoid misinformation by publishing periodical situation reports on the humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem (*Ibid.*). Additionally, the focus on the role of the European Union is reflected by the keywords *Borrell* and *Leyen*, respectively Former Vice-President of the European Commission and President of the European Commission (Example 30 retrieved from *Corriere.it*, published October 18<sup>th</sup>, 2023):

30) Lo ha dichiarato la presidente della Commissione Europea, Ursula von der Leyen, commentando l'attacco su larga scala di Hamas contro Israele.

In sum, a portion of keywords found exclusively in the *Corriere.it* list suggests the news outlet's tendency to frame the Israel-Palestine war in broader terms, with an international and diplomatically oriented perspective which emphasizes geopolitical, humanitarian and institutional aspects.

It is also important to consider that among the organizations involved are the media outlets reporting on the war, as well as the local sources of information. Both *Corriere.it* and *LiberoQuotidiano.it* mention *Al Jazeera*, an independent news organization partly funded by the Qatari government (*Al Jazeera*, n.d.) *Wafa*, a Palestinian News and Information Agency linked to the PLO Executive Committee (*Wafa Agency*, n.d.) and *CNN*. However, while *Corriere's* keyword list includes *Axios*, *al Manar*, *Afp*, *ynet*, *Libero* relies on *Al Arabia*, *Anadolu*, *Kan*, *Askanews*. The differences in the sources of information, as this thesis discuss, have great impact on

the narrative of the same in event. In fact, the sources selection operated by a journalist or an outlet as a whole might expose patterns of media bias (Hamborg, 2023: 28).

*LiberioQuotidiano.it* corpus displays several keywords which are not found in *Corriere.it*. For example, *anticarro* ‘anti-tank’ and *missile* ‘rocket’ suggest a focus on the conflict’s military dimension, as they provide details on the weaponry used by each side and their tactical operations (Examples 31 and 32 retrieved from *LiberioQuotidiano.it*, published October 18<sup>th</sup>, 2023):

31) Nelle ultime ore, aggiungono i militari, "sono stati rilevati diversi lanci di missili anticarro verso le zone di Metulla, Malkia e Manara.

32) Il missile caduto su un ospedale di Gaza, causando una strage di civili, ha scatenato violente accuse reciproche

In addition to the keyword *terroristico*, present in both lists, *Liberio*’s list also includes *terrorista* ‘terrorist’ and *islamista* ‘islamist’, words that might indicate the framing of the conflict in terms of ideological warfare and suggest that this war is part of a broader struggle against terrorism. As a consequence, *Liberio*’s readers realistically perceive the party labeled as terrorist as a threat to national and public security (Examples retrieved from *LiberioQuotidiano.it*, 33 published October 10<sup>th</sup>, 2023 and 34 published October 8<sup>th</sup>, 2024):

33) I terroristi vogliono caos, morte e distruzione.

34) Comunque sia, l'avanzare delle teorie terzomondiste, della critical race, delle culture "altre", è proseguita fino ad arrivare ai giorni nostri, quando nelle università alla presunta intolleranza della cultura classica occidentale si è poco alla volta sostituita la vera intolleranza degli islamisti e degli antisemiti

Another keyword in *Liberio*’s list is *kefiah* ‘keffiyeh’, a cultural emblem of Palestinian identity and resistance, which has gained political significance as a symbol of solidarity towards Palestine in international movements and protests. However, the collocational behavior of this term shows the negative connotation it acquires in the

corpus (Example 35 retrieved from *LiberoQuotidiano.it*, published October 13<sup>th</sup>, 2024):

35) Le zucche vuote ornate di kefiah ormai operano in servizio permanente.

*Evacuazione* ‘evacuation’ and *ferito* ‘wounded’ are keywords relating to the outcomes of the conflict and providing insights in the humanitarian crisis (Example 36 retrieved from *LiberoQuotidiano.it*, published October 13<sup>th</sup>, 2023):

36) Le autorità di Hamas hanno chiesto agli abitanti di Gaza City di ignorare l'ordine di evacuazione verso sud annunciato da Israele in vista dell'avvio dell'operazione di terra

These terms reflect attention on the struggle of those directly affected by violence, though with less focus on broader humanitarian policies compared to *Corriere*.

The list also includes politicians such as *Meloni* and *Piantedosi*, prominent figures in Italian politics. This suggests that *Libero*'s coverage is concerned with the Italian response to the conflict and focuses more on Italy's defense and political leadership, as opposed to the international perspective observed in *Corriere* (Example 37 retrieved from *LiberoQuotidiano.it*, published October 10<sup>th</sup>, 2023):

37) "Bisogna intensificare la protezione dei cittadini di religione ebraica anche sul nostro territorio perché il rischio di emulazione degli atti criminali da parte di Hamas potrebbe arrivare anche da noi": lo ha detto Giorgia Meloni in visita alla sinagoga di Roma.

In the example above, *Libero* quoted Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, who portrays the war as an issue with a potentially direct impact on Italian people. In this framing, the conflict becomes a matter of national security and opposition between the civilized “us” and the dangerous “them” (Amin et al., 2024). More precisely, by describing Hamas as a threat to national security, politicians are able to assert the prevalence of safety concerns over human rights, fostering empathy for the “citizens of Jewish faith”, while alienating Palestinians (*Ibid.*).

To sum up, the *LiberioQuotidiano.it* keyword list suggests a framing of the conflict concerned with Italian national security and frequently resorting to terms with ideological and militarized allusions. Such narrative can be defined as nationalistic, with a persistent focus on military actions and internal political responses.

These features align to an editorial approach and a target audience different from those hypothesized for *Corriere*, a distinction that may be attributed to their ideological orientations.

Conversely, *Corriere.it* appears to provide a broader perspective on the Israel-Palestine war. In fact, it devotes attention towards the international community in the narration of the conflict, including humanitarian concerns and diplomatic engagement, which might indicate less ideological polarization in *Corriere's* articles.

In conclusion, the analysis of keywords was useful to comprehend the main themes of the study corpora, highlighting their similarities and differences. Through keyword analysis, it was possible to make initial assumptions on the news outlet's attitudes towards the Israeli-Palestinian war.

However, the discussed results are not sufficient to answer the research questions and to demonstrate that the selected newspapers employ different language patterns to convey their ideologies and political stances in the news reports about the Israel-Hamas war. For this reason, selected keywords will be further analyzed in the following sections.

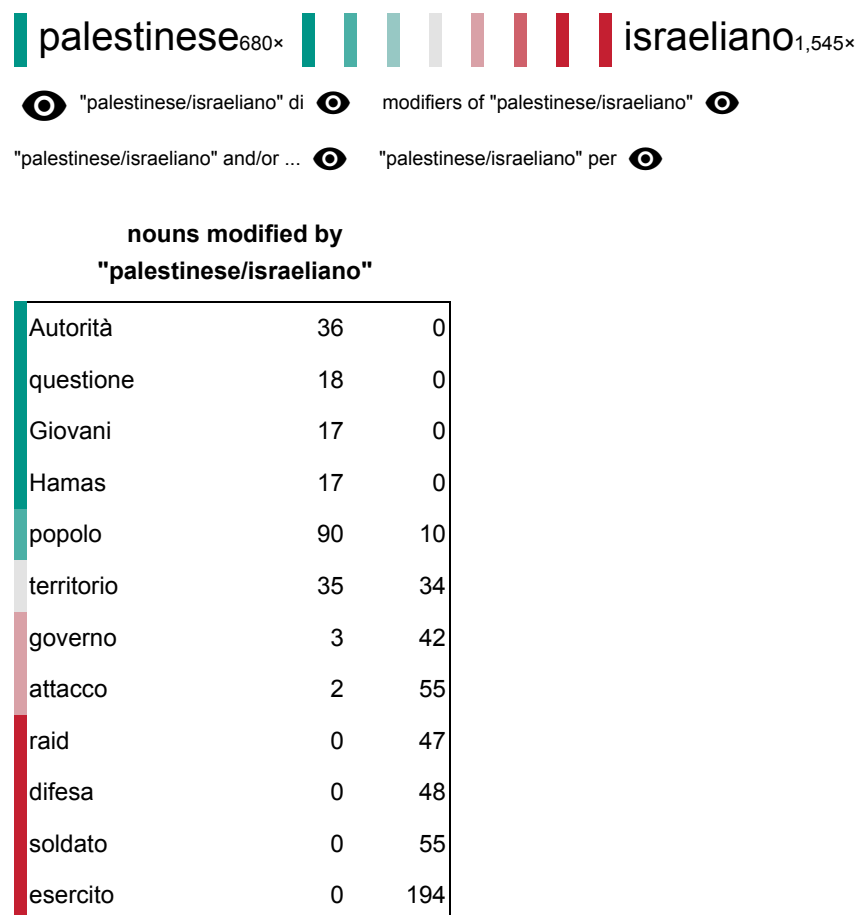
### **3.3 World Sketch Difference between Keywords *Palestinese* and *Israeliano***

The word sketch difference tool allows to make comparisons by contrasting collocations, enabling the researcher to compare the use of two different lemmas via their collocates (*Sketch Engine*, 2018a). For the present study, adjectives *palestinese* 'Palestinian' and *Israeliano* 'Israeli' were selected, as they show

differences in terms of their usage, particularly when they are modifiers in association with nouns.

Sketch Engine associates each search word with a color, to graph whether the collocate appears more frequently with the search word *palestinese* or *israeliano*; in this case, green was assigned to *palestinese* and red to *israeliano*. The intensity of the color represents the strength of the collocation, while the white lines in the center depict the collocates with no clear preference for either of the search words.

**Table 8: Word sketch difference of keywords *palestinese* and *israeliano* in the *Corriere.it* corpus: nouns modified by *palestinese/israeliano***



Note: Retrieved from Sketch Engine <http://www.sketchengine.eu>

Table 8 shows that *Palestinese* is associated with various institutional terms in *Corriere.it*. For example, *Autorità* ‘authority’ has a capital letter because it refers to the Palestinian Authority (PA), governing body of the Palestinian autonomous regions, which have controlled parts of the West Bank in recent decades (Robinson, 2024). Moreover, the term *questione* ‘question’ indicates the broader conflict, namely the Palestinian question (Example 38 retrieved from *Corriere.it*, published October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023):

38) Negli ultimi anni Benjamin Netanyahu ha spinto per la normalizzazione con i Paesi arabi in funzione anti-iraniana, marginalizzando sempre di più la *questione palestinese* nella politica del Medio Oriente, dove la Repubblica Islamica è vista da molti come la principale minaccia.

This might indicate that *Corriere*’s articles frame the conflict in a bigger political and geographical context, confirming the hypothesis proposed at the conclusion of the keywords analysis.

As far as the nouns modified by *israeliano* are concerned, they are mostly military-related terms, such as *esercito* ‘army’, *soldato* ‘soldier’ and *difesa* ‘defense’. Thus, it can be stated that Israelis are prevalently associated with military terms, while the noun *governo* ‘government’ suggests a reference to the governmental aspect (Examples retrieved from *Corriere.it*, 39 published October 14<sup>th</sup>, 2023, and 40 published October 8<sup>th</sup>, 2023):

39) Secondo il Times of Israel, le forze di difesa Israeliane stanno usando carri armati contro i combattenti di Hamas nella zona.

40) L'esercito Israeliano ha lanciato di una serie di attacchi massicci contro il sobborgo di Gaza, Shujaiyya, considerato "il nido del terrore" usato da Hamas come base di lancio per i razzi contro Israele.

There is also an imbalance between the phrases *popolo palestinese*, mentioned 90 times, and *popolo israeliano*, which appears only 10 times. This differences may



Table 9 illustrates the nouns that are most frequently modified by *palestinese* and/or *israeliano* in the *LiberoQuotidiano.it* corpus. Similarly to *Corriere.it*, *israeliano* is associated with military and defense-related terms, such as *difesa* ‘defense’, *esercito* ‘army’, *forza* ‘force’, and *raid*. This co-occurrence may indicate that the Israeli actors are predominantly framed in a military and defense context. However, this corpus differs from the previous one in the collocational behavior of *palestinese*, which is linked to terms with negative connotations, such as *islamista* ‘islamist’ and *terrorista* ‘terrorist’ (Examples retrieved from *LiberoQuotidiano.it*, 41 published October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2024 and 42 published October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023):

41) Le forze Israeliane hanno sventato un attacco con razzi pianificato del movimento islamista palestinese Hamas per l'anniversario del 7 ottobre 2023

42) Le Forze di difesa Israeliane (Idf) confermano che "i terroristi palestinesi della Striscia di Gaza si sono infiltrati in Israele"

This framing may reflect a perspective on Palestinians within a narrative of extremism and terrorism. According to Kristof (2024: 181), by associating Palestinians with Hamas and its history of terrorism, they are devalued. This became evident in the early stages of the conflict, when the large-scale bombing of Gaza and ground invasion were largely accepted by public opinion (*Ibid.*).

Additionally, there is no government institution referenced for Palestinians, which indicates a diminished focus on Palestinian governance in comparison to the Israeli side.

Finally, the strongest collocation for *palestinese* is *enclave* ‘enclave’, a small town or village situated in between the bordering spaces claimed by Israel (Peteet, 2016). Despite being physically within the territory governed by the state, inhabitants of the enclaves are not recognized as part of it. According to Peteet (2016), enclaves constitute evidence of how space can be exploited to isolate and control marginalized groups, since they mark a boundary that explicitly excludes the undesired population,

ensuring control over it. Moreover, by separating the occupied population from the group, the first are deprived from any citizenship right (Ibid.). Consequently, the frequent co-occurrence of the term *enclave* and *palestinese* gains importance, for the connotation it brings to the territories inhabited by Palestinians and the legitimate right to inhabit them.

To sum up, The Word Sketch Difference analysis of the terms *palestinese* and *israeliano* revealed distinct patterns in the framing of these identities. In *Corriere.it*, *palestinese* is associated with institutional and collective identity terms such as *autorità* and *popolo*. The collocation *popolo palestinese* is stronger than *popolo israeliano*, suggesting that more emphasis was drawn to the collective identity of Palestinians.

Instead, in *LiberoQuotidiano.it*, *palestinese* is frequently associated with terms carrying negative connotations, such as *terrorista* and *islamista*, an association resulting in the devaluation of Palestinians as “lesser victims” (Kristof, 2024) and the only reference to Palestinian governance is Hamas, in contrast with the focus on Israeli institutions. Thus, the narrative surrounding the Palestinian side recalls a context of extremism and terrorism and it is, overall, more polarized. Additionally, the prominence of the collocation *enclave palestinese* implies both spatial and political exclusion and raises the question of territorial legitimacy.

In view of the above, it can be stated that two news outlets show different tendencies: *Corriere.it* puts more emphasis on the humanitarian and institutional contexts, while *LiberoQuotidiano.it* prefers a conflict and security-driven narrative

### **3.4 Collocational Analysis of the Prepositional Phrases containing Keywords *Attacco* and *Razzo***

The Word Sketch tool from Sketch Engine allows to visualize a summary of a word's grammatical and collocational behavior (Kilgarriff et al., 2014). More specifically, the

word sketch of *attacco* and *razzo* produced numerous results, the most interesting for the present paper being the prepositional phrases with the selected nouns. This is because different types of prepositions in Italian can be used to mark the semantic role of agent (Piunno & Ganfi, 2019). Furthermore, each preposition “may have its own collocational features and reveal a different degree of engagement on the part of the Agent in the action performed.” (Piunno & Ganfi, 2019: 146).

The sociological concept of agency is relevant for the present research as it constitutes a pivotal element of study in CDA (Van Leeuwen, 2008). In fact, agency distinguishes the social actors portrayed as ‘agents’, who have an active role in performing the action, from those described as ‘patients’, who are affected by the action (*Ibid.*).

Additionally, agency attributions is also linked to ideological implications, as it conveys a perspective on the actors involved in the war and, either implicitly or explicitly, reflects specific political goals (Amer, 2016: 26). For this reason, the prepositional phrases were examined to determine who is assigned responsibility and who is represented as the patient.

Keywords *razzo* and *attacco* were chosen for this analysis because they are suitable to investigate agency distribution. By analyzing prepositional phrases preceded by these nouns, it is possible to distinguish who is represented as the perpetrator of violence from its victim, the one who fires the rockets and initiates the attacks from the one who is under attack.

Before proceeding with the analysis, it should be noted that, between October 2023 and 2024 and during the weeks in which the articles constituting the corpora were published, both Hamas and Israel attacked the opponent and fired rockets during the assaults. For context, here follows an overview of the conflict by Zanotti & Sharp (2024: 3), which lists the key information regarding casualties and hostages during the first year of war:

Reportedly, as of October 2, 2024, more than 1,200 Israelis and foreign nationals (including 46 U.S. citizens in Israel) had been killed as a result of the October 7 attacks, more than 41,000 Palestinians in Gaza have been killed, and at least 346 Israeli soldiers have died in battle since Israel's military began ground operations in Gaza. Israel claims it has killed around 17,000 of Hamas's some 25,000-30,000 fighters, including half the leadership of its military wing. Hamas and other groups reportedly seized some 251 Israeli and foreign national hostages on October 7, including some Americans. To date, 117 hostages have reportedly been returned alive from Gaza, many in exchange for 250 Palestinian prisoners during a week-long November 2023 pause in fighting. Some 37 additional hostages have been "recovered dead or killed in encounters.

Given the contextual information above, the analysis was carried out. Firstly, the Word Sketch of *razzo* was searched on Sketch Engine for the *Corriere.it* corpus, as seen in Table 10.

Secondly, the prepositional phrases indicating agency were selected and considered for further analysis of their collocations. This process of analysis was repeated for the search word *attacco*, illustrated in Table 13.

The Word Sketch of *Corriere.it* displays 16 prepositional phrases with the noun *razzo*. The most frequent prepositional phrase with "razzo" is "razzo da", which appears 29 times (Examples 43 and 44 retrieved from *Corriere.it* published October 18<sup>th</sup>, 2023):

- 43) Le immagini satellitari hanno catturato "l'area intorno all'ospedale prima e dopo il fallito lancio del razzo da parte dell'organizzazione terroristica della Jihad islamica" scrive Hagari
- 44) In aria si è sentito l'eco delle esplosioni causate dall'intercettazione dei razzi da parte dell'Iron Dome.

**Table 10: Word Sketch of the prepositional phrases with *razzo* in *Corriere.it***

**prepositional phrases with  
nouns**

"razzo" da	29
"razzo" di	15
"razzo" su	15
"razzo" contro	13
"razzo" dal	6
"razzo" sul	5
"razzo" verso	5
"razzo" dalla	5
"razzo" della	4
"razzo" sulla	3
"razzo" per	3
"razzo" nella	2
"razzo" nel	1
"razzo" in	1
"razzo" con	1
"razzo" alla	1

Note: Retrieved from Sketch Engine <http://www.sketchengine.eu>

The preposition *da* ‘from’ often signals the presence of the complex preposition *da parte di* ‘by’, ‘from’. In both cases, the underlying meaning remains similar, referring to the origin or provenance of the rockets. By indicating the place from which rockets are fired, the articles’ authors distinguish the perpetrator of the violence from their victim. This allows to understand which actor is mainly represented as the aggressor, through a collocation analysis of the prepositional phrase.

Table 11 shows the results of Sketch Engine’s Concordance tool, demonstrating that Gaza is the most recurrent complement of the prepositional phrase. A plausible hypothesis is that Gaza is a metonymy for Hamas, which is therefore represented as the main perpetrator of violence. By associating Gaza with the origin of violence, the articles’ authors focus attention on the aggression. However, Gaza is a generic term which does not straightforwardly represent the military wing of Hamas, since it is

strictly connected to the Palestinians, who are in turn associated to the initiation of violence. Thus, the association of Palestinians with Hamas produces a fundamental consequence, illustrated by Kristof (2024: 190), namely a “suggestion, more implicit than explicit, that Gazan lives matter less because many Palestinians sympathize with Hamas”.

Similar findings could be reached by considering the compound preposition *dalla*, always followed by *Striscia di Gaza* (Example 45 retrieved from *Corriere.it*, published October 9<sup>th</sup>, 2023):

45) Continua intanto il lancio di razzi dalla Striscia soprattutto verso le comunità Israeliane a ridosso dell'enclave palestinese.

Similarly, *razzo di*, which appears 15 times in total, is followed by Gaza twice, and all the remaining occurrences are followed by Hamas (Example 46 retrieved from *Corriere.it*, published October 18<sup>th</sup>, 2023):

46) Per Israele l'ospedale di Gaza è stato colpito da Hamas: L'esercito Israeliano, citato dai media, ha fatto sapere che l'esplosione nell'ospedale Al-Ahli Arabi Baptist di Gaza City è dovuta al lancio fallito di un razzo di Hamas e che non c'è nessun legame dell'esercito di Tel Aviv con l'esplosione
















Again, Hamas is the main perpetrator of violence, while there is no mention of Israel or IDF as such. Finally, all occurrences of *razzo della* are followed by Jihad (Example 47 retrieved from *Corriere.it*, published October 17<sup>th</sup>, 2023):

47) Esercito Israeliano: Sull'ospedale un razzo della Jihad islamica: “La Jihad islamica è responsabile di un lancio fallimentare del razzo che ha colpito l'ospedale”

To sum up, the prepositional phrases containing the prepositions *da*, *dalla*, *di* and *della* indicate agency. Their collocational behavior showed a common feature, namely their association with Palestinian organizations, such as Hamas or Jihad, and places in

Palestine, such as Gaza or *Striscia*. Conversely, there was no example of these prepositional phrases in association with Israel or Israeli organizations, such as IDF. This suggests that agency and responsibility of rockets launches is not distributed evenly between the warring parties, but rather it is all attributed to Palestinian actors and organizations. In order to validate this hypothesis, the prepositions which indicate the victim of rocket launches are considered below.

**Table 11: Collocation list of “razzo da” in *Corriere.it***

Details	Left context	KWIC	Right context
1	doc#0 notizie   Nuove sirene d'allarme a Tel Aviv: raffica di	<b>razzi da</b>	Gaza.</s><s>Netanyahu: "Azzereremo i covi di Ha 
2	doc#0 >rose le esplosioni in cielo per l'intercettazione dei	<b>razzi da</b>	parte dell'Iron Dome.</s><s>Ore 20:29 - Ex ambas 
3	doc#0 >L'esercito ha confermato il lancio di almeno 2200	<b>razzi da</b>	Gaza. "Sono in corso combattimenti in sette localit 
4	doc#0 l'allarme a Gerusalemme Le sirene di allarme per i	<b>razzi da</b>	Gaza stanno di nuovo suonando a Gerusalemme.< 
5	doc#0 liche palestinesi locali.</s><s>Ore 12:00 - Salva di	<b>razzi da</b>	Gaza colpisce appartamenti a Ashdod: ci sono ferit 
6	doc#0 o dei territori palestinesi.</s><s>Ore 11:32 - Nuovi	<b>razzi da</b>	Gaza: "Sirene a Gerusalemme e Tel Aviv" Ore 11:2 
7	doc#0 ite esplosioni in cielo dovute all'intercettazione dei	<b>razzi da</b>	parte dell'Iron Dome, il sistema antimissilistico isra 
8	doc#0 ro di un'ora sono risuonate le sirene di allarme anti	<b>razzi da</b>	Gaza nella zona centrale di Israele e a Tel Aviv.</s: 
9	doc#0 lei fondi già stanziati.</s><s>Ore 14:47 - Lancio di	<b>razzi da</b>	Gaza contro l'aeroporto di Tel Aviv Una salva di raz 
10	doc#0 sirene di allarme stanno risuonando per il lancio di	<b>razzi da</b>	Gaza su Tel Aviv.</s><s>Lo constato un giornalista 
11	doc#0 ha risposto che "se c'è un uomo armato che spara	<b>razzi da</b>	li, quello diventa un obiettivo militare".</s><s>Ore ( 
12	doc#1 <s>Ore 20:16 - Nuove sirene di allarme in Israele,	<b>razzi da</b>	Tel Aviv Per la seconda volta sono risuonate le sire 
13	doc#1 onda volta sono risuonate le sirene di allarme per i	<b>razzi da</b>	Gaza nel centro di Israele e nella zona grande di Tr 
14	doc#1 >co delle esplosioni causate dall'intercettazione dei	<b>razzi da</b>	parte dell'Iron Dome.</s><s>Ore 19:55 - Vertice de 
15	doc#1 detto Saïed.</s><s>Ore 12:14 - Ripreso il lancio di	<b>razzi da</b>	Gaza verso il sud di Israele Sono ripresi stamani, d 

Note: Retrieved from Sketch Engine <http://www.sketchengine.eu>

**Table 12: Collocation list of “razzo su” in *Corriere.it***

Details	Left context	KWIC	Right context
1	doc#0 tini L'attacco è iniziato nella prima mattina.</s><s>	<b>Razzi su</b>	Israele, incursioni nei villaggi e nei palazzi, caserm
2	doc#0 1 Israele.</s><s>Ore 00:33 - Hamas: "Lanciati 100	<b>razzi su</b>	Ashkelon nel sud di Israele" Hamas ha affermato d
3	doc#0 :/s><s>Ore 19:41 - Hamas annuncia: "Lanciati 150	<b>razzi su</b>	Tel Aviv" L'ala militare del movimento palestinese h
4	doc#0 Hamas, le Brigate Al-Qassam, hanno lanciato 150	<b>razzi su</b>	Tel Aviv in risposta al bombardamento israeliano di
5	doc#0 do un massiccio attacco missilistico, sparando 150	<b>razzi su</b>	Tel Aviv", si legge nella nota.</s><s>Ore 19:40 - L&
6	doc#0 israelo-palestinese".</s><s>Ore 19:25 - Raffica di	<b>razzi su</b>	Tel Aviv Sirene antiaereo sono risuonata a Tel Aviv
7	doc#0 Tel Aviv.</s><s>Ore 09:48 - La risposta di Israele,	<b>razzi su</b>	Gaza Israele risponde ai razzi di Hamas con un att
8	doc#0 ) che i militanti di Hamas hanno lanciato migliaia di	<b>razzi su</b>	Israele nell'attacco a sorpresa all'alba.</s><s>Il pre
9	doc#0 a Striscia di Gaza, così come il lancio di migliaia di	<b>razzi su</b>	località abitate rappresentano un'escalation seria e
10	doc#0 bini uccisi da Hamas, alcuni decapitati" • Raffica di	<b>razzi su</b>	Ashkelon e comunità al confine con Gaza.</s><s>(
11	doc#0 iso, neppure a Gaza.</s><s>Ore 16:12 - Raffica di	<b>razzi su</b>	Ashkelon e comunità al confine con Gaza.</s><s>(
12	doc#1 ientre Hamas ed Hezbollah continuano a lanciare i	<b>razzi su</b>	Israele".</s><s>Lo afferma il ministro degli Esteri A
13	doc#1 ientre Hamas ed Hezbollah continuano a lanciare i	<b>razzi su</b>	Israele".</s><s>Lo afferma il ministro degli Esteri A
14	doc#5 : "Alluvione Al Aqsa" e vengono lanciati quattromila	<b>razzi su</b>	Israele, nemmeno Hamas s'immagina di poter amn
15	doc#5 ! Ottobre Idf: "In 2 giorni Hezbollah ha lanciato 320	<b>razzi su</b>	Israele" L'esercito israeliano ha reso noto che negli

Note: Retrieved from Sketch Engine <http://www.sketchengine.eu>

The prepositions indicating the target of rocket attacks are *su*, *sul*, *sulla*, *contro*, *verso*, the most recurrent being “su”, with 15 occurrences. The collocational behavior of the phrase *razzo su*, displayed in Table 12, shows that there is only one instance of *razzo su Gaza*. In this case, the Gaza Strip is the target of the attack and, thus, victim of violence.

However, Israel, Ashkelon and Tel Aviv occur in all the other cases. Similar results were displayed by researching the collocational behavior of the phrases *razzo sul* and *razzo sulla* (Examples 48 and 49 retrieved from *Corriere.it*, published October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023):

48) Lo riportano il quotidiano Haaretz che riferisce di una "pesante raffica" di razzi sul sud e il centro di Israele.

49) Le Brigate Qassam, l'ala armata di Hamas, hanno dichiarato in precedenza di aver lanciato una salva di razzi sulla città Israeliana di Tel Aviv.

A similar pattern can be identified with the search phrase *razzo contro*, which occurs 13 times (Examples retrieved from *Corriere.it*, 50 published October 9<sup>th</sup>, 2024 and 51, published October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2024):

50) "Gli attacchi di Hamas contro città e villaggi Israeliani vicino alla Striscia di Gaza, compreso il lancio di migliaia di razzi contro i centri abitati, rappresentano una escalation seria e grave", si legge in una nota del ministero degli Esteri degli Emirati. "Il ministero è sconvolto dalle notizie secondo cui civili Israeliani sono stati rapiti e presi come ostaggi dalle loro case".

51) Hamas aveva pianificato di lanciare un più ampio sbarramento di razzi contro Israele questa mattina, e i suoi piani sono stati sventati: lo ha affermato l'Idf.

Finally, *razzo verso* exhibits the same behavior of the previous phrases (Examples retrieved from *Corriere.it*, 52 published October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2024 and 53 published October 8<sup>th</sup>, 2024):

52) Secondo i media arabi sono stati lanciati razzi verso Acri, Haifa e la Galilea.

53) Da un anno risuonano comunque tutti i giorni: ieri ad alzare il volume della paura sono stati i fondamentalisti di Hamas per "celebrare" a modo loro il 7 ottobre, quattro razzi verso Tel Aviv tenuti nascosti per l'occasione, perché gli Israeliani non dimentichino com'è cominciata

The numerous examples appear to align with a common narrative, in which Palestinians are the perpetrators of violence and Israelis are their victims. Conversely, there are only few occasions displaying an attack from the Israeli side and these are

mostly described as a response to previous offensives, which could suggest a reason to justify the violence.

The study of the Word Sketch for the keyword *attacco* served the purpose of further confirming this distribution of agency. In fact, the very meaning of attack indicates to the reader who the perpetrator of violence is. Table 13 shows the prepositional phrases with the noun *attacco*.

**Table 13: Word Sketch of the prepositional phrases with *attacco* in *Corriere.it***

prepositional phrases with nouns	
"attacco" di	198
"attacco" a	69
"attacco" del	51
"attacco" al	48
"attacco" contro	47
"attacco" con	27
"attacco" su	15
"attacco" da	13
"attacco" alla	13
"attacco" senza	7
"attacco" in	6
"attacco" della	5
"attacco" sul	4
"attacco" ad	4
"attacco" nella	3
"attacco" nel	3
"attacco" sulla	3
"attacco" dalla	3

Note: Retrieved from Sketch Engine <http://www.sketchengine.eu>

In the *Corriere.it* corpus, the occurrence of *attacco* is significantly more frequent than *razzo*, appearing in total 1045 times. Among those occurrences, the following phrases were deemed useful for the attribution of agency and, thus, considered for the study.

Firstly, the prepositional phrase *attacco di* occurs 198 times. The concordance tool demonstrates that the most frequent collocation for this phrase is *Hamas*, which appears 151 times in the corpus. On the contrary, *attacco di Israele* recurs 16 times (Examples 54 and 55 retrieved from *Corriere.it*, published October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023):

54) I morti Israeliani sarebbero più di 250. Almeno 250 Israeliani uccisi e più di mille feriti. I media Israeliani hanno tragicamente aggiornato il bilancio delle vittime per gli attacchi di Hamas.

55) Anche gli ospedali della Striscia di Palestina sono in allerta di fronte ai continui attacchi di Israele, che ha chiamato la sua operazione militare di rappresaglia "Spade di ferro".

*Attacco del* displays a wider variety of results. In fact, 10 out of 53 results represent Israel and IDF as the agent of the attack. However, for the great majority of the instances, the perpetrator of the attack is the Palestinian side (Examples retrieved from *Corriere.it*, 56 published October 9<sup>th</sup>, 2023, 57 published October 9<sup>th</sup>, 2023, 58 published October 8<sup>th</sup>, 2024 and 59 published October 18<sup>th</sup>, 2023):

56) Continuano gli attacchi dell'aviazione Israeliana a Gaza. Lo riferiscono i media palestinesi che parlano anche di esplosioni seguite ai raid.

57) Gli Stati Uniti condannano gli attacchi dei terroristi di Hamas contro i civili Israeliani: "Non c'è mai giustificazione per il terrorismo. Siamo fermamente accanto al governo e al popolo di Israele".

58) Un anno dopo l'attacco del movimento islamista palestinese in Israele, la situazione a Gaza e in Medio Oriente "non fa che peggiorare"

59) Com'era forse prevedibile, la guerra scaturita dall'attacco del 7 ottobre 2023 ha polarizzato con una violenza senza precedenti l'opinione pubblica lontano dal Medio Oriente

The phrase *attacco da* shows similar results, occurring 13 times. There are 2 instances in which Israel is depicted as the perpetrator; otherwise, Gaza follows

the phrase, being recognized as the origin of the attack (Examples retrieved from *Corriere.it*, 60 published October 12<sup>th</sup>, 2024 and 61 published October 9<sup>th</sup>, 2023):

60) Durante il colloquio telefonico, entrambi i ministri hanno sottolineato la necessità di aumentare gli sforzi diplomatici per fermare gli attacchi da parte di Israele in Libano e a Gaza e inviare aiuti umanitari ai rifugiati, riferisce Isna.

61) I morti in Israele per gli attacchi da Gaza sono arrivati a 800.

These insights are compatible with the previous suggestions, as they show a great majority of instances where agency is attributed to Palestinians. To confirm this insight, the prepositional phrases with the noun *attacco*, indicating the victim of the attacks are taken into consideration.

The most frequent prepositional phrase, in this case, was *attacco a*, with 69 occurrences. It is followed by Gaza or Rafah 8 times and 30 times by Israel or Israeli cities such as Yitzhar (Examples retrieved from *Corriere.it*, 62 published October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023 and 63 published October 18<sup>th</sup>, 2023):

62) Oltre 700 Israeliani, la maggior parte civili, sono stati uccisi dall'inizio dell'attacco a Gaza

63) Hamas avrebbe usato armi nordcoreane nell' attacco a Israele

This prepositional phrase also appears 21 times to indicate *attacco a sorpresa*, thus referring to the Hamas' surprise attack of October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023.

However, prepositional phrases *attacco al* and *attacco contro* display a wider variety of collocations, which reflect a more balanced distribution of agency between Israel and Hamas.

In conclusion, although the Word Sketch of *attacco* provides a higher number of results compared to *razzo*, its results are more varied and less uniform in their interpretation. However, there is a tendency to represent Palestinians as aggressors and Israelis as victims.

Table 14: Word Sketch of the prepositional phrases with *attacco* in *LiberioQuotidiano.it*

**prepositional phrases with  
nouns**

"attacco" di	101
"attacco" a	26
"attacco" contro	24
"attacco" del	17
"attacco" al	14
"attacco" in	8
"attacco" con	7
"attacco" da	7
"attacco" alla	5
"attacco" nel	4
"attacco" su	4
"attacco" senza	4
"attacco" sulla	3
"attacco" via	2

Note: Retrieved from Sketch Engine <http://www.sketchengine.eu>

Table 14 displays the prepositional phrases found in the Word Sketch of *attacco* in *LiberioQuotidiano.it*. In total, the noun *attacco* recurs 476 times.

With respect to Corriere, the results displayed by Libero are more polarized and the most frequent prepositional phrase, *attacco di*, which occurs 101 times, is a striking example, as seen in Table 15. In fact, *attacco di Hamas* recurs 81 times, while *attacco di Israele* appears only 3 times.

According to Amer (2024), Israel usually puts accountability of the attacks on the Palestinians, and mainly Hamas, despite frequently lacking evidence, in order to legitimize pre-planned wars. *LiberioQuotidiano.it* appears to adopt the same legitimization strategy

**Table 15: Collocation list of “attacco di” in *LiberoQuotidiano.it***

Details	Left context	KWIC	Right context
1	doc#0 ani hanno aggiornato il bilancio delle vittime per gli	<b>attacchi</b> di <b>Hamas</b> .	</s><s>Le Forze armate confermano ch
2	doc#0 irava il bilancio Si aggrava il bilancio dei morti per l'	<b>attacco</b> di <b>Hamas</b> a Israele: oltre 200.	</s><s>Hamas ha an
3	doc#0 presenza di polizia nelle comunità ebraiche dopo l'	<b>attacco</b> di <b>Hamas</b> a Israele.	</s><s>Lo annuncia il sindaco
4	doc#0 In una nota "condanna con la massima fermezza l'	<b>attacco</b> di questa <b>mattina</b> di Hamas contro le città israelian	
5	doc#0 ata la vigilanza su obiettivi israeliani in Italia Dopo l'	<b>attacco</b> di <b>Hamas</b> in Israele innalzata anche in Italia la vigil:	
6	doc#0 ata la vigilanza su obiettivi israeliani in Italia Dopo l'	<b>attacco</b> di <b>Hamas</b> in Israele innalzata anche in Italia la vigil:	
7	doc#0 ><s>Ore 14.35 - Mattarella: "Ferma condanna dell'	<b>attacco</b> di <b>Hamas</b> "	"Ho appreso con profonda costernazior
8	doc#0 sidente dello Stato di Israele, Isaac Herzog, dopo l'	<b>attacco</b> di <b>Hamas</b> .	"Siamo sinceramente vicini al lutto delle
9	doc#0 iti.</s><s>Ore 14.10 - Libano, festeggiamenti per l'	<b>attacco</b> di <b>Hamas</b> A Beirut, capitale del Libano, Paese politi	
10	doc#0 Salute.</s><s>Ore 11.45 - 22 israeliani morti negli	<b>attacchi</b> di <b>Hamas</b> Sarebbero almeno 22 le persone uccise	
11	doc#0 stro israeliano Benjamin Netanyahu ha parlato dell'	<b>attacco</b> di <b>Hamas</b> e ha detto: "Cittadini di Israele, siamo in	
12	doc#0 an.</s><s>Ore 8.50 - Ambasciata Usa condanna l'	<b>attacco</b> di <b>Hamas</b> L'ambasciata Usa in Israele condanna "il	

Note: Retrieved from Sketch Engine <http://www.sketchengine.eu>

Similarly, *attacco del* is found 18 times in the corpus. In 14 occurrences, the prepositional phrase refers to *attacco del 7 ottobre*. In the remaining cases, the majority of instances still refer to Hamas as the attacker (Examples retrieved from *LiberoQuotidiano.it*, 64 published October 12<sup>th</sup>, 2024, 65 published October 12<sup>th</sup>, 2023 and 66 published October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023):

64) Migliaia di militanti dell'organizzazione palestinese Hamas si sono infiltrati in Israele durante l'attacco del 7 ottobre.

65) Il ministero della Sanità palestinese afferma che 1.200 persone sono morte da quando Israele ha iniziato gli attacchi aerei nella Striscia, in risposta al devastante attacco dei militanti di Hamas sabato.

66) Sarebbero oltre 260, secondo le ricostruzioni, le vittime dell'attacco dei miliziani di Hamas al rave party Nova Music Festival.

The collocational behavior of the prepositional phrase *attacco contro* displays numerous examples of Israel being the target of the attack. In other instances, Hamas militants or terrorists are the targets; however, Palestinian civilians are never mentioned as the victims of the attacks (Examples retrieved from *LiberoQuotidiano.it*, 67 and 68 published October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023, 69 published October 12<sup>th</sup>, 2023):

67) Tajani: "Condanniamo gli attacchi contro Israele".

68) Israele ha deciso che gli attacchi contro gli obiettivi terroristici a Gaza saranno condotti con grande forza e ampiezza, anche a costo di mettere a rischio gli Israeliani presi in ostaggio da Hamas.

69) L'Idf dà priorità all' attacco contro i comandanti di Hamas.

By describing the victims of the attack as terrorists, rather than civilians, *LiberoQuotidiano.it* exploits terrorism discourse as a legitimization strategy. Over the last year, Israel has bombed almost every day civilian areas such as mosques, schools and hospitals (Amer, 2024). To legitimize these attacks, the conflict is framed in Israeli discourse as a “war on terrorism and a war on Hamas” (Amer, 2024). *Libero*'s use of the theme of terrorism impacts the audience perception of the attacks, which are presented as efforts to eliminate a terrorist and criminal organization (Toomey & Singleton, 2014).

Finally, the prepositional phrase *attacco a* indicates Hamas' surprise attack on October 7<sup>th</sup> 2023, used in the phrase *attacco a sorpresa* or *attacco a Israele* (Examples 70 and 71 retrieved from *LiberoQuotidiano.it*, published October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023):

70) Le Brigate Ezzedin Al-Qassam avrebbero preso in ostaggio "decine" di Israeliani, durante l' attacco a sorpresa sferrato oggi su Israele.

71) Al centro del Consiglio, ovviamente, la situazione in Medio Oriente dopo i violentissimi attacchi a Israele.

In conclusion, the comparative analysis of the prepositional phrases containing the selected keywords reveals differences in their portrayal of the Hamas-Israel conflict. In fact, *Corriere.it* shows a tendency in assigning agency to the Palestinian side, while *LiberoQuotidiano.it* does that with close to no exceptions. Moreover, in *Libero*, Israelis attacks are represented as mere responses and legitimized as necessary to stop the terrorist organization Hamas.

### **3.5 Comparative Analysis of the Strongest Collocations of Keyword *Terrorista***

It is difficult to provide a systematic definition of terrorism, because of the political and moral charge associated to this concept (Baele et al., 2019). However, Toomey and Singleton (2014: 184) argue that it is widely acknowledged that “terrorism” or “terrorist” are pejorative terms, that inherently carry negative connotations. When these terms are employed to label a group, a value judgement about the legitimacy of their actions and purposes is implicitly assigned to it (Toomey & Singleton, 2014: 184). Moreover, labeling a group as terrorist links it to specific ideologies and values, reinforcing the perception that its use of political violence is an end in itself rather than a means to an end (Toomey & Singleton, 2014: 185).

The category of terrorism is not a neutral descriptor in terms of values or interests, but rather a powerful instrument to shape public opinion in a specific direction (Baele et al., 2019). After 9/11, terrorism was growingly portrayed as a criminal rather than military activity, adding “a sense of illegitimacy to the existent notions of brutality and evil that had already been associated with it” and setting “groups labeled as terrorists as of lesser, inferior status to the states which they oppose” (Toomey & Singleton, 2014: 188). In this way, terrorism discourse is manipulated to comply with political needs, to justify political actions and discredit pockets of resistance (Gunning, 2007, in Toomey & Singleton, 2014). The strategic employment of terrorism discourse to assert political stances was also demonstrated by previous studies. For example,

Weimann (1985, in Baele et al., 2019) conducted a quantitative analysis of news articles on violence, revealing that the use of the terrorist label depends on the political alignment between the reporting media and the group in question.

In the corpora under investigation, both *terrorista* and *terroristico* were found among the keywords, suggesting that terrorism discourse was frequently exploited by the authors. This section considers the strongest collocations for the term *terrorista*, to hypothesize whose action is described as terroristic, and which associations are consequently brought to these groups. Moreover, the difference between the two study corpora in this regard could also suggest ideologies which distinguish the online newspapers.

Interestingly, the strongest collocate for *terrorista* in the *Corriere.it* corpus is *Hamas*, while in the *LiberoQuotidiano* corpus, it is *palestinese*. Here below, the collocation *terrorista di Hamas* is examined, starting from a definition of Hamas, which describes itself as follows:

The Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) is a Palestinian national liberation movement that struggles for the liberation of the Palestinian occupied territories and for the recognition of the legitimate rights of Palestinians. [...] In spite of the overwhelming militant image it has in the minds of many people in the West, Hamas is not a mere military faction. It is a political, cultural and social grass roots organisation that has a separate military wing specialising in armed resistance against Israeli occupation (Hroub, 2010: 15).

Numerous countries, among which Italy, consider Hamas a terrorist organization. After 9/11, when the United States began the “war on terror”, pro-Israel neoconservatives associated Hamas with groups like al-Qaeda, despite the great differences in their goals, methods, areas of operation, and the nature of their

respective movements (Hroub, 2010). In this way, the 'national liberation dimension' of Hamas has been dismissed and reduced to 'global terror' (*Ibid.*). Consequently, the terrorism discourse surrounding Hamas has been consolidated over the last decades, which explains why the strongest collocation for *Corriere.it* is *terrorista di Hamas* (Examples retrieved from *Corriere.it*, 72, 73 and 74 published October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023, 75 published October 19<sup>th</sup>, 2023):

72) L'Idf ha spiegato su X di avere "attaccato un edificio in cui si trovavano dei terroristi di Hamas. Allo stesso tempo, sono stati attaccati diversi quartier generali operativi delle organizzazioni terroristiche, tra cui un quartier generale a tre piani e un quartier generale associato alla forza navale di Hamas, Muhammad Keshta.

73) I terroristi di Hamas hanno massacrato oltre 1.400 uomini, donne, bambini e neonati.

74) Hagari ha detto anche che ci sono "soldati Israeliani uccisi in combattimento" ma non ha fornito numeri, neanche sugli ostaggi. Ha poi spiegato che sono "centinaia i terroristi uccisi" dall'esercito e che "tutti i terroristi di Hamas entrati in Israele saranno uccisi".

75) Non si tratta di mettere in discussione la condanna dei terroristi di Hamas, bensì di analizzare con onestà le cause di un conflitto pluridecennale e attribuire diverse responsabilità politiche, oltre al fatto che la reazione di Israele potrebbe portare il Medio Oriente in un precipizio definitivo.

Instead, *LiberioQuotidiano.it* displays a different collocation as the strongest, namely *terrorista palestinese*. Table 16 shows that the collocation identified is traceable to a linguistic pattern which frames Palestinians as terrorists. In this case, terrorism discourse is not employed with reference to a definite organization such as Hamas, but rather to a nationality, blurring the distinction that should be made between Hamas and the Palestinian people.

**Table 16: Examples of *palestinese* collocated with *terrorista* in *LiberoQuotidiano.it***

Details	Left context	KWIC	Right context
1	doc#0 unciato di aver ucciso nelle ultime ore centinaia di	<b>terroristi palestinesi</b>	nel Sud di Israele e nella Striscia di Ga 
2	doc#0 e Forze di difesa israeliane (Idf) confermano che "i	<b>terroristi palestinesi</b>	della Striscia di Gaza si sono infiltrati in 
3	doc#0 ome ostaggio ed esibita come un trofeo a Gaza dai	<b>terroristi palestinesi</b>	.</s><s>Il video che mostra la nonnina 
4	doc#0 upazione sulla terra".</s><s>L'impressione che è i	<b>terroristi palestinesi</b>	stessero preparando questa operazion 
5	doc#0 'esercito con la stella di David ha ucciso più di 400	<b>terroristi palestinesi</b>	nel sud di Israele e nella Striscia di Ga 
6	doc#0 ondo quanto filtra dalle Forze di Difesa Israeliane,	<b>terroristi palestinesi</b>	stanno continuando a infiltrarsi in Israe 
7	doc#0 Yoav Gallant.</s><s>Intanto "i corpi di circa 1.500	<b>terroristi palestinesi</b>	sono stati ritrovati in territorio israelian 
8	doc#0 giorno di fila della guerra tra Israele e Hamas, con i	<b>terroristi palestinesi</b>	che hanno fatto piovere razzi oltreconf 
9	doc#0 raele "sarebbero stari ritrovati i corpi di circa 1.500	<b>terroristi palestinesi</b>	".</s><s>Ma la caccia agli infiltrati non 
10	doc#1 dale stesso.</s><s>Israele, l'intercettazione di due	<b>terroristi palestinesi</b>	: "Missile nostro?</s><s>Sembra di si' 
11	doc#1 sei soldati israeliani, 17 terroristi di Hezbollah e sei	<b>terroristi palestinesi</b>	sono stati uccisi in scaramucce al conf 
12	doc#3 lle stragi di civili israeliani del 7 ottobre a opera dei	<b>terroristi palestinesi</b>	.</s><s>Proprio a questo riguardo, il c 

Note: Retrieved from <http://www.sketchengine.eu>

According to Ayyash (2010: 111) Israeli narratives are based on the discursive strategy of “shock and awe” not only towards Hamas, but towards the Palestinians. This narrative holds that a terrorist is who engages in the “outlawed use of violence” and it is possible to act toward those who are outside the bounds of law without policy constraints, eliminating them without consequences, whether from legal accountability or divine judgment (Ayyash, 2010: 111).

If such definition of terrorist applies not only Hamas, but to Palestinians in general, the perception of violence against them is mitigated and legitimized. As previously mentioned, the association of Palestinians with Hamas and its history of terrorism devalues them and presents them as “lesser victims (Kristof, 2024).

To conclude, while *Corriere.it* distinguishes between the militant organization and the broader Palestinian population, *LiberioQuotidiano.it* appears to blur the distinction between Hamas and Palestinians as a whole. This lexical choice links Palestinian identity itself to terrorism. As a consequence, Palestinian resistance is delegitimated and, at the same time, Israeli attacks are seen as justified responses to the terrorist threat.

Ultimately, it can be stated that *Corriere* displays a more detailed and nuanced discourse, as opposed to *Liberio*, which adopts a firm ideological stance in its narrative. These results align with all the considerations drawn from the analysis of the previous section and confirm that the articles in the study corpora present biases.

## Chapter Four: Conclusions

The analysis presented in the previous chapter aimed at identifying the linguistic strategies, if any, that were employed by *Corriere.it* and *LiberoQuotidiano.it* in their coverage of the conflict between Israel and Palestine. Given that the two online newspapers are known to hold different political stances, the purpose was that of determining whether their ideological positions could be identified through the distinctive strategies that characterize each outlet.

This process was carried out through different steps of analysis.

Firstly, the analysis of frequency lists and the keywords lists allowed to identify the most frequent and most characteristic words of each corpus and, thus, reveal the most prominent themes of each news outlet.

Secondly, the collocational behavior of *Palestinese* and *Israeliano*, the main actors of the Israel-Palestine war, showed how the news outlets framed each party.

It was then possible to identify the patterns of agency attributions through the study of prepositional phrases indicating the attacker and the victim, namely the prepositional phrases containing the keywords *attacco* and *razzo*.

Finally, the collocation analysis of the politically connotated key term *terrorista* revealed significant insights into the choices of the two news outlets.

### 4.1 Key Findings

#### 4.1.1 Key Topics

The first notable difference between *Corriere.it* and *LiberoQuotidiano.it* emerged from the study of the frequency lists and keywords' lists, which revealed diverse linguistic choices, indicative of the prominence given to different themes.

*Liberò* wordlist did not include terms referring to Palestinians, while mentioning both the singular and plural form of Israeli, *Israeliano* and *Israeliani*. This suggests that the newspaper prioritizes Israeli viewpoints, events, or figures.

Moreover, *LiberòQuotidiano.it* employed a majority of terms which point to security concerns and Italian political responses. The keyword list also featured a frequent use of military terms, revealing a particular focus on the military dimension of the conflict. Despite that, the absence of the term *guerra* in its wordlist suggests an intentional avoidance of framing the conflict as such.

On the other hand, in the *Corriere.it* corpus there was a higher number of terms referring to international organizations, humanitarian concerns, and diplomacy. These findings confirm Degano's (2008: 41) claim that *Corriere* pays particular attention to the diplomatic and institutional discourse in its war coverage.

#### **4.1.2 Framing of Palestinians and Israelis**

The two news outlets frame the main actors of the Israeli-Palestinian war differently. Through a comparative collocation analysis, it was possible to find that *Corriere* mainly associates Palestinians with institutional terms like *Autorità* and collective identity phrases such as *popolo palestinese* whereas Israelis are linked to military and governance-related terms, such as *esercito*, *soldato* and *difesa*.

*Liberò* reinforces the militaristic description of Israelis, who are associated with military terms, such as *difesa*, *esercito*, and *forza*. However, *Liberò* mostly links Palestinians to pejorative terms like *terrorista* and *islamista*, reinforcing a narrative of extremism and terrorism. Moreover, the strength of the collocation *enclave palestinese*, symbol of spatial and political exclusion (Peteeet, 2016), raises doubts over Palestinian territorial legitimacy and control.

Overall, *Corriere.it* appears to maintain a more humanizing description of Palestinians and a rather balanced depiction of Israeli governance and military aspects. Instead,

*LiberioQuotidiano.it* proposes a more polarized perspective, framing Palestinians in terms of extremism and exclusion. These findings align with Marzano's (2016) analysis, which highlights how right-wing Italian newspapers, including *Liberio*, framed the Gaza war through an Islamophobic lens. The portrayal of Palestinians as a threat, rather than as political actors, served to justify Italy's pro-Israeli foreign policy aligned with the right-wing media's political agenda (Marzano, 2016).

#### **4.1.3 Agency Attribution**

The analysis of prepositional phrases containing *razzo* and *attacco* demonstrated an asymmetry in the attribution of agency. Both corpora predominantly describe Palestinians, and particularly Hamas, as the aggressors and Israelis as the victims. However, this tendency is even more evident in the *Liberio* articles, which portrays Israeli actions as defensive responses and Hamas as the primary source of violence. This tendency is confirmed by Raimondi (2024: 30), who claims that "biases found in the analysis were deployed to construct representations of Israel as the victim of the attack on 7 October 2023 and Hamas, rather than Palestine, as the obscure organization on the other side."

#### **4.1.4 Terrorism Discourse**

The use of terrorism discourse has significant implications, since it undermines the perceived legitimacy of Palestinian actions, while framing Israeli attacks as justified responses towards terrorist threats. Marzano (2011) found that, already during the Gaza war, *Liberio* reinforced the stereotype of Islam as a barbaric, irrational, and aggressive civilization by portraying Hamas as the primary antagonist in its conflict with Israel.

Terrorism discourse was identified in the corpora through the study of the terms collocating with *terrorista*. In *Corriere* the strongest collocation was *terrorista di*

*Hamas*; hence, the term is attributed specifically to the organization. However, *LiberoQuotidiano.it* conflates the Palestinian identity with terrorism by frequently using the collocation *terrorista palestinese* and blurring the distinction between Palestinians as civilians and Hamas militants.

## **4.2 Implications of Findings**

The findings presented above demonstrated how the same topic and events were presented differently by two newspaper via different language patterns, revealing their editorial biases. In light of these key differences, the questions that guided this research can be answered to.

At the various linguistic levels examined, the analysis highlighted different strategies in the representation of reality, that can be traced back to the ideological positions of the newspapers. Thus, this study demonstrated that *Corriere.it* and *LiberoQuotidiano.it* employ different linguistic patterns to convey their ideological and political stances. More specifically, in the *Corriere* corpus, it was possible to identify a broader narrative, focused on humanitarian concerns and global diplomacy whereas *LiberoQuotidiano.it* adopted a militarized and nationalistic narrative, with a focus on security concerns and Israel's victimhood.

Finally, the analysis revealed the presence of media bias in both outlets, though differing in type and intensity. Biased word choice and labeling characterized *LiberoQuotidiano.it*, that strongly frames the conflict in terms of terrorism and security, marginalizing Palestinian civilian experiences. Moreover, the differences are also attributable to a biased events' selection and commissions or omissions of information.

### **4.3 Limitations and Future Research**

The present study provided valuable insights on the discursive strategies employed by the selected news outlets in the representation of the ongoing conflict between Israel and Palestine. However, its scope was limited to the linguistic analysis of two Italian online newspapers.

Future research could expand this framework by including additional sources of analysis, both within Italy and internationally, to offer a comparative perspective on how the conflict is reported across different cultural and political contexts. Furthermore, a deeper understanding of how these narratives influence public opinion can be obtained through audience reception studies.

The analysis conducted in this study focused mainly on the analysis of frequency lists, keywords and collocations. However, other relevant features were not taken into consideration. Further studies might include an in-depth analysis of headlines, which often serve as a crucial element in shaping readers' perceptions and framing narratives. Additionally, a detailed and thorough diachronic analysis could shed light on how the reporting evolved over time, reflecting shifts on political and humanitarian issues. Finally, a combined manual and automated approach to identify media bias, as suggested by Hamborg (2023) could ensure an improved perspective on biased news media.

### **4.4 Concluding Remarks**

In conclusion, the linguistic patterns analyzed in this study revealed that news outlets can construct distinct narratives in the coverage of the same issue. By highlighting the differences in lexical choices usage, portrayal of agency, use of terrorism discourse or ideological framing, this research demonstrated the profound impact that media discourse holds on shaping public perceptions.

The findings of this research should be interpreted within the broader understanding of the interplay between language, ideology, and media in the context of international reporting. Consequently, these insights underscore the necessity of engaging critically with media representations, to develop awareness of the presence of media biases and foster a more critical comprehension of the news coverage of complex events.

As media consumers, it is crucial to approach such narratives with a critical lens, recognizing the subtle yet powerful ways in which language influences our understanding of complex geopolitical issues.

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