



Humanitarian Actor Representation in Gaza Freedom Flotilla News Reports: A Transitivity Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how Al Jazeera English (AJE) and The New York Times (TNYT) represent humanitarian actors in their online coverage of the 2025 Gaza Freedom Flotilla, focusing on the textual dimension of Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis as operationalized through Halliday and Matthiessen's transitivity system. Rather than pursuing Fairclough's full three-dimensional model, the analysis is delimited to the lexicogrammatical level, treating participant roles, process types, and circumstantial elements as the primary evidence of ideological positioning. Using a qualitative descriptive design, four online news reports (two per outlet, published May–October 2025) were analyzed at clause level. The findings show that AJE assigns humanitarian actors as the Actor role in 41.3% of clauses, embeds them predominantly in material processes (64.5%), and frames their action through circumstances of Purpose and Means, constructing them as deliberate, self-directed agents. TNYT instead assigns the Goal role most frequently (36.4%), relies more heavily on verbal processes (29.4% versus 13.8% in AJE), and foregrounds circumstances of Place marking displacement rather than intention, constructing humanitarian actors as participants who are acted upon rather than agents who act and speak for themselves. These patterns show that ideology here is not asserted through explicit commentary but built cumulatively through recurring, consistent grammatical choices, and the study makes explicit the interpretive steps by which such patterns can be read as ideological rather than incidental.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, Transitivity, Participant Roles, Process Types, Humanitarian Actor Representation

1. Introduction

News language does not always express ideology explicitly. Instead, ideology can be reflected through the way language is organized, particularly through grammar. When an entity is presented as the one who performs an action, it is given a different position in the discourse from when the same entity is presented as the one affected by the action, even when both clauses refer to the same event (Basit & Zamzani, 2025; Hadidi et al., 2022). This shows that representation is not only shaped by the choice of words or the tone of a news report, but also by the structure of its clauses. Such grammatical choices may influence how readers understand the roles of different actors in an event. This becomes particularly important in humanitarian reporting, where presenting an actor as someone who takes action or as someone who is affected by an action can influence how readers understand their role, legitimacy, and responsibility in the reported event.

Since 2007, the blockade of Gaza has restricted the movement of people and goods into one of the most humanitarily constrained territories in the world, producing chronic shortages of food, clean water, fuel, and medical supplies. Recent humanitarian event have reported famine-level food insecurity across Gaza, while malnutrition and preventable diseases have further worsened the effects of continued military escalation (Bahour et al., 2025; Faris et al., 2025). In this situation, the Freedom Flotilla Coalition organized the 2025 Gaza Freedom Flotilla, a civilian maritime mission that carried food, medicine, and other essential supplies to

Gaza. The mission was presented as a nonviolent effort to challenge the blockade rather than as a political or military operation (Freedom Flotilla Coalition, 2025). Its civilian and humanitarian nature makes the flotilla relevant for examining how news reports represent humanitarian actors. Unlike armed conflicts, where the roles of opposing parties are more clearly established, the flotilla involves humanitarian actors who provide assistance while also becoming part of the reported event. How these actors are represented in news discourse can therefore show how their roles are constructed through language.

Furthermore, Al Jazeera English (AJE) and The New York Times (NYT) were selected as the data sources because both are high-reach, English-language outlets that covered the flotilla within days of one another, yet their institutional positioning on Israeli–Palestinian affairs has been shown to diverge systematically. Al Jazeera English is typically positioned as a counter-hegemonic voice relative to the Western mainstream, while The New York Times sits within an American mainstream press tradition that Warshagha (2026) and Khalifah et al. (2026) both describe as more closely aligned with official Israeli and Western government narratives. Badad (2025) documents a comparable divergence between the two outlets in an entirely different context, the US–Taliban Qatari mediation, which suggests that this pattern is not specific to Gaza coverage alone but reflects a more durable institutional orientation that resurfaces whenever the two outlets report on the same event from opposite ends of a geopolitical fault line.

Previous studies relevant to this study have mainly focused on three areas. The first area uses transitivity analysis to examine Israeli–Palestinian media coverage, with most studies focusing on large-scale armed conflicts and political actors such as Israel, Hamas, and Palestinians (Abunahel, 2023; Mohamed, 2024; Parveen et al., 2025; Sedigh & Genç, 2025). In these studies, humanitarian actors are generally mentioned as part of the broader conflict rather than examined as a specific group of actors. The second area directly compares AJE and NYT and shows differences in their framing and institutional orientations (Badad, 2025; Khalifah et al., 2026; Warshagha, 2026). These studies are useful for showing that the two news outlets may represent events differently, but they mainly discuss framing and news values rather than the grammatical structure of news discourse. The third area is more closely related to the present study. Arafat (2025), for example, examines the coverage of the 2025 Gaza Freedom Flotilla in AJE and NYT from a pragmatic perspective, focusing on discursive power and resistance. This study provides an understanding of how power relations are presented in the coverage, but it does not examine how humanitarian actors are assigned different participant roles through the transitivity system. Therefore, there is still a need for a clause-level analysis of how humanitarian actors are represented through transitivity in the coverage of the 2025 Gaza Freedom Flotilla. The present study addresses this gap by examining the transitivity patterns used to represent humanitarian actors in AJE and NYT news reports.

Based on this gap, the present study examines how humanitarian actors are represented through the transitivity system in AJE and NYT coverage of the 2025 Gaza Freedom Flotilla. The analysis focuses on process types, participant roles, and circumstantial elements based on Halliday and Matthiessen's systemic functional grammar. By focusing on the clause level, this study examines how grammatical choices represent humanitarian actors as participants who perform actions, experience events, or are affected by them. The study therefore does not focus on framing or pragmatic aspects of the news coverage, but specifically on how representation is realized through grammar. Following Fairclough's (1995) view that textual analysis can be examined as a distinct level of Critical Discourse Analysis, this study limits its focus to the textual dimension. The discursive practice and sociocultural practice dimensions, including the analysis of intertextual source selection, are beyond the scope of the present study and may be addressed in future research. In this way, the study provides a clause-level account of humanitarian actor representation that complements previous pragmatic and lexical studies of Gaza-related media discourse.

To lay the groundwork for this analysis, the following subsections review the concepts on which the study is built. Section 1.1 discusses Critical Discourse Analysis and explains why the present study is limited to its textual dimension. Section 1.2 presents the transitivity system used to identify participant roles, process types, and circumstantial elements in the data. Section 1.3 discusses the conventions of online news reporting relevant to the two outlets examined in this study. Section 1.4 defines the humanitarian actor as the category examined in this study and distinguishes it from the grammatical Actor role in transitivity theory.

1.1 Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) treats language as a social practice that both reflects and reproduces power relations, rather than as a neutral vehicle for transmitting information (Fairclough, 1995). Fairclough's influential three-dimensional model analyzes any communicative event simultaneously as text, discursive practice, and sociocultural practice. Textual analysis examines vocabulary, grammar, and cohesion within the text itself; discursive practice examines how the text is produced, distributed, and consumed, including how it

incorporates other voices through intertextuality; sociocultural practice situates the text within the wider institutional, political, and historical conditions that make a particular representation possible or normal (Fairclough, 1995). This view of language as a site of power extends beyond news discourse: Lubis et al. (2024) applied Fairclough's framework to a McDonald's advertisement and showed how persuasive language constructs consumer identity and reinforces brand-audience power relations, indicating that the same analytic logic applies wherever language performs ideological work, not only in journalistic texts.

Although Fairclough intends the three dimensions to work together, he also treats textual analysis as capable of standing as a self-sufficient level of description, since the lexicogrammar of a text is itself a legitimate object of ideological inquiry independent of production and reception data that are often difficult to access directly. Several transitivity-based studies of Gaza-related media coverage adopt exactly this narrower scope, analyzing clause-level grammar without separately tracing sourcing practices or institutional production routines (Abunahel, 2023; Mohamed, 2024). The present study follows this precedent, it draws on Fairclough's CDA only for its textual dimension, using the concept of ideology as habitual, naturalized meaning to interpret the transitivity patterns identified in the data, while leaving the discursive-practice and sociocultural-practice dimensions, which would require interview or newsroom-production data beyond the scope of a text-based study, for future research. This delimitation is a methodological choice rather than an oversight, it allows the analysis to describe, with more grammatical precision than a three-dimensional study normally affords, exactly how humanitarian agency is constructed at the level of the clause.

1.2 Transitivity

Systemic Functional Linguistics treats the clause as encoding experience through a system Halliday & Matthiessen (2014) call transitivity, every clause selects a process (what is happening), one or more participants (who or what is involved), and optionally, circumstances (the conditions surrounding the process). Material processes construe doing and happening and typically involve an Actor, the entity that performs the action, and, where the action affects another entity, a Goal, the entity that undergoes it. Verbal processes construe saying and involve a Sayer; mental processes construe sensing, thinking, or feeling and involve a Sensor, relational processes construe being, having, or identifying and involve a Carrier or Token. Circumstantial elements, such as place, time, means, cause, and purpose, situate the process without being one of its core participants.

Transitivity provides a systematic way to examine how agency is distributed in a text because each clause represents an event through particular grammatical choices. These choices can show how different actors are positioned in relation to an event, rather than relying only on the analyst's interpretation of the tone of a news report. Participant roles, for example, can influence how agency is represented. The same event can be expressed by presenting the intercepting force as the Actor and the humanitarian vessel as the Goal, as in "Israel's military intercepted the Madleen," or by presenting the vessel as the Actor in a material process, as in "the boat continued toward Gaza." The first construction places the state in the position of the actor and the humanitarian mission in the position of the affected participant, while the second gives the humanitarian actor a more active role. Repeated grammatical choices of this kind can therefore contribute to particular representations of agency.

In addition, ideology is therefore not necessarily expressed through a hidden message that readers must uncover. It can also be reflected in the repeated selection of one grammatical pattern over another across different clauses (Fairclough, 1995; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). A single clause in which a humanitarian actor is represented as a Goal rather than an Actor may not be sufficient to indicate a particular pattern of representation. However, when the same pattern occurs repeatedly, together with differences in process types and circumstantial elements, it can provide evidence of a more consistent way of representing the actor. This is the basis of the present analysis. Rather than interpreting ideology from individual clauses, the study examines recurring patterns in participant roles, process types, and circumstances and compares these patterns across AJE and TNYT coverage.

1.3 News Report

Online news reports are generally expected to present information objectively by placing the most important facts first and attributing claims to identifiable sources (Ghadeer, 2018). However, this convention of objectivity does not mean that news reports are completely free from perspective. Since hard-news reports generally avoid explicit evaluation by the reporter, perspectives can be expressed through choices that may appear neutral, such as which information is included, which sources are quoted, and how actions and events are represented through grammar (Hadidi et al., 2022). This is particularly relevant to online news, where readers often access and scan news quickly rather than read the entire report in detail (Pew Research Center,

2019). In such a context, the grammatical structure of a clause can contribute to how an event and its participants are understood. Transitivity is therefore useful for examining online news reports because it allows the researcher to identify how actions, participants, and circumstances are represented through grammatical choices that may not be immediately noticeable to readers. A similar pattern of implicit positioning has been documented outside the Israeli-Palestinian context. Using the UAM Corpus Tool, Nurlela et al. (2025) showed that Indonesian online news reports on the Kanjuruhan tragedy varied in their attitudinal positioning even though the reports followed the same fact-first and source-attributed news convention, indicating that stance can be encoded through linguistic choices even within reporting that presents itself as objective.

These linguistic choices become particularly important when online news reports cover humanitarian events involving multiple groups of participants. Humanitarian actors may appear in the same report as government authorities, military forces, international organizations, journalists, and affected populations, but their roles in the reported event may be constructed differently through language. A humanitarian organization, for example, may be represented as the participant carrying out an action, as the recipient or target of another actor's action, or as a source of information about an event. Such differences can shape how agency, responsibility, and affectedness are distributed among participants without requiring the reporter to make an explicit evaluation. Examining these patterns is therefore important for understanding how humanitarian actors are positioned within news discourse. At the clause level, transitivity provides a systematic way to examine these representations by showing who performs an action, who is affected by it, what is being said or experienced, and under what circumstances the event takes place. This makes transitivity particularly relevant for examining the representation of humanitarian actors in online news reports, where seemingly neutral grammatical choices can contribute to different constructions of their roles in a reported event.

1.4 Humanitarian Actor

Humanitarianism, broadly defined, is a way of responding to crises that seeks to save lives, reduce suffering, and uphold human dignity, requiring individuals, organizations, and institutions to apply humanitarian principles in providing relief, protection, and coordination during emergencies. Following the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, humanitarian actors in this general institutional sense include UN agencies, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, international and local non-governmental organizations, community-based organizations, humanitarian volunteers, and medical teams directly involved in humanitarian assistance and protection.

For the purposes of this study, however, the category is defined operationally rather than institutionally, in order to fit what can actually be identified in news texts rather than what a formal registry of organizations would recognize. Humanitarian actors here are individuals, organizations, initiatives, and affected populations that are involved in, associated with, or directly affected by humanitarian action during the 2025 Gaza Freedom Flotilla, as represented in the sampled news reports, this includes the flotilla's organizers, volunteers, and passengers, as well as the civilian populations the mission was organized to assist. Government officials, military institutions, and political authorities are explicitly excluded from this category, since their institutional role centers on governance, diplomacy, and security rather than humanitarian assistance, in the coded data, such entities are instead treated as political or governmental actors, as illustrated throughout Section 4.

This operational definition is deliberately broader than the institutional definitions used by international agencies, because it is not limited to formally recognized humanitarian organizations, it also includes an affected civilian population whose experience becomes part of the humanitarian narrative even though that population does not itself provide aid. This broader inclusion is appropriate because the object of the study is the linguistic construction of humanitarian actors in news discourse, not their institutional classification, and because a humanitarian actor's claim to legitimacy in public discourse typically rests on need, neutrality, and nonviolence rather than on the sovereignty or authority that legitimizes a political or military actor (Fraser & Murakami, 2022).

2. Method

2.1 Research Design

This study uses a qualitative descriptive design (Miles et al., 2014) to interpret meaning construction in news discourse rather than to test statistical hypotheses. As discussed in Section 2.1, the analysis is deliberately delimited to the textual dimension of Fairclough's (1995) Critical Discourse Analysis, operationalized through Halliday & Matthiessen's (2014) transitivity system. The discursive-practice and sociocultural-practice dimensions of Fairclough's model, which would require production-side data such as

newsroom interviews or editorial records, are outside the scope of this study and are noted in Section 5 as a direction for future research. Within this delimited design, ideology is treated not as a variable measured directly, but as an interpretive layer built from the consistency and direction of transitivity patterns across the corpus, following the reasoning set out in Section 2.2.

2.2 Data and Data Source

The data consist of four online news reports on the 2025 Gaza Freedom Flotilla, including two reports from Al Jazeera English (AJE) and two from The New York Times (NYT), retrieved from their official websites. The reports were published between May and October 2025, covering the period in which the flotilla received substantial media attention. The reports were selected based on comparable length to minimize the possible influence of text volume on the analysis. Only straight news reports were included, while opinion pieces, editorials, live blogs, and multimedia-only content were excluded. Headlines, images, and captions were also excluded because the analysis focuses on clause-level linguistic representation. The clause was used as the unit of analysis, and every clause in which a humanitarian actor occurred as a participant was extracted and coded. This included clauses in both the reporters' narration and reported speech attributed to sources.

2.3 Data Collection Method

Data were collected through documentation by accessing the official websites of AJE and NYT. The search terms "Gaza Freedom Flotilla 2025," "Global Sumud Flotilla," and "aid flotilla Gaza" were used to identify potential articles. The search was limited to reports published between May and October 2025, after which the results were screened according to the content and length criteria described in Section 3.2. Two articles from each outlet were then selected because they contained sufficient clauses involving humanitarian actors for systematic transitivity analysis. The selected articles were archived in PDF format to preserve the texts used in the analysis and minimize the effect of subsequent changes to the original online versions.

2.4 Data Analysis Method

The analysis followed Miles et al.'s (2014) interactive model of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. In the data condensation stage, every clause containing a humanitarian actor was identified and coded according to three transitivity categories based on Halliday & Matthiessen (2014), namely participant role (Actor, Goal, Sayer, Senser, Carrier, Token, or Value), process type (material, verbal, mental, or relational), and circumstantial element (Place, Time, Means, Reason, Purpose, Matter, Accompaniment, or Quality), where present. Each coding decision was checked against the surrounding context to ensure that the humanitarian actor, rather than another participant, occupied the role being coded. In the data display stage, the coded frequencies were organized into frequency and percentage tables for each transitivity category and calculated separately for AJE and NYT using the formula $P = \frac{fx}{N} \times 100\%$, where fx represents the frequency of a given sub-category and N represents the total frequency of all categories within the respective dimension. Bar charts were also generated from the same frequencies to facilitate the identification of differences in patterns between the two outlets.

In the conclusion drawing and verification stage, the three transitivity categories were considered together rather than separately. Following the interpretive framework presented in Section 2.2, a pattern was considered relevant to the ideological interpretation when it recurred across more than one transitivity category and showed a clear difference in distribution between the two outlets. This cross-checking process provided the basis for moving from frequency patterns to an interpretation of how humanitarian actors are constructed through transitivity in the two sets of news reports.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Results

3.1.1 Participant Roles: Who Acts, Who Is Acted Upon

Seven participant roles associated with humanitarian actors were identified in the corpus: Actor, Goal, Sayer, Senser, Carrier, Token, and Value. No instances of Verbiage, Target, Receiver, Phenomenon, Attribute, Behavior, or Behaviour were found. As shown in Table 1, the distribution of these roles differs between AJE and NYT. In AJE, humanitarian actors most frequently occur as Actors, accounting for 41.3% of the identified participant roles, followed by Goal at 23%. In NYT, however, Goal is the most frequent role at 36.4%, while Actor accounts for 30%. This difference indicates that humanitarian actors are more frequently

represented as participants who perform actions in AJE, whereas TNYT more often represents them as participants who are affected by or involved in actions carried out by others.

Table 1. Distribution of Participant Roles Associated with Humanitarian Actors

Participant Role	AJE (%)	TNYT (%)
Actor	52 (41.3%)	32 (30%)
Goal	29 (23%)	39 (36.4%)
Sayer	21 (16.7%)	22 (20.6%)
Senser	7 (5.5%)	2 (1.8%)
Carrier	11 (8.7%)	10 (9.4%)
Token	3 (2.4%)	2 (1.8%)
Value	3 (2.4%)	0 (0%)
Total	126 (100%)	107 (100%)

This pattern is illustrated the difference can be seen more clearly in the material processes. In AJE 1, the clause “six ships carrying humanitarian aid and more than 600 passengers” presents the humanitarian convoy as the Actor of the material process *carrying*. The aid and passengers are represented as the Goal of the process. Through this construction, the flotilla is presented as an entity engaged in an ongoing action of transporting humanitarian assistance. The humanitarian actor is therefore represented through what it does and the assistance it carries.

A different pattern appears in TNYT 1, where the clause “Israel recently barred the entry of humanitarian aid into the territory for 80 days” places Israel as the Actor of the material process *barred*, while “the entry of humanitarian aid” functions as the Goal. In this construction, the humanitarian dimension of the event is represented through what happens to the aid rather than through an action performed by the humanitarian actor. The focus of the clause is therefore placed on the action of the political actor and its effect on humanitarian assistance.

The contrast between these two examples reflects the broader distribution found in the corpus. AJE more frequently assigns humanitarian actors the Actor role, giving greater grammatical prominence to their actions, while TNYT more frequently assigns them the Goal role, placing them in the position of participants affected by actions performed by others. The difference does not mean that humanitarian actors are represented only as active participants in AJE or only as affected participants in TNYT. Rather, the frequencies show a difference in the grammatical patterns through which their roles are constructed. This pattern provides an important basis for understanding how the two news outlets represent humanitarian actors through transitivity.

3.1.2 Process Types: Action Versus Reaction

Four process types were identified in the clauses involving humanitarian actors: material, verbal, mental, and relational. As shown in Table 2, material processes are the most frequent in both AJE and TNYT, accounting for 64.5% of the clauses in AJE and 55.6% in TNYT. However, the two outlets differ in the second most frequent process type. Relational processes rank second in AJE at 15.1%, whereas verbal processes rank second in TNYT at 29.4%. Verbal processes occur at a much lower rate in AJE, at 13.8%.

Table 2. Distribution of Process Types Associated with Humanitarian Actors

Process Type	AJE (%)	TNYT (%)
Material	98 (64.5%)	100 (55.6%)
Verbal	21 (13.8%)	53 (29.4%)
Mental	10 (6.6%)	8 (4.4%)
Relational	23 (15.1%)	19 (10.6%)
Total	152 (100%)	180 (100%)

Based on the data above, the dominance of material processes in both outlets indicates that humanitarian actors are frequently represented through actions and observable events. The difference in the other process types, however, shows that the two outlets give different grammatical emphasis to what humanitarian actors do, say, and are represented as being. The action-oriented pattern in AJE can be seen in the clause “the ships will arrive on the coast of besieged Gaza.” The humanitarian convoy functions as the Actor of the material process *will arrive*, while the circumstance of Place specifies its destination. The clause presents the flotilla as an actor engaged in a physical activity, with its movement toward Gaza becoming the

main event of the clause. In this representation, humanitarian actors are not merely associated with the consequences of an event, they are presented as participants who perform an action and move toward a particular goal.

A different emphasis can be seen in TNYT, particularly in its relatively high use of verbal processes. In the clause “the Freedom Flotilla Coalition announced that alarms had sounded,” the Freedom Flotilla Coalition functions as the Sayer of the verbal process *announced*. Here, the humanitarian actor is represented through an act of communication. The focus is not on a physical action performed by the organization, but on the information, it provides about an event during the mission. This gives the humanitarian actor a role as a source of information and places its verbal response within the reported event.

The distinction between action and reaction becomes clearer when the process-type findings are considered together with the participant roles discussed in Section 4.1.1. In AJE, the high frequency of material processes corresponds with the relatively high occurrence of the Actor role, suggesting a stronger emphasis on humanitarian actors as participants who perform actions. In TNYT, material processes remain dominant, but the higher proportion of verbal processes, together with the more frequent Goal role, creates a more varied representation in which humanitarian actors are not only shown through what they do but also through what they say and what happens to them. Thus, “action versus reaction” is not a distinction between two separate SFL process types. Rather, it describes the different patterns of representation that emerge from the combination of process types and participant roles. The findings show that AJE places greater grammatical emphasis on humanitarian actors’ actions, while TNYT gives relatively more attention to their statements and their position within events involving actions by other participants.

3.1.3 Circumstantial Elements: Purpose Versus Displacement

The eight types of circumstantial elements were identified in the corpus: Place, Time, Means, Reason, Purpose, Matter, Accompaniment, and Quality. As shown in Table 3, Place and Time are the most frequent types in both AJE and TNYT. Place accounts for 35% of the circumstances in AJE and 36.7% in TNYT, while Time accounts for 28.3% and 36.7%, respectively. Means is also relatively frequent in both outlets, accounting for 14.2% in AJE and 16.7% in TNYT. A notable difference appears in the use of Purpose, which occurs more frequently in AJE (7.5%) than in TNYT (3.3%). This difference is relevant because Purpose can make the intended goal of an action more explicit, particularly when it is associated with a humanitarian actor. At the same time, the use of circumstantial elements related to Place and movement can contribute to a pattern of displacement, especially when humanitarian actors are represented in relation to movement, restricted access, or attempts to prevent them from reaching a particular location.

Table 3. Distribution of Circumstantial Elements Associated with Humanitarian Actors

Circumstantial Elements	AJE (%)	TNYT (%)
Place	37 (35%)	33 (36.7%)
Time	30 (28.3%)	33 (36.7%)
Means	15 (14.2%)	15 (16.7%)
Reason	4 (3.7%)	2 (2.2%)
Purpose	8 (7.5%)	3 (3.3%)
Matter	4 (3.7%)	0 (0%)
Accompaniment	6 (5.7%)	1 (1.1%)
Quality	2 (1.9%)	3 (3.3%)
Total	106 (100%)	90 (100%)

The use of Purpose in AJE can be seen in the clause “the ship had been seeking to deliver aid to the besieged enclave.” The phrase “to deliver aid” functions as a circumstance of Purpose and is connected to the material process *had been seeking*, with the humanitarian ship as the Actor. The purpose of the action is therefore included directly in the clause. The humanitarian mission is represented not only through the action of the ship but also through the intended goal of that action, namely delivering aid. This construction makes the humanitarian purpose of the mission more explicit and connects the actor’s action with the provision of assistance.

A different pattern appears in TNYT 1, where the circumstance expressing purpose is connected to the action of a political actor. In the clause “Israel had vowed to prevent the vessel from reaching Gaza,” the phrase “to prevent the vessel” expresses the purpose of Israel’s action. Israel functions as the Sayer of the verbal process *had vowed*, while the humanitarian vessel is the participant whose movement is to be prevented. The purpose in this clause therefore does not express the humanitarian actor’s own intention. Instead, it describes

another actor's intention toward the humanitarian mission. The humanitarian vessel is represented in relation to an attempt to restrict its movement and prevent it from reaching its destination.

The pattern of displacement should not be understood as a separate type of circumstance in the transitivity system. Rather, it emerges from the way circumstantial elements, particularly Place and Purpose, work together with processes and participant roles to represent the movement and restriction of humanitarian actors. In AJE, the more frequent use of Purpose can make the humanitarian objective of the mission more visible, as in the intention to deliver aid. In TNYT, the example above places the humanitarian vessel in relation to an action that seeks to prevent its movement. Thus, the contrast between Purpose and displacement reflects two different ways of contextualizing the humanitarian mission. AJE more often makes the intended purpose of humanitarian action explicit, while TNYT can represent humanitarian actors in circumstances involving movement, restriction, and attempts to prevent access to their intended destination.

3.2 Discussion

The results above show that the representation of humanitarian actors differs between AJE and TNYT. In AJE, the higher frequency of the Actor role, the dominance of material processes, and the relatively frequent use of Purpose contribute to a representation that gives greater emphasis to humanitarian actors as participants who perform actions and pursue particular aims. In TNYT, the higher frequency of the Goal role, the greater use of verbal processes, and the pattern of movement and restriction contribute to a representation in which humanitarian actors are more often presented in relation to actions performed by others and to events that affect them. These findings are therefore not viewed as separate statistical patterns, but as related grammatical choices that together show different ways of representing humanitarian actors in the two news outlets. When compared with previous studies, these findings also show areas of similarity, differences in focus, and aspects that have received less attention in earlier research.

The result that transitivity distributes agency differently across participants in Gaza-related news coverage is consistent with Abunahel (2023), who found that material processes were used to assign agency and responsibility between Israel and Palestinian factions in *The Hindu* and *The Washington Post* during the August 2022 escalation. The present study shares Abunahel's (2023) view that participant-role assignment is not neutral, but it differs in its focus. While Abunahel (2023) examines how agency is distributed between the two main political sides of the conflict, the present study examines how agency is distributed in the representation of humanitarian actors. This difference extends previous transitivity research by shifting attention from the representation of political actors to a participant category that is positioned outside the main political binary of the conflict. The findings suggest that the role of transitivity in constructing agency can also be observed in humanitarian discourse, where actors may be represented as participants who perform actions as well as participants who are affected by the actions of others. In this sense, the study extends existing research by applying the analysis of participant roles and process types to humanitarian actors in the context of the Gaza Freedom Flotilla, an area that has received less attention in previous transitivity studies.

At the level of overall outcome, the finding that AJE emphasizes humanitarian agency while TNYT emphasizes institutional process agrees with Mohamed (2024), Parveen et al. (2025), and Sedigh & Genç (2025), all of whom report that Arab-aligned outlets foreground humanitarian suffering while Western outlets foreground state legitimacy and response. The agreement, however, is only at the level of conclusion, the method differs sharply, since those studies rely on framing or headline-level analysis, which describes what an article emphasizes overall without specifying which grammatical choice produces that emphasis. The present analysis supplies exactly that missing mechanism: the same outcome those studies describe as framing is shown here to be assembled, clause by clause, from participant-role assignment, process-type selection, and circumstantial placement. This is the clearest contribution relative to the framing-oriented literature: it does not simply confirm that AJE and TNYT frame the flotilla differently, which is already well established, but shows the grammar that makes that framing happen.

A similar humanitarian-versus-institutional asymmetry appears in El Damanhoury et al. (2025), who found that Al Jazeera English foregrounded Palestinian and humanitarian sources in its coverage of the 2023 Gaza War while a Western counterpart relied more heavily on Israeli and Western institutional sources. That study, however, concerns an open military conflict and analyzes source foregrounding rather than clause-level transitivity. The present findings suggest that the same underlying asymmetry, humanitarian actors constructed as agentive in AJE and as acted-upon in a Western outlet, recurs even in a civilian relief mission with no direct military confrontation, and recurs specifically in the grammar of the clause rather than only in which sources are quoted. This suggests the asymmetry El Damanhoury et al. (2025) documented is not specific to wartime

reporting but reflects a more general representational tendency that surfaces across different event types and different levels of textual analysis.

The most direct point of comparison is Arafat (2025), who analyzes this same 2025 flotilla coverage in AJE and TNYT through a pragmatic framework centered on discursive power and resistance. Arafat's (2025) conclusion that the two outlets construct asymmetric power relations around the flotilla is compatible with the present findings and is not contradicted by them. What this study adds is a layer of evidence a pragmatic analysis does not by design produce, quantified, clause-level data on which participant role, which process type, and which circumstance each outlet assigns to the humanitarian actor. Where Arafat (2025) shows who appears to hold power in the exchange, the present analysis shows the specific grammatical configurations, Actor versus Goal, material versus verbal, Purpose versus Place, through which that power asymmetry is built at the level of the sentence. This is the study's principal claim to novelty: it is not a second framing study of an already-documented divergence, but a clause-level transitivity account of that divergence for this particular event and this particular participant category.

Finally, the finding that AJE and TNYT diverge systematically is consistent with Badad (2025), Warshagha (2026), and Khalifah et al. (2026), each of whom documents comparable institutional divergence between AJE and a Western counterpart on entirely different topics: the US–Taliban Qatari mediation, the aftermath of October 7, and bilingual coverage of the 2023–2024 Gaza-Israel war, respectively. Because none of these studies examines humanitarian actors specifically or uses transitivity as its analytic tool, their agreement with the present findings is at the level of general institutional orientation rather than of method or object. Taken together with the present results, they suggest that AJE–TNYT divergence is a durable pattern that resurfaces across topics and analytic frameworks, of which clause-level transitivity in humanitarian-actor representation is one previously undocumented instance.

It is important to clarify the limits of the interpretation presented here. Ideology is inferred from grammatical patterns rather than explicitly stated by either news outlet, and counterexamples are present in both datasets. Humanitarian actors do occasionally appear as Goal in AJE and as Actor in TNYT. The argument is therefore distributional. Across the full set of coded clauses, the two outlets show clear differences in the dominant configurations used to represent humanitarian actors. It is this recurring distribution of participant roles, process types, and circumstantial elements, rather than any single clause, that provides the basis for the conclusions drawn in this section. This approach also avoids treating individual examples as direct evidence of ideology and instead considers how repeated grammatical patterns contribute to the representation of humanitarian actors.

4. Conclusion

This study examined the representation of humanitarian actors through the transitivity system in Gaza Freedom Flotilla news reports. The findings show that humanitarian actors are represented through different combinations of participant roles, process types, and circumstantial elements. In AJE, the frequent use of the Actor role and material processes, together with the relatively greater use of Purpose, gives greater emphasis to humanitarian actors as participants who perform actions and pursue humanitarian aims. In TNYT, the higher frequency of the Goal role and the greater use of verbal processes place more emphasis on humanitarian actors as participants who are affected by actions and represented through their statements and responses. These patterns show that humanitarian actors are not represented through a single, fixed role. Instead, their representation is shaped by recurring grammatical choices that position them as both active agents and affected participants.

The findings contribute to previous transitivity research on Gaza-related news discourse by extending attention beyond the main political actors of the conflict to humanitarian actors involved in humanitarian events. The study also demonstrates the value of examining transitivity at the clause level to identify how agency and affectedness are distributed in news discourse. Although the interpretation of ideology is based on recurring grammatical patterns rather than explicit statements by the news outlets, the differences in participant roles, process types, and circumstantial elements provide evidence of distinct patterns in the representation of humanitarian actors. The study therefore highlights how grammatical choices can contribute to the construction of humanitarian actors as participants who act, communicate, pursue humanitarian purposes, and experience the actions of others in news reports.

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