'ItsMyDam': Proximization and Framing Strategies in the Renaissance Dam Crisis Discourse: A Critical Cognitive Case Study

Nihal N. Sarhan

Associate Professor,
Faculty of Al-Alsun
(Languages), Ain Shams
University, Egypt.

Abstract

The present study examines how Egyptian and Ethiopian officials seek to (de-)legitimize the course of action towards the so-called crisis of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) as exemplified in the two countries' respective letters to the UN General Assembly in May 2020. Adopting a qualitative analysis of the two selected documents, I investigate how the crisis is cognitively and discursively framed in the two countries' official discourse. This type of framing is seen as a subtle form of persuasion to prioritize some issues over others, and thereby promote a particular interpretation of reality. In fact, frames are seen as a means of gearing the audience's cognition; specially to the direction of the speaker's viewpoint. From a cognitive perspective, Cap (2013) proximization theory is employed to show how the crisis discourse space is constructed in both letters, hence, in both official discourses. This cognitive-pragmatic framework proves instrumental in both interventionist and crisis discourse to reflect how authors legitimize their actions to the public. Cap (2014a) specified strategies of proximization as linguistic resources of 'legitimization' in political interventionist discourse. Moreover, the discourse-historical approach (2001, 2009, 2016, 2017) informs the analysis of the letters to highlight the discursive strategies used to frame the crisis. Qualitative findings reveal how the linguistic choices evoke cognitive and discursive frames intended to influence the addressees' preference for the speaker's viewpoint. This is achieved through abundant use of framing strategies that include deictic expressions, discourse markers as well as metaphors. From a proximization perspective, emphasis is placed on spatial and axiological proximized threat devices in the Egyptian letter, in contrast to temporal proximized threat ones in the Ethiopian. Both letters employ similar framing and proximization strategies in addressing the UN Security Council.

Keywords: proximization, framing, GERD, discourse analysis, Egypt, Ethiopia, letters

'ItsMyDam': Proximization and Framing Strategies in the Renaissance Dam Crisis Discourse: A Critical Cognitive Case Study

Nihal N. Sarhan

1. Introduction

Over the past decade, the 'crisis of the Renaissance Dam' has been a dominant daily topic in all forms of Egyptian, Ethiopian, as well as international media discourse. It has been tackled in press, TV shows, social media channels, and even memes. Framed as a 'matter of life or death' for Egypt, the negotiations over the construction and filling of the dam along phases have occupied both national and international concern. On the Ethiopian level, the construction of the dam lies "at the heart of Ethiopia's manufacturing and industrial dreams" ('BBC'). It is seen as a golden chance of reuniting the multi-ethnic African country, and a final call for achieving sustainable development for the poverty-ridden Ethiopia. This seems to be the reason why the hashtag #It'sMyDam, initiated by the Ethiopian Water Minister, went viral on Twitter in January 2020.

The present study investigates how the Renaissance Dam crisis is framed in both Egyptian and Ethiopian official discourse as exemplified in the selected data. It examines how these cognitive and discursive-based framings operate as persuasive devices in public discourse to orient the target audience's beliefs according to the author's viewpoint. It addresses, in particular, the construction of 'proximized' threat discourse, within a socio-political historical context that eventually help authors of the discourse (de-) legitimize the construction and filling of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD). The legitimization process includes gathering both national and international support by both parties.

Drawing on Cap (2013) proximization theory, with its tripartite spatial-temporal and axiological dimensions, I show how discourse space is linguistically indexed, and how language plays a 'strategic role…to force construals of changes…in the service of socio-political goals" (Cap, 2013, p.59). This angle of analysis highlights how the officials create their message in a way that helps the target audience *conceptualize* the crisis, and hence align themselves with the official discourse cognitively.

On the other hand, the letters are examined from a discourse-historical approach as proposed by Wodak (2006), Reisigl (2017), and Reisigl and Wodak (2001, 2009, 2016). Being an approach of critical discourse analysis, it enables the target audience embed the data in a social, political and historical context. Their model, thus, illustrates how discourse, in general, and framing, in particular, is interdiscursively constructed. It thus helps uncover the ideology adopted by both parties, as linguistically encoded in their public discourse.

2. Proximization in Crisis Discourse

Proximization is a cognitive-pragmatic theory that shows how linguistic choices help speakers conceptualize physically and temporally distant threats as 'proximized' to the audience's cognitive and physical 'territory'. This conceptualization aims at driving the audience to 'align' to and 'accept' the speaker's 'interventionist' action, being discursively 'legitimatized'. Cap (2013) defines legitimization "as an enactment of the speaker's socio-political right to be obeyed" (p.50). It mostly involves

some sort or another of 'fear appeals". These originate from the speaker's conceptualization of an ideological or material threat that is *proximized* towards the 'threatened' addressee.

Cap sees proximization theory as "a recent cognitive-pragmatic development designed to account for strategic regularities underlying forced construals in political/public discourse" (Cap, 2014). Drawing on concepts from Chilton's (2004, 2005) Discourse Space (DS) Theory, Cap (2013) formulated this theory that proves particularly instrumental in analysing state political discourse, which mostly involves ideological maneuvering, while addressing and/or persuading the public.

This concept of discourse space and the adjacent 'speaker-imposed construal of distance and proximity' have been widely used in a number of linguistic approaches. The most prominent and pervasive of which is Chilton's (2004, 2005) DS theory where the concept of *proximized* powerful entities operating on a deictic center was present in a number of studies. Similarly, Hart (2010) has examined the power of proximization as a 'coercive strategy' in anti-immigration discourse. Cap (2008) utilizes it as a persuasive device with the 'War on Iraq' discourse.

Cap (2017) defines proximization as "as a forced construal operation meant to evoke closeness of the external threat, to solicit legitimization of preventive measures". The set off point for the operation of the proximization is the construction of a cognitive discourse space (DS). This mentally constructed DS primarily consists of a centre and a periphery. All entities within the discourse are defined and conceptualized in relevance to the centre and/or the peripheries. The two major entities are: first, the IDC (inside-deictic-centre) entities, which, in Critical Discourse Studies (CDS)

terms, are the 'US', the protagonists. The second are the antagonistic ODC (outside-deictic-centre) entities, which are the 'THEM'. They are conceptualized as representing negative, and threatening values to the IDCs. The main premise of the theory is that speakers frame those ODCs as 'encroaching' on the IDCs territory, hence posing potential threat. This encroaching could take spatial, temporal, and/or axiological forms, hence the spatial-temporal-axiological (STA) analytical model proposed by Cap. As clearly defined by Cap (2017)

> ''Spatial proximization'' is a forced construal of the DS peripheral entities encroaching physically upon the DS central entities (speaker, addressee). ''Temporal proximization'' is a forced construal of the envisaged conflict as not only imminent, but also momentous, historic and thus needing immediate response and unique preventive measures. Spatial and temporal proximization involve strong fear appeals and typically use analogies to conflate the growing threat with an actual disastrous occurrence in the past, to endorse the current scenario. Finally, ''axiological proximization'' is a construal of a gathering ideological clash between the ''home values'' of the DS central entities (IDCs) and the alien and antagonistic (ODC) values.

As the above quote shows, all parameters involved in constructing this DS are threat-based. They primarily address how speakers try to 'manipulate', or at least, persuade the audience of the physical and temporal imminence of the threat, which calls for an action, typically the one advocated by the speaker. The axiological parameter draws clearly on CDS orientations, where the speakers' and audiences' ideologies are

always at play, especially when it comes to public political discourse. As cited by Cap (2017), "the principal goal [of the discourse] is usually legitimization of actions and policies the speaker proposes to neutralize the growing impact of the negative, ''foreign'', ''alien'', ''antagonistic'', entities" (36).

Apart from this cognitive-pragmatic angle of the theory, the linguistic features are realized via a number of deictic and syntactic structures: Noun phrases (NPs) representing the ODCs, the IDCs, and abstract concepts as well as verb phrases (VPs) indexing the spatial-temporal and axiological action across the DS.

3. Discourse Historical Approach

Discourse historical approach (DHA) is a field of study that falls under the umbrella of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Working along the same lines of thought pioneered by Fairclough (1995, 2002), van Dijk (2006), and van Eemeren (1992, 2016), Ruth Wodak (2001) developed her model of analysing discourse using a triangulated approach, and lending due importance to both the macro-context of the discourse as much as the micro-text.

It is a comprehensive research design, which is "useful in the analysis of discourses about racial, national, and ethnic issues" (Wodak and Reisigl, 2005). The data under investigation is a typical instance of a national issue, hence the choice of the framework. Discourse, as defined by Wodak, is "a cluster of context-dependent semiotic practices… it is topic related, that is discourse on x" (pp.89-90), where x here is GERD. Moreover, it is a 'triangulated approach' which enables the analyst to look into the data from different angles, and thus helps "with demystifying the – manifest or latent – persuasive or 'manipulative' character of discursive practices" (Reisigl &

Wodak, 2016). In their work, Reisigl and Wodak saw the orthodox link between power and discourse; how "power is legitimized or de-legitimized in discourses. Texts are often sites of social struggle in that they manifest traces of differing ideological fights for dominance and hegemony" (2017). They lent due importance to how linguistic resources are used in 'manipulations of power'.

Looking at texts from this triangulated perspective entails considering a) the 'macro-topics' engaged with in the discourse, b) the socio-political and historical perspectives, and c) the discursive and argumentation strategies involved in the discourse. As pointed by Wodak (2016), "[T]he DHA considers the intertextual and interdiscursive relationships between utterances, texts, genres, and discourses as well as extra-linguistic social or sociological variables, the history of an organization or institution, and situational frames.

In their model, Reisigl & Wodak (2016) identified five major strategies employed in the discursive construction of discourse. They defined strategy as an "intentional plan of practices (including discursive practices) adopted to achieve a particular social, political, psychological or linguistic goal". These discursive strategies included a) referential/ nomination strategy; b) predication; c) argumentation; d) prespectivization, framing, or discourse representation, and finally, e) intensification and mitigation (Wodak, 2016, p.73). The present study focuses on how the fourth strategy, in particular, has been employed as a means of framing the crisis and the entities involved in it.

Framing is concerned with the positioning of the speaker's point of view, which reflects the degree of engagement. As identified by Wodak (2016), the discursive strategy of framing/ prespectivization is concerned with 'establishing legitimacy',

through a discursive process to "reinforce by aligning the issue at hand with a) the speaker, b) the relevant field of action/ control and c) the discourse topic" (p.7). Hence, the speaker works to frame the issue as one of direct relevance to them and other 'in-group' entities, calls for a particular mode of action to ensure the implementation of a 'legitimate' outcome. This is linguistically encoded in the use of either direct, indirect, or free indirect speech, as well as metaphors. To frame is to select some aspects of perceived reality and make them more salient in the communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation for the item described (Entman, 1993). Framing can be seen as a dynamic process in which the choice of language plays a key role in making meaning and the frames used by speakers affect the amount of persuasion their messages elicit. Hence, selection and salience intimately relate framing to persuasion, and contribute to shaping frames as persuasive devices. According to Barnett (1999: 25), frames "fix meanings, organize experience, alert others that their interests and possibly their identities are at stake, and propose solutions to ongoing problems.

The DHA model has been used in a plethora of studies, mainly pertaining to analysis of political speeches and persuasive discourse. Wodak (2000) investigated the FPO petition "Austria first" using the discursive strategies developed in her model to highlight aspects of 'discriminatory discourse'. In her analysis, she showed that the most commonly used type of topoi was that of burden, "where the FPO implies, by a topos of burden in combination with a topos of threat and a topos of culture, that for Austrian schools, non-native speakers of German represent a great handicap for the school education of the `Austrian' children" (p.92). Similarly, Wodak (2016) conducted a discourse-historical analysis of David Cameron's speech related to the UK-EU relationships. Weißbecker (2017) adopted an eclectic approach of some of Wodak's model in analysing the speech given by Michael Gove in support of the Leave camp. She highlighted how the speech was clearly persuasive in nature, its goal being to get voters to vote 'Leave' in the referendum, by primarily using topoi of burden and threat, as natural outcomes of staying within the EU. She concluded that the topos of urgency and the topos of threat/danger were extensively used in his Bloomberg speech, "warning the EU that it would suffer under the loss of the United Kingdom". A more recent study was conducted by Boukala (2016) where an analysis of Greek media discourse on "Islamist terrorism" is conducted using the concept of topoi.

4. Research Objectives

The present paper aims to a) examine the major linguistic resources used to construct the GERD discourse space; b) to investigate the different types of frames employed by the author(s) for persuasive goals, and c) to analyze how different linguistic choices and strategies indexed these frames to influence the audience, and finally d) compare the Egyptian and Ethiopian strategies of (de-)legitimization pertaining to the GERD discourse. In addressing these objectives, the study answers the following questions:

1. How do the linguistic resources of the selected data construct the discourse space spatially, temporally, and axiologically?

2. Which of the three dimensions feature more prominently in each letter?

3. How is the crisis framed via the linguistic choices employed?

4. How far are the Egyptian and Ethiopian frames different?

5. Methodology

The present study examines the two official letters sent by the Egyptian and the Ethiopian governments on the 1ˢᵗ of May 2020 and 14ᵗʰ of May, 2020 respectively. Both letters, retrieved from the UN Security Council archive, were addressed to the UN Security Council. The letters, with the attached aide memoirs, are qualitatively analysed to arrive at the answers to questions raised by the study.

Drawing on DHA analytic guidelines, I set off the analysis by determining the wider socio-political, and historic context of the selected data. Much of the contextualization of this crisis is extracted from both official statements, speeches, interviews and news coverage in different media in Egypt, Ethiopia and worldwide. This is followed by an identification of the macro-topics covered in both letters. Moving to examining the micro-level of linguistic analysis, the analysis particularly focuses on the discursive strategy of framing and prespectivization. In doing so, deictics, metaphors, direct and indirect speech, and discourse markers are highlighted within the letters, to identify the speaker's position towards the discourse.

The above analysis is followed by the proximization-based investigation of the data as informed by Cap (2013, 2017). I focus on what Cap (2013) calls 'lexical builders of spatial, temporal, and axiological proximization" (p.73). I qualitatively examine a set number of categories which include the key lemmas, grammatical relations and discourse patterns responsible for the enactment of a given strategy, whether spatial, temporal, and/or axiological. In the Discussion section below, the major findings

of the linguistic analysis are presented and discussed.

6. Data Analysis

6.1. DHA-based analysis

6.1.1. The socio-political and historical context

Egyptian-Ethiopian relationships date back to ancient times. The Church of Ethiopia remained affiliated to the Church of Egypt, since its inception in the beginning of the fourth century AD until its independence in 1958, long after diplomatic relations between the two countries were established in 1930. Political relations with Ethiopia saw a number of ups and downs, ever since Egypt's support of the United Nations resolution in 1950 on the annexation of Eritrea to Ethiopia in a federal union. Tension around water surfaced in 1979 after the declaration of a project to convert part of the Nile water to irrigate 35 thousand feddans to Sinai…[and] the situation has escalated by threatening of Ethiopian President "Mengistu" by transforming the Nile River ('Egypt and Ethiopia'). The deepest point was that in 1995 when the ex-Egyptian President Mubarak "narrowly escaped assassination in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa, when gunmen opened fire on his motor" ("The Independent"). The attempted assassination came against an unsatisfied Ethiopia towards the construction of the Peace Canal in Egypt in 1990, and resulted in the suspension of the Egyptian-Ethiopian council for 17 years.

As elaborated in the *aide memoirs¸* Ethiopia set off on building the GERD in April 2011, where the GERD is framed as the "first major hydroelectric dam…on the Nile". Historically speaking, this was a period of unprecedented upheaval in Egypt, following the January 2011 Egyptian revolution. Over the two following years, Egypt witnessed a

series of phases of unrest, with the rise and fall of the Muslim brotherhood regime, the June 2013 revolution, endless terrorist attacks, the suspension of constitution and the interim presidency. It was not before 2015 that the situation in Egypt started to settle and well-chartered official positions were taken.

Dispute over the Nile waters could be seen as dating back to 1929, through an agreement between "the governments of Egypt and Britain, in which Britain recognized that Egypt had historical rights to the Nile and that water would be shared between it and Sudan, with 48 billion cubic meters going to Egypt and 4 billion to Sudan" (Ottaway, 2020). At the present moment, the main dispute lies over the period Ethiopia would take to fill the dam, rather than the construction itself. Negotiations are stumbling mainly due to Ethiopia's unilateral proceeding with filling the GERD, without reaching an agreement with Egypt or the Sudan. A parallel scenario that would mitigate the losses would be that "Ethiopia fills the reservoir between five and seven- year intervals, then Egypt's water share of Egypt will be decreased by somewhere from 12 to 25 percent during the filling period. So, it would be a good idea that the reservoir be filled over a more extended period of time" (El Baradei, 2021).

Meanwhile, "for Ethiopia, the dam is the symbol of its industrial ambitions and of its determination to escape the historical poverty that afflicts its population" (Ottaway, 2020). A landlocked country, Ethiopia is the "largest and most populated country in the Horn of Africa" ('Britannica'). It is an ethnically diverse, with the Oromos and the Amhara constituting around 60% of the population, and a range of minorities including the Somali, Tigray, Sidamo and others ('Britannica'). With ethnic violence surfacing between the Oromo and the ethnic Somalis (2017), between the Oromo and the

Gedeo people (2018), as well as the recent Tigray War between the federal government and the Tigray regional government (2020), Ethiopian officials look at the construction of the GERD as the only salvation route for both political and economic whitewashing. Despite having eight other rivers, besides the River Nile, Ethiopia considers this water project as one "that will lift their country out of poverty", considering that it is "the biggest of Ethiopia's water projects,…[that] will have a reservoir holding 67 billion cubic meters of water—twice the water held in Lake Tana, Ethiopia's largest lake" (Carlson, 2013).

6.1.2. Macro-topics

Both letters follow the same pattern in, first giving a summary of the whole situation, as envisioned by each entity, then moving to a more detailed elaboration in the *aide memoir*. Both the Egyptian and the Ethiopian letters refer to the impact of constructing GERD, negatively on the former: 'serious threat to peace and security', 'cause significant harm to downstream communities', 'jeopardize the water security, …and indeed the very existence of over 100 million Egyptians' and positively on the latter: 'improve Ethiopia's energy availability', 'serve as a buffer against climate change', 'ensure water, food, and energy security'. Technical details about the construction and filling of the dam are highlighted in both texts. Special focus is given to the challenges incurred on both countries in case of carrying on/ not carrying on with the process of filling without agreement in terms of water scarcity, loss of economic development, deforestation and poverty. Similarly, both letters dwell on the extensive efforts done on each part to reach a satisfactory agreement, through the multiple committees, panels, and initiatives done by both parties. As highlighted below, whereas the Ethiopian discourse brings about few

historical events to support their standpoint, the Egyptian letter focuses more on the status quo, highlighting how the construction and filling would have both short and long term precarious consequences on the 'downstream countries'.

6.1.3. Framing as a discursive strategy

As elaborated beforehand, framing a particular discourse is directly related to 'establishing legitimacy', which lies at the heart of the whole GERD crisis. This discursive strategy involves representing the speaker's, and hence the addressee's position within the discourse. It projects the speaker's point of view, and how they align/ disalign with the addressee. Within DHA, framing or prespectivization is encoded via the use of multiple linguistic resources. As with the all CDA-oriented approaches, the use of deictics demarcates the two - 'usually opposing'- entities in two groups: the US and the THEM. Accordingly, the use of the inclusive first person plural pronoun 'we' would designate the 'in-group', conceptually realized as the inside-deictic centre entity (IDC) elaborated on below. On the other hand, the plural third person pronoun 'they' would designate the 'out-group' or what would be categorized below as the ODC. As clear throughout the letter, the Egyptian discourse is keen on showing how the 'US' includes not only Egypt, but the Sudan, 'African states', as well as the United States and the World Bank as exemplified in: '*we* have now reached a stage….', '*we* call upon the international community…. ', and 'our American partners'. On the other hand, the THEM group is framed as including Ethiopia only, with the recurrent use of the personal pronoun 'it' to refer to Ethiopia. It is noteworthy that the use of 'it' rather than 'they' indicates how the Egyptian discourse projects the crisis as one made by the government rather than the people of Ethiopia.

Moving to the Ethiopian letter, it is noted that deictic expressions are hardly used across the text (only four occurrences) such as "We are ancient civilizations…. We believe that the Nile can deliver a new level of fraternity….", where 'we' here refers to Ethiopia. In fact, the NP 'Ethiopia' is used 191 times. There are few instances where 'other riparian countries' are referred to, but deictically speaking, they are not included within the use of 'we'. On the other hand, there is a total absence of 'they' is observed, where 'Egypt', 'Egyptian government', or 'Egyptian officials' are used instead.

Whereas deictic expressions do not feature prominently within the two texts, discourse markers, a second framing device, are recurrently employed. The most commonly used are the ones that compare and contrast the Egyptian standpoint with the Ethiopian and vice versa. Hence, there is abundant use of 'however', 'conversely', 'on the other hand', 'despite the fact that', and 'whereas'. These contrast-marking connectors reflect not only the difference, and sometimes the opposition, between the two countries points of view, but they also draw comparisons between the two countries need for water, as well as people's status. Causal discourse markers are also abundantly used, especially where each letter attributes the stalemate to the 'obstructionism' of the relevant country. This features in the abundant use of 'therefore', 'as a result', 'due to', and 'accordingly'. Finally, discourse markers indicating the speaker's position are also used across the two texts, which are typical realization of how the framing strategy, where the speakers position themselves, and accordingly others, towards the

discourse topic and the action. Markers such as 'clearly', 'regrettably', and 'unfortunately'. It is worth noting that the Egyptian text uses these markers with higher frequency, especially 'regrettably'.

Direct and indirect speech quotation, another linguistic resource of framing, is used within the Egyptian letter to document the agreement. Meanwhile, it is used within the Ethiopian text to question Egypt's insistence on its "historic rights and current use". Indeed, this has been a recurrent phrase used by Egyptian official and unofficial discourse. Frequent reference to this quotation in the Ethiopian letter is meant to frame Egypt as making use of an illogical argument.

The final device used in the texts is metaphor. As elaborated by Charteris-Black (2005), metaphor "is understood as a linguistic device which can shape reality and frame it according to the persuader's goals. Along the two texts, and with higher frequency within the Egyptian one, the major conceptual metaphor used is that where AGREEMENT is JOURNEY, where 'reaching an agreement', 'significant progress', 'current impasse in these discussions', 'there are avenues to address', 'moving forward', 'backtracking from its own attestation', 'accelerate the process', or 'blocking' are recurrent mapping features between the source domain (JOURNEY) and target domain (AGREEMENT). Indeed, this is a primary conceptual metaphor considering the recurrent collocation of 'reach' and 'agreement'. Below is a table that highlights the frequency of occurrence of the different framing strategies in the two letters

Table 1. Frequency of framing strategies in Egyptian and Ethiopian letters

Framing strategy	Egyptian letter	Ethiopian Letter
1. Deictic expressions		
a. inclusive 'we'	72	4
b. they	3	0
2. Discourse Markers		
a. Contrast-marking connectors	16	11
b. Causal connectors	16	19
c. Positioning connectors	9	3
3. Direct and indirect quotations	0	3
4. Metaphors	29	13
Total	145	53

To sum up, it could be concluded that both discourse samples employ the same discursive strategies to frame the situation. This partly explains why no one party seems to win a wider public support.

6.2.   Proximization-based analysis

Typical of discourse genres that are examined by proximization theory, discourse of GERD by both parties, Egyptian and Ethiopian, force 'a direct and growing conflict between symbolically demarcated 'home' and 'external' entities. This type of discourse primarily surfaces as a form of interventionist/ preventative discourse, where the latter aspect seems to befit the present discourse. Both letters create a discourse space that centres around GERD, whereas- naturally- the IDCs and the ODCs differ, or are rather reciprocal.

6.2.1. The Egyptian letter

Examining the Egyptian letter, being chronologically prior to the Ethiopian, proximization strategies are employed on both synchronic and diachronic levels. Synchronic proximization is realized mainly through the lexico-grammatical choices that denote spatial proximization; where the Ethiopian government insistence on constructing and filling the GERD, and the subsequent actions pose an 'encroaching' threat on the Egyptian rights. On the spatial axis, the major IDC entities realized via NPs are 'Egypt', '(100 million) Egyptians', 'the Sudan', 'downstream states/ communities/ co-riparians'.   The inclusion of other entities, besides Egypt, as members of the deictic centre aims at creating a more regional coalition to support the Egyptian case against Ethiopia, hence *framing* the case as an international, rather than a national, one. Noun phrases conceptualizing entities that are outside the deictic centre, hence pose threat, are '(Federal Democratic Republic of) Ethiopia' and 'government of Ethiopia'. As

noted in the analysis of the Ethiopian letter, other entities support the Ethiopian case, yet never mentioned by the Egyptian discourse to focalize the threat in one and only one ODC, Ethiopia.

Moving to the other categories of spatial proximization, verb phrases, functioning as linguistic carriers that denote either movement towards the ODC or contact between ODC and IDC feature abundantly. These include "cause significant harm', 'refused to accept', 'unilaterally commenced the construction', 'has effectively thwarted every attempt', 'violated an agreement', 'decided not to attend', 'refused to sign the final agreement', 'will not accept any constraints on its future projects' and 'decision …was taken unilaterally' and 'Ethiopia backtracked'. This abundant use of verb phrases of 'motion and directionality' or of 'action' both indicate the seriousness and continuity on the Ethiopian part, which is taking incessant steps towards the construction, hence encroaching the IDC entities. As clear from the mentioned samples, VPs vary in their tense, reflecting a feature of temporal proximization, where a past action, and a present situation are probably reflected in future cases. As elaborated on later in the Ethiopian letter analysis, the SA-related lexico-grammatical and discourse items employed in the Egyptian letter are more abundant, which typically reflects how the ODC's intended action 'proximizes' threat to the IDC, both conceptually and physically.

What particularly conceptualizes the encroachment of the ODC on the IDC is the use of different noun phrase constructions denoting 'anticipation of potential contact' between both entities. These include 'cause of concern', 'unilateral filling of the GERD reservoir', 'material breach', 'Ethiopia's rejection of the mitigation measures', 'serious threat', and "disingenuous and distorted

reading of the DoP". Finally, NPs construed as conceptualizations as effects of actual contact include 'potential adverse effects', 'thousands of hectares of arable land would disappear', 'urbanization would sky-rocket, lead to an increase in unemployment'.

On a diachronic axis, the Egyptian letter falls behind the Ethiopian in terms of temporal proximization strategies. As elaborated later, in the Ethiopian letter, discourse forms involving contrast between past and present events are more abundantly used. Within the Egyptian letter, few references to past events that may overshadow future instances are used. A sample construction that involves parallel contrastive construals of oppositional futures from the now such as: 'Ethiopia's overall objective was, and remains' and "Ethiopia's overall objective has been to establish a fait accompli" and "Ethiopia…will not enter into any arrangement depicted as 'the long-term operation' of the GERD."

Finally, the axiological axis features prominently in the Egyptian letter, framing the conflict as one that primarily rests on conflict about values, rather than concrete issues. In fact, the employment of the axiological axis functions as, what Cap calls an 'emergency door' where the Egyptian, and the Ethiopian discourse, may resort to this alternative as "a swift change from strong fear appeals (enacted, before, by spatial proximization of the ''direct/emerging threat''), to a subtler ideological argument for legitimization, involving predominantly axiological proximization" (2014b, p.21). All through the letter and the attached aide memoire, the Egyptian discourse on GERD projects the conflict of values between the ODC members and those of the IDC. It is even interesting how both letters make use of the very same NPs 'good faith' and 'cooperation' construing the positive values of the concerned parties. NPs construed as

Egypt's positive ideologies include 'good will', "genuine political commitment", "considerable flexibility and limitless good will" and "unwavering commitment". On the other hand, negative ideologies are recurrently instantiated in NPs pertaining to Ethiopia such as 'obstructionism and equivocation', Ethiopian prevarication', 'unilateralism', "violation of its obligations under international law", and "bad faith".

To conclude, whereas the Egyptian letter employs the different spatial, temporal, and axiological proximization strategies, the spatial and the axiological frameworks seem to stand out in the discourse.

6.2.2. The Ethiopian letter

Adopting the same vein of analysis, as expected, the Discourse Space is almost inverted with Ethiopia (and other African nations) representing the IDCs and Egypt representing the ODC. Hence, the use of the IDC- realizing NPs features as 'Ethiopia', 'its people', 'the poor citizens of Ethiopia', 'more than 65 million Ethiopians', the dominantly agrarian and pastoralist population of Ethiopia', 'lower riparian countries', 'nine riparian countries', and 'Nile riparian countries'. On the other hand, 'Egypt' is the one and only element realizing the IDC.

Synchronic proximization in the Ethiopian letter provides clear examples of the SA category of VPs of action 'construed as markers of impact of ODCs upon IDCs'. Throughout the letter and the attached aide memoir, VP constructions frame Egypt as either an obstructionist force, or a perpetrator on Ethiopia's rights to the Nile waters. These constructions include: 'Egypt …saw to it that it received the lion's share of Nile waters', 'Egypt has been going through motions, first for dragging, stonewalling, and delaying the process', 'Egypt persistently blocked international financial institutions', 'Egypt is

backtracking', and 'Egypt withdrew from its membership in 2010'.

Unlike the Egyptian discourse which employs a plethora of NPs that denote 'proximized' threat incurred from the ODC upon the IDC, which directly appeals to the latter's fears, the Ethiopian letter has few examples of such NPs. '[P]ersistent obduracy of Egypt', 'unwarranted escalation of the issues', 'disruptive approach' and 'the obstacles mounted by Egypt' are the clearest examples of such NPS. This can be interpreted in the light of the fact that it is the construction of the GERD that poses/ encroaches a threat to Egypt, which is conceptually a typical representation of 'proximized threat'. On the other hand, Egypt's objection to the terms of constructing and filling the GERD is of indirect impact, hence the scarce presence of the NPs.

This lack of the aforementioned NPs is balanced by an abundance of NPs denoting 'abstract concepts construed as effects of impact of ODCs upon IDCs". These include constructions such as 'deforestation', 'environmental and land degradation', 'abject poverty', 'severe food insecurity', 'famine', and 'severe damage to livelihood, and the physical and psychological wellbeing of Ethiopians'. It is worth, however, that all these abstract concepts that anticipate the proximized threat are nominalized constructions that have no direct reference to the IDC. Rather these refer to anticipated impact in case of rejection of construction.

On the other hand, the diachronic axis of proximization in the Ethiopian letter is foregrounded via the temporal axis, to highlight how the crisis goes back to eras before the present; hence *framing* it as a historical, rather than a present, conflict. The Ethiopian letter launches a temporal analogy axis which links past reference points (as exemplified in the NPs below) with the present point, creating a common conceptual

space for both the proximized historical 'building of the High Dam', 'the Peace and Toshka canals', and the current and/or prospective acts construed as their natural follow-ups. There is indeed abundant use of temporal proximization categories, with discourse forms involving contrastive reference to past events such the NPs 'after thirteen years long negotiations', 'in the years 1956, 1957, 1980, and 1997', 'Egypt's century-old monopolistic approach', 'the droughts in the 1980s', 'since the 1950s', which highlight how the conflict is deeply entrenched. This is contrasted with other discourse forms that involve verb phrases that reflect "conditions for ODC impact as existing continually between the now and the infinite future". This, again, in meant to frame Egypt as not only showing obstructionism, but also as being historically unfair. There is recurrent use of VPs reflecting this aspect as in 'Egypt *has never accepted* these principles', 'Egypt *continues* to give a distorted interpretation', 'Egypt *had and continues to invoke* historic rights', 'in the same way as it [Egypt] *does not recognize* the 1959 agreement'. Similarly, the letter employs discourse forms that involve 'parallel contrastive construals … of oppositional and privileged futures" in case of moving on with the plan of construction. This is exemplified in forms such as:" This unjust state of affairs …must be redressed", "the ongoing trilateral negotiations can result in a successful outcome", "Egypt should be encouraged to sign", "Ethiopia must harness its available resources", and "Egypt will become a valuable partner…if it embraces fairness".

Whereas the Ethiopian letter appears more persuading on the temporal axis, the Egyptian better employs the axiological axis. As elaborated earlier, the axiological proximization framework construes a 'clash of the positive ideologies and values of the IDC with the negative ones of the ODC'. This

directly reiterates the classical positive Self and negative Other in critical discourse studies. Cap (2010) states that "the mechanism of axiological proximization involves the addressee's construal of a continuing ideological conflict which eventually materializes in a physical clash between the speaker/addressee and the adversary". Whereas the overall argument of the Ethiopian letter rests on the fact that Ethiopia's developmental opportunities would multiply as a result of the construction of the GERD, Egypt's argument is one that rests on values and ideologies. In fact, in terms of frequency of occurrence, the spatial axis, with its attached lexico-grammatical categories, outnumber those pertaining to the axiological axis-based constructions. Discourse items pertaining to the axiological proximization include NPs denoting positive IDC values: 'potential cooperation and good neighborliness', 'economic integration', 'collective security and multilateralism', 'promotion of sustainable development, peace, and security', 'sovereign and legitimate rights', and 'spirit of good faith'. It is worth noting that both countries' discourse involves the lexical item 'good faith' abundantly, but naturally in opposing senses. Fewer examples are found of NPs construed as ODC negative values such as: 'flagrant violation of international law', 'obdurate stance and unilateralism', 'absolute injustice', and 'infringement of Ethiopia's sovereignty'.

One final note is worth raising in this respect: looking at the categories of the spatial proximization framework, certain lexico-grammatical items do not seem to fit in Cap's (2013, 2017) classification. This is particularly realized via the use of VPs of action construed as markers of resistance of the ODC impact upon IDC. These can be identified in both the Egyptian and Ethiopian sample discourses. For example, Ethiopia recurrently refers to the fact that it 'took the

initiative to establish' different committees and panels, it also 'will continue its unfailing efforts', and "will pursue fraternal dialogue" where it "remains committed to complete the negotiations". Similar constructions are found in the Egyptian letter: "Egypt invited the United States of America and the World Bank Group", and "Egypt proposed the creation of a Nine-party Mechanism".

7. Discussion

As elaborated, both texts have been investigated to highlight how the conflict is framed in the Egyptian and Ethiopian official discourse. Drawing on DHA premises, with emphasis on the prespectivization, both letters are seen as domains for projecting the speaker's position, and hence their trial to align the audience. It becomes evident how both official discourses employ prespectivization linguistic resources to frame the conflict in a light that serves their respective interests. Whereas they differ in using deictic expressions, which are more abundant in the Egyptian letter to highlight how the conflict is one that involves parties other than Egypt, namely down-stream countries, both letters use discourse markers extensively. Most discourse markers relate to contrasting the two countries' positions with respect to the conflict, such as 'conversely', 'however', 'on the other hand', and 'whereas' in different frequencies as shown above. Naturally, each country frames itself in a positive light, whereas the other in a negative one. This reiterates the classical dichotomy in CDA of the positive Self and the negative Other. Similarly, both letters employ direct quotations, either from the other party's official discourse or from international treaties to substantiate their argument. Finally, what is worth noting is the scarce presence of metaphors or conceptual metaphors. This seems to be consistent with the type of data examined; since the letters, although available to the public, is mainly

addressed to the UN and its members, where persuasive strategies differ from those employed in public discourse.

Examining the letters in the light of Cap's framework, the researcher identifies abundant use of proximization strategies, in varying ways, to (de-)legitimize the (intended) course of action. The Egyptian letter abounds in using both spatial and axiological proximization strategies. As highlighted earlier, this comes in line with the fact that the construction and filling of the dam represents a typical 'encroachment' on the Egyptian DS, both physically and conceptually. On the other hand, the abundant use of axiological proximization strategies can be attributed to the fact that whereas Egypt never denied Ethiopia its right to development, it is addressing a matter of ethics, values and respect of international treaties. Ethiopia's letter, on the other hand, foregrounds the temporal proximization strategies to draw historical analogies to actions on the Egyptian party, notwithstanding the fact that Egypt, being a downstream, could not cause the same harm as Ethiopia, being the sole source of water supply.

Drawing on lines from CDA, it could be concluded that Egypt's ideology rests primarily on conceptualizing the conflict as one of values and rights, rather than of water and power generation. Hence, the axiological parameter should always be the main pivot upon which addressing the public is done. This could counter Ethiopia's ideology that conceptualizes the conflict as a historically deep-rooted one.

Both letters seem to employ similar linguistic resources either to 'frame' the conflict or to (de-) legitimize their action. To gain more grounds, both nationally and internationally, each country has to change the type of discourse and adopt differing persuasive strategies in addressing the audience.

8. Conclusion

The construction and filling of GERD, its benefits for Ethiopia and its threat on down-stream countries in general and Egypt in particular is one of the most heated topics in international discourse over the past years. It has occupied much local and international concern, especially with the inability of the two concerned parties, Egypt and Ethiopia, to reach an agreement that satisfies their needs as well as those of the Sudan. To secure as much international support as possible, first Egypt, and then Ethiopia both address the UN Security Council through official letters to elaborate on the status quo, and define the situation, each in their own terms. These respective letters have been examined, primarily to see how each sample text frames the conflict, with the ultimate goal of justifying their position, and hence aligning the target addressee to them. Addressing the first research question, it could be concluded that various linguistic resources are used to construct the discourse space via the use of noun phrases identifying the IDCs and the ODCs; verb phrases that indicate the act of threat and encroachment, and abstract noun phrases that project the conflict of values. Moving to the second research question, and as elaborated earlier, Egypt frames the conflict as one of physical (spatial) threat as well as ethical one (axiological). On the other hand, Ethiopia projects the conflict as one that is historically deep-rooted, hence much focus is given to the temporal axis. The use of different linguistic resources, such as deictic expressions, linguistically frames the conflict as one that involves more than the two major parties (Egypt and Ethiopia), whereas the use of metaphor frames the conflict as a journey full of obstacles. The answer to the final research question could

provide an explanation why international endeavors by both parties are not conclusive. This could be attributed to the fact that both countries' official discourses employ quite similar strategies of proximization and framing.

It is suggested that further studies would be conducted to investigate the conflict from other perspectives. Diachronic studies could show how the discourse has evolved throughout the past decade and the type of changes that occurred during the construction phase and the filling phase. Similarly, studies could be done on a wider scale to include GERD public discourse, whether through examining media discourse, or computer-mediated discourse such as social media discourse. Examining the conflict from different perspectives could better highlight the hidden ideologies and hence the path forward for a more settling action.

References

Barnett, M. (1999). Culture, strategy and foreign policy change: Israel's road to Oslo. *European Journal of International Relations* 5(*1*): 5–36.

Boukala, S. (2016). Rethinking topos in the discourse historical approach: Endoxon seeking and argumentation in Greek media discourses on 'Islamist terrorism. *Discourse Studies*, 18. Sage Publications.

Cap, P. (2008). Towards the proximization model of the analysis of legitimization in political discourse. *Journal of Pragmatics,* 40 (*1*), 17-41.

Cap, P. (2010). Axiological aspects of proximization. *Journal of Pragmatics,* 42. 392-407. 10.1016/j.pragma.2009.06.008.

Cap, P. (2013). *Proximization: The pragmatics of symbolic distance crossing*. John Benjamins, Amsterdam.

Cap, P. (2014a). Applying cognitive pragmatics to critical discourse studies: A proximization analysis of three public space discourses. *Journal of Pragmatics*. (*70*), 16–30.

Cap, P. (2014b). Expanding CDS methodology by cognitive-pragmatic tools: Proximization theory and public space discourses. In C. Hart & P. Cap (Eds.), *Contemporary critical discourse studies* (pp. 189–210). London: Bloomsbury Academic. Retrieved July 6, 2021, from http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781472593634.ch-008

Cap, P. (2017). From 'cultural unbelonging' to 'terrorist risk': Communicating threat in Polish anti-immigration discourse. *Critical discourse studies,* 15 (*3*), 1-18.

Carlson, A. (2013). *Who owns the Nile?* https://origins.osu.edu/article/who-owns-nile-egypt-sudan-and-ethiopia-s-history-changing-dam

Chilton, P. (2004). *Analysing political discourse: Theory and practice*. Routledge, London.

Chilton, P. (2005) *Discourse space theory: Geometry, brain and shifting viewpoints. Annual Review of Cognitive Linguistics*, (*3),* 78-116.

Crummey, D. Edward , Marcus, . Harold G. and Mehretu, . Assefa (2021). Ethiopia. Encyclopedia Britannica. https://www.britannica.com/place/Ethiopia

El Baradei, S. (2021). *Egypt and the Ethiopian Renaissance Dam*. AUC Publications

Entman, R.M. (1993). Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of Communication*, 43, pp. 51-58. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1993.tb01304.x

Fairclough, N. (1995). Critical discourse analysis. The critical study of language. *Language in social life series*. London: Longman.

Fairclough, N. (2002). *Analysing discourse: textual analysis for social research*. London: Routledge.

Hart, C. (2010). *Critical discourse analysis and cognitive Science: New perspectives on immigration discourse*. Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke

Ottaway, M. (2020). *Egypt and Ethiopia: The curse of the Nile*. Wilson Centre Publications.

Plastina, A. F. (2018). Reframing as a persuasive device in public speech: beyond globalized biodiversity. In J. Pelclová and W. Lu (Eds.), *Persuasion in public discourse: Cognitive and functional perspectives*.

Reisigl, M. and Wodak, R. (2001). Discourse and discrimination: Rhetorics of racism and antisemitism. London: Routledge.

Reisigl, M. and Wodak, R. (2009). The discourse-historical approach. In R. Wodak and M. Meyer (Eds.), *Methods of critical discourse analysis*, 2nd ed., 87–121. Sage Publications.

Reisigl, M. and Wodak, R. (2016). The discourse-historical approach. In R. Wodak and M. Meyer (Eds.), *Methods of critical discourse studies*, (pp. 23–61). Sage Publications.

United Nations, Security Council, *Letter from the Permanent Representative of Egypt to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council,* (1 May 2020), available from https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3861977

United Nations, Security Council, *Letter from the Permanent Representative of Ethiopia to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council,* (14 May 2020), available from https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3862715

van Dijk, T. A. (2006). Discourse and manipulation. *Discourse and society*, 17, 359-383

van Eemeren, F. and Grootendorst, R. (2016). *Argumentation, communication and fallacies*. New York: Routledge.

Weißbecker, E. (2017). Discourse Analysis of the EU Referendum on EU membership

Wodak, R. (2000). The rise of racism: An Austrian or a European phenomenon? *Discourse & Society*, 11(*1*), 5–6. https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926500011001001

Wodak, R. (2001). The discourse-historical approach. In R. Wodak and M. Meyer (Eds.), *Methods of critical discourse analysis*,1st. edition, (pp. 63-94). Sage Publications.

Wodak, R. (2016). We have the character of an island nation: a discourse-historical analysis of David Cameron's "Bloomberg Speech" on the European Union. *EUI working paper RSCAS.*

Wodak, R. and Reisigl, M. (2005). *Discourse and discrimination: Rhetorics of racism and antisemitism.* Routledge.