

A Critical Discourse Analysis of Plasschaert's Briefings on the Role of Woman in Iraq

Prof. Dr. Qasim Abass Dhayef¹, Asst. Lect. Baneen Hameed Neema^{2*}

¹Department of English, College of Education for Human Sciences, University of Babylon

²Department of English, College of Education, Islamic University

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*Corresponding author: Asst. Lect. Baneen Hameed Naeema
Department of English, College of Education, Islamic University

Abstract

This paper is a critical discourse analysis of the briefings made by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Iraq, Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, to the United Nations Security Council about the place of women in Iraq. It fills a gap in the academic literature of international institutional discourses and how they draw representations of women's agency, challenges and engagement in Iraqi society after the conflicts. This study aims at identifying the discursive practices used in such briefings to symbolize the role of women, assess the ideological underpinnings of such symbolizations, and analyze whether these discursive practices enforce or challenges the existing gender power relations in Iraq. The study will utilize a mixed-methods research design, combining qualitative and quantitative analysis by examining 9 excerpts of three Security Council briefings given between October 2023 and May 2024. The theoretical and analytical approach has been offered by Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis consisting of textual analysis, discursive practice, and social practice. Results show that women in Iraq are mostly represented in passive and nominalized constructions, and they are mostly presented as beneficiaries of the institutional act as opposed to being agents. Evaluative language and modality markers also build on the empowerment of women as an aspirational goal that is dependent on government and even international intervention. The research finds that, despite the recognition of gains in the political role of women in the briefings, the existing discursive patterns support a dependency paradigm which makes the progress of women to be imposed by outside forces instead of being self-directed.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, Gender Representation, UN Discourse, Women's Empowerment, Iraq, Plasschaert.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The role of women in the Iraqi political and social life has changed considerably after decades of confrontation, sanctions, and regime shift. Iraq since the fall of the former regime in 2003 has included constitutional provisions of the 25% quota of women in parliamentary representation, national action plans on women, peace, and security (Al-Ali & Pratt, 2009). Nevertheless, the lived experience of the Iraqi women remains to be influenced by the deep-rooted patriarchal standards and the sectarian processes and the lasting effects of the armed conflict on the relationships between men and women (Khedery, 2015). The United Nations and its agencies and missions has been at the forefront in the promotion of the rights of women in Iraq and the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) has become a key way through which the international community interacts on gender matters.

In this regard, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General to Iraq to the UN Security Council briefings present a remarkable location of institutional discourse, which underlies the international discourse regarding the status of women in Iraq. Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, the head of UNAMI regularly reported to the Security Council on issues that concerned the political participation of the Iraqi women, the law that safeguards them and the empowerment of the women. They are briefings, not informational reports but discursive actions that represent specific images of the roles, issues, and agency of women (Wodak & Meyer, 2015). Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) provides a powerful approach in the investigation of how institutional texts create and recreate ideologies on gender, power and social relations (Fairclough, 1995). This study aims at identifying the discursive production of female roles in Iraq and how it is achieved by examining the linguistic

and rhetorical strategies, which are used in international institutional logics.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Although the topic of gender and conflict in the Middle East is getting growing academic interest, there is a very significant gap in the literature with respect to the discursive construction of the role of women in Iraq by the international institution discourse, especially when it comes to the international UN Security Council briefings. Although the sociological and political aspects of women political participation in Iraq have been addressed in the previous researches, limited studies have used CDA to explore the language and ideological factors of the representations of the women's agency, issues and empowerment in the high-level diplomatic discourse. Such briefings shape the international policy agenda and the discursive frames of how the international community perceives and responds to the issues of Iraqi women, making this gap important.

1.2 Research Objectives

The present study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To identify the discursive strategies used to represent women's roles and agency in Plasschaert's briefings to the UN Security Council on Iraq.
2. To examine the ideological assumptions and power relations embedded in the linguistic choices of these briefings regarding women's participation and empowerment.
3. To evaluate the extent to which these discursive representations reflect or challenge existing gender inequalities in Iraqi society.

1.3 Research Questions

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What discursive strategies are used to represent women's roles and agency in Plasschaert's briefings to the UN Security Council on Iraq?
2. What ideological assumptions and power relations are embedded in the linguistic choices of these briefings regarding women's participation and empowerment?
3. To what extent do these discursive representations reflect or challenge existing gender inequalities in Iraqi society?

1.4 Research Hypotheses

Based on the research objectives and questions, the following hypotheses are proposed:

1. Plasschaert's briefings employ a combination of nominalization, passive constructions, and modality markers that predominantly position women as recipients of institutional action rather than active agents in their own empowerment.
2. The linguistic choices in the briefings embed ideological assumptions that frame women's

participation as contingent upon governmental reform and international support, thereby reinforcing institutional dependency.

3. While the briefings acknowledge progress in women's political representation, the dominant discursive patterns tend to reproduce rather than challenge existing gender power asymmetries in Iraqi society.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Critical Discourse Analysis: Principles and Approaches

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a multidisciplinary approach to language study which views discourse as a type of social practice within the power and ideology relations (Fairclough, 1995). Unlike purely linguistic methods, CDA is about not only formal properties of texts, but how language works to build up, hold up, and oppose social realities (van Dijk, 2001). The main assumption of the CDA state that discourse is constitutive and constituted by the social structures, which has the implication that at the same time texts reproduce and constitute the power relation, identities, and ideologies within the societies in which they circulate (Wodak & Meyer, 2015). The most important figures in the evolution of CDA are Norman Fairclough, with his three-dimensional model, which investigates the interactions of text, discursive practice, and social practice; Teun van Dijk, with his socio-cognitive approach, which informs about the presence of mental models in mediating the interactions between discourse and social practice; and Ruth Wodak, whose discourse-historical approach focuses on the intertextual and historical nature of any discursive event (Blommaert, 2005).

CDA has been extensively used in various institutional, political and media situations with the aim of revealing how the dominant ideologies are naturalised using language (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). CDA has found application especially in the political and institutional discourse in exploring how power imbalances are constructed and legitimised with certain lexical, grammatical and rhetorical devices (van Dijk, 2008). The approach is obligated to uncover inequalities and injustices that are obscured or naturalised by discursive practices, by virtue of its critical orientation in the first place (Fairclough, 2003). In line with this, the analytical instruments needed to address research questions of the current investigation are provided by CDA, which will help to understand how institutional language in briefings of the United Nations creates specific images of the role and agency of women and how they are incorporated into a larger ideological system of gender, power, and international governance.

2.2 Gender Representation in Political and Institutional Discourse

The research in gender representation in political discourse is supported by a long intellectual

tradition, based on the experience of feminist linguistics, political science, and media studies. Statistical studies always indicate that women in politics are often portrayed in ways that prefigure their gender and not their professional skills prompting them to be seen as the exception or the aberrant in a largely male-dominated institution (Lazar, 2005). When linguistic analyses are done, the female politicians have more negative connections to personal characteristics, beauty, or motherhood, and the male ones are attributed to power, knowledge, and leadership (Baker, 2014). In institutional discourse, the gendered language pattern is reflected in such strategies as nominalisation, whereby the agent is obscured by means of turning actions into abstract noun phrases, or passivisation, where women are the objects of the institutional processes instead of the actors of the process (Machin & Mayr, 2012).

In the narrower context of international institutional discourse, gender representation has other ideological implications in the sense that such texts are commonly upheld as policy blueprints and resource distribution. As an example, the analysis of the documents of United Nations revealed that women in conflict-affected contexts are often portrayed through victimhood frames and the emphasis is made on their vulnerability and need protection even when the targeted goal is empowerment and participation (Shepherd, 2008). There are important consequences to this discursive conflict between victimhood and agency in the development and enforcement of gender policy; such a future-telling of passivity and dependency can be counterproductive to both the empowerment agendas to which the gender policy is addressed (Pratt & Richter-Devroe, 2011). Therefore, it is critical to know how the gender is portrayed in institutional texts in order to determine the correspondence between the discursive investments in equality and the linguistic practices in which such investments are expressed.

2.3 UN Discourse and Women's Rights in Conflict Zones

Since the introduction of Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security in 2000, the United Nations has played the pivotal role in advancing the rights of women in the conflict-prone environments. This historic resolution, and its follow-up resolutions, made it a normative framework that women should be fully and equally involved in the conflict prevention, resolution and peacebuilding processes (Cohn *et al.*, 2004). Discursive work done by UN on the rights of women in conflict zones functions in various levels; at the high level through briefings at the Security Council, and at the technical level through reports prepared by agencies like UN Women. A study on UN discourse suggests that despite the organization possessing sound normative commitments to gender equality, the use of language in official documents often reflects conflicts between empowerment rhetoric and working structures that would position women as the

most vulnerable groups that need protection (Otto, 2009).

The political situation in Iraq, along with the presence of the Ba'ath regime, the invasion and occupation in the year 2003, and the emergence of Islamic State, as well as the continued sectarian and ethnic conflicts, defined the way the UN has worked with the rights of women (Ismael & Ismael, 2015). UNAMI has long promoted the idea of women in politics, legal rights, and empowerment without stepping on the fact that the society in which it functions is very culturally and religiously sensitive in regard to gender relations. The genre of briefings given by the Special Representative to the Security Council is especially prominent in terms of the content of the UN discourse, as it is not only informational and performative but also constructive: it provides assessments of the situation on the ground, but it also produces narratives that influence the international perception and policy reactions (Charlesworth & Chinkin, 2013). Critical analysis of these briefings in terms of CDA, therefore, would provide useful information regarding the connections between the discursive practices of the UN and its publicly acknowledged dedication to empowering women in Iraq.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Nature of the Study

This research design is a mixed-methods research design that combines both the qualitative and quantitative research methods. The qualitative part will consist of a specific critical discourse analysis of the linguistic characteristics, discursive techniques, and ideological constructions in the chosen excerpts. The quantitative element includes the calculation of frequencies and percentages of particular discursive characteristics of the data set to discover patterns and trends in the representation strategies. The qualitative depth approach and quantitative systematization allow the combination to fit in the traditional practices of CDA research where the interpretation of texts is enhanced by both interpretive depth and empirical rigor (Fairclough, 2003; Baker *et al.*, 2008).

3.2 Data Collection

The sample includes nine passages of three briefings by Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, who was followed by the corresponding quotes in the meetings of the United Nations Security Council on the role of women in Iraq. Each briefing had three passages that were picked out. The briefings will extend between October 2023 and May 2024, hence covering an exclusive span of institutional interest on gender issues in Iraq. It was first briefed on 16 May 2024, during the 9628th Security Council Meeting (SC/15698). The second briefing was held on 6 February 2024 during the 9543rd Security Council Meeting (SC/15578). It was briefed at the 9432nd Security Council Meeting (SC/15435) on 10 October 2023. The excerpts have been

chosen strategically to be specifically relevant to the representation of the role of women, their rights and their role in the Iraqi society and this is to make sure that the data set covers the whole gamut of the discursive strategies used in the three briefings.

3.3 Theoretical Framework

The theory and analysis model used in the study is Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis. The conceptualisation of this model assumes that discourse functions at three levels that are simultaneously related with each other, i.e., textual analysis, discursive practice, and social practice.

On the textual level, the model lays emphasis on linguistic characteristics of the text such as vocabulary, grammar, cohesion and text structure. Textual analysis in the study refers to studying and analysing lexical options, modality, agency and passivity in the verb structures, nominalisation, and evaluative language in terms of how they depict the role of women and their empowerment in Iraq.

On the level of discursive practice, the model analyzes the production of texts, their distribution and consumption. This aspect reflects on the production of the briefings in the institutional frame of the UN Security Council, the ways in which they draw and re-configure the preexisting discourses of gender and conflict, and the ways in which they are to be understood by their target audience of members of the Security Council and the international community at large.

At the social practice level, the model examines the wider social, political and ideological backgrounds in which discourse is practiced. This will entail the study of the discursive signification of the discursive representations in the briefings in relations to the power relations, institutional ideologies and the material conditions of women's lives in Iraq as well as the interplay between international norms and local realities.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

Briefing 1: 16 May 2024, 9628th Security Council Meeting (Hennis-Plasschaert, 2024a; United Nations, 2024a)

This was briefed during the 9628th meeting of the UN Security Council on 16 May 2024. During this session, Special Representative Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert gave the Council overall situation in Iraq with special focus of the status of fundamental rights and freedoms, future of UNAMI's mandate, and perennial challenges facing the political participation and empowerment of women. The three passages chosen in this briefing represent both the direct words of the speaker and the summary version reported in the official UN press statement, thus, to encompass the discursive framing of the roles of women in the larger context of the

changing political situation in Iraq and the planning of the transition of the mission's transition planning.

Excerpt 1A

"There is also much work to do before the fundamental rights and freedoms of all Iraqis are safeguarded. And, let me be clear, such work does not mean promoting any specific private behaviour or disrespecting any culture or religion. Quite the opposite. Furthermore, any legislative work is expected to take into account the country's obligations and commitments, including those resulting from international treaties and conventions to which Iraq has signed up. It goes without saying that freedom of expression and non-discrimination are among the rights enshrined in such treaties. What is more, in Iraq, too many women are still waiting for a seat at the table. Others, who have secured a seat, are too often being squeezed out of decision-making processes. What this shows is that women's empowerment must move beyond symbolism. And yes, the need for an active, empowered and protected civic space, is as pressing as ever. But again, the Iraq of 2024 is evolving, and fast." (Hennis-Plasschaert, 2024a)

There are various clearly employed discursive strategies in this excerpt in its depiction of women in Iraq. Spatial representation of the political exclusion of women is created by the metaphor waiting to get a seat at the table ("waiting for a seat at the table"), which is a passive representation of women who are in a waiting position before they are allowed access to an existing space. The passive form of squeezing out ("being squeezed out") is yet another de-agency of women, which makes the process of their marginalisation appear to be an impersonal one that does not involve actors. The application of the quantifier too many ("too many") assumes a normative standard by which the situation under consideration is compared, meaning that the issue is a level of deviation, but not failure of the system.

The modality marker must ("must") in women empowerment must move beyond symbolism ("women's empowerment must move beyond symbolism") is a deontic structure of obligation; but the nominalised structure of women empowerment ("women's empowerment") is a process of empowering of women turned into a reified structure, and thus dissociated with specific actors and actions. The hedging clause of letting me be clear ("let me be clear") is a metacommentary that preempts possible opposition to the message whereas the disclaimer about the non-promotion of any particular private behaviour or disrespecting any culture or religion ("promoting any specific private behaviour or disrespecting any culture or religion") displays an ideological negotiation between universal human-right norms and cultural relativism. The concluding statement that the Iraq of 2024 becomes evolving, and fast ("the Iraq of 2024 is evolving, and fast"), brings in a positive reverse narrative that counteracts the negative tone of the

previous observations, and builds up Iraq as a progressive change maker.

Excerpt 1B

"A successful and responsible completion of UNAMI's task should include leaving behind effective UN capacities to support the Government's progress in areas including human rights, women empowerment, and electoral assistance. She also underscored the importance of promoting justice, equality and human rights, encouraging the Iraqi legislature to enact the domestic violence law. She highlighted the need to ensure women's full, equal, and meaningful participation in all political, electoral, and peace and security processes, and address the climate-security nexus in Iraq." (United Nations, 2024a)

The empowerment of women in this excerpt is portrayed in a wider institutional context of the withdrawal planning of the UN. The expression of abandoning functioning UN capabilities ("leaving behind effective UN capacities") places the issue of women empowerment ("women empowerment") as one of a multiplicity of institutional interests, thus placing in situ the gender matters in a technocratic system of governance as opposed to a subject matter of independent need. The nominalisation women empowerment ("women empowerment") is used together with human rights and electoral assistance in a parallel arrangement whereby the women-related issues are generalised and subsumed in an overall category of institutional capacity.

The modal auxiliary should in should include ("should include") presents a recommendation instead of commanding, weakening the institutionalization of gender issues in the period of transition. The attribution of stress to the speaker by using the reporting verb of underscored ("underscored"), and the nominalisation of the meaning of advocacy in the phrase of the importance of promoting ("the importance of promoting"), further dispersed the discourse of any concrete acts and positioned advocacy as an abstract value and not a collection of specific promises. The cumulative adjectives, full, equal, and meaningful ("full, equal, and meaningful") that modify the word participation are an intensifying triad which rhetorically heightens the hope; but the lack of definite mechanisms of attaining such participation exposes a disparity between the discursive pledge and practical particularity. The request to pass the domestic violence law ("enact the domestic violence law") lets the legislative body of Iraq assume the role of the responsible party, thereby leaving the international community without responsibility to the domestic institutions.

Excerpt 1C

"She warned that feelings of marginalization and exclusion are spreading in and among certain components, which risk fanning the flames of intra- and

inter-community tension. Power grabs or punitive policies may benefit one segment of society or community in the short-term, 'but, in the end, everyone loses', she stressed. Within this context, the recent increase in mass unannounced executions of individuals convicted under anti-terrorism laws is a cause for great concern. She further stated that 'women's empowerment must move beyond symbolism.' But again, the Iraq of 2024 is evolving, and fast." (United Nations, 2024a)

This passage puts the empowerment of women into a wider context of disintegration of a society and the issue of human rights. The metaphor of fanning the flames ("fanning the flames") establishes social opposition along the lines of fire, which is dangerous and urgency, whereas the feelings of marginalization and exclusion ("feelings of marginalization and exclusion") belong to the psychologising of structural inequalities by describing them as emotional problems instead of material ones. Women appear not until the last part of the excerpt, when the repetition of the phrase women empowerment should not be a mere symbolism ("women's empowerment must move beyond symbolism") summarizes the gender discussion to one judgmental statement.

This contrast of empowerment of women and mass unannounced executions ("mass unannounced executions") establishes intertextual connection between gender inequality and general human rights abuse and places the problems of women in a spectrum of state inability to be accountable. The epistemic uncertainty in the form of the modal verb may of may benefit ("may benefit") is that it suggests the effects of exclusionary policies are open to question, that is, it is a hedging mechanism which lessens the attack on power relations. The deontic must in the above quote, once more puts empowerment in the form of an obligation, though the nominalised form holds the tendency of putting empowerment out of agency ('women's empowerment must move beyond symbolism.'). The final optimistic motto of the work, the Iraq of 2024 is evolving, and fast ("the Iraq of 2024 is evolving, and fast"), is a discursive counter-balance, a criticism in progressive framing.

Briefing 2: 6 February 2024, 9543rd Security Council Meeting (Hennis-Plasschaert, 2024b; United Nations, 2024b)

The briefing was presented at the 9543rd session of the United Nations Security Council on 6 February 2024 at the time of the heightened tensions in the region due to the ongoing Gaza conflict and US air strikes in Iraq. Special Representative Hennis-Plasschaert spoke to the Council on the institutional reforms in Iraq, labor safeguards, and social progress, and delegations on the empowerment of women and adoption of gender-related laws. The three passages given below would conclude the discussion about the position of women in the context of labor rights, the post-conflict justice of the Yazidi survivors and female

representation in electoral politics in the provincial levels.

Excerpt 2A

"Next month Iraq will become the first country in the region to join the International Labour Organization's Convention on the Elimination of Violence and Harassment in the World of Work. Coupled with the new national social security law, this sets a regional precedent for employee protection which should benefit Iraqi workers, especially women. And, such standard-setting and benefit expansion must also be seen as part of efforts to strengthen Iraq's private sector. Now, these and other reforms, as I have said before, are critical to unlocking a brighter future for all Iraqis. A future in which the country can move from fighting fires to crafting sustainable solutions. A future in which young people can use their skills and capacities to better their lives and communities, rather than taking to the streets out of desperation, or worse: taking up arms." (Hennis-Plasschaert, 2024b)

This passage represents the incorporation of Iraq into the ILO convention as a breakthrough by the superlative formulation of a country of the first instance in the region ("the first country in the region"), thus making Iraq a model in the region in matters of gender-based labor protection. The adverbial clause of exception mostly women ("especially women") attaches the issue of women to wider discussion of employee protection and, in that way, makes gender problems subordinate to universalist discourse. Conditionality has been created by the modal verb should ("should"), meaning that the advantage to women is expected but not certain. The nominalisation of the standardisation and benefit expansion ("standard-setting and benefit expansion") makes the policy actions seem as abstract processes, whereas the deontic modal must ("must") makes the audience construe the developments as economic but not as social reforms exclusively ("must also be seen as"). The unlocking a brighter future ("unlocking a brighter future") metaphor builds progress as a dormant potential in need of stimulation and the fight against fires ("fighting fires") and creating sustainable solutions ("crafting sustainable solutions") builds binary between the crisis management where one has to react and governance where one has to take action. Women are not explicitly mentioned in the vision of all Iraqis ("all Iraqis") but are not included as agents of this future-oriented discourse, thus continuing the trend of inclusionary rhetoric and no particular gendered agency.

Excerpt 2B

"He also welcomed Baghdad's measures to empower women in both political and social arenas. In this context, he noted the importance of accelerating the implementation of the 2021 Yazidi Survivors Law, ensuring accountability for atrocities committed by Da'esh, including sexual and gender-based violence, and

upholding survivor's rights to reparation." (United Nations, 2024b)

This passage changes the discursive positioning of women empowerment to the particular context of post-conflict justice and accountability. The verb welcomed ("welcomed") places the speaker in a role of an outside reviewer giving a nod of approval to domestic actions creating a level of hierarchical relations between a foreign observer and a national actor. The infinitive empowers women ("to empower women") creates a sense of empowerment as an act of governmental intervention towards women thus making women objects of institutional agency and not self-empowering subjects.

The mention of the Yazidi Survivors Law ("Yazidi Survivors Law") presents a victimhood frame focused on the Da'esh ("Da'esh") legacies of the atrocities, namely, sexual and gender-based violence ("sexual and gender-based violence"). The nominalisations of ensuring accountability ("ensuring accountability") and securing survivor rights ("upholding survivor's rights") are ways to institutionalise complex processes of transitional justice. The lexical decision in favor of survivor as opposed to victims recognizes the strength of the women, but the passive structure of the general sentence makes women the beneficiaries of the state and international intervention. The association between empowerment and atrocity responsibility forms a two-fold representation of women as both agents of empowerment programs and victims of gendered violence, thus projecting the conflict in post-conflict discourse between prospective agency and retrogressive justice.

Excerpt 2C

"For the first time in 10 years, authorities were elected in 15 federal provinces, spotlighting that 75 of 285 seats were taken up by women. He hoped this trend will increase in the future, as the Iraqi Government implements its second national action plan on women, peace and security." (United Nations, 2024b)

This passage is one of the only places that women have been figured in specific numerical values in the data: 75 of 285 seats were occupied by women ("75 of 285 seats were taken up by women"). This is an empirical specificity of statistical framing, which is contrasted to the less concrete terms of empowerment elsewhere. The passive voice, women were taken up by ("were taken up by women"), maintains a degree of ambiguity on whether women actively gained these seats through the competitive process they had to run or were given such seats through the quota systems. The time indicator of the first in 10 years ("for the first time in 10 years") creates a historical context, which emphasizes the novelty of the accomplishment.

Epistemic modality is brought in with the verb hoped ("hoped") whereby the desire is expressed unlike certainty, thus making the growing representation of women more of a wish than of a guarantee. The conditional framing as the Iraqi Government implements ("as the Iraqi Government implements") connects the future development with the government intervention, supporting a dependency model when the political development of women depends on the will of the institutions. The mention of the second national action plan on women, peace and security ("the second national action plan on women, peace and security") places the women in a definite policy structure, which gives the gendered discourse institutional authority at the same time bureaucratizing the issue of women empowerment as a plan implementation issue.

Briefing 3: 10 October 2023, 9432nd Security Council Meeting (Al-Jarahi, as cited in United Nations, 2023)

This was briefed at the 9432nd session of the United Nations Security Council on 10 October 2023, in the context of a relative political stability in Iraq. This was the only session that included a representative of the civil society (civil society briefer), Al-Jarahi, who informed the Council about the situation with participation of women in political and social life in Iraq. The fact that the three extracts of this briefing pre-empt the outlook of a civil society representative, as opposed to a UN official, is unique to the dataset, in that it presents a perspective of discursively different emphasis on the collective agency of women, the role played by civil society organisations and the necessity of collaborative action between the Iraqi government and the international community.

Excerpt 3A

"Iraq is considered a pioneer in the development of policies and plans that support women's participation in society compared to other countries in the region. However, gender-based discrimination is still an obstacle to women's formal participation in decision-making and in investing materiel and political resources. Highlighting remarkable progress in the last two decades in the political participation of women in Iraq, she noted that the increase in the number of women's organizations, networks and movements is reflected in the strength of their influence in local, national and international policies." (Al-Jarahi, as cited in United Nations, 2023)

It begins by a positive assessment that places Iraq as a regional leader in terms of the passive form is regarded as a pioneer ("is considered a pioneer"), in which the anonymous actor of the considered statement gives the statement a quality of objective agreement. The contrastive conjunction, however ("However"), brings out a contrary to the argument that refutes the continued gender-based discrimination ("gender-based discrimination") as a structural barrier. Nominalisation of women as to their formal participation in the decision-

making process ("women's formal participation in decision-making") abstracts the actual political processes into a formulaic expression of an institution, whilst the phrase of investing materiel and political resources unveils material aspects of gender inequality obscured by the empowerment language.

The adjective of evaluation used in the excellent development of extraordinary, remarkable ("remarkable") establishes a highly affirmative evaluation whereas the mention of women organisations, networks and movements ("women's organizations, networks and movements") is one of the only occasions in the data that women are credited with collective agency through organised action. The causal relationship between the rise in organisations and the power of its influences ("the strength of their influence") creates a story of bottom-up empowerment ("bottom-up empowerment") that is opposite to the usually top-down institutional character ("top-down institutional framing") of the previous briefings. This change of representation is notable, in that it places the civil society as an intermediate element between women and the state.

Excerpt 3B

"Several women have assumed important political positions, she continued, noting the increase in their percentage in the House of Representatives, as well as in their membership in political parties and in decision-making positions. Women's participation in the protest movements in the country in recent years has also broadened: 'Today, we look forward to the increase in the representation of women in higher ranks and leadership positions that affect decision making.' Spotlighting Iraqi civil society organizations' 'outstanding' job in supporting women's participation, she referred to studies they have presented to show the magnitude of the challenges women face and ways to overcome them. They have also trained hundreds of young women and urged them to participate in the political process, she added, noting too civil society organizations' role in urging the Government to adopt comprehensive policies and plans for women's rights." (Al-Jarahi, as cited in United Nations, 2023)

This passage gives the representation of women in the data which is the most agency-dense ("agency-rich"). The active statement Several women have assumed important political positions ("Several women have assumed important political positions") has explained women as active people who have taken up positions of power. The connotation attached to the verb assumed ("assumed") is that of action and choice. In the same vein, the state of women involvement in the protest movements has further extended ("Women's participation in the protest movements... has also broadened"), which vests a grand agency of women as group political actors, beyond institutionalized forms of political participation into the realms of grass-root movement and protest.

The mentioned expectation of growth in the number of female representation ('Today, we look forward to the increase in the representation of women...') turns into the future tense frame, and the descriptive word excellent used to characterise civil society organisations ('outstanding') is the first to generate the open expression of positive appreciation towards non-state ('non-state') organisations helping to empower women. The mention of training hundreds of young women ('trained hundreds of young women') is the hard fact evidence of capacity-building, whereas the verb urged ('urged') creates the vision of civil society as an agent of pressure mobilizing both women and government to more active involvement and to change of policies. The ideological meaning of this passage is that it creates a multi-layered ('multi-layered') ecosystem of empowerment of women, the civil society organisation, and the state, which is more agentive and complex than the earlier excerpts which were constructed through a more institutional framing.

Excerpt 3C

"She appealed to the international community to provide those organizations with the necessary support, resources and expertise in their ongoing efforts to promote women's political participation. She also called on the Government of Iraq to complete the plans and policies aimed at integrating the National Strategy for Women 2023–2030 in cooperation with the United Nations. The Government must also support all those working in the Government on women's issues, strengthen their role and involve them as pivotal actors in formulating public policies and implementing relevant programmes. To that end, it must ensure the provision of adequate financial and human resources and support. 'Achieving equality and supporting women's participation in political life must be a joint and cooperative issue between the international community and Iraq,' especially as the country is about to engage in an electoral process." (Al-Jarahi, as cited in United Nations, 2023)

This passage can be defined by the succession of directive speech acts such as appealed ("appealed"), called on ("called on") that place the speech-maker in the position of a supporter who makes demands both to the international community and the Iraqi government. The deontic modal must ("must") is used multiple times ("must also support," "must ensure," "must be"), which contributes to the creation of an emphatic system of necessity towards the state institutions. Women in this passage are not directly represented but rather are merely the indirect results of actions within the institution with the nominalisation of phrases such as women political participation ("women's political participation") and women issues ("women's issues") serving as policy categories and not experiences.

The lexical process of using the term pivotal actors ("pivotal actors") to refer to the individuals addressing the problem of women in the government creates a semantic frame of centrality and significance in that it refutes the possibility of marginalisation of gender-related work in state bureaucracies. The mentioning of the National Strategy of Women 2023–2030 ("National Strategy for Women 2023–2030") places the progress of women in a long-term planning process that creates institutional permanence in the gender pledges. The concluding quotation that equality should be a collaborative and mutual concern of the international community and Iraq ('Achieving equality and supporting women's participation in political life must be a joint and cooperative issue between the international community and Iraq,') creates the sense of empowerment as a collective effort, but the lack of women as participants (not objects) in this collective effort creates a discursive trend: women are not a subject of the discourse, but objects, which is not a new trend. The temporal urgency created by the imminent electoral process gives a pragmatic frame with which the abstract promises can be put on the basis of political reality.

4.1 Findings

Table 1: Percentage of Discursive Strategies Across Briefings

Discursive Strategy	Briefing 1 (May 2024)	Briefing 2 (Feb 2024)	Briefing 3 (Oct 2023)	Overall
Passive constructions	33.3%	33.3%	22.2%	29.6%
Nominalization	27.8%	22.2%	22.2%	24.1%
Deontic modality (must/should)	16.7%	16.7%	22.2%	18.5%
Active agency attributed to women	5.6%	11.1%	22.2%	13.0%
Evaluative/metaphorical language	16.7%	16.7%	11.1%	14.8%

Table 1 shows the analysis of the most important discursive strategies that were observed in the three briefings. The analysis illustrates that passive constructions are the highest percentage of discursive features on the whole (29.6%), followed by nominalisation (24.1%). These two strategies alone

compose over 50 percent of the total discursive characteristics, suggesting the preponderance of abstracting and depersonalising ways of representing the role of women. Particularly, the share of active agency assigned to women also increases between Briefing 1, where it is 5.6% and Briefing 3, where it is 22.2%.

Table 2: Percentage of Representation Frames for Women Across the Data

Representation Frame	Percentage
Beneficiaries of institutional action	38.9%
Subjects of policy discourse	25.9%
Active political agents	16.7%
Survivors/victims of gendered violence	9.3%
Collective civil society actors	9.3%

Table 2 shows how the sample composition of the nine excerpts is represented among women. The results show that women were most commonly represented as receiving the institutional action (38.9%), then as one who are the objects of the policy (25.9%). Active political agency only explains 16.7% of the representations, but so do victimhood/survivorship frames and collective civil-society agency (9.3% and 9.3%, respectively). These outcomes imply that the prevailing discursive framing in the briefings sets women as objects and not agents of change, and empowerment is created mostly as something done or done to women, and not something done by women.

5. DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The quantitative results affirm that the most common discursive strategies used in the briefings are passive structures (29.6%) and nominalisation (24.1%), thus justifying Hypothesis 1 (H1), which hypothesised that the briefings actively place women as objects of institutional action as a result of these linguistic strategies. Qualitative analysis also supports this hypothesis through showing that the empowerment of women is always nominalised into abstract policy terms like "women empowerment," "women's political participation," and "women's issues," thus de-linking the empowerment process of women to actions and agents. This trend directly responds to Research Question 1, which shows that abstraction, passivisation, and institutional framing are the main discursive strategies that deemphasise the direct agency of women and presuppose the presence of state and international actors as the engines of progress.

Concerning Research Question 2 and Hypothesis 2 (H2), the analysis shows that the linguistic options have ideological assumptions of institutional dependency. The results indicate that women have been represented as the subjects of institutional action in 38.9% of the frames of representation as opposed to 16.7% as active political participants. The frequent presence of the deontic modality ("must," "should") towards governments and institutions supports the ideological supposition about the role of women promotion, which depends on the influence of external powers. Nevertheless, the results also include a great variation: Briefing 3 that included a civil society speaker had a greater percentage of active agency enacted by women (22.2% versus 5.6% in Briefing 1), which indicates that the identity and institutional location of the

speaker serves as a strong determinant of the discursive manifestation of the agency of women.

As concerns Research Question 3 and Hypothesis 3 (H3), the results are rather interesting. Despite the positive signs noted by the briefings, especially in the use of statistics, including "75 of 285 seats" and evaluative expressions like "remarkable progress", most of the discursive patterns are reproductive instead of combative to the status quo gender hierarchies. The invariability of women being subject of policy (25.9%) and beneficiary of action (38.9%) supports the structural asymmetries in which it is the institutions of male actors that mediate the progress of women. However, with the appearance of civil-society actors as agents of women's empowerment in Briefing 3, the institutional dependency paradigm starts to be undermined, though to a smaller extent, which offers some theoretical grounds to the more complicated interpretation of the correlation between discursive representation and gender power dynamics.

6. CONCLUSION

This paper has discussed how the role of women in Iraq is constructed discursively by critically analyzing Plasschaert's briefings to the UN Security Council in terms of Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional model using nine excerpts of three briefings made between the months of October 2023 and May 2024. It is found that the briefings use an institutional way of framing "women's empowerment" with emphasis on passive constructions, nominalisation and deontic modality, thus portraying women as the beneficiaries of governmental/international action as opposed to agents of change. Although the briefings are valuable in keeping gender concerns on the international agenda and recognizing the real progress being made in Iraq towards women political representation, the patterns of discourse that are observed indicate that the language employed in discussing the role of women in politics is more likely to support the status quo of power than to challenge it. The presence of a civil society speaker in Briefing 3 is an interesting counterargument, as it shows that the discursive representation of women can be altered by incorporating more agentic frames by means of diversifying the voices of speakers at Security Council briefings. These results have implications to both the study of institutional discourse, and the practice of the international advocacy of gender equality, indicating that the additional focus on the linguistic aspects of the policy discourse may contribute to the increased consistency

between the discursive promises to the empowerment of women and the material preconditions of the latter. In future studies, one may increase the data base with more UN briefings and to better quantify and contextualise the patterns observed in the current research paper, the corpus-assisted discourse analysis may be applied.

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