

Research Article

**The Media Representation of Coronavirus As A Tool of Discredit And Praise:  
The Cases of Sözcü And Sabah <sup>1</sup>**

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**ABSTRACT**

This study addresses the media representations of Coronavirus pandemic in two of the leading Turkish newspapers: Sözcü and Sabah. Sözcü has the highest circulation in Turkish print media with an ideology critical of the government and Sabah is one of the best-selling dailies having a pure pro-government stance. This study makes a critical discourse analysis of how each newspaper covered the Coronavirus crisis. All of the columns of Sabah and Sözcü between March and September 2020 have been scanned and the articles having the selected key words of “Pandemic”, “Coronavirus” “Virus” and “Corona in the title have been put under scrutiny. For each month, two articles have been analyzed in each newspaper and a total number of twenty-eight articles have been analyzed through employing Critical Discourse Analysis methodology of Van Dijk. Critical Discourse Analysis is an interdisciplinary approach that studies the ways power abuse, dominance, and inequality are reproduced, and resisted by text and talk. Through using socio-cognitive approach of Van Dijk, this study aims to trace the following: how the discourses regarding the pandemic are made in Sabah and Sözcü and how these discourses are related with the political orientations of the newspapers. It can be argued that, newspapers representing different ideologies based on the media ownership structures present a certain framework to the readers. They represent events through their own ideological perspectives.

**Key Words:** Critical Discourse Analysis, Socio-cognitive Approach, Turkish Print Media, Media Representation of Coronavirus, News Discourse..

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## İtibarsızlaştırma ve Övgü Aracı Olarak Koronavirüsün Medya Temsili: Sözcü ve Sabah Örnekleri <sup>1</sup>

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### ÖZ

Bu çalışma, Türkiye'nin önemli iki gazetesi Sözcü ve Sabah'ta Coronavirus salgınının temsillerini incelemektedir. Sözcü, hükümeti eleştiren ideolojiye sahip en yüksek tirajlı gazetedir. Sabah ise hükümet yanlısı duruşuyla bilinen en çok satan gazetelerdendir. Çalışma, her iki gazetenin Koronavirüs krizi söylemlerini eleştirel söylem analizi ile ele almaktadır. Sabah ve Sözcü'nün Mart-Eylül 2020 arasındaki köşe yazıları taranarak, başlığında “Pandemic”, “Coronavirus” “Virus” ve “Corona” bulunan yazılar incelenmiştir. Her ay için her gazeteden ikişer makale seçilerek Van Dijk'in metodolojisi ile toplam yirmi sekiz makale incelenmiştir. Eleştirel Söylem Analizi, gücün kötüye kullanılması, tahakküm ve eşitsizliğin söylemde yeniden üretilme biçimlerini inceleyen bir yaklaşımdır. Bu çalışma Van Dijk'in sosyo-bilişsel yaklaşımını kullanarak, salgına dair söylemlerin Sabah ve Sözcü'de nasıl temsil edildiğini ve bu söylemlerin gazetelerin siyasi duruşları ile nasıl ilgili olduklarını ele almayı amaçlamaktadır. Sermaye yapılarına göre farklı ideolojilere sahip gazetelerin okuyucularına belirli bir görüş sunduğu söylenebilir. Medya aktörleri, olayları kendi ideolojik bakış açılarıyla sunarlar.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Eleştirel Söylem Analizi, Sosyo-Bilişsel Yaklaşım, Türk Yazılı Basını, Medyada Koronavirüs Temsili, Haber Söylemi

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## INTRODUCTION

The Coronavirus pandemic emerged in China in late 2019. The Coronavirus pandemic spread almost all over the world in a short period of time. The pandemic has created an environment that is not limited to only health crisis, it is known that the pandemic has also created a serious economic and political crisis. The first case of the pandemic in Turkey was reported on March 11, 2020. The pandemic has been represented in Turkish print media in different ways. For example, despite having the recorded data of death tolls related with the pandemic the way these news were made has been dependent on the ideology of the media actors.

This study is an attempt to analyze the media representations of Coronavirus pandemic in Sözcü and Sabah newspapers. Sözcü is one of the best-selling dailies in Turkish print media with an ideology critical of the government and Sabah has the highest circulation<sup>1</sup> having a pure pro-government stance. The main objective of the study is to focus on the discourses of these two newspapers on how government has managed the Coronavirus crisis. All of the columns of Sabah and Sözcü between March and September 2020 have been scanned and the articles having the keywords of “Pandemic”, “Coronavirus” “Virus” and “Corona” in the title have been selected. For each month, two articles have been analyzed in each newspaper and a total number of twenty-eight articles have been analyzed through employing Critical Discourse Analysis methodology of Van Dijk. The limitation of this study is about the content of some of the analyzed articles. Not all the articles having the keywords of “Pandemic”, “Coronavirus” “Virus” and “Corona” in the title address how the government managed the pandemic however still evaluations about the government could be traced which serve the aim of this study to some degree.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is an interdisciplinary approach that studies the ways power abuse, dominance and inequality are reproduced and resisted by text and talk. CDA is not a single theory but rather a “*research program with many facets and numerous different theoretical and methodological approaches*” (Wodak, 1999, p. 186). Through using socio-cognitive approach of Van Dijk, this study aims to trace the following: how the government discourses regarding the pandemic are reproduced in Sabah; and what kind of discursive challenges have been made by Sözcü against the government discourses. It is argued that, newspapers having different ideologies based on the media ownership structures present a certain framework to the readers. They reproduce or challenge the government discourses through their own ideological perspectives.

The media representations may involve stereotyping, discrimination or exclusion to reproduce the dominant ideology. Media may enact symbolic violence with the use of derogatory vocabulary or marked expressions. Bourdieu defines symbolic violence as a situation when one dominates another by bringing their own distinctive power to bear on

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<sup>1</sup> For the circulation of newspapers in Turkey you can visit, <https://www.medyaradar.com/tirajlar> (1.11.2021)

the relations of power which underlie them (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 167). The media can be used as an instrument for (re)producing the hegemonic discourse. Torfing (1999, p. 220) notes that a hegemonic discourse establishes a truth regime that defines what can be considered true and false.

Bourdieu argues that, the power of the words lies in the belief that they are uttered by authorized spokespersons (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 170). The media serve a complex role; their role is believed to be so central in framing issues for the public. Media according to Gurevitch and Levy (1985, p. 19) serve as “*a site on which various social groups, institutions, and ideologies struggle over the definition and construction of social reality.*” In this sense, media discourse plays a key role in shaping power configurations in a society. The newspapers are not neutral while covering diverse events. The newspapers, according to critical discourse analysis perspective depict different events based on political perspectives. It can be said that, the news reporting is socially created; it reveals the operation of an artificial set of criteria for selection depending on the ideology of the news reporter (Fowler, 1991).

Based on the above, this study will first address the Turkish print media scene along with the profiles of Sözcü and Sabah newspapers. Secondly, the Critical Discourse Analysis and the approach of Van Dijk as the methodology of the study will be addressed. Next, the content of the data under analysis (newspaper articles) will be covered and finally in the analysis section Van Dijk’s method will be used to make critical discourse analysis of the two newspapers under scrutiny.

## **1. THE PRINT MEDIA IN TURKEY AND THE PROFILES OF SABAH AND SÖZCÜ**

The history of establishment of the print media in Turkey goes back to the Ottoman times. In both the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic, journalists have played a crucial role in the introduction of Western values to society. According to Ragıp Duran (2003), Turkish media takes the power from the military elites and the big capital owners. In this sense, one of the most important characteristics of the Turkish media has been its reliance on power. It has generally been against the weak. This is also the same for the international arena; it has advocated the most powerful state. Turkish media do not represent the Turkish society, the Turkish media represents the Turkish sovereign class. It is the spokesman of the minority (Duran, 2003, p. 71).

In the post-1980 era, with the introduction of free-market economy, the private-run media organs have begun to challenge the official state discourse. As a result of the liberalization measures which were introduced in the 1980s, Turkey’s media scene if not qualitatively, in quantitative terms has expanded (Sezgin and Wall, 2005, p. 789). Within the context of these changes, the press has become an important actor.

The Doğan Media Group used to be one of the major media actors in Turkey. Before being sold to Demirören Group, Doğan Group used to own important newspapers like the *Hürriyet*, *Milliyet*, and boulevard daily *Posta* along with numerous other publications, several publishing houses, and TV channels (CNN Türk, Kanal D, Star TV), and radio stations. It should also be noted that, in Turkish media scene, the pro-government businessmen experienced a certain degree of opportunity under the Justice and Development Party rule. This also led to the emergence of major pro-government media organs in both print and broadcast media. In this sense, The Turkuvaz Media Group<sup>2</sup> is an important actor. Turkuvaz Media Group operates under Zirve Holding<sup>3</sup>. It can be described as a pro-government media actor. It was discovered that Turkuvaz Media Group has owned 18.37% of the public resources distributed through formal advertising (DW Türkiye, 28.05. 2021). So far, the institutional and legal arrangements in Turkey have not paved the way for the emergence of free environment for media actors. Thus it can also be said that Turkish print media suffers from this problem. Moreover, despite the improvements in printing technology, overall readership of newspapers had stagnated until the mid 1980s. Favorable demographic factors such as high population growth did not change this situation. Nevertheless, during the second half of the 1980s, a noticeable increase was realized (Kaya and Çakmur, 2011, p. 525). As one of the results of neo-liberal economic system adopted after the 1980 military coup, several new private media actors have been founded since late 1980s and this increased and diversified the profiles of audience and readership to some degree. In such an environment Sabah and Sözcü newspapers appeal to totally different readership profiles in terms of political positions.

### 1.1. The Sabah Newspaper

Sabah was founded by Dinç Bilgin in 1985 (Somerville et. al., 2017). Sabah newspaper as of the end of September of 2021 has the highest circulation with a number of 190.000 copies sold daily<sup>4</sup> and it is seen as an important mouthpiece of the government. Along with the major TV channel ATV, Sabah belongs to Turkuvaz Media Group. Serhat Albayrak is the vice president of Turkuvaz Media Group. He is the brother of Energy Minister Berat Albayrak, son-in-law of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. He was a board member of Çalık Holding. In 2007 it was acquired by the pro-government conglomerate Çalık Holding and then sold to the Kaylon Group, another pro-government group in 2013 (*Hürriyet Daily News*, 20.12.2013). According to Aslı Aydıntaşbaş (2009) who was Sabah's Ankara bureau chief, the newspaper has taken on “an unwavering pro-government line.”

2 The broadcast and print media actors of Turkuvaz Group can be found on its website, <https://www.tmgrup.com.tr/> (2.11.2021)

3 Zirve Holding has branches in several countries such as Russia, Qatar, Iraq and Saudi Arabia, <https://turkey.mom-rsf.org/tr/medya-sahipleri/sirketler/> (3.11.2021)

4 The circulation of September 20-26, 2021 <https://www.medyaradar.com/tirajlar>

## 1.2. The Sözcü Newspaper

Sözcü was founded by Burak Akbay in 2007. The daily newspaper Sözcü is one of the best selling newspapers in Turkey. It has around 176.176 copies sold daily<sup>5</sup> as of the end of September in 2021. It's known for its Kemalist critique of Justice and Development Party rule. Its origins go back to Gözcü (literally, Observer, published by Doğan Media Group) which began publication in 1996 and ceased publication in 2007. Gözcü was taken over by its employees and its name was changed to Sözcü (Gazeteler.org). Sözcü has an anti-government (Justice and Development Party) stance. According to journalist Pelin Turgut (2013) the rise of newspapers like Sözcü can be seen as a result of Erdogan's crackdown on mainstream media which faces government pressure.

## 2. METHODOLOGY: CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS AND THE SOCIO-COGNITIVE APPROACH OF VAN DIJK

Media power is generally persuasive, in the sense that the media holds the potential to control the minds of the audience (Van Dijk, 1996, p. 10). Bearing in mind the critical role of media power, this study employs critical discourse analysis (CDA) as the main research tool in analyzing media discourses vis-à-vis the representation of the Coronavirus pandemic. The CDA was developed by a network of scholars in the early 1990s. Wodak (2001) defines CDA as being concerned with analyzing structural relationships of dominance, power, and control as manifested in language.

The methodological framework of this study is based on Michel Foucault's understanding of discourse. According to Foucault, discourse constitutes the social, in other words, there is a constitutive nature of discourses. According to Foucault, discourse refers to different ways of structuring areas of social practice and knowledge. Foucault argues that discursive formations direct a writer's choice of topic, the structure in which the topic may be constituted and the conceptual framework within which the handling of the topic is set (Crawshaw and Tusting, 2000, p. 25).

The notion of "critique" in CDA stems from the Frankfurt School. The Critical Theory developed by Frankfurt School thinkers, means that social theory should be oriented towards critiquing and changing society as a whole in contrast to traditional theory oriented towards understanding it. The Frankfurt School refers to a group of German-American theorists who developed analysis of the changes in Western capitalist societies that took place since Marx. Under the influence of critical theory, CDA "*sought to combine linguistic and socially grounded approaches to the analysis of discourse*" (Crawshaw and Tusting, 2000, p. 27).

The CDA has its origins in textual and linguistic analysis. CDA adopts an interdisci-

plinary approach as CDA is problem-oriented and problems in society are too complex to be studied from one perspective. Van Dijk's Socio-Cognitive Approach is one of the approaches used in Critical Discourse Analysis along with Fairclough's approach and Ruth Wodak's approach. According to Van Dijk, ideologies may determine all structures of text or talk and they may be expressed explicitly or implicitly in the structure of discourse. The Socio-Cognitive Approach developed by Van Dijk argues that discourse plays a major role in the expression and reproduction of ideologies. Van Dijk (1995, p. 17) perceives discourse analysis as ideology analysis, because according to him, ideologies are typically expressed and reproduced in discourse.

Van Dijk started to apply his discourse analysis theory to media texts focusing on the representation of ethnic groups in Europe in the 1980s. In his work titled "News Analysis" Van Dijk integrates his theory of discourse to the discourse of news and applies his theory to authentic cases of news at both the national and international level. What distinguishes Van Dijk's (1988) framework for the analyses of news is his call for a thorough analysis not only of the textual level of media discourse but also for analysis at the production or comprehension level. This model is based on the interconnection among cognition, discourse and society.

According to Van Dijk, the important element is what is not said in news texts. Hidden ideological structures in news must also be uncovered. In this sense, CDA is quite functional as it examines news texts concerned with the examination of ideologically biased discourses and the way they polarize "our" (in-group) and "their" (out-group) representation. Van Dijk formulates principles which enable ideological analysis to express the ideological stances. These principles consist of emphasizing the positive things about "Us" and the negative things about "Them".

Van Dijk (2000) distinguishes critical discourse analysis into two different structures. These are the macro and micro-structures. The headlines are part of the macro-structure and the interpretations and the choices of words belong to the micro-structure. Headlines as the macro-structure draw a framework for the news, summarize the subject and represent the main theme. Central to Van Dijk's analysis of news reports is the analysis of macrostructure since it pertains to the thematic/topic structure of the news and their overall schemata. Themes are realized in the headlines and lead paragraphs. According to Van Dijk (1988) the headlines "*define the overall coherence or semantic unity of discourse, and also what information readers memorize best from a news report.*"

In terms of micro-structure, it is known that, the choice of words is one of the micro-structure elements. It is one of the important items where ideology shows itself. At the microstructure level, analysis is focused on the semantic relations between propositions, lexical and other rhetorical elements that provide coherence in the text, and other

elements such as quotations, direct or indirect reporting that give factuality to the news.

According to Van Dijk (2015), in the past two decades CDA approaches to the media have multiplied. These studies have not only investigated the social and communicative contexts of news as is the case in critical media studies, but have also related these to a systematic analysis of the structures of media discourse, such as lexicon, syntax, topics, interaction, news schemas, and multimodal analysis of images, among many other structures.

Van Dijk (2004) proposes categories of ideological analysis conducive to the representation of “us” versus “them” and some of them are as follows:

- Actor description: Actors are described based on our ideologies, we describe the in-group in a positive way.
- Authority: mentioning authorities supports one’s argument.
- Categorization: classifying people to different groups and attributing them positive or negative characteristics.
- Lexicalization: the expression of lexical items creating an overall ideological strategy for negative other-presentation. Lexicalization or word choice according to Van Dijk (1995) is the major dimension of ideologically controlled discourses.
- Polarization: categorizing people in in-group and out-group and assigning good attributes to in-group and bad attributes to out-group.
- Vagueness: using vague expressions which do not have definite referents.
- Victimization: emphasizing the bad nature of out-group.

Finally, it can also be said that, the socio-cognitive approach put forth by Van Dijk sees discourse as a form of social practice. However, it does not focus on discursive practices. Van Dijk concentrates on social cognition as the mediating part between text and society. He argues that CDA needs to account for the various forms of social cognitions that are shared by the social collectivities (Van Dijk, 2001).

### **2.1. Data under Analysis**

This study is an attempt to shed light on how the Coronavirus pandemic was covered by the two leading newspapers in Turkey with totally different ideological orientations: Sözcü and Sabah. To this aim, all of the columns of Sabah and Sözcü between March and September 2020 have been scanned and the articles having the keywords of “Pandemic”, “Coronavirus” “Virus” and “Corona” in the title have been selected and only the content addressing the pandemic was translated into English. Turkey witnessed the first case of Coronavirus on March 10, 2020 so March has been selected as the beginning of the time span. For each month, two articles have been analyzed in each newspaper and a total number of twenty-eight articles have been analyzed through employing Critical Discourse Analysis methodology of Van Dijk, known as Socio-Cognitive Approach.



### 2.1.1. The Columns Published in Sözcü

Article 1 under scrutiny was authored by Çiğdem Toker and published on March 16, 2020. The article is entitled “**The Coronavirus Opportunism Should Stop**” (Koronavirüs Fırsatçılığı Sona Ermeli)

Article 2 was written by Saygı Öztürk and published on March 29, 2020. The article is entitled “**Virus is not What Kills**” (Öldüren Virüs Değil)

Article 3 is entitled “**Cov 19 Doesn't Kill**” (Cov 19 Öldürmüyor) and belongs to Soner Yalçın, this article was published on April 3, 2020.

Article 4 is entitled “**He Turned the Virus into Opportunity!**” (Virüsü Fırsata Çevirdi!) the article belongs to Necati Doğru which was published on April 9, 2020.

Article 5 was written by Rahmi Turan on May 4, 2020. It is entitled “**The Lesson Given by Corona**” (Koronanın Verdiği Dersler).

Article 6 is entitled “**The Coronavirus League is Starting Again**” (Koronavirüs Ligi Yeniden Başlıyor) it belongs to Yılmaz Özdil and it was published on May 9, 2020.

Article 7 was written by Serpil Yılmaz on June 7, 2020. It is entitled “**We spent 18 billion TL less from Cards During the Pandemic**” (Salgında Kartlardan 18 Milyar TL az harcadık)

Article 8 is entitled “**Long Live We Found the Medication for Corona!**” (Yaşasın Korona İlacını Bulduk!) This article belongs to Deniz Zeyrek and it was published on June 13, 2020.

Article 9 which is entitled “**What Kind of Exam did Bodrum Give during the Pandemic Days?**” (Salgın Günlerinde Bodrum Nasıl bir Sınav Verdi?) was authored by Rahmi Turan and published on July 17, 2020.

Article 10 was written by Emin Çölaşan and published on July 29, 2020. It is entitled “**The Virus is again in our Doorstep**” (Virüs Yine Kapımızda)

Article 11 was written by Emin Çölaşan and published on August 22, 2020. It is entitled “**The Corona Slackness**” (Korona Rehaveti)

Article 12 is entitled “**The Pandemic and Health Expenditures**” (Pandemi ve Sağlık Harcamaları) and it was written by Çiğdem Toker on August 29, 2020.

Article 13 belongs to Uğur Dündar which was published on September 13, 2020. The article is entitled “**What Should be Done in Order not to Create a Lost Generation in Education due to the Pandemic?**” (Salgın Nedeniyle Eğitimde Kayıp Kuşak Yaratmamak için Ne Yapmalı?)

Article 14 which is entitled “**This Pandemic Doesn't Stop**” (Bu Salgın Bitmez) belongs to Emin Çölaşan. It was published on September 24, 2020.

### 2.1.2. The Columns Published in Sabah

Article 1 to be analyzed is entitled “**When Virus Goes, a Major Shame will Stay Behind!**” (Virüs Gidince Geriye Kocaman bir Utanç Kalacak!). The article was published on March 25, 2020 and authored by Melih Altınok.

Article 2 is entitled “**Politics During the Pandemic Days**” (Salgın Günlerinde Siyaset). The article was written by EnginArdıç and published on March 25, 2020.

Article 3 belongs to Mahmut Övür which was published on April 10, 2020. The article is entitled “**Coronavirus and the Condition of the Opposition**” (Korona ve Muhalefetin Hali PürMelali)

Article 4 belongs to Melih Altınok. It is entitled “**Is Dying Good for Corona too?**” (Ölmek de Koronayalı mi Geliyor?) This article was published on April 24, 2020.

Article 5 was written by Mahmut Övür and published on May 9, 2020. It is entitled “**What if Elections are Held During Corona Days?**” (Korona Günlerinde Seçim Olsa...)

Article 6 belongs to Mehmet Barlas. The article which is entitled “**There Should not be Excessive Measures in the Second Period of the Fight Against the Pandemic**” (Salgınla Mücadelenin İkinci Döneminde Ölçsüz Önlemler Olmamalıdır) was published on May 27, 2020.

Article 7 was written by Haşmet Babaoğlu and published on June 15, 2020. It is entitled “**The Benefit of the Virus!**” (Virüsün Faydası!)

Article 8 was authored by Yavuz Donat and published on June 29, 2020. The article is entitled “**The Corona Effect**” (Korona Etkisi)

Article 9 was authored by Yavuz Donat and published on July 6, 2020. The article is entitled “**In the Capital... The Corona Scenes**” (Başkente... Korona Manzaraları)

Article 10 is entitled “**The Corona has not Got Afraid of the Hot**” (Korona Sıcaktan Korkmamış). This article was written by Yavuz Donat and published on July 9, 2020

Article 11 is entitled “**Coronavirus Brings up Models Reminiscent of Hitler's Concentration Camps**”. (Koronavirüs Hitler'in Toplama Kamplarını Hatırlatan Modelleri Gündeme Getiriyor). This article was written by Mehmet Barlas and published on August 8, 2020.

Article 12 is entitled “**Is Fear Good for Corona?**” (Korku Korona'yalı mi Geliyor?). This article was written by Melih Altınok and published on August 29, 2020.

Article 13 is entitled “**Tattle or Get Corona!**” (Gammazla Ya da Korona Ol). The article was published on September 16, 2020 and written by Mevlüt Tezel.

Article 14 belongs to Yavuz Donat. The article which is entitled “**Ankara, the Capital City of Corona**” (Ankara... Korona'nın da Başkenti) was published on September 24, 2020.

### **3.THE ANALYSIS OF SÖZCÜ AND SABAH DISCOURSES ABOUT THE PANDEMIC**

As noted earlier, central to Van Dijk's analysis of media discourse is the analysis of macrostructure. The topics are elements of macro-structure. In terms of micro-structure, the choice of words is one of the micro-structure elements. At the microstructure level, analysis is focused on the semantic relations between propositions, syntactic, lexical and other rhetorical elements that provide coherence in the text, and other rhetorical elements such as quotations. Based on these theoretical assumptions, below is the analysis of the selected articles.

#### **Article #1**

The first Sözcü article for March has the headline of “The Coronavirus Opportunism Should Stop”. The author criticizes the policies of the government regarding the pandemic with the word “opportunism”. The author strengthens her position in the following lines by a rhetorical question: “Do we have a social policy for the disadvantaged citizens and the citizens over the age of 60?” The pronoun “we” refers to the government. Through creating the out-group (government) as an opportunist actor, the author emphasizes negative things about them.

#### **Article #2**

The second article of Sözcü for March is entitled “Virus is not What Kills”. Through this title, the author states that the causes of the deaths cannot be explained simply by the pandemic. The author implies that the government’s management of the pandemic is not good. In the article, the author makes reference to the mayor of Ankara as a good example of managing Coronavirus crisis. Through the positive representation of the main opposition party’s candidate who won the elections in Ankara, the author criticizes the government policies about the pandemic. The subtitle of “They are not in the Science Committee” is another element of macrostructure analysis. In this part too, there is a rhetorical move to criticize government’s pandemic policies. The author does this by saying “There is no 'immunologist' among the members of the Scientific Committee. There is a virus, there is no system to fight it!”

#### **Article #3**

The first article of Sabah for March is entitled “When Virus goes, a Major Shame will Stay Behind!” As the main part of the macrostructure, this title tells that the author criticizes some policies concerning the Covid-19 pandemic. However as the content reveals, the author does not criticize domestic policies, on the contrary he makes reference to foreign news agencies to note that they are not covering the issue in a correct way. Moreover, the author notes that a new type of virus has emerged. Hyperbole is the use of exaggeration as a rhetorical device or figure of speech. By writing that “the news of the

new virus exploded like a bomb.” The author uses hyperbole.

#### **Article #4**

The second article of Sabah for March is entitled “Politics During Pandemic Days” The author labels the people who do not follow the pandemic rules and who escaped from quarantine because of getting bored as “lumpens” and “mobs”. The content of the article is not in harmony with the title. In the article, the author addresses the people who do not follow the rules and who take advantage of the pandemic.

#### **Article #5**

The first April article of Sözcü is entitled “Cov-19 Doesn’t Kill”. Here the author aims to question the causes behind the deaths. The subtitle of “Which blood pressure?” is a rhetorical element supporting this aim. Van Dijk (2004) has proposed categories of ideological analysis conducive to the representation of “Us” versus “Them”. One of the categories is mentioning authorities to support one’s argument. In such a way, the author uses the quotations from Health Minister.

#### **Article #6**

The second April article of Sözcü is entitled “He Turned the Virus into Opportunity”. The pronoun “he” refers to the Istanbul governor. Vagueness is one of the categories of ideological analysis Van Dijk (2004) has proposed for the representation of “Us” versus “Them”. Through using “he” instead of noting the name of the governor, the author beware of a direct conflict with the political authority. In the first part of the article, the author addresses the food packages which the governor of Istanbul distributed on live TV broadcast. In the second part of the article, the author poses a couple of imperatives to support what he argues in the title. Through saying “wait for a while!” and “ask yourself!” he tries to attract the attention of the readers. He later supports his argument by the following rhetorical question: “If Ekrem İmamoğlu did not put forward the donation campaign to help the needy-the poor-jobless before, when the coronavirus pandemic came, would we see the ‘mask-cologne-catering package’ supported by the president’s letter from the governor?” According to the author, the politicians hide the truth while announcing their success with help packages. The author writes that “Virus opportunism is cheap business” and he ends the article with what there should not be: There should not be anyone who is hungry, exposed, or left without medication.

#### **Article #7**

The first April article of Sabah is entitled “Coronavirus and the Condition of the Opposition”. The main argument of the article is that the governments which cannot manage the pandemic crisis in a successful way cannot survive in the political scene. After putting forward this argument, the author praises the Justice and Development Party government. According to the author despite its loneliness, the government “with a strong

leadership and political foresight gained a serious experience...” In order to emphasize positive things about the in-group (the government), the author makes a comparison and poses rhetorical questions: “What is the opposition doing? What vision does it reveal and what kind of future hope does it give?” Mentioning authorities to support one’s argument is one of discursive tools to positively represent the in-group. The author makes reference to the findings of a research company in order to show that there is public support behind the government.

#### **Article #8**

The second article for April published in Sabah is entitled “Is Dying Good for Corona too?” The author criticizes the research suggesting that smokers are less affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. The author does not use a politicized language related with domestic affairs. This article addresses different researches conducted about the pandemic.

#### **Article #9**

The first May article of Sözcü is entitled “The lessons Given by Coronavirus”. The author in the article adopts neither an anti-government nor a pro-government discourse. Instead he summarizes what kind of changes the pandemic has brought to the lives of people. According to the author, the Coronavirus is a milestone and the state leaders along with ordinary people all should revise their approach to the world.

#### **Article #10**

The other article of Sözcü was written by Yılmaz Özdil. Yılmaz Özdil is known as a hardcore Kemalist and adopts a strict anti-government discourse. In the article entitled “The Coronavirus League is Starting Again” he adopts an ironic language. Through making an analogy between a football game and the management of the pandemic, the author in fact criticizes the government in an implicit way. As noted, vagueness is one of the categories of ideological analysis Van Dijk (2004) has proposed for the representation of “Us” versus “Them”. Through using “they” instead of noting the name of the ruling elites, the author beware of a direct confrontation with the political authority. With the aim to make an analogy between the government and the footballers, the author uses the pronoun “they” for the football players who do not follow rules: The author writes “They hire trolls with money and fill the empty stands like spectators.” “They give the opponents a red card and their own supporters a green card.” In such an implicit way, the author criticizes government policies.

#### **Article #11**

The first May article for Sabah is entitled “What if Elections are Held During Corona Days?” The author begins the article by demonizing the out-group. The out-group is CHP, the main opposition party. The author mentions CHP right after mentioning the terror units PKK and FETO. This is a rhetorical move to criminalize the opposition. The

author addresses the critical media actors namely Cumhuriyet Daily and the foreign media actor namely the British media one after another and depicts them as actors aiming to discredit Turkey. The author accuses CHP and pro-CHP media actors of supporting military coups. In such a way, the author depicts the ruling party as the sole legitimate actor in democratic politics and delegitimizes the opposition. According to Van Dijk, categorization is a way for classifying people to different groups and attributing them positive or negative characteristics in the representation of us versus them. In the article, the opposition is labeled as “coup-lovers”. This is a strategy to undermine their democratic identity in the eyes of the public. In such a way, the author in fact positively represents the in-group, the Justice and Development Party government.

#### **Article #12**

The other article of Sabah for May is entitled “There Should not be Excessive Measures in the Second Period of the Fight Against the Pandemic” Modality refers to judgments, comment and attitude in text and talk and is indicated through the use of modal verbs such as “should”. Through the use of modality expression in the title, the author reveals his attitude. In the first half of the article, the author mentions the flaws of Trump administration in dealing with the pandemic. In the second part of the article, the author praises Turkey’s fight with the pandemic. In comparing USA and Turkey, the author attempts to stress the success of Turkish government.

#### **Article #13**

The first June article of Sözcü is entitled “We spent 18 billion TL less from Cards During the Pandemic” According to Van Dijk (1988), the headlines define the overall coherence or semantic unity of discourse, and also what information readers memorize best from a news report. The headline of the article tells the content of the article. The article addresses the economic dimension of the pandemic. As noted, Van Dijk (2004) proposed categories of ideological analysis conducive to the representation of “Us” versus “Them”. One of the categories is mentioning authorities to support one’s argument. In the article, the references made to global strategy and management consulting company Oliver Wyman's Turkey office is a rhetorical strategy to provide reliability to the article content. The author adopts neither a supportive nor a criticizing language towards the government in the article.

#### **Article #14**

The other article is entitled “Long Live We Found the Medication for Corona!” As the title tells, the content of the article is about Covid-19 medication. The author starts the article with a positive self-representation of “us”. This pronoun denotes to Turkey. However this positive self-representation is made in an ironic way through non-existent examples like that of “covid-19 medication developed by Turkey”. The next paragraph

includes the headlines the author compiled from the newspapers of previous day. Van Dijk (2004) noted that actor description is one of the categories for the in-group and out-group representation. Actor descriptions stands for the ways we describe actors based on our ideologies, for example, the description of in-group as positive and out-group as negative. In the article, using the sentence “Our healthcare workers have already shown a legendary example of struggle and set an example to the world.” the author utilizes the discursive strategy of actor description. This description appraises health professionals.

#### **Article #15**

The first June article for Sabah is has the headline saying “The Benefits of the Virus”. The author makes a comparison between two periods: before and after the outbreak of the pandemic. According to the author, the crisis will save the rich, the gap between the poor and the rich will widen, and unfortunately the middle classes will melt a little further. After the pandemic, these issues have just been started to be discussed on TVs, and streets. The author argues that this is one of the benefits of the virus and names it as an “awakening”.

#### **Article #16**

The other article is entitled “The Corona Effect”. The author draws a picture of the social environment shaped by the pandemic. According to the author, the pandemic rules such as mask and social distancing have not been applied. The author does not make any reference to the domestic political affairs or the management of the pandemic in the article.

#### **Article #17**

The first article of Sözcü for July is entitled “What kind of Exam did Bodrum Give during the Pandemic Days?” As the title reads, the author addresses Bodrum city and how it experienced the pandemic. The author emphasizes that the people living in Bodrum are conscious and they apply the rules such as masks, social distancing and hygiene. The subtitles also stress that the people living in Bodrum are very conscious about the pandemic. There is no confrontation with the political authority in the article.

#### **Article #18**

The second article is entitled as “The Virus is in our Doorstep”. This article is authored by EminÇölaşan. Çölaşan is a hardcore Kemalist and uses a rather strict anti-government discourse. In the article, the author accuses government of hiding the real data regarding pandemic-related death tolls. He supports his view by making reference to other countries. He writes: “including Turkey many countries hide the death tolls regarding the pandemic.” As noted, in the analysis of the microstructure, lexicalization, or word choice plays a key role. Van Dijk (1995) points out that lexicalization is the major dimension of ideologically controlled discourse meaning. The repetition of certain words and sentences

is a strategy to make emphasis. The author by writing that the data about the pandemic is not revealed properly twice aims to emphasize what the title tells: The pandemic is about to rise anytime soon.

#### **Article #19**

The first July article of Sabah is entitled “In the Capital... The Corona Scenes”. The article addresses the personal trip experience of the author. The author describes the situation he observes. According to the author, there two main groups: supporting the government and normalization policies and the ones against the policies. Generally, the article has a personal tone and language. The author adopts neither an anti-government nor a pro-government discourse in his article. Instead he summarizes what he observed during his trip in a personal tone.

#### **Article #20**

The second article is entitled “The Corona has not got Afraid of the Hot”. In the first part of the article, the author addresses the city of Adana stressing that the despite the fact that the temperature is getting high there, the pandemic still hits the city. As part of the macro-structure, themes and topics are important and they are realized in the headlines and lead paragraphs. According to Van Dijk (1988), the headlines define the overall coherence or semantic unity of discourse. The subtitle of the article reads “Health infrastructure ... ‘Excellent’” Through using “excellent” in this sub-title, the author makes reference to the words of the local governor. Mentioning authorities is a way to support one’s argument. In the article the author uses the quotations for this aim.

#### **Article #21**

The first August article for Sözcü is entitled “The Coronavirus Slackness”. The author in the article heavily criticizes the snugness of the people. As understood from the title, the main argument of the article is that there is slackness about Coronavirus in the society. The author also criticizes the government saying “The power of the power-holders is only sufficient for the elderly over 65 years old, all restrictions and prohibitions are for them.” Through these words, it is clearly understood that the author finds the policies regarding the pandemic unfair. In addition, the author also criticizes the Scientific Committee which is responsible for reporting and informing about the pandemic. According to Van Dijk (1995), word choice is the major dimension of ideologically controlled discourse meaning. Here, the author labels the members of the Committee as people who love being mediatic.

#### **Article #22**

The second article for Sözcü is entitled “Pandemic and Health Expenditures”. As the title reads the article addresses the economic dimension of the pandemic. The author accuses the government officials of doing nothing for protecting health professionals:



“They don’t do anything to improve personal rights or to provide life security support to those who are left behind” The pronoun “they” is used for the government officials while “those who are left behind” refers to the health professionals who did not die of Covid-19. Van Dijk (2004) defines mentioning authorities as a rhetorical strategy to support one’s argument. In the article, the author makes reference to Turkish Medical Association reports saying that the number of active patients is 10 times higher than the number officially announced. As parts of the macrostructure of the article, the headlines draw a general framework for the news, summarize the subject covered by the news, and represent the main theme. One of the subtitles of the article is “Where Is Ushaş Running?” Here the author criticizes the political ties of the leading cadre of Ushaş implying that there is some sort of corruption. Ushaş is acronym for International Health Services Corporation and it is a company whose foundation is led by the Ministry of Health.

#### **Article #23**

The first August article of Sabah is entitled “Coronavirus Brings up Models Reminiscent of Hitler's Concentration Camps”. In the beginning of the article the author talks about the new world order shaped by the Coronavirus pandemic. Hyperbole is defined as the use of exaggeration as a rhetorical device or figure of speech. In the article, the author uses the term “Hitler’s concentration camps” to describe the five-step precaution against the pandemic offered by Professor Mehmet Ceyhan and this can be seen as an example of hyperbole. The article has 6 subtitles. Each section addresses a topic related with the pandemic. The first section tells about professor Ceyhan’s meeting with the Ministry of Health. The second, third and fourth sections address recommendations about the pandemic restrictions. The fifth section covers the unfairness the elderly citizens over 65 have to face. The last section consists of criticism about Professor Ceyhan’s package. The author asks rhetorical questions to make his criticism: “Do you think whether your breathing should also be controlled, or whether maintaining family unity will escalate the pandemic?”

#### **Article #24**

The other article is entitled “Is Fear good for Corona?” The article consists of three parts. In the first part of the article, the author addresses the latest developments about the pandemic by making references to the situation in different countries. In the second part of the article, the author draws a more pessimistic picture stressing that there can be other diseases as dangerous as Coronavirus. In the third part of the article, the author presents the reasons of why he draws such a picture in the previous part of the article. He finally notes that his main concern is about the fight against Coronavirus and notes that he does not want this struggle to be wasted.

### **Article #25**

The first September article for Sözcü is entitled “What Should be Done in order not to Create a Lost Generation in Education due to the Pandemic?” As the title reads, the article mainly covers the impact of the pandemic on education. According to the author, distance learning has not been fully efficient. The children especially in the East and Southeast part of Turkey cannot have access to distant learning tools. The author criticizes the ministry’s approach to the problem. He argues that since there is no equality in terms of opportunities between regions in the country, it is not possible for such an approach to be successful. Modality refers to judgments, and attitude in text and talk and is indicated through the use of modal verbs such as “should”. The author ends the article with the use of a modality expression: It should not be forgotten that a generation that has not received a good education means wasted!

### **Article #26**

The other article is entitled “This Pandemic Doesn’t Stop”. In the article, the author criticizes government policies in the fight against the pandemic. He lists the causes of the risk and argues that without proper policies, it is impossible to get control of the pandemic. The author uses a personal tone in the article to criticize the government. He says: “I wonder what will those who open the borders of our country to a million Russian and Ukrainian tourists .... and who removed the restrictions do next. This pandemic does not stop that way.”

### **Article #27**

The first September article for Sabah is entitled “Tattle or Get Corona!” The article begins with making reference to United Kingdom. The title also carries the same message. The author notes that in UK, the Minister of Interior Affairs asked citizens to report their neighbors who were having a party to the police. The author stresses the rise of the Coronavirus cases in the article and gives data about it. In addition, the author notes that some celebrities in Turkey continue to organize crazy parties without masks and social distancing even if the test results are positive.

### **Article #28**

The final article is entitled “Ankara, the Capital city of Corona” As noted above, mentioning authorities is a way to support one’s argument. In the article the author uses the quotations from the governor of Ankara for this aim. In the first part of the article, the author describes the recent situation about the pandemic in Ankara and he complains about the people who do not pay attention to pandemic rules. He further lists the causes behind the rise of the pandemic cases. He also makes references to different districts of Ankara. The author ends the article with a call for common sense about the pandemic rules.

## CONCLUSION

Coronavirus pandemic has lately been one of the influential factors that shape the discourses of both the ruling elites and the media actors. The pandemic has gone beyond a health crisis and it has put a significant impact on the domestic policy agenda of the governments as well. The representation of the pandemic in Turkish print media is mainly shaped by the political orientation of the media actors which most of the time relies on the media ownership structures and financial concerns. The main purpose of the study is to shed light on the media discourses of the Coronavirus crisis by the use of critical discourse analysis and how these discourses are related with the political perspectives of the newspapers.

It is known that, Gurevitch and Blumler (1990) present a variety of functions that the media perform. These functions include surveillance of sociopolitical developments, providing a platform for a diverse range of views, identifying relevant issues, and providing incentives for citizens to become involved in the political process. In a similar vein, Wilbur L. Schramm (1964) says that the newspapers under a democracy have three fundamental functions: They act as a watchman, as a policy shaper, and as a teacher (providing information). Taking into consideration the functions of the newspapers which has been taken from Schramm as noted above, this study has attempted to analyze how the Coronavirus pandemic was represented in two of the leading Turkish newspapers: Sözcü and Sabah. Sözcü has the highest circulation in Turkish print media scene with an ideology critical of government and Sabah is the best-selling daily having a pure pro-government stance.

The term “ideology” according to CDA is regarded as an important means of establishing and maintaining unequal power relations. CDA takes a particular interest in the ways through which language mediates ideology. Following this theoretical consideration, this article has attempted to understand how media discourse shapes, produces and also challenges government (dominant) ideology via using Van Dijk’s CDA approach. Van Dijk (2001) states that ideologies appear in polarized thought where prejudice is evident through a positive representation of the self (the in-group) and a simultaneous negative representation of the other (the out-group; ‘Them’). The dominant ideology shapes the production of media discourse and this explains why the media can be expected to function as agents of justification. Within the framework of CDA, it is noted that mainly in discourse consent is achieved, ideologies are transmitted, and values and identities are taught and learned. Events are reported in media through a given ideological perspective so CDA is important while analyzing how power is exercised on a discursive level in media discourse.

Bearing in mind these theoretical assumptions, all of the columns of Sabah and

Sözcü between March and September 2020 have been scanned and the articles having the keywords of “Pandemic”, “Coronavirus” “Virus” and “Corona” in the title have been selected. For each month, two articles have been analyzed in each newspaper and a total number of twenty-eight articles have been analyzed through employing Critical Discourse Analysis methodology of Van Dijk known as “Socio-Cognitive Approach”. The main purpose of the study is to shed light on the discourses of these two newspapers’ representation of the Coronavirus crisis. Through using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as the methodological framework, this study is an attempt to explore how print media empowers and/or undermines dominant discourses vis-à-vis the government’s management of the Coronavirus crisis. As noted above, the limitation of this study is about the content of some of the analyzed articles. Not all the articles having the keywords of “Pandemic”, “Coronavirus” “Virus” and “Corona” in the title address how the government managed the pandemic however still evaluations about the government could be traced which serve the aim of this study to some degree.

It can be argued that, newspapers representing different ideologies present a certain framework to their readers. The media actors cannot have neutral stance and media actors hold a key role in shaping the minds of the masses. Rather than merely conducting a linguistic analysis, this study tries to investigate what kind of role media actors play in reproducing the dominant ideology, namely that of the ruling elites. Sabah newspaper is one of the best-selling dailies which adopts a pro-government line and in almost all of the analyzed articles of Sabah it has been observed that government policies concerning the pandemic were represented in a positive way. On the contrary, Sözcü is known as one of the anti-government media actors and almost all of the articles published in Sözcü pose criticism against the government.

Critical Discourse Analysis is an interdisciplinary approach that studies the ways power abuse, and inequality are reproduced, legitimated, and also resisted by text and talk. Through using critical discourse analysis, this study has tried to explore how the government discourses regarding the pandemic are reproduced in Sabah; and what kind of discursive challenges have been made against them by Sözcü.

It is known that, CDA takes a particular interest in the ways through which language mediates ideological orientations. Following this, this article has attempted to understand how media discourse shapes, produces and also challenges government (dominant) ideology via using Van Dijk’s CDA approach. Van Dijk (2001) states that ideologies appear in polarized thought where prejudice is evident through a positive representation of the self and a simultaneous negative representation of the other. In this study, the pro-government newspaper Sabah has covered the government management of the pandemic in a positive way in the articles that address this side of the pandemic, whereas Sözcü does not adopt

this supportive discourse for the government. This mainly derives from newspapers' different ideologies as they represent events through their own ideological perspectives.

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### EXTENDED ABSTRACT

This study addresses the media representations of Coronavirus pandemic in two of the leading Turkish newspapers: Sözcü and Sabah. Sözcü has the highest circulation in Turkish print media with an ideology critical of the government and Sabah is one of the best-selling dailies having a pure pro-government stance.

The main objective of the study is to shed light on the discourses of these two newspapers on the Coronavirus crisis and how these discourses were shaped by their ideological orientations. All of the columns of Sabah and Sözcü between March and September 2020 have been scanned and the articles having the selected key words in the title have been put under scrutiny. For each month, two articles have been analyzed in each newspaper and a total number of twenty-eight articles have been analyzed through employing Critical Discourse Analysis methodology of Van Dijk. The limitation of this study is about the content of some of the analyzed articles. Not all the articles having the keywords of “Pandemic”, “Coronavirus” “Virus” and “Corona” in the title address how the government managed the pandemic however still evaluations about the government could be traced which serve the aim of this study to some degree.

Critical Discourse Analysis is an interdisciplinary approach that studies the ways power abuse, dominance, and inequality are reproduced, and resisted by text and talk. Through using socio-cognitive approach of Van Dijk, this study argues that newspapers representing different ideologies based on the media ownership structures present a certain framework to the readers. They reproduce or challenge the government discourses through their own ideological perspectives.

This study first addresses the Turkish print media scene along with the profiles of Sözcü and Sabah newspapers. Next, the Critical Discourse Analysis and the approach of Van Dijk as the methodology of the study will be addressed. Later, the content of the data under analysis (newspaper articles) will be covered and finally in the analysis section Van Dijk’s method will be used to make critical discourse analysis of these two newspapers.