1 Reporting events: point of view

One of the key claims of cognitive linguistics is that grammatical organisation is not neutral, but indexes point of view. In light of this consider the following examples of newspaper headlines:

Passive versus active

(1) a. Shops were looted and burnt.
   b. A group of youths looted and burned the shops.

(2) a. The police van was set ablaze.
   b. Violent youths set the police van ablaze.

a. In light of what you have learned about the cognitive linguistics approach to discourse, say what the effect is, in terms of point of view, of using active versus passive voice in these pairs of examples.

b. In your own words, give a definition of ideology, and state how the discourse organisation and structure influence ideology.

c. What are the divergent ideologies conveyed by these pairs of examples? Explain your rationale.

2 Analysing discourse

Consider the following article by Rana Kabbani, published in The Guardian newspaper on Tuesday, 23 November 2004. The article addresses the appointment of an interim prime minister, in Iraq, after the demise of the previous Iraqi leader, Saddam Hussein, following an US-led invasion of Iraq.
No one is taken in by the US lies: The graves of Falluja show the reality of Iraq’s occupation

In an ideal world, the US-appointed interim prime minister of Iraq, Ayad Allawi, would find himself answerable for his craven obeisance to his American overlords, instead of using this week’s Sharm el-Sheikh conference as an excuse to condemn those who are fighting back against occupation.

A year and a half ago, CIA wings wafted him and his ilk back to long-suffering Baghdad, the ancient capital of a resilient Arab people, who had somehow survived two devastating wars, 13 years of history’s most punitive sanctions, the all-consuming degradations of life under a totalitarian regime, the destruction and occupation of their country by a motley crew of US soldiers, British tag-alongs, ‘a coalition of the coerced and the bribed’ – to use John Kerry’s once radical phrase – and the harpies and carpetbaggers in the form of American private contractors, corporate swine, exiled Iraqi fraudsters, and professional torturers. Iraqis watched helplessly as their country’s infrastructure was destroyed – electricity, sewerage, houses, hospitals, schools, libraries, bridges, roads – and as their national treasures were allowed to be looted, and their natural resources robbed.

Now they are bankrupt, riven with preventable disease, chafing under emergency laws and watching as respectable political figures are roughed up and arrested for their party’s stance on the methods of the occupation. There has been a regression to Saddamite tactics – one Islamist politician’s daughter and grandchildren were reported to have been arrested when he could not be found. Press freedom is muzzled, and directives are issued to the media to follow the interim-government line on Falluja, or else.

But the graves of Falluja speak for themselves: ‘Ya Allawi, ya jaban. Ya ‘ameel al-Amercaan. Sheel idak, sheel idak. Hatha shaabak mai reedak!’

This rousing chant, in Iraqi vernacular, which calls on Allawi to make himself scarce for being a coward and an American agent, is being chanted throughout the cities of Iraq in furious demonstrations. Al-Jazeera showed one of these last week, which may explain why Allawi scurried over to the more supine al-Arabiyya satellite station (which most Arabs sneer at, although not quite as hard as they do at al-Hurra, the Pentagon-financed and controlled propaganda station). There he denounced al-Jazeera yet again, having already closed down its offices more than three months ago, and harassed and insulted their journalists.

In this, he was merely following in the footsteps of his American taskmasters, who sought to blow al-Jazeera off the face of the earth, first in Kabul, then in Baghdad, for allowing Arabs to see what the US was up to. What with embedded journalists giving us asinine reports
on all other stations, using marine-corps terms as though there were no others ever taught them, and with Tony Blair forbidding anyone to parody Bush, al-Jazeera has become more necessary than ever, simply because it lets Arabs speak their minds freely, with eye-witness reports of the most uncensored and unpackaged sort.

Now answer the following questions:

a. The expression ‘CIA wings’ in the second sentence can be described as being an instance of both metonymy and metaphor. Explain in what way this is the case.

b. Consider the use of the term ‘carpetbagger’, in the second paragraph. Look up and briefly give an account of the etymology of this term. Explain what it means in the context of this article, and the author’s portrayal of the American’s military involvement as an ‘occupation’.

c. Consider the term ‘harpies’ in the second paragraph. First comment on its origin. As used in this text, is this an instance of a resemblance or correlation-based metaphor? Give a detailed rationale to support your claim.

d. A notable feature of this text is the use of the rhetorical figure known as parallelism. First, give a clear definition of parallelism (you will need to look it up). Second, provide examples of parallelism at the level of the word or phrase and at the clause level. What stylistic or ideological effect is achieved by the use of parallelism in this text?

e. What is the stylistic purpose/effect of the use of Arabic expressions and words in the text? Could this index (point to) the writer’s identity and/or sympathies? What evidence is there in the text to support this?

f. Does the writer have a favourable opinion of Ayad Allawi? In answering this question consider in particular the writer’s i) lexical choice, and its implications, ii) the use of metaphor and its effects, iii) the use of rhetorical figures such as parallelism, and iv) the events that are chosen for discussion, and Allawi’s alleged role in these events.