Framing the Israel War on Gaza: A Shared Task on News Media Narratives: Proposed Manual Annotation Guidelines by Participating Team "The Lexicon Ladies"

1. Introduction

Bias is defined as language that favors one side or presents a subjective perspective. This document serves as the final guidelines used by the annotators manually annotating this task. It is worthwhile to note that the level of annotation experience for the team is that of beginners. All annotators are BA holders of Applied Linguistics, and sufficient annotation training has been completed.

These guidelines were finalized after the labeling of at least 200 posts in the IAA sheets as pilot annotations, and 400 in the main sheet. The annotation process was highly based on the keyword method, and consultation of the annotators' knowledge of English and Arabic social media buzzwords and their underlying contexts.

2. Label Definitions and Categories

Headlines are assigned one of the following labels:

- **Unbiased:** Labeling a neutral perspective, devoid of emotional language or favoring one side of the war.
- **Biased against Palestine:** Portrays Palestinians negatively or focuses on their offensives.
- **Biased against Israel:** Portrays Israelis negatively or focuses on their offensives.
- **Biased against both Palestine and Israel:** Portrays both sides negatively or focuses on unrelated issues.
- **Biased against others:** Focuses negatively on a different party involved (e.g., UN, specific countries).
- **Unclear:** Headline is ambiguous, too short, or lacks context to determine bias.
- **Not Applicable:** Headline does not directly relate to the Israel war on Gaza.

3. Detailed Category Guidelines:

1. Unbiased: Labeling a neutral perspective, devoid of emotional language or favoring one side of the war. This is the preferred form of news reporting. However, not all posts were headlines. Many such posts were stories or perspectives. The annotators decided that, as long as the non-headline retrospective stories did not use language attacking a side, and mainly shared the perspectives of individuals affected by the war, then they would be labeled "unbiased".

This label is aided by the lack of negative or positive keywords referring to a certain side. It merely presents the event as it is with facts, preferably briefly.

Keywords:

This label does not feature certain searchable keywords, and rather focuses on the lack of them. However, the distinction between this label and the "unclear" label is the latter's lack of sufficient information or context, making it unfit as a proper news headline. Moreover, it does not need to present both sides, unlike the label of "Biased against both Palestine and Israel".

Examples:

- "Israel and Hamas have announced a four-day truce deal. Here's a rundown of what's happened in Gaza since October 7 🔽"
- "An Israeli child talks about his experience being held hostage by Hamas and mentions that he was taught some Arabic and how to use prayer beads."
- "The exciting reunion after 52 days in captivity, Renana in a first hug with her son Or Weigal Yaakov https://13tv.co.il/news/news-flash/"
- "Hamas says a top official was among four people killed in an explosion in Beirut."

2. Biased against Palestine: Portrays Palestinians negatively or focuses on their offensives. This label is meant for posts that stress the acts committed by the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) over the acts committed by the Israel Defence Forces (IDF). It can also include language which undermines the autonomy of the Palestinian state, such as by referring to it or its establishments as "Hamas-run".

Other cases referring to Hamas combatants as "terrorists", or comparing them to other terrorist groups. Many cases also include the "October 7 attacks", or refer to the Hamas acts as "terrorist attacks". In general, the posts refrain from mentioning Israel's involvement and focus largely on Hamas' offensive. Some posts required implicit context inferred by the annotators, such as the use of metaphors by Israeli outlets to refer to Palestinians or Hamas ("darkness", "evil").

Keywords:

- "Hamas attackers"
- "terrorists"
- "terror attack"
- "massacre" *(in reference to Oct. 7)*
- "October 7"
- "Daesh" / "ISIS"
- "Hamas-run"
- "Jihad"
- "pro-Hamas"
- "barbaric"
- "antisemitic"
- "captors"
- "Nazi"
- "ordeal" / "brutality" + "Hamas"
- "kidnapped (by Hamas)"
- "#BringThemHome(Now)"
- "#IsraelFightsTerror"
- "#IsraelUnderAttack"

Examples:

- "Documents left behind by terrorists in Kibbutz Nir Oz reveal the orderliness of the operation, the degree of the planning and the extent of the intelligence information in the possession of Hamas"

- "Watch: IDF soldiers light first candle of Hanukkah in Gaza 🕎 This is the victory of light over darkness. Good over evil. Israel over Hamas. https://bit.ly/41gpT32:=:https://www.ynetnews.com/article/hyhd0hgla"
- "Outrage and violence erupted in response to media reports that Israel hit a Gaza hospital in an airstrike, but Israel has presented evidence that the explosion was actually caused by a terrorist rocket that misfired."

3. Biased against Israel: Portrays Israelis negatively or focuses on their offensives. This label is meant for headlines that emphasize actions committed by the IDF and their effects on Palestinians. This includes the usage of words of warfare, especially those referring to bombings and airstrikes, as well as the declaration of genocide and the accusation of Israeli induced famine and starvation upon Palestinians. It may also be labeled on posts that refer to Israelis or their institutions as zionists, occupiers, or settlers. Usually, posts calling for a ceasefire are also biased against Israel.

Keywords:

- "Zionist"
- "war crimes"
- "occupation"
- "settlers"
- "airstrikes"
- "bombardment"
- "siege"
- "Palestinians killed"
- "invasion"
- "genocide"
- "Israeli aggression"
- "Israeli attacks"
- "bombing"
- "aggression"
- "assassination"
- "ceasefire"
- "collective punishment"
- "displace" / "displacement" / "displaced"

- "#FreePalestine"
- "#CeasefireNow"

Examples:

- "Hamas: We call for the formation of popular protection committees in all areas of the West Bank to repel settler attacks"
- ""They bombed us." This Red Crescent paramedic testifies to bombings that occurred while he was transferring civilians to the south of the Gaza Strip."
- "This Palestinian grandmother was 15 years old when she survived the Nakba in 1948. 75 years later, she underwent forced displacement again in Gaza."

4. Biased against both Palestine and Israel: Portrays both sides negatively or focuses on unrelated issues. Within this category, both Israeli and Palestinian sides of the war are highlighted, along with each party's aggressions upon the other. This is usually in the form of numbers of casualties resulting from the war as a total instead of focusing on one side. This label features authors who are often from third-party news outlets and individuals with a neutral stance on the war, but who remain biased to the aftereffects.

This often includes posts referring to the Palestinian side of the war as represented by Hamas militants and highlighting their offenses as well as Israeli offenses. This label is often in favor of a ceasefire or a two state solution, and may be anti-war or focusing on the resulting destruction and casualties rather on the conflict itself. In many cases, it may be unrelated to the political stance of the war and more on the humanitarian side.

Keywords:

There are no specified keywords to search for regarding this label.

Examples:

- "In The New York Times Opinion Section "Israel has suffered a horrifying terrorist attack and deserves the world's sympathy and support, but it should not get a blank check to slaughter civilians or to deprive them of food, water and medicine," Nicholas Kristof writes."
- "Israel- Palestine at war: Hamas militants attack Israel killing over 100 people. Hamas claims to have fired over 5,000 rockets into Israel. Israel launches

airstrikes to Hamas bases in Gaza. Netanyahu: Enemy will pay the price it has never known #CitizenWeekend Victoria Rubadiri"

- "Hummus in tahini, which became one of the symbols of the national-culinary conflict, has a common heritage in the Middle East. To attribute it only to Palestinians or to Israelis is almost a contradiction in terms | Opinion"
- "Press coverage | UAE Minister of International Cooperation, Reem Al Hashemi, before the Security Council: "Hamas' attacks are barbaric and heinous, and we demand the immediate and unconditional release of the hostages, but Hamas' crimes against civilians do not justify the Israeli policy of collective punishment towards the Gaza Strip." What is your comment?"
- "Massive destruction in the neighborhoods of Gaza City after fifty days of war between Hamas and Israel"

5. Biased against others: Focuses negatively on a different party involved (e.g., UN, specific countries). These are posts which often portray other entities in a bad light or contain certain criticism of their actions or own biases. These headlines can be written by either Pro-Palestine or Pro-Israel sides and they feature different criticism of "others". From the Palestinian supporter side, the most critiqued parties are western countries with a focus on the USA and the UK. Israeli supporters critique a diverse body of parties, ranging from countries to formal and informal organizations. They mostly include countries of the Gulf region, Iran, and neighbors of the Palestinian territories, as well as the United Nations and several resistance groups.

Keywords:

- "Houthis"
- "Hezbollah"
- "ISIS"
- "Pakistan"
- "Iran"
- "Iraq"
- "Egypt"
- "Yemen"
- "ICC"
- "ICJ"

- "United Nations"

Examples:

- "Yemen's Houthis have waded into the Israel-Hamas war raging more than 1,000 miles from their seat of power in Sanaa, declaring they fired drones and missiles at Israel in attacks that highlight the regional risks of the conflict"
- "🔴The war between Israel and Hamas ⬅️Iran's allies in the Middle East are on alert as the war rages 👉Follow the latest developments around the clock via the link"

6. Unclear: Headline is ambiguous, too short, cutoff, or lacks context to determine bias. Usually, the author cannot be identified by keywords, but there is strong or emotional language involved, and therefore cannot be labeled as "unbiased". This label may also refer to the war as "controversial". The headline may also be deliberately confusing or misleading.

Examples:

- "Sderot, on the border with the Gaza Strip, has become a ghost town. And in Jerusalem, where Martin also takes us, the situation is very tense."
- "Among them are Hamas and Jihad.. Shtayyeh: Algeria will invite the factions to reconciliation sessions"
- "Brace for impact."
- "NYU student Ryna Workman, who says they were denied a job following their controversial comments on the Israel-Hamas conflict, speaks with LinseyDavis."
- "The family of 16-year-old Noiya Sharabi said she was murdered in the attack, along with her 13-year-old sister and mother."
- ""They gave us pitta bread, hard cheese, some low fat cream cheese, and cucumber and that was our food for the entire day." Freed Hamas hostage Yocheved Lifshitz recounts her experience saying "there were people there who took care of all the needs.""
- "France: The Public Prosecutor's Office opens an investigation after about 60 Stars of David were painted on buildings in Paris on Monday night #France #Paris #Israel #Jews #Gaza #Palestine #Hamas #War"

7. Not Applicable: Headline doesn't directly relate to the Israel war on Gaza. No words concerning the war are included, and the headline is usually off-topic and therefore cannot be labeled within bias.

Examples:

- "Ipsos Barometer – "Le Point": Mélenchon in free fall"
- "unity!! For the first time in history, after the signature of 85 MKs, the way was paved for the removal of Ofer Kasif from the Israeli Knesset."
- "JUST 'ONE PROBLEM': The president's theory that he says he "cannot prove" is at the link:"

4. Process:

The annotators worked directly within the Google sheet provided. There was no specific role assignment and each annotator was to work at their own leisure. Every annotator worked on an IAA sheet briefly before moving on to the main sheet. Discussions were made during this initial annotation phase concerning several labels, and guidelines were not finalized until later.

4.1. Quality Standards and Consistency:

To ensure consistency, upon the completion of 400 IAA label assignments, total shared label assignments would be calculated and compared, and differences should be resolved before the full annotation attempt.

Final annotation statistics:

Labels	IAA-2	IAA-3
1-Unbiased	42	74
2-Biased against Palestine	71	62
3-Biased against Israel	40	43
4-Biased against both Palestine and Israel	9	3
5-Biased against others	16	2
6- Unclear	16	11
7- Not Applicable	6	5
Total	200	200

Major inconsistencies discovered upon comparison of IAA-2 and IAA-3:

- "Unbiased" label: annotator 3 faced confusion claiming that "news headlines reporting attacks from one side might not necessarily mean certain bias against that side". Both annotators met to discuss this while considering the nature of social media news and the deliberate framing of many headlines. It was decided in the final annotation guidelines that posts reporting a side's offensive **alone** would be reported as biased rather than unbiased.
- "Biased against others" label: for the same reason as the previous label, annotator 3 did not consider headlines reporting on the actions and offensives of other parties such as Houthis and the United States as being biased against these parties. Rather, they viewed the headlines as normal and recommended news reporting. This was once again discussed and considered for the final annotations where the percentage of bias against other parties correlated with the count of times where other parties were criticized or their offensives were highlighted.

Other inconsistencies were brushed upon briefly but were statistically minor and easily resolved.

4.2. Handling Ambiguities:

Due to the nature of the war, many posts tend to tip-toe around their biases or use confusing language. Similarly, certain established keywords in the guidelines may be used in different contexts within some headlines. To stay on the side of caution, labeling such examples as "unclear" may be best practice, to avoid distorting the system with an assumptive thought process. Hashtags are also considered to resolve certain ambiguities, where the headline itself linguistically fails to be classified.

Another problem was dealing with the absence of labels as "biased **towards**" a certain side. This was most inconvenient when dealing with headlines which highly glamourize a certain side's achievements or framed their offensives in a positive light while not referring at all to the other party. This appeared largely within Israeli-inclined headlines. Furthermore, criticism of a government was decided against being a biased headline against that government. For example, Israeli headlines often criticize Netanyahu, but this does not mean they are not biased against Palestinians.

Certain comments were written next to controversial headlines to resolve ambiguities or clarify decisions. These comments were included with the following headlines, with a brief explanation:

- **ID 757 "Talks to secure the release of a large number of hostages being held by Hamas in Gaza are ongoing, two sources familiar with the matter and one western diplomat familiar with the discussions told CNN, but the negotiations are being complicated by a number of factors.":** while the contents of the headline seem neutral, the use of the word "complicated" is a known dog-whistle within western news outlets such as the CNN, and only the Palestinian side of the negotiations is mentioned, implying that the Israeli side is fully on board and did not reject any conditions.

- **ID 761 ""They gave us pitta bread, hard cheese, some low fat cream cheese, and cucumber and that was our food for the entire day." Freed Hamas hostage Yocheved Lifshitz recounts her experience saying "there were people there who took care of all the needs.""**: the headline is highly ambiguous, with the hostage's words possibly being shortened or misphrased. The first part of the quote is framed as a bad situation, while the second part is giving the situation a better light. There are little signs to confirm any bias. This was labeled "unclear".

- **ID 969 "🔴 White House spokesman John Kirby alleges that Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad use certain Gaza hospitals, including al-Shifa, for military operations without presenting evidence.":** the headline at first glance may seem against Palestine, yet the words surrounding it prove otherwise and lessen Kirby's credibility, making the headline biased against others, i.e: the United States.

- **ID 1319 "A pioneering Israeli scholar of German history, Prof. Moshe Zimmermann looks back to 1930s Europe in order to understand where Israel is headed":** the lack of keywords against Palestine, along with the glamourization of Israel, inclined the annotators to label this as "biased against Palestine" at first. It was settled as "unclear".

- **ID 8 ""The enemy did not achieve any field achievement on the ground other than committing war crimes and horrific massacres." Hamas leader Khalil Al-Hayya: "Netanyahu and the Israeli army will not be able to achieve any achievement and we are confident of their defeat" #News #Gaza_War":** the first part of the headline is ambiguous and unclear, especially combined with the second

part where it is clearly against Israel. The use of the words "war crimes" and "massacres" can mean either side. In the end this was labeled against Israel.

- **ID 199 "▬ The Israeli army 🇮🇱 said on Wednesday that 1,200 Israelis were killed and more than 2,700 people were injured in the war against #Hamas. ▬ The Ministry of Health in the #Gaza_Strip 🇵🇸 announced that "950 citizens were martyred and 5,000 other citizens were injured with various injuries as victims of the Israeli aggression as of 8:25 a.m." Wednesday local time.":** there is a very slight detail in this headline which leads the annotators to believe that it is inclined against Israel. The use of martyrdom has specific pragmatic relevance and significance within Arabic headlines, which is meant to put higher importance upon the Palestinian casualties. This was therefore labeled against Israel, yet may require further review.

- **ID 805 "Israeli Troops Overrun Hamas Stronghold: Is It Endgame Gaza?":** this is framing the Palestinian side in a bad light or forcing their surrender prematurely. Again, this is an inconvenience resulting from the lack of a "biased towards" label, yet may be clearer within the labeling of propaganda.

- **ID 939 ""They give priority to eliminating Hamas." Families of Israeli prisoners criticize the Netanyahu government's policy regarding the file of prisoners held by Palestinian factions #Video #Gaza_War":** the ambiguity here is present in the difference in sentiment of the keywords of the headline. Eliminating Hamas is classified against Palestine, yet the whole sentence upon inspection is a criticism of Netanyahu, therefore it was labeled against Israel to outweigh the initial confusion.

- **ID 205 "After four years of absence, a committed return in sight for the PNL rappers with the single "Gaza" ➡️:** while this headline very very remotely concerns the war, it is highly inapplicable. Its original topic is an artist's return to the scene, with no clarification whether the single named "Gaza" is for or against the Israeli side.

- **ID 1108 "He is accused of supporting the complaint filed by South Africa for "acts of genocide" in Gaza 👉":** the use of the word "accused" and the air quotes between "genocide" are meant to refer the readers to discredit the speaker and the claim of genocide upon Gaza. The context is clear to be against Palestine, yet the language used is intentionally omitting it. Therefore the end label is "unclear".

- **ID 10756 "A sad and painful day. May we be worthy of the terrible, unimaginable, unbearably difficult price. Our hearts go out to the families. The**

people of Israel are with you in the heavy mourning. Best wishes for recovery to the injured.": no keywords referring to Palestine or the attack by Hamas are present. Yet with context, it is clear that the opposing side is Palestine and that this headline is against it.

4.3. Ethical Considerations:

The large range of labels and headlines call for further discussions. As each annotator has their own knowledge and experience, as well as English or Arabic levels, sharing each input and viewpoint is preferred. Each annotator must consider their own and their teammates' exposure to news headlines, preferred news sources, preferred social media channels, and personal language understanding and biases. IAA sheets are filled independently and it is not permitted for an annotator to edit upon another annotator's work in the main sheet (except in cases where it is directly asked of them for convenience reasons).

4.4. Training and Support:

As the annotators have limited annotation experience but possess high linguistic knowledge of both English and Arabic, along with communication studies, training was required prior to the annotation process. Training on sample headlines took about 2 weeks from the availability of the datasets. Further communications and training are done offline and on communication applications, usually in the form of discussions and resolving any confusion in an attempt to simplify the task.