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De/Victimizing Christian Copts in/outside Contemporary Egypt: A Critical Corpus-Based Study

This study is critically oriented towards exploring the conflicting discourses that have arisen out of the ideological clash between the majority Muslim community in Egypt and the minority expatriate Christian Copts, who either immigrated to or were born in the US. The study investigates the different discursive representations of Christian Copts in and outside Egypt across two corpora. The first is an Arabic specialized corpus of the Egyptian national Arabic newspaper of Al-Ahram (2000 - 2009) (<http://www.ahram.org.eg/>). This corpus contains 111,323,089 words; it comprises 12 domains: Egyptian local news, Arab world news, international Politics, Opinions, Columns, Al-Ahram Writers, Economy, Sports, Culture and Arts, Women and Children, Al-Ahram Files, science and Medicine. The second is an English corpus with 466,504 words; it includes all the articles archived on the website of the U.S. Copts Association (2000 – 2009) (<http://www.copts.com/english/>).

Drawing on a 'methodological synergy' of corpus linguistics (CL) and critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Baker et al. 2008), we conducted a contrastive collocational analysis which reveals opposing discourses on Christian Copts. We use the corpus software CQPweb (Hardie forthcoming) to identify the 'statistically significant collocates' (Church, Hanks & Moon 1994) of the node words Copts and Coptic in the English Corpus and the corresponding terms in the Arabic corpus. We then use CDA to describe the inter-collocate relations and their respective 'discourse prosodies' on Egypt's Christian Copts across the two corpora. We focus upon nominalization, mitigating vs. intensifying strategies, the use of nationalist inclusive vs. dissenting exclusive metaphors, stance and perception modality, and opposed 'social actors'.

The overall goal is to explore how these conflicting discourses may impact upon the social situations in which the texts in question are produced and read.