

Case Study

Analyzing the Political Uses of Figures Of Speech in Non-State Leaders' Rhetorical Titles: Case Studies of Al-Qa'ida and ISIS

Ali Badeen Al-Rikaby¹, Tengku Sepora Tengku Mahadi² and Debbita Ai Lin Tan^{2*}

¹English Department, College of Arts, Mustansiriyah University, Baghdad, Iraq

²School of Languages, Literacies and Translation, Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), 11800 USM, Penang, Malaysia

ABSTRACT

A figure of speech, or trope, is often used to communicate ideas as mental models that go beyond the literal and common use of words. The present study is a discourse analysis of 50 titles delivered by 15 al-Qa'ida and ISIS leaders between 2005 and 2015. It is conducted to: 1) investigate the use of figures of speech in non-state leaders' rhetorical titles, and 2) analyze the types of figurative language most frequently employed in their hortatory discourse of jihad. Their tropes are analyzed because figurative language is not neutral vis-à-vis politics and is frequently situated in relation to a jihadist ideology. To achieve the objectives of this study, Leigh's (1994) framework, which includes his categorization of various types of tropes, was adopted to analyze the 50 titles sourced from three different sources, including international websites that are directly linked to the non-state leaders themselves. Our content analysis includes frequency measures of wordplays as well as qualitative evaluations of the selected titles. The results reveal that certain figures of speech – namely allusions, metaphors and ironies – were widely used while others were

not. Also, some tropes such as oxymorons and parallelisms were simply not utilized at all. These findings are of vital interest to instructors, students and scholars engaged in media discourse and pragmatics, as well as rhetorical analysis and politics of language. Directions for future research are also outlined.

Keywords: Discourse analysis, figurative language, political leaders, rhetorical titles, tropes

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E-mail addresses:

alibadeen1972@gmail.com (Ali Badeen Al-Rikaby)

tsepora@usm.my (Tengku Sepora Tengku Mahadi)

debbita_tan@usm.my (Debbita Ai Lin Tan)

* Corresponding author

INTRODUCTION

The form in which a message is communicated is a significant consideration in the construction of a title (Genette, 1997; Leigh, 1994). Political leaders, as writers, differ as to what form and in what manner a message should be revealed. Some employ the use of catchy titles which are usually short, rhythmical and alliterative, while others prefer using titles full of puns, literary allusions and other obscurities. A third group may prefer clichés, superlatives, stock phrases and vague generalizations. However, though the figurative language or wordplay that they use may differ, as do their views on the practice of power, political leaders generally employ the use of figures of speech in their rhetorical titles.

One of the primary reasons why political leaders use figures of speech (or wordplay) in their titles is that these elements serve as a vital tool of persuasion because they nurture interest and engagement, and sell ideas to the public; as a whole, they are specific formations of syntax, letters (palindromes, lipograms), sounds (puns, rhymes) and word order that can, and are used to, create certain effects (Bonyadi & Samuel, 2013; Ifantidou, 2009; Leigh, 1994; Monsefi & Mahadi, 2017; Tuan, 2010).

Of late, wordplay has been deployed to justify and normalize violent actions. For leaders to set up their political plans, they essentially need to persuade their target audience and such persuasion is not possible without certain forms of wordplay. There is often a need for them to regularize the practice of their jihadist ideology, especially

when violence is expected to last for a relatively long time (Jackson, 2005). Also, such leaders need to make their agendas look rational, desirable and achievable. Therefore, as put forth by Chilton (2004), there is always a special kind of wordplay that is endemic to their speeches.

The significance of figurative language or wordplay in the rhetorical titles of non-state leaders and its impact on present day Muslim recipients represent the impetus for this article. The study examines the use of figures of speech in non-state leaders' rhetorical titles to determine if their jihadist ideology is explicitly served by the wordplays that they employ to justify and normalize their deeds and actions. The present study also rests on the premise advanced by van Dijk (2009) that a title or a headline is the most projecting information which comes first and sums up the story in the body of a speech.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A political speech's title is regarded by researchers as one of the most arduous messages for the pragmatic communication of persuasion (van Dijk, 2009; Genette, 1997; Leigh, 1994). As a vital medium for persuasion, titles are often used to combine the inventiveness of figures of speech, as a form, with the intended political message. For instance, most non-state leaders use Islamic allusions, metaphors, ironies, symbols and other literary concepts in the construction of their jihadist ideology. They often invoke Quranic allusions and quotes from Prophet Muhammad's sayings, and

lock the basis for their ideology in Islamic metaphors and analogies, taking advantage of their allusive, alliterative and unbound forms.

In the process and stages of persuasion, the element of wordplay is often inevitable. The use of wordplay is common in many forms of discourse. Its linguistic layout is rarely limited in terms of form. Simply put, unlike legal language, literary tropes and their grammatical structures embrace a vast range of semantic functions and do not suffer confined interpretations. They are, thus, commonly used by non-state leaders in their rhetorical titles, speeches and written texts. Most of the tropes are branded in allusions, metaphors, puns and other vague generalizations; their figurative obscurities are intended to camouflage radicalism.

According to van Dijk (2006) and Chilton (2004), language has the potential to drive the mindsets of Muslims through jihadist texts. Al-Qa'ida and ISIS leaders' public rhetoric shapes the key principles for their local and global radical movements.

Few studies have focused on the content analysis of non-state leaders' texts (Chilton, *ibid.*), the qualitative analysis of their rhetoric (Burke, 2007), the social psychology of their language (Podvornaia, 2013), the symbolic analysis of their speeches (Rowland & Theye, 2008), and specifically the discourse analysis of Osama bin Laden's rhetoric (Taylor, 2013).

Chilton (2004) applied a three-dimensional analytical model to his analysis of two speeches by George W. Bush and Osama bin Laden, focusing on linguistic

deixis with emphasis on the contextual implications of time, place, and mode. Chilton noted that bin Laden manipulated religious language in defending suicide bombers, stating that they would be awarded entry into paradise for this act. Likewise, Bush asked God to bless those who were killed and mentioned that they were blessed in the afterlife.

A study by Rowland and Theye (2008) highlighted that the key to understanding terrorists' motives was to analyze their political discourse, what they called "the symbolic DNA of terrorism". Rowland and Theye examined the facets of religion and ideology in al-Zawahiri's (of al-Qa'ida) rhetoric.

Taylor (2013) concentrated on three keynote speeches delivered by bin Laden to the American population. In her analysis, Taylor looked at the persuasive and discursive strategies used by bin Laden and concluded that he portrayed himself as honorable and righteous in his speeches, with a linguistic style that was not explicitly hostile or aggressive even with the inclusion of many threats directed at American forces.

None of these studies have laid emphasis on the figurative language or wordplay used by al-Qa'ida and ISIS leaders, or attempted to study the functional aspects of their rhetorical devices from a literary perspective. Additionally, the researchers have not come across any research analyzing the wordplay strategies and rhetorical devices in the selected texts delivered by the non-state leaders of these two movements. The present study is intended to fill these

gaps and contribute to current literature. The researchers argue that non-state leaders' rhetorical titles commonly involve more than terminologies, and are inherently more than mere sentence structures or literary pieces. Rather, such titles are pragmatic communication threads of political persuasion. In essence, figurative language is an instrumental factor in the process of communicating political messages to achieve specific political gains or to induce specific actions.

Leigh's (1994) Categorization of Wordplay (Figures of Speech)

Leigh (1994) presented 41 rhetorical figures that were classified into tropes and grammar structures. Grammar structures are figures of speech that tackle syntax, word order and sounds rather than the meaning of words. Conversely, tropes are figures that alter the typical meaning of a word or words. They display deviation from basic meanings.

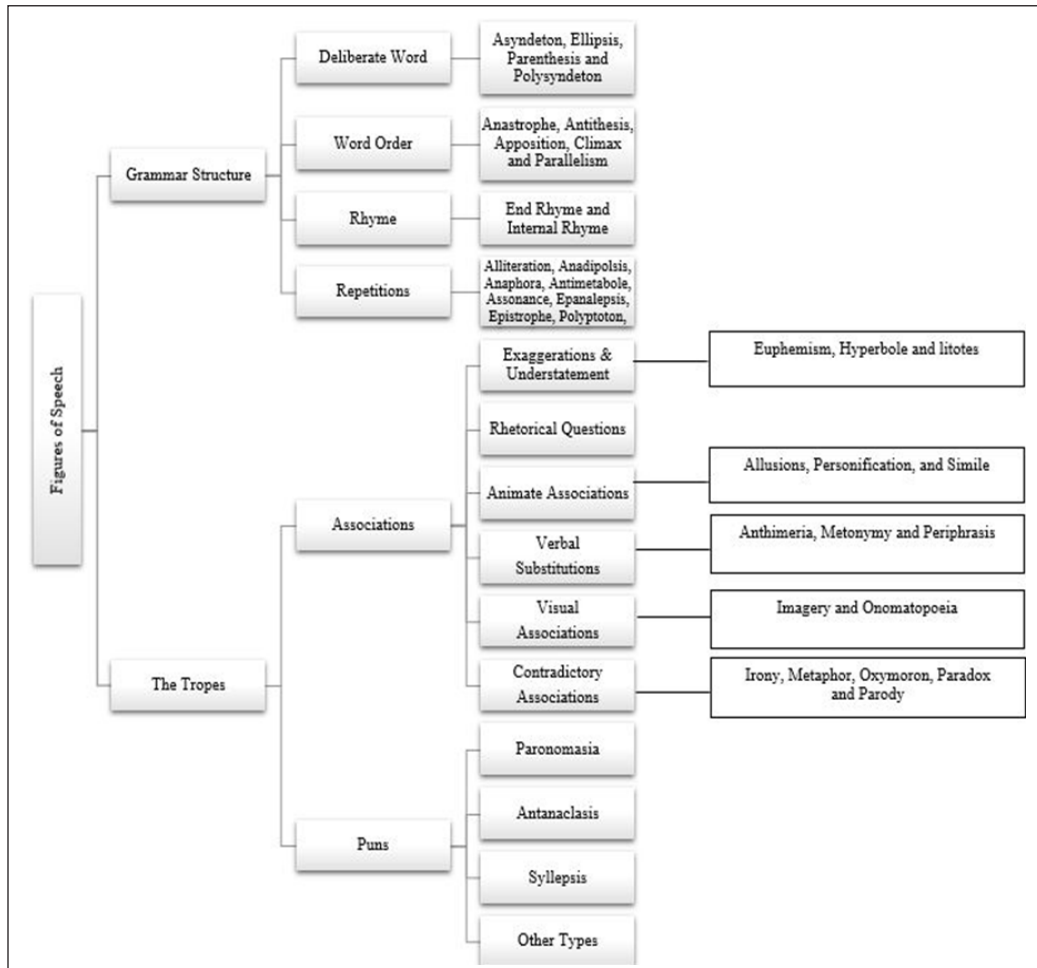


Figure 1. Leigh's (1994) categorization of wordplay (figures of speech)

Tropes are split into associations and puns. Leigh considers the second category of tropes (puns) to be the most outstanding for wordplay with regards to headlines. It is a humorous use of words or phrases that possess more than one meaning. Associations, the first category of tropes, is subdivided into six major groups and their related 16 smaller subclasses. The latter category of wordplay is schemes which consists of coordinated, deliberate word omissions, word insertions, repetitions and rhymes. These four classes are also divided into related subclasses, and the overall number of subclasses is 20. Figure 1 illustrates Leigh's framework. This model was also used in Monsefi and Mahadi's (2017) study.

METHOD

Approach

The study's approach is both quantitative and qualitative. A frequency analysis was conducted to quantify the selected rhetorical titles; the 50 titles were analyzed for mean length of title-unit, subordinate clauses per title-unit, and frequency of varied wordplay categories. The researchers opted to analyze titles per se as titles often serve as the core element of any formal discourse meant for the masses. Specifically, Beharrell et al. (2009) opined that titles were of crucial importance in media discourse; they were essential for persuasion because they served to summarize a story and drew attention to that story. They also represented the strongest visual indicator of the speaker's (or writer's) style. In other words, titles

are rhetorical forms that can function as effective carriers of ideological meanings and are therefore worth studying.

McGuigan (2008) pointed out that there were many figures of speech, ranging from anadiplosis to zeugma. Some of these were scarcely used while others, such as allusions, metaphors and ironies, were regularly operated in political texts or speeches. Scholars of classical rhetoric have categorized the various figures of speech into two major groups – tropes and schemes. Specialists like Abrams and Harpham (2012) classified them into two main groups: 1) figures of thought or tropes, and 2) figures of speech or schemes. However, they conceded that there was no clear-cut distinction or border deterrent between the two groups and experts in the field differed in their understanding and categorization of figures of speech. In the present study, the researchers adopted Leigh's (1994) model of categorization.

Sample size is of importance as a fair level of saturation is required to provide qualitative evaluations and to minimize the risk of errors. It is worthy of note, however, that sample size in discourse analysis is also relative to the analysis' level of rigor and intensity. The 50 titles selected for the present study were, as stated, tri-dimensionally analyzed. The researchers also opted to analyze rhetorical titles from a fairly substantial pool of non-state leaders – 15 in total, from two very well-known and active movements (al-Qa'ida and ISIS). In addition, these titles were observed to contain core elements of jihadist discourse, which serves the purpose of the study well.

Corpus

In terms of corpus, all the titles subjected to our analysis were taken from three sources:

1. International websites – SITE Intelligence Group (SITE), National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), The Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI), Global Terrorism Research Project (GTRP)
2. Websites directly linked to the non-state leaders themselves – al-Sahab Media Foundation, al-Hayat Media Centre
3. Translations available for their statements – IntelCenter (2008, 2010), Ibrahim (2007), Mansfield (2006)

Procedure

Applying the descriptive method, the procedure for data analysis is as listed below:

1. Analyzing for mean length of title-unit and subordinate clauses per title-unit (for comparability).
2. Conducting a frequency analysis of the titles based on Leigh's (1994) framework to provide a taxonomy of the wordplays detected.
3. Breaking down each Arabic title into their lexical components and providing literal English equivalents for each unit (to make it possible for non-Arabic readers to comprehend the units), then presenting a back translation for

each title (for contextualization to facilitate comprehension and discussion).

4. Providing qualitative evaluations of selected titles.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The sample of 50 rhetorical titles were found to be comparable in terms of mean length and subordinate clauses, and are thematically distributed as follows:

1. Jihad and hate speech ($n=20$)
2. Support for violence ($n=10$)
3. Special interests ($n=10$)
4. Lifestyle ($n=10$)

The results of the frequency analysis based on Leigh's (*ibid.*) framework is presented in Table 1.

Based on the sample of 50 rhetorical titles (from 15 non-state leaders), the analysis suggests that most titles contain at least one or more plainly defined form of wordplay. In both Arabic and English versions, allusions, metaphors and ironies achieved the highest frequencies. Meanwhile, other figures of speech such as euphemisms, hyperboles, alliterations and anaphoras were sparingly used. Some forms such as oxymorons, parallelisms, repetitions and litotes were simply not utilized at all.

As shown in Table 1, the occurrence of allusions is noticeably greater than other forms in the 50 rhetorical titles analyzed, with a total of 23 occurrences (27.8%). This suggests that non-state leaders may have a preference for using allusionary references when disseminating their views to the

Table 1
Frequency-percentage count by category

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Alliteration	2	2.3
Allusion	23	27.8
Anaphora	2	2.3
Anastrophe	0	0
Anthimeria	0	0
Antithesis	7	8.3
Apposition	1	1.1
Assonance	1	1.1
Climax	0	0
Ellipsis	2	2.3
End Rhyme	0	0
Euphemism	1	1.1
Hyperbole	1	1.1
Imagery	2	2.3
Irony	8	9.5
Litotes	0	0
Metaphor	12	14.2
Metonymy	4	4.7
Onomatopoeia	0	0
Oxymoron	0	0
Paradox	1	1.1
Parallelism	0	0
Parenthesis	0	0
Parody	6	7.1
Personification	1	1.1
Pun	3	3.5
Repetition	0	0
Rhetorical Questions	4	4.7
Simile	3	3.5

masses. Metaphors rank second in number with 12 occurrences (14.2%) and ironies, third (with 8 occurrences). The use of antitheses ranks fourth with 7 occurrences. In most of the titles analyzed, the presence of allusions led to the employment of metaphors, ironies and antitheses.

The researchers have also drawn out five samples for more in-depth evaluation and discussion of the political uses of figurative language in rhetorical titles.

Sample 1

The title of al-Zawahiri's speech dealing with the political status of Muslims after a decade of political crises in the Middle East:

أمة منتصرة وصليبية منكسرة تسع سنوات من بداية
الحملة الصليبية

صليبية أمة Nation Victorious منتصرة
Crusade Broken سنوات Nine
Years من After بداية The Start
الحملة الصليبية The Crusade

Back Translation: *A Victorious Nation
(Ummah) Versus a Broken Crusade:
Nine Years After the Start of the
Crusader*

بعد أن استنفذت أمريكا أغراضها من
مبارك واستخدمته كمخلب القط في
تنفيذ كل جرائمها القذرة في المنطقة.
فلما تحول مبارك إلى رمز للفساد ولما
أحست أمريكا أن توريث مبارك الحكم
لولده ربما يثير القلاقل والمتاعب،
قررت أن تجرب خطأ موازياً لتحقيق
أهدافها، عبر مبعوث العناية الأمريكية
الدكتور محمد البرادعي.

So, when Mubarak turned into a symbol of corruption, criminality, thievery and treason, and when America sensed that Mubarak's bequeathal of power to his son might cause problems and inconveniences, it decided to experiment with a parallel line for achieving its goals, by way of the emissary

of American providence, Mohammed al-Baradi.

The dichotomy between al-Qa'ida's nature of Us and the crusading spirit of Them is made explicit through allusionary references to its enemy as *a Broken Crusade*. The implications associated with such allusions do not only stress on the nature of America and Israel as the major enemy, but they also work to represent the enemy in a single personality such as Hosni Mubarak (see Hodges, 2013).

Sample 2

The title of al-Baghdadi's speech in which he taunts the West for not placing military boots on Syrian and Iraqi grounds:

فتربصوا إنا معكم متربصون
معكم إنا We متربصوا So Wait,
Waiting متربصون Are Also

Back Translation: *So, Wait, Indeed We, Along with You, Are Waiting*

تعد لم اليوم المعركة إن المسلمون، أيها
حرب هي وانما صليبية، حملة مجرد
ولم أمة السلام، ضد جميعا الكفر أمم
عليها اجتمع أن أمتنا تاريخ في يسبق
هو كما واحدة في معركة بأسره العالم
جميعا الكفار معركة إنها حاصل اليوم،
مسلم كل وان جميعا، المسلمين ضد
الحرب. بهذه معني

O Muslims, indeed the battle today is no longer merely a crusader campaign. It is but the war of the nations of disbelief altogether against the Ummah of Islam, and it has not occurred before in the history of our Ummah that the entire world gathered against it in

one battle as is occurring today. Indeed, it is the battle of the disbelievers altogether against the Muslims altogether, and indeed every Muslim is intended by this war.

In his allusions, al-Baghdadi positions his enemy as an intentional actor with agency functions to assign responsibility to the enemy for the outbreak of jihad. The naming of America and Israel (as nations of disbelief) as metaphorical figureheads for a personified enemy allows for a subtle distinction between Islam and the West. This differentiation further highlights the colonizing nature of Them whereby the enemy rules over and hence works against the interests of God and Islam.

Sample 3

The title of al-Adnani's speech in which he adheres himself to many oaths of a great future for terrorists:

هذا وعد الله

Allah الله وعد This هذا

Back Translation: *This is the Promise of Allah*

العرب في جاهلية جهلاء، وضلالة
عمياء؛ أعرى الناس أجساماً، وأجوعهم
بطوناً، أمة في مؤخرة الأمم، غارقة في
الحضيض، لا يؤبه لها، ولا يُحسب لها
حساب، تخضع بالذل لكسرى وقبصر،
وتنقاد لمن غلب.

The Arabs are in the depths of ignorance and blinding darkness. They are the most naked, the hungriest, and the most backwards of peoples, sinking in depths of lowness. No one cared about them or gave them

any regard. They submitted in humiliation to Khosrow and Caesar, yielding to the conqueror.

In the analytic scheme presented in Sample 3, each negative metaphor of Us not only opposes a positive attribute of Them, but also aligns with a cluster of other negative metaphors that come to be associated with one another. Thus, references to the Arabs align with the scorns of ignorance, darkness, lowness, corruption and humiliation which contrast with the divine ethics of Islam. Since Muslims are generally strong believers in religion, al-Zawahiri, al-Baghdadi and al-Adnani attempted to draw connections between the exhortations voiced and the prevalent religious consciousness of the Muslim audience by focusing on rhetorical devices such as allusions, metaphors, ironies and antitheses.

Sample 4

The title of al-Baghdadi's speech in which he obliges his followers to risk their lives for the sake of a claimed Islamic caliphate, to submit to its orders, and to gather within it its power:

جَاءَ الْحَقُّ وَزَهَقَ الْبَاطِلُ

Truth Come الْحَقُّ جَاءَ

and Vanished الْبَاطِلُ وَزَهَقَ

Falsehood

Back Translation: Truth Has

Come and Falsehood Has

Vanished Away

أمة الاسلام .. امتي الحبيبة .. لقد عزم
رجالك على ان يقيموا للاسلام دولته
يحكموا فيه شرعه و يطيعوا فيه امره و

يجتمع فيه جنده فسكبوا لذلك دماؤهم من
بعد ما ضحوا بأموالهم فطلقوا كل شهوة
وقاسوا كل شدة يطلبون الموت مضانه
يبتغون النصر او الشهادة فجاءت
الخطوة المباركة بوضع الاساس المتين
لدولة الاسلام.

O Ummah of Islam, my beloved Ummah: your men have been determined to give Islam its State, and establish within it its Sharia, and to obey therein its commands, and to gather within it its forces. To this end, they spilled their blood and spent their wealth; they left every desire and encountered every hardship. They sought out death where it was to be found, desiring victory or martyrdom, and then came the blessed step of establishing the firm foundation for the Islamic State.

Abu Omar al-Baghdadi derived his title from a famous Quranic verse (17:81). It is a Quranic allusion which forms a threat and a warning to the disbelievers of the Quraysh people (Mecca) in the 7th century.

The ability of a non-state leader such as al-Baghdadi to oblige his followers through such allusions to risk their lives for the sake of a claimed Islamic caliphate is a provoking aspect of the ideology that has the facility to induce violent actions. He seems to have obliged his followers to risk their lives on his behalf by going into jihad without first justifying the obligation to die. Following van Dijk (2006), we may call this use of sacred allusion as the manipulation of the mental models of followers to make them feel religious obligations. However, the importance of such obligations is not

specifically about sending someone to die as it is about sending someone to cause death to others; in any case, encountering an external enemy has often led to the use of violence against innocent people. In essence, the religious authority here may compel al-Qa'ida and ISIS followers to perform different acts of violence and atrocities against civilians.

Sample 5

The title of al-Libi's speech, which expounds on manipulation and hypocrisy:

وانقشعت سحابة الصيف

سحابة Has vanished انقشعت

Cloud الصيف Summer

Back Translation: *The Summer Cloud Has Vanished*

امّة الاسلام السلام عليكم ورحمة
الله وبركاته فكل شئ يمكن للمرء
ان يتلاعب به وان يظهر معه حنكته
ودهائه وخداعه الا دين الله عزوجل فما
ان يسلك المرء معه هذا المسلك ويدخل
هذا النفق حتى يكتشف ومن حيث لا
يحتسب انه قد جنى على نفسه واوبقها
بيده ولايحقق المكر السي الا باهله وقد
مرد اهل النفاق على هذا الاسلوب...

O Nation of Islam, may the peace, mercy, and blessings of God be upon you all. Anyone can manipulate anything. He can display his trickery, deception, and deceit through such an act. The only exception to this is the religion of God Almighty. If a person were to take this path and embark on this passage, he will surely discover,

from where he least expects, that he has actually transgressed against himself. It is a consequence of his own making, and surely wickedness befalls those that are astray. The people of hypocrisy have taken this path now and then...

To make his violent actions morally justifiable, Abu Yahya al-Libi used a common conceptual metaphor to establish a beneficial comparison between the allies of Satan (hypocrites) and the allies of Allah (mujahideen). Using certain items such as *dark cloud* to relate to the claims of the enemy and *light* to refer to the removal of such a cloud in his comparisons, he reminds Muslims of the atrocities committed by those he calls *the hypocrites*. Arguably, this will not only increase violent jihadi actions, but may also contribute to the persuasion of others to become new militants. Lastly, his use of such a device (conceptual metaphor) is considered valuable for the efficiency of persuasive communications meant to sway public opinions and direct their attention towards religious obligations.

CONCLUSION

Since figurative language or wordplay has apparently been used extensively by non-state leaders in recent years, and seeing that it appears to be an essential element in rhetorical threads in general, the researchers attempted to bridge both dimensions and examine not just the types of figures of speech used, but also the political uses of figures of speech in these leaders' rhetorical titles.

The present study is significant because of the prominent position of rhetorical titles in relation to political agendas. Their attributive functions in terms of linguistic manipulation is undeniable; rhetorical titles express the overall intentions of the speaker or writer, and studying them allows us to trace out the suggestions and implications within.

The findings of this study demonstrate that figurative language or wordplay is regularly operationalized in non-state leaders' rhetorical titles. Nevertheless, it is to be noted that some forms of wordplay attained higher frequency than others, while some forms did not even feature at all.

It should be highlighted here that the role of wordplay in terms of this element shaping the psyche of Muslims and non-Muslims is not within the immediate scope of the present study. This issue, as Wodak (2009) mentioned, needs to be specifically addressed by studies of political texts or speeches within psychological and sociological frameworks.

The present study is a comprehensive and illustrative sample of wordplay manifested in the rhetorical titles of 15 non-state leaders aligned to two extremely well-known movements – al-Qa'ida and ISIS. For future studies, the researchers recommend the use of an even larger corpus covering the rhetorical threads of more political leaders, state and non-state, from different nations and regions. Within this structure, comparisons from various perspectives can then be made and even more solid conclusions can be arrived at

as to the operationalization of figurative language or wordplay in politically-inclined rhetorical threads.

The researchers expect this study and its findings to be of worth to not only politicians and security officials, but also to instructors, students and scholars engaged in media discourse and pragmatics, as well as rhetorical analysis and politics of language as the study has essentially demonstrated the potency of the non-state leaders' ideology; that which attracts young Muslims to join al-Qa'ida and ISIS likely lies, at least to an extent, in the figurative religious titles employed by these leaders. In fact, the use of such manipulated titles is a powerful tool that can encourage radical behavior among those recruited, even after the death of these non-state leaders. Additionally, from an academic perspective, this study and its findings are of relevance in that they contribute to the knowledge base that currently exists in the field and provide direction for future related research, specifically in terms of corpus, design and analysis.

The selected titles were analyzed according to the main principles of Leigh's (1994) framework. His categorization of wordplay focuses on latent power dynamics in rhetorical titles and the potential of mediators as clients because it integrates and triangulates knowledge about tropes and their schemes to provide a taxonomy of the wordplays detected. In future research, we suggest that his framework can also be utilized to demystify other kinds of titles apart from highly political ones. For

instance, the hegemony of marketing or advertisement titles and powerful media actors that seek to promote and maintain distorted views in society.

In essence, figures of speech can work as a method of persuasion in societies. They postulate different shades of meanings and can motivate radical actions from the masses. Because political leaders often use rhetorical devices to achieve certain effects through their titles (a prominent element of any speech or text), researchers are in turn naturally interested in these devices and in the ideological structures that these leaders utilize to drive home their messages to the public. This study has essentially demonstrated the ways through which non-state leaders influence the masses, via their use of language and their articulation of ideas beyond the real meanings of the references used, and perhaps this understanding can help prompt certain parties – for instance, general members of the public, the media, security officials, policy-makers, and educators – to not presuppose that language is necessarily straightforward, to be more wary of and sensitive to the ideas projected by such political leaders, to be observant of the young and impressionable, and to emphasize tolerance, moderation and respect.

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