

Critical Discourse Analysis of Religious Sermons in Egypt—Case Study of Amr Khalid’s Sermons

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Abstract

This paper attempts to provide an ideological approach within a critical discourse analysis (CDA) in order to investigate the Islamic discourse and to trace the ideological devices in Amr Khalid’s sermons. In so doing, this paper tries to show how language, employed in Khalid’s sermons, reflects the common conceptual structures and interrelationships between him and his audience. The study is also concerned with uncovering certain forms of ideological disguises and demystifying power relations in discourse within specific context. This approach makes it possible to explore the tension between idealism and pragmatism, the conflict between ‘us’ and ‘them’, and the other aspects of ideologies existing in the Khalid’s sermon.

Keywords: discourse analysis, strategic functions, persuasion devices, modality, idealism and pragmatism, ideological devices

1. Introduction

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a branch of discourse analysis which, in the late of 1980s, has been discussed by many linguists such as Fairclough and Van Dijk. CDA may be seen as a reaction against the dominant uncritical paradigms of the linguistic theory. It requires multidisciplinary approach and an account of intricate relationship between text, talk, social cognition, power, society, and culture. Van Dijk is regarded as one of the most quoted scholars in the field of critical studies especially in media discourse. As part of the discourse structure, he asserts the concept of production processes. Van Dijk (1988) contends the journalistic and institutional practices of news-making and the economic and social practices. Reception processes involve the comprehension, memorization, and reproduction of information in the short and long term memories. In this respect, Van Dijk (1983, p. 17) handles the notion of evaluative beliefs or opinions associated with general models. Generalized models and schemata formation entail generalizations and abstractions of these evaluative beliefs in the reception process.

In this sense, Van Dijk (1995, p. 18) shows the link between such mental representation and abstract concepts of ideology as “ideologies are the overall, abstract mental systems that organize the socially shared attitudes.” In his understanding of discourse, Van Dijk (1995, p. 2) calls the mental representations of individuals during such social actions and interactions “models.” In his view, such mental representations or models influence the way in which people act, speak, write, or understand the social practices. Van Dijk realizes that attitudes cannot be mentioned through cognition only, rather it is also through the linguistic practice. Thus, he links his cognitive models of racism with the study of CDA.

2. Theoretical Background

The purpose of the present study is to assess the role of ideology in religious discourse. According to Williams (1976, p. 126), the word “ideology,” first appeared in English in 1796, as a direct translation of the new French word “idéologie” which had been proposed in that year by philosopher Destutt de Tracy to denote the “science of ideas.” A contentious argument in CDA has been how discourse may manifest or at least implicate the ideologies of the discourse participants. By restoring the focus upon discourse in society, CDA offers an occasion to subject ideology to new methods of investigation and to formulate an explicit ideology in discourse. For Fairclough (1992), through power relations implicit in discourse, ideology can appear. He makes three claims about ideology, based in part on the French Marxist philosopher, Althusser. Fairclough (1992a) explains that ideology

functions in discourse appear through dominant discourse in terms of what the Marxist theorist and activist Gramsci called “hegemony”.

Hegemony is a form of control through consensus, as contrasted with control based on coercion (force or threat of force). For Fairclough (1992), hegemony operates through orders of discourse of a society and institutions such as education, media, and business. Belsey (1980, p. 5) shows that ideology is “inscribed in discourse...it is not a separate element which exists independently in some free-floating realm of ideas...but away of thinking, speaking, experiencing.” It is generally assumed in CDA that innocent and neutral form and substance of discourse appears on the surface, it is thoroughly charged with the biases, constraints, opinions and variable judgments. Ideology plays a crucial role in Van Dijk’s analytical method. He offers a schema of relations between ideology, society, cognition and discourse. This consists of short-term memory whereby strategies process or decoding and interpretation take place. Social attitudes reside within long-term memory.

Ideologies are socio-cognitive, that is, they are both cognitive, involving basic principles of perception, judgments, knowledge, and understanding and social values, shared by members of groups or institutions, and related to the socio-economic or political interests of these groups. In addition, ideologies are not true or false, rather they represent the partisan, self serving truth of a social group. They are efficient frameworks of interpretation of such groups if they are able to further the interests of these groups.

Moreover, ideologies may have various degrees of complexity. They range from simple and basic propositions to complex and well-organized frameworks such as, the ideologies of democracies or socialism. Besides, ideologies have contextual variable manifestations. Personal and contextual variation of ideological discourse may be due to the existence of several groups with several ideologies, general social norms or laws. Lastly, ideologies are general and abstract. They are situation-independent. Their expressions may be locally produced and contextually constrained. It is important to mention that ideology can be also manipulated for the abuse of power since our mental representation and misrepresentation of the distribution of power in our society is governed and sustained by ideology.

3. Discussion of Data

3.1 Modes of Ideology

Thompson (1990, p. 64) proposes five modes by which ideology can operate in discourse, naming them “modus operandi,” and classifying them as the following: *Unification*: such ideological strategy, according to Thompson (1990, p. 64), involves dissolving differences between individual and putting them in a collective unity that overcomes racial, religious, social, gender or political differences, such strategy can be employed by two ways. It can be achieved by *standardization* whose symbolic forms that are used to deliver the message (1990, p. 64). The second way is achieved by the *symbolization of unity* which involves binding individuals together by producing symbols of unity and collective identity. The second mode of operation, *legitimation* strategy, aims at representing relations of power and domination by three sub-branches. *Rationalization*, “whereby the producer of a symbolic form constructs a chain of reasoning which seeks to defend or justify a set of social relations or institutions, and thereby to persuade an audience,”

Thompson (1990, p. 61). The second sub-way is *universalization*, where certain concepts held by few individuals are represented as serving the interests of all. The third sub-way is *narrativization* which involves stories that “recount the past and treat the present as part of cherished tradition.” Thompson (1990, p. 61). *Narrativization* involves reference to the traditions and history of the community to create a sense of belonging. The third ideological mode of operation is *dissimulation*, whereby power is maintained by “being concealed, denied or obscured, or by being represented in a way which deflects attention from existing relations.” (Thompson, 1990, p. 62) One of the strategies used for activating this ideological mode is displacement which is a process where ‘a term customarily used to refer to one object or individual is used to refer to another.’ *Euphemization* is another strategy used to achieve *dissimulation*, where “actions, institutions or social relations are described or re-described in terms which elicit a positive valuation.” (Thompson, 1990, p. 62).

Tropes “figurative language” plays a great role in achieving *dissimulation*. Examples of tropes would be synecdoche (using a part to refer to the whole or vice versa) or metaphor. Each of these techniques is used to dissimulate social relations by different methods. In contrast to *unification* mode, *fragmentation* maintains power relations. In this track, Thompson (1990, p. 65) affirms that fragmentation is achieved not by unifying individuals in a collectivity, but by fragmenting those individuals and groups that might be capable of mounting effective challenge to the dominant group, or by orienting forces of potential opposition towards a target which is projected as evil, harmful or threatening.

Based upon the previous concept, fragmentation is used when there is mounting challenges to the controlling group in society. Such strategy is employed by two ways, *differentiation*, which focuses on the differences and divisions between groups of potential power, thus preventing them from challenging existing relations or individuals of power. The other strategy in this mode is *expurgation* of the other, which involves constructing an evil and threatening enemy which calls individuals to unite together in order to challenge, resist and expurgate the threats and evil of that enemy.

Thompson (1990) observes that this strategy often overlaps with strategies of unification since it calls for uniting individuals in the face of the enemy creating a unified strategy. The last mode of ideological operation is *reification*. *Reification* establishes and sustains relations of domination by representing a transitory, historical state of affairs as if it were permanent, natural, outside of time” (Thompson, 1990, p. 65). There are different methods that refer to reification. First, *naturalization*, which occurs where a state of affairs may be treated as a natural event. Second, *externalization*, which portrays a state of affairs as permanent unchanging. Third, *passivization*, which focuses the attention of the hearer or reader on certain themes at the expense of others.

3.2 CDA and Persuasion

Persuasion is not only considered an essential tool in achieving the power of a speaker, but also for its prominent role in being the goal of any public or political speech. Amr Khalid delivers his speeches about specific topics that concern their audience at a certain time and place. The purpose of their speeches is to inform, impress, move the emotions of the audience, or persuade and call them for action. Simons (2001, p. 7) defines persuasion as “human communication designed to influence the autonomous judgments and actions of others.”

Persuasion is a form of attempted influence in the sense that it seeks to alter the way to think, feel, or act, and it differs from other forms of influence. The speaker makes use of certain rhetorical devices in conducting his speech to appear persuasive. A persuasive speech achieves power, influence, and dynamism. However, it is not sufficient to study the speaker’s task, as persuasion is transactional process that involves both the speaker and the audience. The audience’s position must be also taken into consideration since they can be holding very different beliefs, making the task of persuasion difficult in discourse.

3.3 Levels of Persuasion

Simons (2001, p. 29) branches persuasion into three levels: Response shaping, Response reinforcing, and Response changing. Response shaping may involve, for example, teaching a child to become a patriot or democrat. Political campaigns may shape voter’s attitudes toward previously unknown candidates. The key characteristics of shaping are that, it leads to the formation of new beliefs, values and attitudes. A campaign on behalf of a charity might begin by transforming verbal commitments into strongly felt commitments, then transforming those commitments into donations of money, then working to maintain strong behavioral support.

Response changing involves converting others, and getting them to switch parties, such as change cigarette brands, or perhaps quit smoking. The persuader’s goal on any occasion may be neutralization, bringing an audience from the point of disagreement to a point of ambivalence or indecision. The second sub-branch of response changing is crystallization, getting those persons, who are uncommitted because of mixed feeling about an idea, to endorse the persuader’s position or his proposal.

3.4 Branches of Persuasion in Discourse

There are various approaches of persuading people. Pardo (2001, p. 98) mentions that the type of persuasion is determined by “the use and the type of argument in verbal behavior.” The first element of persuasion is the Speaker’s credibility “ethos.” Ethos is the primary element in persuasive speech, i.e. credibility should be achieved first since the recipients tend to accept the message if they accept the speaker. Ethos is defined by Aristotle as the credibility that the author establishes with his audience. Therefore, it is obviously related to the speaker, his character and his stance towards the issue he is talking about. Speaker’s credibility is an important element in persuasion since the beliefs the speaker is trying to convey will not be accepted by the audience unless he is first accepted personally by them. There are some elements which could contribute to establishing speaker credibility like “occupation, personal looks, respect for others, general expertise, knowledge of the problem” (Berko & Wolvin, 1989, p. 469).

The second element is pathos, which is related to affecting the audience emotionally. It urges the listeners to believe in the proposed ideas as it appeals to their emotional and psychological motives. Therefore, a skillful speaker is one who is able to play on the right emotions, controlling them as he desires. Hence, the speaker has to know his audience and adapt his ideas according to his audience’s beliefs and ideology. The third element of persuasion is logos, which stands for logic and reason as it appeals to the minds of the audience and has a great

persuasive role. In this track, Berko and Wolvin (1989, p. 474) assert such notion by affirming that the effective speaker should remember that all factors in the persuasive situation ought to be centered on the audience and that an audience is influenced by clarity of ideas, vividness of language, for example, and specifics that illuminate the reasons for the chosen solution.

Based on the previous quotation, there are other factors that can influence the completion of persuasion, such as clarity of ideas and the directness of language. Persuasion which is based on logic can be classified in three sub branches, pure, manipulation and coercive persuasion. Pure persuasion depends on the rhetorical dimension of language. Speakers in this pure persuasion employ logic, facts and past experiences. The purpose of this type is to make a recipient have a freedom of choice. Pinto (2004, p. 654) views manipulative persuasion as “a distinct form of persuasion and control.” This type of persuasion presupposes that the person “who is in power hides his intention from subject of power,” (Pardo, 2001, p. 97).

In other words, the persuader attempts to hide the effect he wishes to produce in a way that does not allow the persuadees to understand the real goal of the persuader’s argument. Manipulative persuasion is usually based on false information, lies and brainwashing. This type leads to producing a controlled-will recipient who has no freedom to choose. Coercive persuasion is the third sub branch of logo persuasion. This type depends on logic mixed with fear, threats and violence. This type leads to creating a controlled-will recipient. Coercive persuasion restricts the freedom of recipients and forces them to take only one choice. Persuasion, in the cognitive framework, has certain elements that clarify the concept of persuasion in discourse. The first element is that; persuasion is a symbolic process. It means that persuasion involves the use of symbols, with messages transmitted primarily through language with its rich, cultural meanings. Symbols include words like freedom, justice, and equality. Such linguistic symbols are Khalid’s tools, harnessed to change attitudes and mold opinions. The second element is that; persuasion involves an attempt to influence. Such element is activated by breaking down barriers and winning hearts and minds.

To sum up, one can figure out that persuasion is an ancient art, as it dates back to ancient Greece. Yet, there are important aspects of contemporary persuasion in discourse that are unique. It includes the subtlety, volume, and complexity of modern messages as well as different types of persuasion that can be practiced explicitly or implicitly by the speaker to convey his message to his audience.

3.5 Modality

Modality reveals the speaker’s attitude and stance towards what he says in his speech. It also reveals his power over his audience. Therefore, it is an indicator of the speaker’s ideology in relation to his recipients. The concept “modality” subsumes a wide range of tools that reflect the orator’s attitudes to their topics and to their receivers. Such attitudes vary from predictability, desirability, obligation, and permission. The relation between such modal meanings and the concepts of power and persuasion is quite clear.

The numerous considerations of validity, predictability, and desirability constitute an important part of legitimization of the authority, and persuasion to the speaker. Modal adverbs or adjectives such as “possibly, certainly, necessarily” indicate the speaker’s attitude. Modal auxiliaries like “I should explain, she has to have,” can be used to indicate the speaker’s relationship towards his argument as well as imply something about his authority.

3.6 Classification of Modality

Fairclough (1989, p. 129) explains that modality can be either influence modalities or knowledge modalities. Influence modalities are those that direct and influence the behavior of others, while knowledge modalities are cognitive acts of assessment. In other words, modals are employed to indicate the power and authority of the speaker, his persuasive impact. It also refers to the certainty level of the speaker of what he utters. Fairclough (1989) confirms the significance of modality in representing both relational and expressive features of language.

Relational modality refers to the social power, while expressive modality discloses the speaker’s own evaluation by his use of probability or certainty. In other words, it expresses the speaker’s commitment to the truth. In his classification of modality, Fowler (1991, p. 85) divides modality into the following branches:

- 1) Truth
- 2) Obligation
- 3) Permission
- 4) Desirability

Fowler (1991, p. 85) explains truth modal means that a speaker/writer must always indicate or imply a

commitment to the truth of any proposition he utters or to a prediction of the degree of the likelihood of an event. Truth modality varies in strength from hedges or mitigators like “might” to emphatics “certainty markers” like “will”. Second, obligation reveals the amount of authority and power the speaker has. Permission is expressed by means of “can” and “could” which also are power markers because those in authority can provide such permission.

Desirability expresses less authority by using ought to or should. On the functional level, modality is subjected to classification and scrutiny by different linguists. They offer different labels for the different modes of modality. Palmer (1979, p. 41) classifies modality into the following three kinds:

1) Epistemic modality: the primary function of modality here is to denote the speaker/writer’s judgment about the possibility that something is or is not the case. In epistemic modality, there are three degrees. First, the degree of possibility indicated by “may.” Second, the degree of certainty denoted by “must.” Third, the degree of probability expressed by “will” to express a reasonable inference, and might, should, would to express probability.

2) Deontic modality: it may also be labeled as performative, since “by uttering a modal, the speaker/writer gives permission, makes a threat, or even lays an obligation (Palmer 1979, p. 41).

3) Dynamic modality: which is connected with ability and volition

4. Analyzing the Data

Amr Khalid, an Egyptian Preacher, started a number of TV shows that target the youth and various social classes inside Egypt and across the Arab World. His main idea is to revive the moral principles and create a social change in his society. Khalid was selected among the other 100 influential persons in the world by the standard of Time Magazine. He is also considered a very persuasive speaker by a lot of analysts in the Middle East. Khalid got his B.A from Cairo University, and his Ph.D. from University of Wales

The Sermon,

We must not make this mistake and close our eyes and hearts to Allah’s call to humbleness and humility to Him. We must not let Satan trick us into believing that our problems have nothing to do with our relation with Allah. The night before the battle of Badr, Prophet Muhammad (SAWS) saw how the army of the pagans had out-numbered them and was so well equipped. Then he looked at the Muslim army and how few they were with poor weaponry. Badr was the first military confrontation between the Muslims and the non-believers. It was a critical event in the history of Islam. Had Muslims lost this battle, Islam would have disappeared forever. Realizing this, Prophet Muhammad (SAWS) started to pray to Allah in humility and humbleness. He raised his hands up high, stretching his arms to the extent that his armpits showed.

The analysis of Data

Khalid in his sermon used certain specific ideological modes to deliver his message strongly and influence his audience. Khalid uses specific ideological modes, when he mentions the tragic events afflicted directly to his race by saying, *The night before the battle of Badr*; Khalid uses the strategy of narrativization which involves the reference to certain historical aspects of first confrontation between Muslims and non-believers and the consequences that can be learned by deep focus on them. In addition, Khalid activates the stored information in the long-term memories of his audience. He activates the strategy of *unification* through using symbols of unity based on the historical and legal rights in saying “*One of the main factors that would lead to the rise of this ummah is its unity.*” He uses the word “*ummah*” to describe specific rights as important and motivate the youth and to interpret the concept of unity in such a way that it can be accessible to as many as possible. By saying, *The European Union, The United Kingdom, The United States of America, Euro, Shengen*, Khalid shows two processes which are employed in his sermons. The first process is *standardization* in which he uses symbolic forms “*Union, United*” to make his argument being acceptable. The second one is the *symbolization of unity* which involves binding the ideas of the people to face the segregation.

Khalid, to activate his persuasive strategy, employs another way to convince his audience about his beliefs. Khalid creates some important signs through rationalization on repeating the phrase “let us.” Khalid moves on to another ideological strategy of universalization in which he uses certain concepts held by all individuals in the society. That is obvious on saying, *You must apply the whole system, the whole matrix of Divine Laws*, as he uses universal concepts (prosperity, security, and happiness) which are shared by most strugglers. The essence of universalization is to identify a set of common values regarding the social status quo in his social background because these values form the basis for a dynamic action. Therefore, Khalid tries to be persuasive by combining universal concepts with the moral system such as, divine law. These concepts evoke strong feelings of sympathy

towards an entity which identify as the universal values.

In order to persuade his audience, Khalid explains that if one wants to be successful in facing challenges, he has to change the minds of the people and their behaviour. This would never happen by using oppression, but by using universal concepts that all people agree upon, and he details that on explaining how to depend on Allah to find help and protection. He explains that through his cognitive strategy of *quasilogical* persuasion which is based on the notion that the key to the persuasiveness of an argument is the logical sequence of ideas. That is strongly mentioned by using the logic historic facts of Badr Battle and supporting his argument by using some verses from Quran. He confirms his persuasive strategy of *pathos*. By repeating “*let us,*” he influences the audience emotionally by motivating the listeners to accept the proposed arguments.

When Khalid starts his speech with a historic reference, he deliberately attempts to pave the way to make the rest of his speech logical for his audience. Khalid also employs the presentational mode by using, emotions and the repetition through the utterance. That kind of persuasion is used to call on the audience’s emotions and to create their involvement in the experience, which can push them forward to be motivated. Modality is obviously employed to reveal Khalid’s power of certainty and ability. First, the use of “*must*” in his utterance “embodies certainty and power. He repeats such modal in paralleling structure as he presents his audience with the only key that could help in explaining the social situation. he employs the root modal of obligation to show the necessity of taking a specific action and to present a level of certainty to his audience. Modality reveals Khalid’s ideology of power as it expresses his attitude towards his message and his audience. Khalid shows that he is able to convey his view by manipulating certain modals and using them in various contexts. He does that by employing power modals which appear in the climaxes of his speech to voice a sense of hope, change and power. It also reveals a sense of certainty, determination, and a high degree of obligation to persuade his hearers.

Khalid applies the concept of emotions and he tried to make his speeches met the goals and illustrated his views. By repeating the words “*Allah and Muhammad,*” he uses the emotion by mentioning different concepts like love, hatred, fear, and also motivation or desires which gave rise to emotions. Both emotions and motives help Khalid to be persuasive by building his ideas on three principles: happiness, holiness, and love. Khalid also uses other psychological elements which are; identification, suggestion, and attention. He usually employs such techniques in his speeches by identifying his own argument, suggesting different visions and paying attention to specific elements.

5. Conclusions and Results

It is evident that communicative processes are at the core of religious sermons, and it plays a critical role in the religious preaching. The purpose of such communication is persuasion, at least to some extent. The aim is to bring hope, encourage the community to keep their faith, challenge to effect changes in persons and communities, and to convince listeners that a God they cannot see is with them.

Firstly; one important aspect of convincing his audience was that; Khalid shared a specific charisma that pushed both to play a role in earning trust, and in energizing and motivating their audience. He also succeeded in breaking down barriers by stressing common dreams and values, paying attention to shared history, and transcending traditional divisions of race, ethnicity, age, gender, religion and region. Khalid made the best use of the three strategies; recognition, remembering, and responding. By using recognition, they showed their realization of the circumstances they are facing. Both focused on cognitive strategy of remembrances as a way of refreshing their audience minds of the principles and values of their religion. He also activated the strategy of responsiveness by being aware about the surrounding issues they face in their society.

Secondly, Khalid showed himself as persuasive speaker, not only using the three traditional elements of persuasion (ethos, pathos and logos), but he also employed the quasi logical persuasion technique which was based on the logical structure of his speeches. He also used presentational persuasion which was based on making the argument strongly persistent in the audience’s consciousness by using repetition, paraphrasing, and metaphors. He also employed the third persuasive technique of analogical persuasion, based on comparison and evaluation. Khalid uses modality as it reveals a relative power status between the participants in the speech situation. In addition, modals have a significant role in exposing the ideology of the speaker and his degree of commitment to truth.

Thirdly, Khalid affirms the fact that Islamic history and historical change were closely associated. He also uses the sense of history’s rationality which was included both in his guarantees that achieving success in the struggle and expecting changes in the Islamic community can be very possible. In a nutshell, Khalid’s skillful maneuvering of linguistic and ideological techniques help him in achieving his goals and in controlling the minds of his audience.

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