



A Study of Persuasive Techniques in English and Arabic Religious Sermons: A Comparative Study

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The present paper addresses the issue of persuasive techniques used in both English and Arabic religious sermons. The study aims to identify the persuasive techniques adopted in the selected sermons from both languages showing how these techniques are really devoted to persuade the audience. Additionally, it tries to pinpoint the points of distinction concerning the persuasive techniques we have in the two elected sermons.

To achieve the aims above, it is hypothesized that both English and Arabic religious sermons witness the presence of persuasive techniques which appeal the audience's emotions and then make them alter their attitude or behaviour. Moreover, it is hypothesized that though most persuasive techniques in English sermon are similar to those we find in the Arabic one, some differences are available between the two. The two researchers intend to select Alwaely's sermon entitled (AL Jihad and Immigration) as a sample of the Arabic sermon and Tillich's sermon (You Are Accepted) as a sample for the English one. After examining the corpus, the researchers have found out that though most persuasive techniques are present in both sermons, still some points of difference are available between the two.

ملخص البحث

تشخص الدراسة الحالية تقنيات الإقناع المستخدمة في الخطب الدينية العربية و كذلك الانكليزية. وتهدف الدراسة الى تحديد تقنيات الإقناع الموجودة في الخطب المختارة من كلا اللغتين وتبين كيف ان تلك التقنيات قد كرسّت لتحقيق غاية إقناع الجمهور في وجهة نظر المتكلم (الخطيب). تحاول تلك الدراسة أن تبين نقاط الاختلاف في تلك التقنيات لكلا الخطبتين المختارتين. لتحقيق الأهداف المذكورة آنفاً، افترض الباحثان أن تقنيات الإقناع موجودة في كلا الخطبتين وتعمل على إنجاز مهمتهما في الإقناع من خلال مناشدتها لعواطف الجمهور من ثم تغيير وجهة نظرهم او سلوكهم. بالإضافة الى ذلك، فقد افترض الباحثان بان هناك بعض الاختلافات في تلك التقنيات بالرغم من تشابه معظمها في كلا الخطبتين. تم اختيار خطبة الشيخ احمد الوائلي (الجهاد و الهجرة) كنموذج للخطبة العربية و خطبة بول تلج (انتم مقبولون) كنموذج للخطبة الانكليزية. توصل الباحثان الى أن تقنيات الإقناع موجودة في كلا الخطبتين وقد استخدمت تماماً لإقناع الجمهور وجعلهم يوافقون الخطيب بفكرته وتوجد بعض الاختلافات بينهما بالرغم من تشابه معظم التقنيات المستخدمة في الخطبتين.

Introduction

Persuasion is an art and science as well which has a close connection with human daily life .It is an intellectual and formal process that is used by someone to influence another. Someone may stir the audience by using certain words and gestures as a way of changing an attitude or concept and consequently changing a behaviour .To Mortensen(2004:7), Persuasion is "a process that aims to change or reform attitudes, beliefs, opinions, or behaviours towards a predetermined outcome through voluntary compliance."

The English term "persuasion" is borrowed from Latin term "persuadere" which is blend from the prefix "per" meaning "completion" plus the base "suadere" meaning to "advise" or "urge" (Sandell, 1977 :78). Brembeck and Howell(1976:24) add that the term "persuasion" in old English refers to an attempt to convince rather than convince .

The process of persuasion is applied in situations where a behaviour is modified by symbolic transactions (messages) that appeal to audience' s emotions and reasons . The process of persuasion is a kind of communication and as in all communication , there is a

source (a persuader) , a message delivered through symbols, a media of communication, and the target (audience). The source has an aim, and is trying to affect the audience (target). To achieve persuasion in any argumentative discussion, the speaker has to use a persuasive style including speech acts, many different stylistic markers on all levels of expression (syntax, morphology, phonology, and semantics) and variety of techniques as well.

The present paper is a stylistic and comparative study of the persuasive techniques occurred in English and Arabic religious sermons. The two researchers intend to select Alwaely's sermon entitled (Al Jihad and Immigration) as a sample of the Arabic sermon and Tillich's sermon (You Are Accepted) as a sample for the English one. Those religious speakers are chosen specifically as they are regarded as among the best prominent and effective religious speakers who belong to the twentieth century. Additionally, their well-known religious publications and sermons have their own vital impact on the people's mind who are related to two different religions .i.e the Islamic and the Christianity respectively.

The study aims to achieve the following :

1-Identifying the kinds of techniques used in both sermons.

2- Pointing out the aspects the selected sermons are similar or different in.

To achieve the aims above, it is hypothesized that persuasive techniques are present in English and Arabic religious sermons as well and they are devoted to appeal the audiences' emotions and make them change their attitudes or behaviour .Moreover, it is hypothesized that though most persuasive techniques occurred in English sermon are similar to those used in the Arabic sermons ,still some differences exist between the two. The paper is limited to investigate the persuasive techniques in two elected religious sermons from different languages (English and Arabic) and the stylistic persuasive markers are ignored and left for a further study.

1- Literature Review

The topic of persuasion has been tackled by a number of linguists among them is Sandell (1977) who has attempted to investigate the style of persuasion. In his book *Linguistic Style and Persuasion*, he shows that there are many different stylistic markers of persuasive style that can occur at all levels of expression: syntax, morphology, phonology and semantics .In addition to these persuasive markers, some techniques are used to achieve the persuasion.

Reardon (1982: 25) believes that persuasion is, in all cases, "the activity of demonstrating and attempting to change the behaviour of at least one person through symbolic interaction". Similarly, Cegala (1987:13) and Johnstone (1994:7) argue that persuasion refers to the transmitted symbolic act that modifies , or strengthens the beliefs, opinions, values, attitudes and behaviours of oneself or others.

Arabic linguists such as Al- Hussaini (2007 :498), Al- Hmidan (2005:242), and Al= Mussawi (2008 :117) , among many other Arabic linguists , confirm the existence of persuasion by mentioning that generally Arabic discourse has its own persuasive techniques which are with slight differences similar to that used in the English discourse .Further , those techniques in both kinds of discourse (English and Arabic) perform the same function of persuading the reader/ audience ,making them share the speaker 's point of view , and sometimes altering their behaviour or action.

Breuer and Napthine (2005) and Huggard et al. (2006) have dealt with the techniques of persuasion. Similarly, Cildini (2007:25-26) and Walton (2007:24) have recognized some techniques that help in achieving persuasion. Additionally, several studies such as the one conducted by Zainab et al. (2015) have dealt with persuasive markers on three levels of language in English and Arabic religious discourse. Accordingly, the significance of this study lies in its limitation to persuasive techniques and comparing them in similar discourse (religious) that belongs to two completely different languages.

2- Techniques of Persuasion

2-1 Breuer and Napthine's Techniques

Many different techniques are used to persuade people and make them share the speakers' view point and such techniques are regarded as basic to social influence. Breuer and Napthine (2005:5-6) mention seven persuasive techniques that can be listed as follows:

2.1.1 Action

The speaker usually prompts the listeners/audience to take an action and this is often done by creating a sense of urgency by the use of phrases such as (now, today, immediately). Consider this line from Tillich's sermon "You Are Accepted":

"look for these words 'sin' and 'grace' in your souls".

2.1.2 Adjective

In this technique, the speaker tends to describe a noun with adjectives which are highly connected to that noun. Describing, for example, the noun 'house' with the two adjectives 'red and bright'

*The bright red house

2.1.3 Inclusive and Exclusive Language

Inclusive language is represented by using words like (we, our and us) to create the impression that the speaker/ writer and the audience/ reader are on the same side of the issue and to make the reader or the audience think that the speaker/ writer is talking only to them. Exclusive language, on the other hand, is shown by the use of "them" which is used to persuade by including the reader/ audience. For instance:

‘People like you and me don’t want to see this happen’

2.1. 4 Rhetorical questions

Rhetorical questions are questions that do not require an answer and are asked for effect only. The answer in such questions is obvious and they are often used to lead the audience or the reader to a particular conclusion. Look at this question:

“Do we want our children growing up in a world where they are threatened with violence on every street corner?”

2.1.5 Alliteration and Assonance

To add emphasis to the main and important points in an argument, initial consonant sounds (alliteration) or vowel sounds (assonance) are often repeated.

e.g. “Sydney’s slippery slide”

e.g. Elite meet and greet.

2.1. 6 Generalisation

A general statement is used by the speaker in this technique and this statement claims that whatever is being asserted is true for most people or majority because it is true in one or some cases. Consider the following sentence that illustrates this technique:

“Australian children see too much violence on television”.

This sentence implies that this is true for most or all children; no statistics from reputable research are announced to make such claim be acceptable.

2.1.7 Connotations (Associations)

Persuasive speakers often tend to choose their words carefully and this is achieved by selecting the emotional meanings associated with the word. For instance, the words “kill” and “slaughter” both mean the same thing, but the word “slaughter” has a different connotations to kill since it causes the audience to imagine that the act was particularly horrific (Ibid).

2.2 Huggard et al Techniques.

Huggard et al.(2006:28-33) add new techniques that are mentioned below:

2.2.1 Anecdote

This technique refers to the use of a short account or story of an entertaining or interesting incident/episode. Such technique usually makes the reader/ listener be sympathetic and receptive to the point. It can set up a character, then position the reader/ the listener to either accept or reject that individual character.

2.2.2 Attacks/ Praise

The writer/ the reader sometimes attacks or praises a particular idea. This technique is actually an assertion of the writer's/ speaker's view point. For instance, attacking the person who is unreliable, dishonest, unqualified etc.

2.2.3 Exaggeration

The speaker in this technique states the case too strongly; such exaggeration is used to mock opposing opinions, as a shock tactic technique, or an appeal for fears.

E, g "Every weekend, the city is overrun by beggars.

2.2.4 Graphs and Diagrams

Sometimes, diagrams or graphs are used to achieve persuasion. They aim to explain and interpret information. Such figures and statistics make the argument more readily accessible and look scientific and reliable.

2.2.5 Irony

A speaker may state ironic situations where the intended or the implied meaning is different, often the opposite, from the literal meaning. For instance, one says "Oh great ! I've just lost my wallet with everything in it". Such powerful device is used for scorning or sending up others. A clever device like this is effective for humiliating opponents and make the point distinctive; it engages the listener through tone, choice of words and even by creating a ridiculous situation.

2.2.6 Language Style

The kind of language used to suit the speaker's purpose is one of the techniques used to fulfil persuasion in argumentation. It may be formal, informal, poetic, literary, informative, plain, ornate, reasoned and so on.

2.2.7 Metaphor

Using images in any argument refers to the comparisons that of one thing in terms of another. The speaker, then, can reinforce a point without mere

repetition; the used image creates interest and engages the listener.

2.2.8 Repetition

The speaker can reinforce an argument by repeating letters, words, phrases and sentences. Such device is helpful as it lets the speaker's point of view stays in the audience's mind. For instance:

"Now is the time to make real the promises of democracy. Now is the time to raise from the dark".

2.2.9 Reason and Logic

Argument may be developed step by step through using reasonable and logical justifications. In doing so, the speaker will support each main point and appeal the listener's mind rather than emotions.

2.2.10 Simile (Analogy)

Analogy is a form of reasoning where the speaker compares one thing with another so as to make a particular point or issue be clearer. This is achieved by using 'like' or 'as ...as'. For example, when one says "John run like a rabbit" or "school is like a prison". This literary device may delight or shock the listener and the aptness of the comparison used can make a specific point clearer and more comprehensive.

2.2.11 Evidence / Proof

It refers to presenting an evidence of what other people think as a reason for accepting a proposition or going along with the recommended course of action. Examples of this technique are using statistics, expert opinions, research findings, and anecdotal evidence.

3-Data Collection and Analysis

In argumentative discussions, especially the religious ones, the speaker tends to argue for a certain view and s/ he will try to convey the intended meaning in a rather dialectical frame work. Thus, religious speech is viewed as a phenomenon of verbal communication which has an aim of resolving a dispute. In order to achieve the aim behind such religious speeches, the speakers tend to use a variety of techniques that help to manipulate the listener's attitudes towards their argumentation and finally alter even their behaviour.

Through adapting an eclectic model from Breuer and Naphthine (2008) and Huggard et al.(2006), the two selected religious sermons from each language are examined. The two researchers intend to use rather eclectic model as it is noticed



that those techniques used in the chosen religious sermons outnumber those presented by the first writer.

After examining Alwaely's sermon 'AL jihad and immigration' and Tillich's 'You Are Accepted', the two researchers have identified the following persuasive techniques :

3.1 Action

As it has been mentioned before, the speaker, in this technique asks the audience to perform an act. An example of this technique is shown in Tillich's sermon when the speaker asks the audience to look down into themselves in order to discover the struggle between separation and reunion. In doing so, he aims to let everybody look for 'grace' and 'sin' deeply in their souls. Likewise, Alwaely asks the audience to prepare themselves and be ready for uphill exam represented by homeland departure (immigration). Requesting the audience to achieve a task pointed out by the speakers' use of different speech acts actually expresses how those speakers are sure of their own credibility and finally how those concepts are necessary to be turned into reality (fulfilling an action).

3.2 Evidence

Tillich's sermon starts with a well-known statement said by a Christian man "moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound".

Starting his sermon with these two sentences, Tillich adds weight to his point of view as well as supporting his belief that 'grace' is much more abundant than 'sin'. Further, using such social proof makes the audience see him as a knowledgeable person and the argument seem more logical and reliable. In the Arabic sermon, such device is widely used to the extent that in each paragraph relatively the presence of a specific evidence is shown. Alwaely tends to mention some poetic lines of famous poets; some holy verses from the Holy Quran are also used to confirm his point of view. Supporting his concepts with such strongly grounded proofs reflects how a reliable and sophisticated man he is. Consider the following poetic lines written by Alkaabi and a holy verse from the Holy Quran.

شعر الكعبي :

بمقامك التحديد و التعديدا
تهدي اليك بوارق و روعودا

مناقب لك دون احمد جاوزت
فعلى الفراش بيت ليك و العدى

Virtues, you have gained next to Ahmed`s in rank

One, on replacing the prophet in bed while enemies thundering and apt to kill.

(Translated by Hussein Naser Jabr)

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

و اذا يمكر بك الذين كفرو ليثبتوك او يقتلوك او يخرجوك و يمكرون و يمكر الله و الله خير الماكرين"
الانفال 31 - صدق الله العظيم

In the name of Allah, the Gracious, the Merciful

“And remember the time when the disbelievers plotted against thee that they might imprison thee or kill thee or expel thee. And they planned and Allah also planned, and Allah is the Best of planners”

(Translated by Maulawi Sher Ali)

3.3 Rhetorical Question

Both English and Arabic sermons witness the presence of rhetorical questions as in the examples below:

1- Have the men in our time still a feeling of the meaning of sin?

٢- هل الذي قتل سيد شباب اهل الجنة يبقى مسلما؟

Did the one who killed the master of youths in paradise remain Muslim?

As it is noticed, rhetorical question is a powerful device used by both Tillich and Alwaely to manipulate the audience to agree. By doing so, the audience are engaged and encouraged to consider the speaker's idea and to accept his answer. The questions above are merely used to attract the listeners' attention. In other words, such questions put the audience in a situation that the one who disagrees is a foolish person.

3.4 Adjective

Several adjectives are mentioned in both sermons to describe specific nouns which carry the core of the speaker's message. For instance, Tillich uses



the adjective 'mysterious' to describe the noun 'facts' in the sentence "sin and grace are impossible to be described or replaced by other terms. This fact is mysterious". Here, the speaker asserts directly the impossibility of substituting these words 'sin' and 'grace' with others and how all attempts for that substitution have failed. Alwaely, on the other hand, uses adjectives like 'ignorant', 'honest', and 'uphill' to describe the nouns 'society, area, and test' respectively. He is, in fact, so careful in his choice of these adjectives as they deeply reflect how, for instance, the area where the Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) was born, is so pure; how the society before Islam is ignorant; and how this test of immigration is as uphill as a woman who gives birth.

3.5 Metaphor

Both Tillich and Alwaely use some artistic images to paint pictures for some words or concepts and make their points be visual. Through comparison and appealing to the audience's emotions and feelings, these images show how the speakers are sophisticated and well educated.

Tillich uses the image of a sudden flash of lightening to explain what 'separation' means. Concerning Arabic sermon, Alwaely mentions very beautiful image of humans who plant a plant in a specific area without getting any product (fruit) and accordingly, they tend to plant it in a better soil. Through this image, Alwaely clarifies the main reason behind people's immigration which is either to apply successfully an idea (experiment) or to achieve a task that is already unfulfilled in a previous attempt and area.

3.6 Language Style

In his sermon "You Are Accepted" Tillich uses a formal style that creates an impression of authority and impresses the audience with information and knowledge. He continues in using the same style till the end and this reflects the importance of his topic and his authority as well. Speaking of the Arabic sermon, Alwaely, in most of his sermons including "Al jihad and Immigration", appeals to the listeners' emotions and feelings by electing a rather variable style which is reasonable, informative, and finally colloquial. Such variability in language style distinguishes the Arabic sermon from the English one which is characterized by the tendency of using a specific style in the whole sermon. This, in its turn, reveals a good image of the Arabic religious speaker who

motivates the audience's inner feelings by adopting a rather musical and ornate movement from one style to another.

3.7 Alliteration

The phonetic English device 'alliteration' is noticed in Tillich sermon. That is, the same consonant sound is repeated in words like (be better than before) and (confidence and courage). Such repetition of consonant sounds adds emphasis to the major points and makes them more memorable. The repetition of /k/ sound, for instance, emphasises how grace is able to change guilt into courage and confidence. On the contrary, the Arabic sermon witnesses the absence of such device 'alliteration' and 'Al-Sajaa' is used as a substitute.

Al-Sajaa refers to the repetition of the final consonant sound. Al-Waely, for instance, states

تركت السنام و قد اعذق و اليسر و قد اغدق

As in English sermon, the repetition of /k/ sound at the end of these words ((اعذق and (اغدق) helps in confirming a certain view point such as how the situation in Mecca after the Prophet's immigration to Al-Madina is bad. Thus, both speakers, Tillich and Alwaely, have used phonetic repetition to emphasise a specific issue but the difference between them lies in choosing the position of the repeated sound. This of course reflects another point of difference between English and Arabic language which may be due to the different nature that each language has.

3.8 Generalization

Tillich as well as Alwaely use general statements that include a group of people to confirm another idea and show how their point of view can be acceptable not only to the existing listeners but also to all people in the world. For instance, Tillich states a statement like "separation reaches beyond our graves into all the succeeding generations". Through this sentence, Tillich indirectly informs the audience that his concept about separation will last to all succeeding generations as 'separation' refers to the existence of human beings. Alwaely, on the other hand, mentions general statements such as "الانسان بتركه عبادة التصنيم لا ينتقل للتوحيد" (the man who leaves the worship of statues does not move to monotheism). Alwaely intends to confirm that what is important for all human beings is not to leave the worship of statues but to get rid of those statue-worshipping ideas hidden inside our soul.

3.9 Repetition

Generally, repetition of words, phrases, and sentences reinforces the speaker's argument and ensure that the point of view being made stays in the audience's mind. Tillich repeats words like 'sin' and 'grace' 'separation and life' relatively in each paragraph of his sermon in order to give an emphasis and prominence to his idea and make the listeners remember the point conveyed in his speech. The same can be said about Alwaely's sermon where words like 'islam', 'statue', and 'the right' are mentioned more than once to ensure Alwaely's viewpoints which are through such device are memorable and distinguished in the listeners' mind.

3.10 Reason and Logic

In addition to the two distinctions between English and Arabic sermons mentioned earlier, one can add a further one. Alwaely intends deliberately to provide the audience with logical and reasonable justifications that lie behind achieving specific and important acts mentioned in his arguments. In doing so, he lets the audience determine, accept, and then adopt his point of view logically without asking them directly to do that. Alwaely, for example, mentions reasonable justifications for Imam Al-Hussein's immigration from Al-Medina to Iraq. Tillich, on the other hand, tends to use 'if clause' for guiding his audience to a determined conclusion. For instance, he states that (if such responses were to occur among us, we could say that we have known grace). This means that humans know 'grace' just when they realise the existence of grace deeply inside their souls. In doing so, Tillich informs his audience directly the result of their performing a specific and important act such as looking deeply in their souls to find where grace is.

3.11 Inclusive and Exclusive Language

Inclusive language represented by the use of the pronouns (we, us, and our) and the exclusive one shown by the pronoun (them) are present in both religious sermons. Consider the following examples taken from the two sermons :-

1- "There are few words more strange to most of us than sin"

٢- (نحن بهذا نكون قد تجردنا من صفات الاسلام

(Thus, we are hereby left without Islamic qualities).

3.12 Attacks

The speakers in religious sermons specially tend to attack others' point of view to prove and assure their own thoughts. Alwaely, for example, attacks directly and angrily the historians' viewpoint concerning insulting Yazeed. According to those historians, insulting Yazeed who is the killer of Imam Al-Hussain (peace be upon him) must be avoided as insulting Muslims is forbidden in Islam. Likewise, Tillich rejects and attacks the concept of relating 'grace' closely to 'forgiveness'. He states that "grace is the willingness of the divine king and farther over and again the foolishness and weakness of his subjects and children". His attack in fact is a forceful assertion of how deeply he refuses this close connection of grace with forgiveness .

3.13 Simile

The literary device 'simile' is used by Tillich to argue that 'sin' is as difficult to be described as 'grace'. Such rhetorical device clarifies and enhances the fact that nobody is able to describe those complex terms 'sin' and 'grace'. Similarly, Alwaely uses such a device (simile) to point out that departure from homeland is like the soul leaving our body. He actually intends deliberately to reveal a fact through this picture that immigration means death to the immigrants as homeland represents life to everybody where one can find peace, kindness, and safety.

3.14 Anecdote

Telling a short story that conveys a message (antecedent technique) is a feature of just the Arabic sermon. Alwaely prefers to support his ideas by supplying the audience with interesting and beneficial short stories as well. He, for instance, informs the listeners about Imam Ali's (peace be upon him) sacrifice and courage by telling them how he has slept in the Prophet's bed in order to deceive his relatives and let them think that the Prophet is still there. More than one story is mentioned by Alwaely and each one has its own useful message that leads the audience to believe in a specific concept or point of view. On the contrary, the English sermon lacks such useful device in appealing to the audience's emotions, persuading them, and finally guiding them to change their attitudes or point of view. Using such device actually reflects the glorification and richness of Arabic language which is the language of poetry and that of the Holy Quran.



Conclusion

Throughout the analysis of the corpus, the following findings are obtained:-

1- Both English as well as Arabic religious sermons witness the presence of most persuasive techniques that help in evoking the audiences' emotions and sharing the speaker's point of view or concepts.

2- Although most persuasive techniques in English sermons are similar to those available in the Arabic one, still some differences are noticed between the two. First, the English sermon lacks the Anecdote technique which is one of the most beneficial techniques in fulfilling persuasion. Second, while alliteration is used in English sermon, Al-Sajaa is abundantly used as a characteristic of the Arabic one, and this reflects how English language differs in its nature from the Arabic one. Third, the Arabic religious speakers 'Alwaely intends deliberately to adopt a rather variable style in his sermon whereas Tillich does his best to stick to the same style in his sermon 'You Are Accepted'. Such result shows Alwaely's creative ability represented through this nice, accurate, quick, and rhythmic movement from one style to another.



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