



Research Paper

Terrorist Representation in Political Discourse: A Hallidyan Approach

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Abstract	Manuscript Information
<p>The topic of Terrorism has gained interest among researchers since the terrorist attacks of 9/11. The media, politicians, and scholars spoke volumes about terrorism, wherein a significant amount of debate is directed toward Muslims and Islam. This study investigates the common transitivity processes employed by Trump to depict terrorists and terrorism in his popular announcement of the killing of Baghdadi. By employing Halliday’s six process types of verbs, this analysis also reveals how the terrorists are represented in the announcements. The study finds that terrorists are represented as powerless, though they have been attributed negative traits. They can no longer do harm; when confronted, they whimper, cry, and scream.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ISSN No: 2583-7397 ▪ Received: 29-04-2024 ▪ Accepted: 28-05-2024 ▪ Published: 05-06-2024 ▪ IJCRM:3(3); 2024: 67-70 ▪ ©2024, All Rights Reserved ▪ Plagiarism Checked: Yes ▪ Peer Review Process: Yes
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KEYWORDS: Terrorism, Political discourse, Transitivity selections, Halliday

1. INTRODUCTION

Political discourse is “the way a certain situation is talked and written about in the political field” (van Meeteren & van Oostendorp, 2018, p. 528) ^[9]. The discourse on terrorism has been widely discussed, especially in the media. Bartolucci (2019) ^[2] investigates Trump’s discourse on terrorism during the first year of his presidency. He found that Trump uses very simple language with a small working vocabulary, many empty adjectives, an abundance of adverbs, and a simple syntax. That is why he terms it as “unpresidential” discourse. Simple language is used to reach the widest possible audience and convey an idea of authenticity. ‘Trump’s discourse is a discourse

of action in which verbs (e.g., must) are used to express strong beliefs and obligations. Trump uses authoritarian language to reassert his strong leadership in times of crisis (Bartolucci, 2019, p. 143) ^[2]. Bartolucci (2014) ^[3] employs CDA to investigate the governmental discourse on terrorism and finds out that the government links counter-terrorism with its domestic agenda. For example, in Morocco, terrorism is linked with the danger of Islamists, and the narrative against terrorism is used to give support to the monarchy there and to strengthen national unity. Therefore, it is crucial to present a better understanding of terrorism discourses since ‘terrorism is portrayed by politicians as the biggest threat of our time’ (Archetti, 2004, p. 1301) ^[1].

According to Bartolucci (2014) [3], ‘the terrorism discourse (re)framed in the aftermath of the 2001 events can be approached as an “Othering discourse” in which “our” positive attributes are contrasted with the negativity of “theirs” (p. 4). Therefore, this paper aims to expose how terrorists are represented by applying Transitivity Analysis (Halliday, 2004) [7]. The data selected for the study is an oral announcement made by Trump on the occasion of the killing of Baghdadi. The research questions for the study are as follows:

1. What are the transitivity processes that are used to depict terrorists?
2. How are terrorists represented, and are they represented as powerful or powerless?

2. Theoretical background: Transitivity theory

Transitivity is a system that realizes the ideational meaning and shows how phenomena in the real world are linguistically represented. ‘Transitivity tells whether agency, causality, and responsibility are made overt in a text’ (Idrus, Nor & Ismail,

2014, p.181) [8]. The system of Transitivity can show how the relation of power (actor and goal) is reflected in discourse to fulfill ideological, social, and cultural needs. This system has three components: verb processes, the participants involved in the process, and the circumstances. The verb processes refer to the kind of event or state being described. The verbal group realizes the process. The participants refer to the doers of the action, the persons who are acted upon, and the entities involved in the process, such as actor, sayer, sensor, or goal. ‘Participants are inherent in the process: every experiential type of clause has at least one participant, and certain types have up to three participants’ (Halliday, 2004, p.175, emphasis in the original) [7]. The circumstances reveal the temporal, spatial, and manner qualities in which the clause is expressed. Adverbial groups or prepositional phrases realize the circumstances. The circumstances specify when, how, where, and why the process was carried out. Table 1 gives a layout of the processes, the participants, and sample examples.

Table 1: Process types, their meaning, and key participants

Process type	Category meaning	Major participants	Sample verbs	Additional participants
Material	Doing	Actor, goal	kick, run, paint, repair, send, burn	Recipient, client, scope, initiator, attribute, place role
	happening	Actor, affected	appear, emerge; occur, happen, take place	
Behavioral	Behaving	Behaver (conscious)	gossip, chat, watch, ponder, listen,	behavior
Mental	perception	Sensor (conscious), Phenomena	see, hear, see, hear, notice, feel, taste, smell.	behavior
	affection	Sensor (conscious), Phenomena	like, fear; like, love, admire, miss,	
	Cognition	Sensor (conscious), Phenomena	think, believe, think, believe, know, doubt,	
	Desiderative	Sensor (conscious), Phenomena	want, need, intend, desire, hope, wish, <i>earn for; intend, plan; decide, resolve, determine;</i>	
Verbal	Saying	Sayer, Target/recipient	say, tell, warn, argue, ask, say, tell, pledge, express, address	receiver, verbiage,
Relational	Attributive	Carrier, attribute	to be, linking verbs: become, look, last	Attribute, beneficiary, assigner
	Identifying	Token, value	to be, equal, signify, define	
	possessive	Possessor-Possessed	have, has, possess, own	
Existential	Existing	Existent		

(Halliday, 1994, p. 143; Halliday, 2014) [6, 7]

3. METHODOLOGY

The present study critically analyses Trump’s discourse on terrorism to see how Terrorists are constructed as powerless or powerful. To select the relevant discourse on terrorism, the Presidential announcement on the killing of Baghdadi was taken as a topic of analysis. The data used for the research is taken from: <https://www.npr.org/2019/10/27/773842999/read-trump-statement-on-baghdadis-death>

on March 8, 2021. The data is an essentially oral announcement made by Trump on the occasion of the killing of Baghdadi. Having collected the data from the given website, we have conducted a comprehensive analysis of each clause according to the Transitivity analysis given by Halliday. The text has been divided into numbered clauses, and we have identified the process types, the participants, and the circumstances. We

particularly focused on the terrorists as participants to identify whether they are actors, goals, sensors, attributes, or behaviors.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Terrorists as Actors in Material Process

The analysis shows that terrorists are represented as actors and goals. The announcement consists of many material processes that construe events (happenings) and actions (doings). Material processes ‘express the notion that some entity ‘does’ something — which may be ‘to’ some other entity’ (Halliday, 2004, p. 181) [7]. An actor is the one who does things or makes things happen. The actors in the announcements are he (eight times), these savage monsters, Baghdadi and the losers, and they (two times). This is illustrated in (1-12).

1. He died after running into a dead-end tunnel.
2. He reached the end of the tunnel.

3. He died in a vicious and violent way, as a coward, running and crying manner.
4. He will never again harm another innocent man, woman, or child.
5. He died like a dog.
6. He died like a coward.
7. He ignited his vest.
8. He had dragged three of his young children with him.
9. They will not escape the final judgment of God.
10. They killed many, many people.
11. These savage monsters will not escape their fate.
12. Baghdadi and the losers who worked for him.

The clauses above show that though Baghdadi is represented eight times as an actor, he is powerless and in no position to construe action. Most noticeably, when Baghdadi is represented as powerful, he harms himself and his children, as in 'he ignited his vest' and 'he had dragged three of his children.' This may implicate that terrorism will hit the terrorist in the end. Similarly, terrorists are powerless when they are referred to in plural form as in 'they' in (9), 'these savage monsters' in (11), and 'Baghdadi and the losers' in (12).

4.2 Terrorists as goals in Material processes

The goal is the entity that is impacted on or to which the impact is extended. There are two forms of goals: operative and receptive (Halliday, 2004, p. 181-182) [7]. The operative goal takes place in active clauses and the receptive goal in passive clauses. Analysis shows that there are seven operating goals representing individual or collective terrorists, as seen in.

13. The United States brought the world's number one terrorist leader to justice.
14. The United States has been searching for Baghdadi for many years.
15. Our dogs chased him down.
16. We recently killed Hamza bin Laden, the very violent son of Osama bin Laden.
17. We will completely destroy them.
18. We obliterated his caliphate, 100 percent, in March of this year.
19. We will continue to pursue the remaining ISIS terrorists to their brutal end.

There are only three receptive goals, as shown in (20-22).

20. while a large number of Baghdadi's fighters and companions were killed with him.
21. His body was mutilated by the blast.
22. A brutal killer, one who has caused so much hardship and death, has violently been eliminated.

4.3 Terrorists as carriers in an attributive relational process

There are two types of relational clauses: attributive and identifying. Relational processes construe outer experience and the inner experience as 'being.' The attributive relational clause is mostly realized by the verb 'be' and its variants, and it has two participants: the carrier and the attribute. The identifying

relational clauses serve to identify its participants, which are tokens and value. Attributive relational has three types: (a) (1) intensive 'x is a' such as 'Jack is wise,' (b) possessive 'x has a' such as 'Jack has a car,' and (c) circumstantial 'x is at a' as in 'Jack is in the garden.' It serves to characterize. Upon closer scrutiny of the data, it was found that the text is replete with attributive relational clauses. The most noticeable carriers are 'Baghdadi/_Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi,' 'he' (3 times), 'they' (5 times), and the pronoun 'it' 'referring to Baghdadi.

23. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi is dead.
24. Baghdadi was vicious and violent.
25. He was the leader of ISIS, the most ruthless and violent terror organization.
26. He was a sick and depraved man.
27. He has gone.
28. It was him.
29. They were very frightened puppies.
30. They were hardcore killers.
31. They were led to certain death.
32. They are, likewise, in our sights.
33. They had no idea what they were getting into.

The examples in (23-27) intensively characterize Baghdadi as being 'dead, vicious and violent, leader of ISIS, a sick and depraved man, and gone,' respectively. Similarly, terrorists are characterized as 'very frightened puppies' and 'hardcore killers' in (29-30). The examples in (32) and (33) are instances of circumstantial and possessive attributive clauses. However, there is only one relational identifying clause as given in (34), wherein 'Baghdadi' is the token and 'the only ones remaining' is the value.

34. The only ones remaining were Baghdadi in the tunnel

4.4 Terrorists as sayer/sensor/ behavior

Verbal clauses are clauses of saying. They 'allow the reporter to attribute information to sources', and 'they contribute to the creation of narrative by making it possible to set up dialogic passages' (Halliday, 2004, p. 252) [7]. The main participant is the sayer. Terrorist is represented only one time as sayer as shown in (35). In this case, 'Hamza bin Laden' is the sayer.

35. Hamza bin Laden, the very violent son of Osama bin Laden who, was saying very bad things about people, about our country, about the world.

Similarly, the terrorist is represented as a sensor only once. 'The thug' is the sensor in the mental clause in (36).

36. The thug who tried so hard to intimidate others spent his last moments in utter fear, in total panic and dread, terrified of the American forces bearing down on him.

Besides, 'he' and 'terrorists' are behaviors in the behavioral processes (37, 38).

37. He [...] whimpering and crying and screaming all the way.
38. Terrorists who oppress and murder innocent people should never sleep soundly.

5. CONCLUSION

This study set out to explore the representation of terrorists in the political discourse of Donald Trump, focusing specifically on his announcement regarding the killing of Baghdadi. The study used Halliday's Transitivity Analysis to examine the different types of processes through which terrorists are depicted in this speech. The findings highlight how language is used strategically to construct the image of terrorists and justify political actions. The analysis reveals that terrorists are predominantly portrayed through material processes. These processes highlight actions and events, with terrorists frequently depicted as both actors and goals. As actors, they are often shown attempting futile actions, such as trying to escape or harm themselves, underscoring their ultimate helplessness and failure. This representation of terrorists as powerless actors serves to diminish their threat and justify the actions taken against them.

In addition to material processes, relational processes play a crucial role in shaping the perception of terrorists. These processes assign negative attributes to terrorists, labeling them as "vicious," "violent," "sick," and "depraved." Such attributes reinforce the negative image of terrorists, presenting them as inherently evil and morally corrupt. This negative characterization aligns with the broader political narrative that seeks to justify their eradication by portraying them as a threat to societal values and security. Verbal, mental, and behavioral processes, while less frequent, also contribute to the overall depiction of terrorists. When terrorists are represented as sayers or sensors, it is usually to highlight their threats and the fear they instill. These instances are used to emphasize the psychological impact of terrorism, portraying terrorists as cowardly and fearful. This depiction further diminishes their perceived power and humanizes their weaknesses, reinforcing their negative portrayal. The consistent pattern that emerges from this analysis is the construction of terrorists as both powerless and inherently negative. This dual portrayal serves a strategic purpose in political discourse. By depicting terrorists as capable of harm but ultimately powerless and morally corrupt, the discourse justifies aggressive counter-terrorism measures. This representation reassures the public of the necessity and righteousness of these measures, framing them as essential for maintaining national and international peace.

The implications of this study extend beyond the specific context of Trump's announcement. It illustrates the powerful role of language in shaping public perception and policy responses to terrorism. By using transitivity processes to construct a particular image of terrorists, political discourse can influence how threats are perceived and how counter-terrorism strategies are justified. This study underscores the importance of critically examining political language to understand the underlying messages and implications for policy and public opinion.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that in Trump's announcement, terrorists are depicted through the strategic use of transitivity processes that highlight their negative traits and powerless states. They are constructed as threats to others and their own kin, emphasizing their destructiveness and moral depravity. This representation aligns with the broader political

narrative that seeks to justify strong counter-terrorism actions and reinforce the moral high ground of the United States. By illustrating the strategic use of language in political discourse, this study contributes to our understanding of the role of linguistic analysis in revealing the mechanisms through which political messages are crafted and conveyed.

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