

RHETORICAL STYLES IN THE RELIGIOUS SPEECH ON YOUTUBE

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to identify and analyse the categories of rhetoric and rhetorical styles used in religious speech in YouTube videos. The research method consists in qualitative content analysis based on the modern rhetoric theory developed by Enos and Brown (1993). The findings show that religious speech on YouTube can be divided into six rhetorical categories: argumentation, disclosure, persuasion, descriptions, narrative and description. In addition, the study shows that the main rhetorical styles are tricolon, ellipsis, sarcasm, balance, hyperbole, alliteration, anaphora, repetition and rhetorical questions. Overall, it can be concluded that the religious speakers in this study skilfully employ a wide range of rhetorical categories and vary their rhetorical style in order to attract the highest possible number of viewers.

Keywords: *Rhetorical styles, rhetorical categories, religious speech, YouTube.*

INTRODUCTION

Rhetoric is one of the branches of knowledge that focuses on verbal activities and speaking (Norida & Zulkifli, 2012). According to Aristotle, rhetoric is the art of persuasion and argumentation through speech and utterance (Lim, 2007; Raja Ariffin, 2007). Sonja claims (2004:4) that rhetoric pertains to “how people use symbol to communicate.” Speech, essays, conversations, poetry, novels, comics, television programmes, films, aesthetic expressions, architecture, drama, music, dance, advertisements, furniture, vehicles and clothes are examples of different discourses that can be embedded with rhetoric. Rhetoric also exists in religious speech. Even though religious speech is generally considered boring and is less preferred by the youth (Fandi, 2013), religious speeches on YouTube by popular speakers such as Ustaz Azhar Idrus, Ustaz Kazim Elias and Ustaz Don Daniyal have attracted one million audiences (Themalaymailonline, 2015). In order to get that kind of attention, religious speakers need to have high rhetorical skills. The aims of this study are to identify and analyse various categories of rhetoric and rhetorical style in six religious speeches on YouTube.

Note that the study is part of a growing trend to analyse religious discourse more systematically and in greater depth. Following Parks and Tracy (2015:3), “discourses of religion are forms of social interaction in which a connection to religion is foregrounded. This can be because the setting or particular features of the social interaction has a distinctively religious character.” The connection to religion is, of course, quite explicit in the YouTube speeches. As a form of online social interaction, these videos play a significant role in shaping contemporary religious beliefs and practices.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Past scholarship shows that rhetoric or the art of persuasion has many benefits. Zoriati binti Osman (2005), for example, found that persuasion skills enable political speech to be more effective and attractive. Other studies focus on how these positive effects are achieved. Raudah Hj. Siren et al.'s (2012) work reveals that Tuan guru Nik Abdul Aziz (a famous Malay political and religious leader) employs *Uslub Bil Hikmah* ("politeness and wisdom in giving advice"), namely encouragement (gentle advice) and warning. A second rhetorical style used by this Muslim leader is *Uslub Bil Maw 'Al-Hasanah* ("rational rhetoric"), which are figurative expressions and direct expressions. Another important rhetorical style in Nik Abdul Aziz's speech is *Uslub Bil Mujadalah Hiya Ahsan*. This category of rhetoric can be further divided into the following five categories: rational expressions, satirical expressions, emotive expressions, eulogy expressions and pathos expressions. Norida Berhan and Zulkifley Hamid (2012) found that the repetition scheme is the most common and effective rhetorical style used in Malay religious speech. Also the usage of other rhetorical styles contributes greatly to making a speech more powerful.

Many studies into rhetoric are conducted within the Theory of Modern Rhetoric developed by Enos and Brown (1993). An example is Noor Husna Abd. Razak (2011). Her study of health product advertisements has three main objectives: to identify the rhetorical structure used in these ads, to analyse the categories of rhetoric and to analyse the style of rhetoric. Findings indicate that rhetoric can take the form of different structures such as words, phrases, clauses, sentences and discourse. Noor Husna Abd. Razak (2011) found that there are five categories of rhetoric, namely: narrative, descriptive, exposition, persuasive and explanation. As for the rhetorical styles, the research showed that health product advertisements contain many comparisons, linkages, contradictions and repetitions.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research design. A qualitative research design enables data to be analysed descriptively to provide a better understanding of a particular phenomenon (Creswell, 2002). As this study is interested in the persuasiveness of religious speeches, content analysis was conducted to examine the data both textually and contextually (Asrul & Nor Azuwan, 2015).

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

A total of six religious speeches were downloaded from YouTube and transcribed. All of the speeches are given by popular religious Islamic speakers such as Ustaz Azhar Idrus, Ustaz Kazim Elias and Ustaz Don Daniyal. The YouTube videos are 40 to 50 minutes' long and were published between 2012 and 2013. Given the qualitative aims of the study, a corpus of six videos is considered sufficient to allow meaningful insights about rhetorical styles and their persuasiveness. Also Zulkifley Hamid et al.'s (2012) comparative analysis of religious and political speeches uses a relatively small number of data. The objective is not to generalise or extrapolate but to understand and interpret. Analysis of the transcribed speeches will rely on Enos and Brown's (1993) theory of Modern Rhetoric.

RESULTS

The results of the content analysis will be reported first for the rhetorical categories and next for the rhetorical styles.

Rhetorical Categories in Religious Speech on YouTube

Exposure

Exposure aims to reveal an issue. It can be used to explain concepts, views, proposals, processes or to interpret incidents, analyse social problems and political issues by using deductive and inductive arguments or analogies. The text below indicates the usage of rhetoric of exposure in the one of the videos:

“... Tuan-tuan panggil apa isteri tuan-tuan? Nabi Muhammad panggil ya Muwafaqah. Wahai perempuan yang cerdas. Nabi Muhammad panggil isterinya ya Umairah, wahai perempuan yang putih kemerah-merahan ...”
(Ustaz Kazim Elias, Aku Terima Nikahnya 1)

As stated above, prophet Muhammad S.A.W. used to call his wife “ya Muwafaqah” (“dear intelligent woman”) and “ya Umairah” (“dear reddish white woman”). The story of the prophet is used to show Muslims that the Prophet Muhammad used to treat his wife gently and respectfully. According to Faraz (2012:2), “the Prophet Salallahu Alaihi Wasallam would call his wife ‘Humaira’ out of love. Linguistically, it means the little reddish one, but the scholars state that in reality it refers to someone who is so fair that due to the sun they get a reddish tan.” It is apparent that the term of address used by the Prophet Muhammad is pleasant to hear and that it is able to create a sense of intimacy between married couples.

Argumentation

Argumentative rhetoric was also evident in the findings. This type of rhetoric functions to convince readers about particular issues using proposed ideas with evidence, as illustrated below:

“Sebab tu kalau laksana hukum hudud maka berkuranganlah. Jenayah tidak akan habis tapi berkuranganlah dengan jaminan daripada Allah. Bila kita laksanakan hukum Allah, nampak? Kata Allah ‘Hendaklah kamu berhukum di kalangan manusia dengan hukum yang diturunkan daripada langit iaitu dalam kitab Quran.’ Kalau pecah rumah, kalau samun apa semua dipotong tangan dan potong kaki, nampak? Kalau mencuri potong tangan saja ...”
(Ustaz Azhar Idrus, Matahari Naik Sebelah Barat)

The main issue found in this excerpt is *Hudud* law, which is supported by evidence from the Quran. The speaker also mentions the examples of punishments if a person fails to abide by the rules. From the text, it is stated that with irrefutable evidence and fair witnesses,

a thief's hand can be cut off. However, it should be noted that a thief can be forgiven if he repents sincerely.

Note that the Arabic word which refers to arm (“aydi”) can have multiple meanings. Punishment for theft can be carried out in different ways (Muhammad, 2016):

1. Cutting off thieves' hands;
2. Cutting or marking their hands;
3. Cutting their means/power to steal (e.g. detention/jail);
4. Cutting their sustenance, e.g. in order to compensate the value of the theft.

Persuasion

Persuasion is a category of rhetoric that is often used by many religious speakers. Persuasive communication is an essential element in changing an audience's belief towards a particular issue or policy. Through persuasion, a speaker may be able to convince the listeners to do or not to do a particular action. Put another way, “[p]ersuasion encompasses the pure and intrinsic ingredients with potential to influence others” (Taquini, 2016:11). A good example from the YouTube speeches is:

“Seronok padahal hantu kopek kata celaka tak takut sikit pun. Kalau tak dak orang perempuan takut nak masuk kubur. Maka bertaubatlah kita segera kerana nanti kehidupan yang seronok ialah di dalam syurga untuk orang beriman.”

(Ustaz Azhar Idrus, Matahari Naik Sebelah Barat)

In the second sentence, the speaker urges the audience to repent “maka bertaubatlah” and to do so immediately. The speaker suggests that for people of strong faith, an enjoyable life (“kehidupan yang seronok”) is in the heavens.

Description

Descriptive rhetoric is used to deliver new knowledge or strengthen existing information. According to the *Oxford Dictionary* (2017), description pertains to the way we serve or seek to describe ideas. This rhetorical category can take different forms as the following extract shows:

“... Hak curi ni baik sikit, baik dia sikit. Potong tangan kanan saja, yang tu tangan kanan, kaki kiri. Dah kalau bunuh pulak tuan rumah, ragut rampas kereta tengah highway, tembak tuan, maka hukumnya disalib di batang pokok. Paku faham dak? Dihukum bunuh. Paku di atas dada ikat di atas tiang pokok. Tinggal situ sepuluh hari. Biar kering ...”

(Ustaz Azhar Idrus, Matahari Naik Sebelah Barat)

The speaker describes the sentence that should be imposed on thieves. For example, if stealing, grazing, robbing and murdering are committed at the same time, the offenders can be punishable by death through crucifixion. The body of the crucified person should be left to dry on a tree for ten days. The description made by the speaker enables audiences to consider the consequences of committing such crimes. This rhetorical category can be used to intimidate people. The text is embedded with a stern warning so that Muslims will distance themselves from committing capital crimes. Fixed and discretionary punishments are two elements of *Hudud* law. Ashgar (2012:237) sums it up as follows:

Hadd (plural *hudud*) and *qisas* are crimes where the punishment is ascribed by Allah (SWT) and is thus unchangeable. *Hudud* crime consists of *zina* (unlawful intercourse), *qadhif* (false accusation of *zina*), drinking intoxicants (*shurb al-khamr*), theft (*sariqa*), robbery (*hiraba*), apostasy (*ridda*), and rebellion (*baqhy*)”.

The excerpt above suggests that although *Hudud* law has not been implemented in Malaysia, it can expose its YouTube audiences to the sharia laws. Ashgar (2012:239) emphasizes, however, that “the application of syariah in Malaysia is restricted in the area of Muslim personal law and minor offences against the precepts of the religion of Islam.”

Narrative

Narrative rhetoric aims to narrate stories or incidents. In narrating a story or an incident, a speaker can decide to choose first-person or third-person pronouns to replace the original names of the characters. According to Nik Hassan Basri (2007:145), “narrative rhetoric is a technique to present more compelling story lines.” Therefore, it enables the story to grab the audience’s attention by making them feel part of the story. Narrative rhetoric can take the form of dialogues, monologues or descriptions.

“Hari tu pergi mengail gelama tengah malam. Tepi pantai gelap. Pantai ni tak dak lampu. Dah tengah jalan pun kalau tak dak lampu gelap gelemat. Jadi mengail gelama ni, dia ikat telur gitu dia makan. Jadi ada orang tengah mengail sorang. Kita kata makan dak sini? Tak makan sejam lebih dah. Dia tak mau kita duduk situ kita baru nak pergi bunyi plup plup plup (ikan gelupur). Rupanya dia bubuh dalam sumpit ikan. Dia tak mau khabar, tapi ikan tu cerdik. Ikan tu khabar ada ada ada ada ada.”
(Ustaz Azhar Idrus, Matahari Naik Sebelah Barat (Kitab Hadis 40))

As can be seen above, the speaker talks about human attitudes and livelihood in the form of narration. The story began with an angler who went fishing at midnight. He went through the dark shoreline which had no lamps. Once the angler arrived, he asked a man whether or not there was fish in that place. The man replied that there was no fish. However, once the angler walked away, he heard the sound, “plup plup plup,” which implies that there was fish. The speaker mentions that the fish was intelligent because it was lashing in the water to show its existence. Implicitly, the speaker wants to remind Muslims not to lose their faith and believe that we can earn a living anywhere we live because God has predefined humans’ provision. Hendry (2010:78) points out that “narrative has the potential to remind us of the complex and multiple ways in which humans make meaning.” In the YouTube video, the religious speaker tells a story of a man and fish because people can easily connect

a general idea – that they can earn a livelihood anywhere – with something concrete and dramatic, something that they can directly associate with.

Explanation

The explanation rhetoric was also found in this study. It is used to clarify an idea in detail and in an organised manner. This category of rhetoric also intends to influence attitudes or the future behaviour of the listeners. Explanations can be conveyed using method of instruction such as in cooking, installing machines and handling equipment. The text below is an example of explanation rhetoric as used in the YouTube speeches.

“Tuan-tuan, Nabi baca apa rakaat pertama? Nabi baca alhakumuttakasur. Hattazurtumulmaqabir. Makna ayat, orang yang buat jahat ni, dia akan buat jahat banyak sampai ke liang kubur. Makna kata nak mati pun dok buat jahat. Hak Sa’labah ni baru masuk. Dia kan ada buat jahat. Dia dengar ayat ni dia rasa seolah-olah Nabi macam dok kata kat dia, dia boleh tarik ... Esok tu masa hari akhirat, Allah akan tanya nikmat yang Allah bagi ni, dua biji mata ni. Hak Sa’labah kena tadi tu. Bila Nabi baca somma latus alun nayau maizin ‘anin naim. Di hujung esok, kami akan tanya hampa atas apa nikmat yang kami bagi, Sa’labah dengar yang tu, dia tarik haaaa ... Pum! Wafat terus.”

(Ustaz Don Daniyal, 40 Minit Ustaz Don)

In this excerpt, an explanation follows a Quranic verse and Hadith. The speaker talks about the consequences of committing sins. The verse mentions that one of the Prophet Muhammad’s companions (Sa’labah) had committed sins. The man almost raped his friend’s wife. The speaker explains that God will question everything that we do with our senses and body. This is congruent with one of the verses in Surah al-Anbya: “At the time of resurrection, we shall set up the scales of justice, and none will be wronged on that day. Everyone will be requited in accordance with his deeds” (21:47).

Rhetorical Styles in Religious Speech on YouTube

Tricolon

According to Merriam-Webster (2017), tricolon is a period in classical prosody composed of three cola. Tricolon is the recurrence of words, expressions, phrases or sentences. Naeem (2013) points out that tricolon can be used to strengthen one’s arguments and make them more approachable and tempting to the ears. Furthermore, tricolon has rhythm and rhyme and this will create a dramatic effect on the audience. People are easier to draw in by mellifluous sound and rhythm. The following excerpt shows the usage of tricolon in one of the videos:

“Kita tak memilih keseronokan dengan isteri. Kita tidak memilih keseronokan dengan suami. Kita memilih keseronokan dengan orang lain.”

(Ustaz Kazim Elias, Aku Terima Nikahnya 1)

As can be seen, the word “memilih” is reiterated three times by the speaker. The word is repeated for three significant purposes:

1. The first and second sentences emphasise the irresponsibility of husband and wife in their married life.
2. The third sentence stresses the attitudes of a husband and wife, which tend to find pleasure with others.

“Men shall take full care of women with the bounties which Allah has bestowed more abundantly on the former (men, with several special merits) than on the latter (women) ...” (An-Nisa’, 4:34). In this verse, God tasks a husband to support his wife from the day he marries her. The repetition of the word “memilih” (“choose”) from the first to the third sentences indicates the importance of carrying out responsibilities as married couples especially responsibilities as a husband. Islam encourages a husband to play their role accordingly in order to maintain a strong husband-and-wife relationship.

Ellipsis

Like tricolon, ellipsis is also a common linguistic occurrence in a religious speech. Ellipsis is when a speaker or writer deletes particular words or phrases in speech or writing. According to the *Oxford Dictionary* (2017) “ellipsis is the omission from speech or writing of a word or words that are superfluous or able to be understood from contextual clues.”

“Sebab tu kalau laksana hukum hudud maka berkuranganlah. Jenayah tidak akan habis tapi berkuranganlah dengan jaminan daripada Allah. Bila kita laksanakan hukum Allah, nampak?”
(Ustaz Azhar Idrus, Matahari Naik Sebelah Barat)

The present study found that the word “jenayah” (“crime”) is omitted in the first sentence (“Sebab tu kalau laksana hukum hudud maka berkuranganla”). In the second sentence, the speaker uses the word “jenayah,” which was deleted earlier: “Jenayah tidak akan habis tapi berkuranganlah dengan jaminan daripada Allah. Bila kita laksanakan hukum Allah, nampak?”. Even though the word “jenayah” is deleted in the first sentence, listeners can still comprehend the idea that the writer attempts to deliver if the whole paragraph is observed. It is suggested that the listeners are able to reconstruct from context the meaning of the sentence because the omission does not alter its intended meaning.

Asyndeton

According to *Kamus Dewan Edisi Keempat* (2010), asyndeton is a line of words (phrase, clause or sentence) that does not use conjunction. Corbett (1971) defines the term as an expression where one or more conjunctions are deleted from a constituent. An asyndeton is found in the following extract:

“Dia lari tak turun bukit, menangis, menangis, menangis, tak makan tak apa.”
(Ustaz Don Daniyal, Seminar Zakat Koperasi)

The speaker employs asyndeton to explain a sequence of the story about a boy who ran up the hill, (and) keeps crying, (and) keeps crying, (and) keeps crying. The word “menangis” is repeated three times. It is apparent that that the speaker does not use conjunctions in the sentence. Asyndeton is used because it is one of the narration techniques that can make a story more dramatic and effective.

Scheme of Balance

There are two categories of scheme of balance, namely parallelism, antithesis in this study.

a) Parallelism

Parallelism is consistency of word forms used in a sentence, for example:

“Hati dia, yang jaga tangan dia, kaki dia, hati dia, mulut, telinga.”
(Ustaz Azhar Idrus, Mengapa Anak Isteri Manusia Lalai Akhirat?)

The speaker uses parallelism because parallel structures help listeners to comprehend a similar category of ideas. In this case, hearts, hands, feet, mouth and ears are categorized as having characteristics of human body parts and organs. The use of parallelism helps the audience to derive a more general idea more easily. As pointed out by Chetia (2015:983), though parallelism is commonly viewed as bad style, parallelism can constitute an effective technique to help memorise particular statements. This is due to the fact that parallelism is a form of repetition, either of sound or pattern. In the example above, parallelism refers to body parts that need to be used carefully. This statement needs highlighting because the same body parts can also be used to commit sins. The speaker advises the audience to use their body parts for good purposes in order to gain rewards in the afterlife.

b) Antithesis

Antithesis occurs when two ideas are put together in a sentence to achieve a contrasting effect (Fomukong, 2015:13). The comparison of two opposite ideas or antonyms is through juxtaposition. The following text will help to clarify the concept:

“Bila keras di dunia, kita tidak lagi dikeraskan dalam azab Allah di akhirat nanti.”
(Ustaz Azhar Idrus, Mengapa Anak Isteri Manusia Lalai Akhirat?)

The two antonyms or opposite ideas are world and afterworld. The speaker emphasises that a husband should be strict in the world (when he is still alive) so that they will not suffer in the afterlife. “Keras di dunia” (“strict in the world”) and “keras dalam azab Allah di akhirat (“hereafter”)” is used by the speaker to advise husbands to educate their family members in religious principles so that their family will not be suffering in the hereafter.

Hyperbole

Finally, the YouTube religious speeches also make use of hyperbole. This rhetorical style elements consists in stating something superfluously, using facts, to give more effect or to get or maintain the listeners' attention. To quote Farahman and Sanaz (2015:158), hyperbole can be employed "as a strategy for making excessive exaggeration for producing rhetorical effect." This use of hyperbole is clear from the following text:

"Tak kira kamu janggut lapan kaki ke kamu pakai jubah hijau ke, kamu siapa ke, masuk dalam neraka atas dosa anak dan isteri."
(Ustaz Azhar Idrus, Mengapa Anak Isteri Manusia Lalai Akhirat?)

"Janggut lapan kaki" (eight-foot-long beard) is an attribute of a religious man but here is also an instance of hyperbole. The excerpt above suggests that a husband will bear the sins of their family's members regardless of the husband's own piousness. In this regard, the speaker attempts to give advice to a husband who has important responsibilities towards their family. The usage of hyperbole in this context is to produce a rhetorical effect.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to answer the following two research questions: What are the rhetorical categories that can be found in religious speech on YouTube? What rhetorical styles are used by religious speakers? The findings show that exposure, argumentation, persuasion, description, narrative and explanation are dominant rhetorical categories in religious speech. The analysis of the religious YouTube speeches has also been able to identify six rhetorical styles: tricolon, ellipsis, asyndeton, parallelism, antithesis and hyperbole. The findings of this study can add to the growing body of literature on the discourse of religion, especially Islam. It is hoped that the findings can also enhance our understanding of rhetorical categories and rhetorical styles.

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