

Forced Lexical Primings as evidence of Power Relations in Jihadist Magazines



Katie J. Patterson, Universidad de Granada; kpatterson@ugr.es
 Michael Pace-Sigge, University of Eastern Finland; michael.pace-sigge@uef.fi



Introduction:

Two key aims of extremist propaganda are 1: to influence attitudes and, through this, directly or indirectly, human actions, and 2: to reinforce power in order to change a social system. According to (Łyżwa, 2019 p.280), this is achieved through manipulating “the institutional patterns governing social relationships, intertwined with commonly accepted moral norms”. In other words, propaganda invokes differences in power, social practices, principles, and beliefs through a manipulation of accepted norms and established patterns. We argue that these norms and patterns are present at the linguistic level, as can be demonstrated from a psycholinguistic approach, namely lexical priming.

Hoey’s theory of lexical priming (2005) argues that contexts have important implications for understanding how we come to perceive reality based on our interaction with a text. The theory does this in a number of ways, demonstrating how power is (both consciously and unconsciously) manifest in a text. For example, Partington and colleagues (2013; 2017) have shown how evidence of *forced primings* of keywords demonstrate the extent to which news readers construct contrasting ideologies based on the textual input of competing news editorials (Stubbs 2001; van Dijk 1998). Olsen (2021) has similarly demonstrated how the political connotations and diachronic shifts of keywords and their co-textual patterns (primings), reveal the ways in which American newspaper editorials have shaped contemporary events for their readers.

We focus on **a)** the recurrence of a number of lexical items and **b)** the unconscious anchoring of the given lexical items in their semantic, lexical and grammatical environments; something Hoey (2005) refers to as *nesting*. Specifically, we explore how far keywords found in the magazine corpus diverge from a more ‘general’ usage of those words. Using the principle of *forced primings* as the basis, we focus on how far the usage, that is, the *nestings* of these words differ to what can be found in the COCA magazines sub-corpus.

Research Questions:

- Are there differences in the lexical, grammatical, semantic, pragmatic and textual patterns associated with keywords in the jihadist magazines compared to a general reference corpus?
- What might these primings tell us about the writers and their collective ideology?

The research presents the hypothesis that the writers of articles in jihadist magazines have become primed to employ certain words and sets of words through their repeated usage in context (cf. Hoey 2005, 2017).

Methodology

Corpora:

- Radical (RAD) corpus: a compilation of jihadist magazines freely available online, created by Benitez-Castro (University of Zaragoza), Dhiab-Hassan and Hidalgo-Tenorio (University of Granada). Composed of a variety of material including instructional guides, editorials, statements and interviews published between 2010 and 2017.
- 10 year segment of the COCA *US magazines* sup-corpus (COCA). Used to reflect general usage of keywords.

Keywords, are “significant binding words in certain activities and their interpretation; they are significant indicative words in certain forms of thought” (Williams, 1983: 15)

Keyword	RAD Freq.	RAD %	RC. Freq.	RC. %	BIC
STATE	2,298	0.18	18,299	0.05	2,712.21
VICTORY	644	0.05	2,134	0.01	1,589.68
TRUTH	762	0.06	3,492	0.01	1,440.39
ALLIES	489	0.04	1,195	0.00	1,431.35
FEAR	697	0.05	3,899	0.01	1,165.61
OBLIGATORY	205	0.02	57	0.00	1,138.29
FALSEHOOD	193	0.02	34	0.00	1,136.07
RULING	318	0.02	575	0.00	1,068.69
AMERICA	1,102	0.09	11,225	0.03	930.32
PERMISSIBLE	175	0.01	63	0.00	929.26
TRUTHFUL	168	0.01	67	0.00	874.95
OPPRESSION	193	0.02	174	0.00	828.78
DEVIANT	142	0.01	27	0.00	823.95
LAND	795	0.06	7,433	0.02	754.33
LEADERS	547	0.04	3,966	0.01	704.17
RULERS	175	0.01	231	0.00	659.78
RULE	446	0.03	3,173	0.01	582.94
DEMOCRACY	317	0.02	1,561	0.00	581.27
SLAVE	203	0.02	633	0.00	508.09
TERROR	206	0.02	853	0.00	425.97
ESTABLISHMENT	195	0.02	759	0.00	420.81
NATIONS	334	0.03	2,486	0.01	410.74
HUMILIATION	119	0.01	193	0.00	407.94

Table 1: *power relations* keywords in RAD; Reference Corpus (RC): COCA magazines.

Indication of keyness: BIC

The *BIC score* indicates keyness – it is an alternative to the p-score. For details, please see https://lexically.net/downloads/version7/HTML/keywords_display_info.html (last accessed 10/03/2021).

Results

- In the current study, a corpus linguistic approach presents an insight based on a few examples taken from the semantic field of *power relations*
- Both the RAD and the COCA material centre on issues that are of particular interest to their readership. COCA appears to use words more for idiosyncratic expressions (*rule of thumb*) whereas RAD presents loaded terminology (*rule of Allah*)
- COCA also appears to employ words with a wider range of contexts*. For example, *oppression* is far more frequent in RAD, yet often this appears in the form of the formulaic *oppression and tyranny*
- Another example is *democracy* which is typically linked with *secularism* in RAD
- Finally, words appear to be primed very differently for its collocations and colligations. Thus *establishment* appears in COCA as *drinking establishment*; *the medical establishment* etc. In RAD, however, there is *the establishment of the Islamic state*.

Conclusions:

- In almost all cases, the primings differ notably from the primings found in COCA magazines.
- Writers in jihadist magazines prime their readers through a definite set of *nestings* that is often exclusive and has been found to be strictly limited.
- We argue that this represents a distinct, targeted discourse that underpins the collective aim of the contributors.
- In terms of rhetorical strategies, distinctive primings can be seen to help further the ideological motivations of the writers.

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