

Mubarak's Use of Religion in his Political Discourse

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Abstract

Egyptian politicians use religion to avoid criticism or escape some danger. For example, the late Egyptian president Nasser (1918-1970) used religious terms before and after the defeat of the 1967 war with Israel. During the era of President Sadat (1918 – 1981), the state used religion to achieve some political goals or gain political interests. In the 1970s, during Sadat's era, the aim was to counter the left, i.e. the communist ideas. The case was a little different during President Mubarak's era in the 1980s as there was an attempt to adopt Islamist political groups within the fringes of formal politics, but in the 1990s there was an attempt to contain the Islamist challenge. This paper relies on an analysis of some of Mubarak's speeches before the joint session of the Peoples' Assembly and Al-Shura Council, because this occasion is one where the President will tackle almost every aspect of Egyptian policy: domestic and foreign. The current paper concentrates on the question of using religious lexical forms in the ex-Egyptian president, Hosni Mubarak, political speeches.

Key Words

Religion – Political Discourse – lexical choice – Intertextuality – Egypt

1. Introduction

A Prince [...] should be careful that there does not issue from his mouth anything that is not full of [...] five qualities. To those who see and hear him he should seem all compassion, all faith, all honesty, all humanity, all religion. There is nothing more necessary to make a show of possessing than this last quality. (Machiavelli, *The Prince*, Chap. 18, Q. in Donahue, 1975, p. 64)

In spite of the importance of religion for politicians to persuade their audience, “little scholarly attention has been directed at understanding the effect of religion appeals on political attitudes” (Albertson, 2007, p. 2). Chilton agrees to this fact and stresses that “the role of religious beliefs [...] is neglected by analysts of discourse” (2004, p. 173).

The paper argues that Mubarak's discourse is almost void of religion, if compared to his predecessor; Sadat. This could be the result of relying mainly on pre-written speeches and inability to improvise.

2. Data and Methodology

The study analyses mainly a subset of Mubarak's presidential speeches. Most of the speeches are available on the electronic website of the Egypt State Information service; www.sis.gov.eg/Ar/politics/PIstitution/president/speeches/. The number of the speeches is too large to be analysed in a single study. Therefore, I have narrowed the selection in the first instance to Mubarak's speeches delivered before the joint session of the Egyptian parliamentary houses, the Peoples' Assembly and Al-Shura (consultation) Council. These speeches are in Arabic and vary tremendously in length, ranging from 3 pages to 20 pages of transcription, ranging from 1040 to 11200 words. They cover almost all aspects of the Egyptian political agenda and Mubarak uses them to tackle all issues; domestic and foreign.

The current study relies heavily, but not solely, on Ruth Wodak's discourse-historical approach (DHA). The study will, also, make use of other approaches and methods, especially those of Fairclough and Chilton. One of the main tools I use in the current paper is intertextuality. According to Fairclough (2001), ‘intertextuality’ refers to the relationship

between texts. Fairclough believes that there is a linking chain between texts and that in order to fully understand texts, they need to be related to other texts. A cornerstone of DHA is the term ‘historical’. Wodak agrees to the view that there is a historical relatedness among texts and discourses. She affirms that any discourse “is always historical, connected synchronically and diachronically with other communicative events that are happening at the same time or that have happened before”, which to some degree replicates Fairclough’s intertextuality (Wodak, 1999, p. 187). Fairclough (2001, p. 127) affirms that “discourses and the texts which occur within them have histories, they belong to historical series”. He, also, maintains that “texts always exist in intertextual relation with other texts” (ibid, p. 129), i.e. they are always dialogic.

Another tool, the paper relies on, is lexicalization. In fact, lexicalization is one of the linguistic toolkits for textual analysis in CDA. Lexicalization is one of the main features of textual analysis. Some words may be used to convey particular negative or positive meanings and implications (Shojaei & Laheghi, 2012). Lexicalization or word choice is very important as it may control the conveyed meaning. Word choices can reflect the politician’s ideological stances and the hidden meanings. The paper relies on quantitative analysis that counts lexical choices of Mubarak and builds on it.

The methodology of the current study will attempt to analyse the selected speeches by focusing on three aspects: first to identify the main topics of the texts, i.e. the topics tackled by the president such as economic reform, democracy, internal affairs and Egyptian relations with other countries. It is worthy noting that topics may change due to the change of the writers. In fact, there is no regular speechwriting staff for the president. Then we focus on nomination and predication strategies, i.e. we show how Mubarak refers to himself using mainly personal pronouns, yet in some instances he uses other words such as ‘the president’. We, also, show the features he attributes to himself to strengthen a certain claim he makes or an identity he establishes. Finally we focus on discourse representation.

3. Religion in Political Discourse

Albertson affirms that religious similarity, i.e. of the same religion or having similar religious beliefs, may help politicians persuade their

audience on the pretext that “similarity can enhance persuasion”. Sometimes, this similarity can enhance the idea that “the speaker is one of us and others are not”. Therefore, Albertson argues that the use of similar religious language “allows politicians to speak directly to like-minded others”. Hence, they will communicate “common ground and shared values” (Albertson, 2007, pp. 9-11).

It is worthy noting that in political discourse which uses religious references, “the intent of the speaker, or more likely speechwriter, is interesting and would shed light on how politicians view the role of religion in political speech” (Albertson, 2007, pp. 3-4). That is why Donahue stresses the influence of religious language on the audience and cites Machiavelli's view in his book “The Prince”, regarding the use of whatever tools to achieve a specific target. Machiavelli believed that “it was essential to the successful prince that he at least appears to be religious, so that religion, any religion, might be used as an instrument of social control” (Donahue, 1975, p. 64). In order to control their audience, politicians need to persuade them with whatever they say. Politicians may persuade their audience by making use of one of the three persuasion categories listed by Aristotle. These categories include “persuasion through personality and stance, persuasion through the arousal of emotion [and] persuasion through reasoning of emotion” (Beard, 2000, p. 37). Religion is a good instrument to achieve at least the last two categories.

In fact, political actors believe in the possibility of achieving all aims. They may be “described as brokers of ideas and feelings in the pursuit of power” (Jones, 1960, p. vii). Therefore, they tend to use religion, especially in their campaigns, because of the fact that “religion touches the most profound, intimate, and cherished emotions” (ibid, p. vii). That is why they “feel the need to pay lip-service to religion” (Weiss, 2010), which will help portray them as more religious even than their audience. Donahue applies this fact to the American people. He states that “American politicians have long accorded to religious symbols a prominent role in the shaping of a political image for themselves” (Donahue, 1975, p. 49).

American presidents use religion frequently in their speeches to achieve some political gains. Albertson (2007, p. 2) gives examples of some presidents, and makes it obvious that “Bush's use of a religious reference is not exceptional”. Bush is not the only president who uses religion. In fact, Albertson affirms that “Ronald Reagan used language in his 1984 State of the Union address that closely paralleled [a] biblical passage”. Reagan said, “We have finished the race; we kept them free; we kept the faith”. This is paralleled to “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith” (2 Timothy, 4:7) (ibid, p. 2).

Yet, the use of religion is sometimes criticised. Kradel (2004) affirms that “President George W. Bush has come under increasing criticism for his use of religious rhetoric [on the pretext that] using such language was inappropriate in the public sphere”. However, he attributes Bush’s use of religion to his speechwriter, Michael Gerson, who is “an evangelical Christian who [...] add[ed] phrases to the President’s speeches” (Kradel, 2004, p. 2).

4. Religion in Egyptian Political Discourse

The use of religion in political speeches is not confined to American presidents. Chilton asserts that “American leaders used religious discourse in the aftermath of September 11 as did Muslim leaders” (Chilton, 2004, p. 173). Although Chilton was referring to Usama Bin Laden, it still applies to other Arab and Muslim leaders and presidents.

Egyptian populace is religious by nature or at least religion-oriented. Due to the economic, social, and even political hardships they face in their lives, Harris (1988, p. 4) affirms that Egyptians “take refuge in God, seeking relief in religion”. They rely on religion as their support in difficulty. That is why they, or at least most of them, opposed the use of religion to serve a political party. Yet, in Muslim countries, religion cannot be overlooked in any aspect of life. Harris states that in a Muslim country “religion and state are theoretically indivisible [...] religion retains a potent role as the justifier of political action” (ibid, p. 4). Therefore, it is vital for a leader to use religion when speaking to religious populace. Albertson affirms that “speaking to a group in language that resonates with them is strategic [and] genuine” (Albertson, 2007, p. 35).

4.1. Nasser’s Era

Nasser (1918- 1970) and his colleagues, the Free Officers, who governed Egypt after the 1952 revolution, did not have a detailed programme of action to begin with after the revolution. Hence, the present research argues that they had no ideology. However, according to Hourani (1991, p. 405), “in course of time, they acquired a characteristic ideology [...] identified with the personality of Abdel-Nasser”. An important element of that ideology with which Nasser controlled and mobilized the public, was “the language of Islam [...] which the leaders used in appeals to the masses”. Those leaders, especially Nasser, used a form of religious language or “version of Islam which did not oppose but rather endorsed the kinds of secularizing and modernizing change” they wanted (ibid, p.405). Therefore, Hourani argues that during that period of Nasser “Azhar came more strictly under the control of the government”

(ibid, p. 406). The government was seeking to establish a social secular state.

At the beginning of his rule, Nasser ignored religious matters, encouraged “political and economic reform” and did not accept a religious state (Abdo, 2000, p. 7). After the defeat in the 1967 war, religion was widely used at both the state and scholars levels. Zeghal (1999, p. 381) states that “the Ulema of Al-Azhar raised the notion of repentance”. They called people to return to Islam and they transformed “their discourses from one of references to Arab socialism into one of the supremacy of Islam” (ibid, p. 381). The state, with Nasser on its head, used the same ideology. Nasser resorted to religion in his speeches. For instance, in his speech on the 23rd of July 1967, Nasser “addressed the crisis [...] as a lesson sent by God to the nation in order to purify it” (ibid, p. 381).

Nasser's use of religion was severely criticised by the Muslim Brotherhood. They accused the state “of using the language of Islam in order to cover a basically secular policy” (Hourani, 1991, p. 407). A quick look at the speeches delivered by Nasser reveals that before 1967, Nasser used some common religious references in his speeches such as ‘praise be to Allah, inshallah..., etc’. Yet, after 1967, he intensively used religion and called all Egyptians to be patient and to rely totally on Allah. Later on, he avoided using such references. Generally speaking, the defeat affected the whole populace to the degree that all Egyptians entered “a period of soul-searching [and they began to] re-establish [Egypt's] national collective identity [i.e. Islam]” (Abdo, 2000, p. 7). By that time, according to Abdo, Nasser was trying to establish “a hybrid ideology of Islam and socialism” (ibid, p. 53).

4.2. Sadat's Era

Islam emerged as a political force in Egypt in the aftermath of 1967 and continued in the 1970s under Sadat. In fact, Sadat encouraged the religious trend in Egypt. Flores confirms that the growth of that trend in Egypt “infused political discourse [...] with images and slogans deriving from religion”. In fact, all political forces including the ruling party were “try[ing] to assume an Islamic colouring” (Flores, 1988, p. 27).

Sadat (1918- 1981), or as the media used to call him ‘the Believer President’, used religion to show how different his personality is from Nasser's secular personality. In fact, Sadat showed his faith in Islam, according to Sullivan et al, “by waging the 1973 war with Israel [...] during the Islamic holy month of Ramadan”. Even the code name of the war was “operation Badr” referring to the first battle in the history of Islam (Sullivan & Abed-Kotob, 1999, p. 72).

In a similar move to his predecessor, Zeghal (1999, p. 381) states that Sadat used the Ulema of Al-Azhar to “get rid of the leftist opposition”. In his struggle against communism, “Sadat used the earlier fatwas of Sheikh Abdel-Halim Mahmoud [...] to launch his anti-leftist campaign in the media”, especially stressing the words that consider followers of communism as “have no faith” (ibid: 381). Therefore, this paper argues that Sadat “used religion as the basis for political ideology [...] in what has been called Islamization of nationalism” (Abdo, 2000, p. 53).

In the late 1970s, Egypt was to sign a peace treaty with Israel. At that time, Abdo (2000, p. 54) affirms that Sadat “became more tolerant of the Islamists”. Nevertheless, when they began to defy his power, he repressed them harshly and declared that “no politics in religion and no religion in politics” (ibid, p. 54). In 1979, he went even further to declare, “Those who wish to practice Islam can go to the mosques, and those who wish to engage in politics may do so through legal institution[s]” (ibid, p. 127). However, Sadat’s policy of using Islam as a political instrument led in the beginning of 1980s to his assassination in 1981.

4.3. Mubarak’s Era

Leading a country whose populace is religious by nature, Mubarak, like his predecessors Nasser and Sadat, “sought to accommodate the Islamic tendency and earn a religious seal of approval” (Abdo, 2000, p. 14). In fact, Mubarak followed a double-edged policy. After the assassination of Sadat in 1981, Mubarak severely repressed the Islamic radical groups. At the same time, according to Abaza (2006, p. 15), the state continued to use religion to “co-opt Islamists’ supporters”. Following the same streamline of Sadat, Mubarak used media as a means through which the Ulema of Al-Azhar would appear and “contradict the thought of the Jamaat (Islamic groups)”. The regime used “Al-Azhar to legitimate its fight against radical Islamism” (Zeghal, 1999, p. 385).

Abaza affirms that “Mubarak’s regime adopted more repressive measures against militant Islamist groups”, mostly in the 1980s (Abaza, 2006, p. 15). On his part, Ayubi (1988) believes that “Mubarak leadership has adopted a low-key, business-like style”. This policy “seems unlikely to generate strong emotions among the populace”. He affirms that this style of leadership “appears well suited to a society that has reached [...] a crossroads in its development” (Ayubi, 1988, p. 55). However, during the 1990s, “radical Islamic groups declared war against the state” (Abaza, 2006, p. 15). The state’s response to such acts was quite harsh.

The use of religion as an instrument to control the public was not something new. In fact, Mubarak's regime, like its predecessors, wanted to portray itself as an Islamic one through the instrumentalization of Islam. In order to achieve that end, Abaza affirms that the state used "the media, education [text books], legislation, and toleration of some Islamic opposition figures". For instance, "in the late 1970s [...] television [...] started to present more religious programmes [...] and] preachers were seen more frequently". In addition, the state permitted "veiled actresses [...] to appear on television [...] in 1990s" (Abaza, 2006., p. 16).

Another important tool of instrumentalizing religion, according to Abaza, was enacting legislations that give "more prominence to Islamic law", i.e. Sharia. In the 1980s, the regime requested an amendment to the constitution that "made Sharia [...] the source for legislation". Yet, Islamists "understood that [the Egyptian regime] was using Islam for political maneuvers" (Abaza, 2006, p. 16). Such an attitude by Islamists is supported by the regime's attempts, at the international arena, to portray "itself in secular terms of defending freedom and democracy, hoping to bestow international support on the regime" (Abaza, 2006, p. 18).

President Mubarak's use of religion varies from one speech to another. He may use many religious references in one speech, but may use only one instance in another. This variation in his use of religion is due to circumstances that form the overall context. For instance, in his first speech on October 14, 1981, just eight days after the assassination of President Sadat, President Mubarak quoted seven religious instances and used the word 'Allah' 13 times. The analysis of the selected speeches will tackle this point in detail.

5. Analysis of the Speeches

The reason behind selecting only some of President Mubarak's speeches is the great number of these speeches. They amount to more than 1080. His speeches before the joint session of the Peoples Assembly and Al-Shura Council only are more than 36. These speeches vary tremendously in terms of length, ranging from 984 to 22288 words. The selected speeches delivered on his taking the oath of office mark the beginning of a new term in his presidency. In addition, these speeches tackle almost all aspects of Egyptian political, social and economic life.

The analysis shows that President Mubarak concludes almost all his speeches with the same formula; 'May Allah guide all of us to the best of Egypt, He is the best Custodian and the best Supporter'. Sometimes, he concludes with 'May Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon you all'. However, this could be the result of monotony and inability to come up with new religious lexical forms. Whenever Mubarak uses a religious

quotation, he presumes first-hand knowledge of religion by his audience. Otherwise, the message he implies in his use of religion will not be grasped.

In his first speech on the 14th of October 1981, Mubarak's religious references functioned as a call to those Islamists opposing his authority to join the good party and obey the ruler. He called on them to build not to destroy, "let all of you come to the righteous word". Yet, he gave an implied threat to those who would not respond positively, "Do not be like those who dispersed and differed, after they have received the knowledge, and those will have a severe torment", "[...] and those are the losers".

In that speech, Mubarak's lexical choices functioned as a reply to those fundamentalists who accuse the regime, and the president, of being unbelievers. In fact, he accused them of being unbelievers and even losers. He quoted directly from the Qur'an: (الذين ينقضون عهد الله من بعد ميثاقه) "the ones who break the covenant of Allah even after its binding compact, and cut off what Allah has commanded to be held together and corrupt in the earth; those are they who are the losers" (Al Abaqarah Chapter, 27). In the same context, he affirmed that Egypt is the safest place by attributing the name given to Mecca in the Qur'an to it; (البلد الأمين) "the ever-secured land". Those direct quotations from the Qur'an may be signs of the president's well-awareness and knowledge of the Qur'an.

The same stance of the president was repeated in the early 1990s. In his 1990 speech, Mubarak attacked terrorism and took advantage of religious terms to support his attitude. He made indirect quotations from the Qur'an when he referred to police officers, who fought against terrorism, as (منهم من قضى نحبه) "amongst them are those who was killed". In the same speech, he repeated the lexical refer (البلد الأمين) "the ever-secured land", yet this time he was referring to Saudi Arabia. However, the president's use of religion almost disappeared from his speeches after winning the presidential elections in 2005. It could be argued that Mubarak used religion at the beginning of his reign to legitimate his authority. Later on, he relied more on his authority and then on his acquired legitimacy.

In his speech of November 8, 1981, he quoted indirectly from the Qur'an and used some phrases in different contexts. For instance, he said (راضيا مرضيا) (satisfied and fully contented), referring to the verse 28 from Surat Al Fajr (The Dawn Chapter) , in the context of commemorating late President Sadat. When he talked about Egypt and its relations with super powers, Mubarak quoted the phrase لا شرقية ولا غربية, i.e. neither eastern nor western, from the verse 35 of Surat An-Nour (the Light Chapter), which denotes that Egypt is not an ally or a

follower of a specific power. This can be viewed as a message to the world as to Egypt's role in the Non-Alliance Movement.

Addressing the nation on regaining Sinai on the 26th of April 1982, Mubarak made an abundant use of religion. In fact, Mubarak used religious forms the most in that speech more than any other of his speeches. He started the speech with a preamble similar to that of a Friday sermon, starting every sentence with the phrase (الله الحمد والشكر), i.e. praise and thanking be to Allah. In addition, when he talked about the national soil of Egypt, he likened it to ((الوادي المقدس طوى), i.e. the sacred valley of Tuwa; both are sacred and worth dying for. He likened the sacrifice of those soldiers who died for the sake of Egypt to that of prophet Ibrahim when he was about to sacrifice his son in obedience to God's order. When he spoke of Egyptian leaders like Ahmad Urabi, Mustafa Kamel, Abdel Nasser, and Sadat, Mubarak quoted the verse (رجال صدقوا ما عاهدوا الله عليه), i.e. men who have been true to their covenant with Allah, from the verse 23 of Surat Al-Ahzab (Chapter of the Factions), affirming that they were working and struggling for the sake of Allah. Furthermore, Mubarak made use of Christianity. When he talked about the unity among Muslim countries, he stressed that unity will never break because (ما يربطه الله لا يفرقه الانسان), i.e. what Allah binds, man can never break. He concluded that speech with a call, similar to that of his first speech on 14 October 1981. He called upon all Egyptians to be (كالبنيان المرصوص), i.e. like a solid structure, quoting from a prophetic Hadith .

In his speech on October 3, 1982, Mubarak made only one religious reference. When he spoke of Sudan and its people, Mubarak affirmed that the Sudanese people are closer and nearer to the Egyptians than (حبل الوريد), i.e. Jugular vein, denoting that Egyptians and Sudanese are one people and cannot be divided or separated. In his 1987 speech, Mubarak quoted a Hadith when he was talking about his responsibility towards poor people in Egypt. He stressed the state awareness of the problem and affirmed it by the Hadith (كلكم راع وكلكم مسئول عن رعيته), i.e. every one of you is sponsor (of someone or something) and he/she will be asked about his/her followers or sponsored ones. He concluded that speech with a prayer, similar to that at the end of a Friday sermon; i.e. the speech delivered by the Imam of a mosque before the Friday prayer.

In the 1993 speech, Mubarak repeated the use of the phrase (كالبنيان المرصوص), i.e. like a solid structure, when he was talking about the national unity in Egypt. It is worth noting that during the early 1990s Egypt witnessed a hard time with terrorism, and Egyptians were divided. Therefore, he called upon them to unite behind their leader to confront that phenomenon that could destroy the country. In the 1999 speech, he

made use of a Qur'anic verse. Influenced by the Qur'an, he said 'we need to change what is inside ourselves' referring to the verse (*إن الله لا يغير (ما يقوم حتى يغيروا ما بأنفسهم*), i.e. Allah will not change the (good) condition of a people as long as they do not change their state (of goodness) themselves (verse 11, the Thunder Chapter). He concluded that speech with a short prayer asking Allah to help him achieve his goals and afford him with support.

In his September and December 2005 as well as November 2006 speeches, President Mubarak made no use of religious references except in his concluding sentence: 'May Allah guide us all to the best of Egypt [...] He is the best custodian and the best Supporter'. This may reflect the features of his new presidential era at that time, i.e. a secular state.

6. Conclusion

The main hypothesis, supported by the results, is that Egyptian presidents use religion according to circumstances. For instance, because of the defeat in the 1967 war, Nasser used religious references in his speeches more than he did before that defeat. In the case of President Mubarak, the speeches are almost void of religious terms. However, he used a number of religious instances in his speeches following the assassination of President Sadat to appear in front of his people as a believer, especially that he knew that he was addressing a religion-oriented populace. The same hypothesis is true for the abundant use of religious references in his speech after the regaining of Sinai on 26 April 1982. He believed that the use of religious references would bring him closer to the majority of the populace and hence religious and public legitimacy, which he sought at the beginning of his presidency. Table 1, a quantitative one, compares the selected speeches and affirms the hypothesis.

Later on, in his speeches in 2005 and 2006, rare were the religious instances Mubarak used. This was because Egypt witnessed no dangers at that time and he had already gained legitimacy through public elections in September 2005. Therefore, the researcher argues that Egyptian presidents, in general, and Mubarak, in particular, resort to religion whenever the need calls. Sometimes, they use it to avoid criticism and escape danger. The use of religious references differs from one speech to another because "there was no regular speechwriting staff" for Mubarak (Dunne, 2003, p. 48). Dunne affirms that there was a different writer or writers every time. She even affirms that different writers or contributors "can lead to gaps and differences on issues between one speech and another" (Dunne, 2003, p. 49).

Speech	Religious references	The Word 'Allah'
14 October 1981	7	13
8 November 1981	6	8
26 April 1982	9	16
3 October 1982	1	3
12 October 1987	6	8
11 November 1993	2	9
13 November 1999	2	5
27 September 2005	1	4
19 December 2005	-----	3
19 November 2006	1	4

(Table 1: Frequent occurrence of religious references)

Although President Mubarak addresses a religious populace and knows that religion deeply touches their emotions, the effect of his religious references is superficial [this may need a sociological study of the Egyptian society]. Politicians' use of religion is something that may affect the audience temporarily, but soon they will discover the reason behind that use. In fact, most of the Egyptian people believe that politicians use religion to achieve some political aims.

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