

# Creating Discourse Using Figures of Speech in the Speeches of King Abdullah II

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Language is the main medium to create discourse for politicians and public speakers. Deviations from the norm create multiple levels of meanings, in both spoken and written language. This paper tackles the effect of using some figures of speech by political speakers. To narrow the discussion, some speeches of King Abdulla II are analysed in terms of using simile, metaphor and personification. Such figures of speech make the discourse more effective in reaching its intended aims, by forging listeners, not only to enjoy the ornamentation of the speech, but to think and act of the events and situations discussed. The paper shows that using figures of speech by political speakers is one method of creating understanding of concepts and abstract ideas. In addition, it is a method to send messages more effectively and purposefully.

**Key words:** *Language, figures of speech, King Abdullah II, simile, metaphor, personification, and political speeches.*

## Introduction

Language is the most important tool of persuasion. In fact, the ability to exploit linguistic resources correctly, in the particularity of every communication, is the most useful asset in pursuing public or personal goals. By subtly manipulating language, competent speakers have been able to significantly influence the beliefs, preconceptions, and fears, and aspirations of the masses, to the extent that they have caused people to accept false claims as true axioms, or even to support policies opposite to their concerns.

The “rhetorical art of persuasive argumentation”, politicians’ ability to convince the public – is essential in political speeches. Political rhetoric depends on politicians exploring and exploiting the public’s hopes, expectations, beliefs, and fears. In political speeches, persuasion is achieved by choosing a discourse that will appeal to both supporters and potential opponents. To linguistically manipulate an audience with a view to persuading them to support unsupportable policies and issues, politicians may play on the audience’s emotions by instilling fear, or even euphoria, in them. This paper aims to show the powerful effect of figures of speech in political speeches, to deliver a discourse intended by the speaker, by exploring simile, metaphor and personification in some speeches of King Abdullah II of Jordan.

Political speakers have used certain registers in their speeches to express the discourse they intend. The best way to characterize various registers is to find out what rhetorical acts they typically perform, how they combine to form composite units of communication, and what linguistic devices signal them. “[...] *the conventions of use associated with particular types of discourse very often override linguistic indicators of rhetorical acts*” (Widdowson, (1979: 16). Such conventions in the text type we are addressing are undoubtedly the classical features of “rhetoric” itself. Rhetoric is the language use which achieves a specific purpose or type of effect on an audience or reader. Rhetoric is the “the art of persuasive discourse” (Cockcroft and Cockcroft: 1992: 3). It is humans' use of words to induce actions or form attitudes to other humans (Partington, 2006: 13).

To produce a specific effect in language, speakers deviate and shift from the semantic norm. Therefore, figurative shift is a mechanism of semantic change. “*Of all components of language, lexical meaning is most susceptible to change*”, claim Laurel J. Brinton and Leslie K. Arnovick (Brinton and Arnovick, 2006, p. 76). It is very flexible; a word can be vaguely used or vague by itself, and as every single person can comprehend one expression various ways, the meaning is also subjective (Brinton & Arnovick, 2006, p. 76). In semantic change, the words' denotation or connotation may change, and they may either delete or add semantic features. (Brinton and Arnovick, 2006, p. 77). Figures of speech are the core of people’s creativity and thought. For politicians to make a political claim, they tend to convince their constituents of this claim. In other words, politicians use figures of speech to make their point. A metaphor, for example, is a minor premise, if accepted as such, it proves the major premise, and the result is the set of actions. Figures of speech can create political reality. If accepted they can form our perception and lead to consequences that are logical.

## **Discussion and Analysis**

Metaphors are essential to increasing the emotional impact of a given message (Black, 2011: 320-321). Arousal of emotions is essential to the establishment of heroes, victims and

enemies. This arousal reacts to human feelings that connect to the protection of nation, friends, and family, etc. This could be ascribed to a fear of attacks from the unknown other (Black, 2011: 320-321). Moreover, metaphors can provide proofs to a logical argument. This can be done by equating two words or phrases. For example, Martin Luther King represented segregation based on racism as either a prison, an illness, or as slavery. These metaphors equated the word/phrase “segregation based on racism” with the words/phrases of illness, prison or slavery. This equation increased the understanding of segregation based on racism, by explaining it as illness, a prison or as slavery. The metaphors enabled the possibility of drawing a logical equality between segregation based on racism and illness, a prison or a slavery. This argument is therefore based on this logical equality and therefore logos. So, the use of metaphors provided proof to a logical argument (Black, 2011:35).

*Conceptual metaphor theory* highlights the role of concepts in structuring how we think and understand the world around us. It is part of *cognitive linguistics*, which is mainly concerned with concepts to understand language. *The conceptual metaphor* was first systematically studied and investigated by Lakoff and Johnson (1980). They presented their first and the most famous example of what they called *the metaphorical concept* or *the conceptual metaphor* ARGUMENT IS WAR<sup>4</sup>, and a wide range of expressions derived from this metaphor. Following their classification, the *metaphorical concept* connects two semantic areas, or *domains*, ARGUMENT is known as the *target domain (TD)*, while WAR is the *source domain (SD)*. Certain characteristics and attributes of the *source domain* are grouped into the *target domain*.

Lakoff (1993) also studied conceptual metaphors; he included the metaphorical concept A PURPOSEFUL LIFE IS A JOURNEY in his discussion of *inheritance hierarchies*. He argued that metaphorical mappings are interrelated; they are structured in a hierarchy. They are linked together in a *higher mapping* (level 1), which is more comprehensive, and a *lower mapping*, which is included in the upper mapping; the *lower mapping* as in levels (2 & 3).

How are conceptual metaphors used in King Abdullah’s speeches? I argue that metaphors are not only used for ornamentation, they are also used to call for action. King Abdullah uses many metaphors to call the audience to action, stir their emotions, and move them to carry out certain actions or adopt particular points of view, or change some prior ideas. Lakoff (1993), Lakoff and Turner (1989) and Lakoff and Johnson (1980) discussed the conceptual metaphor “LIFE IS A JOURNEY”, which is a significant conceptual metaphor used in the speeches of King Abdullah II, as exemplified in the following speech:

**Let me pause to thank all those who have believed in our journey** - Bay Area accelerators like 500Startups, Plug & Play, and Alchemist; investors like Intel Capital; corporations like



Cisco Systems; other angels and mentors. Bay-area Jordanians have also been important in helping us unlock our potential.

But no house can be built when its city is burning. And today, the region's fires cannot be ignored. **All the world is in their path.** To protect the future, our world must respond.

King Abdullah II draws in this speech a whole picture of a journey; it starts off as a maritime metaphor as a journey in a boat and this journey has a destination and impediments that travellers may encounter. Some of the other terms which are related to journey are found such as: *path* and *potential*. Within a journey, there are some impediments, which travellers face. The *journey* metaphor is frequently used in speeches to express the conceptual metaphor "LIFE IS A JOURNEY." It is used to reflect King Abdullah's own experience; he tries to share his personal life with the audience by using "our (own) **journey**". He also tries to identify himself with the audience, and engage with them in some activities which he calls *journey* as in "our journey", so that he appears as a member of them, not distanced from them. In addition to the idea of identification, this metaphor is used to call for action. The above-discussed metaphors are conventional metaphors; they are extracted by investigating the source domain *journey* and other lexical items related to it such as: *path*. This result is in line with Black's (2011) study where he found that *journey* metaphors are frequently used in political language. To clarify, study the following example:

"I welcome your voice, and the voices of world leaders of many religions, who stand with billions of Muslims worldwide, in rejecting provocations meant to divide those of different faiths. **Islam is a fundamental guiding light that teaches us to honour all human beings, promote tolerance, and show mercy.** As a Hashemite, and a descendant of the Prophet Mohammed, peace and blessings be upon him, I condemn all acts that vilify the name of the Prophet, or falsely use his name or the name of Islam or any other religion for that matter, to justify violence and evil acts, such as we have recently witnessed. There are no sidelines on this issue. All of us, of every faith, everywhere, must be pro-active in promoting understanding and a much stronger global dialogue."

King Abdullah II uses *light* metaphors. He tries to spread more positive images to the audience, especially about key issues he defends about Islam and Muslim worlds. King Abdullah II uses this metaphor to defend Islam as a good religion that calls for forgiveness, tolerance and acceptance. He uses this image to counter the erroneous image that some people hold about Islam, as some claim that it is a religion of terrorism, especially after the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York. He wants to draw an opposite picture, by using the image of *light* to offer a positive evaluation of Islam as *a guiding light*, as *light* has positive connotations, such as the metaphor INTELLIGENCE IS LIGHT. To

emphasise his argument, he also associates Islam with consecutive positive traits: *mercy*, *honour* and *tolerance* and *peace*.

King's metaphor "Islam is a guiding light" reflects this concept found in the Holy Qur'an, as God is the source of both the physical and spiritual light in this universe, according to Islamic doctrine. He is the source of actual light in this life; He lights up the sun, the moon, other planets and Paradise, and without His light all the universe will be complete darkness. He is also the source of the spiritual light which is *Islam*, and the Holy Qur'an, which was revealed to the Prophet Mohammad, and God guides those who He wants to His light, which is *Islam*, or the right path according to Islamic teachings. King Abdullah intentionally uses the image of light as he addresses a western audience at the United Nations General Assembly, in the United States, so that this audience can grasp this image, because it is found in the Holy Bible as well. Politicians use imagery from holy resources to support their argument and influence the audience.

As we see, metaphors may function differently in political discourses. According to the analysis and discussion above, three main functions that are widely accepted by different scholars can be shown. The first is simplification. Politics is abstracted and complicated, and therefore common people will not be able to comprehend it if politicians do not try to make it familiar to the people. Thompson claims that "*until and unless that metaphorical leap of understanding is made, there is no participation in politics or political discourse*" (Thompson, 1999: 186). A well-known topic for people is "The journey", so politicians often adopt journey metaphors to make their audience feel that they are easily comprehending the message. The second function is persuasion. Jeffery points out that "*metaphors in politics are applied to convey policies, convince or persuade the public for action or to characterize political opponents.*" (1996: 127). Thus, persuasion is an essential goal that politicians try to gain. Politicians will try to deliver their feeling and emotion to their people, by using effective metaphors. This can be seen clearly in the above discussed war metaphor. The last function is motivation. Edelman argues that "*metaphors are employed in order to provide the motivation or justification to think or behave in a particular manner.*" (Edelman, 1977: 36) Therefore, to encourage citizens to act correctly, politicians will provide motivation. In the journey metaphor for example, politicians usually figure out that the final destinations will be perfect. Similarly, in the war metaphor politicians confidently inform individuals that the last victory is America's. They all provide motivation for individuals to behave and act. These functions enable politicians to employ metaphors to achieve their aims. At the same time, people not only easily comprehend different political points of view, but also get greatly encouraged and motivated, all of which are basic if a country is to be successful.

Simile is the second figure of speech to be discussed in King Abdullah's speeches. It explicitly compares two items / things employing connective words "as" or "like". Lucas

(1992: 223) defines simile as “*an explicit comparison between things that are essentially different yet have something in common in a way as to clarify and enhance an image*” (Cuddon, 1998/1999: 830). Abdul-Raof (2006: 198) states that simile refers to something, or to someone having in common a characteristic of something or someone else where a common signification is set through one of the simile particles or the relevant context. Like other figures of speech, simile numerous functions. Corbet (1990: 479) mentions that a simile clarifies the analogy by calling out precisely what is being compared, as in “*He had a posture like a question mark*”. Further, simile adds meaning by calling to attention the process of comparison itself. Simile in political speeches is an aesthetic and skilful mode of discourse whose major aims are to clarify an opinion or feeling, to bring two significations close to each other, and to compare a given entity with another in praise, dispraise, ornamentation, or repugnance. Therefore, simile, as a linguistic and aesthetic skill, varies from one text-producer to another in quality, effectiveness, and most importantly, the impact upon the text-receiver. To clarify what we mean and corroborate and diversify our argument, let us consider the following illustrative example drawn from the speech of His Majesty King Abdullah the Second on 23 May 2013, in the opening of the World Economic Forum on North Africa and the Middle East. It should be noted that this is the only example that the researcher found in the data.

Independence stands for the sacrifices made by our forefathers to liberate the national will, and build a better future. Our independence embodies sacrifice, belonging, and a sense of responsibility to build our homeland and preserve its security, stability, and achievements. I congratulate you all on this occasion, and on behalf of the generous Jordanian people, I welcome you all to Jordan.

My Friends,

Today, we celebrate our beloved country. We honour our citizens, past and present. And we look to the future. I am delighted that you are here to join us. This Forum recognizes the partnership of all our countries. **From the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean, our countries stretch in one sweep, like a strong spine across the world. And as a spine is central to a human being, so our region is central to this globe.**

In the above example, His Majesty’s sincerity and willingness to cooperate with his audience (investors from different countries) are presented by statements like: “Our independence embodies...” His Majesty’s words work to establish his good will. A listener to the English text will undoubtedly be struck by the representation of his virtue. We have the simile “*From the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean, our countries stretch in one sweep, like a strong spine across the world*”. In this example, the simile can be analysed in its three components:



- Topic: our countries.
- Image: strong spine.
- Point of similarity: stretch in one sweep across the world.

Here, the components of the simile are explicit. The readers/listeners will understand the picture painted by His Majesty; it evoked the emotions of the audience. A text is influential if it obtains its goal of convincing listeners of the validity of certain opinions. The language of political speeches is poetic. It impacts readers by comparisons and contrasts to create the intended meaning.

Personification is the other figure of speech often noticed in political speeches. It is an ontological metaphor, realized by giving inanimate objects and non-humans humanistic attributes and characteristics as if they were people. "Personification" is a distinct linguistic phenomenon according to Lakoff and Johnson, even though it belongs to the group of ontological metaphors (1980: 33). To be more precise, in personification something non-human is spoken about as if it is human. Personification makes it easier for the speaker but also for the listener to localize and refer to these non-human objects.

The study of personification is important for a critical analysis of political rhetoric, as it displays how certain topics are thought about. Furthermore, personification makes new measures and complex matters more comprehensible as they receive human qualities.

For example, when we say "*life has cheated me*" (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980: 33), life is personified; it is understood as a person who deceives others and leaves them desperate. This type of metaphor is necessary in order to understand abstract ideas, and by viewing them in terms of human characteristics, they can be easily grasped by the mind. To illustrate, consider the following examples:

The Arab States have spoken with a united voice on behalf of a just peace: two states, with a sovereign, viable and independent Palestine, on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in accordance with UN resolutions, resolving all final status issues, with security and acceptance for Israel. Tonight I ask for your partnership in the work of peace as well as prosperity, to get the parties to the negotiation tables and a final agreement. (Appendix Nine)

In another speech, his majesty King Abdullah II said:

"As the 41st descendant of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him), I have sought to uphold the true spirit of Islam, the Islam of peace. My Hashemite duty extends to protecting the Holy Sites of Christians and Muslims in Jordan and in Jerusalem. As



Custodian, I am committed to safeguarding the Holy City, as a place of worship for all and, God willing, a safe home for all communities for all generations."

In the above examples, King Abdullah uses personification to make live pictures in words. He gives anthropomorphic qualities to inanimate objects to make them dynamic. This is a kind of hyperbole, to highlight the point he wants to address by using the personification the Arab States have spoken and the words' spirit. Personification is also used to arouse audience emotions and call them to action. For example, he uses personification to stir the audience's emotions and convince them of the importance of having two states.

Charteris-Black (2011) had a similar observation about the role of personification in political language; he maintained that personification is used in political speeches to move the audience. He analysed speeches by both Presidents Bush, and by British Prime Ministers Winston Churchill, Margaret Thatcher and Tony Blair. He found a strong inclination towards personification, to evoke the audience's emotions. For example, the second George Bush frequently used the personification HISTORY IS A PERSON in his speeches, to stir the audience's emotions and call them to action. In King Abdullah's speeches, personification is also used to create images in the mind of people, to move their emotions and thoughts toward the intended meaning of His Majesty's discourse.

## **Conclusion**

The powerful linguistic effect that figures of speech produce, when used by political speakers, forms the discourse that they intend to create in listeners' minds. Rhetoric depends on figures of speech to help orators and political speakers shape their discourse and create effective meaning. As argued earlier the audience is taken into consideration when King Abdullah selects the appropriate type of argument. Similarly, the analysis of metaphors, similes and personification asserts that the audience is vital when speakers select their metaphors. King Abdullah's choice of figures of speech takes into consideration the nature of the audience. This is in line with the nineteenth-century's perspective of rhetoric as an *adaptation* process, in which communicators adjust their language according to the nature of the audience and the event.



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