

THE RHETORICAL STRATEGIES OF AN INTERNATIONALLY RENOWNED PREACHER: NOUMAN ALI KHAN

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Article History:

Received : 27 September 2024

Revised : 1 November 2024

Published : 31 December 2024

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To cite this article:

Sidek, N. H., & Yunus, K. (2024). THE RHETORICAL STRATEGIES OF AN INTERNATIONALLY RENOWNED PREACHER: NOUMAN ALI KHAN. *Jurnal Ilmi*, 14(1), 1-12.

ABSTRACT

Nouman Ali Khan, a distinguished preacher at the international level, accentuates a remarkable phenomenon in preaching history as he has been consecutively listed among 500 influential Muslims for almost a decade. This raises the question of how prominent his preaching approach is in the realm of Islamic discourse. Despite his incredible achievement in this sphere, there is a paucity of his discourse analysis to exemplify the preaching strategies to other preachers. Hence, this study aims to investigate his video's most crucial persuasive features to identify the rhetorical strategies. The transcribed video scripts were analysed using ATLAS.ti 23 through thematic analysis, guided by Fairclough's triple-dimensional model. Regarding the preliminary analysis done, the present emphasis is on analysing the text rather than discursive and social practices, which is the highlight of the paper. As a result, Khan's speech on the 'Power of Bismillah' orchestrates three significant elements of ethos, pathos, and logos based on Aristotle's persuasion triad. It concludes that logos is the highest component Khan utilises. The significance of such approaches in giving da'wah will enhance one's skills when delivering Islamic knowledge to the audience. The study has implications for Muslims, especially preachers worldwide, as a milestone in conducting effective preaching.

Keywords: *Nouman Ali Khan; Aristotle's rhetorical appeals; preachers; ATLAS.ti 23.*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

For a long time, researchers and intellectuals have placed religious discourse at the forefront of their academic and public interests (Mahmood & Kasim, 2019). The medium of Islamic speeches and documents has been analysed critically to review the substantial components of the discourse. The Muslim speakers have utilised contemporary and latest platforms to ensure the message of Islam is well perceived. For example, Khan has established a YouTube channel called Bayyinah, consisting of video playlists covering endless Islamic and Arabic studies topics. They are a collection of speeches ranging from sermons, tours, seminars, Arabic classes, animated and short videos, Ramadan insights, and many others. Thus, the art of preaching has tremendously changed and enhanced over time. Alhidayatillah defines preaching as persuading people to adopt the Islamic way of life, which aligns with their character and values (2017). In order to prevent misunderstandings and division, preachers—such as leaders, religious instructors, and scholars—send out the word of Islam. This is not only a Muslim message; it is meant for everyone. Preaching in one’s capacity is advocated among Muslims as part of the sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). Moreover, knowledgeable Muslims with different backgrounds contribute to the distinctive types of preachers nowadays.

2.0 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Preachers employ various techniques to disseminate religious teachings, especially among individuals with formal Islamic education, as they serve real-life resources for questions about Islamic lifestyles. Nonetheless, they need to strategise their preaching accordingly. This is to avoid less inspiring da’wah approaches when propagating the message of Islam to others. For example, uninformed remarks on subjects unrelated to the preacher’s area of competence, as well as provocative and contentious public discourse statements, are instances of ineffective methods of preaching to Muslims (Mustapha & Razak, 2019). Also, unlike any other figure, as an outstanding American Muslim preacher, Nouman Ali Khan employs Quranic linguistic devices in his lecture to persuade listeners. Many people can preach, but not everyone can also be a linguist. Hence, this study aims to identify Khan’s rhetorical strategies to propagate da’wah as an influential global preacher.

3.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

This study examines Khan’s rhetorical use in preaching, focusing on its theoretical foundations. It explores persuasive theory and the complexity of earlier studies on preaching in Muslim discourse, aiming to enhance the relevance of the research. For instance, Aristotle, an important figure in the academic study of persuasion, is among the first to theorise on persuasion and rhetoric, stating that rhetoric is the “gift of observing, in each particular instance, the accessible instruments of persuasion” (Larson, 2012, as cited in Nwagbara & Belal, 2019). Recent literature on this topic is meticulously evaluated to highlight the relationship between rhetoric and persuasion in contemporary research.

Rhetorical Strategies

Rhetorical strategies are methods speakers and authors use to engage, inform, or persuade their listeners. These tactics have their roots in rhetoric, which involves the art of persuasion. Among established strategies utilised in this spectrum are metaphor and simile, hyperbole, rhetorical questions, alliteration, parallelism, antithesis, anaphora, kairos, and the well-known trio of ethos, pathos, and logos.

One of the renowned persuasion frameworks is the Aristotelian triad, which has been the leading language strategy. It consists of three categories: logos, pathos, and ethos. Logos handles the speech's intricacies. For instance, how a speaker puts together his sermon reveals his personality and influences the listeners' opinion of the speech. In addition to the framework, the speaker also needs to set up a transitional mode so that it continues to be effective in capturing the audience's interest. Furthermore, the factual components of logos derive from pertinent references that offer proof and bolster the speaker's assertion. Furthermore, pathos is examined by considering the utterance's emotional context. The speaker helps the audience comprehend his message by providing a clear explanation, allowing them to picture themselves as characters and express their emotions at the same time. Additionally, this may motivate individuals to take action or make a positive difference in their lives. Lastly, ethos is defined as a 'reliable appeal' that encompasses the speaker's dependability in using his methodology and information sources throughout the speech. The speaker's ability to persuade the audience and increase their level of trust in him is a test of his credibility. Reputable references also contribute to the audience's development of independence from the speaker.

A study used Connor and Lauer's methodology to analyse rational, believable, and emotional appeals (1985, as cited in Rumman, 2019). The findings emphasised the crucial role that persuasive appeals played in increasing an argument's ability to persuade. The results demonstrated that credibility appeal is utilised the most, followed by emotive appeal, with rational arguments used the least frequently (Rumman, 2019). According to Aini et al. (2019), the rhetorical triangle described by Aristotle, which was crucial to the following investigations, served as the model for this methodology. The preachers' participation and appointment by Islamic organisations, their knowledge, purposeful preaching, spiritual practices, and virtuous characters, as well as the implementation of behavioural, emotional, and cognitive changes, are all examples of the persuasive strategies in the study (Aini et al., 2019). On one side of the coin, the other study examined rhetoric and compared the speeches of Aa Gym and Habib Rizieq. The two preachers used every rhetorical strategy at their disposal, as the language used in Gym was primarily epideictic with some deliberative rhetorical elements. Conversely, Rizieq's rhetoric primarily combined forensic rhetorical elements with epideictic and deliberative elements (Az-Zahra et al., 2021). Based on the available research, it demonstrates the concrete foundation of Aristotle's modes of persuasion. Therefore, this study will utilise the relevance of Aristotle's model in order to analyse the most compelling components of Khan's speech to determine its persuasiveness based on the research question:

What is the most utilised persuasive linguistic approach in Khan's preaching?

4.0 METHODOLOGY

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is an approach for conducting research that examines spoken or written language in light of its social environment. It seeks to comprehend language usage in everyday contexts. One of the fundamental theories under CDA is Fairclough’s three-dimensional paradigm. It consists of text analysis, discourse practice, and social practice. While discourse practice analyses discourse’s formation, reception, and distribution, textual analysis looks at language and its linguistic components. The larger institutional and social context—which encompasses power structures and social norms—in which speech is situated is examined by social practice. This study, however, only emphasises textual analysis to have a detailed understanding of the element employed within Fairclough’s 3D model, particularly in Khan’s speech.

The selected video was dated 2019, during a speech on Ramadan in English and Arabic at a mosque. It consists of approximately 4552 words with a duration of almost 25 minutes. The video highlights the value of remembering Allah and the significance of saying ‘bismillah’ (in the name of Allah) before doing anything. Khan emphasises how crucial it is to establish a relationship with Allah and comprehend His descriptions with further enlightenment. He also talks about the importance of the letter ba’ (ب) in ‘bismillah’, which denotes how everything we do is linked to Allah’s name. Additionally, our deeds are also incomplete without uttering it. The difference between ‘ilah’ and ‘Allah’ is also brought up by the speaker, who says that ‘ilah’ connotes worship and turning to Allah in times of need, whilst ‘Allah’ is inclusively the exclusive name of God. In fact, the most frequent word, with a total of 101 times mentioned in the video, is ‘Allah’, which signifies the prestige of the name and the topic is profoundly centred on Him. Figure 1 shows the word cloud generated from the speech transcription produced in ATLAS.ti 23.

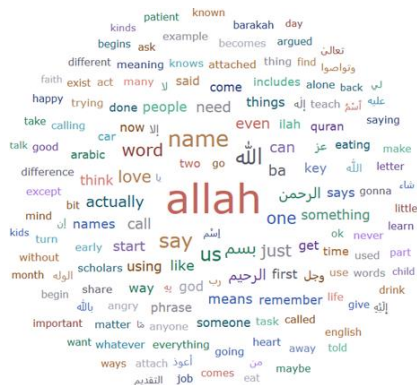


Figure 1: Word frequencies generated from Khan’s speech

The first step requires the authors to transcribe the speech into the written form. This ensures that the second step can be carried out smoothly when uploading the document file to ATLAS.ti 23 for further analysis. By utilising the software, the themes and essential elements of the speech can be grouped into significant categories accordingly. This step is called thematic analysis, whereby the components of the speech are categorised into three

groups of ethos, pathos, and logos. Aristotelian triad plays a vital role in methodologically crafting the approach. After an exhaustive process throughout the analysis, the relevant information is later used to write the results and discussion succinctly.

5.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As a result, based on the analysis using ATLAS.ti 23, the findings show that the highest persuasive appeal belongs to logos or logical aspects in the speech. Figure 2 indicates the three different elements of Aristotle's triangle of persuasion. The Sankey diagram of 'Power of Bismillah' below compares the allocated use of each appeal in Khan's speech. While logos comes first in the ranking, the second and third places of pathos and ethos discuss emotional and credibility aspects, respectively. Logos deals with the technicalities of the speech. For example, how the speaker constructs his sermon composition illustrates the individual's personality and affects how well the recipients will regard the speech. Not only the aspect of its structure, but the speaker is also responsible for arranging a transitional mode to maintain its effectiveness in gauging the audience's attention. In addition, the factual elements of logos come from the relevant references to provide evidence and support the speaker's claim or statement.

Moreover, in the case of pathos, it examines the emotional context of the speech. By giving a clear description to the audience, the orator guides them to understand his message as if they join the storyline, imagining themselves as part of the characters and expressing their feelings simultaneously. Also, this can inspire them to instil a move or contribute to improving their lives. For instance, phrases or punchlines that are impossible to move a mountain but can melt one's heart strike the audience's inner sense and open their hearts. Finally, ethos refers to reliable appeal, which covers the prominent essence of the speaker's reliability in applying his approach throughout the speech and his sources of information. The speaker's credibility is tested through his convincing speech delivery to enhance the audience's trustworthiness towards him. Credible references also play a role in inculcating the audience's self-reliance on the speaker. This will nurture a stronger relationship between both parties, making the communication or Islamic knowledge dissemination process most effective. The speaker can own the floor based on his competence when they believe each other. All in all, these three categories represent multilayered persuasive elements in the speech.

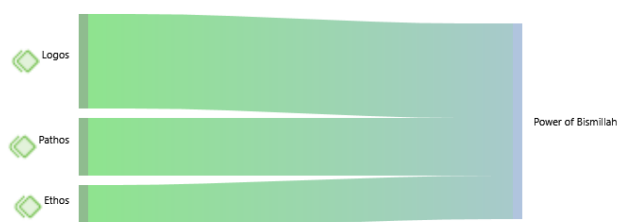


Figure 2: Sankey diagram analysed through the Aristotelian triad

The most frequent use of this category of logos also applies to previous literature by Hossain et al. (2019), Kaldahl (2019), and Davoudi et al. (2020). However, they investigate different elements of their unique field of study. To commemorate the importance of the preaching perspective, this paper digs deeper into the language-based discussion of the preacher. Specifically, logos is a big umbrella of three groups resulting in significant transcription themes: linguistic element, structure of speech, and comparison. Figure 3 exhibits three important elements of logos.

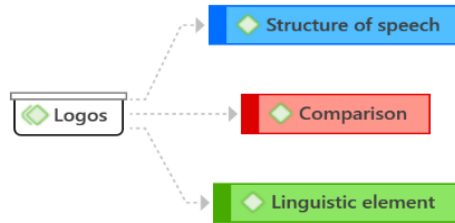


Figure 3: Elements of factual appeals under the ‘logos’ group

Theme 1: Linguistic Element

The linguistic element becomes the most salient aspect of this study. It represents Khan’s exclusive approach in preaching when he systematically and deliberately organises the explanation of Arabic words, one after another, in almost every part of the speech from the linguistic point of view. Figure 4 shows 12 elements of Arabic linguistics that work as facts for the audience to refer to, which comprise one word or more.

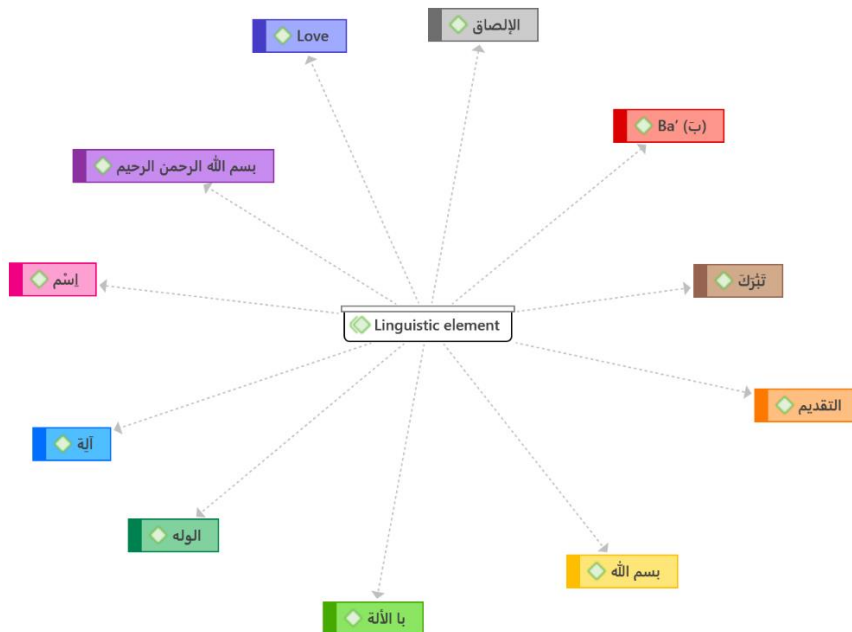


Figure 4: Components of the theme ‘linguistic element’

The audience is rationally persuaded through factual references as the explanation of several main components of Arabic words is rooted in 'bismillah' itself. From the smallest element of one letter ba' (ب) to the extent of additional parts of 'ar-Rahman-i Rahim' (الرحمن الرحيم) to the word 'bismillah' to form a more meaningful verse, uttered in everyday basis or at the very beginning of Quran recitation, the speaker has given an immense credit on the linguistic base to describe them clearly. In fact, these elements are interconnected to each other, becoming one trail of concise description towards the final, well-received message to the audience. For example, after a precise illustration of the letter concerning its historical appreciation in ancient times by influential and credible groups of people, i.e., respected Islamic leaders and the generation living with Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), the speaker introduces its characteristics by referring to *Basri* scholars who characterise it as ba' الإلصاق, with daily examples: -

If you attach Allah's name or you don't attach Allah's name, you still eat a burger. You're still eating...you still drink orange juice. (Nouman Ali Khan - Official - Bayyinah, 2019).

The function of it is to show an attachment that letter made within the word that connects or binds any action to Allah when recited as if it will yield something afterwards. The preacher then provides the element of 'barakah' when he quotes the meaning as "something that becomes stable" as a result of combining any verb to 'Allah' and further describes the concept with other Arabic linguistic components like بركه النعير - بركة - تَبْرَكَ (Nouman Ali Khan - Official - Bayyinah, 2019). For example, by saying 'bismillah' before eating or drinking, the doer will obtain blessings, other indirect materialised gains, and even the unseen ones in that simple activity. In a similar vein, the other characteristic is ba' الألة as echoed by *Kufi* scholars to explain the letter as a means of the action, such as presented by Khan in the speech that only with 'bismillah' the action can take place. Also, he illustrates an instance of "I use the key to open the door", which works the same with nothing will get done without the name of Allah or 'bismillah' recitation (Nouman Ali Khan - Official - Bayyinah, 2019). The whole explanation expresses the importance of the word in one's life.

Such a practice is a dependency test for Muslims to rely on Allah alone. Their firm conviction in Islam is not only realised through their words and actions but also spiritually anchored in their hearts and minds as an integration to nurture the criteria of a real practising Muslim. Hence, the Arabic linguistic element stimulates the audience to enhance their reasoning by convincing them with a complete set of proofs. Lack of evidence will trigger their rejection of the message or make them doubtful towards the information and the speaker. The perceived idea will later lead to a failure process for preaching purposes. According to Hussain et al., the significance of logos is that it allows the person to make an argument to confidently support his claims (2020). Thus, factors contributing to the audience's rationality, such as reasons or logical premise, will add up to the preacher's preaching effectiveness.

Theme 2: Structure of Speech

The second theme highlighted in the analysis is the structure of speech. The component is needed to ensure that the message of the preaching is effectively articulated and understood. The knowledge transfer occurs clearly when every element of the speech is well-structured as if a particular storyline can greatly impact the audience without direct interference. Figure 5 explains Theme 2, which is divided into ‘opening remarks’, ‘transition signal’, ‘section signal’, and ‘closing remarks’.

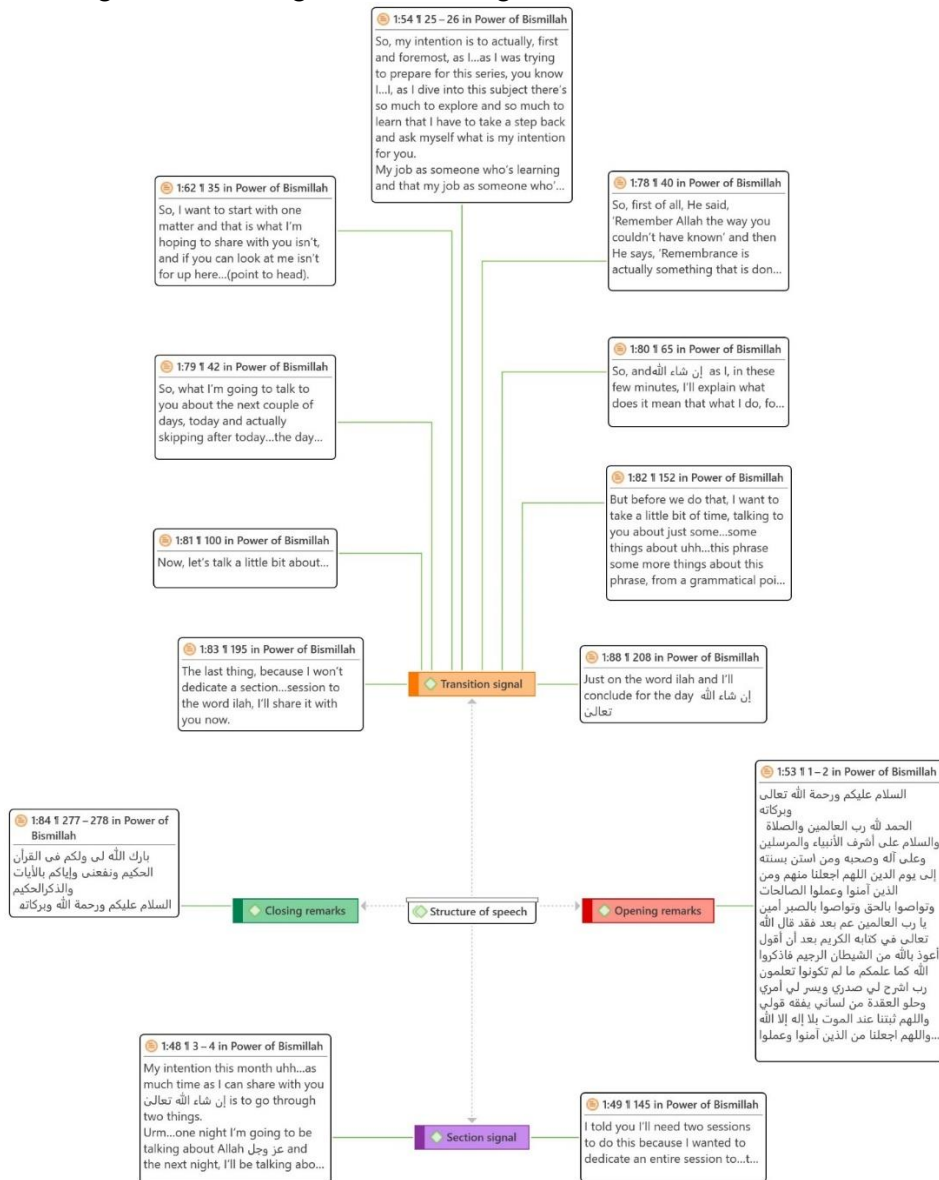


Figure 5: Components of the theme ‘structure of speech’

The speech structure indicates the speaker’s organisation throughout his entire delivery. Whether or not the audience will get the message systematically from listening to the

speech depends on the speaker to map the strategy to communicate the idea. Firstly, the speech is divided into three main parts: introduction, body, and conclusion. It starts with the opening remarks by addressing fellow Muslims with Islamic greetings, salutations to Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), prayers, and Quranic verses before introducing the speech topic as background knowledge. Also, for each new content he wants to convey, he would highlight it beforehand and explain it afterwards. He marks several beginnings of his sharing with transitional signals like ‘so’, ‘now’, and ‘but’ as the first element of his statement and other conjunctions such as ‘first and foremost’ and ‘first of all’. The choice of words like ‘start’, ‘conclude’, and ‘last’ indicate the direction of the speech mentioned by Khan so that the audience is prepared for the next stage or parts of the speech. Similarly, he ends his speech with closing remarks, hoping the audience will practise the new knowledge properly.

By the same token, in other contexts of structural elements provided in a written example, such as in the Quran, it can also attract and encourage the readers to further explore their reading of the Book. For instance, at the beginning of the narratives in surah al-Shu’ara’ (the 26th chapter), a cyclic structure pattern is identified in the chapter that connects the opening and closing sections (Farsi, 2021). This peculiar structure will spark the readers’ curiosity to develop an understanding of the surah. Indeed, from the perspective of their conviction towards Allah’s greatness, it can also grow stronger due to the acknowledgement of His exalted power in writing such a special structure in the Holy Quran. Thus, presenting a storied structural pattern with an organised outline enhances the addressees’ interest and focus, which can also last longer. In the context of Khan’s speech, the key to persuading the audience is a systematic or organised delivery structure.

Theme 3: Comparison

The last extensive part of logos, which is explicated in this study, generates the idea of comparison used by Khan. This is demonstrated via three groups of comparing resemblance, creating analogy, and suggesting metaphor, which are further explained in Figure 6 through quotations below.

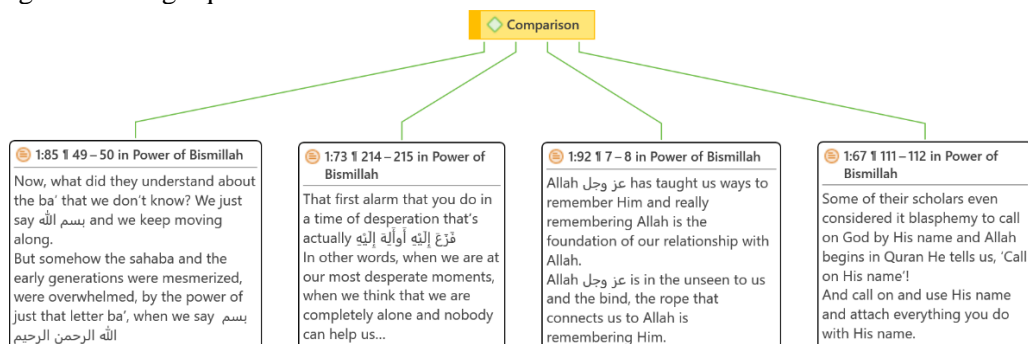


Figure 6: Components of the theme ‘comparison’

The first example is a direct comparison of a difference between the present generation and early generation in Muslim groups as the latter show higher appreciation for the letter ba’.

The second example shows the relationship between the ‘first alarm’ and Allah. In the previous explanation Khan gave in his speech, he discussed the meanings of ‘Allah’ and ‘ilah’. It is said that Allah is the name of God, which applies the same to all god’s name in the past scriptures. The word ‘ilah’, as in the declaration of faith in one God in Islam, is rooted in a word which means: -

(W)hen we are at our most desperate moments when we think that we are completely alone and nobody can help us...there is no one to turn to accept Allah, there’s no possibility of anyone that we can ever turn to except Allah. (Nouman Ali Khan - Official - Bayyinah, 2019).

Thus, the ‘first alarm’ is an analogy for Allah, as mentioned previously in the speech, as the response to the act of someone breaking the window. That is the urge one should have to reach out to Allah. On the other hand, the third instance declares Allah’s remembrance as a ‘rope’ that connects one worshipper to his God, which refers to a metaphor. This is due to our limited capacity to see God physically with our naked eyes. However, that can be grasped through remembering Him. The last instance shows mentioning God’s name as an act of blasphemy. A group of non-Muslim scholars proposes the action as it should be avoided at all costs to prevent people from getting the punishment for committing the so-called sin for them.

The comparison is included to help the audience understand the storytelling of the speech. This will increase their comprehension of the topic, which is sometimes difficult to comprehend due to the complicated terms or concepts unless compared to everyday examples to enhance their imagination. Hence, they can relate and agree or disagree. As reported by Barkessa, it is mentioned that people use metaphors to convey to others their beliefs and attitudes (2021). The preacher imposes his beliefs, putting his point of view, as he metaphorically embeds the word ‘rope’ as stated in the third quotation (in Figure 6) to the listeners so they can grab the concept decently. This is also seconded by Marni et al., who state that understanding a metaphorical word or phrase’s meaning might help one become closer to God (2019). For example, the speech again emphasises ‘rope’ as the remembrance of God to connect with Allah, which aids the believers to understand the existence of God in their everyday life and include Him in whatever they do as they acknowledge the presence of the unseen supreme being from that understanding. Eventually, as an outcome of the process, they will be able to be near Allah.

Based on the above discussion, the study has a relatively presented limitation since the results were generated solely from a preliminary analysis. A generalisation cannot be done due to speaker and video selection. However, the demonstrated (ways of) analysis can be applied to other studies that encompass similarly examined subjects and aims compared to this research.

6.0 CONCLUSION

The study attempts to examine the rhetorical strategies in a religious discourse. The discourse of an American preacher, Nouman Ali Khan, employs English as the medium of

interaction in his preaching, highlighting remarkable Quranic elements in Arabic. With the analysis of Aristotle's three ways to persuade, Khan's inclination to maximise his linguistic expertise is demonstrated in the analysis.

In conclusion, by comparing the frequency of Aristotle's persuasive elements, the most utilised approach in Khan's speech entitled 'Power of Bismillah' falls under the 'logos' theme, followed by pathos, and finally, ethos, as the least mentioned component by him. It can be observed that Khan predominantly exercises logos in his preaching. This spiritually God-centred speech theme repeatedly mentions the element of rational or reasonable persuasion. Logos incorporates three specific entities of 'linguistic element', 'structure of speech', and 'comparison'. The use of linguistic elements is evident in his speech compared to other discussed themes of the video, which colours his extraordinary preaching strategies as a feature that stands out throughout his Islamic discourse.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Sidek, N. H: Conceptualisation, Methodology, Software, Writing-Original Draft Preparation; Yunus, K: Validation, Writing-Reviewing and Editing.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The manuscript has not been published elsewhere and is not under consideration by other journals. All authors have approved the review, agree with its submission and declare no conflict of interest on the manuscript.

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