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# Primed for Violence? A corpus analysis of jihadist discourse

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Professor Tony McEnery (Lancaster University) delivered the annual John Sinclair Lecture on Thursday 9 May 2013.

## Abstract:

'How are people persuaded to be violent? How might a small group of people influence members of a larger group of people to behave in ways that they may normally find abhorrent? This talk looks at these questions, which are typically summarised as 'radicalization', using the example of jihadist language.

I will explore how language may be manipulated in order to legitimate violent acts against certain groups or individuals in jihadist materials. However, I will also be exploring the important claim that there is a direct link between what the jihadists write and what other Muslims write, an assumption held by policy makers, academics and the media.

This talk examines how we look for linguistic evidence of this process, with an emphasis upon incitement to violence. If there is evidence that the manipulation of language in jihadist writing leads to a corresponding adaptation in either the Muslim mainstream media or the writing of ordinary Muslims over time, then we may begin to accept and understand with some linguistic sophistication what is at the moment assumed by many. We may also, however, be able to see how such radicalization is resisted, and hence better understand the process of resistance to radicalization also.

Central to my account of incitement to violence are the linked ideas of collocation and lexical priming. Together these begin to explain, I will argue, both the rhetorical process around incitement to violence and the broader dynamics in discourse that alienate and leave open to persuasion sections of society that may be persuaded to undertake violent acts.

My exploration is based on tens of thousands of words of corpus material, including i.) transcripts of so-called 'martydom' videos; ii.) texts by those who exhort jihadists to acts of violence; iii.) muslim news media and iv.) comment data from the Muslim news media. By drawing upon a range of sources like this, I will be better able to characterise the competing forces being brought to bear as different groups try to influence mainstream Muslim discourse.'

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