



ROUTLEDGE
HANDBOOKS



The Routledge Handbook of Language and Mind Engineering

Edited by Chris Shei and James Schnell



THE ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK OF LANGUAGE AND MIND ENGINEERING

The Routledge Handbook of Language and Mind Engineering is a comprehensive work that delves into the complex interplay between language, culture, politics, and media in shaping the human mind.

The book is divided into five main sections, each exploring different aspects of mind engineering: I. Political Mind Engineering; II. Commercial Mind Engineering; III. Media, Culture, and Mind Engineering; IV. Linguistic and Semiotic Analysis of Mind Engineering; V. Mind Engineering in Educational Settings.

The book provides a multi-dimensional perspective on how language, media, culture, and politics intersect to shape individuals' thoughts and beliefs. It highlights the diverse methods and contexts in which mind engineering occurs, making it a valuable resource for scholars, researchers, and policymakers interested in understanding the complexities of contemporary discourse and manipulation of human thought.

The contents of this cutting-edge handbook will engage all undergraduate, postgraduate, PhD students and scholars, and researchers at all levels, in fields such as languages, linguistics, politics, communication studies, media studies, and psychology.

Chris Shei, originally from Taiwan, pursued MPhil and PhD degrees in the UK at Cambridge and Edinburgh, respectively. Since 2003, Chris has taught and researched in applied linguistics and translation studies at Swansea University, UK, with a particular interest in authoritarian discourse. Highly experienced in overseeing large-scale book projects such as handbooks, encyclopedias, and thematic book series, Chris invites proposals to publish monographs, edited volumes, or book chapters in the fields of linguistics, rhetoric, political discourse, language learning, Chinese studies, or translation studies, at ceshei@gmail.com.

James Schnell, Ph.D. (Ohio University, 1982), presently works in administration at Ohio State University after spending three years as a cultural advisor in the Defense Critical Languages & Culture Program at the University of Montana, USA. He retired from the U.S. Air Force at the rank of Colonel with his final 14 years serving as an Assistant Air Force Attache at the U.S. Embassy in Beijing, China. Schnell is a three-time Fulbright Scholar to Cambodia, Myanmar, and Kosovo; has completed three visiting fellowships at the East-West Center (Honolulu); and has taught at universities in the United States and throughout Southeast Asia.

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CONTENTS

<i>Editorial Board</i>	<i>ix</i>
<i>List of Figures</i>	<i>x</i>
<i>List of Tables</i>	<i>xii</i>
<i>List of Contributors</i>	<i>xiii</i>

Introduction	1
<i>Chris Shei</i>	

PART I

Political Mind Engineering 9

1	Nostalgia as False Commemoration: How US Conservatives and White Supremacists Mind Engineer through Dog Whistle Politics	11
	<i>Laila S. Dahan</i>	
2	“Trump”-ing to the Capitol: Brainwashing through Social Media	25
	<i>Rimi Nandy and Jhilli Tewary</i>	
3	The Chinese Communist Party’s Historical Resolutions as Mind-Engineering Projects	39
	<i>Heike Holbig</i>	
4	Identifying Partisan Efforts to Generate Authoritarian Legitimacy	58
	<i>Joanna Rak</i>	

5	Political Legitimization of Hybrid Regimes: Chinese State Discourses on the Democratization of Post-Handover Hong Kong <i>Chi Kit Chan</i>	74
PART II		
	Commercial Mind Engineering	89
6	The Benefit of the Doubt: How Big Oil Makes Us Think <i>William F. Schnell</i>	91
7	Chain-Effect Mind Engineering: The Multilayered Manipulation of Advertising <i>Brian L. Schnell</i>	105
8	On the Commodification of Sexual Wellness: Race, Gender, and the Engineering of Consent <i>Kwasu D. Tembo</i>	121
9	Manipulative Practices of Programming and Controlling Employee Behaviour in the Activities of Chinese Managers <i>Pavel Deriugin, Liubov Lebedintseva, and Evgeny Kremnyov</i>	137
10	Humor as a Mind-Engineering Tool in the Digital Age: The Case of Stand-Up Comedy <i>Joanna Ut-Seong Sio and Luis Morgado da Costa</i>	153
PART III		
	Media, Culture, and Mind Engineering	167
11	Corporate Colonization, Geopolitical Power Struggles, and Hypernudge – How Social Media Engineers Minds <i>Till Neuhaus and Lee J. Curley</i>	169
12	Red Tourism: Spirituality, Modernity, and Patriotism in China's Tibet <i>Kamila Hladíková</i>	183
13	The Truth Lies In-between: Mind Engineering in the 2020–2021 Indian Farmers' Protest <i>Sony Jalarajan Raj and Adith K. Suresh</i>	197
14	Patriotism and Nationalism in Chinese Fansubbing <i>Pin-ling Chang</i>	212

- 15 Pop Cultural Media as a Resource for Fostering Responsible
World Citizens 224
Valentin Werner and Theresa Summer

PART IV

Linguistic and Semiotic Analysis of Mind Engineering 243

- 16 Newspeak and Cyberspeak: The Haunting Ghosts of the Russian Past 245
Kristina Šekrst and Sandro Skansi
- 17 Understanding the Roles of Violent Extremist Dream Accounts in
Radicalization and Recruitment 259
*Noor Aqsa Nabila Mat Isa, Nurul Miza Mohd Rashid,
and Ahmad El-Muhammady*
- 18 Framing and Metaphor in Media Discourse: Multi-Layered Metaphorical
Framings of the COVID-19 Pandemic in Newspaper Articles 274
Tetsuta Komatsubara
- 19 Uncovering the Linguistic Agenda of ‘Hindi’stan: The Political
Implications of Language Imposition in India 293
Raisun Mathew
- 20 Language Corruption in Chinese: A Cognitive Linguistic Perspective 310
Haidan Wang and Albert H. W. Jiang
- 21 Visual Language and Mind Engineering: The Case of Multicultural Emojis 329
Amin Heidari
- 22 Brainwashing at Home and Abroad in Cold War Fiction and Film 352
David Seed

PART V

Mind Engineering in Educational Setting 367

- 23 Engineering the Mind of a Child: The Potency of Japanese
Language Lessons in Colonized Korea 369
Catherine Ryu
- 24 Creating ‘Ignorance of Ignorance’ through School Education:
A Sociology of Knowledge Approach to Victimhood Nationalism
and Educational Ignorance in Japan 386
Mitsuhiro Tada

Contents

25	Language, Ideologies, Discrimination, and Afrocentric-Focused, Critical Language Awareness Writing Curricula for African American Language and Akan Language Speakers <i>Shenika Hankerson and Monica A. Obiri-Yeboah</i>	404
26	Navajo Students' Perspectives of Their Heritage Language and Translingual Identity <i>Yi-Wen Huang</i>	418
27	Linguistically Responsive Instruction and Ideologies in Preservice Teacher Preparation <i>Laura Mahalingappa, Jessica B. Crawford, and Astrid Sierra</i>	431
	<i>Index</i>	447

CONTRIBUTORS

Chi Kit Chan is Associate Professor at the School of Communication at the Hang Seng University of Hong Kong. His research interest covers journalism, mass communication, media sociology, and cultural identities. Chi Kit's articles are seen in various peer-reviewed journals – *Journalism, Media, Culture and Society, Journal of Contemporary China, Chinese Journal of Communication, and China Perspectives*, for example. He is the leading author of *Hong Kong Media: Interaction Between Media, State and Civil Society* (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 288 pages, published in 2022). Chi Kit is the guest editor of a special issue of the *Chinese Journal of Communication* – 'Anti-extradition law and beyond: the role of media and communication in the crisis of Hong Kong' (Vol. 15, Issue 3, 2022). He also received the Emerald Awards Literati – Outstanding Reviewer from Emerald Publishing in 2022.

Pin-ling Chang is Professor at the Department of Applied Linguistics and Language Studies, Chung Yuan Christian University (CYCU), Taiwan. She earned her PhD degree in Translation Studies from Newcastle University, UK. Her research interests focus on identity and ideology in translation and interpreting history and practice in the Chinese language world. Her publications have appeared in journals, such as *The Translator* and *Linguistica Antverpiensia, New Series – Themes in Translation Studies* (LANS–TTS). She has also contributed to two other Routledge Handbooks and another three edited volumes published by Routledge, Palgrave Macmillan, and Cambridge Scholars.

Jessica B. Crawford is a Ph.D. student in Applied Linguistics and Language Education at the University of Maryland, College Park, USA. Her research interests include TESOL teacher education, the literacy and biliteracy development of multilingual youth, and asset-based, culturally sustaining pedagogies.

Lee J. Curley submitted his PhD in January 2018 and graduated with his PhD in June of the same year. Lee is currently a lecturer in applied Psychology in the School of Life and Health Sciences

at Glasgow Caledonian University, UK. His research interests include forensic cognition, legal psychology, and decision science. Lee has published over 20 articles in highly respected journals and has engaged with the media extensively, being written about in the UK press (the Telegraph, the Times, and The Guardian) and being interviewed on BBC radio.

Laila S. Dahan is Adjunct Professor of writing and ESL specialist in the Professional Writing Department at Woodbury University in Burbank, California, USA. She taught writing for 14 years in the UAE at the American University of Sharjah. She holds MAs in political science and TESOL and a PhD in applied linguistics from the University of Exeter. Her research interests are multidisciplinary including global English, language and identity, women and Islam, politics of the Middle East, and social justice.

Pavel Deriugin has been working at St. Petersburg State University since 2010. In 2022, he became Head of the Russian-Chinese Center for Interdisciplinary Research at the Sociological Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences. His areas of teaching and research interests include modern Chinese sociology and the sociology of organizations. He is particularly interested in the study of human capital in modern societies, especially in Russia and China. He has over 200 papers published.

Ahmad El-Muhammady is Assistant Professor and Head of Responsible Research and Innovation at the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilisation (ISTAC-IIUM). Besides that, he holds various external positions such as Associate Fellow at the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT), The Hague, Netherlands; International Advisory Committee Member at the Global Peace Institute (GPI), United Kingdom; and Associate Research Fellow at the Accounting Research Institute (ARI), Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Malaysia. Dr. Ahmad also testified as an expert witness in the Malaysian High Court in various terrorism cases involving former members of Jama'ah Islamiyyah (JI), al-Qaeda Malaysia, and ISIS-affiliated groups. Additionally, he is a panel member in the prison rehabilitation program for individuals detained under terrorism laws and a consultant to develop Malaysia's National Action Plan on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (NAPPCVE).

Shenika Hankerson is Assistant Professor of Applied Linguistics and Language Education in the Department of Teaching and Learning, Policy and Leadership at the University of Maryland-College Park. Her research explores the intersection of race, language, and equity, with a focus on African American Language (AAL) and college writing. Dr. Hankerson's research has two strands: (1) examining how critical and Afrocentric college writing practices and policies shape the writing experiences and outcomes of AAL speakers, and (2) examining how college writing instructors develop dispositions about teaching and learning that foster equitable and just writing environments for AAL speakers. Her published and forthcoming scholarship can be found in peer-reviewed journals such as the *Journal of Second Language Writing*, *Written Communication*, and *Language Arts Journal of Michigan* and edited collections published by Routledge, Oxford University Press, and Utah State University Press.

Amin Heidari shifted his focus to the world of art and theater after obtaining his law degree from the University of Kashan. He pursued a master's degree in Theatre Directing at the Tehran University of Art. He is now a PhD candidate at Macquarie University, analyzing the performativity of

emojis in digital communications. Specifically, he is exploring how emojis, in their aesthetic engagement within everyday digital interactions, contribute to the propagation of macro ideologies like neoliberalism and principles of the capitalist market. His other field of interest is film studies, and his article on the anti-Nietzschean nature of the cinema of Abel Ferrara is under review.

Kamila Hladíková graduated from sinology at Charles University in Prague and completed her PhD in 2011. Since 2007, she has been teaching Chinese literature and film at the Palacky University Olomouc. In her research, she focused primarily on the representation of Tibet in the PRC and contemporary Chinese popular culture. She published articles on Tibet-related literature and film in the PRC and translated works of modern Chinese and Sinophone Tibetan fiction. She is also the author of the first Czech language teaching material on modern Chinese literature and co-author of the first Czech lexicon of the Sinophone cinema.

Heike Holbig has been trained in Modern and Classical Chinese Studies, macroeconomics, and social sciences in Erlangen, Beijing, and Heidelberg, where she obtained her PhD in 1997. Since then, she has worked as a researcher on Chinese politics at the German Institute for Global and Area Studies in Hamburg and as a professor of political science with a focus on Chinese and East Asian area studies at Goethe University in Frankfurt am Main. Her research interests include, among others, the role of language and ideology in the legitimation of party rule in the People's Republic of China, Chinese domestic politics, state-society relations, comparative authoritarianism, and growing efforts by the Xi Jinping leadership to shape global norms and global governance standards.

Yi-Wen Huang is a Professor of English and Linguistics at the University of New Mexico-Gallup, USA. Her research interests include language anxiety, writing apprehension, second language acquisition, psycholinguistics, and Native American literacies.

Albert H. W. Jiang received a Bachelor of Science and a Master of Engineering in Chemical and Biological Engineering from Princeton University. He is currently working as a biomedical scientist in New York City. Previously, Jiang was a senior news writer and associate editor at *The Daily Princetonian*, specializing in coverage of research, science, education, health, and health policy.

Tetsuta Komatsubara is a lecturer at Kobe University, Japan. He received his PhD in linguistics from Kyoto University in 2015. His main fields of research are rhetoric, pragmatics, and cognitive linguistics with foci on communicative effects of metaphor and metonymy, conceptual motivations for figurative understanding, and grammatical constructions of figurative language. He is the author of *Retorikku to Imi no Sozosei: Kotoba no Itsudatsu to Ninchi Gengogaku* (Rhetoric and Creativity in Meaning: Linguistic Deviation and Cognitive Linguistics, Kyoto University Press, 2016) and has published articles in *Cognitive Linguistic Studies* (John Benjamins), *Journal of Cognitive Linguistics* (The Japanese Cognitive Linguistics Association), *Studies in Pragmatics* (Pragmatics Society of Japan), and others.

Evgeny Kremnyov graduated from Transbaikal State University in 2002 and worked at Irkutsk State Linguistic University. Since 2016 he has been working at Irkutsk State University. In 2022, he joined the work of the Russian-Chinese Center for Interdisciplinary Studies of the Sociological Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences as an associate researcher. He carries out teaching

and research in the following areas: sociology of management in China and transdisciplinary regionology in Asia Pacific. Much of his research focuses on China's socio-political system. To date, he has published more than 100 research papers.

Liubov Lebedintseva graduated from St. Petersburg State University and has been working there since 2002. Since 2022 she has been an associate researcher at the Russian-Chinese Center for Interdisciplinary Studies of the Sociological Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences. She teaches and researches in the field of modern Chinese sociology and economic sociology and is particularly interested in the study of indigenization processes in Eastern societies' social knowledge, especially in China. In total, more than 150 works have been published.

Laura Mahalingappa is Associate Professor in the Applied Linguistics and Language Education program at the University of Maryland, College Park. Her research focuses broadly on the language and education of marginalized learners, incorporating sociolinguistic and critical linguistic and pedagogical perspectives into issues related to teacher preparation to support linguistically and culturally diverse learners and first and multilingual language acquisition.

Noor Aqsa Nabila Mat Isa is Senior Lecturer based in the Department of English Language, Faculty of Languages and Linguistics, Universiti Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. She is also a Research Fellow at Rabdan Academy, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. Her teaching and scholarly interests are focused on the areas of Critical Discourse Studies, Social Semiotics, and Multimodality. She is interested in multidisciplinary work and research involving (violent) extremism, (de)radicalization, religion, and politics, specifically on social media platforms. She is actively involved in various Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism initiatives in Malaysia, and she hopes to educate the general public about the dangers of (violent) extremism, equipping them with knowledge to resist extremist ideologies.

Raisun Mathew is Assistant Professor of English at Chinmaya Vishwa Vidyapeeth (Deemed to be University) in India. He teaches and researches in English literature and language and has conducted his doctoral research in liminality and transition studies. He is the author of *Zephyr: The Breeze of Love* (2021) and *In-Between: Liminal Stories* (2022), and the editor of *Literature, Media, and Society: Scholarly Perspectives* (2021), *The Post-Truth Era: Literature and Media* (2021), *Identity: Quest and Questions* (2022), and *Power, Politics, and People* (2023). He has presented many research papers and guest lectures at hybrid international conferences held in Spain, Poland, the Philippines, Turkey, and different states in India. His research interests include identity studies, liminality, post-truth, power politics, and religious studies.

Nurul Miza Mohd Rashid is Assistant Professor at the International Islamic University of Malaysia (IIUM). She has recently completed her PhD in Psychology at IIUM. Her thesis uncovered the risk factors of the radicalization process using Malaysian ex-detainees and citizens as her research samples. Her main research interests include violent extremism and the radicalization process from a psychological point of view. Her other interests include exploring various psychological processes in media use and social issues permeating Malaysian society, including the intergroup tensions between Malaysians and migrants in Malaysia. Her most recent publication, 'Examining the Effects of News Frames as a Risk Factor of Radicalisation', is available in the *Journal of Intellectual Discourse*.

Luis Morgado da Costa received his PhD from the Nanyang Technological University, in Singapore. He is currently an Assistant Professor in Computational Linguistics at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, The Netherlands. His main research interests are Computational Lexical Semantics, Syntactic and Semantic Parsing, Educational Technology, and Digital Humanities. His work often employs multi- and cross-lingual methodologies. He works mainly with English and Mandarin Chinese but has also worked with other languages such as Japanese, Portuguese, Kristang, Cantonese, Coptic, Indonesian, and Abui.

Rimi Nandy is a PhD Research Scholar at the School of Media, Communication and Culture, Jadavpur University, India. She has been teaching English Language and Literature at various institutions since 2011. Her research interests include Digital Humanities, Narratology, Media Studies, Postmodernism, Posthumanism, and Japanese Cultural Studies. She has published journal articles and book chapters in the field of digital humanities.

Till Neuhaus works and researches at Bielefeld University, Germany. In his PhD project, he investigates decision processes in the field of educational assessment. His research interests include the history of decision-making sciences and the socio-political negotiation of Nudging. Prior to his current occupation, he earned three separate master's degrees – Political Communication, Interamerican Studies, and Education – all from Bielefeld University.

Monica A. Obiri-Yeboah is a PhD student of Applied Linguistics and Language Education at the University of Maryland College Park. She seeks to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in education through her research and teaching. Specifically, her research focuses on language policy in education (especially in multilingual settings), black language, and language use in specific contexts. She has published with the *Nordic Journal of African Studies* and *Current Issues in Language Planning*.

Sony Jalarajan Raj is Assistant Professor at the Department of Communication, MacEwan University, Edmonton, Canada. Dr. Raj is a professional journalist turned academic who has worked in different demanding positions as a reporter, special correspondent, and producer in several news media channels.

Joanna Rak is Associate Professor at the Faculty of Political Science and Journalism of Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan. From 2016 to 2023, she was a visiting researcher at CEU San Pablo University in Madrid, Universidad de Navarra, Charles III University of Madrid, and Valladolid University. She is the principal investigator of the research projects 'The Culture of Political Violence Dynamics of Anti-austerity Movements in Europe', 'Contentious Politics and Neo-Militant Democracy', and 'Civil Disorder in Pandemic-ridden European Union' financed by the National Science Centre, Poland. The laureate of Scholarship by the Minister of Science and Higher Education for outstanding young scientists, the Barbara Skarga Scholarship, the START Scholarship by the Foundation for Polish Science, and the POLITYKA Scientific Award. The author of the book *Theorizing Cultures of Political Violence in Times of Austerity: Studying Social Movements in Comparative Perspective* (Routledge, New York 2018) and co-editor of *Neo-militant Democracies in Post-communist Member States of the European Union* (Routledge, New York 2022). Her research interests include political violence, militant democracy, democratic and nondemocratic regimes, contentious politics, and protest movements.

List of Contributors

Catherine Ryu is Associate Professor at Michigan State University. Her teaching and research interests encompass classical Japanese poetry, second language studies, game studies, digital humanities, global studies, translation studies, children's literature, and diaspora studies. Recently, her research scope has broadened to include data visualization and human-machine collaborative writing. She is one of the co-editors for *Passing, Persuasion, Propaganda: Cultural Production and Coloniality in Japan's East Asian Empire*, published by the University of Hawaii Press in 2023. A key aspect of her ongoing research is the transnational and translingual translation of writings by ethnic Koreans in China.

Brian L. Schnell studied Cognitive Science, Psychology, and Marketing at Case Western Reserve University. Prior to his current role in consumer research, Brian worked in market research at Audacy – one of the nation's largest radio companies – in support of its media sales team. His current research focuses on the exploration of trends in consumer sentiment during times of crisis.

William F. Schnell (Bill) retired as a pastor after a 37-year tenure serving three congregations in succession, including a term as President of the Ohio Council of Churches. He earned a Master of Arts degree from Central Michigan University and both Master of Divinity and Doctor of Ministry degrees from the Methodist Theological School in Ohio, USA. Since retirement Bill has completed a Graduate Certificate in Social Justice from Harvard University, where continuing coursework supports his independent research. In 2022 he published *Migration and the Metaproblem of Climate Change* based upon research that had previously informed a presentation at the 2021 Annual Symposium of the Harvard Extension Alumni Association and a TEDx Talk at Case Western Reserve University. Bill is a trained activist with the Climate Reality Project. He is married to Nancy, and they have two grown children and three grandchildren.

David Seed was educated at Cambridge, Leicester, and Hull universities and has taught in the English Department of Liverpool University since 1977. He helped secure the transfer of the Science Fiction Foundation Archive to that university, one of the largest such collections in Europe. His published work includes editing scholarly editions (Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *The Coming Race*, for example) and critical collections on nuclear war, science fiction, and nineteenth-century travel writing. His monographs include studies of Thomas Pynchon, Joseph Heller, and Ray Bradbury; an analysis of Science Fiction and the Cold War; a study of the interaction between the cinema and U.S. fiction up to the Second World War; and *Brainwashing: The Fictions of Mind Control* (2004). His main current projects are an edited collection of nineteenth-century science fiction and a study of John Wyndham's fiction.

Kristina Šekrst has earned a PhD in Logic at the University of Zagreb. She holds master's degrees in Philosophy, Comparative Linguistics, Cognitive Linguistics, and Croatian Language and Literature. She is an author of an Ancient Egyptian grammar and a contributor to various papers and talks regarding philosophy, linguistics, logic, computer science, and film studies. She is currently teaching linguistic and philosophical courses at the University of Zagreb, along with volunteering as a mentor in Caltech's and University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign online courses. Her research interests comprise logic, comparative and historical linguistics, philosophy of science, artificial intelligence and cognitive science, cosmology, film studies, and computational complexity.

Astrid Sierra is a PhD student in Applied Linguistics and Language Education in the Department of Teaching and Learning Policy and Leadership at the University of Maryland, College Park. Her

research focuses on equitable spaces for bi/multilingual learners and teachers, teacher education, bilingual education, transnational bilingual teachers, TESOL, and language ideologies.

Joanna Ut-Seong Sio received her PhD from Leiden University, The Netherlands. She has worked in Hong Kong (Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong Baptist University) and Singapore (Nanyang Technological University) and is currently Associate Professor of Chinese linguistics at Palacký University Olomouc, The Czech Republic. Her main research focus is on the syntax and semantics of languages spoken in China (Mandarin, Cantonese, Min, Zhuang), especially in the area of noun phrase structure. She is also an improviser and a stand-up comedian and is interested in the use of verbal arts in the training of communication skills.

Sandro Skansi is Associate Professor in Logic at the University of Zagreb. He is the author of *Introduction to Deep Learning* (Springer, 2018) and *Logic and Proofs* (Element, Zagreb, 2016), serving also as the editor of *Guide to Deep Learning Basics: Logical, Historical and Philosophical Perspectives* (Springer, 2020). He is a member of the Association for Symbolic Logic, the Association for the Advancement of Artificial Intelligence, the SAT Association, and the Croatian Philosophical Society. His main research interests include artificial intelligence, philosophy and history of cybernetics and artificial intelligence, deep learning, reasoning, complexity, and logical satisfiability.

Theresa Summer is Associate Professor of Teaching English as a Foreign Language at the University of Bamberg, Germany. She completed her PhD at the University of Würzburg and worked as an English and Music teacher at secondary schools for several years. Her research interests comprise learner perspectives, critical language pedagogy and taboos, pop culture, global education, and grammar teaching and learning. She is co-editor of the volume *Taboos and Controversial Issues in Foreign Language Education* (Routledge, 2023, with Christian Ludwig), co-editor of the practitioners' journal *Englisch 5–10*, and has been active as a developer of teaching materials.

Adith K. Suresh is currently associating as a research assistant at the Department of Communication, MacEwan University. Adith holds a master's degree in English Language and Literature from Mahatma Gandhi University. His research interest includes Film Studies, Literary Criticism, and South Asian Cultural Studies.

Mitsuhiro Tada, Professor of Sociology at Kumamoto University in Japan, works on sociological theory, history of sociology, and sociology of nationalism. He received the Young Investigator's Award for *The Temporal Construction of the Social World: Theory of Social Systems as Sociological Phenomenology* (English title) from the Japan Association for the Study on the History of Sociology. He is presently researching the relationship between nationalism and language in sociological theory. His latest English publication, 'Alfred Schutz on Race, Language, and Subjectivity: A Viennese Jewish Sociologist's Lifeworld and Phenomenological Sociology within Transition from Multinational Empire to Nation-State', appears in *Kumamoto Journal of Humanities* 4 (2023), 103–158.

Kwasu D. Tembo's eclectic and wide-ranging research interests include – but are not limited to – comics studies, literary theory and criticism, and philosophy, particularly the so-called 'prophets of extremity' – Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, and Derrida. He has published in Christopher Nolan's *The Prestige*, in *The Cinema of Christopher Nolan: Imagining the Impossible*, eds.

Jacqueline Furby and Stuart Joy (Columbia UP, 2015), and in Superman, in *Postscriptum: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Literary Studies* (2017). He also has essays in *Porn Studies*; *American, British, and Canadian Journal* and *Messengers from the Stars*, as well as a monograph on the life and work of Genndy Tartakovsky for Bloomsbury titled *Genndy Tartakovsky: Sincerity in Animation*. He is currently a full time lecturer at Lancaster University, UK.

Jhilli Tewary is Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychology, School of Arts and Social Studies, St. Xavier's University. She has been teaching Psychology at various institutions since 2000. Her research interests encompass the fields of positive psychology, personality studies, and aggression. Dr. Tewary's scholarly contributions have been featured in numerous peer-reviewed journals, where she has shared valuable insights and findings related to these areas of study.

Haidan Wang is Associate Professor at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. She is interested in cognitive linguistics, pragmatics, and many perspectives of Chinese as a second language (CSL), ranging from proficiency assessment to multimodal interactions at workplaces. Wang's publications cover CSL curriculum design, program evaluation, pedagogy, and technology-assisted Chinese learning for specific purposes. She co-authored the Intermediate to Advanced Level textbook, *Chinese for Working Professionals*, and co-edited a volume, *Chinese for Business and Professionals in the Workplace: Reaching across Disciplines*. Wang's articles have also appeared in international journals and as chapters of books published by Springer and Routledge.

Valentin Werner is Associate Professor of English Linguistics at the University of Bamberg, Germany. He studied at the universities of Bamberg, Limerick, and Cambridge and held previous positions at Leipzig and Marburg. His research interests comprise stylistics, sociolinguistics, the study of variation and change, media linguistics, applied linguistics (including learner corpus research), and how linguistic insights can inform EFL education. He has co-edited the award-winning volume *Pop Culture in Language Education: Theory, Research, Practice* (Routledge, 2021, with Friederike Tegge) and has published several articles on the language of TV series and song lyrics and their use in language education. He is the founding editor of the *Journal of Language and Pop Culture*.

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Chapter 17

UNDERSTANDING THE ROLES OF VIOLENT EXTREMIST DREAM ACCOUNTS IN RADICALIZATION AND RECRUITMENT

*Noor Aqsa Nabila Mat Isa, Nurul Miza Mohd Rashid
and Ahmad El-Muhammady*

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UNDERSTANDING THE ROLES OF VIOLENT EXTREMIST DREAM ACCOUNTS IN RADICALIZATION AND RECRUITMENT

*Noor Aqsa Nabila Mat Isa, Nurul Miza Mohd Rashid,
and Ahmad El-Muhammady*

Introduction

Dream, or dreaming, is an experience that differs from the waking experience (Foulkes 1993). Wamsley (2013) refers to it as a conscious experience during sleep. The erratic nature of dreams, likely due to their content that often betrays human logical construction of reality occurring in the waking consciousness, may make us feel somewhat in a different place – one that strips us of the physical world. Despite its nonsensical element, Kuiken and Sikora (1993) propose that dreams can influence waking moments. In cognitive neuroscience, human dreams serve their functions to consolidate memories, integrate existing and new knowledge, and maintain memories to assist with future planning (Wamsley 2013; Wilhelm et al. 2011). Kuiken's research found that dreams could move dreamers to experience intensive self-reflection, spiritual transformation, and enhanced creative thinking (Kuiken 2015; Kuiken et al. 2006, 2018).

The influence of dreams is also pervasive in extremist discourse. An instance is the case of David Koresh, the leader of a religious cult called the Branch Davidians based in Waco, Texas, who claimed to have had prophetic dreams and was believed to be a messiah figure. Another instance is an opposition against the Saudi Kingdom in late 1979 that led to an insurgent attack on the Grand Mosque in Mecca (the holiest place in Islam), which is said to have been partly motivated by the leader, Juhayman bin Seif al-Utaybi's dream. Along the same vein is the 9/11 attack, whereby Bin Laden and his followers had prophetic dreams pertaining to the destruction of the World Trade Center (Devji 2017).

Additionally, dream can also become the 'source of strategic military action and decision-making' (Edgar 2006, p. 268) as it has guided Mullah Omar, a former Taliban leader who claimed to have been instructed in his dream by the Prophet to liberate Afghanistan from corruption and foreign invasion. More recently, we were enlightened by a first-person account of a Malaysian family whose late husband decided to travel to Syria to fight for Daesh (also known as ISIS – the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria). He claimed to have had a dream in which he heard a *Hadith* ('a narrative record of the sayings or customs of Prophet Muhammad and his companions',

Merriam-Webster, n.d.) telling him to die in Syria as a martyr. These instances are some of the many dream accounts included as part of extremist recruitment materials that have led to violent actions in the real world.

A search in the literature on dreams in extremism research reveals predominant works in this aspect by Iain Edgar. Looking at dreams from an anthropologist's point of view, his studies involved examining whether dreams play a role in inspiring and guiding extremist group members such as those from Al-Qaeda, Taliban, and Daesh (Edgar 2004, 2006, 2007, 2011, 2015). In the Islamic tradition, lying about dreams is considered sinful and this type of accounts has often been utilized by fundamentalists to corroborate their worldviews and their pathway to martyrdom (Edgar 2011). Edgar argued that, while issues on validating dream accounts may arise, researchers could look at the 'worldly usage ... and the politically legitimating function of dreams' (2011, p. 27). He found that dreams are essential in decision-making in that it is used as a form of justification and a show of authority. Edgar (2015) also pointed out that violent actions may be informed by the dream accounts. While Edgar's works look more broadly at the roles of dream accounts in mobilizing extremists, our study examines the micro level of these accounts in terms of the construction of words and ideologies in dreams and the psychological process behind them.

It is also useful to explore how dreams could be strategically used to ensure the success of radicalization, which involves changing an individual's mindset to accept radical and extreme viewpoints, including the use of violence (Bott et al. 2009; McCauley and Moskaleiko 2008). One popular psychological theory of radicalization is from Kruglanski's line of research on the quest for significance as a major underlying motivation of violent extremist engagement (Dugas and Kruglanski 2014; Jasko et al. 2017; Kruglanski et al. 2014a, 2014b, 2017, 2019). The radicalization process involves activating the quest through actual or anticipated loss of significance and perceived opportunity for significance gain (Kruglanski et al. 2019). Therefore, the loss of significance in life, e.g., losing identity and life purpose due to ethnic marginalization, may cause an individual to be vulnerable to extremist ideology. The theory explains what makes an individual vulnerable to extremist ideology and what makes the ideology attractive. We hope to further contribute to the current literature by analyzing how the dream accounts found in the disseminated work of Daesh could further propel ideological formation and readiness to commit violence.

Data and Framework of Analysis

Daesh has published magazines in various languages, namely English, Bahasa, Bosnian, French, German, Kurdish, Pashto, Russian, Turkish, and Uyghur (Mahzam 2017), to reach audiences from different backgrounds. However, we only focus on their English materials and there are three publications in this language: Islamic State Report (4 issues), Dabiq (15 issues), and Rumiya (13 issues). As part of our ethical consideration, the magazines were collected on 'Jihadology', a scholarly repository founded by Aaron Zelin. As the focus is on the accounts of dreams being the thoughts and images perceived during sleep (Wamsley 2013), the search terms we used to gather relevant data were *dream*, *night*, *vision*, and *prophet* or *prophecy* based on our preliminary analyses of several dream accounts. Texts not related to dreams were excluded, for instance, the use of the word 'dream' to refer to a metaphorical indication of future hope, a better situation for oneself or society as a whole (Mittermaier 2015). Out of the 32 magazines, only 5 contain dream accounts – although the sample size is small, our aim is not on the representativeness of the data but rather on how we can offer insights into the ways dream accounts can cause emotional and cognitive change in individuals, which may motivate or inspire them to join violent extremist groups and even commit violence.

There may be concerns over the validity of the data since dream reports may not be as accurate as waking reports as they are subjected to fabrication due to poor memory and the erratic nature of dream content (Rosen 2013). Some may even recall dreams that have never occurred due to situations of misinformation, e.g., suggestive remarks made by others (Beaulieu-Prévost and Zadra 2015). However, we argue that the debate surrounding the accuracy of dream content should not invalidate the written dream accounts in Daesh magazines for two reasons. Firstly, the inclusion indicates the importance of the accounts narrated to the target audience – the members of Daesh and their supporters to legitimize the group and their ideologies even though there is no way of authenticating the dreams. Secondly, our focus is on the linguistic construction of dreams that play a role in the psychological and ideological formation of the audience.

In terms of data analysis, the integration of linguistic, psychological, and ideological approaches may enhance the explanatory power of how dream accounts can be employed as a recruitment tool to garner support for Daesh's cause. To understand how the dream accounts have been constructed linguistically, we drew on Reisigl and Wodak's (2016) discourse historical approach (DHA) to critical discourse studies to see how the different elements (e.g., objects, actors, their actions) in the data are positioned and labeled – either negatively or positively (via nomination and predication strategies), how the treatment of the elements are justified (via argumentation strategies), from which point of view they are expressed (via perspectivation strategies), and finally in what manner they are represented (via intensification and mitigation strategies). The DHA provides the premise to understand the macro-level (i.e., sociocultural, political, historical contexts) surrounding the dream accounts under study, alongside the micro-textual level, that is, all the semiotic (mainly verbal) components that are essential to understanding the dream construction extensively.

The linguistic elements identified from the narrated dreams were then evaluated for their potential link to a psychological process related to awe cultivation among the target audience. The psychological analyses focus on the latent, underlying meaning of the dream and its potential cognitive and emotional impact on the dreamer and the audience. Seeing dreams that are difficult to be conceived with a logical mind may make one feel a sense of ecstasy and awe (Kuiken 2015; Kuiken and Sikora 1993; Kuiken et al. 2006). We propose that the changes in motivation and willingness to commit to the ideologies of Daesh could be attributed to the awe emotive as a result of the dream experience. Awe is an emotional response involving the process of perceiving and accommodating into the mind an object, a person, or an event that is much larger than the ordinary self either in physical size, divinity status, or power (Keltner and Haidt 2003; Shiota et al. 2007; Tyson et al. 2022; Upenieks and Krause 2022). As per our data, for instance, this pertains to the experience of positive valence and thought about Islam, such as feeling relatively small and amazed in the presence of greater beings (e.g., connection to God or the divine world), reduction of a personal sense of self, and enhanced personal purpose constructed by Daesh. We then looked at how the experience or feeling may move the target audience to commit spiritual or religious actions endorsed by Daesh (e.g., committing suicide attacks). The experience of awe could increase willingness to commit selfless actions (Piff et al. 2015; Van Kleef and Lelieveld 2022), and awe-induced dreams could affect spirituality and motivation (Kuiken 2015; Kuiken et al. 2006), work resilience (Belinda and Christian 2022), feeling of gratefulness, and wishes to be good to others (Andresen 1999).

Finally, based on the discursive and psychological analyses, we decipher the ideologies embedded in the dream accounts. An ideological approach also reveals how dreams may strengthen the dreamers' conviction in the legitimacy of their cause and belief system, which could later

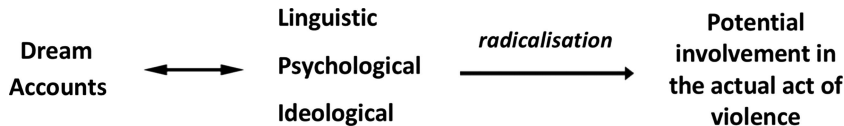


Figure 17.1 Analytical model used in exploring the dream accounts in Daesh propaganda materials

be translated into actions, such as performing martyrdom operations (*amal al-ishtishhadiyyah*). Briefly, our analytical model is summarized in Figure 17.1.

The Discursive Construction of Dreams – A Linguistic Analysis

An overview of the analyses of dream accounts shows that such element has been narrated by Daesh's top leader himself, Abu Hamzah al-Mujahir, who was the Prime Minister and the Minister of War, as well as the media producer (Alhayat Media Center). Dream accounts are also found in eulogies of their deceased fighter (Abul Muthanna as-Sumali who was based in the so-called Islamic State) and foreign supporter (Khalid al-Bakrawi, a suicide bomber in Belgium).

Dreams Narrated by Daesh Top Leader and the Media Producer

A section in one of the magazines written by Abu Hamzah al-Mujahir was dedicated to the rest of the leaders within his government. The section contains advice for them which includes how to be good leaders, manage war operations, and handle their armies in battles. In getting the leaders to encourage their armies to remain steadfast and envision victory in the upcoming battles against the enemies, Abu Hamzah made a reference to the Quranic verse 43 from chapter 8 (Surah Al-Anfal), which mentions the dream of Prophet Muhammad. According to Schmid (2015), a Quranic verse is meant to refer to the time when it was revealed to the Prophet to address any issue that arose at that particular point in time. This specific verse refers to the time when the Prophet experienced a dream before the Battle of Badr that took place in 624 between his people in Medina and the people in Mecca (Tucker 2011). In his dream, he saw the enemies being small in number (although the reality showed otherwise), and, when such a dream was narrated to his people, they became more encouraged and bolder to face the enemies. Eventually, the Prophet and his people achieved victory despite battling with limited resources (i.e., army and weapons). Daesh has recontextualized this dream to refer to the modern-day situation involving their own armies, which were fewer and less powerful in contrast to their enemies (Mat Isa 2020). By narrating the dream, Abu Hamzah al-Mujahir attempted to get the leaders to belittle their enemies and keep on mobilizing their armies for war. Also worth noting is the origin of the dream – it was given by Allah to Prophet Muhammad as narrated in the Quran. Citing holy verses is a practice known to extremist groups such as Daesh and Al-Qaeda. This citation is a form of argumentative strategy whereby a reference to authorities (Allah and the Prophet), known as the topos of authority, is made as a way to show confidence in establishing a claim, and in this case, the message was for the leaders to do what has been done by the Prophet historically to keep the war spirit high.

In the meantime, the use of dream accounts by the producer of the magazines, Alhayat Media Center is predominantly to get the target audience to perform *hijrah*, that is, to migrate to the so-called Islamic State. Again, the topos of authority is observed here as the dream account came from Prophet Muhammad's companion, Jabir who reported about the account of At-Tufayl Ibn

Amr as-Dawsi and a man from his tribe who migrated to Medina where the Prophet resided. The man eventually took his own life and later appeared in At-Tufayl's dream. The dream saw the man being forgiven by Allah for his act of ending his own life, which in Islam is considered as a forbidden, sinful act (Pouradeli et al. 2021). This is due to the account of his migration, which Daesh has skilfully exploited to get their target audience to do the same by putting forward the idea that sins can be forgiven as long as *hijrah* to the so-called Islamic State is performed. In this way, the mitigation strategy is evident in that Daesh is diminishing the burden of committing sins.

Dreams in Eulogies – The Deceased's Personal Accounts

Daesh also includes accounts of their deceased fighters' prophetic and apocalyptic dreams as one of the motivations for attacks against their enemies. For instance, there are detailed descriptions of three dream accounts described as 'vivid' and 'life-changing', experienced by the deceased Khalid al-Bakrawi who was responsible for the attacks in Paris in 2015 and in Brussels in 2016 where he blew himself up, causing the deaths of approximately 20 people and injuring more than 100 others. He was reported to be a known criminal for carjackings, possession of weapons, kidnapping, and bank robbery (Grierson 2017) and was in prison where he was radicalized and claimed to have dreams. These were the dreams that 'motivated him to carry out an *istishhadi* ('suicide') operation', which corresponds with what Edgar (2015) describes as '[confirming and legitimating] ... the path of holy *jihad*' (p. 80).

In the eulogies, Daesh shows appreciation for their deceased fighters by informing what they have done for the group and how they died as 'martyrs'. However, it is not known whether these are actual or made-up accounts. They provide quoted speeches from the fighters telling the audiences about the motivations for their actions prior to their death that are written from the first-person perspective (e.g., 'I arose to a high place', 'I detonated my belt', 'my soul then became full of light'). These first-hand accounts which demonstrate the perspectivization strategy used by Daesh may enhance the audiences' engagement with the protagonists (i.e., the fighters) – in this case, al-Bakrawi. There is a possibility that this type of narrative may build trust and empathy toward them.

Additionally, al-Bakrawi's dreams are both 'explicit' and 'opaque', as described by Edgar (2015) – 'explicit' in that it is clear what is said or done in a dream (e.g., 'I saw myself as an archer shooting arrows at the enemy'), and 'opaque' in that it needs further interpretations as it tends to be metaphorical (e.g., 'I arose to a high place, as if I was in space, surrounded by stars; but the sky was like the blue of night'). In the more opaque dream, al-Bakrawi claimed that he dreamed about being alongside Prophet Muhammad in a battle, fighting their enemies. He made a reference to chapter 48 (Surah al-Fath) from the Quran, which was 'recited in a loud voice'. The significance of this is evident in the title of the chapter itself (al-Fath), which means 'the victory', in which the chapter talks about the achievement obtained by the Prophet and his followers following the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah that led to the conquest of Mecca and eventually the formation of Islam (Ab Halim 2018). Mentioning this chapter in the dream may mean that al-Bakrawi was anticipating or signaling a victory for the modern Muslims, and this aligns with Daesh's aim to 'revive Islam' and establish a caliphate. Meanwhile, in the more metaphorical dream, al-Bakrawi saw himself ascending to the sky, which was described as 'the blue of night', and was surrounded by the stars. In Abrahamic religions, it is believed that heavens are in the sky and beyond, as stated by van Bladel (2007) that '[as] in the received Judaic and Christian traditions, so also in the Quran God holds rewards for the pure in a place literally located at the top of the sky, that is, in the heavens' (p. 231). This may be an indication of his journey to heaven, emphasizing the result of martyrdom as being promoted by Daesh to their potential recruits and existing fighters. This was then

followed by a voice telling him that the purpose of his existence was solely to worship Allah and imploring him to fight for Islam (i.e., ‘fight for His (Allah’s) cause and make His word supreme’).

On the other hand, al-Bakrawi’s dream was also described as a precognition that resembles the actual suicide operation at the Maelbeek metro station in Brussels which saw him detonating his explosive belt. Edgar (2015) describes this situation as part of ‘dreams ... (that are) redeemed in action’ (p. 80). Similar to the dream of fighting alongside Prophet Muhammad, an authoritative figure was mentioned here, as well but in this case it was Abu Mohammad al-Adnani, the group’s spokesperson and leader in Syria who later was killed during a US airstrike. As discussed previously, the use of authorities may further legitimize the group’s actions and thus give greater persuasion power.

Eventually, al-Bakrawi saw himself die in his dream on the battlefield, in which he saw his head falling on the ground. His head was then picked up by another fighter and shown to al-Adnani who then asked if he had a smile on his face. This is evidence of the intensification strategy through the use of hyperbole whereby the decapitated head of al-Bakrawi in the dream is exaggerated as having the possibility to smile. According to de la Paz (2019), the smiling faces of deceased fighters are another story of miracles used in Daesh’s materials, and this may signify a good ending (going to heaven). Often illustrated visually, Cohen and Kaati (2018) state that ‘[these] images are presumably staged in order to make the prospect of death on the battlefield more appealing’ (p. 49). Following the smile at death, al-Bakrawi’s soul and the Daesh flag that appeared from the earth are described as becoming ‘full of light’ and ‘shining brightly’, respectively. The reference to light is often associated with what one may perceive as sacred elements, which in this situation refers to the ‘martyr’s’ soul and the group’s flag. On the contrary, the enemies’ souls have been described as ‘burned’, or, in other words, in the state of being on fire which is a central imagery of (entering) hell in the Islamic context (Rustomji 2012).

Another account told in the third-person perspective is of Abul Muthanna as-Sumali who was imprisoned in Canada for seven years for terrorism-related charges before leaving for Syria in 2012. As-Sumali was described to have received good news in his dream that he would die as a martyr. What draws our attention is the inclusion of the word *Hur* in his dream account, described as ‘the maidens of Paradise’. In Daesh’s narrative, their fighters have been described as those who look forward to meeting the ‘maidens’ in heaven (deemed as angels) after having achieved martyrdom (Mat Isa 2020). This can be seen as a mitigation strategy, whereby death as the consequence of war is downplayed by the idea of heaven and living with the angels. According to Perry and Hasisi (2017), in the Quran it is stated that human beings will exist alongside divine-looking (male and female) companions, but ‘*jihad*’ spiritual leaders often imbue this concept with sensuality. They add that the idea of ‘martyrs’ going to heaven and having the opportunity to wed these maidens has long been ‘ingrained into the minds of these so-called [‘martyrs’] during recruitment and at the outset of attack’ (p. 60), and that it is seen as a sexual reward for them. By mentioning the maidens in as-Sumali’s dream account, it aligns with Daesh’s narrative of such reward in heaven which may entice the target audience to join the group’s cause.

Table 17.1 summarizes the discursive analysis of the dream accounts as discussed previously, that is, in the ways these accounts have been described (i.e., the nomination and predication strategies), how Daesh justifies its actions and claims through the accounts (i.e., the argumentation strategies), the perspectives from which the accounts are told (i.e., the perspectivization strategies), as well as how it exaggerates or downplays specific situations to appeal to its target audience (i.e., the intensification and mitigation strategies).

Table 17.1 Discursive analysis of dream accounts in Daesh magazines

Discursive strategies	Purpose
Nomination strategies: How are persons, objects, phenomena, events, processes, and actions related to the dream accounts named and referred to linguistically?	<p>Discursive construction of social actors: Allah, At-Tufayl, him, the Prophet, the disbelievers, Khalid al-Bakrawi, horse, archer, enemy, myself, Abu Sulayman, brother, Turkish soldier, hostage, soldiers, Shaykh al-Adnani, Abul Muthanna as-Sumali, he, <i>Hur</i>, maidens of paradise</p> <p>Discursive construction of objects/phenomena/events: dream, last verse of al-Fath, battle, distance, vision, battlefield, arrows, stars, sky, voice, boat, pistol, belt, head, ground, operation, soul, banner of Islam, Daesh flag, earth, deliverance, glad tidings, martyrdom</p> <p>Discursive construction of processes and actions: saw (in a dream), fight (the enemies/for His cause), shooting (arrows), take cover, arose (to sky), surrounded (by stars), created to worship (Allah), heard (voice in dream), make Allah's word supreme, advanced (with hostage), close in (on other soldiers), (head) descended (to the ground), (al-Adnani) took head, check to see if (al-Bakrawi) is smiling, (enemies' soul) burned and vanished, (flag) shining, achieved (deliverance), expecting (martyrdom), narrated (dream)</p>
Predication strategies: What characteristics, qualities, and features are attributed to social actors, objects, phenomena/ events, and processes?	<p>Discursive characterization/qualification of social actors (positively or negatively): alongside the Prophet (fighting the disbelievers), better (having detonating belt)</p> <p>Discursive characterization/qualification of objects, phenomena, events, processes, and actions (positively or negatively): loud (voice reciting a Quranic verse), vivid and life changing (dreams), beyond (the battlefield), high (place/ sky), like blue of night (sky), (Allah's word) supreme, (flag shining) brightly, (soul) full of light</p>
Argumentation strategies: What arguments are employed in discourses of the dream accounts?	<p>Persuading audience Topos of authority</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intertextual reference to Quranic verse to get Daesh leaders to emulate Prophet Muhammad's leadership skill • Intertextual reference to <i>Hadith</i> to get the target audience to travel to the so-called Islamic State <p>Recontextualization of Quranic verse and <i>Hadith</i> as a means to juxtapose the past with modern-day events</p>
Perspectivization strategies: From what perspective are these nominations, attributions, and arguments expressed?	<p>Positioning Daesh's point of view and expressing involvement or distance: First-person point of view</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance reader engagement with personal dream accounts • Third-person point of view • Show relations with deceased fighter/supporter
Intensification/ Mitigation strategies: Are the respective utterances articulated overtly; are they intensified or mitigated?	<p>Intensifying or mitigating utterances Intensification through hyperbolic descriptions of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Al-bakrawi's decapitated head smiling and soul beaming with light to amplify the appeal of death on the battlefield • The enemies' soul burning to signify them being burned in hell <p>Mitigation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Death in war is downplayed by promoting the hereafter (heaven and life with 'maidens of Paradise') • Sin is forgiven when migrating to the so-called Islamic State

The Latent Meaning of Dreams and Their Impacts – A Psychological Analysis

Following the linguistic analyses, the narrated dreams were examined with the intention of identifying elements that could induce awe, including describing the events in the dream as bigger than the perception of oneself, existing in the spiritual realm or elements that are supernatural and difficult to be conceived in immediate reality. Based on the analyses, we have arrived at four relevant elements of dreams cultivating awe toward the dreamers, the narrators of the dream, and, potentially, the readers or supporters of Daesh. In addition, the earlier findings on the linguistic strategies used in the dream accounts are identified and categorized according to their presence and relevance in cultivating the experience of awe in the dreamers and their potential to affect the target audience's feelings of awe.

Perceived Connection with Spiritually Divine Being

The first key element of awe is perceived vastness, which is central to the connection between humans and God or a divine being (Keltner and Haidt 2003). Van Cappellen and Saroglou (2012) outlined that the connection of awe to God involves spiritual and mystical experiences. In the case of Daesh, the entity that is most superior to men is God (Allah), and, in our analyses, the dream experienced by the Prophet (narrated by Abu Hamzah al-Mujahir) was conveyed by Him. The dream elucidates the divine origin of dreams and accentuates the presence of a Greater Being in providing good news to the fighters of Islam. The experience of vastness illustrates the connectivity between the dreamer, the Prophet, and the source of the dream, Allah, who is divine in nature. The next most divine Being to the followers of Islam is Prophet Muhammad. Many followers wish for a dream of an encounter with the Prophet, perceiving it as the promised reward in the afterlife, and they perceive that this would be a revelation sent through a dream (Edgar 2015). One narrated dream in the magazine was experienced by al-Bakrawi, and he perceived it as a life-changing experience.

The linguistic strategy used in the two dreams narrated under this element is the argumentative strategy, that is the *topos* of authority with the purpose of persuading the audience through the mention of the divine Being, Allah and His Messenger, Prophet Muhammad. Their presence in the dream highlights the divine origin and purpose of the dream. Additionally, as indicated earlier, the strategy further involved intertextual references to *Hadith* and Quran to show confidence in establishing a claim. This strategy may further convince the readers of the divine origin of the dream and cultivate a sense of awe as they perceive that their overall actions are of divine motives as well.

Personal Elevation

A personal elevation, inspired by Keltner and Haidt's (2003) work, refers to a perceived experience of oneself being raised to a higher position, either physically or spiritually. It is an experience in which one is placed in an alternate reality that ascends one's physical position or divine status. It is the account of a temporal change, or quality change from worldly, which is within the immediate reality of the current world lived in, to beyond in the spiritual realm. From the data, we found that there is a similar elevated experience in the dreams experienced by deceased members of Daesh.

The elevation of self was found in al-Bakrawi's dream containing illustrations that are difficult to be perceived within an immediate reality. In the dream descriptions, the elevation of self is a shift of self from normality or a normal self toward a higher status in divinity. Al-Bakrawi recalled being raised to a higher place surrounded by stars, hearing a voice with the speaker nowhere in

sight, and seeing one's soul full of light. This almost out-of-world experience transcends the logic of the current world. The dream indicates a change in al-Bakrawi from being a mere fighter to a person achieving the most significant status as a Muslim. In his dream, the vastness is conceived from seeing himself rise to a higher place, in relative comparison to the world or earth, that is, to space. Additionally, there are two other references to personal elevation to his status. The first compares the condition of al-Bakrawi's soul to those of the enemies. While the enemies' souls 'burned and vanished', his 'became full of light'. The second sees his transformation from being a regular fighter to a soul beaming with light following the appearance of the Daesh flag. This narration symbolizes a personal elevation in the dream as he envisioned personal success as a Muslim and a member of Daesh as he achieved martyrdom. In this case, the details in the dream accounts could perpetuate feelings of awe in the dreamer, which may be transferrable to the target audience susceptible to Daesh's content and manipulation.

Greater Purpose for Self

Past research has indicated that an aspect of awe is about instilling a greater sense of being beyond oneself that could lead to the feeling of diminishment of personal self upon realizing that one could be part of a larger scheme of existence (Chen and Mongrain 2021; Yaden et al. 2019). Recent research focused on the process of awe causing the shift of focus from oneself to others as a result of the connection with humanity or a sense of ingroup cohesion (Cricher and Lee 2018; Naclerio and Van Cappellen 2022; Tyson et al. 2022). Being in awe of God's omnipotence improves the sense of significance and purpose of life (Upenieks and Krause 2022). Studies on radicalization have consistently found that members of Daesh have been attracted by the promise of spiritual and religious prominence and elevation in self-status as humans (Kruglanski et al. 2019; Jasko et al. 2018).

Our analyses reveal that the dream accounts of al-Bakrawi depict his experience of seeing himself in a third-person perspective, and he saw his dream as foretelling that he was meant for a greater purpose. This purpose is beyond the immediate reality of the world and rather divine in nature. The dream informs him of his purpose in this world, which is not only to worship Allah but also to be a fighter. Another dream experienced by as-Sumali is also related to a greater purpose, that is martyrdom. The utilization of the dream accounts is meant to familiarize the group members with paramilitary culture and death as a martyr. Seeing themselves in a dream as fighters who fought in a God-blessed battle may build mental preparation, emotional readiness, ideological assurance, and commitment to undertake the challenge of war and impending death. Even the concept of death is altered as a 'sweet experience', not painful or horrible as depicted or imagined by viewers, as visibly depicted in the intensification strategy we highlighted earlier pertaining to al-Bakrawi's decapitated head that was potentially smiling. The framing of death as a positive experience may emotionally impact followers as they come to the realization that it may be a sweeter and more meaningful purpose that is meant for them. Instead of seeing death as painful and horrible, it can be perceived as an act of sacrifice. By that virtue, it may also instill positive hope in the dreamer and the target audience whereby committing martyrdom would be seen as lifting them to a noble position in the eyes of God, which is their ultimate purpose.

Dream as a Prophecy for Religious Sacrifice

It is assumed that the experience of awe could lead to a willingness to commit religious action. This is a consistent finding in various research attesting to the induced experience of awe through

the view of nature toward individuals' willingness to commit various acts of prosocial behavior such as sharing, donating, and helping others in need (Guan et al. 2019; Lin et al. 2020; Piff et al. 2015), making ethical decisions (Tyson et al. 2022), tolerating mistakes by others (Sawada and Nomura 2020), migrating to a spiritual destination (Van Cappellen and Saroglou 2012) or sacrificing oneself for the sake of religion or fellow believers (Naclerio and Van Cappellen 2022).

The willingness to sacrifice oneself for religious groups could be related to feelings of awe due to the perceived element that is greater than oneself (the experience of vastness) and a deep emotional bond with one's religion (Naclerio and Van Cappellen 2022). Given the special position of dream in the Quran as experienced by Prophet Muhammad and Prophet Yusuf and its mention in the *Hadith*, a dream is taken as the source of motivation and commitment for the fighters to remain in the cause of struggles. Our data reveals that the willingness to sacrifice oneself for one's religion may have been induced by perceived supernatural experiences occurring through dreams. The experiences include al-Bakrawi hearing a mysterious voice that asked him to worship Allah and fight for Islam, and as-Sumali seeing the 'maidens of Paradise'. Other instances are the experiences of being elevated to the sky and surrounded by the stars and the soul becoming full of light. These phenomena and events may further signify the symbolic nature of the dreams as a prophecy for the dreamer. The transcendental and supernatural nature of the dreams could cause feelings of awe in the dreamers recalling it and the target audience who are immersed in the narrative. They may cause strong emotional and motivational changes to partake in a battle or engage in martyrdom operations (*istishhadi*). In short, dreams should not be seen as a fantasy in the discourse of a *jihadi* movement. It is a spiritual, transcendental experience that may propel an individual to engage in an actual act of violence due to the cultural relevance of dreams in the group.

The Centrality of Dreams in Daesh Discourse – An Ideological Analysis

Following the linguistic and psychological analyses of dream accounts earlier, we will now explore how they are conceived and employed to strengthen Daesh's ideologies. In doing so, three key points will be highlighted. First is the centrality of the dream in Islamic discourse and how it is exploited by Daesh. Second is the mental, emotional, and spiritual conditioning to familiarize fighters with the paramilitary culture. Third is how a dream is employed to motivate violence-oriented actions. It is also important to note that the ideological component related to dreams is also well-embedded in linguistic and psychological analyses discussed previously.

Dream Account as a Legitimizing Tool

It is evident in our data that dreams have a special role in Daesh discourse, particularly in enhancing the conviction of the legitimacy of the Daesh struggle. This is demonstrated in Daesh's ability to convince its followers to undertake suicide missions (*amal al-ishtishhadiyyah*), using dreams as a source of guidance, inspiration, and motivation. In the Islamic tradition, dreams have a special function in Muslims' lives as depicted in the Quran, such as the dreams experienced by Prophet Muhammad and Prophet Yusuf. In the context of our data, it is interesting to observe how Daesh has exploited the dream accounts by recontextualizing them to speak about the modern-day struggles to defeat the enemies and establish a caliphate. In other words, Daesh has made use of dreams to verify the veracity of its struggle and ideology, and, in doing so, they employ several Quranic verses as a legitimizing strategy for its existence and ideology using chapter 8 verse 43 regarding the Battle of Badr, and chapter 48 regarding the victory of Prophet Muhammad following the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah. This discursive strategy, specifically the argumentation strategy, which

is evident in the use of Quranic verses, *Hadith*, and the experience of the companion regarding dreams, provides compelling narratives to convince followers and fighters alike to support Daesh's struggle, ideology, and act of violence.

There are several examples of how dream accounts have been infused with religious elements to form a belief system in the discourse of extremism, particularly Daesh discourse. Such belief system manifests in the following forms: (1) the conviction that they are the true warriors (*mujahiddin* or 'jihad fighters') and liberators who defend the weak, as well as fight and sacrifice their life for the sake of God and religion; (2) the conviction that they are fighting the true *jihad* or armed struggle against the enemies of God; and (3) the ultimate aim of establishing a caliphate in modern times to replace democracy, which is regarded as an anti-thesis to monotheism (*tawhid*). Having some of these elements in the dream accounts as demonstrated in the analyses may strengthen the legitimacy of Daesh's ideologies and inspire the target audience or already radicalized individuals further by validating their beliefs and strengthening their sense of belonging within extremist circles.

Mental, Emotional, and Spiritual Conditioning Leading to Actualization and Radicalization

The exposure to Daesh's dream accounts, especially the ones about meeting or fighting alongside the Prophet or his companions, is in actuality a form of conditioning. Specifically, it is a cognitive, emotive, and spiritual conditioning or indoctrination to prepare prospective fighters to engage in battles and undertake life-threatening missions in real life. This conditioning may reduce the fear of imminent death as often experienced by Daesh fighters. Additionally, Daesh often cites chapter 3 verses 169 and 170 as a spiritual and religious basis, in which the verses state that those who have died in a battle (martyrs) are in fact still alive. The use of these verses, which underscore the promise of continuity beyond death, may bolster the fighters' dedication to Daesh's cause and strengthen their readiness to participate in combat. The target audience of such narrative being promoted in dream accounts may find the idea of the hereafter particularly appealing, especially in terms of ascending to heaven as the result of joining a violent cause.

The dream accounts can also be seen as an integral element in the radicalization process, which sees an individual gradually embracing certain ideas, usually extremist ideas, cognitively and emotively, and subsequently translating those ideas into a form of action (Edgar 2015). For instance, the experience of al-Bakrawi mentioned earlier demonstrates the transformation of an individual from a long-time criminal to a suicide bomber after having radicalized while incarcerated and experiencing dreams of dying as a martyr. In this context, the dreams served to strengthen his existing belief system and made him more convinced of the truth of his ideology – a finding similarly revealed by Edgar (2011) in his work on dreams serving as inspirations for extremists. In the studies of radicalization (e.g., El-Muhammady 2020), relating the theories to al-Bakrawi's case, there are two phases involved: (1) the formative phase, in which he went through a learning process, inculcating and embracing extreme ideologies at the cognitive, emotive, and faith level; and (2) the action phase, in which the ideas were then translated into actions, which saw al-Bakrawi eventually becoming a suicide bomber. Radicalization, however, does not necessarily lead to the commission of violent acts (Wieviorka and Sageman 2017). In other words, adopting an extreme ideology doesn't always imply an inclination toward violence. Yet, the experience of dreams might motivate individuals to transform the ideology into violent actions.

It is also useful to note that the experience and meaning behind dreams have been understood as serving social and political functions in a group, and their meanings may be specific to the

culture and ideology embedded within the group (Dentan and McClusky 1993). Based on our analyses, we observe that a dream, in Daesh discourse, is considered a God-given privilege seen as guidance, affirmation of truth, motivation, and encouragement to remain composed in the cause of struggle for individuals who are sincerely engaged in the battle or *jihad* against their enemies. Thus, in this context, a dream is not a mental projection of an unreal situation, nor is it an unreasonable element subjected by the subconscious thoughts during sleep. Instead, it is seen as theologically rooted and is considered a form of spiritual experience given by God for a selected few, especially those who sincerely seek His rewards.

Briefly, our analyses demonstrate how dream accounts in Daesh propaganda materials have been creatively exploited to be used as a recruitment and legitimizing tool to garner support for its religiopolitical cause, i.e., the establishment of a caliphate. We also propose that there may be a psychological change caused by a dream due to its potential to cultivate awe in the dreamer and likely the target audience. This process itself could be pertinent to explain the process of radicalization through experiencing a dream or reading about dreams. In the case of the dreamers and followers of Daesh, they may experience an enhanced moral and spiritual connection to the values and missions of Daesh.

Concluding Remarks

Our analyses of the dream accounts could be extended for research and prevention practices by examining the use of linguistic and psychological strategies to engineer an extremist mindset in the radicalization process. Linguistically, various discursive strategies (i.e., nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivization, intensification, and mitigation strategies) have been identified and explained in terms of how they may be used strategically to manipulate the target audience to subscribe to extreme ideologies. For instance, the inclusion of historical and contemporary leaders in the dream accounts as part of the nomination and argumentation strategies adds credibility to the messages delivered through the accounts. An example from the analyses is an account of fighting alongside Prophet Muhammad (topos of authority). While the era of prophecy ended with him, divine messages are believed to persist through dreams, as echoed in Bukhari *Hadith* (Edgar 2007). Therefore, narrating such dream could tap into the target audience's familiarity with Islamic history and symbolism, making it relatable and engaging. It is also noteworthy to observe the discussion about attaining heavenly rewards through martyrdom, as described using the predication strategy (e.g., 'arose to a high place', 'soul ... became full of light'). This may act as a compelling tool to inspire existing members to achieve martyrdom or draw in new followers who seek a deeper sense of purpose or spiritual fulfillment.

Psychologically, we propose that the content of dream accounts must be scrutinized for potential narratives that could induce awe. In our analyses, we have identified four relevant narratives that could cultivate awe: perceived connection with a divine being, perceived personal elevation, the greater purpose of self, and the prophecy of future martyrdom or the afterlife rewards. Conclusively, we infer that the narrated dreams with content that could induce awe could strengthen Daesh members' and supporters' ideological commitment and enhance their readiness to perform violent actions. The target audience who read the dream accounts could vicariously experience the dreams and feelings of awe due to the vivid and evocative narration. Relevant examples include al-Bakrawi's dream, in which he heard a mysterious voice that asked him to worship Allah and fight for Islam, and as-Sumali who saw the 'maidens of Paradise' in his dream. The audience may become immersed in the narrative which could in turn ignite deep emotional and motivational

changes to commit acts of extremism. Although the behavioral effect of awe is not examined in our study, it has been consistently recorded in other research exploring awe through viewing videos of nature or remembrance of God (Guan et al. 2019; Lin et al. 2020; Naclerio and Van Cappellen 2022; Piff et al. 2015; Sawada and Nomura 2020; Tyson et al. 2022; Van Cappellen and Saroglou 2012). We hope that our research findings could supplement the current knowledge of factors contributing to radicalization, such as exposure to news or other materials related to extremism that may cause a change in mindset (e.g., Rashid and Mat Isa 2022).

As a final point, the linguistic and psychological strategies that we have identified could be reverse engineered to prevent individuals from being susceptible to the content of Daesh materials by rectifying the extreme ideologies promoted by the group. Many Quranic verses promote and encourage spiritual and prosocial activities that are non-violent in nature. The verses may be an ingenious means to promote goodness and prevent susceptibility to Daesh's manipulative strategies among individuals at risk of radicalization. It is recommended that future practices in preventing radicalization and violent extremism could educate members of the public on how dream accounts could be a manipulative source to induce individuals into embracing radical extremism.

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