A Critical Corpus- Based Analysis of the Words Muslim and Islamic Vs. Christian in Contemporary American English

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Abstract

The words *Muslim* and *Islamic* have recently become a recurrent theme in western media especially in the U.S. However, there is little research on how the words *Muslim* as opposed to *Christian* are represented in the US spoken and written media discourse. Utilizing the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), the current study investigated how Muslims and Christians are portrayed in U.S media outlets through a quantitative and a qualitative analysis of the lexical collocations of the words Muslim, Islamic and Christian. A threshold of Mutual Information (MI) score of at least 3. and 2% frequency was set for the candidate collocates. The results showed that the former group was largely associated with fanaticism and ethnicity while the other group was largely associated with knowledge and theology. A fine-grained analysis of a common collocate i.e., fundamentalist revealed striking differences between the characteristics of Muslim fundamentalists and Christian fundamentalists in US media. The study highlights the value of corpus-based approaches in enhancing the objectivity of critical discourse analysis and pinpointing the lexical and grammatical patterns that contribute to biased mental construction of particular groups.

Keywords: Christian, COCA, collocations, critical discourse analysis, Muslim

1. Introduction

The discourse of terrorisms has become significantly prevalent in the mainstream media especially after the events of September 11th. Jackson (2007, p. 294) contends that the term terrorism has become widely established alongside terms of freedom, democracy and justice stressing that "the terrorism discourse- the terms, assumptions, labels, categories and narratives used to describe...terrorism has emerged as one of the most important political discourses of the modern era alongside climate change, human rights, global poverty and arms proliferation". Categories and terms such as political Islam, Global Jihadi Movement, and the Islamic world are commonly circulated in modernday western media, yet they are vaguely if at all defined (Jackson, 2007).

The association of certain groups with violent acts might be explained by the need to guarantee the public's unquestionable support for what otherwise could be considered non-democratic or inhumane acts. Labeling activities as terrorist acts promotes, in turn, an extraordinary type of response (Poole & Richardson, 2006). For example, political calls for terror- countering strategies led to substantial number of legislative measures that legitimate illegal acts such as detention without trial, physical and psychological torturing of detainees (Flynn & Salek, 2012). Richardson (2004) claims that the negative stereotypes of Islam contributed to the marginalization of Muslims in the British society. This is not surprising considering that media are a proven lethal weapon for controlling and shaping public views and perceptions, mobilizing political actions, reinforcing unquestioned policies and for legitimizing what might be otherwise considered illegitimate human and democratic practices. The gravity of the situation is reflected in the fact that a large portion of the western population including Americans relies on western media channels for understanding the world of which Muslims constitute over 23% .Consequently, "if recipients read or listen to many discourses of politicians or the mass media, and have no competing, alternative information, such models[ethnic prejudices] may in turn be generalized to shared abstract representation about Muslims, minorities…." (Van Dijk, 2008, p. 164).

Baker (2010) along with other linguists (e.g., Hoey, 2005) argue that repeated exposure to certain concepts or lexical association acts as a mental trigger for certain mental representations. Hoey (2005) argues that the main sources of the homogeneity of lexical priming or lexical association are education, literacy, religious sources, and mass media. Lexical collocations, hence, shape the abstract mental representation of a particular group and they themselves reflect the mainstream social ideologies. The dual role of lexical collocations or lexical priming and the availability of corpus analysis software stimulate researchers' appetite to understand the reciprocal relationship between lexical collocations and social actions. Unfortunately, when digital corpora are used for examining lexical collocations, critical discourse researchers tend to manually extract collocations without specifying frequency thresholds or statistical criteria (Baker et al., 2008). Thus, findings of such studies may not be sufficiently objective enough because they may "miss or disregard strong non -adjacent collocates or include non-significant collocates in the analysis" (Baker et al., 2008, p. 275). This study attempts to overcome these research flaws by combining qualitative and quantitative analyses to explore features of biased language in contemporary English

discourse in the U.S. In particular, the study attempts to answer the following question:

1. How the words Muslim and Islamic as opposed to Christian are represented in English contemporary discourse?

In order to situate the context of the research question, this paper commences with a theoretical orientation examining the power of language and the relationship between language and social actions. The second section offers an overview of the main linguistic features that signify biased language. The third section examines the literature of studies on Muslim representation in the western media and the gap the current study intends to address. This is followed by a description of the methodology and a comprehensive quantitative and qualitative analysis of the results.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Power of Language

Language has been designated as a powerful tool for achieving political and social goals as it aims to emotionally inflame the followers, degrade the designated out-class, inflict permanent harm, and, eventually, conquer identified outgroups (Willock & Slayden 1995, p. 22). Creating social distance from specific outgroups creates an environment primed to nurture negative stereotypes. This allows for consequent social actions against whole classes of people and unquestionable acceptance of negative descriptions even if the characterizations are not truthful: "any statement, whatever, no matter how stupid, any 'tall tale' will be believed once it enters into the passionate current of hatred" (Ellul, 1965, p. 47).

Because of the power of stereotyping, even counter instances of a stereotyped belief could be perceived as exceptional and unrepresentative (Willock & Slayden, 1995). Despite the global and popular rejection of torture, media language managed to turn the term into an acceptable, and perhaps a desirable practice. In the past, torture in the media language used to be represented as a psychopathic, inhumane act, one which drove audiences to sympathize with the tortured. After September 11th, the concept has been reversed, with torture being represented as an enhanced type of investigation and a critical source of intelligence (Edelstein, 2006). Such persuasion strategies then, serve the purpose of persuading the audience and legitimizing consequent actions. They can be perceived as acts of self-defense when institutionalized actions or policies are not often publicly acceptable or are in violation of the law (Van Dijk, 1998). Legitimizing the acts of one group and, hence, persuasion involves, by necessity, delegitimization of opponent groups who, in most cases, lack the rhetorical tools to defend themselves. Fear of being negatively labelled and fears of bearing such responsibility bring the whole group accountable for the actions "or the supposed actions" of the minority (Willock & Slayden, 1995, p. 41). Linguists bear the responsibility of raising consciousness about the subtle linguistic strategies that the elites utilize in creating predefined mental constructs of their projected enemies. This is of a paramount importance as language and social actions are reciprocally associated. The use of particular discourse reflects dominant political, social, and cultural structures. On the other hand, political, social, and cultural practices motivate and feed into the use of particular linguistic expressions. This position is strongly adopted by Fowler (1991, p. 10) who argues:

> Anything that is said or written about the world is articulated from a particular ideological position: language is not a clear window, but a refracting, structuring medium. If we can acknowledge this as a positive, productive principle, we can go on to show by analysis how it operates in texts.

Critical discourse analysis aims to unfold such complex interrelatedness of texts and social actions. Critical discourse analysts are mainly concerned with systematically opaque as well as explicit relationship of dominance, discrimination and power embedded in language use and "how such practices, events and texts arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power, and to explore how the opacity of these relationships between discourse and society is itself a factor securing power and hegemony" (Fairclough, 1993, p. 135). Various features of the prejudice language have been discussed by critical discourse analysts as will be shown below.

2.2 Characteristics of Biased Discourse

Comprehensive understanding of biased language requires probing the recursive strategies used to promote certain mental representations. Biased discourse is characterized by detailed description of "our" good acts and "their" bad acts and of being more general and abstract about "their" good acts as opposed to "our" bad acts (Van Dijk, 2008). General attitudes of a society are generally constructed, or at least influenced, by the "elites'" ideology (VanDijk, 1998, p. 268). Elites refer to the groups who have special power-oriented resources. They are not restricted to one class, because different elite groups may be in conflict if they have inconsistent goals and interests. Based on their domain of power, elites can be politicians, journalists, teachers, scholars, or scientists. The major power however, is in the hand of "symbolic elites" or those who "are directly involved in making and legitimizing general policy decisions about minorities… namely leading editors, TV program directors, columnists, textbooks' authors and scholars of human and social sciences" (VanDijk,1993, p. 46).

Tuchman (1972) argues that journalists resort to several strategies in their attempt to conceal their active role in reporting events: (1) using sources for verbalizing counter truth claims (2) presentation of supporting evidence and (3) the use of quotation marks. Reinforcement of the elite dominance is featured by the fact that sources of quoting, and the supportive evidence are limited primarily to the "members of more powerful social groups and institutions and especially their leaders (the elites)" (VanDijk, 1998, p. 5). The quotes, however, do not only show how credible the speaker is but also how journalists evaluate the quoted views. Presenting anti-racism statements with mitigated language e.g., *alleged, claim* before quotation or enclosing certain words in quotations is not an evaluation but rather an implicit rejection of the quoted view (Van Dijk, 1993).

The control of knowledge sources is as such, subtle through persuasive discourse and through other influential means like education

system that not only limit the access to knowledge necessary for acting freely but also promote mental representations that serve the goals and interests of the dominant groups (VanDijk, 1993). In a series of studies, Van Dijk (1998, 2000) developed a conceptual framework for describing or identifying features of racial language. It describes principally the positive representation of oneself and the negative representation of others. Racial representation is manifested across all levels of discourse moving from the selection of lexical items, through syntactic structure to the meaning of the sentences and the relation between sentences. Notions of implicature and presupposition are also important in understanding how writers or speakers manage to communicate their beliefs implicitly (Van Dijk, 2001). At the lexical level, negative lexical words can be used to describe individuals, groups, events, or mental process. This takes several forms including (Richardson, 2004, p. 55):

1. Nouns (e.g., terrorists vs freedom fighters) or verb phrases *(e.g., attack vs defend*) or adjectives (Adjectival phrases e.g., *fanatical* vs *devout)* with specific semantic connotations

2. Determiners (e.g., our army vs the army)

At the syntactic level, nominalization, the passive and active structures contribute to the mental construction of events and actors. Syntactic structures reveal the concepts that are of primary importance in the mind of writers or speakers and also contribute to the vagueness of the agency (VanDijk, 1993). Van Dijk (2000) maintains that minority groups are usually represented as passive recipients unless they are agents of negative actions. The semantic level refers to the type of topics or a summary of the most important information or themes conveyed by the texts i.e., the topics that emphasize our good actions and de-emphasize our bad actions. Biased discourse can be either overcomplete or incomplete. In other words, information that are totally irrelevant to the event e.g., race, origin, color, or ethnicity news can be provided. On the other hand, information that are considered essential for understanding the context of events are deliberately left out. This discursive practice is relevant to what Grice (1975) referred to as a violation of relevance and quantity maxims for the purpose of creating conversational implicature.

In the same vein, Wodak and Reisigl (2001) identified five discursive strategies for representing the positive oneself and the negative other. First, naming, or referential strategies by which social actors are represented. These include references by tropes like biological, naturalizing, or depersonalizing metaphors. Second, the implicit or explicit stereotypical or evaluative attributions of positive or negative traits. Third, the argumentation strategies through which negative or positive traits are rationalized. Fourth, the strategies speakers or writers utilize to present their involvement or their position from the report. Fifth, the intensifying or the mitigating strategies used to modify or intensify the illocutionary force of the utterance. Being a significant segment in the western news, the words Muslim and Islam have been examined by several critical discourse studies. Understanding where this study fits requires hence a critical examination of the findings and limitations of these studies.

2.3 Research on Islam and Muslims' Image in the Media

The humane, social, and political reverberations of the so called "War on terror" stimulated sociolinguists' appetite to unfold how Muslims and Islam are represented in the Western Media. Dunn (2001, p. 296) examined two Australian newspapers and found that Muslims are portrayed as "fanatic, intolerant, militant, fundamentalists, misogynist[and] alien" 75% of times. Positive representation accounted, however, for 25% of all cases. Poole and Richardson (2006) examined the published materials in Britain from 1994-2003 focusing on topics with explicit reference to Muslims. They found that terrorism has the largest portion of coverage. Baker, Gabrielatos and McEnery (2012) used sketch engine to examine the presentation of the word Muslim in a 143-million-word corpus of British newspaper articles published between 1998 and 2009. They found references to categories of ethnic identity, organization, culture religion and conflict. The category of conflict was found to be lexically rich and implied in other categories as well. The findings also pointed to the use of collective language e.*g., community,* a word that emphasizes the sameness of Muslims and their difference from the West.

In the US context, Samaie and Malmir (2017) examined the construction of Islam and Muslims in a corpus of 670,000 words from U.S newspaper articles printed between 2001-2012. The corpus-based analysis revealed that Muslims and Islam were mainly associated with violence and radicalism. Similar findings were reported by AlFajri (2019) who examined how Indonesian Muslims are portrayed in in two corpora of American newspapers published in the periods between 2002-2006 and 2012-2016.

Aside from traditional media and political discourse findings, research into cyberspace discrimination and abuse practices in various western contexts e.g., Sweden (Törnberg & Törnberg, 2016) and Britain(Awan & Zempi, 2016; Barlow & Awan, 2016; Jones et al., 2019) revealed that Muslims are the most vulnerable groups to cyber abuse . Törnberg & Törnberg's (2016) analysis of the words *Muslim and Islam* in a 105 million word corpus of a large Swedish Internet forum from 2000 to 2013 revealed that Muslims were represented as "a homogeneous outgroup that is embroiled in conflict, violence, and extremism" (p.1), and that these characteristics are perceived to be products of Islamic beliefs. They contend that this discourse reflects and amplifies the stereotypical image in traditional media.

A more recent study conducted by Jones et al. (2019) investigated the association between Islam and science in the discourse collected from 117 interviews and 13 focus groups with non-Muslim members of the public and scientists in the UK and Canada. The findings revealed that participants' perceptions of Islam and science were in sharp contrast with their perceptions of other religious traditions, with a significant minority of mainly non-religious interviewees describing Islam as "uniquely and uniformly hostile to science" and logical thinking (p. 161).

While the issue of Islam and Muslims has attracted increasing research in different discoursal contexts, a quick look at the afore-mentioned research on Islam and Muslims reveals several limitations. First, most of the studies focused on British media with less

studies on their US counterparts. The significance of analyzing American discourse lies in the fact that it is the most powerful nation with globally influential policies. In this sense power as Diamond (1996, p. 13) put it: '… is not just the ability to coerce someone or to get them to do something against their will, but rather, it is the ability to interpret events and reality and have this interpretation accepted by others". Second, almost all the media- based studies were centered on newspapers or one type of media outlets. It is needless to say that academic articles, TV shows, textbooks and other channels of knowledge all contribute to the constructions of social beliefs and attitudes. Third and most importantly, the analysis focuses on Islamic representation with no reference to its Christian counterpart. An objective view of the political and social situation requires a comprehensive examination that takes both representation into consideration. Affordances of digital corpus allow for more reliable objective view of the discourse on Islam. Mautner (2009, p. 34) emphasized that digitalized corpora offer discourse analysts with numerous benefits including credence to generalization and dismantling accusations against discourse analysts of "cherry-picking" data that presumably support preconceived notions. Bearing this in mind, this paper attempts to utilize the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) to examine the representation of the words *Islamic* and *Muslim* in comparison to the term *Christian* in various knowledge sources: textbooks, spoken and written media in the U.S.

3. Methodology

The Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), which has a collection of more than one billion words of texts from 1990-2019, is used to examine how Muslims are represented in various U.S scholarly and media discourse. COCA is used because it represents a large balanced up to date corpus that is freely available for public. To this end, lexical collocations of the lexical items Muslim and Christian will be extracted using COCA interface. In this study, collocates are defined as words co-occurring within a span of four words (to the right and to the left) of the node with Mutual Information (MI) score of at least 3. Mutual information is a good indicator of the strength of association (Ackermann and Chen, 2013). However, the strength of association does not imply frequency. Therefore, both frequency and MI scores were used to select collocations. To include highly frequent collocates, the frequency threshold was set to at least 2% frequency. The measure of frequency is useful for analyzing the attention, and thus the importance given to particular stories (Poole & Richardson, 2006, p. 89). The resulting collocate list will then be evaluated to eliminate irrelevant items (e.g., function words, numbers… etc.) and further categorized based on their semantic meaning and connotations into themes. Further fine-grained analysis of the most common collocates in both corpora will then be conducted following Wodak & Reisigl (2001) and Van Dijk (2001)'s descriptions of biased language.

4. Results and Discussion

The search tool of COCA revealed one hundred collocates of Islamic, Muslim and Christian each. The lists were then manually filtered to eliminate numbers, names of people (See Appendix A, B, C). However, the focus of the analysis is on words that meet the preset criteria i.e., collocates with at least 3 MI and 2 % frequency. The findings show that the discourse of the word Islamic in the scholarly and media discourse revolves around certain set of topics. The majority of which denotes negative connotations. The word Islamic found to be strongly collocating with *republic, Jihad, revolution, Hamas, radical, fundamentalism, militants, militant, fundamentalists, fundamentalist, extremists, extremism, Sharia, radicals, extremist, radicalism, militancy.*

The findings indicate that all collocates of the word *Islamic* are negative not only because of their semantic connotations but also their emphasis on the difference and deviance from what is considered normal sense. The use of extreme attributes that are rejected by the common human sense implies the need for eradicating those who possess these labels as they are threatening the very essentials of the civilized world. The collocates of *Islamic* emphasize the cultural differences through the use of ill-defined Islamic terms: *Jihad* and *Sharia*. The word *Muslim*, however, was found to be indexed with more categories: ethnicity or race (*Arab, Hindu, Bosnian, population, Buddhist, non- Muslim*) fanaticism (*extremist, fundamentalist, militants, militant*) political or religious factions (*Brotherhood, Shite, Sunni*) and to less extent religious characters (*cleric devout*).

The word *Christian* was found to have a relatively wider scope of categories: religion (*scriptures, teachings, theology, faith, churches, evangelical*), knowledge (*copy right, science, fellowship, publishing*), morals (*temperance, born again, conservative, ethics, coalition. devout*), ethnicity/race or country (*Netherland, Buddhist, Jew, Jewish, Muslim*); groups (*Orthodox*), and fanaticism (*fundamentalists*).

A general look at the presentation of *Muslim* and *Christian* reveals significant differences. Muslim group is presented in a limited set of topics that are mainly linked to fanaticism, political and religious conflict, and division. Christian group is, however, discussed across a wider range of themes, and it is strongly connected with knowledge, religion, and morals. These findings are in line with previous research conclusions on Islam and Muslims' image in different western contexts (e.g., Baker, Gabrielatos & McEnery, 2012; Barlow & Awan, 2016; Dunn 2001; Jones et.al, 2019; Törnberg & Törnberg, 2016).

The effect of collocates is established by what linguists call "mental lexical priming," i.e., thinking of a word primes other lexical items associated with it. Given the difficulty of conducting a fine-grained analysis of all instances of collocates, the qualitative analysis focuses on one salient common collocate in both corpora: "fundamentalist," which essentially has negative connotations.

The contextual analysis revealed, as will be explained below, positive representations of *our* fundamentalists and negative portrayals of *their* fundamentalists. I will first discuss "fundamentalist" as a collocate for Muslim and then as a collocate for Christian.

Fundamentalist

Examining a sample of one hundred concordance lines revealed that the social actors who are indexed as Muslim fundamentalists are:

parties, groups, states, leaders, populations, movements, countries, organization, Arabs, world, terrorists, cultures, beliefs, opposition. The fundamentalist category tends not to be restricted to individuals or even parties but to countries, leaders, populations, and cultures. The language of collectivity is obvious as *fundamentalists* are used interchangeably with *Muslim cultures* or with the subtle denial of the existence of moderate Muslims. In example (1) below *Muslim fundamentalists* are connected with the one accused of carrying out 11 Sept attacks. The use of the vaguely impersonalized "*they"* and the agentless structures of questionable positive claims "*were told"*, "*who were said to be"* are used strategically to discredit those who say that Muslims are peace lovers. Other linguistic means of justifying *our* stance and discrediting *theirs* include: (1) The use of the hedging verb "*perceive"* to suspect the truth of *their* argument that the west is waging an "*attack on Islam"*. (2) prefacing positive claims with expressions like "*reassuring voice"*, "*nowhere to be seen or heard"* discredits the claims that "*most people did not share the opinions of fundamentalists".* On the other hand, the personalizing of the writers or speakers' propositions "*Danny and I"* meant to align the reader with the writer's conclusion of the non-existence of the notion of "*moderate peace-loving Muslims":*

> *1. …the attacks on Muslim fundamentalists and Osama bin Laden without proof. They asked us to think carefully about our responsibilities as Westerners and as journalists. They said they were lovers of peace and were deeply offended by what they perceived as the West's attack on Islam. # …. The journalists were there to cover a war they could not, as yet actually see. They speculated on the possibility of a coup. Members of fundamentalist Muslim groups demonstrated before the Marriott to display their anger. You could take a close shot of the protesters as they shouted against America and tell the public back home that Pakistan was on the verge of a civil war. Or you could hunt for another opinion, that of the moderates who were said to be the democratic majority. # Danny and I were told that most people did not share the opinions of fundamentalists. But this reassuring voice of the moderate majority was nowhere to be seen or heard.*

Whenever *Muslim fundamentalist* is used in a relatively positive contexts, quotations are used to devalue the source of the proposition as illustrated by example 2 below:

> *2. **The self-proclaimed** "Irish Republican socialist "who wrote to say that "no Muslim fundamentalist would violate their holy month (Ramadan) with a terrorist bombing "...].*

The illocutionary force of the propositions for encountering Muslim fundamentalists is sharpened by various examples of intensifying strategies that were used to persuade the recipients of the increasing threat posed by Muslim fundamentalists. Example (3) and (4) illustrate some of these intensifying strategies (words in bold):

> 3. *... they have very **large** fundamentalist Muslim populations who would like nothing better than overthrowing those regimes*.
>
> 4. *. the **threat** of a fundamentalist **backlash grows**. The Muslim cultures of the Middle East are the best examples to date….*

Examples 5 and 6 illustrate the use of depersonalizing strategies. When Muslim families or parents are described as fundamentalist, they are manifested as humanely insensitive and of sexually abusing their children:

> *5… **Sexual abuse of children within a fundamentalist Muslim family** (aired the week before we arrived) could only be done on Bandung.*
>
> *6. **Some fundamentalist Muslim parents force** female circumcision upon their minor daughters on the basis of religious beliefs.*

Attributes of *Christian fundamentalist* on the other hand, can be grouped into three major themes: home and family (home, *husband),* religion *(churches, theology),* and knowledge *(school, university, culture) as shown in examples 7-9 below:*

> *7... these children lived with their parents in **a fundamentalist Christian home**. For the nine children, life in Paradise was anything but…*
>
> *8. Her **husband** was **a minister in a fundamentalist Christian** sect and was the **pastor** at small rural churches all his life.*
>
> *9. **Fundamentalist Christian theology** about heaven and hell must be wrong.*

A Christian fundamentalist is described as thoughtful and knowledgeable as examples 10-11 show. Example 12 demonstrates that Christians who are "*Fundamentalist"* follow the path of their forefathers and the biblical teachings. This conclusion is supported by several corpus examples in which Christian fundamentalists are used interchangeably with angelical (see example 13).

> *10 ... Although as **a thoughtful Christian fundamentalist**, he could have easily answered his question…*
>
> *11. Not just Christian Scientists, but fundamentalists and hyper-Catholics concerned that the vaccines were derived from fetal tissue.*
>
> *12. … **Fundamentalist Christians** believe, like the **Founding Fathers**, that God…*
>
> *13. Three fifths of all television news stories mentioning **angelical or Christian** fundamentalist …*

On the other hand, the excerpt below reveals that Muslims who follow the Islamic teachings and insist on following the original practices of Islam are posited to be oppressive fundamentalists. On the lexical level, the word choices imply that the "original" practices of Islam are barbarians, and that Islamic society needs the non-original "*foreign influences"* and "*innovations"*. The implication is then that Islamic practices '*theirs*' unlike '*ours'* are old back warded traditions that needs to be changed. One persuading strategy that showed up

repeatedly in the corpus is the exclusion and inclusion strategy. In the excerpt below for example, Muslim Fundamentalists are projected to be different from the rest of Muslim society and hence should be excluded. This is illustrated by the use of the implicative verbs *try, persuade, and hope,* which implies that those who are committed to the "original" Islamic practices are rejected not only by *us* but even by *their* Islamic societies. The underlying implication, however, is that all those who follow Islamic teachings are fundamentalists.

This conclusion is supported by the interchangeable use of the words *Islamists* and *fundamentalists*

> *14. … **Fundamentalists** have always **insisted** that the umma needs to keep the **original principles** of **Islam**. They have tried to **persuade** society to **reject** practices that are foreign to Islam. The primary objective of **Islamists** has been to **return** society, as much as possible, to a style of life characteristic of the time of the Prophet Muhammad… we can summarize the … bases of **Islamic fundamentalism**: … Emphasis is placed upon **the unity** of the umma and the **rejection** of the **diverse influences** that have penetrated Muslim society, which, in the fundamentalist view, could create internal contradictions...Fundamentalists adhere to **the original traditions of Islam** and are **opposed** to **foreign influences and innovation***

The emphasis on the differentiating between *our* and *their* fundamentalists is also manifested in the inclusion of *our* fundamentalists. In other words, Christian fundamentalists are represented as ordinary open-minded citizens who instead of *oppose, ignore* what goes against their beliefs. The qualifying expression *majority of* in example 15 is thus used to include all but few Christian fundamentalists within this description.

> *15. But the majority of **Christian fundamentalists** don't attend the most extreme Christian* universities ... Instead, they attend public and private institutions where they ignore teachings that threaten their beliefs.

Interestingly, Muslim Fundamentalists are not only designated by their deviant behaviors but also by the way they dress as example 16 illustrates:

> *16. ...their **overcoats**, and open-toed **sandals**. We have gone to meet the most famous **Muslim fundamentalist** in Britain….*

However, no reference to the physical appearance was found in the corpus for Christian fundamentalists. Given the major differences between *our* and *their* fundamentalists, those who try to equate Christian fundamentalists with Muslim fundamentalists are designated to be out of the group i.e., against Christianity:

> *17. Anthony Lewis displays the far-left humanist and anti-Christian philosophy that has been his trademark for so many years... He seeks to equate Christians who believe the biblical account of creation with violent Muslim fundamentalists. A Christian fundamentalist does not organize terror campaigns or seek to compel others to accept his beliefs.*

In conclusion, the analysis of the collocate "fundamentalist" revealed widespread bias in the representation of Muslims in scholarly and media discourse in the United States. When the collocate "fundamentalist" is used with Christians, it has positive semantic prosody. Christian fundamentalists are praised explicitly or implicitly for adhering to biblical teachings. In fact, this use is in harmony with the definition of fundamentalism in the online Merriam-Webster Dictionary: "a movement in the 20th century." Protestantism emphasizes the literally interpreted Bible as "fundamental to Christian life and teaching." Muslims who follow Islamic principles, ironically, are portrayed as violent, backward, and abhorrent groups. Linking fundamentalists' characteristics with the essence of Islam in the US media aligns with previous findings from other western contexts in which Islam is presented as an inherently violent and brutal religion (e.g., Törnberg & Törnberg, 2016).

5. Conclusion, Implications and Limitations

This study was conducted to investigate how the words *Muslim and Islamic,* as opposed to *Christian,* are represented in the Corpus of Contemporary American English. The resulting collocations revealed extreme differences in both groups' projections, as the former is primarily associated with conflict, violence, and political divisions, whereas the latter is primarily associated with knowledge. Similarly, the fine-grained analyses of the word "fundamentalist", a shared significant collocate, illustrate how *their* fundamentalists, i.e., Muslims, are bad and hence should be excluded and denigrated, and how *our* Christian fundamentalists are good. The dominance of one discourse ensures homogeneity of views and public majority compliance with any politically motivated actions inside or outside the U.S.With the absence of a competing discourse and with the knowledge being monopolized within certain circles, sociolinguists are further invited to not only demystify the subtle recursive strategies of political language but also decipher the underlying ideological and historical motives, and hence open the public's minds to the backstage goals of political business. One major implication of the current research is highlighting the role that digital corpora and corpus-based tools can play in reinforcing the objectivity of discourse-based studies in general and critical discourse analysis in particular.

While the findings of this study are hoped to add to the existing literature by highlighting the rhetorical strategies used by the U.S media to describe Muslims vs. Christians, the study has limitations.The current analysis overlooked differences between spoken and written language as well as potential differences between various media channels. Future studies are recommended to take such issues into consideration for a more objective analysis of media language.

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Appendix A

Table 1. Collocates of the word Muslim

Collocate	Frequency	Frequency %	MI
WORLD	1412	0	4
BROTHERHOOD	826	31	10
COUNTRIES	562	1	5
CHRISTIAN	530	1	5
ARAB	496	2	6
COMMUNITY	484	0	3
LEADERS	350	1	4
MUSLIM	330	2	6
POPULATION	280	0	4
SHIITE	222	7	8
SUNNI	207	6	7
RELIGIOUS	206	0	3
JEWISH	193	1	5
COMMUNITIES	190	1	4
HOLY	174	1	5
MAJORITY	173	0	4
SOCIETIES	169	2	6
HINDU	168	7	8
ISLAMIC	168	1	5
BOSNIAN	165	4	7
PREDOMINANTLY	162	4	7
LEADER	159	0	3
ISLAM	156	2	5
EGYPT	141	1	5
FAITH	134	0	4
NATIONS	133	0	3
BROTHERS	132	1	4
EXTREMISTS	127	6	7
SCHOLARS	127	1	5
FUNDAMENTALISTS	118	8	8
IMMIGRANTS	117	1	4
MUSLIMS	114	1	5
CLERIC	110	9	8
LARGEST	108	0	3
RADICAL	103	1	4
RELIGION	103	0	3
MINORITY	102	1	4
MOSTLY	102	0	3
YOUTH	100	0	3
PAKISTAN	96	1	4
BOSNIA	95	1	5
SERB	92	3	7
INDONESIA	91	2	6
INDIA	86	0	3
CROAT	84	18	9
POPULATIONS	84	1	4
CLERICS	83	7	8
FUNDAMENTALIST	83	4	7
DEVOUT	81	6	7
CHRISTIANS	80	1	5
RAMADAN	78	10	8
TURKEY	77	0	4
PRAYER	76	1	4
TERRORISTS	74	1	4
MODERATE	74	1	4
LARGELY	74	0	3
MILITANTS	73	2	6
ARABS	70	1	5
LANDS	66	1	4

SAUDI	61	0	4
MILITANT	60	2	6
MOSQUE	60	2	6
BRETHREN	58	5	7
GOVERNMENTS	57	0	3
JEW	56	1	5
SERBS	56	1	5
SECULAR	56	1	4
NEIGHBORS	55	0	3
NON-MUSLIM	53	19	9
ORTHODOX	53	1	5
TERRORIST	53	0	3
BUDDHIST	52	2	6
PALESTINIAN	52	0	3
REFUGEES	51	1	4
PROMINENT	51	0	4
MINORITIES	50	1	4
CIVILIANS	50	1	4
ENCLAVE	47	4	7
JERUSALEM	47	1	4
JEWS	47	0	3
SERBIAN	46	2	5
EXTREMIST	45	3	6
SPAIN	45	0	4
EGYPTIAN	44	1	4
CROATIAN	43	3	6
LEBANON	43	1	4
PRISONERS	43	0	4
MOSQUES	42	3	6
ACTIVISTS	42	0	4
ISLAMIST	41	2	6
SREBRENICA	40	7	8
ARABIA	40	0	4
RULERS	39	2	5
IMMIGRANT	39	0	4
WORLDS	38	0	4
PEOPLES	38	0	4
HAMAS	37	1	4
FIGHTERS	37	1	4
SHIA	36	4	7
PAKISTANI	36	1	5

Appendix B

Table 2. Collocates of the word Islamic

WORLD	904	0	3
REPUBLIC	783	5	7
LAW	694	1	4
JIHAD	648	26	10
GROUPS	494	1	4
REVOLUTION	449	2	6
IRAN	419	2	6
HAMAS	418	9	8
RADICAL	398	3	6
MOVEMENT	369	1	4
FUNDAMENTALISM	350	29	10
MILITANTS	333	11	8
ISLAMIC	269	2	6
MILITANT	255	8	8
FUNDAMENTALISTS	242	16	9
FUNDAMENTALIST	232	11	8
ARAB	223	1	5
COUNTRIES	215	0	3
EXTREMISTS	214	9	8
RELIGIOUS	187	0	3
MOVEMENTS	186	1	5
MUSLIM	168	1	5
ORGANIZATION	162	0	3
TERRORISTS	158	1	5
LEADERS	155	0	3
1979	149	1	5
LEADER	141	0	3
VALUES	137	0	3
COUNCIL	136	0	3
EXTREMISM	135	12	8
TERRORISM	134	1	5
PAKISTAN	133	1	5
SCHOLARS	131	1	5
PALESTINIAN	131	1	5
REGIME	127	1	4
EGYPT	123	1	5
TERRORIST	119	1	5
SHARIA	115	22	9
CONFERENCE	115	0	3
HOLY	114	1	4
AFGHANISTAN	111	1	4
RADICALS	107	5	7
TRADITION	106	0	4
SUPREME	102	0	4
FAITH	101	0	3
CIVILIZATION	100	1	5
MUSLIMS	100	1	5
ISLAM	100	1	5
ORGANIZATIONS	100	0	3
RULE	95	0	3
RESISTANCE	91	1	4
ARMED	90	0	4
PARTIES	89	0	3
REVIVAL	88	2	6
DEMOCRACY	86	0	3
EXTREMIST	85	5	7
RELIGION	85	0	3
SOCIETIES	84	1	5
PRINCIPLES	81	0	4
TALIBAN	80	1	5

EGYPTIAN	79	1	5
ANTHROPOLOGY	78	2	6
SALVATION	76	2	6
REVOLUTIONARY	72	1	5
SECULAR	68	1	5
SAUDI	68	0	4
TURKEY	68	0	3
LIBERATION	67	1	5
OPPOSITION	65	0	3
COURTS	64	0	3
STRICT	63	1	5
RADICALISM	62	9	8
ESTABLISH	62	0	4
MOSQUE	59	2	6
MEDIEVAL	59	1	5
SCHOLAR	59	1	5
TRADITIONS	59	1	4
JURISPRUDENCE	57	6	7
CLERICS	57	5	7
ESTABLISHMENT	57	1	4
TERROR	54	0	4
HEZBOLLAH	53	1	5
CORPS	53	0	4
MILITANCY	52	11	8
ALGERIA	51	2	6
CLINICS	51	1	5
IRANIAN	51	1	4
SHARI'A	50	21	9
SUDAN	50	1	5
IDEOLOGY	50	1	4
LEBANON	50	1	4
BIN	49	0	4
CLAIMED	49	0	3
BROTHERHOOD	47	2	6
ARABIC	47	1	5
LADEN	46	1	4
ARABIA	46	0	4
ASIA	46	0	3
TEACHINGS	44	2	6
HINDU	43	2	6
TOTAL	15027		

Appendix C

Table 3. Collocates of the word Christian

Collocate	Frequency	Frequency %	MI
SCIENCE	3345	5	6
COPYRIGHT	2659	33	9
MONITOR	2544	15	8
FAITH	1097	3	6
CHURCH	841	1	4
COALITION	838	5	6
SOCIETY	522	1	3
TRADITION	487	2	5
JEWISH	479	2	5
CHRISTIAN	474	1	4
MUSLIM	442	3	5
THEOLOGY	377	4	6
PUBLISHING	377	4	6
CHURCHES	346	3	5
EVANGELICAL	308	8	7
CONSERVATIVE	308	1	4
ETHICS	237	2	5
COMMUNITIES	234	1	4
VALUES	234	1	3
RELIGION	228	1	4
DOCTRINE	215	3	5
CONSERVATIVES	207	2	5
LEADERSHIP	205	1	3
ACADEMY	182	1	4
BELIEF	179	1	4
IDENTITY	174	1	3
CATHOLIC	163	1	3
BORN-AGAIN	154	33	9
ORTHODOX	154	3	6
FELLOWSHIP	152	5	6
MISSIONARIES	151	5	6
MONITOR//	144	100	11
CONTEMPORARY	142	1	3
DEVOUT	140	10	7
FUNDAMENTALIST	138	6	7
BELIEFS	126	1	4
HOLY	124	1	4
UNITY	122	1	4
TRADITIONS	118	1	4
BIBLE	113	1	4
CHARITY	106	1	4
LAETTNER	102	32	9
THEOLOGICAL	102	2	5
PRAYER	100	1	3
PRINCIPLES	98	1	3
DENOMINATIONS	97	8	7
THEOLOGIANS	94	4	6
JEW	94	2	5
PAGAN	91	6	7
WORSHIP	91	2	5
MORALITY	88	2	5
FUNDAMENTALISTS	84	6	6
MONITOR#	82	100	11
MINISTRY	82	1	3
MISSIONARY	80	2	5
MEDIEVAL	77	1	4
CHRISTIANS	72	1	3
GOSPEL	71	1	4
FOUNDED	70	1	3

BUDDHIST	69	3	5
SPIRITUALITY	69	2	5
REVELATION	67	1	4
HERITAGE	67	1	3
PASTOR	65	1	4
PREDOMINANTLY	62	1	5
FOUNDER	62	1	3
SALVATION	61	1	4
LUTHERAN	60	3	5
TEACHINGS	60	2	5
BROADCASTING	60	1	4
SECULAR	55	1	3
NORTHLAND	53	29	9
TEMPERANCE	53	8	7
SCRIPTURES	53	5	6