

Anush Martirosyan

*Lecturer and Ph.D. student of Languages, Communication and Pedagogy Department at Eurasia International University,
PHD student of University of Santiago de Compostela
Email: anush.martirosyan@eiu.am*

DOI: 10.53614/18294952-2024.1-170

THE LINGUISTIC PERCEPTION OF EVOLUTION OF TERRORISM AND ITS POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS ACROSS HISTORY

The article examines the linguistic evolution of the perception of terrorism from ancient times to the modern era. It discusses how the concept of terrorism has shifted from a positive to a negative meaning highlighting the significant role of political and state players in shaping this perception by using language as a powerful tool. The article also touches upon the problematic nature of defining and interpreting terrorism, highlighting its subjective nature and the influence of political motivations. It is explained also how the line between terrorist and freedom fighter can be blurred, leading to conflicts in perceptions and definitions which causes problems in the fight against terrorism.

Key words: terrorism, freedom fighter, negative, positive, political motivation, perception, language.

Introduction

Terrorism as a global threat has existed since ancient times and is expressed in the activities of various empires, states, organizations, and individuals. Although the roots of terrorism are quite old and come from ancient times, the term was coined during the French Revolution, known as the *Reign of Terror / 1793-1794/*. During the Revolution, the Jacobins used the term to describe their actions. It was a series of large-scale violent acts that instilled fear in the public.

The word “terrorism”, however, first appeared in English dictionaries in 1978

with a description of the ‘systematic use of terror’ (Sahi, 2017). With the changing norms and political interest over the centuries, the perception of the latter has modified significantly shifting from a positive to a negative meaning.

If in the past, terrorism was often used as a tool by state leaders to pursue their own interests to maintain power and intimidate opposition groups, and was in favor of states, then in modern days it is perceived as a phenomenon against states. The change was orchestrated by the changing global dynamics, political ideologies, and societal norms and the rise of the narratives of international human rights norms and the condemnation of terrorism by the international community since the world has become more interconnected and globalized. With the re-establishment of the kingdoms, the rise of new powers, and the changed course of diplomacy, the concept of terrorism has meanwhile taken on a new role (Crenshaw, 2010).

The language has been utilized as a strategy by individuals and political leaders for their narratives. Fahnstock mentions that that ‘commentators identified and codified the features of language that might enhance its power over audiences’ (Fahnstock, 2011). To conduct the analysis the following research questions were addressed.

1. How has the perception and definition of terrorism evolved over time, particularly in relation to political attitudes and motivations?
2. What role has political power played in shaping our understanding of terrorism, and how has this influenced counterterrorism measures?
3. How has the concept of terrorism been utilized as a tool for influencing audiences or governments throughout history?

The answer to these questions provides invaluable insight into the ever-evolving landscape of terrorism, spreading light on the underlying motivations and factors driving those transformations.

Methodology

This article is rooted in empirical research, which includes a historical review and analysis of speeches from various leaders and individuals. The study utilizes linguistic analysis, qualitative and comparative methods to make possible the examination of the similarities and differences among the speeches and the changing course of the perception of terrorism through the time.

Results

The article discusses the changing nature of the perception of terrorism throughout history. It highlights how terrorism was initially seen as a tool for dominance and control in ancient times, before becoming a controversial and subjective concept in the medieval and early modern periods. Finally, in the late modern period, terrorism became universally condemned as a form of violence. The article also discusses the influence of political power on shaping our understanding of terrorism and emphasizes the subjective nature of defining and

interpreting terrorism. It explores the use of rhetoric and emotions to justify or condemn terrorist actions, as well as the manipulation of the phrase “one man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter” to create confusion and ambiguity. The article provides specific historical examples to illustrate the changing perceptions of terrorism in ancient and early modern times.

Discussion

It is undeniable that before the tragic events of 9/11¹, terrorism received relatively less attention. However, in the aftermath of 9/11, there was a notable shift in focus, particularly among powerful states such as the USA, France, Great Britain, Japan, and others, who significantly increased their efforts in combating terrorism, commonly known as counterterrorism.

The catalyst for this heightened attention was the realization that if terrorists could successfully target a country as prominent as the United States, which boasted a highly developed security system, then no nation was immune from the threat. The fear of potential attacks on any country prompted a collective response to prioritize counterterrorism measures.

When discussing terrorism, it is crucial to acknowledge that our understanding of it, including its definitions and linguistic perceptions, has been shaped by political attitudes. The influence of political power has played a significant role in shaping our understanding of terrorism.

This recognition is essential as it highlights the subjective nature of defining and interpreting terrorism, which can vary depending on political motivations and interests.

As previously mentioned, the concept of terrorism has undergone significant changes over time. In the past, individuals who carried out terrorist actions were sometimes attributed an inspiring heroic profile. They openly boasted about their horrific acts, expressing a sense of pride in their deeds. However, contemporary society has overwhelmingly rejected such glorification of terrorism. Nowadays, anyone involved in terrorizing people or participating in acts of terrorism is universally considered a criminal and is viewed by society as a “bad person.” This shift in perception reflects a broader understanding of the destructive and harmful nature of terrorism, as well as the recognition that the intentional infliction of fear and violence upon innocent individuals cannot be justified or celebrated.

In ancient times (from 6,000 BCE to 650 CE), kings who terrorized people encouraged this phenomenon, the greater the phenomenon of oppressing people through terror, the greater the role of the given person.

Such kind of example can be found also in the speech of Assurnasirpal, the king of Assyria who after conquering territories left the following cuneiform inscription found in Mosul Iraq.

I built a pillar over against his city gate and I flayed all the chiefs who

¹ For more information see the book David M. Bresnahan ‘9-11: Terror in America’ Windsor House, 2001.

had revolted, and I covered the pillar with their skin. Some I walled up within the pillar some I impaled upon the pillar of stakes... Many captives from among them I burned with fire, and many I took as living captives. From some, I cut off their noses, their ears, and their fingers, of many I put out the eyes. I made one pillar of living and another of heads (Matusitz, 2013).

In the given examples they tried to praise terror actions and the usage of the personal pronoun 'I' meant to emphasize the dominant image of the kings. Through linguistic means like the use of past simple and the detailed description of events sequences, / did, impaled, skinned, raped, burned, etc./ they tried to point out the tyrannical power of the king. This style of language could be considered the first manifestation of diplomatic-political speech which was low-developed and deconstructive.

The cuneiform inscriptions show that the perception of terrorism by states, kingdoms, and empires was positive, and spreading terror ideas among people was one of the main tools for keeping power.

However, this type of tyrannical discourse was deconstructive and diplomatically uncompetitive since the only idea was to dominate and frighten others by spreading terror everywhere. On the other hand, this was conditioned by the fact of limited rights of people and total freedom and lack of punishment of world leaders. The absence of global organizations was another reason for such kind of behavior by kings and emperors. However, later, we see the change of the perceptions and actions based on this.

The perception of terror in the early modern period (15th–18th century AD) started to change and operate against countries. We see a new chapter of terrorism history where people or specific groups started to use terrorism for new ideas such as democracy, human rights, etc. In this period terrorism was supposed to bring revolution and democracy, meaning instead of terrorizing the people itself, it terrorized the country's leaders and was against the leading regimes. It was a time when terrorism was used against states and as an act of violence was no longer something done by the state leaders but against the state organs with a persuasive and emotional discourse directed to the public that was one of the engines of the latter.

In 1793 Maximilien Robespierre, the radical Jacobin leader and one of the main figures of the French Revolution made terror 'the order of the day'. A year later, in 1794, the leader of the French Revolution justified terrorism in his speech and the moral was that it was revolutionary terrorism in the name of democracy, equality, etc. making 'aristocracy as the enemies of the state' (Nacos, 2016).

The moral of his terrorist actions expressed in his speech was much more constructive and convincing. In a speech given to the National Convention in February 1794, Robespierre declared:

*'If the spring of popular government in time of peace is a virtue, the springs of popular government in revolution are at once virtue and terror. Virtue without terror is fatal; terror without virtue is powerless. **Terror is nothing other than justice: prompt, severe, and inflexible.** It is, therefore, an emanation of virtue... a consequence of the general principle of democracy applied to our country's most urgent needs'* (History, 2023).

Using words like justice or order of the day, the revolutionist Maximilien Robespierre transmitted his messages to the audience searching for democracy, equality, and justice by vindicating it to gain support from the audience. In his speech, we see a combination of rhetoric and emotions, which is to say that his speech was based on emotions with the peculiarities of rhetoric speech whose main idea was to persuade, impress and motivate people.

The word 'justice' itself was persuasive since the associations people have with the word are moral, strong, and fair. Once someone hears the word 'justice' imagines something true, and rightful, and this is the word drawing lines between fair and unfair, equal and unequal, etc.

Later, another interpretation of terrorism emerged: "*one man's terrorist another man's freedom fighter*"² which became a tool of manipulation of the term until now. Weinberg mentions that the statement goal was to create confusion with the activity (Weinberg, 2009).

A question that arises here is '*why this slogan is so unique and what makes it so actual*'. The first characteristic of it is the combination of negative and positive sentences that allows one to manipulate the term. The slogan is controversial since it is not only about the combination of good and bad perceptions, but the contradiction between them. This is when we see the duality of the interpretation of the concept and how different groups of people perceived it. This is mostly correct, but there are a few minor errors in grammar and phrasing.

The root of this perception lies in the reasons why people act in favor of terrorism and what justification they have for it. The roots of terrorism can be varied, stemming from reasons such as ethnic, religious differences, political grievances like the desire to achieve independence or self-determination for a particular group or community, and so on.

Perceived injustices or discrimination against a certain group can also fuel feelings of anger and resentment that may lead to acts of terrorism. Based on these reasons, people, state leaders, or specific groups may have their own interpretations or perceptions regarding this concept.

For instance, the Palestinian Liberation Army Group which is fighting for the occupied territories of Palestine is labeled as a terrorist group by the Israeli side, however the group has other justification for their actions. The Palestinian side says they fight for the liberation of their country (freedom fighters), meanwhile,

² The author is unknown.

the Israeli side says they are fighting against terrorism and that is why they attacked those groups (counter-terrorism operations). The slogan in the context of linguistics can be paraphrased as a rhetorical question– *And what if the person you think is a terrorist is a freedom fighter?*

In such a way, one can justify terrorist actions logically by explaining the very deep and hidden reasons for doing it, but it creates tremendous problems for those who are fighting against it. The slogan, however, is a perfect reflection of subjectivity since it is a subjective understanding, and linguistic uncertainty and vagueness allow anyone to interpret it in their own way. Ganor writes that understanding terrorism ‘*depends entirely on the subjective outlook of the definer*’ (Ganor, 2010). The influence of the slogan was impressive and made even presidents talk about it to stop its unhindered prosperity.

U.S. President Ronald Reagan in his interview on May 7, 1986, in Tokyo in an answer to a question of one of the journalists about the roots of terrorism, set clear lines between who terrorists and freedom fighters are to avoid its misinterpretation and confusion.

*(2) ‘I think that’s the same thing as the cliché line that is going around that, well, **one man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter**. No such thing. The people that are customarily called **freedom fighters** are fighting against organized military forces. Even if it is a civil war, it is a war. **Terrorists**, as I said before, are people who deliberately choose as a target to murder and maim innocent people who have no influence upon the things that they think of as their political goals., therefore, those people must be treated as to what they are, and that is they are base criminals* (Reagan, 1986).

In the interview, we see that the president was trying hard to show and explain that not every person could be called a **freedom fighter**, and everything had its name. He tried to clarify that creating confusion and manipulation through words like **freedom fighters** makes counterterrorism actions even harder. The president also explains that the essence of a freedom fighter is against organized military groups, so terror actions are not compatible with the word **freedom fighter** and if a person deliberately chooses a target to murder or maim, that person cannot and should not be called a **freedom fighter**.

But when we analyze Yasser Arafat’s speech, a member of PLO’ in 1974 addressed to the UN, we will see quite the opposite attitude. He mainly says:

‘He who fights for a just cause, he who fights for the liberation of his country, he who fights against invasion and exploitation or single-mindedly against colonialism, can never be defined as a terrorist.’ (Mohanty, 2006)

A comparison of Ronald Reagan’ and Yasser Arafat’s opinions about the slogan

shows that negative and positive meanings, contradictions, and controversiality of the slogan overlap each other, which means that it is extremely difficult to set clear lines between who can be called freedom fighters. Yasser Arafat's speech opposes Ronald Reagan's speech where Yasser Arafat indirectly offers to analyze why people do such kinds of things. Ronald Reagan interprets it as an action against the country, meanwhile, Yasser Arafat's speech hints to us that those are actions for the state, hence for Ronald Reagan it was terrorism and for Yasser Arafat, it was a fight for freedom which once again showed the pure nature of the slogan.

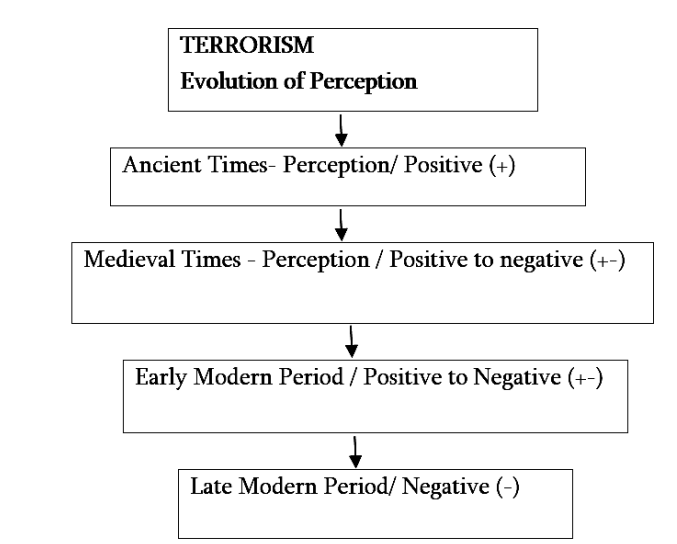
It is necessary to mention that along the evolution of the concept of terrorism, as the Encyclopedia of Britannica indicates, terrorism was defined as an 'act of violence done by a state, head of a state, or a state against its domestic and external enemies', (Encyclopedia of Britannica, 2023) however, nowadays the term means the opposite, namely terrorism is an act of violence aimed at governments to change or influence their policy.

This interpretation is of great importance since nowadays the whole narrative of policies of the countries is designed based on the given definition: countries suffering from terrorism and fighting against it.

If before some states could justify the terror actions, then now states condemn it, regardless of whether they are engaged in it or not, use it as a tool for their goals or not. Nowadays the perception of terrorism is so negative that sometimes some countries manipulate it to meet their goals.

Taking into consideration different periods of the perception of terrorism by states, we can say that it had changed from positive to negative meaning for states and state actors, and the table below will explain it more practically.

Table 1.



In the table below we distinguished 3 stages³ of terrorism perception and tried to explain how it was used to influence audiences or governments.

Table 2

<p><i>Positive</i> First Stage</p> <p>→</p>	<p>The period when terrorizing people was carried out by kingdoms and states was perceived as a very effective way to control territories, by creating intense fear in the minds of people and influencing their psychology to subjugate people and gain power.</p>
<p><i>Positive to Negative</i> Second Stage</p> <p>→</p>	<p>The concept of terrorism had both positive and negative meanings. A terrorist could fight under the name of a freedom fighter, and the value of a true freedom fighter could fade since they could be considered terrorists. This created confusion among people.</p>
<p><i>Negative</i> Third Stage</p> <p>→</p>	<p>The concept of terrorism became completely negative, since it was already something against the government and made the states act against it. Narratives and statements are to codify people's minds to condemn terrorism regardless the the rightfulness of their actions and the deep reasons behind them.</p>

Conclusion

After having examined the evolution of the perception of terrorism and some problematic areas connected with it, it is concluded that:

The evolution of the perception of terrorism from ancient times to the modern era has been characterized by a shift from a positive to a negative meaning, because of political, state, and other factors.

The subjective nature of defining and interpreting terrorism, as well as the blurred line between terrorist and freedom fighter, has caused problems in the fight against terrorism and led to misunderstandings, hindering counterterrorism efforts, and spreading violence.

To address these problems, it is essential to establish clear definitions of terrorism to escape linguistic misinterpretation and promote dialogue and understanding between conflicting parties. It is important to recognize the destructive nature of terrorism and the significance of condemning it unequivocally.

It is also determined that other factors such as inequality, oppression, and political dissatisfaction affected in dissemination of terrorism and those factors

³ For more information see the book Kubiak A. 'Stages of Terror: Terrorism, Ideology, and Coercion as Theatre History' Indiana University Press, 1991

should be discussed and resolved to hinder terrorism and weaponization of words in favor of terrorism.

In conclusion, the evolution of the perception of terrorism shows the complexity and challenges surrounding this phenomenon. By understanding the historical context, political motivations, and linguistic nuances of terrorism, makes it more effective combating terrorism and promotes peace and stability in the world.

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Անուշ Մարտիրոսյան

*Եվրասիա միազգային համալսարանի լեզուների, հաղորդակցման
և մանկավարժության ամբիոնի դասախոս, նույն ամբիոնի հայցորդ,
Սանսյուզո դե Կոնսյուսյոելա համալսարանի ասպիրանտ
Էլ փոստը՝ anush.martirosyan@eiu.am*

**ԱՀԱԲԵԿԶՈՒԹՅԱՆ ԼԵԶՎԱԿԱՆ ԸՆԿԱԼՄԱՆ ԷՎՈԼՅՈՒՑԻԱՆ ԵՎ
ՎԵՐՋԻՆԻՍ ՔԱՂԱՔԱԿԱՆ ՀԵՏԵՎԱՆՔՆԵՐԸ ՊԱՏՄՈՒԹՅԱՆ
ԸՆԹԱՅՔՈՒՄ**

Հոդվածն ուսումնասիրում է ահաբեկչության ընկալման լեզվական էվոլյուցիան հնագույն ժամանակներից մինչև մեր օրերը: Այն քննարկում է, թե

ինչպես են ահաբեկչության վերաբերյալ ընկալումները դրականից վերածվել բացասականի՝ ընդգծելով քաղաքական և պետական խաղացողների նշանակալի դերը հասկացողության ձևավորման գործում՝ օգտագործելով լեզուն որպես հզոր գործիք:

Հողվածն անդրադառնում է նաև ահաբեկչության սահմանման և մեկնաբանման խնդրահարույց բնույթին՝ ընդգծելով դրա սուբյեկտիվ բնույթը և քաղաքական դրդապատճառների ազդեցությունը: Բացատրվում է նաև, թե ինչպես կարող է չտարանջատվել ահաբեկչի և ազատամարտիկի միջև սահմանը՝ հանգեցնելով ընկալումների և սահմանումների հակասությունների, ինչը խնդիրներ է առաջացնում ահաբեկչության դեմ պայքարում:

Հիմնաբառեր. ահաբեկչություն, ազատամարտիկ, բացասական, դրական, քաղաքական դրդապատճառ, ընկալում, լեզու:

Ануш Мартиросян

Преподаватель и аспирант отделения языков, коммуникации и педагогики

Международного университета Евразия.

Аспирант Университета Сантьяго-де-Компостела.

Эл. почта: anush.martirosyan@eiu.am.

ЛИНГВИСТИЧЕСКОЕ ВОСПРИЯТИЕ ЭВОЛЮЦИИ ТЕРРОРИЗМА И ЕГО ПОЛИТИЧЕСКИЕ ПОСЛЕДСТВИЯ НА ПРОТЯЖЕНИИ ИСТОРИИ

Статья исследует лингвистическую эволюцию восприятия терроризма от древних времен до современности. Она обсуждает, как понятие терроризма изменилось с положительного на отрицательное значение, выделяя значительную роль политических и государственных игроков в формировании этого восприятия с использованием языка как мощного инструмента. Статья также затрагивает проблематичную природу определения и интерпретации терроризма, выделяя его субъективную природу и влияние политических мотивов. Также объясняется, как грань между террористом и борцом за свободу может размыться, приводя к конфликтам в восприятиях и определениях, что вызывает проблемы в борьбе против терроризма.

Ключевые слова: терроризм, борец за свободу, отрицательный, положительный, политическая мотивация, восприятие, язык.

Հողվածը խմբագրություն է ներկայացվել՝ 2024թ. մայիսի 18-ին:

Հողվածը հանձնվել է գրախոսման՝ 2024թ. մայիսի 22-ին:

Հողվածն ընդունվել է տպագրության՝ 2024թ. հունիսի 11-ին: