Forensic Linguistics and the Detecting of Deviant Teaching in Malaysia

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Abstract

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Recently, deviant teaching has become a religious crime because it has been associated with extremist groups promoting violence and killing people in the name of Islam. This paper discusses the importance of forensic linguistics in detecting religious deviant teaching in Malaysia, having the objectives of (1) identifying a text's features that can be used as evidence when detecting deviant teaching, and (2) describing the interpretation of meanings given by the leader of the deviant group. The discussion of forensic linguistics is based on a religious discourse analysis approach proposed by Nordin (2015). The data used in the discussion are selected from two religious decisions, which are *Ajaran Azhar bin Wahab* in the state of Kedah and *Ajaran Harun* in the state of Pahang. The results show that the main features of a text that can be used as evidence in detecting deviant teaching are sacred words; for instance, *karamah* (extraordinary happenings) and*Tuhan* (God). The results also show that the interpretation of meaning given by the leader of a deviant group is distorted from its actual meaning as determined by religious authorities, namely the *Ahl Sunnah walJama'ah*.

1. Introduction

Recently, deviant teaching has become a religious crime because it has been associated with extremist groups promoting violence and killing people in the name of Islam. To prevent a religion from being misunderstood and acted upon erroneously by deviant adherents, it is important to have various mechanisms to detect all aspects of the deviant spreading of a religion, including forensic linguistics.

This paper discusses the importance of forensic linguistics in detecting religious deviant teaching in Malaysia, having the objectives of (1) identifying a text's features that can be used as evidence when detecting deviant teaching, and (2) describing the interpretation of meanings given by the leader of the deviant group.

The discussion of forensic linguistics is based on a religious discourse analysis approach proposed by Nordin (2015). This approach involves analyzing the structure of a written or spoken utterance. The data used in thediscussionrelate to Islamic keywords in the Malay language relating to Muslim beliefs in Malaysia. The words are selected from two religious decisions made by two fatwa committees of the state council for Islamic religious affairs in relation to two issues of the Islamic faith. The issues are *Ajaran Azhar bin Wahab* in the state of Kedah and *Ajaran Harun* in the state of Pahang.

2. Deviant teaching in Malaysia

In the study of religion, deviant teaching is referred as uncommon religious practice. It departs from usual or accepted standards of system of belief, ritual and religious behaviour. Hence, deviant teaching is associated with wrongly religious understanding and practice. It is a threat for survival of religion. Every single religion from monotheistic religions with holy texts and messengers to polytheistic religions without any solid sources has its own deviant practice. For instance, although Islam is a perfected and bestowed religion as confirmed by Allah (Quran 5: 3), it is also exposed to uncommon religious understanding and practice.

As the study focuses on Islam, this paper emphasizes on deviant teaching of Islam in Malaysia.Islam is a federal religion of Malaysia. According to data of the Department of Statistics of Malaysia (2015), Islam is the religion that has the highest number of adherents in the country: that is, 61.3%, followed by Buddhism (19.8%), Christianity (9.2%), Hinduism (6.3%), Confucianism and Taoism (1.3%), and other religions (2.1%).

Generally, deviant teaching in Islam is not a new phenomenon. It emerged after the death of Prophet Muhammad and after the spreading of Islam outside of the Madinah until nowadays. On one hand, there are various internal factors of the emergence of deviant teaching which can be associated to lack of true understanding of Islam (Mahmud, 1994), fanaticism (Hassan, 2014), seeking for popularity, money and power to control people (Jamil, 1997; Husin & Sa'ari, 2013). On the other hand, the external factors relate to in fluence of syncretism, secularism, pluralism, liberalism and so on (Awang, 2012; Amin, 2009).

In dealing with deviant teaching, various approaches have been applied either by the authorities in connection with the Muslims' affairs or non-governmental organizations. The approaches involve the exposure of malpractice of deviant teaching (Ibrahim, 2010), religious decision toward deviant teaching (Alwi, 2007), and legal enforcement related to deviant teaching (Yusof, 2011).

3. The importance of forensic linguistics

Basically, forensic linguistics refers to the interconnections between language and the law in all of its forms. There are activities signal the main duties a forensic linguist can expect to perform (Simpson & Mayr, 2010):

a. Performing expert analysis and commentary on the language of legal documents, courts and prison;
b. Improving translation services in the court system;
c. Helping linguistic disadvantage produced by the legal process;
d. Providing forensic evidence that is based on professional academic knowledge of language and discourse;
e. Offering advice in legal drafting and interpreting, often with an emphasis on the use of 'plain language'.

The importance of forensic linguistics can be seen clearly when many linguists are now recruited for court appearances as expert witnesses. Because of their subject knowledge and their professional standing, linguists are able to offer opinion which can count as evidence. They have been able to make genuine interventions in the outcome of trials (Simpson & Mayr, 2010).

4. Text as evidence

This part identifies a text's features that can be used as evidence when detecting deviant teaching. There are the issues of *Ajaran Azhar bin Wahab* in the state of Kedah and *Ajaran Harun* in the state of Pahang.

4.1. Kedah

Ajaran Azhar bin Wahab in the state of Kedah focuses on the matter of *akidah* (belief), *syariah* (Islamic law) and *akhlak* (Islamic ethics). According to the decision made by the Fatwa Committee of the State of Kedah in August 2004, *Ajaran Azhar bin Wahab* are contradictory and deviating from the *Ahlus Sunnah WalJama'ah* and become anxiety to the public (threat to the solidarity, and religious unity of the State). As the fatwa relates to the religious concerns, there are evidences mentioned in the fatwa decision which are divided into the issues of *akidah*, *syariah* and *akhlak*. The most similar linguistic features in these issues are the words *berkat* (blessings) and *karamah* (extraordinary happenings) as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. The words in the state of Kedah

	Evidence in Deviant Text Traced bythe Fatwa Committee	Translation	Issue	Word	Contradiction
a.	Menggunakan "*Tawassul*" iaitu berdoa sebelum melakukan urut refleksi dengan berkata: "Ya Allah dengan berkat dan karamah Guruku Tuan Azhar, sembuhkanlah penyakit pulan-si-pulan…"	Using "*Tawassul*" which is praying before doing massage reflection by saying: "O Allah, with even more blessings and extraordinary happeningsof my teacher Azhar, heal disease of this person..."	*Akidah*	*Berkat and karamah*	Nobody can give blessings and extraordinary happening to others
b.	Boleh memberi barakah dan syafa'at kepada anak muridnya.	Can give blessings and being an intercessor for his students	*Syariah*	*Barakah*	
c.	Mendakwa ada keberkatan kerana boleh menarik duit para pelanggan dan mereka akan mengeluarkan sebanyak mana wang yang mereka ada.	Claiming of having blessings because he can attract customers' money and they will spend as much as they have	*Akidah*	*Keberkatan*	
d.	Mengugut ahli agar jangan derhaka kepadanya nanti tidak mendapat karamah	Threatening members not to disobey him so that they will not be granted his extraordinary happening	*Akhlak*	*Karamah*	Nobody can grant extraordinary happening to others

Source: The Fatwa Committee of the State of Kedah (2004)

In this deviant teaching, the main reason of using *berkat* and *karamah* is to show the specialties and outstanding characters of deviant leaders. By having the charismatic leadership, the followers will give their respects and obedience hoping that they will be honored his blessings as well as his extraordinary happenings.

4.2. Pahang

Ajaran Harun in the state of Pahang is a business oriented religious group. The Fatwa Committee of Pahang 2013 decided that what this group believes in akidah, especially about God is different with *Ahlus Sunnah WalJama'ah*. The word relates to the deviance is the essence of God as mentioned in Table 2.

Table 2. The words in the state of Pahang

	Evidence in Deviant Text Traced bythe Fatwa Committee	Translation	Issue	Word	Contradiction
a.	Melalui buku yang ditulisnya "Buku Teks Maha Graduan" terbitan Pusat Latihan Masa Hadapan (PLMH) Harun bin Mat Saad menukilkan bahawa beliau telah mengenal zat Tuhan. Hal ini amat bertentangan dengan akidah Ahli Sunnah Wal Jamaah yang mengatakan manusia adalah mustahil mengenal zat Tuhan	Through thebook he wrote, "The SupremeGraduatesTextbook" published by Future Training Centre, HarunbinMatSaadnarratesthat hehad knownthe essenceof God.It isstrongly opposed tothe faithof the *Sunni* community, which saidhumanis impossibleto knowthe essenceof God	*Akidah*	Zat Tuhan	Nobody knows the essence of God
b.	Harun bin Mat Saad juga mengakui dia adalah berpangkat Tuhan. Buku terbitannya adalah menyeleweng pada keseluruhannya kerana tiada seorang ulama pun membicarakan mengenai zat Tuhan melainkan Harun bin Mat Saad sahaja yang berbuat demikian	HarunbinMatSaadalsoadmitted heisthe rank ofGod. His bookon the wholeis absurdbecause noscholarstalkedabout theessenceof God butHarunbinMatSaadaloneto do so	*Akidah*	ZatTuhan	

Source: The Fatwa Committee of Pahang (2013)

Ajaran Harun uses the essence of God to demonstrate what he believes on his status of God's rank. This is to prove the level of his knowledge about the essence of God. However, his belief is strongly opposed to the faith of the majority of Muslims in the state of Pahang and Malaysia, i.e. the *Sunni* community. The majority believe that human is impossible to know the essence of God.

5. The Interpretation of Meanings

This part describes the interpretation of meanings given by the leader of the deviant group, which are *Ajaran Azhar bin Wahab* in the state of Kedah and *Ajaran Harun* in the state of Pahang.

5.1. Kedah

In common use, the word *berkat* means endless blessings and *karamah* refers to an outstanding matter granted to selected persons who behave good manners (Mustafa, 1989),. The words contain metaphysical meaning which are not easy to be debated by everyone. In order to interpret, the words need a valid argument; basically by referring to al-Quran and *hadith*. The ordinary meaning of *berkat*

and *karamah* can be understood by connecting them to Allah; the ultimate power in giving everything to human being. As shown in Table 1, every single man has no privilege to give blessings to others as well as to grant to selected persons who behave good manners.

5.2. Pahang

The knowledge about the essence of God is different with the knowledge about the names and attributes of God. As shown in Table 2, Muslims believe that studying these names and attributes is one of the most effective ways of strengthening one's relationship with God. However, these names and attributes cannot be linked to a real physical matter of which He consists and which has a tangible, solid presence, such as an idol. This is because man is unable to know the physical matter of God.

6. Conclusions

Forensic linguistics plays an important role in detecting deviant teaching by dealing with the aspect of linguistics in deviant texts in order to identify the type of word used and the interpretation of meaning. In the paper, the aspect of linguistics like semantic, pragmatics and discourse analysis approach has been applied.

The results show that the main features of a text that can be used as evidence in detecting deviant teaching are sacred words; for instance, *karamah* (extraordinary happenings), *barakah* (blessings) and *Tuhan* (God).

The results also show that the interpretation of meaning given by the leader of a deviant group is distorted from its actual meaning as determined by religious authorities, namely the *Ahl Sunnah wal Jama'ah*. One of the aims of their interpretation is to promote themselves as successful leaders by associating their group's names with their names.

Acknowledgement

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