

The Representation of Religion as Fiction in TED Talks: A Critical Metaphor Analysis

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Abstract

This paper explores the representation of the general concept of religion in TED Talks. The aim of this study is to investigate how religion is framed in TED speeches from 2006 to 2018, and what are the possible religious or irreligious ideologies implied in these speeches. By adopting Charteris-Black's (2004, 2018) Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA) analytical framework, Lakoff and Johnson's (1980, 2003) Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), and with the assistance of Corpus Linguistics (Baker et al., 2008), the analysis was performed on sixty-seven TED speeches delivered by diverse and prominent speakers. Focusing on the FICTION novel metaphor, the results indicate that TED speakers tend to portray God, religion, and religious beliefs as fictional characters and stories. Thus, God and religion are unreal, and believing in them is an irrational and immature decision.

Keywords:

TED Talks, Religion, Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA), Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), Fiction Metaphor

الملخص العربي

اجتهدت الدراسة المقدمة في رصد تصوير مفهوم الدين في خطابات "تيد" العامة. وقد حاولت هذه الدراسة معرفة الإستعارات المستخدمة التي تسهم في بناء صورة إيجابية أو سلبية عن الدين في هذه الخطابات. كما تحاول الدراسة استنتاج الدور الذي يلعبه هذا التمثيل في اظهار الأيدولوجيات الدينية أو اللادينية المحتمل وجودها في خطابات تيد. شملت البيانات التي قامت الباحثة بتحليلها ٦٧ خطاب علني ألقاها مجموعة من أشهر المتحدثين التحفيزيين و العلماء و الفلاسفة في الفترة من ٢٠٠٦ حتى ٢٠١٨. تم ذلك من خلال إستخدام مناهج بحثية متعددة كالمناهج النقدي لتحليل الاستعارة لتشارترتربلاك (٢٠١٨، ٢٠٠٤)، ونظرية الاستعارة المفاهيمية للاكوف وجونسون (١٩٨٠، ٢٠٠٣) بمساعدة منهج التحليل الكمي الاجتماعي للغة لبيكار والباقون (٢٠٠٨) لضمان مصداقية النتائج. وبالتركيز على استعارة الخيال والأدب القصصي، تشير النتائج إلى أن معظم المتحدثين في تيد يميلون إلى تصوير مفهوم الله و الدين والمعتقدات الدينية على أنهم غير واقعيين والإيمان بهم كقرار غير منطقي. الكلمات الأساسية في الدراسة: خطابات تيد التحفيزية أو العامة – الدين – تحليل الاستعارة النقدي – نظرية الاستعارة المفاهيمية – استعارة الخيال

Introduction

Although TED new media organization is mainly about Technology, Entertainment and Design (hence the TED acronym), religion is a controversial topic in TED Talks, comprising approximately 278 speeches out of 3000, tagged with this word (“Religion,” n.d.). “Are you there, God?”, “Faith in the modern world”, and “Misconceptions of Islam and Muslim life” are some of the playlists recommended by TED organizers for those who are interested to know more about religion (“Religion Playlists,” n.d.). Thus, owing to the fast-growing community of TED and the wide spreading nature of its speeches, it is essential to investigate how TED addresses religious issues especially during the concurrent and significant rapid growth of the religiously unaffiliated people all over the world (Funk & Smith, 2012; Hoover, 2012; Knott et al., 2013; Silver, 2013; Smith, 2011; Thiessen & Wilkins-Laflamme, 2017; Vermeer, 2014; Zuckerman, 2014). The religious “nones” form the third-largest religious (or irreligious) group worldwide (Hackett et al., 2017). Some scholars have associated this phenomenon with the 9/11 attacks and other world events in the early 2000s. Since then, they have identified a growing tension between people of faith and media outlets (Golan & Day, 2010; Hoover, 2006; Stout & Buddenbaum, 2003). In particular, Islam has become the focus of academic interest due to the increasing media coverage of Muslims and Islamic issues (Al-Azami, 2016; Baker et al., 2013; Hoover, 2006; Hussain, 2014; Knott et al., 2013; Moore et al., 2008; Poole, 1999, 2006, 2009, 2011, 2016; K. A. Powell, 2011; Said, 2008; Samaie & Malmir, 2017).

The question is; is it Islam only that is negatively portrayed in media coverage? The answer is no (Al-Azami, 2016). In general terms, faith is often perceived as a source of fear, terrorism, backwardness; sometimes as a threat to the modern world. Hence, theorists have started to examine how religion and spirituality have become increasingly sensitive and controversial topics in media (Baker et al., 2013; Bouma, 2006; Croucher et al., 2015; Deller, 2012; Donkin, 2012; Drescher, 2014). However, unlike the topic of the portrayal of Islam and Muslims in media, little empirical research has been conducted on the media representation of religion and atheism or other irreligious ideologies in media (Al-Azami, 2016; Bellar et al., 2013; Deller, 2012; Feltmate, 2010; Hoover, 2006; Knott et al., 2013; Skill et al., 1994; Vermeer, 2014) despite being increasingly visible in all types of media coverage (Knott et al., 2013).

Categories of Religion

To better understand the concept of religion in different contexts, a classification of the various forms of religion, which differentiated between conventional religion, common religion, and the secular sacred,

is provided in Figure 1. The figure is adapted from Knott et al.'s Appendix A (2013, p. 191)

<p>Main Categories and Subcategories of Religion (Summarized)</p> <p>Conventional Religion: World Religions; Christianity; Islam; Judaism; Hinduism; Buddhism; Sikhism; New Religious Movements; Religious Cosmology; God, Jesus Christ, Virgin Mary, Angels, Devil, Satan, Hell, Heaven; Religious Practice; Pilgrimage, Sermon; Worship, Prayer, Exorcism, Fasting, Preaching, Conversion, Rituals, Christmas, Easter, Festival, Faith Healing, Meditation, Religious Concepts; Prophets, Martyrs, Miracles, Reincarnation and the Afterlife, Morality, Holy Spirit, Messiah, Revelation, Guru, Crucifixion, Jihad, Resurrection, Redemption, Sin, Creation, Apocalypse, Doctrines; Religious Texts; Bible, Gospel, Qur'an, Religious Issues; Creationism and Intelligent Design, Homosexuality, Abortion, Interfaith, Multifaith, Euthanasia, Adoption, Sex Education, Catholicism; Protestantism; Church; Clergy; Baptism; Trinity; Orthodox</p> <p>Common Religion: Magic; Witchcraft; Chance; Signs; Ghosts; Spiritualism and Spirit Possession; Psychic Powers; Luck; Superstitions; Gambling; Fortune Telling Techniques; Fate and Destiny; Supernatural Beings; The Unexplained; Folk Religion; Folk Practices; Mythologies; Gypsies</p> <p>Secular Sacred: Secularism; Atheism; Humanism; Religion and Science; Liberalism; Spirituality; Religion-Like</p>

Figure 1. Main Categories and Subcategories of Religion
TED

TED is a global media organization that publishes relatively short videos online for free distribution. TED is devoted to its main mission and slogan, which is disseminating “ideas worth spreading”; ideas that engender positive social change (Our Organization, n.d.). It organizes worldwide conferences that convene the world's inspiring thinkers to share their diverse topics in relatively short talks or public speeches called TED Talks.

Several academic studies have attempted to analyze TED’s emergent genre (Ludewig, 2017). Since they expanded to encompass speakers with unlimited backgrounds and topics from all aspects of life; not only Technology, Entertainment and Design, TED talks do not share a specific theme or context, speaker’s status or generic organization (Rossette-Crake, 2020). Although they are unique in their purpose, format, target audience and speakers (Josephine, 2014), they have the features of various genres such as public speeches, popularizing videos, academic discourse; lectures in universities, self-learning videos as well as conference papers and formal presentations (Compagnone, 2015; Josephine, 2014; Rossette-Crake, 2020). Moreover, TED represents a popular means of mass and new media communication (Denskus & Esser,

2015; Josephine, 2014). Thus, TED talks are considered a “hypergenre” or hybrid genre more than a genre (Rossette-Crake, 2019, p. 256).

In this paper, TED is selected as a case study for multiple reasons, namely the growing popularity of TED (Banker & Gournelos, 2013; di Carlo, 2014), its importance in different educational and communication disciplines (Esser, 2014; Friesen, 2011; Josephine, 2014; Ochoa, 2011; Romanelli et al., 2014), and the criticism that it attracts from many scholars and media professionals, particularly concerning its ideological bias (Banker & Gournelos, 2013; Hustad, 2015; Ochoa, 2011; Robbins, 2012).

Aim of the Paper

This paper reports on a Corpus-Assisted Critical Metaphor Analysis of 67 TED speeches that tackle religion or religious-related issues as main themes. Particularly, it aims to explore the portrayal of God and religion as fictional in new media discourse through the case study of TED public speeches between 2006 and 2018 to determine what they would reveal about TED’s perspective on faith. Thus, it has sought answers to the following questions:

How are God and religion represented as fiction in selected TED discourse?

To what extent do these representations promote certain religious or irreligious ideologies?

Theoretical Background

Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA) and Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT)

Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA) is an approach created by Charteris-Black (2004, 2011, 2018) to investigate the language of metaphor, the context in which it arises, and the evidence provided for the speakers’ intentions and ideologies underlying their linguistic choices. This interdisciplinary model of analysis integrates perspectives from different approaches such as Pragmatics, Cognitive Linguistics, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) or Critical Discourse Studies (CDS), and Corpus Linguistics.

CMA is based on Lakoff and Johnson’s (1980, 2003) notion of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT). Conceptual or Cognitive Metaphor Theory, viewed metaphor as a mode of thought, denied the ornamental use of metaphor, and argued that it is widespread in everyday language (Deignan, 2005; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, 2003) as it “arises naturally in communication” (Allott, 2010, p. 123). In other words, the metaphorical expressions created by speakers or authors are not simply part of their individual poetic style, but they reflect their worldviews. Thus, metaphor is not just a linguistic or figurative expression; it has become an

indispensable tool to conceptualize the world (Chilton, 2004; Guo, 2013) and make allegations about it to view it from the speaker's perspective (Partington, 2007, p. 267).

The core function of conceptual metaphor is to perceive one conceptual domain with recourse to another despite being unrelated to each other (Kövecses, 2010; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, 2003). This means that metaphors facilitate perceiving the more abstract concepts in terms of more obvious or concrete ones. For instance, understanding the concept of LIFE is made easier when it is explained with reference to a JOURNEY as in, I am at a crossroads in my career and he has gone through a lot recently. Expressions such as at a crossroads and gone through, which are extracted from the domain of journey to describe life, are called metaphorical expressions, while the conceptual metaphor that embodies these linguistic metaphors is LIFE IS A JOURNEY, which takes the form A is B (Kövecses, 2010).

Such conceptual metaphor is easier to comprehend, and it enables the mind to think of further related semantic connections between the two domains. For example, when we perceive life as a journey, it becomes easier to conceptualize complicated decisions in life as a 'crossroads' and difficulties as 'obstacles' to overcome (Quinonez, 2018, p.23). It is worth noting that, in the field of Cognitive Linguistics, the statement of conceptual metaphors is conventionally marked by SMALL CAPITALS while metaphorical linguistic expressions are written in italics (Josephine, 2014; Kövecses, 2010).

In conceptual metaphors, a specific domain of experience is employed to understand another domain of experience. In other words, certain aspects of a domain are mapped into another domain (Kövecses, 2018). Technically, this process of understanding one domain in terms of another involves a set of systematic correspondences between the two domains called metaphorical mapping (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003). The conceptual domain that we try to conceive is entitled the target domain (TD) while the one we use for this purpose is the source domain (SD) (Kövecses, 2010).

Target domains tend to be abstract, diffuse, or less clearly delineated; that is why they need metaphorical conceptualization. On the other hand, source domain are typically more concrete, physical, or more clearly delineated concepts than the targets (Kövecses, 2010). The target domains are viewed as frames to construct the image of the source domains. Therefore, conceptual metaphors help recipients comprehend intangible and difficult-to-understand target concepts by comparing them to more tangible and explicitly illustrated source concepts. The most common

types of source domains are concrete such as JOURNEY, BUILDING, ANIMALS, HUMAN BODY ...etc. However, a few source domains are abstract yet more obvious than the target domains such as FICTION and DIRECTIONS.

How deeply entrenched a conceptual metaphor or its metaphorical expressions are in the everyday language of the common people is referred to as the conventionality of metaphors (Kövecses, 2010). On the scale on conventionality, metaphors can be ranged from highly conventional to highly unconventional or novel metaphors. A novel or creative metaphor is the one that has not been frequently used in a language community (Charteris-Black, 2004). In theology, most scholars treat conventional and novel metaphors differently. For some of them, a conventional metaphor is “no longer insightful” because it is a “dead metaphor” and has lost its ability to shock people. For instance, GOD IS A FATHER metaphor is claimed to be a dead or a basic conventional metaphor for the previously mentioned reasons.

On the other hand, a novel metaphor “creatively shapes thought” and is able to shock people, that is why it is deemed insightful (McFague (1982) cited in DesCamp & Sweetser, 2005, p. 211). For instance, in some TED speeches, although speakers frequently used the conventional conceptual metaphor of GOD IS A HUMAN or a PROTECTIVE FATHER, they sometimes employed unconventionalized or creative metaphorical expressions to talk about God as a COLD, INDIFFERENT or RUTHLESS FATHER (Honey, 2005). Similarly, by altering the traditional source domains like JOURNEY and HUMAN BODY and using new ones like FICTION, TED speakers creatively spread their new ideas by employing novel metaphors.

According to Kövecses (2010), metaphorical mapping from source to target domain is only partial; which means that only a part of B, or the source domain, is mapped onto a part of A, or the target domain. Consequently, only certain features of the source concept are utilized for this purpose; which are called metaphorical entailment potentials. In other words, we use our background knowledge of the conceptual elements of the mostly concrete source domain and map them onto the mostly abstract target domains in order to understand them.

However, the basic claim of the CMA approach is that metaphorical expressions, or linguistic metaphors, are based on more general concepts or conceptual metaphors (Charteris-Black, 2004, p. 9; Deignan, 2005, p. 14; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, 2003). This consequently entails that by employing conceptual metaphors and using specific linguistic metaphors, speakers and authors highlight specific aspects of the target domains and hide others, sometimes intentionally (Deignan,

2005; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, pp. 10–14). In other words, they allow us to comprehend and focus on one aspect of a concept in terms of another, which necessarily hides other aspects of the concept that are not coherent with that metaphor or not needed by the speaker in a specific context.

Due to this significant role conceptual metaphors play in revealing hidden intentions, many linguists became concerned with examining the role of metaphors in constructing ideologies in different types of discourse (Charteris-Black, 2004, 2011, 2018; Guo, 2013; Josephine, 2014; Musolff, 2012). Thus, they recommended the integration of CDA and CMT in order to investigate the ideological aspects of metaphor overlooked by CMT. As an attempt to synergize Cognitive Linguistics, CMT and CDA, Critical Metaphor Analysis (henceforth CMA) was proposed.

Since metaphor is an essential tool in persuasive discourse as it convinces people of certain ways of viewing the world and shapes the knowledge and beliefs of entire communities (Bhatia, 2009, p. 280), they are frequently employed in rhetorical and argumentative language such as political speeches (Charteris-Black, 2004) and other public or motivational speeches such as TED talks, likewise. Therefore, according to Deignan (2016), it is important to examine the linguistic metaphors which construct conceptual metaphors to identify the ideological position of the speaker or author. In other words, conceptual metaphors are considered an important starting point in the cognitive study of ideology (Flowerdew & Richardson, 2018, p. 80) as metaphor analysis helps in unmasking racist ideology in discourse (Musolff, 2012), particularly in areas such as politics and religion, “where influencing judgements is a central discourse goal” (Charteris-Black, 2004, p. 8). Thus, employing CMA to examine the way political, religious and general content creators use metaphors, is crucial in uncovering speakers’ ideologies and revealing their intentions, beliefs and hidden agendas, particularly in religion as Charteris-Black (2004, p. 180) stated “nowhere other than in poetry is metaphor more a question of individual interpretation than in the domain of religion.”

Consequently, CMA, in particular, is selected to be the main analytical frameworks employed due to its influential role in persuading the public of certain ways of viewing the world (Charteris-Black, 2004). CMA demonstrates how some of the most eminent public speakers in the modern era exploit metaphor “for the persuasive communication of their ideas” as metaphor is central to the performance of leaders and public speakers (Charteris-Black, 2011, p. 2). Furthermore, as recommended by DesCamp and Sweetser (2005), employing cognitive linguistics research

is fundamental to the theological disputes regarding metaphors for God or religion, in general. Specifically, TED speeches, according to Josephine (2014), were dense with metaphoric lexical units, and metaphors were employed in sentences that were most significant to the speaker's core opinion. Hence, a better understanding of the metaphors used in TED speeches raises the awareness of the relationship between language and human thought, which can eventually assist in controlling the “overwhelming forces of modernity” (Charteris-Black, 2004, p. xii). It also assists in uncovering any hidden ideologies that might be spread by the speakers.

According to Charteris-Black (2004, p. 21), metaphor is defined and identified according to the three criteria demonstrated in Figure 2.

Linguistic criteria:

A metaphor is a term or expression that causes semantic tension, which is the major criterion for metaphor identification in CMA, by:

1. Reification: referring to abstract concepts using expressions that commonly refer to more concrete entities.
2. Personification: referring to inanimate things using expressions that commonly refer to animate beings.
3. Depersonification: referring to animate beings using expressions that commonly refer to inanimate entities.

Pragmatic criteria

Metaphors aim to covertly influencing opinions and judgements by persuasion.

Cognitive criteria

Metaphors are caused by and may cause a shift in the conceptual system caused by a psychological association between the attributes of the source and target domains.

Figure 2. Criteria for defining metaphor within the CMA framework. Adapted from Charteris-Black (2004, p. 21).

To understand why one conceptual metaphor is selected or created and preferred to another, we necessarily need to consider the speaker's intentions within specific contexts as metaphors are not a requirement of the semantic system but are a matter of speaker choice (Charteris-Black, 2004). Correspondingly, one of the CMA's significant aims is to clarify how metaphors are employed to create competing opinions of the world ideologies as the choice of metaphor is motivated by the speaker's ideologies (Charteris-Black, 2004, 2011, 2018) by illustrating how these metaphors create “myths” (Charteris-Black, 2011, p. 47) and subjective “representations” or “frames” (Charteris-Black, 2018, p. 16).

The Theory of Representation in Media

Media representations are the methods in which the media depicts specific groups, communities, attitudes, events, ideas, or themes from a certain ideological viewpoint. Representation refers to the linguistic features used in a text to attribute meaning to social actors, practices, events and objects (Fairclough, 1989, 1995; van Dijk, 2002; Wenden, 2005, p. 90). This assigned meaning is not enclosed in the perceived reality but rather inferred through the linguistic representations (Schäffner & Wenden, 2005; van Dijk, 2002).

Media provides information about global events and cultures to multitudes of individuals. However, rather than offering an entirely objective, truthful and complete description of an event, media presents a constructed image of events through the use of language and visual aids (Baker et al., 2013). Therefore, instead of mirroring reality, media representations assist in constructing a different reality, and as emphasized earlier, media descriptions of real issues and problems are not always “benign” or neutral (Ryan & Switzer, 2009, p. 88).

Since discourse can influence the way people consider events or situations and the way they react towards them, it can become the focus of politics, media, and religion. Therefore, the speakers representing a certain view use the best possible strategies to ensure that the way they frame a certain issue prevails. To realize the ‘new realities’ constructed by media representations, we need to analyze the discursive structures used in the media through the use of CDS approaches. According to Stuart Hall (Hall, 2003), in CDS, we explore social representations, how these representations are discursively built and socially shared, what social implications are of these representations, and how they result in social discrimination. This representation can be achieved through “framing the ideologies” or justifying and “legitimizing” them (Wenden, 2005, p. 112). Based on Wenden’s model of analyzing representations, to investigate how speakers frame the ideology, researchers examine the topic of discourse, the themes conveyed about it, the structure and the type of the information presented, or the people whom the speaker identifies with. On the other hand, if the discourse analysts are looking for how these speakers justify and legitimize their ideologies, they should scrutinize how speakers contextualize/ decontextualize their representation of social actors and actions, who the people responsible for these actions are and if they are hidden or announced, what characteristics are attributed to the participants or events, which metaphors are used to enhance these features, what pieces of information have been excluded or implied in the discourse, or what kind of information is provided in detail (2005, p. 112).

Previous Studies on the representation of Religion in New Media

Although there is a considerable amount of literature on the representation of specific religions and religious related issues in mainstream media, particularly Islam (Al-Azami, 2016; Baker et al., 2008, 2013; Hassan, 2017; Knott et al., 2013; Lees, 2017; Poole, 2009, 2011; Poole & Richardson, 2006; Said, 2008; Samaie & Malmir, 2017; White, 2017), there was a dearth of studies on the portrayal of the general concepts of God and religion as opposed to irreligion, particularly in new media platforms.

One of the few studies that attempted to examine the depiction of the concepts of religion and spirituality as opposed to irreligion in media was conducted by Feltmate (2010). In her doctoral dissertation, she examined the satirical portrayal of religion and different religious related issues in The Simpsons TV program. Employing Peter Burger's qualitative theory of humor, she assessed how this program criticized major American religious traditions. According to Feltmate (2010), The Simpsons presented some religious practices as "acceptable" and others as unacceptable in America. Moreover, concerning the debate between religion and science, jokes in The Simpsons promoted the superiority of scientific rationality at the expense of Intelligent Design and Creationism. Thus, Feltmate concluded that the Simpsons advocated a more liberal or secular ideology, which is based on deinstitutionalized spirituality and scientific rationality. Generally speaking, there was a predominant sense of mistrust in conventional religion.

In the same vein, Powell (2012) has examined the American medical drama House as a case study to investigate the role and the portrayal of religion in contemporary popular culture. From a sociological perspective, the research also aimed at ascertaining how media transmit cultural ideas about religion to media consumers. Employing content analysis and grounded theory approach, Powell concluded that the American television show indirectly propagated an agnostic view on religious matters by disseminating a sense of uncertainty and doubt towards God and religion as well as caricaturing specific beliefs. Religion was mostly depicted as "inferior to science" and Islam was mostly ridiculed and tackled with irreverence (Powell, 2012, p. 18).

Some researchers preferred to conduct their research in a longitudinal manner, in which they replicated the same methodology on different data over a long period of time to compare the results of the two studies. Employing the quantitative content analysis, qualitative discourse analysis as well as the focus group reception study, Knott et al.'s (2013) comprehensive project investigated how the British media portrayed religious, spiritual, secular and atheist issues, people, institutions, beliefs

and ideologies. Although they mainly examined traditional media; newspapers and TV channels, they asserted the growing significance of new social media. Moreover, they demonstrated what these portrayals reveal about changes in society, religion and the media.

Eventually, Knott, et al. (2013) concluded that between 1982 and 2008-9, there was an increase in the number of references to religion, religious diversity, secularism and atheism in British media, as opposed to the view that media coverage of religion was declining. However, religion was rarely celebrated and sometimes treated as a problem. Particularly, there was a predominant coverage of organized religions, especially Islam then Christianity, extensive treatment of common religion, and some attention was given to secularism, atheism, new religious movements and informal spirituality. Although the British media coverage of religion in the last 30 years was dominated by Christianity, in 2008 and afterwards, Islam has started to receive more attention. However, this attention was predominantly negative as the majority of media portrayal of Islam and Muslims was related to extremism and terrorism. Moreover, Islam, as well as other non-Christian religions, did not receive an in-depth treatment of its beliefs or traditions; conversely, the main focus of media when covering Islam was its political importance, the 'Islamification' of Britain and the anxieties around it. Muslims were mainly portrayed as “preachers of hate,” extremists, terrorists and radicals (Knott et al., 2013, p. 56).

As for Christianity, it was concluded that it was marginalized by the secular state and conservative media although Britain was perceived as Christian in the past, but it is secular and plural at present. Thus, Christian leaders are portrayed as flawed moral guides or immoral criminal. As for liberal media, it stated that religion should be a personal matter, but faith-based organisations may have role to play in public life. However, it depicted Christianity as an obstacle to the human rights agenda because it is anti-egalitarian and out-of-date on issues of gender and homosexuality and as morally and intellectually irrelevant and moribund. As for the metaphors used to refer to religion in general, Knott et al. (2013) deduced that the metaphor of blind faith was often employed to negatively conceptualize religion in the British media. Concerning common religion, which referred to those beliefs and practices that were associated with the supernatural, such as superstition, luck, magic, the paranormal, faith healing, fortune-telling and spiritualism, but were non-institutional and not formally endorsed by religious authorities, they were often described negatively using derogatory terms (Knott et al., 2013).

With reference to the coverage of irreligious ideologies such as atheism and secularism, they were on the rise but ‘atheism’ was more common in public discourse than ‘secularism’, and the presence of the new atheist advocate, Richard Dawkins, in media was “overwhelming” (Knott et al., 2013, p. 117). However, media was rarely anti-religious, even when defending science against creationism and religion as it generally promoted the co-existence between science and religion. Even though when media adopted a scientific worldview, it rarely supported or portrayed atheists positively in a direct manner. As for secularism, although it was a positively-loaded term than atheism, media used to criticize it whenever it opposed Christianity. Thus, the British media was supportive of secularism but not atheism, which was often depicted as aggressive and silly.

On the other hand, in new media platforms, there was a dearth of empirical studies on the representation of God and religion. One of the rare research studies conducted was Bellar et al.’s (2013), who investigated internet memes on religion. They proved that memes had a significant role in shaping positive and negative framing of religion in digital media. Employing a case study approach and using visual and narrative analysis, Bellar et al. (2013) examined the religious-oriented internet memes, which were the memes spread on the internet whose content tackled religious themes. Through studying the process of meme construction, use of humor to frame religious discourse, and audience reception, six case studies, each of which included a significant number of memes on specific religious topics, were explored.

In the findings of the first case study, “Advice God Memes,” which inspected how God, religion and antireligious themes were framed, it was figured out that most of these memes were critical of and cynical about religion. They portrayed God as malevolent, brutal or unethical entity “to be questioned or viewed with suspicion,” and religion as ridiculous. Therefore, “Advice God” memes revealed that religious symbolism may be used to undermine rather than promote religious worldviews in meme discourse. Moreover, these memes sometimes propagated specific anti-religious ideologies online (p.14). Overall, the findings revealed that there was a tendency toward negative framing of religion and that the use of humor helped in constructing this negative representation (Bellar et al., 2013).

Consequently, due to the lack of empirical studies on the depiction of God and faith in new media, this paper investigated how the concepts of representation and framing or legitimizing ideologies were incorporated with the conceptual metaphor of RELIGION IS FICTION in TED speeches. More specifically, the study discusses how TED speakers of

different religious ideologies manipulate or frame FICTION metaphors to their own advantage and how such framing is motivated by ideological considerations.

Methodology

Data

TED new media organization and official platform was purposefully selected as a case study and as the primary source for the data collected, which were primarily all TED speeches that tackle God or religion as main themes. They were purposefully selected from the official TED online database by using the “search by topic option.” The time period was set from 2006 till 2018 since 2006 was the beginning of publishing TED Talks online. There were 17 talks on God and 64 talks on religion. However, after removing the duplicates, 67 speeches on both God and religion were collected between 2006 and 2018. Thus, the corpus, TEDReligion corpus, included 67 files, 164,935 lexical units, 12,787 types.

Procedures

Employing the CMA approach originated by Charteris-Black (2004), with the assistance of Corpus Linguistics, three stages of analysis, where metaphors were first identified, interpreted, and then explained, were followed.

However, an initial stage of contextual analysis of the data and the previous literature on the topic was conducted. It included a context-based analysis through reading a vast spectrum of previous literature on the topic of the representation of God and religion and the common metaphors used to conceptualize them. This array of studies encompassed different disciplines such as religion, media, politics as well as CDA, CMA, and corpus analysis to identify the existing discourse on the topic. Hence, the related conventional topoi on God and religion was identified. Guided by this contextual analysis, the researcher was able to modify the research questions and determine the corpus design and building procedures discussed.

Based on the initial contextual analysis of the data, which was performed through watching the 67 TED speeches, reading their English transcripts, and taking notes of the main themes as well as the characteristics attributed to God and religion in each talk, different source domains were detected. For instance, God and religion were conceptualized in the JOURNEY, PERSONIFICATION, BUILDINGS, ANIMALS, OBJECTS, and FICTION source domains

After conducting the initial contextual analysis of related literature, it was concluded that most of the time in the studies that explore the

metaphors in religious discourse in media and religious studies, GOD was depicted positively as an All-Knowing and All-Powerful Supreme Being, a FATHER, a SHEPERED, a FISHERMAN, a SEA CAPTAIN, a GUIDE, a POTTER, a PAINTER, a SAVIOR, a protective ROCK, LIGHT or LAMP, a FORTRESS, LOVE, and an entity UP in the sky...etc, and RELIGION was mostly conceptualized as POLITICS, and SPIRITUAL ACTIVITY as TRAVELLING ALONG A PATH TOWARDS A GOAL (Charteris-Black, 2004; Deignan, 2016; DesCamp & Sweetser, 2005; Goatly, 2007; Kövecses, 2010; Sommer & Weiss, 2001, p. 192). In some challenging studies, linguists started to tackle the concept of GOD from a different feminist perspective as a nurturing MOTHER or parent not necessarily a FATHER (DesCamp & Sweetser, 2005; Johnson, 2017).

Metaphor Identification

Metaphor identification is concerned with recognizing the metaphors in a text and determining if there is a tension between a literal source domain and a metaphoric target domain (Charteris-Black, 2004).

After the manual compilation of data in text files, the English transcripts of the speeches were uploaded on Monoconc Pro 2.2 (Barlow, 2003) concordance analysis software program, which was recommended by the Routledge Handbook of Corpus Linguistics, because it was “powerful, easy to use and more than up to the tasks that researchers demand of” (O’Keeffe & McCarthy, 2010, pp. 5–6). To investigate the depiction of such religious-related issues in context, target domain search key terms such as god*, Allah, Almighty, the Divine, religio*, faith, atheis*, agonis*, secular*, spiritual* ...etc were used. Based on the results of the search by target domain, some main candidate metaphors were identified, such as the FICTION and IMAGINATION metaphors. Therefore, another search using the source domain key terms was conducted. The search by key terms included fiction*, imagin*, fairy, game*, stories, ...etc. It should be noted that using the search terms with an asterisk, as in god* and religio*, was more efficient than using the plain words god and religion without an asterisk. In the former technique, the asterisk was a wildcard to yield all the possible words related to the search term (O’Halloran, 2010). For example, the search term religio* resulted in a list of the concordance lines of words such as religion, religious, religiously, religiousness, and religiosity whereas the term god* yielded context of words such as god, goddess, godly, godless, ...etc. There were 387 concordance lines for god* and 474 concordance lines for the search term religio*.

Identifying and selecting the metaphors was mainly dependent on Charteris-Black’s (2004) major criteria for defining metaphors, which is

the existence of a semantic tension between a literal source domain and a metaphorical target domain, which was clarified earlier in Figure 2. This semantic tension occurs when using a word from a specific context in another domain, in which “it is not expected to occur” (p.21). According to Charteris-Black (2004, p. 35), this tension can be semantic, cognitive or pragmatic. These metaphors may have only one of these criteria, not necessarily the three. Thus, the candidate metaphors that did not satisfy the criteria were excluded. Then a tentative list of hypothetical metaphors and keywords was generated.

To determine if the candidate metaphors identified were conventional or creative; used frequently or not in literature, seminal metaphor works (Charteris-Black, 2004, 2011, 2018; A. Deignan, 2005; A. H. Deignan, 2016; Kövecses, 2010, 2010, 2018; Lakoff & Johnson, 2003) as well as metaphor dictionaries were consulted (Moon, n.d.; Renton, 1992; Sommer & Weiss, 2001). Therefore, after identifying the metaphors for God and religion in the corpus, the FICTION novel metaphor was selected, due to its creativity, to be scrutinized in this paper as a predetermined source domain. However, the other extracted conventional and novel metaphors were analyzed, interpreted and explained in a more comprehensive study (Elzahar, 2021).

Metaphor Interpretation

The second stage of metaphor analysis, namely interpretation, involved identifying the cognitive motivation of metaphors and examining their pragmatic role in discourse (Charteris-Black, 2004). Thus, it necessitated the identification of the conceptual basis of the identified metaphors; conceptual metaphors, and if applicable, their conceptual keys. It examined the choice of metaphors and the role they played in creating social representation or, in the current study, constructing the image or identity of God and religion. To achieve this, the interpretation stage required investigating the relationship between metaphors and the cognitive and pragmatic elements that determine them. At the second phase of metaphor analysis, the linguistic metaphorical expressions were grouped according to their presumed source domains to construct conceptual metaphors. This classification of metaphors helped in recognizing the writer’s purpose in using these specific metaphors by examining them against their contextual background (Kort, 2017).

Metaphor Explanation

The final phase of metaphor analysis was the explanation and discussion of the findings in the interpretation stage. The focus of this explanation stage was the choice of metaphor. That is to say why the speaker selected a specific metaphorical expression and not another one.

Therefore, it involved deducing the rhetorical purpose and ideological motivation behind the selection of these metaphors through considering their social, political and cultural context (Sadaqa, 2018). This was achieved by identifying the social actors or agents, which are involved in the production of metaphors and their significant role in persuasion. Moreover, the evidence for the ideological motivation of the speaker is brought from the same or other contexts in the corpus rather than from the researcher's intuition or background (Charteris-Black, 2004). Then the entailments created by these conceptual metaphors and the possible ideologies they reflect were considered.

In summary, to examine the metaphors employed, the researcher watched the videos of the speeches while reading through the selected transcripts and manually making notes on the themes and any metaphorical language used when referring to "God" or "religion". With the assistance of the corpus software Monoconc Pro 2.2, these metaphors were then grouped into different categories such as GOD IS SANTA CLAUS, GOD IS A UNICORN, GOD IS A TEAPOT, RELIGIONS ARE COWS, TED IS A CHURCH, TED SPEAKERS ARE PROPHETS ...etc. Then they were tabulated and categorized into more generic metaphors like RELIGION IS FICTION, GOD IS A FICTIONAL CHARACTER, and RELIGIONS ARE ANIMALS, TED IS A NEW RELIGION ...etc. Based on the quantitative and qualitative analysis conducted, it is concluded that one of the main conceptual domains that are frequently utilized by TED speakers to metaphorically describe religion is the FICTION or IMAGINATION metaphor. Thus, the metaphorical linguistic expressions related to RELIGION IS FICTION, IMAGINATION or FANTASY were analyzed in detail.

Analysis and Discussion of RELIGION IS FICTION Metaphor

Throughout the analysis, it is figured out that some TED speakers use various metaphorical expressions and conceptual metaphors from the easier to imagine domain of fiction to systematically conceptualize the mystical or transcendental abstract domain of religion. For example, in some speeches, God is depicted as a fictional character and religious beliefs as fiction or childish games.

GOD IS A FICTIONAL CHARACTER

God is portrayed as a fictional or unreal character in various instances in the data. For example, He is depicted as a fairy, a tooth-fairy, a unicorn, Santa Claus, and an imagined deity.

GOD IS A FAIRY

As illustrated in example 1 from Speech 8, Alain de Botton argues that having faith in the Divine Being is analogous to believing in "fairies", the hypothetical creatures with magical powers that only exist in children's

stories. He also claims that this is how most of the TED community in North Oxford perceive God.

Speech 8: One of the most common ways of dividing the world is into those who believe and those who don't -- into the religious and the atheists. And for the last decade or so, it's been quite clear what being an atheist means. There have been some very vocal atheists who've pointed out, not just that religion is wrong, but that it's ridiculous. These people, many of whom have lived in North Oxford, have argued -- they've argued that believing in God is akin to believing in fairies and essentially that the whole thing is a childish game (de Botton, 2011).

Moreover, the portrayal of God as a fairy is further emphasized in example 2 from Speech 5, in which Dawkins chooses to depict God or "Yahweh" as "tooth fairies", which are fabricated characters that are believed to take children's teeth when they fall out and give them money instead. Additionally, he represents agonists and atheists, like himself, as "a-fairyists," which means anti- or against believing in fairies. This metaphor is accentuated again in example 19.

Speech 5: The list of things which we strictly have to be agnostic about doesn't stop at tooth fairies and teapots; it's infinite. If you want to believe one particular one of them -- unicorns or tooth fairies or teapots or Yahweh -- the onus is on you to say why. The onus is not on the rest of us to say why not. We, who are atheists, are also a-fairyists and a-teapotists (Dawkins, 2002).

GOD IS A UNICORN

As indicated in example 2, Dawkins also compares God to a unicorn, which is a fictitious white figure that looks like a horse with a horn on its forehead. This depiction of God as a mythical one-horned creature accentuates Dawkins' claim that God is just an invented character that has no real existence.

GOD IS SANTA CLAUS

Lexically, Santa Claus refers to "the imaginary old man with long white hair and a beard and a red coat who is believed by children to bring them presents at Christmas, or a person who dresses as this character for children" ("Santa Claus," 2008). In many cultures, Santa Claus is sometimes referred to as the child's version of God, as stated in Staver's (2014) Master's Thesis in Religious Studies; In Santa We Trust: Santa Claus as a God, and Consumption as Religion, and Barrett's (2008) article "Why Santa Claus is not a God, " in which the authors emphasize that Santa is frequently used as a metaphor for the Divine. This somehow explains why in classic paintings and other works of art God was portrayed as an old white man with a beard, which is the same portrayal

of Santa Claus in literary works and media. Moreover, in some cases, Santa is considered the symbolic God of materialism and consumption (Belk, 1987).

In speech 1, the concept of Santa Claus is mentioned 14 times by Julia Sweeney. After Sweeney gets surprised that God has not noticed her good or bad deeds before being seven as illustrated in example 5 below, she wants to know if Santa Claus has the same attitude or not. In other words, she wonders if Santa shares the same qualities like God as she and the other children at her age used to believe. Therefore, she draws this implied analogy between God and Santa Claus. In other words, throughout the speech, there is an implicit comparison between God and Santa, in which the speaker highlights the similarities between them in different situations. First, according to Sweeney, both are supposed to keep a record of her right and wrong deeds and reward or punish her accordingly as demonstrated in examples 3, 4 and 5.

Speech 1: So, you've grown up and reached the age of reason, and now God will start keeping notes on you, and begin your permanent record. (Laughter) And I said, "Oh ... Wait a minute. You mean all that time, up till today, all that time I was so good, God didn't notice it?" And my mom said, "Well, I noticed it" (Sweeney, 2006)

Speech 1: I had a whole other month to do anything I wanted to before God started keeping tabs on me (Sweeney, 2006).

Speech 1: And I thought, "How could I not have known this before? How could it not have sunk in when they'd been telling me? All that being good and no real credit for it. And worst of all, how could I not have realized this very important information until the very day that it was basically useless to me?" So I said, "Well, Mom and Dad, what about Santa Claus? I mean, Santa Claus knows if you're naughty or nice, right?" And my dad said, "Yeah, but, honey, I think that's technically just between Thanksgiving and Christmas" (Sweeney, 2006).

Second, both Santa and God are expected to give gifts to their compliant followers as clarified in examples 6 and 7. Santa delivers presents to children when they behave well and God has already granted men the "gift of prophecy" and women the "ability to bear children"

Speech 1: Now, this was actually not that upsetting to me. My parents had this whole elaborate story about Santa Claus: how they had talked to Santa Claus himself and agreed that instead of Santa delivering our presents over the night of Christmas Eve, like he did for every other family who got to open their surprises first thing Christmas morning, our family would give Santa more time (Sweeney, 2006).

Speech 1: Well, it's because God gave women a gift that is so spectacular, it is so wonderful, that the only gift he had left over to give men was the gift of prophecy (Sweeney, 2006).

The third similarity between Santa and God, according to Sweeney as a child, is that both Santa Claus and God's offer to reward children or human being is conditional and biased. For instance, Santa only honors his obedient advocates when they abide by the rules, behave well, and do not "make a fuss," as clarified in example 8 and emphasized again in example 9. Moreover, Santa is unfair and "judgmental" because he rewards well-behaved children only and does not treat "weird" and "strange" families, like Sweeney's, in the same way he treats other families. That is why she feels embarrassed, humiliated, and rejected by Santa as clearly stated in example 9.

Speech 1: Santa would come to our house while we were at nine o'clock high mass on Christmas morning, but only if all of us kids did not make a fuss. Which made me very suspicious. It was pretty obvious that it was really our parents giving us the presents. I mean, my dad had a very distinctive wrapping style, and my mother's handwriting was so close to Santa's (Sweeney, 2006).

Speech 1: Plus, why would Santa save time by having to loop back to our house after he'd gone to everybody else's? There was only one obvious conclusion to reach from this mountain of evidence: our family was too strange and weird for even Santa Claus to come visit, and my poor parents were trying to protect us from the embarrassment, this humiliation of rejection by Santa, who was jolly -- but let's face it, he was also very judgmental. So to find out that there was no Santa Claus at all was actually sort of a relief. I left the kitchen not really in shock about Santa, but rather, I was just dumbfounded about how I could have missed this whole age of reason thing (Sweeney, 2006).

As for God, besides His eternal condition in almost all organized religions that if His loyal believers only behave well, they will "go to heaven," she proves Him discriminatory and judgmental in other incidents. First of all, in example 10, portraying Mormons as exceptional creatures, who are treated differently by God, emphasizes the favoritism of God towards human beings according to their chosen faith. Secondly, as explained in example 11, Sweeney indicates that God exclusively grants the gift of prophecy to men, and that the gift of bearing children, which is solely bestowed to women, is unworthy or not equal to being a prophet. Finally, as clarified in extract 12, featuring the biblical idea that God segregates Lehi and his family from the rest of the Israelites, and later the good "Nephites" from the evil "Lamanites" is another example

of God's preferential treatment and prejudice. These three situations implicitly support Sweeney's argument that God is prejudiced and unfair, exactly like Santa.

Speech 1: They said, "Well, we also believe that if you're a Mormon, and if you're in good standing with the church, when you die, you get to go to heaven and be with your family for all eternity." And I said, "Oh, dear. (Laughter). That wouldn't be such a good incentive for me" (Sweeney, 2006).

Speech 1: " Like, could the prophets be women?" And they said, "No." And I said, "Why?" And they said, "Well, it's because God gave women a gift that is so spectacular, it is so wonderful, that the only gift he had left over to give men was the gift of prophecy." What is this wonderful gift God gave women, I wondered? Maybe their greater ability to cooperate and adapt? ... They said, "Well, it's her ability to bear children." I said, "Oh, come on. I mean, even if women tried to have a baby every single year from the time they were 15 to the time they were 45, assuming they didn't die from exhaustion, it still seems like some women would have some time left over to hear the word of God." And they said, "No" (Sweeney, 2006).

Speech 1: And they told me this story all about this guy named Lehi, who lived in Jerusalem in 600 BC. Now, apparently in Jerusalem in 600 BC, everyone was completely bad and evil... And God came to Lehi and said to him, "Put your family on a boat and I will lead you out of here." And God did lead them. He led them to America. I said, "America? (Laughter) From Jerusalem to America by boat in 600 BC?" And they said, "Yes." (Laughter) ... Then, after Jesus died on the cross for our sins, on his way up to heaven, he stopped by America and visited the Nephites (Laughter). (Sweeney, 2006).

The fourth and last similarity between Santa and God is one of the "obvious" inferences that she makes "from this mountain of evidence" in speech 1, which is that both are not real and do not exist in reality. The conclusion she reaches, in example 13 and earlier in examples 5 and 9 about Santa as well as in examples 1 and 15 about God, is that the existence of both Santa and God is irrational, and thus they are both unreal. As for her responses upon knowing these revelations, she describes them in examples 6, 8, 9 and 14 as "suspicious" at the beginning, then it is "pretty obvious" but actually "not that upsetting"; on the contrary, it is "actually sort of a relief" to find out that Santa Claus does not exist, and that is why she is "not really in shock." This emphasizes the message of the talk that God and the other related religious or spiritual issues, such as Santa Claus, are fake concepts and should be dismissed or "let go."

Speech 1: And my mother said, "Oh, Bob, stop it. Let's just tell her. I mean, she's seven. Julie, there is no Santa Claus" (Sweeney, 2006).

Speech 1: I left the kitchen not really in shock about Santa, but rather, I was just dumbfounded about how I could have missed this whole age of reason thing (Sweeney, 2006).

Speech 1: But the question they asked me when they first arrived really stuck in my head: Did I believe that God loved me with all his heart? Because I wasn't exactly sure how I felt about that question. Now, if they had asked me, "Do you feel that God loves you with all his heart?" Well, that would have been much different, I think I would have instantly answered, "Yes, yes, I feel it all the time. I feel God's love when I'm hurt and confused, and I feel consoled and cared for. I take shelter in God's love when I don't understand why tragedy hits, and I feel God's love when I look with gratitude at all the beauty I see." But since they asked me that question with the word "believe" in it, somehow it was all different, because I wasn't exactly sure if I believed what I so clearly felt (Sweeney, 2006).

The conceptual metaphor explained in this section, which is GOD IS SANTA CLAUS, proves that Julia Sweeney (2006) treats God as Santa Claus and vice versa and reaches one eventual conclusion that both God and Santa are fake concepts and do not exist in reality, and if they exist, they are both judgmental, biased and unfair. In both cases, believing in God or Santa would be an irrational decision. Nonetheless, despite being an unreasoning thinking, if people insist on having a god, they can only "feel" his or her love and consider this an emotional decision as affirmed in example 15.

GOD IS A SUPERHUMAN

Another example of portraying God as a fictional character is in speech 4, in which the speaker cynically depicts God as "a superhuman" as deemed by primitive believers. According to Honey, in example 16, religious zealots then used to recognize this "superhuman" God through His omnipotent actions, such as, assaulting, flooding, and ruining communities. The speaker here mocks these religious beliefs about God by highlighting His "mighty" deeds, which are all brutal acts that hurt and humiliate people. Thus, this example ascertains that the power of God, as a superhuman, is revealed in his vicious or merciless actions.

Speech 4: Early religious thought conceived God as a sort of superhuman person, doing things all over the place. Beating up the Egyptians, drowning them in the Red Sea, wasting cities, getting angry. The people knew their God by His mighty acts (Honey, 2005).

On the other hand, in Speech 33, God is sarcastically described as a “super intelligent moral being” who is traditionally believed to rescue people from above. To the speaker, the Divine is equal to many imaginary beings such as “spirits”, “ghosts”, “demons”, “angels”, “aliens”, and even government officials who promote conspiracy theories. The common thing among these entities, according to the speaker, is that all are of the invention of the mind.

Speech 33: I think, a lot of different things: souls, spirits, ghosts, gods, demons, angels, aliens, intelligent designers, government conspiracists and all manner of invisible agents with power and intention, are believed to haunt our world and control our lives. I think it's the basis of animism and polytheism and monotheism. It's the belief that aliens are somehow more advanced than us, more moral than us, and the narratives always are that they're coming here to save us and rescue us from on high. The intelligent designer's always portrayed as this super intelligent, moral being that comes down to design life. Even the idea that government can rescue us -- that's no longer the wave of the future, but that is, I think, a type of agenticity: projecting somebody up there, big and powerful, will come rescue us (Shermer, 2010).

GOD IS AN IMAGINED DEITY

Furthermore, after consulting the main corpus, it is found out that God is referred to as an “imagined deity” who give pieces of land as presents to his loyal followers, as demonstrated in example 18 from speech 60. In this example, God is portrayed as an ancient mythological Greek deity, like Zeus, Ares or Apollo, who only rewards his advocates. This allusion to the Greek mythology, which has had “extensive influence on the arts and literature of Western civilization” and “contained a considerable element of fiction” (Pollard & Adkins, 2020). Such representation frames God as a prejudiced divine being and mythical deity.

Speech 60: We see the wars, the rages of identity going on all around us. We see violent religious, national and ethnic disputes. And often the conflict is based on old stories of identity and belonging and origins. And these identities are based on myths, typically about ancient, primordial origins. And these could be about Adam and Eve or about the supremacy of a caste or gender or about the vitality of a supposed race or about the past glories of an empire or civilization or about a piece of land that some imagined deity has gifted (Bhatt, 2015).

To recapitulate this section, a diagram of the conceptual metaphor GOD IS A FICTIONAL CHARACTER is provided in Figure 3. Despite the different characteristics attributed to God as being unfair, judgmental, destructive or ruthless, the most common feature among the five metaphors is that God is fake and unreal.

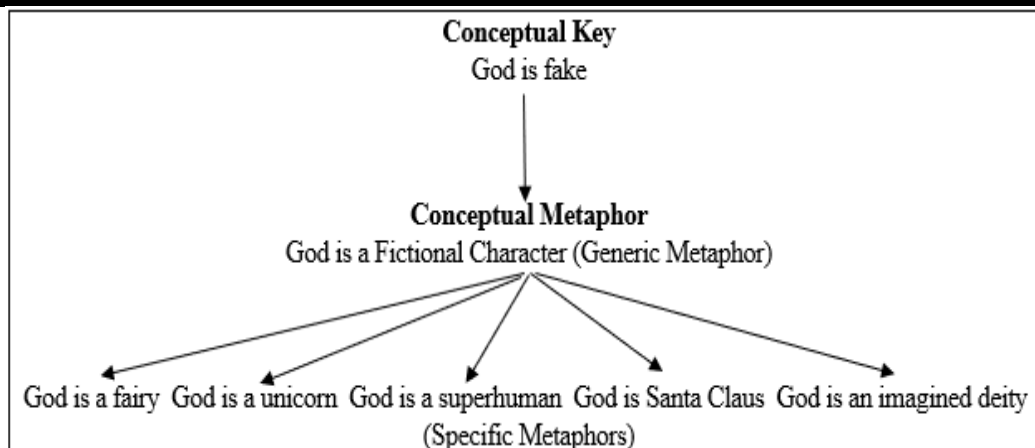


Figure 3. Conceptual Map for Metaphors of God as a Fictional Character

GOD IS AN IMAGINARY OBJECT or TEAPOT

The worthlessness of God and the irrationality of believing in Him are emphasized again in speech 5. Even when represented as an inanimate object in examples 2 and 19, God is depicted as an imaginary teapot orbiting in the sky. By referring to Bertrand Russell's (1952) teapot argument, which is elucidated in the two examples mentioned, seven times in the corpus, Dawkins highlights the irrationality of the existence of God. This well-known argument, which is used by most famous atheists, assumes that there is a hypothetical teapot that revolves around Planet Mars, and no one can disprove its existence just because it is tiny, insignificant, and cannot be detected.

Dawkins, like most atheistic authors and speakers, makes use of Bertrand Russell's teapot argument to support his case for disbelieving in God. In example 19, Russell's argument states that the claim that there is a teapot, which is too tiny to be revealed by telescopes, orbiting the sun somewhere around Mars, cannot be disproved. Although this assertion could not be proven wrong, no one is expected to believe in this teapot. Then he formulated an analogy between the belief in teapot and God, stating that one cannot disprove the existence of both beings since they are invisible and undetectable. However, it would be nonsensical to believe such things. Consequently, Russell concludes that when people want to believe in something that exists, they should provide rational justification and observable evidence for their claim (Russell, 1952). Therefore, it would be irrational to believe in teapots' existence merely because we cannot prove otherwise. In the same manner, it would be ridiculous to believe in a god that no one has seen before.

Speech 5: So, my friend is strictly agnostic about the tooth fairy, but it isn't very likely, is it? Like God. Hence the phrase, "tooth-fairy agnostic." Bertrand Russell made the same point using a hypothetical teapot in orbit

about Mars. You would strictly have to be agnostic about whether there is a teapot in orbit about Mars, but that doesn't mean you treat the likelihood of its existence as on all fours with its non-existence (Dawkins, 2002).

This can be affirmed in example 26 from speech 66 when the speaker uses expressions such as “wishful thinking” and “empty sky” to highlight the non-existence of God.

GOD IS AN IMAGINARY PERSON

Similarly, in another context in the corpus, God is depicted as an illusory figure. For instance, in speech 5, God is just an “agent” that is “postulated” or invented by religious believers to solve the problem of the complexity of the universe. Therefore, God is not real, it is an invented idea or solution.

Speech 5: Complexity is the problem that any theory of biology has to solve, and you can't solve it by postulating an agent that is even more complex, thereby simply compounding the problem (Dawkins, 2002).

These two metaphors of God as imagined inanimate and animate entities, which are employed by multiple TED speakers, reflect the claim that God is either fake and non-existent or real but mindless or worthless.

RELIGION IS FICTION

The previous representations of God as a fictitious being are complemented by the following depiction of religion as a mere act of fiction or invention in the two metaphors RELIGION IS AN IMAGINARY or CHILDISH GAME and RELIGIOUS BELIEFS ARE FICTIONAL STORIES.

RELIGION IS AN IMAGINARY or CHILDISH GAME

As mentioned in example 1 from speech 8, God is depicted as a “fairy” and religion or the “whole thing” of believing in God as “a childish game.” Relating the games played by the children to fairies and fairy tales, the speaker implies that the whole “game” of believing, like the games of storytelling and roleplays, is based on fictional stories created by or for the children. This is further emphasized in example 21 from Speech 7 when Akyol describes Islam, which is one of the organized religions, as part of a political game in Turkey.

Speech 7: Islam and the most pious understanding of Islam have become part of the democratic game (Akyol, 2011).

Moreover, in example 22 from Speech 12, when the speaker is thinking about a collaborative process to improve religion, she announces that they do not have fund, venue, or even a “game plan” to iterate and reclaim religion in a new appealing form to suit the modern world. In other words, in her trial to refine religion before people abandon or “bail on” it, Brous does not have a plan for this “game” in her mind. That is

why she, with her friend, act spontaneously and send an email to their acquaintances to see how they can make use of their religion.

Speech 12: I started to wonder, what if we could harness some of the great minds of our generation and think in a bold and robust and imaginative way again about what the next iteration of religious life would look like? Now, we had no money, no space, no game plan, but we did have email. So my friend Melissa and I sat down and we wrote an email which we sent out to a few friends and colleagues. It basically said this: "Before you bail on religion, why don't we come together this Friday night and see what we might make of our own Jewish inheritance?" (Brous, 2016)

Furthermore, in speech 66, the speaker fiercely urges Africans to finish the "game of blame", quit believing in destiny and in God's control over our lives, stop having "idle expectation" from the Divine, and start being accountable for their own lives.

Speech 66: So as a humanist, I believe we must not despair for humanity. Even in the face of overwhelming difficulties and in the bleakest of circumstances. Human beings are creative beings. We have the power to generate new ideas, new solutions and new cures. So why despair when the unexpected knocks on the horizon? It is in our nature to create a new, to be inventive and innovative, so why languish in idle expectation of a savior from above? So it is time for us Africans to take our destiny in our hands and realize we have agency in the scheme of life. We need to put an end to this game of blame that has prevented us from taking full responsibility for our own lives. For too long, we have been prisoners of our past. We have allowed despair and pessimism to drain us, drain our energies, limit our imaginations and dim our vision for a better and brighter future (Igwe, 2017).

By depicting religion as a childish game, which is sometimes based on imaginary stories, in the previous examples, TED speakers affirm the immaturity of religious believers, who believe in these irrational or fabricated plays.

RELIGIOUS BELIEFS ARE FICTIONAL STORIES

This idea of framing religion as fiction or imagination and religious beliefs as fictional stories is highlighted in several speeches. For instance, as mentioned earlier in example 18 from speech 60, specific religious beliefs or "old stories" such as "Adam and Eve" are described as "myths." Again, this emphasizes that the religious stories mentioned in the sacred texts are like the fabricated ancient tales narrated to children about the gods and goddesses of Greek and Roman myths. Furthermore, in example 24 from speech 5, Dawkins compares the poor "religious

imagination” to the more interesting and rational “scientific worldview.” Thus, he claims that religious people should be afraid of science because it is not based on fiction like religion.

Moreover, in example 25 from speech 42, the agnostic-Jew speaker, Lesley Hazleton, declares that the Muslim belief, which states that Prophet Muhammad has encountered the Almighty in heaven, is just a “wishful fiction.” This consequently implies that Prophet Muhammad is lying about or faking his heavenly journey, known for Muslims in the Quran as “Al-Israa and Al-Miraag”, which are the two parts of his night journey and miracle. Such a claim challenges a fundamental Islamic or religious belief. By stating this clearly in her talk, she destroys the core of Islam, which is the credibility of the Quran and Prophet Mohammed. Claiming that one of the stories narrated by Prophet Muhammad is a lie or fiction, she implicitly attacks the Quran and Islam by portraying prophet Muhammad as a liar and discrediting his discourse. Furthermore, she stresses that this imaginary story should not be believed by any rationalist, including herself and the TED community. Consequently, this example also implies the irrationality of religious believers.

Speech 5: Now, I said that if I were religious, I'd be very afraid of evolution -- I'd go further: I would fear science in general, if properly understood. And this is because the scientific worldview is so much more exciting, more poetic, more filled with sheer wonder than anything in the poverty-stricken arsenals of the religious imagination (Dawkins, 2002).

Speech 42: Still, some boundaries are larger than others. So a human encountering the divine, as Muslims believe Muhammad did, to the rationalist, this is a matter not of fact but of wishful fiction, and like all of us, I like to think of myself as rational (Hazleton, 2013).

For Igwe in examples 23 and 26 from speech 66, religion as a whole is a “wishful thinking” as African believers “imagine” that through dreaming, speculations, and “idle expectations,” faith will rescue them and solve their problems. By ridiculously portraying the religious believers as dependent people, who are waiting for an illusory divine force to solve their problem and achieve their dreams, the speaker challenges the idle believers to be rational and stop believing in fiction and religion. This has been accentuated in example 23, when the speaker generalizes that religious believers are dependent and they “blame” an “idle savior” on their misfortune.

Speech 66: But we cannot accomplish all these goals by wishful thinking with our eyes closed or by armchair speculation or by expecting salvation from empty sky. In contrast, millions of Africans imagine that their religious faith will help their dream come true, and they spend so

much time praying for miracles and for divine intervention in their lives (Igwe, 2017).

This view is further supported in speech 34, in which the speaker ridicules the story and purpose of creation and compares it to “science fiction.” By telling an imaginary story of a walking “puddle”, he sarcastically describes humans as “puddles” and mocks the religious belief of creating the whole universe mainly for humans to live in and worship the Creator.

Speech 34: And it’s rather like a puddle waking up one morning—I know they don’t normally do this, but allow me, I’m a science fiction writer. (Laughter.) A puddle wakes up one morning and thinks, “This is a very interesting world I find myself in. It fits me very neatly. In fact, it fits me so neatly, I mean, really precise, isn’t it? (Laughter.) It must have been made to have me in it!” And the sun rises, and he’s continuing to narrate the story about this hole being made to have him in it. And the sun rises, and gradually the puddle is shrinking and shrinking and shrinking, and by the time the puddle ceases to exist, it’s still thinking, it’s still trapped in this idea, that the hole was there for it. And if we think that the world is here for us, we will continue to destroy it in the way that we’ve been destroying it, because we think we can do no harm (Adams, 2001).

This is confirmed again in example 28 when the former radical jihadist and TED speaker Manwar Ali refers to preachers as “foolish” or silly because they could not see the contradictions and impossibility of the religious “myths and fictions” they preach in their sermons.

Speech 54: I realized that in a world crowded with variation and contradiction, foolish preachers, only foolish preachers like I used to be, see no paradox in the myths and fictions they use to assert authenticity (Ali, 2016).

Furthermore, in speech 57, the speaker, Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks (2017), asserts that the beliefs of the religious and the irreligious, that God, as well as the absence of God, can protect us from ourselves, are both “magical thinking.” In other words, it does not matter if you believe in God or not, but if you think that your religious or irreligious ideology will rescue you, you are wrong. Therefore, these are imaginary beliefs. Nevertheless, this is an invalid argument because it only refutes the religious belief that God saves people from themselves, although it is a generalization that all believers are dependent on this concept as if religion does not require people to be independent, responsible for their actions or to exert effort to grow and save themselves from themselves. On the other hand, as for the “anti-religion” advocates, the speaker also claims that they believe that the absence of God will save them from

themselves, which is illogical and an unsupported argument that needs to be proved.

Speech 57: And then we get the extremes: the far right, the far left, the extreme religious and the extreme anti-religious, the far right dreaming of a golden age that never was, the far left dreaming of a utopia that never will be and the religious and anti-religious equally convinced that all it takes is God or the absence of God to save us from ourselves. That, too, is magical thinking, because the only people who will save us from ourselves is we the people, all of us together. (Sacks, 2017).

Findings and Discussion

Throughout the detailed analysis of the main corpus, it is noticed that the FICTION metaphors are significantly employed by TED speakers. For example, in speeches 1, 4, 5, 8, 33 and 60 God is depicted as an imaginary deity and as one of those fictional beings such as Santa Claus, super humans, fairies, and unicorns. Moreover, in speeches 5 and 60, the Almighty is represented as an illusionary teapot orbiting in the sky, a “wishful thinking” of getting support from “an empty sky,” and a “postulated agent” invented by believers. This depiction of God as a fictitious creature or entity reveals the speakers’ perception of God as fake and unreal. Even as a fictional character, God behaves brutally when He acts as a superhero in speech 4, prejudicially and unfairly when he is portrayed as Santa Claus and an imagined deity in speeches 1 and 60.

Furthermore, the same source domain of fiction and imagination is utilized to produce metaphors for religion and religious beliefs. For instance, religion is portrayed as an imaginary game in speeches 8, 7, 12, and 66 and religious beliefs as fictional stories or myths in speeches 5, 34, 42, 54, 57 and 60. This conceptualization of God and religion in terms of fabricated characters and stories that deceive the minds of human beings, entails that religions are invented by humans and not the sacred words of God. Thus, it highlights the sense of falsehood and mendacity on the part of God, His prophets, His organized religions and their religious figures. Accordingly, the credence in God and religion is an immature assumption and irresponsible decision made by the believers, and that is why it is implied that religious advocates are irrational, dependent and foolish. Such representation of God and religion emphasizes the insignificance of religion and consequently believing in them is unnecessary. A conceptual map for metaphors of religion as fiction is provided in Figure 4.

TD: RELIGION		SD: IMAGINATION/ FICTION
God is fake and unreal	↔	like fairies, unicorns and teapots in the sky.
God is unreal but unfair	↔	like Santa Claus and mythological deities.
God is unreal but ruthless	↔	like superheroes in fiction.
Religion is imaginary	↔	like childish games.
Religious beliefs are	↔	fictional stories, wishful thinking and myths.

Figure 4. Conceptual Map for Metaphors of Religion as Fiction

Consequently, this interpretation of the metaphors of God and religion as fiction and imagination adheres to the convictions of certain irreligious ideologies that ridicule, belittle or fiercely attack God and religion, such as Atheism 2.0, New Atheism, Militant Atheism, and Spiritual But Not Religious, which are frequently promoted in the analyzed corpus in both explicit and implicit manners (Elzahar, 2021).

The metaphor of RELIGION IS FICTION is adopted by most atheists to propagate their various forms of the atheist or irreligious ideology. For instance, Dawkins, who is one of the four leading proponents or “horsemen” of New Atheism (Taira, 2012, p. 97), perceives God as “arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction” due to His jealousy, injustice, unforgiving control-freak; vindictiveness, misogyny, homophobia, racism, infanticide, genocide, malevolence (Dawkins, 2006, p. 31). This is emphasized by Sam Harris, the second horseman, in his “An Atheist Manifesto,” where he described this statement “the biblical God is a fiction” as “the most reasonable and least odious” conclusion about God (Harris, 2006). Criticizing new atheists, Copan explains how they perceive theology, not even as a “useful fiction”, but as a “harmful delusion” (2011, p. 30). Therefore, the metaphor of RELIGION IS FICTION, which is frequently employed by several TED speakers, is originally taken from the New Atheist discourse and ideology.

Conclusion

By conducting a CMA of the 67 TED speeches on religion, it is concluded that one of the main representations of religion is the fiction metaphor, in which religion and religious beliefs are repeatedly portrayed as fake and irrational concepts. One of the significant contributions of this paper to the CMT and CMA academic studies, is the investigation of the novel metaphor of FICTION and IMAGINATION, which makes use of the fiction schema and source domain to clarify more abstract concepts such as God and religion. The current research detects the FICTION novel metaphor, in which speakers allude to fictional or imaginary characters that, despite being less abstract, are well-known in children’s

literature, movies, culture and mythology such as Santa Claus, unicorns, fairytales, Greek deities... etc.

Most of these fiction metaphors, which are used to represent God and religion, are negative and represent overt and covert forms of belittlement of God, religion, and those who believe in them. Such metaphors serve the function of convincing the audience and online viewers that God does not exist nor control the universe and humans. This portrayal of God and religion as fake and irrational concepts is manipulative. Consequently, TED is far from being a nonpartisan new media platform. It provides the opportunity to speakers from different backgrounds and with varied ideologies to speak about their religious and irreligious worldviews. However, concerning faith or believing in God, TED does not fairly provide the two opposite points of view. In other words, it gives the floor to several speakers to spread their irreligious ideologies such as New Atheism, argue for the nonexistence of God and the irrationality of religion, or refute the arguments of the existence or the influential role of God as a Creator and Almighty. On the other hand, despite bringing many religious speakers to talk about the misconceptions about their specific religions (Akyol, 2011; Brous, 2016; Murabit, 2015; Warren, 2006), it rarely allows or tries to bring to TED specialized religious scholars, who would present the other side of the arguments of the existence of God or the rationality of religion by providing reasonable evidence.

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