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A Critical Thematic Analysis of the Guidance Discourse - A Socio-Literary Approach -

NEBEG ZOHRA [1], NEBEG AIMED [2], KERROUM MOHAMED [3]

[1] Laghouat University, Algeria. Email : zahrafadi78@gmail.com
[2] University : ALGER-2- , Algeria. Email : fasfares91@gmail.com
[3] Laghouat University, Algeria. Email : M.Karroume@lagh-univ.dz

Abstract:

In this paper entitled *A Critical Thematic Analysis of the Guidance Discourse – A Socio-Literary Approach*, we addressed the issue by starting from the problem of highlighting the extent of the importance of this type of discourse in society, while emphasizing the role of language in its construction. Our study's questions revolved around the role of language and the themes and topics of the discourse in its construction, highlighting its power and enriching its social value so that it rises to become a model of an effective social awareness text as a tool of social regulation. We relied on the descriptive method and on the use of the content analysis method, through which we analyzed a sample of an awareness-raising guidance discourse directed at a specific group in society, with the use of the thematic approach in the process of analysis in order to identify the linguistic dimension and discover its role in building this type of texts and enriching them. Thus, our study had a socio-literary dimension at the same time. We reached several important results, among which we mention:

The way this topic is addressed and treated through the use of diversity in linguistic styles and the use of appropriate expressions for that, in addition to the manner of presentation and the way of interaction with the recipients, suggests the speaker's interest in this social topic and his linguistic, literary and social competence in dealing with it, and reflects his good preparation for it.

Introduction

The awareness-raising guidance discourse is a sacred act that derives its strength and effectiveness from societal values and divine legislations. It is one of the most important forms of regulation to which societies in general adhere, and it represents one of the most influential models in society because of its symbolic and spiritual sanctity. Its effectiveness and social value are affected by the extent of the interest of those who undertake it through understanding it and realizing its value. Discourse, in its sociological sense, goes beyond the limits of the text with all its linguistic formations and structures to present an intellectual system that expresses a certain aspect of social reality. As a social phenomenon, as one thinker points out in this regard, "any phenomenon is a social fact" (Legros et al., 2006, p. 34).

It is largely subject to temporal and spatial authority, which explains its difference and diversity across societies and within the same society, depending on and influenced by the social and cultural heritage of each society (Belhamari, 2011, p. 57). Since patterns of behavior may differ according to the structural framework of societies through the diversity of their groups and levels, given that every society is subject to a system of regulations

that constrain it and are based on cultural, educational, economic, political, and environmental norms, Michel Foucault defined it as "a complex network of social, political, and cultural relations through which the way speech is produced as discourse involving domination and risks becomes apparent" (Al-Omari, 2008, p. 11).

1. Research Problem

Contemporary societies are witnessing social transformations and changes imposed by several factors and considerations. Since the religious text is the original and main reference because of its strong and direct influence as a tool of social regulation in the view of society and authority, the latter has become more interested in it than ever before. This interest has been manifested in encouraging the organization of intellectual and scientific seminars, holding religious scientific conferences, improving and intensifying the training of preachers and actors in this field, establishing religious scientific councils, and regulating their references, with the aim of producing guidance texts based on the mechanism of renewal, which society has become in urgent need of.

Guidance discourse is considered the most important social sermon; it is a text characterized by a linguistic–intellectual system of a guidance nature issued by a specific social body. For this discourse to be a strong, influential, and effective tool of social regulation, the preacher, as a symbol, a guide, and a social authority, must produce a discourse that carefully selects its themes and topics so that it can be effective in the process of social change. This can only be achieved if the creator/preacher, through his scientific and social culture, is able to choose the topic of his sermon by projecting it onto social reality and addressing it on the one hand, and by being imbued with the literary and linguistic aspect that helps him enrich his topic with appropriate and strongly connotative vocabulary and expressions, and to skillfully select and use linguistic styles that serve the goals of his sermon and attract the audience's attention, in addition to the element of delivery. This led us to pose the following questions:

- Does the sermon/guidance discourse with a strong linguistic structure constitute a model of sacred discourse in the view of society?
- Are the themes and topics of the guidance discourse influential and effective in society, and do they still function as a tool of social regulation and change amid the social transformations and changes of our time?

2. Hypotheses

Based on the questions raised about this topic, we formulated the following hypotheses in an attempt to answer them through our study:

- Guidance discourse, with its themes and topics, constitutes a tool of social regulation.
- The strong linguistic structure of guidance discourse contributes to strengthening its sacredness and its status in the view of society.

3. Definition of Concepts

3.1. Discourse

3.1.1. Discourse Linguistically

The word *discourse* has been used with several meanings that differ from its modern linguistic meaning, although they intersect with it. Among these meanings is "speech"; in Arabic, it means speech, as Ibn Fāris indicated: "*al-khiṭāb*: speech; and discourse is every speech between you and another" (Ibn Fāris, 1986, p. 295).

As for *discourse* (*Discours*) in *Le Petit Larousse*, it refers to an actual, oral, or written phenomenon intended to define a certain ideology or to define a mental state in an important circumstance related to a specific field (Larousse, 1990, p. 329). Discourse is the spoken text used, and the science that studies discourse is pragmatics, that is, the science that studies the relationship between signs (linguistic sounds) and their users. Rudolf Carnap proposed calling pragmatics "the field of research that takes into account the activity of the human being who speaks or hears the linguistic sign, as well as his state and environment" (Hasanin, 2007, p. 65).

3.1.2. Discourse Terminologically

Discourse is defined terminologically as "every utterance or writing that carries a specific point of view of the speaker or writer and is intended to influence the listener or reader, taking into account the totality of the circumstances and practices in which it occurred" (Al-Tayyar, 2005, p. 12). From a sociological perspective, according to Weber, discourse is primarily a social action, as it embodies a certain pattern of relationships among different social units at their various levels and regulations within one social system. Michel Foucault defined it as "a complex network of social, political, and cultural relations through which the way speech is produced as discourse involving domination and risks becomes apparent" (Al-Omari, 2008, p. 11).

3.2. Thematic Analysis

3.2.1. Thematicity Linguistically

Thematicity is derived from *theme* (*thème*). In *Lisān al-ʿArab* by Ibn Manẓūr, under the entry "waḍaʿa" (to place), it is stated: "*waḍaʿa*: placing is the opposite of raising; *waḍaʿahu waḍʿan mawḍūʿan* means that it is what is implied and not spoken" (Ibn Manzur, 1300 AH/1980, p. 396). In language, *waḍʿ* means assigning the word to the meaning; by *waḍʿ* they mean intention, that is, that the speaker intends to convey meaning to the listener (Al-Bustani, 1987, p. 974). Thus, the *theme* is what is not explicitly spoken but for which signs are set according to levels and situations; it includes both the explicit and the implicit. Thematic study therefore focuses on the explicit, which varies and differs, and on its relation to the hidden.

3.2.2. Thematicity Terminologically

In French literary criticism, *objet/thème* are of the same semantic origin, but the first has a Greek origin and the second a Latin origin. Everything that is *thème* as a subject of thought, contemplation, or consideration is *objet*, and vice versa. However, confusion in translation arose because *objet* is opposed to *sujet*, whereas *thème* cannot be opposed in the same way since it includes both meanings. Hence, context is decisive in determining the intended meaning. Jamil Hamdaoui states that this term caused fluctuation in translation and

that its equivalents multiplied, such as *thematicity*, *objectivity*, and *thematics*; and from *theme* we find *thematics*, *themic*, and *themanic* according to Saʿid Alloush, who eventually returned to the Arabized term *thematicity* (Alloush, 1989, p. 7). It also refers to the axis, the root, and the purpose.

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4. Levels of Analysis of Guidance/Directive Discourse

When speaking about the levels of analysis of this type of discourse, we find ourselves speaking about levels similar to those of literary discourse analysis, since guidance discourse is originally a literary model with a religious orientation. *Analysis* linguistically, as stated in *Lisān al-ʿArab*, means: "to untie the knot is to open and undo it" (Ibn Manzur, 1997, p. 143). Analysis thus means deconstruction: breaking something down into partial components that allow us to know its internal (micro and macro) and external structures, and the structure of interaction among them.

Analysis is an inclusive term that, in its practice, calls for many concepts by carrying out a projective process on what is called discourse (*discours*). This process seeks to deconstruct written and spoken discourse into partial, active, and interactive internal and external structures in order to identify the different discursive references (epistemological foundations, background, and theoretical frameworks of discourse) that contributed to its formation, and to identify its contents, aims, standards, space, structures, genre, etc. Analysis thus becomes a highly complex and intertwined process that requires deep encyclopedic knowledge and other resources on the one hand, and mastery of the use of certain concepts to which analysis as an inclusive term leads on the other (Saadia, 2025).

Analysis relies on the following elements:

- **Reading:** Discourse is a space with gaps and an open field; reading it allows the reader to enter its world and experiment within its field. If the text allows more than one reading, each reading has its own logic of penetration into the text, and each reader has his

own strategy behind his reading, attempting, as its legitimate heir, to interpret it and shape it in his consciousness according to his references and visions. Reading is the first step toward understanding, and understanding is "the production of meaning," positioned between the author's meaning and the reader's prior meaning.

- **Explanation:** It is disclosure; to explain something is to open it, clarify it, and reveal it (Ibn Manzur, 1997, vol. 3, p. 416). Here, explanation means moving the text from a degree of obscurity and complexity to a degree of clarity and simplification, and decoding its symbols.

- **Interpretation:** It is clarification and disclosure; the term interpretation means elucidation, explanation, and detailing. In terminology, it is associated with the interpretation of the Qur'an and the explanation of its miraculous nature, as interpretation is an intellectual activity that deciphers the concealed meaning behind the phenomenon. Wherever meaning multiplies, interpretation exists, and interpretation is only achieved after understanding; thus, interpretation here is only a re-production of what is in the text (Saadia, 2025).

- **Hermeneutics (Ta'wīl):** In *Lisān al-ʿArab*, *taʾwīl* and *taʾawwul* mean the interpretation of speech whose meanings differ and cannot be correct except by clarification beyond its literal wording; *taʾwīl* also means the reference and the outcome, and to *taʾawwalahu* is to interpret it. Some consider that interpretation seeks meaning in its clarity, whereas hermeneutics is an effort whose purpose is to provide the reader with more than one meaning within the limits of the data of the text (Saadia, 2025).

The Empirical Aspect
5.1. Method Used

In our study, we relied on the descriptive method, which consists in describing and analyzing the most important themes and topics of the sermon and in determining their effects on the individual and society, considering them as a tool of social regulation. We also used the content analysis method in order to analyze the guidance and directive discourse.

5.2. The Thematic Method and Its Origins

Thematic analysis is a modern critical approach that emerged with the postmodern trend in the 1960s, and it appeared in Arabic criticism about a decade later. It is a reaction against approaches that focused on form and structure at the expense of thematic content, with the spread of hermeneutics, descriptive analysis, structuralism, and linguistics. It aims at identifying the main conscious and unconscious themes of creative texts and determining their recurrent and persistent semantic axes across the variables of the text and through the consciousness or unconsciousness of the creative self as reflected in its works: "Everything that the writer uses to build his inner world and shape his creative self is determined by its repetition and stability across the variables of the text." It then proceeds to deconstruction and analysis through the statistical identification of the dominant features of the subject matter of the text. John Weber links it to childhood and defines it as "the urgent, unique, and present image in the work of a given writer." It is the exploration of the semantic roots that generate the ideas of the text in order to reach the dominant idea in the text.

5.3. Origins of Thematic Criticism and Its Procedures

Thematic criticism emerged as a method within phenomenological philosophy with Husserl in the 1960s in a purely French critical context, and on the ideas of the French philosopher Gaston Bachelard, who is considered its primary source, theorist, and the originator of the term thematic criticism. Various ideologies — phenomenology, existentialism, Marxism, structuralism, romanticism, psychology, and aesthetics — passed alongside thematic criticism when they

attempted to unify the methods of studying literary works from within. Although it was delayed in its emergence and completion, it starts from Bachelard and returns to him regardless of the different starting points of thematic critics. Among its pioneers are:

- **Gaston Bachelard (1884–1962):** He was interested in the creative human imagination, its psychological functions, and the poetic image more than in the author's fictional world. He considered imagination as reflected in the literary work to be the essence and the primordial image of the human being itself, thus making it repetitive and depriving it of uniqueness.
- **Abdelkrim Hassan:** He is credited with the most prominent Arabic efforts in thematic criticism, in application through *Structural Thematic Analysis: A Study of al-Sayyab's Poetry* (1983), and in theory through his book *The Thematic Method: Theory and Application.*

Procedures and Mechanisms of the Thematic Method

It has several procedures, among which we mention:

- **Theme:** The present theme in the text; it is the essence from which the study begins and to which it returns. It is a dynamic internal constant; when we uncover it, we uncover the hidden affinity between that theme and its surroundings.
- **Meaning:** It is the concept carried by the theme; every theme is a garment of meaning, and meaning is known only through its forms of appearance and positioning.
- **Sensibility:** As defined by Richard, it is the way the text seduces the reader's body, that is, linking creativity to instinct and desire; it is based on imagination and related to imaginative sensibility.
- **Imagination:** The creative self derives from sensibility and imagination the elements with which it builds its work; it starts from the world and returns to it

in order to build its work within the field of sensibility.

- **Form of content / structure:** The totality of signifier and signified chosen by the poet to build his work or works through interconnection and branching.
- **Depth / hidden meaning:** All the meanings that are not said in the apparent meanings; it is the real speech that is not spoken in speech, hence the role of criticism is to search for this hidden meaning of the literary work.
- **Project and intentionality:** The most important driving force of the critical process; it is the thread that unifies and gathers the fragmented aspects of the creative experience. It is the consciousness of something through the literary work — its intentionality.

Among the mechanisms are also: the signifier and the signified, homogeneity, form of content, and relation.

6. Research Tools

We used the content analysis technique in analyzing the guidance discourse, and analysis according to the procedures of the thematic method, which allowed us to obtain the data related to this article, especially since this sermon is considered a written documentary sample. We preferred relying on written documents for several reasons, including:

- The ease of obtaining them immediately after their delivery due to our contact with those responsible for these awareness-raising campaigns, such as social reformers and teachers, and the welcoming of most of them to the idea of this academic study, which is considered the first of its kind in the region.
- The ease of studying them since they are readable references available to us during the analysis process.

7. A Thematic Analysis of the Sermon "Cheating in Examinations"

In this work, we attempt to present the subject of the sermon and explore its depths and sensory worlds in advising and warning against the effects of cheating on the individual

506

and society, by relying on modern approaches, namely "discourse analysis and the thematic critical method."

Procedural Analysis Table of the Sermon
Sermon Topic: Cheating in Examinations

Unit No.	Analysis Units	Freq.	%
01	Examination	11	15.94
02	Piety (Taqwa)	12	17.39
03	Success and achievement	06	08.69
04	Reliance and seeking help (on God)	04	05.74
05	Effort and diligence	07	10.14
06	Cheating and envy	11	15.94
07	Competition	02	02.89
08	Gratitude and praise	09	13.04
09	Trustworthiness	04	05.74
10	Facilitation	03	04.34
Total		**69**	**100**

Statistical Reading

From the previous table, we find that the highest percentage recorded is related to the analysis unit *piety (taqwa)*, estimated at 17.39%. It is followed by the analysis units *examination* and *cheating and envy*, each with a percentage of 15.94%. Then comes the analysis unit *gratitude and praise* with 13.04%, followed by *effort and diligence* with 10.14%, then *success and achievement* with 8.69%. Next come both *reliance and seeking help* and *trustworthiness*, each with 5.74%, followed by *facilitation* with 4.34%, and finally the analysis unit *competition* with 2.89%.

General Referential Framework of the Sermon

The date of this sermon traces back to June 7, 2019, within the framework of an awareness campaign for high school students in their final year (Baccalaureate). The topic of the sermon was about cheating in examinations, on the occasion of the approaching end-of-year exams and official final exams (Baccalaureate).

Content Analysis of the Sermon

From the title, it is evident that the sermon was formulated to provide psychological support to students and their guardians for passing the official final exams, particularly the Baccalaureate, considering it a decisive examination that determines the students' orientation and future.

Its content was rich in multiple concepts and terms, as indicated in the previous table under the analysis units. These terms varied between those with a guidance-related significance and others with social significance. The preacher deliberately opened his sermon using the **vocative style** to draw attention to this important topic, addressing the students directly with the phrase: *"O students"*, and using awareness-raising terms strongly, such as *piety (taqwa)*, *cheating and envy*, and *examination*. This was intended to convey that true success in examinations is achieved only through piety and adherence to ethical conduct, avoiding cheating and envy.

Through repeated emphasis, the preacher conveyed that success is linked to hard work,

while failure is associated with cheating and envy. He also recommended gratitude to God, regardless of the exam outcome, repeating this instruction to reinforce the value of contentment in any situation. Furthermore, he repeatedly connected effort and diligence with success and achievement, emphasizing the principle that consistent effort inevitably leads to success and excellence—a social and scientific axiom.

The preacher also highlighted moral values, repeatedly emphasizing *trustworthiness* and *reliance and seeking help from God*, linking them to the examination as a trust that can only be fulfilled through reliance on God. He used several terms with the same meaning to ensure that students internalized their significance and to revive their ethical conscience as a deterrent against such improper behaviors.

As for the term *competition*, although associated with examinations, the preacher mentioned it minimally, giving his discourse a more sacred dimension rather than a social one.

Table of procedural analysis of the directive speech

Themes / Topics	Procedural Analysis
Title	The title of this text is connected through hidden affinities to the phrase *"O students"*, using religious terminology strongly to appeal to the conscience, such as *piety (taqwa)* and *cheating and envy*. The term *examination* corresponds to *competition* and *success*, indicating that true success in examinations is only achieved through God-consciousness, which requires avoiding cheating and envy. - Cheating = Students - Cheating = Envy - Examinations = Existential relationship with piety, knowledge = student = success and achievement = reliance = effort = piety = competition = trustworthiness = gratitude and praise = society
Theme	The theme represents the principle and the center to which we return in the world of tangible realities, revealing hidden and dialectical relationships that govern the elements of the creative work. It extends the private world of the preacher (guiding figure). - Cheating is repeated 11 times, forming a dialectical relationship with students. - The relationship with love and sanctity of knowledge is existential. - Piety (*taqwa*) is repeated 12 times, more than cheating, creating a sensory, dialectical, and existential relationship between cheating and piety. - Other repeated elements: Success 6 times (linked with reliance 4 times, effort and diligence 7 times), trustworthiness 4 times, gratitude and praise 9 times. - Conversely, failure is associated with cheating and envy, repeated 11 times. Example: *"Beware of cheating and forgery, for it is treachery and a bad habit; whoever lives by cheating will have his days taken by God through inner pain or physical illness."*

Spatial Context (Place)	The school is the familiar place, connected to childhood and innocence—a natural purity before life challenges, which may turn into pressure due to Baccalaureate exams. The discourse is addressed to students, guardians, and society. - Examination = Success
Temporal Context (Time)	Examinations are linked to the study period, as are all learning processes: effort, revision, and results. Students confront time, facing the tension between diligence and potential failure. - Creative Self = Preacher - Id = Students = Guardians = Society
Characters	The preacher (creative self) uses the pronoun *"you"* (e.g., *"O students"*, *"beware"*) to address students, especially during exams, positioning them between success and potential failure. The pronoun also addresses guardians for moral guidance, assessment, motivation, and student support. - Sensory correspondence: — Sensibility = (*piety / success / gratitude / praise*) — Sight / movement = (*cheating*)
Poetic Imagery	According to Bachelard (and Proust on sensibility), poetic imagery concerns sensory domains and the organization of forms, sounds, movements, and tastes (Hassan, 1990, p. 52). When linked to the creator's existence (preacher/guide), it becomes central to thematic analysis. - Everything the preacher uses to engage the audience's senses via imagination and imagery reflects *sensibility*, revealing deep meaning. - Repeated sensory themes create tension between fear and encouragement, motivating diligence, competition, trustworthiness, success, facilitation, and achievement, generating joy and gratitude. - Cheating is represented through sight and movement, producing feelings of betrayal and deception. - Sensory correspondence helps the preacher convey meaning to students, guardians, and society, demonstrating piety, effort, and diligence, and manifests poetic imagery in the audience's imagination and deep sensations.

Evaluation:

- The speaker's interest in this topic reflects their concern for various segments of society, despite the relatively small number of students compared to other social groups.
- Their focus on this type of subject demonstrates a strong commitment to combating the plague of cheating, which has spread in the educational environment and reached serious proportions, becoming a normalized practice for many learners. This is addressed through the revival of moral conscience, especially among students.
- The way the topic is handled—using intimidation at times and encouragement at others, along with appropriate phrasing and humor, as well as interaction with the audience—indicates the speaker's deep concern for this social issue and demonstrates their linguistic, literary, and social competence, reflecting careful preparation.

- Addressing this social topic reflects the speaker's awareness and openness to real social phenomena.

Conclusion:

- The advisory and directive speech reflects the tangible reality of the dialectical relationship and existential struggle faced by students: the effort of diligence and piety leading to success versus the ease of cheating and deceit, accompanied by the loss of conscience and higher self (morals, values, and reputation).
- The thematic-method approach was able to explore the depths of the directive speech and analyze its procedures, resulting in substantial and meaningful findings.

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