

LANGUAGE CHARACTERISTICS ILLUSTRATING MASS SUICIDE IN THE DESTRUCTIVE CULT SERMONS

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ABSTRACT

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Destructive cults remain a significant focus in religious research due to their extreme behaviours and tragic outcomes. Among the most notorious were Peoples Temple led by Jim Jones and Heaven's Gate led by Marshall Applewhite. They shocked the world by committing mass suicide. Previous studies have mainly focused on the psychological and behavioural aspects of these groups, particularly in the context of these tragic events. This paper examined the meaningful linguistic features in Jim Jones' sermons and Marshall Applewhite's sermons in the period leading up to the mass suicide. By comparing them to the mainstream sermons and sect sermons using keyword and collocation analysis, distinct patterns emerged. Jim Jones' sermons contain words associated with negative sociopolitical views (such as *socialism*, *communism*, *war*, *violence*, and *killed*), which allowed Peoples Temple to express mass suicide literally. In contrast, Marshall Applewhite's sermons contain implicative words associated with distance and movements (such as *heavenly*, *planet*, *vehicle*, *overcoming*, and *separate*), enabling Heaven's Gate to express mass suicide in a figurative manner. Both sermons apply communication styles where three styles: othering (*we*, *they*), intensification (*very*, *really*), and negation (*can't*) are common in the two datasets, allowing each leader to convey mass suicide. The findings guide us to characterize the behavioural effects of mass suicide and these provide communication signs to identify the dangerous characteristics of suspicious religious groups before their destructive activities happen.

Keywords: Peoples Temple; Heaven's Gate; sermons; mass suicide; communication styles

1. INTRODUCTION

Language plays a crucial role within the realm of religion and the development of each religious community is influenced by how the leader uses language. Normally, religious leaders utilize language to teach their followers to be morally upright, guide them to the presence of God, and make their groups to be more productive. This religious language contains sets of divine teachings on how to live life according to the righteousness of God as a way to eternal life (Antonov, 2008; Anwar, 2004). However, some religious leaders lead their followers in dangerous directions through the power of language. These people are the members of destructive cults that uphold extreme non-traditional or non-religious beliefs, allowing them to perform damaging activities (Bohm & Alison, 2001).

Destructive cults are religious groups whose leaders generally start from mainstream religion and separate themselves building their own religious groups (or sects) with the aim to revitalize some cultures of mainstream religion; however, their main philosophies are still generally associated with those of mainstream religions (see Beaman, 1990, for further details on sects). Later, as they develop their beliefs which are no longer associated with the belief systems of mainstream religious groups and sects, they are more likely to be isolating showing the characteristics of cults (see Beaman, 1990; Richardson, 2018, for further details on cults). In the long run, they perform damaging activities influenced by their beliefs and the use of language (e.g., murder and mass suicide), which show clear characteristics of destructive cults (see Bohm & Alison, 2001, for further details on destructive cults).

Peoples Temple led by Jim Jones and Heaven's Gate led by Marshall Applewhite were two infamous Christian religious groups, and they were called destructive cults after committing mass suicide. Jim Jones and Marshall Applewhite started from mainstream religious groups and moved on to form their own groups as sects. Later, their groups transformed into cults and finally into destructive cults (see Chidester, 2003; Moore, 2018, for further details on the background of Peoples Temple; see Zeller, 2014, for further details on the background of Heaven's Gate). According to the reports on mass suicide events, over nine hundred Peoples Temple members lost their lives on November 18, 1978 in Guyana (Chiu, 2020) and thirty-nine Heaven's Gate members took their lives around March 1997 in San Diego, California (Devine, 2022). Before these events happened, both leaders prepared their followers through their discourses. They utilized the power of language to convey the notions of mass suicide to their followers.

Previous studies on Peoples Temple and Heaven's Gate have mainly focused on social-psychological characteristics, emphasizing the mass suicides the leaders initiated (e.g., Kelley, 2019, for Peoples Temple; Raine, 2005, for Heaven's Gate). The information gathered from this perspective have enriched the literature of religious cults and may allow us to identify the possible dangerous signs of the existing cults. However, their applicability may be limited when applied to other contexts because of the subjective characteristics of the findings. A quantitative approach may be helpful for drawing the findings to reduce the issues of subjectivity and increase the applicability of findings by providing objective data and statistical analysis. Therefore, this paper employed a corpus-assisted discourse analysis (Baker, 2020) by quantifying the keywords and the collocates of the selected keywords in the sermons of Jim Jones and the sermons of Marshall Applewhite to characterize how the events of mass suicide in these destructive cults were conveyed. This method combines corpus linguistics and discourse analysis techniques to uncover the meanings of features based on their patterns and language functions that are not immediately apparent through direct observation. Keywords are important words that carry significant meanings within the target texts and they are used to identify the themes, assisting researchers in analyzing the language elements in the target texts (Rayson, 2020). Collocates are words that often appear together with another specific word and these features may guide us to understand how target words are used in context and their relationships with other words (Evert, 2008). Integrating both approaches provides comprehensive insights into content and communication styles, facilitating deeper interpretations of the language of mass suicide.

To identify the target features in the sermons, we compared each target corpus to the sermons of the leaders of mainstream religious groups and sects as the benchmark corpora using keyword and collocation analysis. Conducting multiple comparisons may allow us to determine the reliable features which characterize the expressions of mass suicide. The findings in this study may enable us to distinguish the behavioural characteristics of mass suicide between Peoples Temple and Heaven's Gate. The linguistic information found in the discourses of the leaders of these groups may also provide indicators to detect the dangerous characteristics of the language of a suspicious religious group. Overall, this paper offers valuable information to further illustrate the characteristics of the language of destructive cults (Palayon et al., 2020).

2. MASS SUICIDE OF PEOPLES TEMPLE AND MASS SUICIDE OF HEAVEN'S GATE

Mass suicide is one of the activities of dangerous religious groups or destructive cults. It happens when all members of a group voluntarily and intentionally choose to end their lives simultaneously for a specific reason (Mancinelli et al., 2002). Destructive cults normally commit mass suicide as an effect of their belief systems and negativity such as social depression (Holology, 2011). In this section, two religious groups that committed mass suicide are presented, namely, Peoples Temple led by Jim Jones and Heaven's Gate led by Marshall Applewhite as the subjects of this study. These groups became widely known, not because of their good works, but because of the damaging acts they performed which labeled them as destructive cults.

Before the event of mass suicide in the jungle of Guyana, Peoples Temple led by Jim Jones started as a beneficial religious group in Indiana in the United States, promoting Christian philosophy with an emphasis on socialist views. Over time, this belief system developed into more politically oriented ideology showing the

clear difference of this group from its earlier form. In 1977, due to accusations of wrongdoing, they moved to Guyana and settled down in the jungle area called Jonestown. While in Jonestown, the group received threats from outsiders. Additionally, the appearance of Congressman Leo Ryan's team in Jonestown and the killing of the congressman and some of his team members while leaving Jonestown triggered the group to perform its dangerous plan. Finally, the members committed mass suicide by cyanide poisoning as a way to avoid or escape from the possible attack after killing some important individuals. Some members willingly drank a flavored drink laced with cyanide and other chemicals. Children were also given this drink and those members, who were unwilling, were coerced to also commit suicide (see Abbott, 2015; Kiger, 2020, for further details on Peoples Temple).

Two decades later, another religious group committed mass suicide in March 1997. Marshall Applewhite, who was the leader of Heaven's Gate and strongly believed in religion and science-fiction stories, led his followers in an exclusive mansion in the community of Rancho Santo Fe, San Diego, California. This group combined religion and science-fiction elements as their belief system. They also believed that the planet Earth would be recycled or rejuvenated. Therefore, the group made farewell videos with the aim of encouraging everyone to join with them for a departure or leaving the world which implied death. To perform their departure, the members were dressed in identical dark clothing and they wore white Nike sneakers. They also had \$5 bills and rolls of quarters stuffed in their pockets. All members committed mass suicide by ingesting a toxic cocktail of barbiturates and alcohol (see Hafford, 2017; Zeller, 2014, for further details on Heaven's Gate).

3. LANGUAGE CHARACTERISTICS CONVEYING MASS SUICIDE AS A RESEARCH FOCUS

From the news reports, the events of mass suicide in Peoples Temple and Heaven's Gate happened in different ways. Peoples Temple employed suicide drills before carrying out the actual mass suicide and violent strategies (such as the use of force and guns) on the day of mass suicide. For Heaven's Gate, the members conducted mass suicide nonviolently which was contrary to Peoples Temple. This group did not initiate suicide practices before conducting mass suicide. The main leader did not use force and guns in convincing or coercing his followers to commit mass suicide. These two cases allow us to examine the meaningful linguistic features in the discourses of the leaders of these groups to describe the language characteristics conveying mass suicide as evidence to distinguish the mass suicide of Peoples Temple from the mass suicide of Heaven's Gate.

To view the language characteristics, we focused first on the concepts of mass suicide as this paper aims to describe the language of mass suicide in the discourse of each leader through aboutness or content keywords. Second, we identified the communication styles through function or style keywords. Communication styles refer to discourse strategies (de Vries et al., 2009) that involve approaches used to convey messages or negotiate meaning. We focused on examining the communication styles in the target sermons given that these provide insights into how Jim Jones and Marshall Applewhite communicated their views on mass suicide through the natural formation of their linguistic patterns. The content features illustrating mass suicide may allow us to view the differences between the mass suicide of Peoples Temple and the mass suicide of Heaven's Gate, and the communication style features may allow us to view how the mass suicide of each group was expressed despite the differences of the time and beliefs promoted.

To identify the target linguistic features, we applied keyword and collocation analysis. Keyword analysis allows us to view the keywords or meaningful lexical items in each discourse characterizing the concepts of mass suicide and communication styles. Collocation analysis allows us to identify the collocates of the selected keywords and these features show how keywords are used in the contexts, which is one way for us to describe the language characteristics conveying mass suicide. The features identified serve as the sets of evidence and they are useful to characterize the behavioural effects of mass suicide in both groups (such as the commotion on the day of committing mass suicide in Peoples Temple and wearing identical dark clothing as part of conducting mass suicide in Heaven's Gate). Examining these linguistic features and viewing the associations of the language concepts in each discourse to the impacts of mass suicide of each group may provide communication signs, which are useful to identify the potentially dangerous characteristics of the language of an existing suspicious religious group.

4. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study aims to examine the keywords and the collocates of the selected keywords in the sermons of Jim Jones (the leader of Peoples Temple) and the sermons of Marshall Applewhite (the leader of Heaven's Gate) in the period leading up to the mass suicide using keyword and collocation analysis. The findings may enable us to illustrate the mass suicide each group conducted and characterize their behavioural effects. To

achieve the goals and purposes of this study, the examination was guided through these research questions: (1) what are the keywords in the sermons of Jim Jones illustrating the mass suicide of Peoples Temple?; (2) what are the keywords in the sermons of Marshall Applewhite illustrating the mass suicide of Heaven's Gate?; (3) what are the collocates of the selected keywords in the sermons of Jim Jones which illustrate how the mass suicide of Peoples Temple was conceptualized and expressed?; (4) what are the collocates of the selected keywords in the sermons of Marshall Applewhite which illustrate how the mass suicide of Heaven's Gate was conceptualized and expressed?; and, (5) how does the mass suicide of Peoples Temple differ from the mass suicide of Heaven's Gate based on the language characteristics in the sermons of the leaders?.

4.1 Corpora for comparisons

To address the research questions, we used the sermons of Jim Jones containing 97,246 words and the sermons of Marshall Applewhite containing 93,135 words, which can be found online. For Peoples Temple, the period was when the group moved to Guyana in 1977 to the mass suicide on November 18, 1978 (Abbott, 2015). For Heaven's Gate, the period was from 1995, when significant activities intensified, to the mass suicide in late March 1997 (Hafford, 2017). We prepared these texts by cleaning (e.g., removing the elements which are not directly spoken) and converting them into text files (see Palayon, 2022, for further details on the data preparation). To perform multiple comparisons as one way to find the target features, we need to compare the sermons of the leaders of destructive cults to datasets from a similar genre to the target corpora. Thus, we chose two sets of sermons from the stage of mainstream religion and two sets of sermons from the stage of sect, all of which can be found online, given that these two stages of religious development display common characteristics (Palayon et al., 2021). The sermons of Billy Graham (containing 91,074 words) and the sermons of Rick Warren (containing 98,470 words) both from mainstream religion and the sermons of Joel Osteen (containing 91,960 words) and the sermons of Apollo Quiboloy (containing 99,818 words) both from sect were selected as the benchmark corpora. Each comparative dataset contains belief characteristics associated with religious concepts and the source of each dataset displays a favorable profile, which are different from the reported information of destructive cults (see Palayon, 2022, for the characteristics of each dataset). For Apollo Quiboloy's sermons, some negative reports toward the leader can be found on social media. However, the findings of Palayon and Perrodin (2023) on these sermons do not show concepts associated with destructive cults, which made these texts qualified to be used as a comparative corpus. Comparing each target corpus to the benchmark corpora in multiple ways may allow the reliable keywords to be identified which serve as strong indicators to characterize the concepts of mass suicide.

4.2 Keywords and collocates

Datasets are composed of words and contain meaningful words which serve as the main linguistic elements that characterize the language concepts in the data. These words are content words showing the aboutness of the data and style words showing the communication styles of the data (see Palayon et al., 2020, 2021, 2022a, for further concepts on aboutness and communication style). It is worthwhile to analyze the words within the target data in order to identify the keywords that represent the concepts of the data. Keywords are the essential linguistic items which display markedly higher relative frequencies in a target corpus than in a benchmark corpus (Baker, 2004; Pojanapunya, 2017; Scott, 1997). These items are identified quantitatively and can be used as reliable evidence for language characterization. Therefore, we focused on examining the keywords in the discourses of the leaders of destructive cults based on the research purpose.

To see the conceptualization and expression of mass suicide in each discourse, we identified the collocates of the selected keywords which represent the concepts of mass suicide and communication styles used to convey the mass suicide. Cruse (1986, as cited in Sadeghi, 2010) defines collocation as a sequence of lexical items with a co-occurrence characteristic showing a semantic cohesion where each element is mutually selective. From this definition, in this study, we viewed collocates as significant words that go together with the keywords determined by a specific distance from the keywords which show their contextual meanings and functions (e.g., Chuaikun & Wijitsopon, 2023). These items are specified through a statistical measure which describes the characteristics of togetherness between collocates and keywords. Since the keywords in each target dataset are used to characterize the behavioural consequences of the mass suicide of Peoples Temple and the mass suicide of Heaven's Gate, it is important to examine the collocates of each keyword which allow us to see how mass suicide was conceptualized and expressed in each destructive cult.

4.3 Conducting a keyword analysis

In this study, we applied a keyword analysis to identify the important lexical items in the sermons illustrating how the events of mass suicide were conveyed in the two destructive cults. Previous keyword studies have employed statistical measures to specify the importance of each item in the lists and the use of the statistical measure is always determined by the purpose of the study (e.g., Lien, 2022). The two statistical measures commonly used for keyword identification are log-likelihood or LL (a probability statistic that

evaluates the likelihood of features occurring and highlights words used more frequently in the specific genre) and odds ratio or OR (an effect size statistic that measures the strength of a relationship or difference between features and highlights specialized words used for critical purposes) where each measure shows different characteristics of keywords (Pojanapunya & Watson Todd, 2018). These two measures could potentially serve as the statistics for this study given that they may be able to highlight the keywords which are useful to address the research questions. Therefore, we employed both statistics in the preliminary data comparisons of this study to see which statistic highlights the most useful keywords. Though both produced meaningful keywords, we found that log-likelihood displayed more meaningful keywords and the initial results allowed us to apply this statistic for keyword identification in this study.

After identifying the method and statistical measure, we compared the target corpora to the four benchmark corpora using AntConc (Anthony, 2005, 2014) to view the potential keywords. Having multiple data comparisons may allow us to see the reliable keywords which can be considered as strong keywords (Pojanapunya & Watson Todd, 2021). We also applied a dispersion method to see the dispersed words in the texts to find the target items. There are keywords in the lists that appear as most significant based on their probability values; however, these items may not be good representatives for language characterization based on their dispersion (Egbert & Biber, 2019). To perform this method, we followed the steps of Pojanapunya (2017) and each target corpus produced four keyword lists with dispersed words.

Having the lists of dispersed words is not a sufficient procedure for keyword analysis. We need to apply a threshold method or cutoff point in each list to determine the final keyword lists which have sufficient words to address the research questions. Applying a cutoff point also allows us to establish a focus in choosing the target items for a straightforward language analysis. There are three possible threshold methods that can be used in this study, namely, (1) a cutoff LL value or its associated probability value (e.g., Esimaje, 2012), (2) Top N (e.g., Palayon et al., 2020; Pojanapunya & Watson Todd, 2018), and (3) a proportion of the range of LL values identified by a z-score or percentage (e.g., Palayon et al., 2022b; Pojanapunya & Watson Todd, 2021).

The first method is highly influenced by the sizes of the corpora being compared and so it is inappropriate to be the cutoff point in this study. The second and third thresholds are the appropriate methods where Top N requires the decision of the analyst to determine the N value and a proportion of the range of LL values offers a systematic procedure to determine the cutoff. Given that this study aims to identify the special keywords which characterize mass suicide, we found that Top N is the most appropriate method as it allows us to find more meaningful patterns to characterize the expressions of mass suicide. Though the third method is systematic and objective, it may provide limited items which are not enough to address the research questions. To apply Top N as the method for identifying a threshold level for keywords, we started by viewing the top keywords (e.g., Top 10) to identify the main concepts in the target texts. We extended viewing each list (e.g., Top 50) to find keywords that reveal new concepts and verify the previous concepts until we reached the saturation point, where no more keywords illustrated new concepts. As a result, there are 150 keywords in each list, which are sufficient for characterization (links to view the complete lists are provided below Tables 1, 2, 3, and 4). Since the lists are extensive, we selected the keywords that best characterize the concepts. Keywords that appear two to four times in the lists were selected. An occurrence of two indicates confirmation, while an occurrence of three indicates consistency, highlighting strong keywords that describe the language characteristics illustrating mass suicide in the discourses of the leaders of destructive cults.

4.4 Conducting a collocation analysis

Collocation analysis is a supporting method applied in this study. This method aims to identify the collocates of each selected keyword which allow us to see how the keywords identified are used in the contexts of destructive cults. The application of this method depends upon the criteria of the analysis and purpose of the study. In the paper of Salama (2011), collocational patterns were identified to critically analyze the target texts, and the analysis contributes ideologically for the reconceptualization of one discourse topic across clashing texts and displays the opposing discursive voices or textual tones in the similar topics. Having the same approach of analysis in the paper of Chuaikun and Wijitsopon (2023), collocations were employed in the discourse analysis to see how LGBT is represented discursively in a major English-language newspaper in Thailand. These studies enable us to see the importance of collocation analysis in this paper as the target findings may shed light on the dangerous characteristics of the language of suspicious religious groups, especially the forms of damaging activities and the ways of conveying these activities. This analysis also lessens the level of subjectivity in terms of interpreting the keywords and selecting the extracts of the keywords.

To conduct this analysis, we established certain criteria. We selected the keywords which represent the concepts of the target corpora for practicality. Through the AntConc tool, we viewed the collocates of each keyword specified by a statistical measure. There are two statistical measures that we can use to view the strength of each collocate, namely, Mutual Information (MI) which is an effect size statistic and T-score which is a probability statistic. From the sizes of the target corpora, MI is more appropriate than T-score. In addition,

its principles and wide-ranging applicability make this statistic more suitable in this analysis. Based on the statistical principle, collocates with MI scores more than 3 display strong collocations to the main words which mean that these may be very interesting features to be used for interpretation. Thus, we generally chose the collocates in the lists with MI scores more than 3. We applied the default window span (5 to the left and 5 to the right) which provide adequate length of each collocate. We also used frequency to sort the collocates. It allows us to select the most meaningful collocates with significant characteristics based on their MI scores for interpreting the semantic and style functions of each keyword. The collocates relevant to the analysis were selected based on their semantic and communication style functions. After selecting the collocates, the concordance lines were provided, allowing us to see more clearly how the keywords were used in the texts.

5. RESULTS

The multiple comparisons of the sermons of the leaders of destructive cults display reliable keywords which serve as strong evidence to characterize the concepts of mass suicide and communication styles used to convey these concepts. Sections 5.1 and 5.2 present the key concepts through the selected keywords in each dataset which characterize the concept of mass suicide of each destructive cult. Section 5.3 presents the collocates of the selected keywords which illustrate how the mass suicide of each group was conceptualized and conveyed.

5.1 Key concepts in Jim Jones' sermons characterizing mass suicide

Table 1 presents the selected keywords which represent the content elements in Jim Jones' discourse describing the concept of mass suicide of Peoples Temple. In the comparisons, keywords associated with political concepts such as *socialism*, *imperialist*, and *communism* are highly frequent indicating that the Peoples Temple members were guided by political beliefs rather than conventional religious beliefs (see also Palayon et al., 2020, 2022b, for further details). In addition, keywords associated with different government affairs such as *government*, *soviet*, *president*, *nuclear*, *war*, and *revolution* are highlighted, which allow the members to view the world as chaotic and inhumane. The keywords *violence* and *kill* associated with threats and the keyword *killed* associated with death events are frequently expressed indicating that the group was feeling anxious.

From previous studies (e.g., Abbott, 2015), Peoples Temple moved to Guyana to escape from social accusations. The group received threats (*violence*, *kill*, *conspiracy*, *CIA*) and these made the members especially the main leader to be very anxious. As Jim Jones frequently emphasized these thoughts, this allowed the word *suicide* to be expressed in the discourse and the group chose mass suicide in the end. The mass suicide of Peoples Temple happened after Congressman Leo Ryan and some of his team members were killed by some Peoples Temple leaders, which signifies that this act serves as a way to escape from the possible attack from wider society. For further details, the collocates of these keywords are presented in Table 5, which show how the mass suicide of Peoples Temple was conceptualized.

Table 1: Selected content keywords in Jim Jones' sermons

Keywords	Frequency	Log-likelihood scores			
		Comparison 1	Comparison 2	Comparison 3	Comparison 4
socialism	53	72.4	76.5	70.6	71.2
imperialist	18	24.6	26.0	24.0	24.2
communism	20	-	28.9	26.6	26.9
government	49	48.2	47.7	46.6	51.8
soviet	120	128.9	173.3	159.7	161.2
president	50	26.2	63.7	37.1	40.8
political	29	16.0	34.4	38.6	27.0
nuclear	23	17.0	21.9	30.6	30.9
war	37	-	19.9	49.3	-
news	74	41.4	50.8	43.9	47.1
revolution	22	-	20.7	29.3	-
violence	23	-	33.2	30.6	-
kill	30	28.8	24.0	21.1	-
killed	40	30.3	40.0	21.5	-
conspiracy	20	27.3	28.9	26.6	26.9
cia	39	53.3	56.3	-	52.4
suicide	32	19.0	38.6	42.6	30.6

(Note: See this link <https://tinyurl.com/KeywordsJimJones> to view the final lists of keywords)

Table 2 presents the selected style keywords illustrating the four communication styles in Jim Jones' discourse which allow mass suicide to be expressed (see also Palayon et al., 2020, 2022b, for further details). The first communication style is othering and this can be seen in the keywords such as *they* and *we*. The use of *they* enables Peoples Temple to view the people from wider society as outsiders and the use of *we* enables the members to view themselves as insiders, and their view created a division which separated them from wider society. The second communication style is negating and this can be seen in the keywords such as *t* (don't, can't) and *no*, which convey negativity and exert control within the group. Extensive use of negations or restrictive statements in discourse frames the act of controlling that manipulates the views and actions of the members. This observation aligns with Hwang's (2003) study on the functions of negation in hortatory discourse. The third style is intensifying that can be seen in the keywords such as *very* and *much*, which characterize the magnification of the information in the discourse; and, the fourth style is swearing that can be seen in the keywords such as *shit*, *damn*, and *hell*, which describe the negative views and feelings of the main leader. For further details, the collocates of these keywords are presented in Table 6, which show how these styles are used in the discourse to convey mass suicide.

Table 2: Selected style keywords in Jim Jones' sermons

Keywords	Frequency	Log-likelihood scores			
		Comparison 1	Comparison 2	Comparison 3	Comparison 4
shit	140	191.2	202.2	186.4	188.1
damn	38	51.9	54.9	50.6	43.2
hell	94	21.3	113.0	115.5	57.9
they	1061	112.8	275.4	42.7	-
we	924	-	64.9	44.5	57.4
t	1166	178.3	38.9	-	338.5
no	363	41.3	71.2	40.5	-
very	176	30.5	73.8	34.5	-
much	184	47.3	57.3	32.0	124.4

(Note: See this link <https://tinyurl.com/KeywordsJimJones> to view the final lists of keywords)

5.2 Key concepts in Marshall Applewhite's sermons characterizing mass suicide

Table 3 displays the selected content keywords which characterize the concept of mass suicide of Heaven's Gate. This group upheld some religious beliefs such as *Heavenly Kingdom*; however, these beliefs were viewed from a science-fiction perspective (see also Palayon et al., 2020 for further details), which means that the philosophy of this group was purely non-traditional. Marshall Applewhite and his followers held a strong belief in the existence of UFOs (Zeller, 2014) and this concept can be seen in the keywords *space* and *above*. They believed that the *Heavenly Kingdom* which was their ultimate goal existed in outer space. Given that the philosophy of Heaven's Gate was founded on these science-fiction stories, these allowed the discourse to frequently use keywords associated with distance (such as *level*, *next*, *above*, *planet*, *space*, and *end*) and movements (such as *vehicle*, *gonna*, *going*, *overcoming*, *overcome*, *move*, *process*, and *separate*). These content elements guided the members to commit mass suicide which they believed was a way to get in the *Heavenly Kingdom*. For further information, the collocates of these keywords are presented in Table 7, which show how the mass suicide of Heaven's Gate was conceptualized.

Table 3: Selected content keywords in Marshall Applewhite's sermons

Keywords	Frequency	Log-likelihood scores			
		Comparison 1	Comparison 2	Comparison 3	Comparison 4
heavenly	100	136.4	58.4	99.6	110.3
kingdom	784	783.0	924.7	1032.3	456.0
level	183	216.6	194.1	95.5	188.9
next	128	83.0	-	33.3	99.2
above	85	88.9	95.3	94.8	56.5
space	31	26.2	32.3	-	43.0
planet	52	28.1	44.4	62.9	-
end	99	34.5	31.6	27.4	43.7
vehicle	138	188.2	199.1	189.6	173.1
gonna	52	28.1	-	-	53.0
going	224	-	29.4	-	46.8

Table 3: Selected content keywords in Marshall Applewhite’s sermons (continued)

Keywords	Frequency	Log-likelihood scores			
		Comparison 1	Comparison 2	Comparison 3	Comparison 4
process	40	46.6	30.1	-	34.2
overcoming	119	162.3	154.0	163.5	141.0
overcome	87	96.6	125.5	66.1	73.3
move	47	41.7	45.1	-	36.0
separate	40	41.3	57.7	41.7	-
leave	80	-	54.9	-	56.3

(Note: See this link <https://tinyurl.com/KeywordsMarshallApplewhite> to view the final lists of keywords)

Table 4 shows the selected style keywords in the discourse of Marshall Applewhite which characterize the four communication styles used to convey the concept of mass suicide (see also Palayon et al., 2020, for further details). The first communication style is othering and this can be seen in the keywords such as *they* and *we*. Othering happened in Heaven’s Gate when the members viewed their group as a different religious group based on the beliefs they promoted (*we*) and wider society as a world of destruction (*they*). The second communication style is negating and this can be seen in the keywords such as *t*; and, the third style is intensifying and this can be seen in the keywords such as *certainly* and *really*, which indicate that Marshall Applewhite’s discourse tends to be controlling based on the extensive use of negations and intensifiers similar to Jim Jones’ discourse. And, the fourth style is conditioning and this can be seen in the keyword *if*. The use of conditioning style in Marshall Applewhite’s discourse appears to be persuasive in convincing the followers to adopt the beliefs promoted by the leader. This style offers hypothetical statements which allow the group to be committed to achieve its goal. For further information, the collocates of these keywords are presented in Table 8, which show how the mass suicide of Heaven’s Gate was conveyed.

Table 4: Selected style keywords in Marshall Applewhite’s sermons

Keywords	Frequency	Log-likelihood scores			
		Comparison 1	Comparison 2	Comparison 3	Comparison 4
they	1059	111.2	273.0	54.8	-
we	1627	235.9	489.2	455.1	495.6
t	963	80.7	-	-	236.5
certainly	135	117.9	131.4	185.4	187.1
really	148	41.0	-	103.1	64.3
if	761	178.6	73.6	-	-

(Note: See this link <https://tinyurl.com/KeywordsMarshallApplewhite> to view the final lists of keywords)

5.3 The conceptualizations and expressions of mass suicide

Mass suicide happened in Peoples Temple and Heaven’s Gate as an effect of their belief systems. Peoples Temple in the late stage focused on political beliefs and Heaven’s Gate promoted science-fiction stories. The two destructive cults which existed in different periods and promoted different sets of beliefs committed the same activity (which was mass suicide) but in different expressions. Each belief system allowed each discourse to use specific words to express each concept of mass suicide where the concept of mass suicide of Peoples Temple differs from the concept of mass suicide of Heaven’s Gate. For that reason, we analyzed the language of each group from the keyword and collocation perspectives for us to see how the significant words in the discourse of each leader allow each group to conceptualize and express mass suicide.

5.3.1 Peoples Temple

Table 5 displays the collocates of the selected content keywords which enable us to view how mass suicide was expressed in Jim Jones’ discourse. The patterns of grammatical collocates (such as article *the* and prepositions) are noticeable associated with semantic collocates (such as *socialism* and *soviet*). Based on the grammatical categories of Biber et al. (1998), these grammatical features are used for informational production, indicating the political and social issues in the discourse. The collocates also reveal that political philosophies such as *socialism*, *communism*, and *imperialist* are distinguished which led the group to understand the political principles (associated with *socialism* and *communism*) the members promoted. The extreme promotion of the political principles led Peoples Temple to focus on *political* (*president*), *government* (*soviet*), and social issues (such as *nuclear*, *war*, and *news*). These concepts can be considered as the roots of expression of mass suicide.

From Jim Jones’ final statement, Peoples Temple committed a revolutionary act of suicide. The keyword *revolution* in the list co-occurs with *a*, *the*, and *you*. This means that *a* and *the* convey the notion of revolutionary act and this allows us to see that Peoples Temple (*you*) had a view to revolt and this was developed from the political and social information the main leader conveyed. In addition, the Peoples Temple members focused on different government systems and criticized their political philosophies. These led them to form beliefs especially associated with the events of *nuclear war* and killing (*killed*), which heightened the group’s anxiety and stress levels, resulting in a markedly negative view of the world. Another issue that made the group more terrified and depressed was the threats from wider society and this can be seen in the collocates of the keywords *violence*, *conspiracy*, *CIA*, and *kill*. From the mixed negative thoughts and emotions of the group, this allowed the members to choose mass suicide as a sign of revolution and it happened after the killing of the important individuals (the team of Congressman Leo Ryan) who visited Jonestown.

The concept of mass suicide of Peoples Temple was expressed through the use of othering style, intensifying style, negating style, and swearing style. As presented in Table 6, the collocates of the selected style keywords identify the Peoples Temple members as insiders and people from wider society as outsiders (e.g., *they* that co-occurs with *you*, *their*, *them*, *us*). This indicates that the use of othering in discourse is very high which illustrates the separation of Peoples Temple from wider society, and this style displays a major part in expressing mass suicide. As a separated group, othering style allows Jim Jones to gain complete authority to control his followers. The presence of collocates such as *don’t*, *not*, and *no* in association with *we* indicates that Jim Jones exerted significant control over his followers’ thoughts and actions during the mass suicide process. As a separated group with a highly controlling leader, this allows the information to be intensified to persuade the followers (e.g., *very* that co-occurs with *the*, *you*, *i*, *we*, and *they*). Jim Jones had complete power to express his extreme negative views through swearing (e.g., *damn* that co-occurs with *you*, *they*, and *thing*) such as viewing his members and outsiders as *damn*, *shit*, and *hell*.

The political beliefs and negative social views of Peoples Temple led the group to think of mass suicide as a revolutionary act. The use of othering, intensification, negation, and swearing as communication styles makes the language in the discourse of Jim Jones more powerful, which enables the group to understand the purpose of committing mass suicide. The othering style allows the group to focus on their belief system. The negating style reveals the negativity of the group towards the world and allows the leaders to be controlling which provide them a direction to choose mass suicide as the only way to escape from the threats. The intensifying style makes Jim Jones’ discourse very persuasive by magnifying the pieces of information presented and this enables his followers to believe towards the purpose of committing mass suicide. And the swearing style describes the negative and depressing thoughts of Jim Jones especially to the wider society, which influence his followers to view the world very negatively like a hell. Below are the excerpts showing the use of some keywords and collocates in Jim Jones’ discourse.

... as **they** say, because **we**’ve been told by **the Guyanese Government** how to do it. **We**’ve had **more** info to this than just our own input, and believe me **no** other form better go out here by hand of hand. **You** could be a **CIA**. **The Foreign Minister of Guyana** said **we** had a **CIA** here, and so did **the** cabinet.

You can’t and **they** say I’ll do my part if he does his part. That’s **not socialism**. **Socialism is you—you** sacrifice yourself and to **hell** with what the rest of people do. See, **I** sit here and **I** look at this thing and **I don’t** know what the **hell**’s going to happen to my future. **I don’t** know what the **hell** will happen to me in Russia. **I wouldn’t** even **don’t** even give a **goddamn**. **I don’t** even think about it. **Don’t** make any difference to me.

Maybe the next time **you**’ll get to go to Russia. The next time round. This is what **I**’m talking about—now is the dispensation of judgment. This is **a revolutionary a revolutionary suicide** council. **I’m not** talking about self—self-destruction. **I**’m talking about that **we** have **no** other road. **I** will take your call. **We** will put it to the Russians. And **I** can tell **you** the answer now because **I** am a prophet. Call the Russians and tell **them**, and see if **they**’ll take **us**.

Table 5: Collocates of the selected content keywords in Jim Jones’ sermons

Keywords	Collocates	Frequency	MI Score	Concordance lines
socialism	the	31	3.93	Soviet Union is the only nation of socialism
	of	20	4.27	has the necessities of socialism that lead to loyalty
	not	7	4.61	That’s not socialism. Socialism is you—you sacrifice
	is	7	4.45	Socialism is based on trust, unity.

Table 5: Collocates of the selected content keywords in Jim Jones’ sermons (continued)

Keywords	Collocates	Frequency	MI Score	Concordance lines
imperialist	the	19	4.79	one of the principle executioners of imperialist policy
	of	10	4.83	the United States of America, imperialist center of the world.
	usa	4	8.17	USA planned an imperialist air base in the Sinai
communism	and	10	4.37	capitalism and to help anti-communism
	of	7	4.17	Communism is the end of ego.
	socialism	3	8.10	noble ideals of socialism and communism
government	the	50	4.74	The leaders in government are strongly socialist
	that	10	3.34	Government reports are that they are mopping up
	and	10	3.08	imperialist government and multinational corporations
soviet	the	165	5.17	the Soviet Union was as bright as USA.
	union	84	9.61	the Soviet Union was able to get such a bomb
	people	10	4.13	and called for the destruction of Soviet people.
president	the	53	4.79	The President of Somalia has urged the Soviet Union
	has	9	6.51	Every president has heaped us with lies.
	carter	9	9.57	President Carter called the Jordanian leader today
political	the	18	4.02	Political opponents of the fascist regime
	to	15	4.25	to fight social, economic and political injustice
	and	10	3.83	by political parties, and since KANU is the only part...
nuclear	war	15	10.74	there will be a nuclear war
	will	4	5.81	And nuclear war will damage too many in Canada and USA
	bombs	4	10.72	and hundreds of nuclear bombs
war	the	23	4.02	so this could be the verge of war
	nuclear	15	10.74	He said, there will be a nuclear war.
	will	4	5.13	they will start nuclear war.
news	the	68	4.59	the Egyptians news media; The Iranian news media
	you	18	3.50	I’m getting you ready for your next news
	that	14	3.24	News reports say that the situation in Beirut
	i	14	3.26	US News & World Report. And I hope that picked up...
revolution	the	22	4.71	but we’re in a revolution, the only American group.
	a	11	5.05	Tung said there’s only one way a revolution can come.
	you	5	3.40	only one way you can bring about a revolution for people.
violence	of	12	4.74	A threat of violence is in my mind comparable to violence.
	or	7	6.61	no threats of violence, or I will make it a redounding
	threat	6	11.31	I will not accept threat of violence
kill	to	24	4.88	last few hours of people trying to kill themselves
	they	11	5.07	They have to kill us, they want us out of...
	you	7	3.44	you better you better fuck to kill
killed	the	23	3.91	the thousands of people reported killed
	you	9	3.39	That shows how you can get killed in the cities
	people	8	5.39	the more people gonna be killed in the long run
conspiracy	the	12	3.97	to know on this tape tonight what the conspiracy is against us.
	i	7	4.14	that’s a conspiracy. I’m talkin’ ‘bout one
	against	4	8.18	he thinks there’s a profound conspiracy against us
cia	the	44	4.88	and all the things the CIA has attempted to do
	in	11	4.47	The CIA and imperialism in general
	they	4	3.23	The CIA is around anywhere. They’d like that done.
suicide	commit	12	11.35	The other one tries to commit suicide very directly
	i	8	3.66	Don’t mess with suicide. I don’t tell you fun and games.
	you	7	3.35	don’t fuck with suicide. Cause you don’t get out
	because	7	6.34	years ago before suicide was hardly practiced because...
	revolutionary	5	10.57	we committed an act of revolutionary suicide
	we	4	3.72	We didn’t commit suicide, we committed an act of revolutionary suicide

Table 6: Collocates of the selected style keywords in Jim Jones’ sermons

Keywords	Collocates	Frequency	MI Score	Concordance lines
shit	you	38	3.66	When you’re a socialist, shit, your wife goes fuckin
	i	33	3.57	What in the movie Oh shit. I’m worse than someone
	they	22	3.85	we got the congressman to write and they’re all chicken shit.

Table 6: Collocates of the selected style keywords in Jim Jones' sermons (continued)

Keywords	Collocates	Frequency	MI Score	Concordance lines
damn	you	15	4.20	you bleed me every day with your damn notes, or you complain about
	they	6	3.86	that's damn truth. They have to kill us, they
	thing	5	6.93	Cause every damn thing there that he told is the truth.
hell	you	27	3.74	There's a lot of things cause you know what the hell you're doing.
	i	22	3.56	I just didn't know what in the hell I would do.
	they	16	3.96	What the hell do you think they'd thought of me
they	they	212	4.19	They want to rob, they want to drain
	you	110	2.27	They do everything, they can to hurt you.
	their	61	4.43	With the goddamned lies they spew out of their mouths.
	people	60	3.57	Without that, people are all animals. They do everything they can
	them	58	4.29	they are in pursuit right now to kill them because they stole their...
	us	55	4.17	I smelled a rat then, that they were trying to kill us.
we	we	156	4.15	We have several enemies. And we had enemies
	t	125	3.50	we didn't have any place
	not	51	3.35	We are not a people flush with money.
	don(t)	51	3.31	We don't lie on these fuckers
	no	33	3.26	And there's no way, no way we can survive.
t	i	477	4.37	I don't want to give them the satisfaction
	you	416	4.06	I can't help you. If you feel like running away or...
	it	248	3.86	I can't relate to it at all.
	they	172	3.76	they can't bring you back.
no	no	256	7.56	but there'll certainly be no doubt about it, no question that you'll
	you	77	3.31	No exceptions. You are to write at the table.
	we	33	3.26	I'm talking about that we have no other road.
very	the	56	3.06	those areas are very immoral and cruel in the Venezuelan border
	you	54	3.84	And it will be very essential that you know all the news
	i	44	3.66	I love you very, very much.
	we	25	3.90	If we were to go to the Soviet Union, that would be very possible
	they	25	3.70	They carry it to the very lethal end.
much	you	84	4.41	Thank you, and I love you very, very much.
	and	56	3.65	too many bombs and too many nationalists and too much fear
	love	52	8.75	I know you're suffering. I care so much. I really love you.
	thank	41	8.23	Thank you very much. Much, much love to you.
	the	30	2.09	The Soviet Union were much more generous

5.3.2 Heaven's Gate

Table 7 shows the collocates of the selected content keywords which allow us to see how mass suicide was formed in Marshall Applewhite's discourse. The high level of cross-collocation in the content keywords implies a clearly focused and coherent set of beliefs. The displayed keywords associated with mass suicide consist of implicative words describing distance and movements. The concepts showing distance refer to the philosophy of Heaven's Gate. The keywords *level*, *next*, *space*, and *above* are frequently used to refer to *the Kingdom Level* (in Heaven), *the Kingdom Level above human*, *Next Level body in a non-earthly environment*, or *the Evolutionary Level above human* (the Kingdom of God), the final destination of Heaven's Gate based on their belief system, which the group believed existed in the world *above human* or in outer *space*. The keywords *planet* and *end* show that the members viewed the *planet Earth* as a place to be refurbished (such as "*it is to be recycled*") or a horrible place (such as "*that Hell is planet Earth*"), and they believed that it was or they lived *at the end of the age*. Therefore, they had to take an action to escape from this event and get to their final destination.

The intense beliefs of the group towards the Kingdom Level and view towards the planet Earth allowed the discourse to frequently use keywords associated with movements. The movement verbs (*going*, *gonna*, *overcome*, *move*, *leave*) collocate with *we* and *you* imply actions telling the members that these are what exactly they need to do based on their guiding beliefs that can be found in the movement nouns (*vehicle* that collocates with *we* and *your*; *process* that collocates with *we* and *you*). The keywords *overcoming* and *overcome* are emphasized which stimulate the members to think about how to overcome the world, how to overcome themselves, how to overcome death, and how to overcome every aspect of life. From the collocates presented (*process of overcoming*, *overcoming of the Human Kingdom*, *overcoming death* or *that* when the vehicle dies, and *and overcoming every element*), these indicate that the frequent use of *overcoming* and *overcome* allows the members to think of a way to get to their final destination, and they found a life-destructive activity (in the form of mass suicide by ingesting a toxic cocktail of barbiturates and alcohol) as a way to achieve their goal. These meaningful words convey a motivating thought generally associated with "succeed in dealing with something" and this allows the members to view mass suicide in a beneficial way to serve their goal.

The members used the keyword *vehicle* that refers to their bodies and associates with movement. The collocates *that*, *this*, and *when* reveal the time (such as *this time*) and destination (*that belongs to the Kingdom of Heaven*) of the movement of the *vehicle* going to their final destination. This word associates with the keywords *move* and *leave* which express other concepts of movement. From the collocates (such as *to move into the Kingdom of Heaven, move out of that body, you can then move up, you leave behind everything, we're going to leave quickly*), the members had already this decision to *leave* the earth and *move* to the Kingdom of Heaven which signify their conviction to *overcome* the world in the form of mass suicide. The keywords *going*, *gonna*, and *process* characterize the act of preparation of the members to commit mass suicide based on the collocates presented (such as *we're going to move, I'm gonna know what home is like, and you're in the process of overcoming*); and the keyword *separate* with collocates such as *from* (to *separate* their mind—their spirit—from a human body), *I* (*I am starting to separate*), and *we* (*we separate from it*) characterizes the act of mass suicide. These meaningful lexical features allow us to view how Heaven's Gate conceptualized the act of mass suicide and describe the behavioural characteristics of committing this act.

Table 8 highlights the collocates of the selected style keywords describing the four communication styles in Marshall Applewhite's discourse used to convey the idea of mass suicide. These communication styles are othering style, negating style, intensifying style, and conditioning style. Othering was developed in the discourse through the frequent use of *they* and *we*. From the collocates, this style separates Heaven's Gate from wider society and allows the members to focus on upholding the concept of *the Kingdom Level above human* or *the Evolutionary Level above human* as the main element of their beliefs. This style allows the leader to freely implement his personal beliefs, magnify these beliefs through the frequent use of intensifiers (such as *certainly* and *really*) which made his followers believed, display his negative views and implement restrictions through the frequent use of negations (such as *t*) which control the thoughts and actions of his followers, and condition the minds of his followers through the frequent use of hypothetical statements (*if*) which convince his followers to commit mass suicide.

The non-traditional beliefs which are conveyed through the use of othering, intensification, negation, and conditioning make the language in the discourse of Marshall Applewhite more powerful. The concepts of beliefs expressed through implicative words can be seen as a communication strategy to gradually convey the act of mass suicide. The othering style allows Marshall Applewhite to firmly connect his followers' understanding and loyalty to his teachings. The negating style reveals the negative perspective of Marshall Applewhite towards the human world and shows his authority by imposing restrictions which provide direction for his followers to commit mass suicide. The intensifying style elevates the members' perspectives by heightening their psychological level, thereby fostering belief. And the conditioning style guides the members to make a strong decision to participate in the destructive activity from the hypothetical statements presented. These language characteristics allow the mass suicide of Heaven's Gate to be expressed and these can be used as indicators to view the language characteristics of other religious groups or cults in terms of whether they display dangerous characteristics. Below are the excerpts showing the use of some keywords and collocates in Marshall Applewhite's discourse.

He told his followers, 'Go tell the good news **that the Kingdom of Heaven** is here.' Meaning, this is your chance, I'm here. **I** can take **you** out of here. **I** can lead **you** into **that Kingdom Level above human**.' But He also said, '**That can't** happen unless **you leave the human world that you** are in and come and follow me.

The only way out of here is for **you** to know **that** as an individual this **human world** is **not** for **you**—**that** tie **that** binds **you to the human kingdom** is **not** for **you**. **If you** know it is **not** for **you**, then come to me—and my Father will feed me information **that** can nourish **you** - and help **you overcome** this **world**—and **we'll leave** this **world**, and **we'll** go to my Father's **Kingdom**.

Don't forget, **they** had learned what 'spirit' was. **They** had learned **to separate their** mind—their spirit —**from a human** body, and knew **that their** identity was **not** lost **if they** lost a body. **They** learned **to move** out of **that** body without losing **their** consciousness...

Table 7: Collocates of the selected content keywords in Marshall Applewhite's sermons

Keywords	Collocates	Frequency	MI Score	Concordance lines
heavenly	father	87	7.38	that our Heavenly Father would put a soul into this world
	our	46	6.10	we have to acknowledge to our Heavenly Father's kingdom
	kingdom	36	5.42	get a little further a little closer to my Heavenly Father's kingdom
	my	27	6.09	nothing to fear if I am a child of my Heavenly Father

Table 7: Collocates of the selected content keywords in Marshall Applewhite's sermons (continued)

Keywords	Collocates	Frequency	MI Score	Concordance lines
kingdom	father	270	6.04	information from the Kingdom Level of my Father
	human	217	6.08	there's only one Kingdom Level above the human kingdom
	heaven	208	6.82	that voice that says, "I'm from the Kingdom of Heaven..."
	level	88	5.84	That Kingdom Level created everything
level	the	181	4.71	leave the Human Kingdom and go to the Kingdom Level...
	kingdom	88	5.84	there's only one Kingdom Level above the Human Kingdom
	human	86	6.85	Any mind of the Level above human is pure Spirit - is Holy Spirit
	above	74	8.79	I'll work for the Kingdom Level above human
	next	71	8.14	A Next Level body in a non-earthly environment
	evolutionary	19	8.92	the Kingdom of God, the Evolutionary Level above human
next	the	111	4.52	The Next Level wouldn't have humans
	level	71	8.14	And the Next Level - the only real extraterrestrials
	and	39	3.35	and according to the Next Level's judgment
	you	25	3.26	when you lost a vehicle the Next Level took your soul
above	the	87	4.76	the Kingdom above human is spiritual
	human	80	7.85	to move into the Level above human, following me out of here
	level	74	8.79	back to the Kingdom Level above human more quickly
	kingdom	56	6.29	I can lead you into that Kingdom Level above human
space	aliens	19	11.41	because one way you could speak of them is as "space aliens,"
	fallen	7	11.19	Those fallen angels - those humanoid space aliens
	angels	6	11.14	fallen angels and space aliens are synonymous
planet	to	25	3.67	"Last Chance to Evacuate Planet Earth before It is Recycled"
	this	25	5.85	certainly humans on this planet are still trying to get out of here
	earth	21	9.22	you can imagine that part of that Hell is planet Earth.
end	the	159	5.41	Now, the end of the age, the end of the civilization
	age	59	8.93	just going to be recycled as waste at the end of the age
	we	22	3.67	because we're at the end of the age
	here	13	5.67	Here we are at the end of the age
	now	11	5.12	in the next few months between now and the end of this age
vehicle	that	80	3.84	a physical vehicle that belongs to the Kingdom of Heaven
	this	24	4.39	I would be leaving my vehicle at this time
	we	20	3.05	we use the term vehicle because it helps us separate from the body
	soul	17	6.68	therefore if that soul that leaves that vehicle while examining that
	when	16	5.21	when the vehicle dies that death is not reached.
	your	14	5.02	when you lost a vehicle the next level took your soul
gonna	i	35	5.00	I'm gonna let you in on another secret
	m	21	6.75	and now I'm gonna know what home is like
	you	18	4.08	I'm gonna say I can give you more satisfaction
	re	17	5.97	we're gonna tell the media what we know
	we	15	4.05	we're gonna let our story out
going	to	222	4.72	and we're going to leave quickly
	that	76	3.07	that it's going to come in the next
	i	67	3.82	if I'm going to get out of the Human Kingdom
	we	60	3.94	we're going to move into vehicles where thoughts...
	you	59	3.69	you're going to -- to leave everything
process	in	25	5.29	you're in the process of overcoming
	overcoming	12	7.88	go through that overcoming process now the Kingdom of Heaven
	you	10	3.62	once you start in the overcoming process
	we	7	3.32	that's the process of growth but here we are at the end
because	7	5.22	you can be a saved because you're in the process of overcoming	
overcoming	of	62	4.40	you're in the process of overcoming
	the	60	3.74	do more overcoming of the Human Kingdom
	that	54	3.49	try to symbolize overcoming death or that when the vehicle dies
	and	35	3.30	and overcoming every element that has been given...
overcome	to	57	4.12	because the flesh is what has to be overcome
	the	45	3.77	we have overcome the world we've lost nothing
	you	34	4.26	information that can help you overcome this world
	world	34	7.49	Jesus had overcome the world
	i	30	4.03	I can help you overcome this world
	we	13	3.10	and help you overcome this world - and we'll leave this world

Table 7: Collocates of the selected content keywords in Marshall Applewhite’s sermons (continued)

Keywords	Collocates	Frequency	MI Score	Concordance lines
move	to	33	4.22	ready at this time to move into the Kingdom of Heaven
	that	23	3.60	They learned to move out of that body
	into	22	7.28	they can move into the Kingdom Level above human
	kingdom	13	5.04	So really as we move into that Kingdom we have to more and more
	you	10	3.38	where you can then move up not needing to return
Separate	from	27	7.36	to separate their mind - their spirit - from a human body
	to	15	3.32	those of you who would choose to separate at this time
	i	15	4.15	I am starting to separate
	we	9	3.69	we abort it and we separate from it
	you	8	3.29	you have to separate from the world
leave	to	49	4.02	the only time we have an opportunity to leave the human kingdom
	you	26	3.99	you leave behind everything of human ways
	we	26	4.22	we’re going to leave quickly; we can leave the body that we’re in

Table 8: Collocates of the selected style keywords in Marshall Applewhite’s sermons

Keywords	Collocates	Frequency	MI Score	Concordance lines
they	that	412	3.27	but they think that Heaven is where God is
	they	340	4.82	they are Christians and think they are Christians
	have	169	4.07	They have their beginning, they have their end.
	their	108	4.87	They had learned to separate their mind
	them	90	4.59	Some of them decided that they didn’t want to listen to
we	have	292	4.24	we have an opportunity to leave the Human Kingdom
	re	264	4.96	we’re at the end of an age.
	don(t)	175	4.51	Don’t forget we are at a very unusual time
	our	138	3.66	we are new comers into our Father’s Kingdom
t	i	355	4.10	I don’t want to listen to somebody who could lead...
	we	303	4.14	now we can’t go anywhere
	you	243	3.60	You can’t have both. His Kingdom is never going...
	they	156	3.80	And they don’t know what Heaven is, but they think...
certainly	that	55	3.33	knowing that some humans should certainly reach a condition
	the	50	3.29	the Kingdom of Heaven is certainly elsewhere more
	i	22	2.95	I am separate I am certainly not a vessel
	we	20	3.08	we certainly can’t go wrong
	because	15	4.57	because this vehicle certainly indulged in human
really	that	71	3.57	we thought that was really the best fuel that we could get
	the	58	3.37	they are really planted in the spirit of that flesh.
	you	41	3.76	Because if you really believed me, you would look at what we
	we	33	3.67	So really as we move into that Kingdom we have to
	i	31	3.31	so I have to really look very carefully and examine
	they	22	3.71	they are really planted in the spirit of that flesh
if	you	391	4.65	you can get to the Kingdom of Heaven if you follow me
	the	230	3.00	the good news of the Kingdom of Heaven if you do what I say
	i	230	3.84	if I tried, I could invade some of that history
	we	124	3.22	We can only be hurt if we displease our Heavenly Father

5.3.3 You and we as the most meaningful collocates to express mass suicide

The collocates *you* and *we* are common in the sermons of Jim Jones and in the sermons of Marshall Applewhite particularly in the communication styles. The collocate *you* refers to the followers of the leaders and the collocate *we* refers to the members of the group. The functions and patterns of these words make them the most meaningful in the sermons, especially in the events of mass suicide.

The pronouns *you* and *we* can be used in many ways such as inclusion and engagement (e.g., Yeo & Ting, 2014). In this context, these pronouns show a process of group representation illustrating the characteristics of Peoples Temple and the characteristics of Heaven’s Gate based on their guiding beliefs. This discourse characteristic led the groups to conduct mass suicide as they viewed it as a way to achieve their goals (*revolutionary suicide* for Peoples Temple and *entering to the Heavenly Kingdom* for Heaven’s Gate). The frequent use of *you* forms a direct address and personal connection with the audience. It can make the key concepts in discourse relevant to each individual, increasing psychological impact. The frequent use of *we* can build trust and togetherness between the speaker and the audience. The leaders present themselves as part of the groups, connecting themselves to their followers, which builds trust and cohesion as their followers feel and see them as influential individuals who share their views and experiences (see Table 9).

The use of *you* and *we* shows that the leaders inculcate their beliefs to their followers, separate their followers from wider society, control their followers, and convince their followers to embrace the beliefs. Jim Jones' views focus on political and social issues, while Marshall Applewhite's views focus on the Heavenly Kingdom from a science-fiction perspective. These guiding beliefs of the leaders shared to their followers allow them to view the outside world negatively. In addition, Jim Jones controlled the thoughts and actions of his followers so they would choose mass suicide against the threats and as a way to escape from the possible attacks after killing the outsiders (Congressman Leo Ryan and some of his team members), while Marshall Applewhite controlled the thoughts and actions of his followers so they would choose mass suicide to enter in the Heavenly Kingdom and escape from the rejuvenation of the Earth as the group believed. While the groups were on the way to their final destructive activities, the use of intensification, swearing (for Peoples Temple), and conditioning (for Heaven's Gate), significantly present in the discourse, gives impact to heighten the views of the members toward committing mass suicide. See Table 9 for how *you* and *we* are used in the sermons of the leaders of destructive cults.

Table 9: The use of *you* and *we* in the sermons

Language aspects	Peoples Temple led by Jim Jones		Heaven's Gate led by Marshall Applewhite	
	You	We	You	We
Beliefs	I'm getting you ready for your next news	We didn't commit suicide, we committed an act of revolutionary suicide	when you lost a vehicle the Next Level took your soul	because we're at the end of the age
Othering	They do everything, they can to hurt you.	We have several enemies. And we had enemies	They're so unrestrained that if you just say something that makes them unhappy, they start throwing rocks at you	we are new comers into our Father's Kingdom
Controlling	everybody hits somebody with something, you just stiffen up against it, you won't listen to a word to it. You're not only not a communist, you're not on a communist course.	I mean, you've got to do that, or we can't stake any kind of reaction. No kind of reaction but calm and cool.	I'm sorry you can't bring anything with, you can't bring your wife with you can't bring kids... you have to come alone	then all of a sudden Ti and I had to start saying now we can't go anywhere we can't have our little meetings we can't have our sessions
Intensifying	And it will be very essential that you know all the news	If we were to go to the Soviet Union, that would be very possible	Because if you really believed me, you would look at what we have to say	we certainly can't go wrong
Swearing	you bleed me every day with your damn notes	So I thought I smelled a rat then, that they were trying to kill us. So we go through all kinds of shit	---	---
Conditioning	---	---	you can get to the Kingdom of Heaven if you follow me	We can only be hurt if we displease our Heavenly Father

6. DISCUSSION

This section presents the inferences of the key concepts derived from keyword findings associated with mass suicide. Section 6.1 differentiates the mass suicide of Peoples Temple from the mass suicide of Heaven's Gate based on the lexical items used in the discourse of each leader. Section 6.2 explains the implications of the language characteristics in the discourses of the leaders of destructive cults.

6.1 Mass suicide characteristics between Peoples Temple and Heaven's Gate

The reports from previous studies (e.g., Bohm & Alison, 2001) show that the characteristics of mass suicide of Peoples Temple were different from the characteristics of mass suicide of Heaven's Gate. While on the day of committing mass suicide, Peoples Temple displayed the expression of contradiction from one member named Christine Miller (Lisagor, 2013), yelling and crying (e.g., True Crime Central, 2022), and applied coercion to persuade the members, whereas Heaven's Gate can be described as peaceful and organized. The dead bodies of Peoples Temple were laid on the ground around the pavilion in different positions, whereas the dead bodies of Heaven's Gate were positioned in a comfortable room wearing dark clothes and Nike sneakers with \$5 bills in their pockets, and had no marks of blood and trauma (History, 2021). The characteristics of the

events of mass suicide can be differentiated not exactly from the periods of existence and belief systems of the two groups, but from the keywords describing the language characteristics in the discourse of each leader.

In the case of Peoples Temple, suicide was driven by the sociopolitical beliefs of its members, along with threats and depressing situations that led to a significant increase in anxiety levels. For Heaven's Gate, suicide became integrated into the members' beliefs, as they viewed it as a step in their journey toward achieving their ultimate goal (entering the Heavenly Kingdom). From the lexical choice in the discourse of each leader, the characteristics of mass suicide of Peoples Temple emerged given that Jim Jones employed the literal notion of mass suicide. The word *suicide* carries a dreadful meaning and it created negative feelings (such as fear) and thoughts which illustrate the commotion in the group on the day of committing mass suicide. The characteristics of mass suicide of Heaven's Gate developed based on the implicative words applied in the discourse which hide the literal notion of mass suicide. This form of language enabled the Heaven's Gate members on the day of committing mass suicide, to feel positive emotions, free from negativity, resulting in a quiet, orderly act of mass suicide. The words associated with distance and movements signify the concept of traveling (moving to the Heavenly Kingdom) which generally describes the overall attire and death position of the Heaven's Gate members.

The communication styles identified (namely, othering style, intensifying style, negating style, conditioning style, and swearing style) also exemplify the commonalities and differences of the mass suicides. The use of othering, intensification, and negation which is common in the two discourses allows the main leaders to convey mass suicide to their followers by poisoning. The othering style separates the members from wider society where the leaders acquired complete power to preach their personal beliefs and implement their rules. The intensifying style magnifies the content elements especially the concepts of mass suicide in the talks of the main leaders, which convince the followers to participate in the hideous activity. The negating style shapes the views of the groups and controls the thoughts and actions of the members, which guided them to achieve their final goals. The use of swearing which is frequently present in Jim Jones' discourse may illustrate some characteristics of mass suicide of Peoples Temple. The word *shit* may reflect the disarray of the members' bodies, which were scattered around the pavilion at Jonestown (*they were trying to kill us. So we go through all kinds of shit*), expressing condemnation or suffering of the members which associated with the swear words *damn* and *hell* (Conroy, 2018). The use of conditioning which is highly present in Marshall Applewhite's discourse may also describe some characteristics of mass suicide of Heaven's Gate. The hypothetical statements allow the Heaven's Gate members to make a final decision to commit mass suicide, following specific ways aligned with their goal of departing from Earth, which included dressing in identical dark clothing and wearing white Nike sneakers.

6.2 Implications of the findings

For Heaven's Gate, the implicative words (such as *overcome, leave, separate*) used in Marshall Applewhite's sermons contain ambiguous meanings which allow the discourse to express mass suicide in a placid way. Implicative words such as metaphors may increase the understandings of individuals and these features may be persuasive for they can motivate their feelings (e.g., Mio et al., 2005). This implies that the use of implicative words in any types of religious discourse must be checked to see if they associate with any dangerous actions. Viewing the associations of implicative words with the target actions is one way to see whether the discourse contains dangerous signs, and so it helps individuals to identify the damaging acts before they are implemented.

For Peoples Temple, the expression of mass suicide in Jim Jones' discourse started from the initial literal suicidal thoughts influenced by the sociopolitical beliefs promoted. However, as the communication progressed in the group, the thought of mass suicide was developed and magnified through negative views until it was chosen as a revolutionary act as if there were no other ways to face the threats or possible attack after killing some important individuals at Jonestown (e.g., "*it's a revolutionary act. We can't go back; they won't leave us alone. They're now going back to tell more lies, which means more congressmen. And there's no way, no way we can survive*"). This implies that a view or a perspective may start from a single thought and it may be developed through communication styles especially the use of intensification. Thus, words that contain literal dangerous meanings must be avoided and not be magnified in discourse for they may be manifested in the long run carrying out destructive effects as the communication develops.

Beliefs contain power to shape the behaviours of religious groups (e.g., Guth et al., 1995; Levy & Razin, 2012) and this power may come from the language used in discourses (e.g., Ekawati, 2019; Palayon et al., 2021). In Peoples Temple, its belief system was manifested in words associated with political and social concepts guiding the group to view the world negatively and commit mass suicide. In Heaven's Gate, its belief system was manifested in words and associated with science-fiction concepts allowing the group to use implicative words that guided the members to commit mass suicide. Therefore, the choice of words in the discourses of

religious leaders should be checked given that the patterns of those words convey beliefs which allow us to view their characteristics and effects whether beneficial or dangerous.

The communication styles serve as elements of language power which are capable of changing the perceptions of individuals. As the language of destructive cults is highly persuasive and elaborative (Palayon et al., 2022a), both sermons contain othering (that separates), intensification (that intensifies), and negation (that controls) which characterize the power of the language of destructive cults. These three styles enable each leader to convey mass suicide to their followers. The findings imply that othering, intensification, and negation which are used to extremely promote non-traditional beliefs (or non-religious beliefs) in the discourses of cults can be used as signs to identify these groups as dangerous. Therefore, the communication styles in the discourses of the leaders of religious groups especially suspicious religious groups must be checked to see if they express any dangerous signs. Checking such language can warn the involved individuals before the dangerous events may happen.

While the findings of this study highlight the functions of stylistic elements (e.g., *we*, *they*, *if*, *don't*, *certainly*), it is important to note that similar style linguistic features are also prevalent in other discourse contexts, such as political discourse. In both settings, these linguistic features may share common discourse functions. For example, the use of *we* in political discourse (Romadlani, 2021) serves to shape perceptions, define group identities, and influence attitudes and behaviours, which are reflected in the use of *we* in Jim Jones' sermons and Marshall Applewhite's sermons, where the members viewed their groups with ideologies distinct from wider society. However, their specific functions and impacts can vary significantly depending on the rhetorical goals and societal dynamics inherent to each discourse context. Exploring the functions of these linguistic elements in various discourse contexts may increase our awareness of how language is employed to achieve communication goals across diverse social settings.

7. CONCLUSION

This paper focused on examining the language characteristics of the sermons of Jim Jones (the leader of Peoples Temple) and the sermons of Marshall Applewhite (the leader of Heaven's Gate) in the period leading up to the mass suicide by identifying the keywords and the collocates of the selected keywords to illustrate the concepts of mass suicide of the two destructive cults. Keyword analysis along with collocation analysis was used which allowed us to gather the target features. The features identified provide sets of information for characterizing mass suicide which enable us to differentiate the mass suicide of Peoples Temple from the mass suicide of Heaven's Gate based on the behavioural characteristics reported. Both sermons heavily promote non-traditional belief systems with the use of othering, intensification, and negation, which allow each group to express mass suicide and view this act as a helpful way to achieve their goals. This study has significant implications for understanding the development of religious groups, particularly cults, and identifying their dangerous signs. Cults that heavily promote beliefs through the use of othering and negative attitudes, which are not traditionally associated with mainstream religious groups and sects, are likely to become dangerous. These language characteristics serve as useful indicators to analyse the discourses of the leaders of suspicious religious groups to determine whether they contain potentially dangerous signs. The findings act as a warning system to detect such signs before damaging activities may occur. Future research could expand on these findings by examining the discourses of other destructive cults or extremist groups to find more linguistic patterns illustrating harmful ideologies and communication styles.

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