**How the dichotomy between** “**us good guys**” **– the Herut movement, and** “**them bad guys**” **– MAPAI – was used as a rhetorical strategy in Menahem Beginʼs speeches**

# Abstract

In this paper we discuss how the late Prime Minister Menahem Begin used the division between “good guys” (members of his own Herut movement) and “bad guys” (members of the MAPAI opposition party) as a vital rhetorical device with which to transmit his political messages, to advance his ideological positions, and to sharply criticize his political opponents. The paper’s central assumption is that divisions in Begin’s speeches are based on specific rhetorical strategies that help put the message in sharp focus and emotionally manipulate the addressee. In the paper we used an analytical tool taken from the CDA (Critical Discourse Analysis) approach.

**Keywords**: Menahem Begin’s speeches, “good guys” vs.“bad guys,” rhetorical devices

## 1 Introduction

In this paper we discuss how the dichotomy between “good guys” (members of his own Herut movement) and “bad guys” (members of the MAPAI opposition party) is reflected in Menahem Beginʼs speeches. We shall show how Begin used the dichotomy to advance his own political and ideological positions and to emotionally manipulate his addressees’ positions. We shall also examine the specific rhetorical devices that serve this dichotomy.

In the present paper we have adopted the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach, which will be seen to contribute to analyzing verbal rhetorical devices, structuring of the political message, sharpening the difference between the “good guys” and the “bad guys,” and using emotional manipulation and bias whose aim is to serve political interests and to demonstrate how a political force is created and preserved through language.

The corpus chosen for the study consists of every one of Begin’s speeches that is accessible on the internet, including the Knesset website, and that exemplifies the dichotomy between the “good guys” and the “bad guys.” We located the verbal rhetorical devices that highlight this dichotomy in Beginʼs speeches, sorted them according to the rhetorical device that characterizes each, and explained their rhetorical contribution to the dichotomy.

Menahem Begin was born on August 16, 1913 in Brest-Litovsk and died on March 9, 1992 in Jerusalem, where he is buried. He was Israel’s sixth Prime Minister, head of the Herut and Likud movements, a minister in Israeli cabinets, commander of the Irgun during the British Mandate period, signatory of the peace treaty between Israel and Egypt, Nobel Peace Prize laureate for 1978, the man who annexed the Golan Heights and ordered the destruction of Iraqʼs nuclear reactor in 1981 (Knesset website).

# 2 The Holocaust in the Israeli political discourse

Prior to the 1967 Six-Day War, the Holocaust was not an obvious part of everyday reality in Israel. It was not taught in schools and was rarely mentioned in survivors’ homes. The decision by Egyptian ruler Gamal Abed al Nasser to close the Suez Canal and blockade the Straits of Tiran to Israeli shipping, coupled with the feeling that the country’s survival was in jeopardy, led to tensions, mainly among the families of survivors. However, Israel’s decisive and total victory in the war offered certain proof that the only way of ensuring the Jewish people’s survival in Israel was a strong army. Israel would guarantee that there would never be another Shoah (Holocaust). Since then, almost every politician repeatedly uses the Holocaust in demands regarding the borders of Israel and its enemies, and in all negotiations over the occupied territories under Israeli army control (Keren 2015: 173). The term Holocaust has become flattened in the public mind because any evil that befalls anyone anywhere becomes a Holocaust: Vietnamese, Soviet Jews, African Americans in American inner cities, women suffering inequality, and so on.

# 3 Theoretical framework

## 3.1 The CDA approach

CDA is a multidisciplinary approach that is used in discourse analysis. It focuses on how social and political power is created and maintained through language, seeking to expose discursive biases and manipulations that serve political interests and advance controversial ideological positions, and highlighting the methods or stratagems through which the discourse produces or maintains an unequal balance of power in a society. CDA aims to expose the linguistic, cultural, and historical roots that support the practices – the modes of action – that preserve the balance of power. The approach’s basic premise is that discourse has the capacity to shape social identities and establish relations between groups of people and individuals. CDA thus focuses on the way in which social structures embody the existing balance of power and control in the society through discourse: how the discourse produces them, approves them, challenges them, or legitimizes them. It seeks to understand, expose, and ultimately oppose social inequality (Hart 2010: 13–14; Livnat 2014a, vol. 2: 361; Meyer 2001: 15; Reisigl and Wodak 2001: 32; van Dijk 2001: 352; Wodak 2001a: 10).

While analyzing texts and “linguistic events” requires some analytical method, CDA on principle is neither based on nor prefers a single theory or a uniform analytical method. Instead, CDA offers a kind of toolbox for the researcher, a list of linguistic and textual characteristics that can be examined when one wishes to analyze a text critically (Livnat 2014a, vol. 2: 366; Wodak 2001b: 64).[[1]](#footnote-1)

## 3.2 Conceptual metaphor theory

Metaphor, as posited by cognitive linguistics, is the essential core of human thought and creativity. Since the language of politics is characterized by metaphorical themes, metaphors are a powerful tool for getting to the heart of political thought. Metaphorical expressions nourish our worldview and shape our thinking and, in turn, our actual behavior (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 3–6; Mio 1997: 117–126; Koller 2012: 25). Examination of the context of metaphorical expressions facilitates our understanding of such metaphors and the goals that they are meant to attain in a given communicative event (Ifeanyichukwu et al. 2018: 95–96). Metaphorical linguistic usages reflect how we perceive reality (Koller 2012: 25; Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 3–6; Mio 1997: 117–126). Lakoff took this idea a step further, showing that metaphors not only reflect our view of reality but also influence it. In January 1991, on the heels of the First Gulf War, he analyzed the US government’s political discourse and showed how the Bush Administration used metaphors to justify going to war. In so doing, he demonstrated how metaphor analysis can be critical in exposing discourse manipulations and normally hidden ideologies (Livnat 2014a, vol. 2: 368–369).

Dalia Gavriely-Nuri (2009, 2011), studying metaphors in the Israeli political discourse, shows how they help to portray war as a normal part of life. Such war-normalizing metaphors aim to naturalize and legitimate the use of military power by creating a systematic analogy between war and objects that are far from the battlefield.[[2]](#footnote-2) For example, the metaphoric phrase “Golda’s kitchen” was the popular nickname for the most intimate circle of Prime Minister Golda Meir’s advisers. This metaphor conceals a secretive and undemocratic decision-making process even in security matters and other central issues. In essence, the “kitchen” metaphor hides what was often, in fact, a “war room” where Israel’s most urgent security matters were decided. According to the CDA approach, the use of such metaphors is manipulative and helps to depict war as a normal, mundane, and unsurprising state of being, as expected and reasonable as medicine or business. In this way, the metaphor masks the true, terrible, and violent nature of war.

For example, Tony Blair defended his decision to send British soldiers to the Second Gulf War in 2003 by using metaphors of progress – the successful attainment of goals (in the future) – as opposed to metaphors of regression, which reflect the failure to reach goals (in the past). These metaphors mirror the choices faced by the Labour Party and its leader, Blair, and thus establish the expected party policy: always go forward. Blair was willing to accept nothing but progress, and thus he presented himself as a strong and reliable leader who would not be swayed by difficulty or criticism (Semino 2008). The metaphoric description of a particular problem or situation reflects the speaker’s perceptions of it and establishes his or her preferred solution (Chilton 2004: 202).

In this context, the rhetorical power of metaphors of movement, widely encountered in political discourse, is worth mentioning. One example is the metaphor that depicts the European common currency (the euro) as a train that must progress at the same speed and in the same direction with all its cars in order to avoid derailment. This metaphor reflects a specific perspective that urges European governments to adopt a uniform monetary policy and act in complete economic harmony in order to ensure the success of the European Monetary Union (Charteris-Black 2005: 54–152; Musolff 2004: 30). Musolff presents examples of manipulative rhetorical baggage evoked by metaphors. The metaphors that he discusses express hostility toward the language of immigrants in Britain, such as the description of roads in British cities as streets in Bombay or Karachi (Musolff 2019: 257–266) and Coronation Street as having been relocated from Britain to Pakistan.

**3.3 Ethos**

According to Aristotle, the ethos (character, reliability, professionalism) of the speaker is the way that he presents himself, his intentions, and his beliefs to his audience. Character-driven persuasion entails speaking in a way that makes the speaker seem worthy of the audience’s trust. A speech without ethos will miss its mark. Character (ethos) is practically the strongest method of persuasion (Aristotle 1973: 1356a; Gitay 2010: 132–133; Livnat 2009: 72). The discourse itself should reveal the speaker’s character. Often, it is not the speaker’s ideas that affect and change his audience, but rather the speaker’s character or image. In other words, the speaker’s qualities and reliability are key factors in persuasion that carry more weight than different rhetorical strategies. Persuasion by means of one’s character, says Aristotle, is effective when the speaker speaks in a manner that appears credible. We assume that the stronger the researcher’s ethos, the greater the chances that his arguments will be favorably accepted (Livnat 2014b: 126).[[3]](#footnote-3)

# 4 Analysis and discussion

## 4.1 Rhetorical devices reflecting the dichotomy between “good guys” and “bad guys”

In nearly all of Begin’s political speeches the dichotomy between the “good guys” (members of his Herut party) and the “bad guys” (members of the MAPAI party) can be clearly discerned. This division is reflected through a variety of rhetorical devices. All involve Begin presenting himself and his people as the guardians of the national honor, who would never collaborate with the British authorities (during the British mandate period) nor revive ties with Germany, who would never support civil war, who take care to promote the self-assurance of Oriental Jews, and who would never exploit Jewish blood or Holocaust victims in order to obtain compensation, unlike the members of MAPAI. Note that Begin uses all these arguments in order to incite his audience and manipulate their emotions in order to gain their trust.

### 4.1.1 Irony

Weizman and Dascal (1991: 18–30) suggest a model that aims to describe how indirect expressions are interpreted, which takes into account the fact that irony is an implicit expression. The model describes two types, or stages, of contextual information that are necessary for interpreting an indirect message: extralinguistic information and meta-linguistic information. In the first stage, the listener must recognize that there is some kind of mismatch: he or she needs to understand that the explicit meaning of the utterance was not what was meant by the speaker. In other words, he or she must reject the explicit meaning of the utterance. In the second stage, the listener works out the alternative meaning of the speaker’s statement, which is, of course, its implied meaning.[[4]](#footnote-4)

(1) What do they[[5]](#footnote-5) offer in the political domain? The *ingenious* idea of the Jordanian option. They declare day and night that they are willing to hand over to Hussein (the late king of Jordan) the territories of Judea and Samaria.

(Speech by Begin in the 1981 election campaign)

(2) I realize full well that you are *courageous* . . .

(Begin’s speech at a mass demonstration against the compensation agreement with German, 1952)[[6]](#footnote-6)

### 4.1.2 Presenting Herut movement members as the guardians of national honor by stressing the difference between them and members of MAPAI

Begin frequently emphasized the heroism of the Irgun members, represented by his party, *Ḥerut*, who had risked their lives in the underground movements and were undeterred by the threat of death, in contrast to members of MAPAI, represented by David Ben Gurion. Begin stresses the difference between himself and Ben Gurion, who did not see a single day of combat and did not risk his life for the establishment of the State of Israel, but in fact cooperated with the British police in an attempt to destroy the Hebrew fighting force, the Irgun. Begin thus positions himself and Ḥerut as the “good guys,” as the guardians of national honor.

Begin in fact goes so far as to explicitly accuse the head of MAPAI, David Ben Gurion, of collaboration with the British authorities against the Irgun’s fighters during the British Mandate period and of betraying those fighters, who had dedicated their lives to the establishment of the State of Israel. Begin attacked Ben Gurion for the latter’s unfortunate statement that the cannon which he had ordered to fire on the *Altalena*[[7]](#footnote-7) was sacred, and should be placed in the Temple when that will be rebuilt.

In contrast to Ben Gurion and his supporters in the MAPAI party, who declare war against Jewish rivals, attack them with Jewish arms and enslave the nation in order to serve the British authorities, thus representing the “bad guys,” the Irgun never declared war on Jews nor used their arms against their brethren. They would never do so, and thus they represent the “good guys,” who stand by the nation at a fateful hour.

(3) In the days in which we risked our lives, what did the head of MAPAI do? Not only did he not fight, not put his life, his liberty and his political dealings in danger for even a single day, but called, and even tried, to annihilate the fighting Hebrew force in cooperation with the British police.

(Menahem Begin’s speech on the *Altalena* Affair, January 1959)

(4) In the Provisional State Council you boasted and slandered, as our dead still cast before us, and said that the canon which you had ordered – with no prior warning – to shell a ship that was surrounded on all sides, was a sacred canon, whose place was in the Temple that would be rebuilt.

(Menahem Begin’s speech on the *Altalena* Affair, January 1959)

(5) Indeed, Mr. Ben Gurion, there is a huge difference between him who stands, at a fateful time for the nation, on the side of its enslaver, collaborates with them [i.e., the British authorities] and begins an internecine war against those who arose, rebelled and fought against the enslaver, only against him, and prevented a mutual civil war and destruction at any price.

(Menahem Begin’s speech on the *Altalena* Affair, January 1959)

Begin attacks Ben Gurion and his government for the reparations agreement with the German government.[[8]](#footnote-8) He is aghast that Jews, representatives of the Israeli government, will sit at one table with the German murderers who annihilated one-third of the Jewish people.

(6) Jews, representatives of the government of Israel, are about to sit at one table with the German murderers.

(Begin’s speech in the Knesset about the reparations agreement with Germany, January 7, 1952)

### 4.1.3 Structuring the message through collective memory

One can notice that Begin relied on the collective memory of Jews, both Ashkenazi and Sephardi, who had fought against the nation’s enemies, in order to structure his current political discourse and attack his political rivals. Begin stresses that all Jews, Ashkenazi and Sephardi alike, are brothers, heroes who sacrificed themselves for their nation. He expresses his disgust at Dudu Topaz, who used the anti-Sephardi slur “*chahchahim*”[[9]](#footnote-9) in a speech that became known as the “*Chahchahim* speech”,[[10]](#footnote-10) delivered at a Labor Party rally, where his words were greeted with cheers.

Although the mass immigration to Israel in the first three years after the state’s establishment consisted of people from Asia, North Africa, Europe and America in almost equal proportions, the Israeli government headed by David Ben Gurion of the MAPAI party discriminated against Sephardi Jews. Some eighty percent of the latter were housed in transition camps,[[11]](#footnote-11) while most immigrants from Europe and America received permanent housing (mostly in the center of the country).

Begin is fully aware that the transition camps are remembered by Sephardi Jews as a particularly traumatic experience, as a collective memory indelibly incised in their minds. He realizes that the great majority of Sephardi Jews will always vote for the Likud party in protest against what was done to them in the transition camps. He pours salt on their wounds by repeating to a Sephardi audience the racist comments ascribed to the rival MAPAI party, as an act of emotional manipulation in order to gain votes. Begin realizes that his political behavior polarizes the nation and increases tensions between Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jews, but considers this legitimate as long as it serves his political interests. In example (7), Begin exploits Topaz’s use of insulting terms in order to exacerbate the trauma of the transition camps and to pick on the bleeding wounds of Oriental Jewry.

(7) Last evening a young actor stood before one-hundred-thousand Labor people and said as follows: The *chahchahim* are in Metzudat Ze’ev. They are barely gatekeepers. Here, that is last evening, are the soldiers and commanders of the combat units. I’ll admit to you that until this morning I never heard the word “chahchahim” and did not know its meaning. But listen! When that what’s his name, Dudu Topaz, said that idiocy, his silly words, the entire audience that stood here yesterday cheered. Now I’ll tell Dudu Topaz whom he meant: Our Oriental Jews were heroic fighters in the underground as well. Some of them were executed and until the last moment sang the “Hatikva,” to the world’s bewonderment.

(Begin’s response to Dudu Topaz’s *Chahchahim* speech, June 1981)

Begin sharply criticizes the leaders of the MAPAI Party for the decision to adopt a red flag. They refused to learn the lesson that the Jewish collective memory taught about the meaning of a red flag in our days.

(8) Yesterday evening there were many red flags in this place. Today there are already many blue-and-white flags. That is the moral, historical and ideological difference between us and the Socialist West. I will speak about Communism. It is the flag of Jew hatred. It is the flag of concentration camps and oppression of the individual (Begin’s response to Dudu Topaz’s *Chahchahim* speech, June 1981)

Begin describes the Israeli government’s approval of the reparations agreement as the worst of abominations. He retrieves an event from the collective Jewish memory: the murder of thirty-four Jews in a Jewish town by a Polish general. The victims’ families, which refused the Polish government’s offer of compensation, serve as symbols of Jewish pride, symbols of national honor. Israel’s government should be inspired by these families and reject the reparations agreement. Begin added that those who had witnessed the horrors of the Holocaust would not hesitate to risk their lives in order to prevent negotiations with the murderers of the Jewish people.

(9) In 1919 a tragedy occurred in a remote Jewish town called Pinsk. A Polish general murdered 34 Jews in that city. The Zionist Council met in the city of Pinsk and declared: “If the bereaved families will receive compensation, they will be desecrating the martyrs’ memories and will themselves be cursed.

(Begin’s speech in the Knesset on the reparations agreement with Germany, January 7, 1952)

(10) We who saw our fathers being dragged into the gas chambers, we who heard the thudding of the wheels of the death trains, will we fear to risk our lives to prevent negotiations with the murderers of our parents?

(Begin’s speech in the Knesset on the reparations agreement with Germany, January 7, 1952)

For Begin, the arms deal with Germany is a worse nightmare than any that can be conjured up by writers of fiction. True, Jews did make arms for Germans during the Holocaust, but they did so because they had no choice. Begin is upset by the fact that Israelis are manufacturing arms for the Germans, who killed one-third of the Jewish nation. He views the arms deal with Germany as a betrayal of the Jewish people.

(11) For many years Jews made arms for the Germans. To their dying day they were forced to produce arms for the Germans. What a nightmare! Again Jews are production arms for the Germans. But this time they are free. No one is forcing them to do so.

(Menahem Begin’s speech on the arms deal with Germany, May 26, 1959)

### 4.1.4 Personal dialogue as a rhetorical device

Begin inserts personal dialogues in some of his speeches, in order to highlight the differences between his political philosophy and that of his political rivals. Through his personal dialogue Begin reveals his individual voice, creates intimacy with his audience and attempts to make them identify with his message. He makes his addressees present and creates the impression that these personal dialogues are indeed taking place now, during the speech. In example (12), Begin contrasts his own respectful attitude towards Sephardi Jews with the humiliating position of his political rivals of the Labor Party, who cheered when the entertainer Dudu Topaz called the Sephardi Jews *chahchahim*. By doing so, Begin attempted to increase the enmity between Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jews, to manipulate his audience emotionally in a way that would serve his purposes in the elections that were due to be held a few days after the speech.

(12) In the underground, in the days of the Rebellion Movement, Galili asked me, after he had consulted with the late Nathan Yellin Mor of Lehi, when they planned together operations against British rule, and said to me: “How have you solved the problem of Oriental Jews in the Irgun?” I look at him in wonder and say to him: “Israel, what are you asking? What problem? We don’t have one. We are all brothers.”

(Begin responds to Dudu Topaz’s *Chahchahim* speech, June 1981)

(13) That person gives me advice, the German Chancellor? He knows about our security and I don’t? Mr. Schmidt, the German Chancellor gives advice, to me, to all of Europe and to the whole world how to force us to accept a Palestinian state. And from whom? From the son of the nation that bears the responsibility for murdering one-third of our nation.

(One of Begin’s speeches in the Knesset)

Begin highlights the difference between his ideology, which forbids opening fire on Jews, and that of Ben Gurion, who did not hesitate to give the order to shell the *Altalena*. Begin was on that ship’s deck and called on his comrades not to open fire on their fellow Jews:

(14) On that night, after we descended from the blood-soaked deck, I called on my comrades – I still had the strength to call them: Do not raise your hand against a brother. Even today. Do not open fire anywhere.

(Begin’s speech on the *Altalena* affair, January 1959)

### 4.1.5 Expressions of contempt and derision for one’s political rivals

Begin frequently heaped scorn on his political rivals, in order to embarrass them and to stress the great differences between his and their policies. His scorn occasionally took the form of insults and expressions of deep contempt. Example (15) contains very sharp words of scorn, bordering on personal insult and humiliation of political rivals.

(15) As for Mr. Peres, he announced some three hours ago that he would be the next Prime Minister. But *he was premature* in his announcement. *I don’t know what drove him. What about Mr. Rabin’s kiss? He has to give that kiss back*.

(Begin in his victory speech over the Labor Party in the 1981 elections)

(16) Let (the Leftists) present this comrade of yours who stands before you, how he takes both his cheeks with his two fingers and almost squeezes them so that they will be red. Why? Because they are now ashamed to show the Socialist red color. Ashamed, afraid. So they want me to be red.[[12]](#footnote-12)

(One of Begin’s election speeches)

(17) Last evening a young actor stood before one-hundred-thousand Labor people and said as follows: The “*chah-cha-him*” are in Metzudat Ze’ev. They are barely gatekeepers. When that what’s his name, *Du-du To-paz*, said that idiocy, his silly words, the entire audience that stood here yesterday cheered.

(Begin responds to Topaz’s *Chahchahim* speech, June 1981)

### 4.1.6 Lexical choices

In the formulation of a discourse, we choose the words with which we denote things. A person who commits an act of terrorism may be called a terrorist or a freedom fighter. As Gerald Seymour famously wrote in his book on the Irish underground (1975): “One man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter.”

The “disengagement” from the Katif Block can be called “evacuation” or “expulsion.” Judea and Samaria can be called “the West Bank,” “the occupied territories,” “the liberated territories” or “the heart of the homeland.” The specific choice can testify to the speaker’s (implied or explicit) perspective, and also affects the way the addressees perceive the world (Livnat 2014a, vol. 2:366).

The choice of words can also depend on their connotations and emotive value. In other words, lexical choices can determine the emotive character of an event’s description. The following example is taken from a newspaper article about a 7-year-old child’s death from pneumonia, after it had been left for three months without conventional medical treatment.[[13]](#footnote-13) The article notes that the boy’s body was brought to the hospital and “laid” on a bed. But subsequently the article states that the body was “cast” on the bed (Livnat, 2014a, vol. 2:367): “No one stood by the small body. So it remained *cast* alone, until the doctors came.”

(18) In the Provisional State Council you boasted and slandered, as our dead still *cast* before us, and said that the canon which you had ordered – with no prior warning – to shell a ship that was surrounded on all sides, was a sacred canon, whose place was in the Temple that would be rebuilt.

(Menahem Begin’s speech on the *Altalena* Affair, January 1959)

(19) I was on the deck of the burning, shelled ship, which had become *a mass grave* . . .

(Begin’s speech on the *Altalena* affair, January 1959)

(20) This is my last call to the Knesset to prevent a *holocaust*[[14]](#footnote-14) . . .

(Begin’s speech in the Knesset on the reparations agreement with Germany, January 7, 1952)

(21) Thanks to Jewish blood Ben Gurion the little despot and great *bastard* (*manyak*), who does not give himself an account of the depth of the Holocaust and the seriousness of the danger, became Prime Minister.

(Begin’s speech at the mass rally against the reparations agreement, 1952)

### 4.1.7 Rhetorical syntactic repetition to highlight the difference between his political philosophy and that of his rivals in MAPAI

Levi and Gvura (2016) discussed rhetorical syntactic repetitions in the speeches of the current Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Yair Lapid. They quote numerous researchers who addressed this topic. Landau (1988: 53) notes that political speeches contain repetitions of whole sentences or of sentence constituents in various forms.

What is unique in the rhetorical repetitions in Begin’s speeches is the number of times that he repeats the same syntactic component, in order to fix the message in his listeners’ minds and convince them of his views. He is aware that repetition can gradually erode opposition, or at least convince those who have not yet made up their minds on the issue in question.

(22) Our Jerusalem, which is our one-and-only capital for ever and ever. And the entire area in Judea and Samaria until the border that existed until June 4 1967, the border that was called “the Green Line.” And I can reveal to you in all simplicity that the Green Line, too, *has disappeared, does not exist, is no longer in force, will never return.*

(Speech by Begin in the election campaign of 1981)

(23) For years we were under a regime of favoritism. They (MAPAI) want to return to that regime. *As if we were not familiar with it. As if we did not experience it. As if the entire nation did not suffer from it*.

(Speech by Begin in the election campaign of 1981)

(24) Today we are fighting for peace. Thank God we lived to see it. Yes, *there are difficulties with the peace, there are. There is pain in the peace, there is. There are sacrifices for peace, there are.* They are all preferable to the sacrifices of war.

(Begin’s speech in the Knesset in favor of the peace agreement)

### 4.1.8 The use of rhetorical questions in speeches

Rhetorical questions are nothing new in political discourse in general, and in political speeches in particular. What is unique about Begin’s use of them is their intensive presence in his political speeches. He utters salvos of rhetorical questions in order to fix the message in his audience’s minds and to give his words the sound of absolute truth, making it difficult for his addressees to examine them critically. The rhetorical questions present the information which Begin provides as something on which he and his listeners are agreed. Example (25) is one example of a speech of Begin which is full of rhetorical questions. Their purpose here is to emphasize the message that no one is responsible for Israel’s security but Israel’s Prime Minister.

(25) *That person gives me advice, the German Chancellor? He knows about our security and I don’t?* I was entrusted by the nation to preserve our security. That is my sacred duty. *And he* (Mr. Schmidt, the German Chancellor) *gives advice, to me, to all of Europe and to the whole world how to force us to accept a Palestinian state*. That is indeed an unheard-of hostile act. *And from whom?* From the son of the nation that bears the responsibility for murdering one-third of our nation. Something that has not happened since God created man and man created Satan. *He will give me advice on how to maintain our security? He will leave us defenseless? He will make propaganda for a Palestinian state?* Forgive me, gentlemen, I come from the fighting underground . . . I’m not afraid of anyone. I’ll tell him the truth to his face. I have no reason to be afraid. We faced death every day. So when he says things like that, *I shouldn’t reply to him? I don’t know what happened to my people? I don’t know what happened to my family? I don’t know what happened to your sisters and brothers? What, I don’t know? After all that he will tell us to create a Palestinian state?* In other words*, put three-and-a-half million Jews in danger of death and extermination, and I won’t answer him?*

(One of Begin’s speeches in the Knesset)

### 4.1.9 Intensifying the political achievement by associating it with significant events in Jewish history

Begin intensifies the political achievement by associating it with significant events in Jewish history. In example (26), the word “slaves” evokes in the reader the slavery of the Jewish people in ancient Egypt. Possibly Begin compares the period of MAPAI and Labor Party rule in Israel, which lasted twenty-eight years (1949–1977) to Israel’s period of slavery in Egypt, in the sense that under Labor rule the citizenry was oppressed, and that Begin’s election victory in 1977 was like the Exodus from slavery to freedom, ushering in the period of rule by the “good guys,” in contrast to the period when the “bad guys,” the leaders of the Labor Party, were in power.”

(26) Israel is a free, democratic country, because its citizens are not *slaves* to the ruling Alignment . . .

(Begin’s victory speech in the 1977 elections)

Begin goes so far as to compare between his victory in the 1977 elections and the history of Zionist triumphs throughout the generations, the climax of which was the establishment of the State of Israel. In making this comparison, Begin intensifies his victory and transforms it into a victory of Zionism rather than a personal victory.

(27) I give thanks to my sister, my teacher, who never ceased believing *in the triumph of Zionism* . . .

(Begin’s victory speech in the 1977 elections)

Begin intensifies the significance of his own victory in the elections by associating it with the fact that the great Zionist leader Jabotinsky did live to see it, just as he did not live to see the founding of Israel:

(28) Jabotinsky did not have the fortune to see the state’s establishment nor the transition that occurred today.

(Begin’s victory speech in the 1977 elections)

### 4.1.10 Distancing oneself brings one closer

Begin is in the habit of ascribing his sacrifices, triumphs and achievements to all the heroic fighters for the nation’s cause, through the use of the first-person plural. While he thus distances himself explicitly, by pointing out that his sacrifices, battles, and victories were shared by all the Jews who fought for their nation, some of whom paid with their lives, this distancing in fact brings him closer to his fellow citizens. In other words, Begin in his rhetoric distances himself from the victories, but by doing so he wins the citizen’s sympathy. In example (29), Begin attributes the successful destruction of the Iraqi nuclear reactor to the entire nation of Israel, whom he addresses in the first-person plural.

(29) The Iraqi atomic reactor, that was about to prepare atom bombs, is no more, does not exist. And now I can say to *our beloved children*: You will bear sons in the Land of Israel.

(Begin’s speech after the bombing of the Iraqi nuclear reactor in 1981)

(30) And now I wish to thank my friends, my comrades the underground fighters of the Irgun and of Lehi, my brothers, glorious heroes. *We traveled* a very long road and they never ceased to believe that there will come such a day and such a night.

(Begin’s victory speech in the 1977 elections)

(31) *We did not come* to this Knesset from a house of the wealth, from a life of comfort. My comrades and I *came* after a war that lasted for years. *We were persecuted* no end, *we were not left alone*, prices were put *on our heads*. Detectives *sought us* throughout the land. *We risked our lives* twenty-four times a day.

(Begin’s speech in the Knesset on the reparations agreement with Germany, January 7, 1952)

### 4.1.11 Expressions of modesty in order not to appear overbearing

Begin took care to project a modest image of himself, in order to gain popular support and sympathy, especially among Oriental Jews, who had suffered from discrimination under the competing Labor Party, which placed them in transition camps. Citizens of Israel, especially Oriental Jews, perceive Begin’s style as modest, as providing consolation to their collective memory of the transition camps.

(32) Jews, you have known me for forty years. I first lived in Petach-Tikva, in the Hassidof neighborhood,[[15]](#footnote-15) to fight for the nation of Israel.

(Begin’s speech after the bombing of the Iraqi reactor in 1981)

(33) We did not come to this Knesset from a house of the wealth, from a life of comfort. My comrades and I came after a war that lasted for years. We were persecuted no end, we were not left alone, prices were put on our heads. Detectives sought us throughout the land. We risked our lives twenty-four times a day.

(Begin’s speech in the Knesset on the reparations agreement with Germany, January 7, 1952)

### 4.1.12 The use of metaphors

#### 4.1.12.1 Military metaphors

The domain of war has remained one of the popular sources of metaphor in politics and political activities are perceived as war. The domain of war is usually employed metaphorically for all types of human struggle and conflict.[[16]](#footnote-16)

In all the metaphors used by Begin in his speeches one can perceive a clear attempt to present Ben Gurion and his supporters as “bad people,” who are not committed to the Jewish people. Begin uses manipulative metaphors that incite his audience and create emotional identification with his positions:

(34) I was on the deck of the burning, shelled ship, which had become *a mass grave*, until the last moment.

(Menahem Begin’s speech on the *Altalena* affair, January 1959)

(35) True, we are still surrounded by enemies, but we have acquired the nation’s honor. And now you come, despotic profiteers, to destroy all that has been attained with our blood, and the nation will once again become mud, [victim] *of the sword of pogroms and annihilation*.

(Begin’s speech at the mass demonstration against the reparations agreement, 1952)

(36) I call on Mr. Ben Gurion, do not do this deed. You are placing *a mine* under the building of the House of Israel, which can explode on its inhabitants.

(Begin’s speech at the mass demonstration against the reparations agreement, 1952)

#### 4.1.12.2 Animal metaphors

The purpose of animal metaphors is to highlight the Nazis’ barbarous treatment of Jews and their unrelenting lust to kill them. In example (37), Begin uses three animal metaphors. The phrase “wolf pack” and the words “fangs” and “claws” emphasize the wickedness of Ben Gurion’s decision to recognize the German nation despite the crimes it committed against the Jews and despite its brutal, barbaric treatment of the Jews during the Holocaust:

(37) Churchill devoted one-half of his book to a depiction of the blindness and idiocy that led to Germany’s rearmament and to World War II. Today he himself stands at the head of the parade to Germany’s rearmament and to World War II. Due to blindness, due to horrible fear, the Teutonic *wolf pack* is given back *the fangs and claws* that had been extracted from it. And we should agree to this? We will say that they are a nation, that they are capable of negotiation, that they will respect an agreement that America or England will sign?

(Begin’s speech on the reparations agreement with Germany, January 7, 1952)

#### 4.1.12.3 Natural metaphors

Metaphors from the domain of nature exist in all religions. In example (38), “rain” is a metaphor for the intensive shelling of *Altalena*, evoking the unusual cruelty shown by Ben Gurion towards the Jewish immigrants on the ship, since the shelling continued even as Begin and his comrades were taking the wounded ashore. In example (39) the reparations agreement with Germany is depicted metaphorically as glass, because the lack of moral support from the Jewish people will make it shatter like glass. The word “rock” is a metaphor for the people’s steadfast rejection of the agreement, which has no chance of being accepted, just as glass cannot withstand a rock:

(38) We took down our wounded under a *rain* of bullets and shells.

(Menahem Begin’s speech about the *Altalena* affair, January 1959)

(39) When evil confronts a just cause, it will shatter like *glass* under a *rock*, and so will this ugly attempt shatter under the people’s opposition.

(Begin’s speech at a mass protest against the reparations agreement, 1952)

#### 4.1.12.4 Trade metaphors

The use of metaphors from the field of trade to describe the reparations agreement belittles it and presents Ben Gurion and his cabinet supporters as wily merchants who are not ashamed to trade in the blood of Holocaust victims for monetary gain:

(40) And now you come, despotic *profiteers*, to destroy all that has been attained with our blood.

(Begin’s speech at the mass demonstration against the reparations agreement, 1952)

### 4.1.13 Attacking the political rival’s principles

Begin in his speeches frequently attacks his political rival’s principles and credibility.[[17]](#footnote-17) He presents Ben Gurion, leader of the MAPAI Party, as a traitor who barters the Holocaust victims’ blood for compensation from the German government. In doing so, he maintains, Ben Gurion betrays the values of Zionism, brings dishonor on the Jewish people and desecrates the dignity of the victims of the Holocaust.

# 5 Summary

As noted above, in almost all of Begin’s political speeches one can find a clear dichotomy between “we,” the “good guys,” members of the Herut Party, and “they,” the “bad guys,” members of the MAPAI Party. This division is expressed through the use of a variety of rhetorical devices, all aimed at demonstrating that he and his comrades are the guardians of national honor, in stark contrast to MAPAI.

Begin exploits Oriental Jews’ collective memory concerning the traumatic experience of the transition camps. He pours salt on this still-open wound and quotes racist comments ostensibly made by leaders of the rival MAPAI Party. Begin is aware that through these emotional manipulations he widens the gap between Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jews, but considers it legitimate as long as it serves his political aims.

Begin also relies to a significant extent on the collective memory of the Holocaust in order to highlight the difference in political philosophy between the “good guys” of the Herut Party and the “bad guys” of MAPAI. He treats the arms deal with Germany as a nightmare of such proportions that even a writer of fiction could not dream of it. True, Jews did produce arms for Germans during the Holocaust, but they were forced to do so. Begin is dismayed that Israelis are manufacturing arms for the Germans, who had exterminated one-third of the Jewish nation, and considers the arms deal with Germany as treason against the nation.

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1. See, for example, Koller (2012: 19–38) where she presents a working model for analyzing collective identity in discourse which integrates a socio-cognitive approach as a major strand in CDA. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See further in Lakoff (1991: 25–32). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See further Amossy (2001: 2). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See further in Weizman (2000: 238–240); Livnat (2003: 141). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. I.e., his rivals from the Labor Party. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. See n. 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. *Altalena* was a ship acquired by the Irgun in the summer of 1947. The name it was given was the nom-de-plume of Zeev Jabotinsky. The ship set sail to Israel in June 1948, with 920 immigrants on board as well as a large amount of military and medical supplies. It reached the Israeli shore during the first ceasefire of the War of Independence, some five weeks after the establishment of the state and three weeks after the Irgun had agreed to disarm and become integrated into the IDF.

In the course of the negotiations between the Irgun leadership, headed by Begin, and representatives of the Israeli government before the ship reached Israeli shores, the government rejected the Irgun’s demand that 20 percent of the military equipment on the ship should be given to Irgun units that were integrated into the IDF and Irgun units in the Jerusalem region (which still retained their independence).

In the confrontation between IDF forces and Irgun fighters sixteen Irgun soldiers and three IDF soldiers were killed. Dozens were wounded. Shortly afterwards some 200 Irgun members were arrested, in what the government called a “purge” operation. The Irgun was disarmed, and its members were integrated into the IDF. The issues raised by this affair, among them the need for a unified armed force, obedience to the government, and the principle of avoiding civil war, continue to be the subject of heated public and political debate to this day. In time, the events came to be known as the “*Altalena* Affair.” [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. An agreement signed between Israel and West Germany on Sept. 10 1952 in Luxemburg. In accordance with this agreement, Germany gave Israel three billion West German marks between 1953 and 1965 to compensate Israel for the heavy burden of having to resettle a large number of penniless Jewish refugees who had been uprooted and had lost their possessions during the Holocaust because of the Nazis. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. A slang insult which in the past was used to denote young men of Afro-Asian descent. The word implies rowdy and impolite behavior. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. One of the most famous speeches in Israel. In it, Dudu Topaz, a well-known Israeli entertainer, called Sephardi Jews “*chahchahim*,” deemed very humiliating, implying that they are wild, misbehaved, and inferior to Ashkenazi Jews. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Living conditions in permanent housing were infinitely superior to those in the transition camps. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Red represents the Socialist Leftist Labor Party. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. *Maariv*, February 5, 1999. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Begin considers the reparations agreement with Germany a “holocaust.” [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. A very modest neighborhood. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Ifeanyichukwu et al. (2018: 95–96). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. All the examples presented in the article clarify this issue and there is no need to repeat them. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)