

## Multilingual Monitoring for Global Security Systems: The Radicalization Watch Project

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### Executive Summary:

Multilingual monitoring consists of a conceptual framework and a language analysis methodology, which seeks to deconstruct and shed the light on implicit conceptions and hidden intentions of foreign speakers or anonymous writers. It builds upon an array of concepts and analysis tools, which have been developed within the scope of the “Radicalization Watch Project” (RWP) – a program monitoring radical groups throughout the world. The three main tools are: 1) the “discursive matrix” which corresponds to the language framework of written or oral utterances of radical groups; 2) the “discursive pattern” which identifies the common semantic occurrences in the language utterances of these groups; 3) the “discursive signature,” which makes it possible to identify and/or authenticate utterances or written documents emanating from open, anonymous or suspicious sources. These tools have been developed based on the detailed analysis of a considerable amount of data on radical, armed and insurrectional groups throughout the world. During the validation phase, these tools made it possible to specify and expand the corpus to create a unique knowledge database to be used for early warning and decision-making purposes. This paper presents the methodology for multilingual monitoring based on practical cases concerning armed groups in Iraq, Afghanistan and North Africa.

### What is Strategic Multilingual Monitoring?

The dictionary definition gives us a first idea of what strategic monitoring is: “research and treatment of information that can be helpful for a company, an institution or a profession” (*Le Robert*). In this context, the verb “to monitor” is synonymous with the verb “to watch”, so the dictionary goes back to the Latin etymology (*vigilare*), “to pay attention to” (*Ibid*). Because of its Indo-European root (*weg*), the word exists in most languages and refers to the state of being vigilant and paying attention to something. In old French, the “veilleur” (watchman) is a soldier on duty, a synonym for “sentinel.” In this context, monitoring is also the ability to clarify an event through a careful search of objects.

In English, there are several equivalents to the French word “veille,” which reflects the disparities in the terminology used in different areas and countries. We can thus find: “scanning, screening, watching, and observing.” While all these words define the “monitoring” activity, they don’t reflect the same view as in French. In English, the words “monitoring / screening / scanning” imply surveillance based on the “device” (monitor / screen / scanner), and is therefore a machine-oriented activity. So, the machine holds a central position in the Anglo-Saxon meta-concept whereas the French meta-concept is human-oriented since the activity requires the presence of the monitoring person.

The task of a “watchman” consists of conducting a regular, comprehensive and systematic search of all data relating to an industry or concerning a particular subject. It can be, for example, to monitor the internal environment of an organization to better understand the weak signals or spot early warning of threats. In this regard, AFNOR defines the “watch”

as a continuous activity, mostly iterative, which supposes an active surveillance of technological and commercial environments to anticipate future developments. The “watch” is therefore a dynamic, actual, open, and prospective process, that is to say, a process oriented towards the future. In other words, it consists of knowledge that is solicited at a given time and in any given field (economics, politics, health, or security) in order to have foresight and anticipation.

In the current globalization context, this anticipation function becomes more complex as our world grows increasingly multilingual. A multilingual watch can thus be defined as an information search, done in two or more languages at the same time. On its face, it seeks to improve the results of a single language document research by diversifying its channels and sources. At its base, however, it signals a real change of perspective and paradigm because multilingualism is both a state of mind and an action strategy. Indeed, our efforts do not have the same ultimate trajectory if we begin from the perspective of a “watch” with a broader spectrum of inputs. The multiplicity of channels and supports derives from a fundamentally different methodology: the data spectrum and depth enables unique quantitative analysis of fundamentally qualitative phenomena.

A multilingual watch is panoramic by definition because it springs from the linguistic and cultural diversity of the world. In comparison, the monolingual watch seems limited and narrow, for its horizon is but a single language and a restricted geographic space. One is international and the other national, one is open and the other is divided. In a multilingual watch, everything is taken into consideration in several languages: the document (text, audio, and video), the environment (country, region, and continent), the source (person, data base, and sample), the target (receiver, customer, supplier), the process (research, analysis, and translation) and the product (report, notes, and summary). In short, multilingualism is essential for “monitoring” because it gives it de facto a strategic function within enterprises and organizations, be they national or international.

The multilingual strategic “watch” is thus a global search activity that leads to a decision-making support tool for complex issues. It is described as “strategic” because it is decisional (Guidere 2007, 45). Indeed, the aim of a multilingual watch is to assist political and military decision makers in making the right choices or to support the strategic choices they make on a local level. This decision support is indispensable in many domains. In the field of geopolitical monitoring, multilingual information research sheds the light on the internal socio-political evolutions of different countries or regions. Having access to information in local languages can only benefit political leaders and military decision-makers for whom this offers insight on the inside story of the situation they are following.

### **Language and Global Security**

In an asymmetric warfare situation, the struggle is between opponents of unequal means, often performing unsynchronized operations. In this context, foreign languages represent a key element in the conflict as they are an advantage and a vital *modus operandi*, especially for the least equipped and armed side. Since the September 11 attacks, it has become evident that language is a critical and unconventional weapon used by insurgent groups. It also appears to be as effective as kinetic weapons in some situations. Verbal

accusations hurled against a regime may lead to its downfall precisely because they carry nuances seeking to debase the opponent and which have an immediate effect on the masses (e.g. the Taliban in Afghanistan). Another example is that of the audio and video messages conveyed by Islamist and Jihadist leaders, which have a mobilizing impact on general audiences and quite often a galvanizing effect on the street (e.g. the messages of Bin Ladin or Zawahiri).

The growing awareness of the importance of languages thus derives from identifying new challenges that are emerging in the context of the international war on terror. Until recently, interest in foreign languages was determined by their added cultural value or by professional communication skills requirements. Nonetheless, the last decade has seen the rise of a more pragmatic view of language, driven by security concerns. Therefore, the main concern is no longer whether or not a foreign language carries a cultural benefit or an economic profit, but whether there is a vital need to understand the ideological context and communication objectives underlying the discourse delivered in a foreign language by certain groups or individuals perceived as a potential threat against public or private interests in target countries.

The approach to a language is, in consequence, oriented towards the understanding of the hidden meaning and intentions more than towards the direct communication function of the tool. It is now more about understanding how the “enemy” thinks, grasping his vision of the world, his means of action, his expression of combat and struggle and even the effect of this expression on his native language audience. This is a paradigm shift from the recognition of the physical to that of the meta-physical cognition. Therefore, one must analyse the ideological motivation and arguments lying behind the recruitment and mobilization of followers and supporters. Language is thus seen as a set of ideas and signs forming a *praxis* that must be identified, because of its implications on human actions (e.g. suicide, as part of the ideology of “Islamic martyrdom”).

Finally, one has to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the enemy on a tactical and strategic level by studying the conflictuality aspects of his language and the schemas he describes in his own language. But beyond that, such a study allows us to understand his “culture of struggle,” the foundations of his actions and political orientation. This justification of the “struggle” is particularly interesting to study because it sheds the light on the reasoning used to perpetuate the fight. Understanding these arguments helps to counter or even neutralize them.

### **A New Classification of Languages**

All this leads us to address the language issue from a security and strategic point of view. If a language is described today as “strategic,” it is because of its decision-making power on the long term. Since it allows us to know the opponent’s culture and ideology *from the inside*, it might allow us ultimately to win wars and not only battles. For this purpose, one must first define an analytical framework in which the target languages can be studied, taking into consideration the new challenges posed by the war on terror. Within this framework, languages are classified by trends according to their subversive use and/or manipulation power and according to the geographic areas concerned with this manipulation.<sup>1</sup>

From a security point of view, three categories of language can be defined:

Highly Strategic Languages (HSL) are those considered as primary potential threat vectors, which convey sensitive information to a society and its citizens. They are generally exogenous languages (i.e. non-national ones and often that of immigrants. This is the case, for example, of the Arabic language in the United States or in Western Europe.

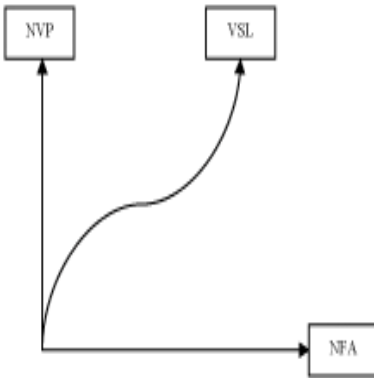
Moderately Strategic Languages (MSL) are those used to convey separatist ideas inside a country, threatening its national unity or social stability, but without prejudicing the culture or civilization as a whole. They generally consist of languages identified as endogenous, that is to say native languages or languages with a strong regional identity value. This is the case of the Kurdish language in Turkey or in Iraq.

Low Strategic Languages (LSL) are those that convey subversive opinions, shared by most citizens, and sometimes going against the dominant conceptions of a society or a government. These groups seek to appeal to the widest public possible, by contesting existing values while remaining an integral part of the national identity. These languages are called “central,” because they are that of the dominant community or the majority, and are used by both the elites and the protesters. This is the case of English in Quebec, Canada or French in Algeria.

These distinctions show that the strategic value of a language, at a given moment in time and in a given context, does not depend solely on the information content it conveys, but also and above all, on the *intent* of communication behind the content, especially in war or conflict contexts.

Indeed, the relation between languages and conflict is a major challenge of modern times as languages can convey the perceptions and representations of a society. This challenge is only exacerbated in instances of armed or unarmed conflicts, but it also applies when a radical or extremist group chooses a language as a primary channel for propaganda purposes or to recruit insurrectionists. To establish the strategic value of a language is thus to place it on a scale of conflictuality established by observing language utterances during a crisis or a conflict. The more the utterances of the opponent in this language are important, the greater the strategic value of this channel. The less the armed action of the opponent is actively supported by publications in this language, the more its strategic value decreases.

FIG. 1 : Indicator of conflictuality



- Number and volume of language utterances (publications of the enemy in any format) (NVP)
- Number and frequency of violent actions (of any category) (NFA)
- Strategic value of the language (over time) (VSL)
- Indicator:  $VSL = NVP / NFA$

The conflictuality indicator allows, on the one hand, to follow the evolution of the opponent’s propaganda in his native language and, on the other hand, to decide whether or not to increase the means of counter-propaganda *in this language* to rally the widest local audience. This indicator has to take into account the language utterances translated in other languages starting with the native language versions to measure the opponent’s intentions and strategies.

### Predictive Linguistics

Predictive linguistics aims at making predictions about actions from the gathered language and discursive utterances. Thanks to the outstanding increase of computer storage and analysis capacities, it has become possible to apply predictive linguistic analysis to massive data volumes. Improvement and automation of search and observation techniques should allow a fast development of the potential applications of this methodology, even if it requires substantial resources, especially when large volumes of utterances are concerned, as they are more complex and require more precise predictions.

Moreover, predictive linguistics transforms data into actions by drawing conclusions about current data and future events. The process begins by analyzing the relation between data and actions. These language data sets, emanating from internal and external systems, are assessed through language techniques that generate models for classification, segmentation, pattern recognition, profiling, trend identification and early warning.

By measuring the “unknown” elements surrounding the global security problem, predictive linguistics can help elaborate strategies and possible ways of intervention, thus improving the decision-making process quality. In other words, it proceeds from proactive

risk management to improving decision-making processes through controlled and iterative tests concerning potential language utterances and their likely, deliberate and unintentional consequences.

These predictive analyses can then be applied to operational systems to identify new threats or tactical innovations. On a strategic level, predictive linguistics provides useful data for a fast identification, an objective assessment and a continuous follow-up of new threats. On a tactical level, it makes it possible to identify – with the utmost precision – the targets to be monitored, the ways to monitor them and the right time to operate.

Language technologies and “watch” tools (*Data Mining, Text Mining and Web Mining*) bring to the foreground a set of phenomena that has to be organized, ordered and structured in the form of a coherent and logical group. The exploration of linguistic data is a process of empirical analysis which extracts knowledge useful for security from raw data. The purpose is to structure the knowledge in various domains for better risk management. This optimal technique uses targeting and case-based reasoning, which are supported by cognitive sciences.

Applied to global security, cognitive linguistics seeks to process the large volume of documents in foreign languages for a quick and efficient extraction of useful information. From this perspective, three conceptual tools have been developed:

- 1) The “discursive matrix,” which refers to the linguistic format of written or oral statements issued by armed groups;
- 2) The “discursive pattern,” which refers to the common semantic occurrences in the language utterances of these groups;
- 3) The “discursive signature,” which refers to the unique sequences that allow us to identify and/or authenticate tracts, flyers or papers resulting from open, anonymous or suspect sources.

These tools were developed based on an in-depth study of a large volume of data concerning the world’s fundamentalist, armed and insurrectionist groups. Even during the validation phase, these tools have allowed us, to clarify and enrich the corpus in order to create a unique and very useful knowledge base for prediction and decision-making purposes.

This method of analysis was first applied to the armed groups in Iraq and turned out to be largely efficient. After analysing one hundred thousand statements, it became possible to establish the discursive matrix, the typical patterns, and the distinctive signatures of Al-Qaeda in Iraq members’ language utterances. The following figure shows an example of these findings:

FIG. 1 : Text in Arabic (bold elements: Allah, Rabb, Al-Qaeda, Jihad, Mujahideen, Iraqi)

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ  
 يَا رَبِّ سَدِّدْ الرَّمِيَّ وَثَبِّتِ الْأَقْدَامَ  
 الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ وَالصَّلَاةُ وَالسَّلَامُ عَلَيَّ يَا مُحَمَّدَ وَعَلَى آلِهِ وَصَحْبِهِ أَجْمَعِينَ.  
 أما بعد:  
 قام إخوانكم في الجناح العسكري لتنظيم القاعدة في بلاد الرافدين، يوم أمس الثلاثاء 22  
 من رمضان 1426 للموافق 2005/10/25 بتغيير عبوة ناسفة على دورية للشرطة  
 المزودة على طريق السادة شيريان في ديالى، قُتِلَ اثنان وجرح سبعة، والله الحمد والمنة  
 وإخوانكم في تنظيم القاعدة في بلاد الرافدين ماضون في جهادهم وقادهم أعداء الله تعالى  
 حتى يكون الدين كله لله فإيا النصر وإما الشهادة.  
 والله أكبر الله أكبر .. والله العزة ولنسوله وللمجاهدين  
 أبو ميسرة العراقي  
 القسم الإعلامي بتنظيم القاعدة في بلاد الرافدين

FIG. 2 : Discursive matrix (indicating the positions of the linguistic important facts: number, date, place, and name)

"Bismi Allah" + 2n  
 "Ya Rabb" + 4n  
 "Al-Hamdu li-Allah" + 4 n + "Ala" + 2n + "wa-Ala" + 3n  
 "Amma Ba'du"  
 "Qama" + 1n + "Fi" + 4n (lieu) + "Fi" + 2n (lieu) + 3n + nombre (22) +  
 "Min" + 1n + nombre (1426) + 1n + date (25/10/2005) + 3n + "Ala" + 3n +  
 "Ala" + 3n + "Fi" + 1n (lieu) + 4n + "Wa-li Allah" + 2n  
 "Wa" + 1n + "Fi" + 2n (lieu) + "Fi" + 2n (lieu) + 1n + "Fi" (lieu) + 5n +  
 "Hatta" + 3n + "li-Allah" + 4n ("Fa-Imma" + 1n + "Wa-Imma" + 1n)  
 "Wa-Allahu" (2 fois) + "wa-li-Allah" + 3n  
 "Abu" (nom) + 2n  
 "Al-Qism" + 3n + "Fi" + 2n (lieu)

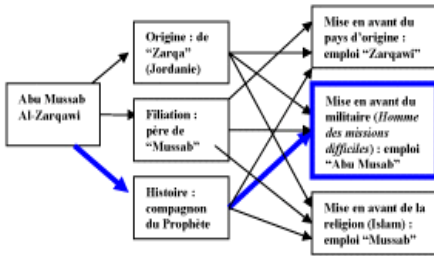
FIG. 3 : Discursive patterns (indicating expressions typical of Al Qaeda in Iraq)

"Bismi Allah" + 2n  
 "Ya Rabb" + 4n  
 "Al-Hamdu li-Allah" + 4 n + "Ala" + 2n + "wa-Ala" + 3n  
 "Amma Ba'du"  
 "Qama" + 1n + "Fi" + 4n (lieu) + "Fi" + 2n (lieu) + 3n + nombre (22) +  
 "Min" + 1n + nombre (1426) + 1n + date (25/10/2005) + 3n + "Ala" + 3n +  
 "Ala" + 3n + "Fi" + 1n (lieu) + 4n + "Wa-li Allah" + 2n  
 "Wa" + 1n + "Fi" + 2n (lieu) + "Fi" + 2n (lieu) + 1n + "Fi" (lieu) + 5n +  
 "Hatta" + 3n + "li-Allah" + 4n  
 "Wa-Allahu" (2 fois) + "wa-li-Allah" + 3n  
 "Abu" (nom) + 2n  
 "Al-Qism" + 3n + "Fi" + 2n (lieu)

FIG. 4 : Discursive signature (with the distinctive pattern of organization)

"Bismi Allah" + 2n  
 "Ya Rabb" + 4n  
 "Al-Hamdu li-Allah" + 4 n + "Ala" + 2n + "wa-Ala" + 3n  
 "Amanu Ba 'du"  
 "Qurna" + 1n + "Fi" + 4n (lieu) + "Fi" + 2n (lieu) + 3n + **nombre** (22) +  
 "Min" + 1n + **nombre** (1426) + 1n + **date** (25/10/2005) + 3n + "Ala" + 3n +  
 "Ala" + 3n + "Fi" + 1n (lieu) + 4n + "Wa-li Allah" + 2n  
 "Wa" + 1n + "Fi" + 2n (lieu) + "Fi" + 2n (lieu) + 1n + "Fi" (lieu) + 5n +  
 "Hatta" + 3n + "li-Allah" + 4n ["Fa-Imma" + 1n + "Wa-Imma" + 1n]  
 "Wa-Allahu" (2 fois) + "wa-li-Allah" + 3n  
 "Abu" (**nom**) + 2n  
 "Al-Qsmi" + 3n + "Fi" + 2n (lieu)

The “discursive signature” is a distinctive choice of expressions that represents, from a formal point of view, a textual “path.” A typical example is that of the discursive signature of Al-Qaeda’s leader in Iraq until 2006. While he was widely known in the West under the name of “Zarqawi,” he never actually signed his speeches or statements by this name. The study shows indeed that the signature corresponds to a particular communication choice as indicated in the figure below:

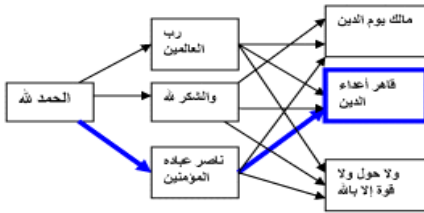


| General audience   | Particular audience                 | Specific audience       |
|--------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| <i>All muslims</i> | <i>The Mujahideen fighters only</i> | <i>Iraqi insurgents</i> |
| Language           | Knowledge                           | Communication           |

The “discursive path” chosen for the signature (Zarqawi or Mussab or Abu Mussab) indicates the nature of the document and the target audience (shown above).

When applied to his entire speech, we note that the choices of linguistic expressions correspond to known discursive paths. Here is an example taken from the same speech of the leader of Al-Qaeda in Iraq:

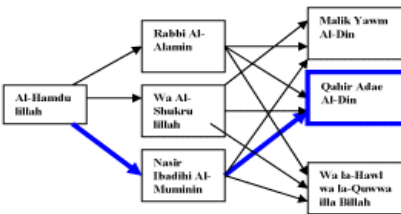
FIG. 5 : A path identifying the discursive signature in Arabic



Possible expressions for the *captatio* in Arabic:

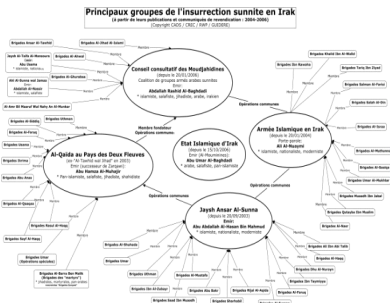
- “thanks to Allah -> Lord of the universe -> No one is more powerful than him”
- “thanks to Allah -> cherish Allah -> Lord of the Day of Judgment”
- “thanks to Allah -> Judge of his faithful ->He who defeats the enemies of the faith”

FIG. 6 : Transcription of the “path” allowing to recognize the discursive signature



Thanks to these various conceptual tools (matrix, head, signature), we were able, by comparing the utterances of different armed groups, to reveal the ideological and operational links among these groups at a time when the utmost confusion prevailed in regards to their identity. The following figure sketches these links that were established on a textual and discursive basis:<sup>2</sup>

FIG. 7 : Chart of the Iraqi insurrectionist groups based on their discursive utterances



This methodology was then applied to the phenomenon of “suicide terrorism” within the framework of an international “watch” program.

### **Multilingual monitoring in the service of global security: RWP**

The "RWP" (Radicalization Watch Project) is a “watch” program in several languages concerning armed Islamist groups, which was led between 2004 and 2007 in partnership between two institutions: the *CREC Saint-Cyr* (French military academy) research center in France (Coëtquidan) and the *Center for Advanced Defense Studies* (CADS) in the United States (Washington DC.). Several papers were published, explaining the methodology described above and the main research results.

The comparison of different biographies written by candidates for "martyrdom" (i.e. suicide attacks' authors) first allowed (in 2005) to establish a real discursive matrix coded by the speeches on suicide terrorism.<sup>3</sup> The extraction of the typical discursive patterns of this trend of radical Islam then led (in 2006) to finding propaganda documents used to recruit suicide bombers on the Internet.<sup>4</sup> Finally, through the discovery of the discursive signature of these types of publications, a significant number of documents were gathered, revealing (in 2007) the on-going implementation of the "martyrdom" suicide ideology in a new geographic area (the Maghreb countries after Iraq).<sup>5</sup> It is useful to recall that the “RWP” program was initiated when a worrying phenomena caught our attention after 2003: the increase in the number of Islamist Internet fora and virtual jihadist communities. The phenomenon grew to such proportions between 2004 and 2007 that we decided to set up a multilingual watch program concerning the radicalization phenomenon in the Muslim world. We chose to concentrate on the most active communities in terms of information flow and the largest ones in terms of number of logged-in members over a given period of time. The main communities under study were: Al-Hesba, Al-Bukhari, Al-Firdaws, Al-Boraq, and Al-Ekhlās.

We tried to answer two main questions for each of the five communities:

- 1) What are the criteria which lead a group of Internet users who chat online to form a Jihadist community?
- 2) What are the linguistic characteristics and interaction behaviours that allow us to define these communities as radical?

To answer these questions, we adopted a *non-participant observation approach*, meaning that we were passive members of the community, following the chats but not taking part in it. To identify the recurring communicative behavior, we adopted the *observation-sweeping* method. Finally, to interpret the results, we used the criteria established by the interacting agents themselves (Baym 1998, Erickson 1997, Kollock and Smith 1996).

Our observation included the following communicative objects: the words used by the members of these communities, the secret language, the explicit and implicit names, the common utterances and the interaction habits.

## Research Results

The Jihadist fora define themselves as exchange areas where the members share a common interest for the “Jihad” (Holy war), which engages them in discursive cooperation and exchange of theological and practical information. Even if these communities are not stable over time, they remain nonetheless active and efficient virtual groups.

The first observation we can draw here is that the feeling of belonging to this internet site, i.e. to the Jihadist community, is based on an “emotional” tie (empathy, projection, identification) as well as on a voluntary commitment (political, ideological, religious). On the other hand, we notice that the more the commitment to the virtual community is important (in terms of login time and posted messages), the more the real commitment to “Jihad” on the ground seems superficial. The most active members spend a lot of time in front of their computers, which leaves little time for real action in the real world.

This observation concerns the internal point of view of these communities, because the Jihadist movement has promoted a new form of militancy called “electronic Jihad”, dedicated precisely to those who spend time in front of their screens fantasizing over “Jihad” in Iraq or somewhere else in the Muslim world. So there is not only a sharp interest in these communities, but also a final intention of interaction between members.

We then sought to study the emergence and the evolution of these virtual communities on the Internet. It seemed that a Jihadist forum “survives” only thanks to a limited number of regular members who animate the discussions and internal debates over a rather long period of time (at least 10 members per month). Sometimes, the presence of one or two motivated or diligent moderators on a forum can have a decisive impact on the creation of “brotherly relations” between the forum members.

Because of the increasing number of fora and Jihadist lists, it is hard to say that there is “one” representative community. Every community is more or less specialized in a geographic area (“Jihad” in Iraq, in Afghanistan, etc.). However, we can define *common uses* of different fora and communities.

These common uses are of a linguistic and not an operational nature. Indeed, although there is a formal engagement in Jihad, it’s rare to find orchestrated campaigns, with the notable exception of support fora for the Iraqi insurrection, which could at times coordinate operations on the ground (finance, propaganda, etc.) during online discussions. But these cases of coordination are rare and engage far too few members to be considered a significant phenomenon in the virtual world of Jihadist communities. Consequently, we were led to closely examine these communities’ language utterances in order to better understand the list of words and ideas that unite them. This task was facilitated by the fact that the community’s composition passes itself through a computer-mediated point of discussion, which helps to understand the range of Jihadist manifestations. Indeed, to analyze the language utterances of online Jihadist communities means to consider them as “word communities,” which is a key notion of interactional sociolinguistics (Gumperz 1991). Verbal interactions in these communities are considered to be social processes in which the produced statements are in agreement with collectively recognized and expected standards.

The observation of these interactions in a Jihadist forum reveals the existence of a real “discursive community” that functions according to specific linguistic behaviours and interactions following particular standards. For example, it is impossible to ask a question on

the forum without starting with the Islamic ritual greeting as a more or less ritual code: "May the peace, mercy and blessing of Allah be upon you" (Assalamu alaykum wa-rahmatu Allah wa barakâtuḥ). Also, it is very rare to end a discussion without praying for the mudjahideens: "May Allah bring victory to the Jihad and to all Mujahideens wherever they may be" (Allahumma unsur al-jihad wa al-mujahidin aynama kânu).

The Jihadist community founds itself around a number of discursive and interactional lines, which are perceived and internalized by the members as real standards. It is very difficult for someone to be accepted as a member of the community if he has not carefully observed, beforehand, its linguistic practices. Non-compliance with the standards exposes the member to immediate correction, often by criticism or disapproval, and sometimes to sanction by expulsion from the group.

### **The Language at the Heart of the Community**

A detailed analysis of verbal interactions shows that a Jihadist community is not solely build on ideology but rather builds itself gradually by developing some of the ideas exchanged by the members as well as by the moral standards that are associated with these members. After a while, the internal discursive structure is such that the community becomes almost closed, in the sense that it no longer accepts members who fail to master the exchange standards and the basic religious principles. For instance, the community of Al-Hesba was closed several times and some of its members were expelled.

This progression of sectarian virtual communities towards radicalization is usually preceded by a conflict phase that is reflected in the used vocabulary and the interactions between members. This phenomenon has been observed mainly during critical events such as the destruction of the Samarra Shrine in Iraq or the Danish cartoons of the prophet Muhammad or the conflict in Lebanon in 2006. During these critical phases, the debates become very tense; the members become sensitive to every word written on the forum, judging it acceptable or not, then reacting accordingly. Two examples illustrate this fact well.

The first one is the debate that took place in the Jihadist community in June 2006, after the death of Al-Qaeda's leader in Iraq, Zarqawi, about whether the term "martyr" was applicable to him or not. For several weeks, all the arguments in favor of his "martyrdom" were discussed. Then when Bin Laden's right hand man, Ayman Al-Zawahiri, stated, in a videotape, that Zarqawi is the "Prince of Martyrs," it became impossible to use another term to address Zarqawi on the forum. And if any user called him simply a "mujahid," he would be verbally attacked and removed by the forum moderator with a public warning. If the user returned to the forum, even after a long period of time, he would be questioned again by some members of the community who seem to have a very good memory of the members and the incidents that occur on the fora.

The second example of this virtual sectarianism concerns the debate which took place, during the conflict in Lebanon in July 2006, around the Shiite party, Hezbollah, which means in Arabic literally "Party of God." Most of the Internet users who visit these fora, who are Sunni, contested the name of the party, despite the popularity of Hezbollah's leader, Hassan Nasrallah, who emerged during this war as a "resistant" and a "defender of Islam" facing the hated enemy (Israel).

But the internal debates led to a very surprising conclusion, namely that: “the real Party of God is Al-Qaeda”, as stated by the moderator of one of the main Jihadist online fora, *Al-Firdaws*. Moreover, this conclusion was adopted collectively by the members until the end of the conflict, describing Hezbollah as the "Party of deniers" (Hizbu Al-Rawafidh), as a result of the massive support brought by the Shiite street in Iraq to Hassan Nasrallah's party. We deduced from these two examples that the interaction rules within these groups were not only strict but also mostly evaluative as they allow perception, interpretation and judgement of the behaviour of the members participating in the community debates.

In the end, we were able to clearly define a *feeling of belonging* between the most committed members that was paired with a *feeling of exclusion* felt by the members less in harmony with the radical movement. The virtual group is in fact tied at its root by a common ideology (the struggle against the West) and by shared ends (support "Jihad" or Bin Laden and his organization), which takes its cohesion beyond the point of interaction on any topic.

### The Cyberspace Leaders

The importance of multilingual watch lies, in the long run, in that it permits the observer to follow the orientation that the exchanges between group members are taking as well as to unravel conflict resolution mechanisms during stormy debates, like the ones mentioned above (Zarqawi or Hezbollah). In these cases, the forum's moderator plays a dominant role, which must to be clarified because it reflects the sectarian schemas prevailing in the physical world. It is the moderator, for example, who "sets the tone" for the community by disseminating common linkages (*topoi*), which recall the group's values and reinforce the sense of internal cohesion.

The discourse on “martyrdom” (Shahâda, Istishhâd) is enlightening in this matter. The most characteristic stylistic feature of the moderator's speech is the use of the inclusive "We" (I + you). For example, “*we have to help our mujahideen brothers, as advocated by Allah's holy book, with our life, our goods and our wealth ...*”

It is also the moderator who first answers the members' “requests” (request for advice, clarification, documents, information updates, technical tips, etc...). When he does not respond directly to a member's “request,” the moderator takes a role of guidance through the “pieces of advice” he gives on these issues (reading recommendations, websites, etc.). This interaction of the members with the moderator also appears to be more or less codified by two main rituals.

The first and most frequent one consists of a “reactive message” where the moderator answers a question posted by a member, by generally indicating another site to visit, according to the plan:

Question -> Contribution of information -> Indication of a contact.

The second scenario consists of a "proactive message" sent by the moderator who presents the information that he “received from the other brothers”, then requests the other members of the community to react or give recommendations (of reading, broadcasting, translation) according to the plan:

Question -> Offer of information -> Recommendation

These modes of interaction grant the moderator control over the community by keeping the critical issues within specific boundaries, such as the "Jihad" issue. Questions concerning technical and computer assistance are always briefly answered, by giving a link

to a site outside the forum, where the member can find the answer to his question without disturbing or diverting the ongoing debate. Moreover, if a member answers his “brothers” immediately and in the body of the community text, the moderator reacts immediately.

The moderator also plays an important role in the opening and closing message rituals. He welcomes every new member who logs in to the forum and salutes their leaving in an “Islamic way,” often by inviting the other members to do likewise. In any case, his “discursive identity” is very clearly established in the exchange: it organizes the information flow concerning “moujahideens” and avoids, by his intervention, conflict between the members.

Finally, an occasional host of the forum sometimes takes the place of the community’s main moderator, when the latter is “absent for a while.” But his role is limited in this case to recalling the the Jihadist community’s values otherwise defended by the moderator. This substitution is only observed within stable groups where the members come to know each other over time (e.g. Al-Hesba). The substitute's role (Na'ib) seems then validated by the other members who are not able though to say precisely on what basis he was endowed with this authority. It seems nonetheless that the pseudonyms chosen by the members on the website (internal code names) play an essential role in the implicit definition of their roles within the virtual community, following the example of what we observe concerning the “war names” within Jihadists groups.<sup>6</sup>

### Conclusion

The multilingual “watch” on Jihadist communities reveals the existence of an electronic non-kinetic war that doesn’t reproduce the function of the active armed groups in the military domain, but instead focuses on the linguistic domain of interactions and ideologies. The identification of this warlike operation in cyberspace leads us to call for extensive research to develop multilingual and semantic-based monitoring tools, aimed mostly at supporting law enforcement in crimes that impact social realities (like calls for hate for example).

It is also necessary to counter the invasion of cyberspace by radical groups, to promote more tolerant communities, expressing peaceful points of view in foreign languages. This requires training linguists and translators specialized in multilingual monitoring and familiar with global security issues.

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<sup>1</sup> See Jens Allwood's comments on the use of a language in *Linguistic Diversity and the Digital Divide*, Göteborg, 2004.

<sup>2</sup> M. Guidère, « L'Irak ou la terre promise des jihadistes », in *Critique internationale*, n°34, janv.-mars 2007, pp. 45-60.

<sup>3</sup> See M. Guidère, *Les « Martyrs » d'Al-Qaïda*, Editions du temps, 2005.

<sup>4</sup> Guidère, *Le Manuel de recrutement d'Al-Qaïda*, Editions du Seuil, 2006

<sup>5</sup> See M. Guidère, *Al-Qaïda à la conquête du Maghreb*, Edition du Rocher, 2007.

<sup>6</sup> See M. Guidère, "How Should We Decode Islamist Noms de Guerre?", in *Defense Concepts*, n°1 (3), CADS Press, Washington DC, pp. 6-16, 2006.