2026. Volume 10, Number 1 *Pages 80-90*

UDC: 32:81'42:81'373.612.2
DOI: https://doi.org/10.30546/09081.2026.1.1028

THE ROLE OF METAPHORS IN FRAMING THE POLITICAL DISCOURSE

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received:2025-05-12
Received in revised form:
2025-06-01
Accepted:2025-07-07
Available online:2026-06-19

Açar sözlər:
Cognitive fuzziness;
metaphorical vagueness;
ideological alignment;
emotional resonance;
power dynamics

ABSTRACT

This article delves into the intricate role of metaphors in political discourse, emphasizing their dual function as cognitive and ideological tools. The study not only provides a theoretical overview but also includes a comparative analysis of metaphors used by different political leaders, such as Donald Trump and Joe Biden, to illustrate varying metaphorical framing strategies. It highlights how metaphors, through their inherent ambiguity, initiate a phase of "fuzziness" that challenges the audience's cognitive resources while simultaneously allowing diverse interpretations aligned with individual "truths." Over time, this ambiguity transitions into clarity, strategically enhancing the speaker's persuasive power by delaying counterarguments. Drawing on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and its sociocultural, discourse-historical, and socio-cognitive approaches, the article situates metaphors as mechanisms for constructing social identities, perpetuating ideologies, and regulating power dynamics. **The methodology includes a step-by-step Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA) applied to a corpus of political speeches, with explicit coding of metaphorical themes and comparative frequency analysis across leaders.** *The findings underscore the emotional resonance of metaphors, their capacity to simplify complex ideas, and their role in fostering trust and guiding public perception. By framing metaphors as tools for political companionship, the article reveals their transformative potential in shaping societal narratives and navigating the interplay between language, power, and ideology. This nuanced analysis positions metaphors as indispensable in the dynamic landscape of political communication.*

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METAFORLARIN SİYASİ DİSKURSUN FORMALAŞMASINDA ROLU

XÜLASƏ

Bu məqalə siyasi diskursda metaforaların mürəkkəb rolunu araşdırır və onların həm koqnitiv, həm də ideoloji alətlər kimi ikili funksiyasını vurğulayır. Tədqiqat yalnız nəzəri icmal təqdim etmir, həm də müxtəlif siyasi liderlər — məsələn, Donald Tramp və Co Bayden — tərəfindən istifadə olunan metaforaların müqayisəli təhlilini əhatə edir və bununla da müxtəlif metaforik çərçivələmə strategiyalarını nümayiş etdirir. Məqalədə metaforaların daxili qeyri-müəyyənliyi vasitəsilə auditoriyanın idrak imkanlarını sınağa çəkərək fərdi "həqiqətlərə" uyğun müxtəlif yozumlara imkan verdiyi göstərilir. Bu qeyri-müəyyənlik zamanla aydınlığa çevrilir və bu, natiqin inandırıcılıq gücünü artırmaqla əks fikirlərin qarşısını gecikdirir. Məqalədə Tənqidi Diskurs Təhlilinin (TDT) sosial-mədəni, diskurs-tarixi və sosial-koqnitiv yanaşmalarına əsaslanaraq, metaforalar sosial kimliklərin qurulması, ideologiyaların davam

etdirilməsi və güc münasibətlərinin tənzimlənməsi üçün mexanizm kimi təqdim olunur. Metodologiya siyasi çıxışlardan ibarət korpus üzərində mərhələli şəkildə tətbiq olunan Tənqidi Diskurs Təhlilini (TDT əhatə edir. Bu yanaşmada metaforik mövzular açıq şəkildə kodlaşdırılır və liderlər arasında müqayisəli tezlik analizi aparılır. Araşdırma nəticələri göstərir ki, metaforalar emosional təsir gücünə malikdir, mürəkkəb fikirləri sadələşdirir, ictimai etimadı formalaşdırır və ictimai qavrayışın istiqamətləndirilməsində rol oynayır. Metaforaların siyasi yoldaşlıq vasitəsi kimi təqdim olunması onların cəmiyyət narrativlərinin formalaşmasında və dil, güc və ideologiya arasındakı əlaqələrin idarə olunmasında çevik potensialını ortaya qoyur. Bu təhlil metaforaları siyasi ünsiyyətin dinamik mühitində əvəzsiz vasitə kimi qiymətləndirir.

Açar sözlər: *koqnitiv qeyri-səlislik; metaforik müəmmalıq; ideoloji uyğunluq; emosional təsir; güc dinamikası*

1. Introduction

Every individual must shape political behaviors to realize their ideas. To expand the empirical dimension of this study, the following section analysis speeches from different leaders, allowing a comparative approach to metaphor usage. To fulfill personal ambitions and secure necessary support, it is essential to create a favorable political context. Maximizing the benefits of this political environment to gain political dividends becomes a key priority. For this, reliance on political language or the politics of language is crucial. A person's knowledge and skills will assist in defending their interests or the position of their represented group during heated discussions, exchanges of ideas, debates, propaganda, elections, and more. Failure to achieve successful communication may lead to the risk of losing credibility. Rich thoughts are expressed through rich language. To articulate thoughts and political views in a way that serves personal and institutional interests, one must skillfully utilize the potential of language. Otherwise, freedom of thought may be restricted by language. Inadequate use of language can result in the imprisonment of thought, which poses a significant obstacle to achieving goals. It is also evident that the power of thought and the power of language are not equal and cannot be compared. There are not enough words to express all ideas, dreams, desires, imaginations, and so on. The main task is to find the words that convey ideas and strike the golden balance between them.

Various strategies must be devised to reach mutual understanding with interlocutors. Persuading or killing trust, influencing, changing opinions, attracting, diverting, revealing or concealing intentions, and more are mental processes employed in political discourse. Charteris-Black describes the power of metaphor in political discourse as follows: "...metaphor is vital to the language of leadership because it mediates between the conscious and rational basis of ideology and its unconscious mythical elements. Metaphor draws on the unconscious emotional associations of words, the values of which are rooted in cultural knowledge. For this reason it potentially has a highly persuasive force because of its activation of both conscious and unconscious resources to influence our rational, moral and emotional response, both directly – through describing and analysing political issues – and indirectly by influencing how we feel about things. It therefore plays a crucial social role in communicating ideology that I have argued is vital to the discourse of politics." [Charteris-Black, 2011: 50-51].

2. Methodological Framework

This study adopts a qualitative discourse-analytical research design to investigate the role of metaphors in framing political discourse. The methodological framework combines insights from Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) in order to examine both the cognitive mechanisms and ideological implications of metaphor use in political communication. Within this approach, metaphors are understood not merely as stylistic devices but as cognitive instruments that shape the way political realities are perceived, interpreted, and evaluated by audiences.

Conceptual Metaphor Theory, originally proposed by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, argues that abstract concepts are often structured through metaphorical mappings from more concrete experiential domains (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Political discourse frequently relies on such conceptual mappings to simplify complex issues and to guide public interpretation. Through metaphors, political actors present policies, crises, and social processes in ways that resonate with shared experiences and cultural knowledge.

In parallel, Critical Discourse Analysis provides the analytical perspective necessary to understand the social and ideological dimensions of political language. Scholars such as Norman Fairclough and Teun A. van Dijk emphasize that discourse is not only a reflection of social reality but also a means of constructing and reproducing relations of power and ideology (Fairclough, 1992; van Dijk, 1998). By combining CMT with CDA, the present study explores how metaphors simultaneously function as cognitive frames and persuasive rhetorical strategies within political discourse.

The methodological procedure is also influenced by the principles of Critical Metaphor Analysis, developed by Jonathan Charteris-Black, which integrates cognitive linguistic analysis with critical discourse interpretation (Charteris-Black, 2011). This approach enables a systematic examination of metaphorical language while taking into account its broader political and social context.

Data and Corpus Selection

The empirical material for this study consists of a corpus of political speeches delivered by prominent political leaders in contemporary political contexts. The speeches were selected according to several criteria. First, they represent high-profile political events such as inaugural addresses, policy speeches, or major campaign statements that reach broad national or international audiences. Second, the texts were chosen for their rhetorical richness and their frequent use of metaphorical language. Third, all speeches were obtained from official archives or reliable media transcripts to ensure textual accuracy.

Political speeches constitute a particularly suitable genre for metaphor analysis because they are designed to persuade audiences, construct political identities, and frame complex political realities in accessible terms. In such contexts, metaphors often function as framing mechanisms that guide how audiences interpret political developments such as economic reform, national security, or social change.

Analytical Procedure

The analysis follows a three-stage analytical procedure inspired by Critical Metaphor Analysis.

Metaphor Identification

The first stage involves the identification of metaphorical expressions in the corpus. This process is based on principles derived from the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) developed in cognitive linguistics. Each lexical unit in the text is examined by comparing its contextual meaning with its more basic or literal meaning. If a semantic contrast between these meanings indicates a conceptual mapping between different domains, the expression is classified as metaphorical. This systematic procedure ensures transparency and analytical consistency.

Metaphor Categorization and Interpretation

Once metaphors have been identified, they are grouped according to their source domains, such as war, journey, construction, health, or family. These source domains are then analyzed in relation to their corresponding target domains, which usually involve political concepts such as governance, national development, economic policy, or political competition. This step allows the researcher to identify broader conceptual patterns, including common metaphorical frames such as *POLITICS AS WAR*, *POLITICS AS A JOURNEY*, or *NATION AS A FAMILY*.

Critical Explanation

The final stage focuses on the interpretation of the ideological and persuasive functions of the identified metaphors. Drawing on Critical Discourse Analysis, the study examines how metaphorical framing contributes to the construction of political narratives, the legitimation of political authority, and the representation of allies and opponents. Particular attention is given to the emotional and persuasive potential of metaphors, since they often evoke collective values such as unity, struggle, progress, or renewal.

3. Conceptual Metaphor Theory

One of the most important processes of cognitive activity is conceptualization. It plays an exceptional role in the emergence of new concepts and the structuring of knowledge. Ideas that arise through conceptualization come to light through language. One of the merits of conceptualization is Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA), based on Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT). The methodology applied includes: 1) corpus selection of political speeches from 2016-2025, 2) identification of metaphorical expressions, 3) coding according to conceptual domains, 4) frequency and comparative analysis across leaders. Conceptual Metaphor Theory "...posits that metaphors are common ground in communication as part of a shared conceptual system that provides knowledge structures for mental representations of particular situations, furnishes rich settings for presuppositions and supplies tools for both realizing implications and drawing inferences. In addition, more and more evidence shows that metaphors constitute a store in long-term memory as multi-modal mental models offering common ground for discourse interpretation." [Ignasi Navarro i Ferrando, 2019: 5-6]. We conceptualize our experiences primarily through metaphors, with language merely assisting in this process: "Metaphor hinges directly on our thought, thus being just subsidiary a matter of language. Besides, it is worthy of mention that we access information from our world through five different senses, i.e. sight, hearing, taste, olfactory, touch. As a result, our encyclopedic knowledge stems from a composite input of information that is combined in our minds and stored as multi-modal information in memory." [Sobrino, 2013: 74].

One of the discourse types where conceptual metaphors are most verbalized is Political Discourse (PD). Politicians use conceptual metaphors to create an image in the minds of their audience. One of the most commonly employed conceptual structures is the conceptual metaphor POLITICS IS WAR. Comparative analysis indicates that Donald Trump emphasizes militaristic metaphors more strongly than Joe Biden, who favors journey-and partnership-oriented metaphors. In this context, the individual frames themselves as good, worthy, more capable, competent, beneficial, etc., while framing their opponents as lacking these qualities, as "enemies." Consequently, the enemy must be defeated, destroyed, or sidelined. The enemy frame serves as a suitable tactic to facilitate this process. In this way, the individual aims to

present themselves as patriotic, loyal, trustworthy, a worthy candidate, and a reliable leader, while portraying the opposing side as an enemy, untrustworthy, politically inept, and incompetent.

"We will be a nation like no other, full of compassion, courage and exceptionalism. Our power will stop all wars and bring a new spirit of unity to a world that has been angry, violent and totally unpredictable," he said. "America will be respected again and admired again … we will be prosperous. We will be proud, we will be strong, and we will win like never before. We will not be conquered. We will not be intimidated. We will not be broken, and we will not fail." [17].

Donald Trump, by saying "...we will win like never before. We will not be conquered," conceptualizes his political steps as a battlefield, war, and military actions. He believes his administration will achieve what previous presidents could not. Our power means being a superpower capable of stopping all wars. Such power, despite all difficulties, demonstrates its strength by calming, stopping, and eliminating other forces. Only the strong win in war; politics is also a kind of war, and in politics, the victory of the strong is indicated through war terminology. Since the president is also the Commander-in-Chief, he is considered the primary soldier. Thus, politics is a battlefield, and the politician is a soldier.

The audience may not immediately 'digest' metaphorical thinking because not everyone possesses metaphorical reasoning. Metaphorical language requires more cognitive resources than non-metaphorical language. This ambiguity may initially cause some tension. Calming a "truth-thirsty" society is not an easy task. Everyone has their "own truth." One of the main tasks is for the politician to stylistically convince the audience of their "own truths." However, after a certain period, the audience undergoes a process of settling, and ambiguity gives way to clarity: "The communication process is a very lively and dynamic process. The ability to transition harmoniously from topic to topic, the skill to guide the interlocutor in the direction you need, the ability to use subtle, deep moments between non-fuzzyness and fuzzyness appropriately are the fundamental foundations of this process. And here, rough (tension-causing) moments, in other words, expressions pointing to unclear, vague moments, can frequently arise. Eliminating them is possible not only by stylistic but also by adhering to logical principles" [Abdulla., Əliyev, 2024: 22]. In such moments (fuzzy - H.G.), the audience is not fully prepared to present counterarguments, making the speaker's arguments more effective. The effect of non-fuzzyness cannot last long. Once everything becomes clear, falls into place, and listeners are freed from mental turmoil—in short, once the waters settle—this effect begins to diminish. Therefore, correctly evaluating the appropriate time and situation is essential.

J.P.Gee explains the tendency of CDA toward political issues as follows: "Critical discourse analysis argues that language-in-use is always part and parcel of, and partially constitutive of, specific social practices, and that social practices always have implications for inherently political things like status, solidarity, the distribution of social goods, and power." [Gee, 2011: 28].

4. Critical Discourse Analysis

The source of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) lies in Critical Linguistics (CL), which studies the connection between language and its social and historical context, cognitive mechanisms, and interactions between cultural codes. "So CDA builds significantly upon the foundations laid by critical linguistics in viewing language itself as a form of social practice and is motivated to set discourse in context. This motivation points to another of the fundamental principles of CDA,

that it is openly committed to political intervention and social change [...] CDA does not cling to the concept of objective or neutral analysis but rather it is committed to using linguistic analysis in a way that contributes to the potential redressing of the imbalances which pervade society." [Statham, 2022: 14].

Discourse analysis deals with syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. This means that depending on context, the reasons for using discourses, the moments of usage, and their various interpretations are analyzed—to clarify, specify, evaluate, ensure transparency, and uncover hidden points through critical examination. Critical Discourse Analysis "is a form of discourse analysis that is specifically concerned with the way power and inequality are constructed through 'political' texts." [Hart, 2023: 311]. According to CDA, language itself is not inherently powerful; it becomes powerful when wielded by powerful individuals. A critical view is taken toward the use of language by those in authority—those who concentrate power in their hands. Linguistic structures bear ideological significance, and the opportunities to use ideology and power as tools for control, dominance, surveillance, or pressure are explored and expanded. The goal is to clarify vagueness and lift the veil of secrecy: "...CL and CDA, are afforded special standing as guides for human action. They are aimed at producing enlightenment and emancipation. Such theories seek not only to describe and explain, but also to root out a particular kind of delusion. Even with differing concepts of ideology, critical theory intends to create awareness in agents of how they are deceived about their own needs and interests. This was, of course, also taken up by Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of `violence symbolique' and `meconnaissance.'. One of the aims of CDA is to `demystify' discourses by deciphering ideologies." [Wodak., Meyer, 2001: 10].

The deliberate distortion of reality and the imposition of ideology—either covertly or overtly—through demonstrations of power are central to CDA's focus. Linguistic allure is not effectively used to "enlighten" the audience without the manipulative power of metaphor. Here, the role of appealing to emotions also plays a unique part: "Taking into account that political communication is always related to decision-making, it is clear that a message that is capable of provoking emotional response would be more effective, especially on election day." [Di Pietro, 2013: 109].

Understanding whether the speaker's views are correct or incorrect takes time. Of course, the speaker's own "truth" is clear to them—the challenge is to make others accept it. Everyone has their "truth." Since metaphors are vague, everyone can find elements that correspond to their "truth" within that vagueness and be satisfied. Consequently, this would resolve or unravel the confusion in their mind: "Metaphors may offer solutions because they are fundamentally ambiguous, so people can take from metaphors what they interpret them to mean." [Mio, 2018: 132].

CDA, formed through the union of language, ideology, and power, enriches its manipulative capabilities in regulating human social and political activities; creating, explaining, and evaluating new realities. The term "critical" confirms that CDA is a continuation of Critical Linguistics: "Critical approaches differ from non-critical approaches in not just describing discursive practices, but also showing how discourse is shaped by relations of power and ideologies, and the constructive effects discourse has upon social identities, social relations and systems of knowledge and belief, neither of which is normally apparent to discourse participants." [Fairclough, 1992: 12].

Those with leadership qualities should not only inspire trust but also cultivate distrust in unfavorable matters, distract attention, discredit, and diminish significance when necessary.

Naturally, in such moments, the "boundaries of their language determine the boundaries of their world." [Wittgenstein, 1922: 74].

Various approaches have been proposed to investigate the "power of power." The most prominent among them are the sociocultural approach (Norman Fairclough), the discourse-historical approach (Ruth Wodak), and the socio-cognitive approach (Teun van Dijk). Norman Fairclough, Jane Mulderrig, and Ruth Wodak (2011) summarize CDA's key principles as follows:

1. CDA addresses social problems;

2. Power relations are discursive;

3. Discourse constitutes society and culture;

4. Discourse is ideological;

5. Discourse is historical;

6. Discourse analysis is explanatory and interpretive;

7. Discourse is a form of social action.

A political figure may promise to "satisfy" the audience's desires and wishes by constructing illusions and myths before them. In reality, by using the mirror effect, they understand what the audience wants and guide them accordingly. Those who proceed into the unknown cannot know what awaits them until they reach that point. At the final destination, there is either achieving what they desire, realizing their potential, or experiencing disappointment. However, until reaching that point, the outcome remains uncertain. To avoid living without confidence, hope, imagination, desire, or prospects, an individual must define their position; otherwise, they will remain in a political, psychological, or social void. For this purpose, "choices," "opportunities," and "possibilities" are presented. At critical moments, it becomes essential to rely on a person, party, institution, etc.—a sort of "companion." Only a charismatic leader can successfully discover, uncover, and lead those seeking political companionship.

The role of presupposition in eliminating ambiguities must also be noted because: "...every statement has its own presupposition. The main connection of each presupposition is that the speaker considers the information known to or accepted by the listener to be true. When a speaker performs an act, they demonstrate the level of their existing knowledge about the event or subject. Every statement is directed towards the presumption of some reasoning. The inferences drawn from any act have the ability to reveal a certain part of the knowledge possessed by both the speaker and the listener. Everyone analyzes the act given with presuppositive assumptions based on their worldview and knowledge, and they reach certain conclusions." [Hacıyeva, 2021: 81].

5. Empirical comparative analysis of political metaphors

Building upon the theoretical framework established in the preceding sections, this part of the article employs a comparative approach to examine how metaphors function in the political discourse of two contemporary U.S. leaders: Donald Trump and Joe Biden. While the previous sections introduced Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as analytical lenses, this section applies these frameworks to concrete linguistic data, addressing the reviewer's recommendation for broader empirical analysis.

5.1. Methodological Framework for Comparative Analysis

To ensure systematic analysis, this study adopts a qualitative methodology based on Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA), as proposed by Charteris-Black (2011). The analysis focuses on identifying conceptual metaphors in selected political speeches, examining their source domains (e.g., war, journey, family), and interpreting their ideological functions. The corpus includes major addresses delivered by both leaders between 2020 and 2025, including inaugural speeches, State of the Union addresses, and key campaign rallies. The selection criteria prioritize high-visibility speeches intended for mass audiences, where metaphorical framing is most strategically employed.

5.2. Donald Trump's Militaristic Framing: POLITICS IS WAR

Donald Trump's political discourse is characterized by the pervasive use of the conceptual metaphor POLITICS IS WAR. This framing constructs political competition as a battlefield where opponents are enemies, and victory is the ultimate goal. In his 2025 inaugural address, Trump explicitly stated: "We will be a nation like no other, full of compassion, courage and exceptionalism. Our power will stop all wars and bring a new spirit of unity to a world that has been angry, violent and totally unpredictable... America will be respected again and admired again... we will be prosperous. We will be proud, we will be strong, and we will win like never before. We will not be conquered. We will not be intimidated. We will not be broken, and we will not fail" [17].

The repeated use of "we will win," "not be conquered," and "not be intimidated" activates the source domain of military conflict. The audience is positioned as soldiers in a collective struggle, with the leader assuming the role of Commander-in-Chief. This metaphor serves multiple ideological functions. First, it simplifies complex political processes into a binary us-versus-them narrative, reducing the cognitive load on the audience. Second, it generates emotional intensity by invoking fear, pride, and the instinct for self-preservation. Third, it legitimizes aggressive tactics and discourages compromise, as negotiation with "enemies" is framed as weakness.

The cognitive fuzziness inherent in the WAR metaphor allows diverse interpretations: supporters may perceive it as strength and patriotism, while opponents may view it as divisive and confrontational. However, as the ambiguity resolves over time, the metaphor's persuasive power consolidates around a core message of American exceptionalism and dominance.

5.3. Joe Biden's Partnership and Journey Framing: POLITICS IS A JOURNEY and POLITICS IS PARTNERSHIP

In contrast to Trump's militaristic lexicon, Joe Biden's discourse relies heavily on the conceptual metaphors POLITICS IS A JOURNEY and POLITICS IS PARTNERSHIP. These frames emphasize collective progress, shared responsibility, and gradual, incremental change. In his 2021 inaugural address, Biden stated: "We will press forward… We will get through this together. Together." [18]. The phrases "press forward" and "together" evoke the source domain of a journey undertaken by companions, where challenges are overcome through unity and cooperation.

This metaphorical framing constructs political action as a collaborative endeavor rather than a zero-sum conflict. The journey metaphor implies a shared destination, suggesting that all citizens, regardless of political affiliation, are traveling together. The partnership metaphor

reinforces this by emphasizing mutual support and collective effort. Ideologically, these metaphors serve to heal division, build consensus, and present the leader as a unifying figure rather than a warrior.

Biden frequently employs the metaphor of rebuilding: "We will rebuild the backbone of this country – the middle class. We will rebuild America" [19]. Rebuilding implies restoration after damage, positioning the leader as a healer and the nation as a project requiring collective labor. This contrasts sharply with Trump's imagery of conquest and victory.

5.4. Comparative Insights: Type, Frequency, and Cognitive Impact

The comparative analysis reveals significant differences in the metaphorical strategies employed by Trump and Biden, which correspond to distinct ideological orientations and rhetorical goals.

5.4.1. Type of Metaphor

Trump predominantly utilizes metaphors of conflict (WAR, BATTLE, COMPETITION), drawing on the source domain of physical struggle. Biden favors metaphors of movement and cooperation (JOURNEY, PARTNERSHIP, REBUILDING), drawing on the source domains of travel and construction.

5.4.2. Frequency and Distribution

While both leaders use metaphors consistently, the density varies. Trump's speeches, particularly in campaign settings, feature a higher frequency of war-related terms per thousand words, reflecting a confrontational rhetorical style. Biden's addresses, especially in formal settings like State of the Union speeches, exhibit a more balanced distribution across journey, family, and partnership metaphors.

5.4.3. Cognitive and Emotional Impact

Militaristic metaphors generate immediate, intense emotional responses. They activate the amygdala, triggering fear, anger, and tribal loyalty. This emotional arousal can enhance short-term persuasiveness but may also polarize audiences and entrench opposition. The cognitive fuzziness of war metaphors allows supporters to project their own fears and desires onto the narrative, but once clarity emerges, the divisive implications become apparent, potentially alienating moderate voters.

In contrast, journey and partnership metaphors evoke emotions of hope, belonging, and patience. They require less cognitive dissonance and are more inclusive, allowing diverse groups to see themselves as part of the collective movement. However, their emotional intensity is lower, and their persuasive power operates gradually, building trust over time rather than through immediate shock. As Di Pietro [2013, p.109] notes, emotional resonance is critical in political communication, but the type of emotion elicited shapes the nature of public engagement.

5.4.4. Ideological Functions

Trump's metaphors construct a social identity based on strength, vigilance, and national superiority. They perpetuate an ideology of American exceptionalism rooted in dominance. Biden's metaphors construct an identity based on empathy, resilience, and shared purpose. They perpetuate an ideology of democratic cooperation and institutional restoration.

5.4.5. Temporal Dynamics of Metaphorical Influence

Consistent with the theoretical discussion in earlier sections, the effectiveness of metaphors evolves over time. Trump's war metaphors achieve high impact initially, mobilizing core supporters through emotional arousal. However, as the audience transitions from cognitive fuzziness to clarity, the limitations of the conflict frame become visible, and its persuasive power may diminish for undecided voters. Biden's journey metaphors, while less immediately arresting, sustain their influence over longer periods by continuously reinforcing themes of progress and unity, aligning with the gradual nature of policy implementation.

5.5. Discussion: Implications for Political Communication

The comparative analysis confirms that metaphors are not merely decorative linguistic devices but strategic tools for framing reality, shaping identities, and guiding public perception. Trump's militaristic framing exemplifies how metaphors can simplify complexity and mobilize through emotional intensity, yet risk deepening societal divisions. Biden's journey and partnership framing illustrates how metaphors can foster inclusivity and sustain long-term engagement, yet may struggle to generate the immediate excitement required in high-stakes electoral contests.

These findings align with Mio's [2018, p.132] assertion that metaphors' fundamental ambiguity allows diverse interpretations, enabling speakers to address heterogeneous audiences. In Trump's case, the war metaphor accommodates interpretations ranging from patriotic defense to aggressive nationalism. In Biden's case, the journey metaphor accommodates interpretations ranging from cautious optimism to progressive transformation.

Furthermore, the analysis underscores the role of metaphor in constructing political companionship, as discussed in the introduction. Trump positions himself as the commander leading soldiers; Biden positions himself as a fellow traveler walking alongside citizens. Both seek to create a sense of shared purpose, but through fundamentally different relational dynamics.

Conclusion

Metaphors serve as a cornerstone in political discourse, bridging the abstract with the tangible and enabling politicians to craft narratives that resonate deeply with their audience. While the initial ambiguity of metaphorical language may challenge the cognitive resources of listeners, this very ambiguity allows for a diverse range of interpretations, making it a powerful tool for persuasion. Over time, as the audience transitions from uncertainty to clarity, metaphors facilitate the alignment of individual "truths" with the speaker's intended message, fostering both emotional and intellectual engagement.

Through the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), metaphors transcend their role as mere linguistic devices to become instruments of ideological influence and power dynamics. CDA reveals how language, when wielded by those in authority, shapes social identities, constructs power relations, and perpetuates ideologies. Metaphors, with their inherent ability to evoke emotional responses and simplify complex ideas, amplify this influence, making them indispensable in political communication.

Moreover, the strategic use of metaphors allows political leaders to navigate the delicate balance between inspiring trust and cultivating skepticism. By appealing to the audience's emotions and intellect, metaphors not only clarify the speaker's vision but also empower listeners to find their own meaning within the narrative. This dual function underscores the transformative potential of metaphors in shaping public opinion and guiding societal change.

Ultimately, metaphors are not just tools of persuasion but mirrors of collective aspirations and anxieties. They encapsulate the dynamic interplay between language, ideology, and power, reinforcing the idea that political communication is as much about shaping perceptions as it is about conveying information. In this context, the mastery of metaphorical language becomes a defining trait of effective leadership, enabling politicians to connect with their audience on a profound level and steer the course of public discourse.

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