



METAPHORS IN POLITICAL DISCOURSE: A REVIEW OF SELECTED STUDIES

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Abstract: *The use of metaphors in political discourse is a linguistic strategy that has been used all over the world. Studies on metaphor have therefore been done in various parts of the world. This study reviewed studies on metaphor in political discourse to assess the role metaphor played in political discourse. It aimed to contribute to the field of metaphor in political discourse by reviewing studies done in this field. The study aimed to show that a metaphor as a linguistic tool could be manipulated both for pragmatic and strategic reasons. The showed that metaphors were used to help the voting public to make sense of different political issues and therefore to express their general attitudes towards politics. Further, they helped to make citizens identify with and understand their beliefs and goals for their country. The mapping principle of source and target domains was further used by the politicians to fulfill their persuasive and rhetorical goals in political discourse.*

Key words: *Pragmatics of Metaphor, political discourse, metaphors, Lakoff, conceptual matter, linguistics, Wei, Vestermark, Persian.*

Studies on political discourse have been based on the view that metaphors play a central role in public discourse, particularly political discourse. These studies have argued that metaphors have significant rhetorical and persuasive use in political discourse.

Proponents of cognitive linguistics such as Lakoff proposed that conceiving or thinking is a matter of manipulating unconscious mental imagery so as to let concretely pictured physical objects and situations stand in for the more abstract



objects and situations we are endeavoring to understand [1]. Lakoff held and still hold that a metaphor is a conceptual matter, a matter of thinking of one thing in terms of another. To them, the conceptual metaphor or cross-domain map was a pervasive culture-wide disposition to conceive one fixed sort of thing in terms of another fixed sort of thing. The review therefore identified a word or a phrase as a metaphor if a word or phrase could be understood beyond the literal meaning in the context, the literal meaning stemmed from an area of sensoric or cultural experience, the source area was transferred to a second, often abstract area. Wei took a strong position on the importance and pervasiveness of metaphors used in election rhetoric to express thoughts and influence ideas in Taiwan. She obtained data for the study from newspaper and website coverage of Taiwanese elections of 1997 [2]. The researcher used all these sources to interpret the interactions among voters, readers and campaigners. Using a cognitively and culturally based analytic work as proposed by Lakoff and Quinn, she explored the specific socio-cultural conditions that provided grounds for the new and productive metaphors. The study argued that on the one hand, recent social events and specific cultural contexts gave rise to certain benign metaphors to describe the unique socio-cultural situations of Taiwanese politics. The study provided socio-cultural analysis of specific political metaphors, showing also that the pragmatic functions of metaphors were more than just heuristic or cognitive devices. They were also adopted for strategic reasons.

Wei further argued that Taiwanese political discussions were inherently and inevitably metaphorical. Wei analyzed [3] metaphorical expressions used in the news coverage of Taiwanese political discourse and found that sets of metaphors, such as “marriage,” “show business,” “war,” “weather” and “financial transaction” were used to stress various aspects of Taiwanese elections. Wei further noted that the 1996 presidential and vice-presidential candidates used “war”, “revenge” and “a journey of spiritual awakening” to promote their visibility and propagate political ideals and political ideologies. Tactics and strategies were further incorporated into these metaphors. Among the linguistic strategies used were the use of familiar terms and conventional images to command votes and excite interest.



The study further noted that metaphors could be used to highlight certain aspects of political discourse practice and hide others. They could also help the voting public to make sense of different political issues and to express their general attitudes towards politics. Metaphors thus served both pragmatic and strategic functions in political discourse. The cognitive approach proposed by Lakoff and used by Wei has enabled linguists to study both the universal and the culture specific character of conceptual metaphors. Though conceptual metaphors are based on our basic human experience, we all grow up in different cultural environments. Our unique cultural backgrounds influence our perception of the world and influence our use of metaphors. Wei's study therefore provides a strong ground for the role of socio-cultural situations in the formulation and use of metaphors. A number of scholars have also established that metaphors structure our understanding of political, social and economic issues [4]. The conceptual metaphor "POLITICS IS WAR" for instance, structures the way we think about politics as a battle to be won. We would view politics differently if the metaphor were, for instance "POLITICS IS LOVE." It is therefore not strange that Wei established just as much in her study. Other studies have identified "business" and "war" as the most frequent source domains for politics. Unlike Wei who analyzed metaphorical expressions used in the news coverage of Taiwanese political discourse, Vestermark carried out a study of the metaphorical personification of America in political discourse. She based her analysis on the Cognitive - Semantic Approach originated by Lakoff and Johnson. Her study looked specifically at the personification of America in the first inaugural addresses by Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton and George, W. Bush. She focused on how they used metaphors, how the metaphors could be interpreted and what messages they sent to the receivers. Her method of analysis was therefore to locate the conceptual metaphors mentioned and analyze how a non-human entity was specified as being a human entity and also to account for the probable intention of the speaker [5].

The study was carried out on Persian newspapers published in Iran. The accumulated data were derived randomly from Persian political sections of



newspapers from 2008 to 2011. Using the cognitive view of metaphors, they investigated the different parts of the human body which were borrowed to conceptualize abstract concepts in Persian political texts. To establish the different parts of the human body which were borrowed to conceptualize some abstract concepts in Persian political texts and discussions, the study took as primary the analysis of the use of metaphorical body parts first. They analyzed 160 numbers from 6 different types of different newspapers and derived metaphors from human body parts. They were then translated into English [6]. The frequency of each body part was illuminated. At the end, a frequency table was illustrated based on the accumulated data.

Conclusion

The studies reviewed earlier have shown that a metaphor is a cognitive device and pervades political discourse. In the studies, metaphors were used to propagate political ideals and political ideologies. The studies have also revealed that political discourse has been studied using both Critical Discourse Analysis and Conceptual Metaphor Theory. Features of conceptual sources could however be manipulated for positive rather than negative rhetorical ends. The use of body parts to generate metaphors as used in Persian political texts emphasized the idea that metaphors are generated from body experience but formed by cultural realization. The studies further revealed that metaphors could be used as a face-saving strategy and could conceal vital information. Further, the studies were a convincing proof that scholarly research on metaphors in political discourse was a strong basis for critical analysis of discourse produced by politicians.

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