

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF COGNITIVE METAPHOR IN POLITICAL DISCOURSE

Inatova Barchinoy Nurmat qizi

*Student of Department of English
philology and translation studies*

Samarkand State Institute of Foreign Languages

E-mail: inatovabarchinoy@gmail.com

Abstract: Cognitive metaphor theory has significantly transformed the understanding of metaphor from a rhetorical ornament into a fundamental mechanism of human cognition. Since the publication of “Metaphors we live by” by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, metaphor has been examined as a conceptual structure that shapes thought, perception, and social interaction. Political discourse, which is inherently concerned with power, ideology, and persuasion, relies heavily on metaphorical framing to construct political reality. This article explores the theoretical background of cognitive metaphor in political discourse by examining its philosophical foundations, cognitive mechanisms, and ideological implications. Using qualitative discourse analysis, the study identifies dominant conceptual metaphors structuring political communication and explains their role in shaping political cognition. The findings confirm that metaphors such as POLITICS IS WAR, STATE IS FAMILY and NATION IS A BODY function as cognitive models that influence reasoning and legitimize political authority.

Keywords: *cognitive metaphor, political discourse, conceptual metaphor theory, ideology, framing, discourse analysis.*

Political discourse plays a central role in shaping public consciousness and constructing social reality. Language in politics does not merely describe events but frames them in ways that guide interpretation and evaluation. One of the most

influential theoretical frameworks explaining this phenomenon is conceptual metaphor theory (CMT), developed within cognitive linguistics. The theoretical foundation of CMT was established in “Metaphors we live by” by G. Lakoff and M. Johnson (1980), where metaphor was redefined as a cognitive mechanism rather than a decorative stylistic device.

Traditional rhetoric treated metaphor as a linguistic ornament primarily used in poetry and persuasive speech. However, cognitive linguistics demonstrated that metaphor structures everyday thinking and reasoning. The human conceptual system is fundamentally metaphorical, and abstract domains are understood through more concrete bodily and experiential domains [6, 57]. This insight shifted metaphor studies from literary analysis to cognitive science. Political concepts such as democracy, justice, reform, sovereignty, and power are abstract and complex. In order to make them cognitively accessible, speakers rely on metaphorical mappings. As a result, political discourse becomes a domain where metaphor is not optional but necessary for meaning construction.

This study employs qualitative discourse analysis grounded in conceptual metaphor theory and elements of critical discourse analysis. The theoretical basis for discourse and power relations follows the work of Norman Fairclough, who argues that discourse both reflects and constructs social reality [2, 87]. The data consist of selected examples from English-language political speeches and media discourse.

The analytical procedure involved identifying metaphorical expressions, reconstructing their underlying conceptual mappings, and interpreting their ideological implications. Conceptual metaphors were analyzed according to the principle that a source domain structures a target domain through systematic correspondences [6, 8]. The research focuses on explanatory depth rather than quantitative measurement.

The analysis demonstrates that political discourse systematically relies on recurring conceptual metaphors that structure political reasoning and ideological representation.

One of the most dominant metaphors is POLITICS IS WAR. Political actors frequently “attack opponents,” “defend positions,” “win battles,” and “fight for votes.” This mapping transfers the structure of war, including enemies, strategies, victories, and defeats, onto political competition. Such framing encourages adversarial thinking and legitimizes confrontation. Political framing activates cognitive models that influence political understanding [4, 26].

Another prominent metaphor is STATE IS A FAMILY. In this model, the nation is conceptualized as a family unit, and political leaders are represented as parental figures responsible for guidance and protection. Lakoff’s moral politics framework distinguishes between the “strict father” and “nurturant parent” models, demonstrating how family metaphor’s structure ideological divisions [5, 34]. This metaphor connects governance with morality and authority.

The metaphor NATION IS A BODY is also widespread in political rhetoric. Expressions such as “economic health,” “social illness,” and “political paralysis” illustrate how bodily experience structure’s national identity. Bodily experience forms the foundation of abstract reasoning and conceptualization [3, 15]. By conceptualizing the nation as a body, political problems are framed as diseases requiring treatment. By conceptualizing the nation as a body, political problems are framed as diseases requiring treatment.

The dominant conceptual metaphors identified in the study are summarized below:

Source domain	Target domain	Example expressions	Idiological function
War	Politics	attack opponents, defend strategy	promotes conflict-based thinking
Family	State	father of the nation, protect our children	justifies hierarchy and moral authority
Body	Nation	economic health, political paralysis	naturalizes political conditions

The theoretical significance of cognitive metaphor in political discourse lies in its capacity to explain ideological framing. Metaphors highlight certain aspects of

reality while concealing others. G. Lakoff and M. Johnson emphasize that metaphorical mappings are partial and selective, shaping how individuals perceive complex phenomena.

The WAR metaphor foregrounds competition and hostility while marginalizing cooperation. The FAMILY metaphor legitimizes authority and moral hierarchy. The BODY metaphor naturalizes political crises by presenting them as biological processes.

From a critical perspective, discourse is a site of power. Fairclough argues that language contributes to the maintenance of social structures and ideological dominance. Metaphors play a crucial role in this process because they operate at a cognitive level that often escapes conscious awareness. Metaphor analysis reveals persuasive strategies embedded in political language [1, 22].

Cognitive metaphor theory demonstrates that political persuasion is not solely rational but deeply conceptual and embodied. Because metaphor's structure thought patterns, they influence how citizens interpret policies, evaluate leaders, and form political judgments.

The theoretical background of cognitive metaphor in political discourse is firmly rooted in Conceptual Metaphor Theory, which reconceptualized metaphor as a cognitive phenomenon shaping human understanding. Political discourse depends on systematic conceptual metaphors to structure abstract ideas and makes them persuasive.

Metaphors such as POLITICS IS WAR, STATE IS A FAMILY, NATION IS A BODY function as cognitive frameworks that influence ideological interpretation and legitimize political authority. Understanding these metaphorical structures provides valuable insight into how political language shapes social reality.

References

1. Charteris-Black J. Corpus approaches to critical metaphor analysis. – London: Palgrave Macmillan. 2004. – 278 p.

2. Fairclough N. Critical discourse analysis. – London: Longman. 1995. – 280 p.
3. Johnson M. The body in the mind. – Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1987. – 230 p.
4. Lakoff G. Don't think of an elephant! – Chelsea: Green Publishing. 2004. – 216 p.
5. Lakoff G. Moral politics. – Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1996. – 413 p.
6. Lakoff G., Johnson M. Metaphors we live by. – Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1980. – 242 p.