

The function of metaphor as a stylistic and rhetorical tool in contemporary English media

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Annotation: *This article investigates metaphor as a stylistic and rhetorical device in contemporary English media, focusing on its role in expressing, evaluating, and narrating complex realities. The emphasis is on metaphor's stylistic functions in shaping perception, evoking emotion, and constructing ideological framings. Drawing on examples from political, economic, and environmental journalism, the study demonstrates how metaphor interacts with other devices such as hyperbole and irony to structure media narratives. By highlighting metaphor's expressive and persuasive capacity, the article underscores its significance in modern media discourse.*

Keywords: *metaphor, stylistic devices, media discourse, rhetoric, framing, emotion, journalism, war metaphors, evaluative language, political communication*

Функция метафоры как стилистического и риторического средства в современном английском медиа-дискурсе

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Аннотация: *Эта статья исследует метафору как стилистическое и риторическое средство в современном английском медиа, акцентируя внимание на ее роли в выражении, оценке и повествовании сложных реалий. Основное внимание уделяется стилистическим функциям метафоры в формировании восприятия, вызове эмоций и создании идеологических конструкций. Опираясь на примеры из политической, экономической и экологической журналистики, исследование демонстрирует, как метафора взаимодействует с другими средствами, такими как гипербола и ирония, для построения медийных нарративов. Подчеркивая выразительную и убедительную способность метафоры, статья подчеркивает ее значимость в современном медиа-дискурсе.*

Ключевые слова: *Метафора, стилистические средства, медиа-дискурс, риторика, фрейминг, эмоция, журналистика, военные метафоры, оценочный язык, политическая коммуникация*

Metaforaning zamonaviy ingliz OAVda uslubiy va ritorik vosita sifatidagi funksiyasi

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Annotatsiya: Ushbu maqola zamonaviy ingliz ommaviy axborot vositalarida metaforani stilistik va ritorik vosita sifatida o'rganadi, uning murakkab voqeliklarni bayon etish, baholash va hikoya qilishdagi roliga diqqat qaratadi. Metaforaning idrokni shakllantirish, his-tuyg'ularni uyg'otish va mafkuraviy talqinlarni qurishdagi uslubiy vazifalariga alohida e'tibor qaratilgan. Siyosiy, iqtisodiy va ekologik jurnalistikadan olingan misollarni tahlil qilgan holda, tadqiqot metaforaning mubolag'a va kinoya kabi boshqa uslubiy vositalar bilan qanday o'zaro ta'sir qilishini va media narrativlarini qanday shakllantirishini ko'rsatadi. Metaforaning ifodaviy va ishontiruvchi salohiyatini ta'kidlab, maqola uning zamonaviy media-diskursdagi ahamiyatini ajratib ko'rsatadi.

Kalit so'zlar: Metafora, uslubiy vositalar, OAV nutqi, ritorika, talqin etish, emotsiya, jurnalistika, urush metaforalari, subyektiv til vositalari, siyosiy aloqa.

Introduction

Metaphors have long been an essential tool in language, offering more than just vivid imagery – they shape how we understand the world around us. In contemporary English media, metaphors are not only stylistic devices but also powerful rhetorical instruments that influence public opinion, frame social issues, and construct ideological narratives. From the portrayal of political conflicts to environmental crises, metaphors provide a lens through which complex realities are simplified, dramatized, and, at times, manipulated. Metaphors are intricately woven into the fabric of news stories, subtly guiding thought and emotion in the modern world, often transcending the rational to evoke a deeper, emotional response from audiences.

Metaphor remains one of the most versatile tools in language, particularly within journalistic and public discourse. While conceptual metaphor theory has emphasized the cognitive function of metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Kövecses, 2010), the focus here is on its stylistic operation. In media discourse, metaphor is not just embellishment but a rhetorical tool used to shape interpretation, convey emotion, and influence judgment. As Leech and Short (2007) suggest, stylistic devices such as metaphor play a crucial role in shaping how texts are received, particularly in formats like headlines where brevity and impact are key.

This rhetorical power stems from metaphor's ability to condense complex or abstract issues into tangible, vivid imagery. Political negotiations likened to a "chess match" offer readers an immediate conceptual schema involving tactics and calculated risk. Musurmanova and Kirgizbayeva (2019) argue that metaphors intensify meaning by activating background knowledge, enhancing communicative economy and stylistic vividness. Metaphor is a form of conceptualization, a cognitive process that generates and shapes new knowledge. It allows for the projection of familiar knowledge structures onto new, abstract domains. Ortony (1993) similarly notes that metaphor achieves representational efficiency by mapping multiple dimensions of meaning onto a single linguistic form.

The metaphor's evocative force is particularly striking in the realm of economic journalism, where it serves not just as a tool for communication but also as a catalyst for emotional engagement. Phrases such as "market meltdown" or "fiscal cliff" do not merely report on economic events or

trends; instead, they imbue them with dramatic intensity, transforming what might otherwise be considered dry, factual content into something much more visceral and engaging. These metaphors go beyond the mere exchange of information by turning complex financial phenomena into experiences that resonate emotionally with the reader. They shape the way the audience perceives and reacts to events by tapping into familiar, often alarming imagery. For instance, the metaphor of a “meltdown” invokes images of destruction and uncontrollability, creating a sense of immediate danger and fear. Similarly, the “fiscal cliff” metaphor suggests an impending fall or catastrophe, fostering a sense of impending doom. This vivid, dramatic language is particularly powerful because it appeals to both the rational mind and the emotional intuition of the reader.

Malyuga et al. (2020) delve into how metaphors of destruction and danger, such as these, amplify the sense of urgency surrounding economic crises or policy decisions, making them seem more immediate and consequential than they might otherwise appear. By invoking the language of catastrophe, journalists can heighten the reader’s sense of emotional urgency, influencing not just how they understand the issue at hand but also how they feel about it. This is in line with the work of Knowles and Moon (2006), who argue that metaphors do more than simply convey information – they bridge the gap between rational discourse and emotional intuition. In this way, metaphors function as powerful rhetorical devices that both inform and evoke, making economic issues not only intellectually engaging but also emotionally compelling. Through their evocative force, these metaphors shape public perception, framing economic events as not merely matters of policy but as dramatic, life-altering events that demand attention and action.

Such emotional compression is particularly striking in the world of journalistic headlines, where space limitations require a sharp focus on maximum impact. In this condensed format, expressions like “tax tsunami” or “Brexit bombshell” serve more than just an informative purpose – they actively shape the reader’s interpretation from the moment they encounter the headline. These metaphors do not merely offer a snapshot of the event; they immediately frame how the reader should understand and emotionally respond to it. By invoking dramatic imagery, these phrases prepare the reader for the forthcoming narrative, influencing the interpretation of facts even before they are presented. Beard (2000) highlights the ideological function of such metaphorical framing, particularly in political journalism, where headlines often carry a distinct ideological weight. Political metaphors in headlines can subtly reinforce partisan or cultural viewpoints, steering readers toward specific interpretations that align with certain political or social perspectives.

Stern (2000) builds on this by emphasizing that metaphors in headlines are far from mere decorative devices. Rather, they serve as powerful framing mechanisms that influence the cognitive pathways through which readers engage with the article. These metaphors act as interpretive shortcuts, guiding the reader’s understanding of the issue by narrowing down the range of possible interpretations. As such, they are not optional flourishes but essential components of journalistic discourse, shaping the reader’s experience and emotional response right from the outset.

Beyond individual headlines, extended metaphorical systems often play a critical role in structuring content throughout full-length articles. For example, election coverage is frequently framed as a “race,” with terms like “front-runners,” “dark horses,” and “photo finishes” creating a narrative rhythm that readers can follow intuitively. This extended metaphor not only provides a cohesive structure for the content but also shapes the emotional tone of the article, making the political contest seem like a thrilling, high-stakes event. Charteris-Black (2004) underscores the role of metaphor in providing cohesion across otherwise fragmented content, especially in complex or multifaceted issues like political campaigns. Through metaphor, journalists create a unifying thematic logic that helps guide the reader’s cognitive processing, ensuring that the story remains coherent and emotionally engaging. This overarching metaphorical framework ensures that readers are not only able to follow the facts but also become emotionally invested in the narrative, fostering a deeper connection to the content.

Metaphors also merge effectively with other stylistic figures like hyperbole. Describing fragile peace talks as “a dance on a minefield” combines elegance with existential threat, expanding semantic range and emotional complexity. Semino (2008) notes that layered metaphorical expressions allow for nuanced readings, while Glucksberg and Keysar (1990) suggest that the interpretive power of metaphor lies in emergent, rather than fixed, similarities.

Editorial writing leverages metaphor for evaluative expression, allowing writers to embed opinion within ostensibly neutral reporting. Phrases like “economic amputation” or “social cancer” invoke pain and moral crisis. Simpson (2004) identifies such metaphors as vehicles for ideological messaging, especially in persuasive discourse. The early empirical work by Ortony, Reynolds, and Arter (1978) confirms that metaphor is inherently judgmental, influencing attitudes through imaginative framing. Ashurova and Galieva (2024) emphasize that inference plays a crucial role in metaphor comprehension, allowing individuals to dynamically reconstruct meaning based on prior knowledge and context.

In the political domain, metaphor constructs identity as much as it conveys information. Leaders may be dubbed “bulldozers” to connote strength or “puppets” to suggest manipulation. Caldas-Coulthard and Moon (2010) argue that these labels operate semiotically, shaping public perception through culturally resonant imagery. Ritchie (2013) emphasizes that metaphorical identity framing often relies on archetypal associations rather than descriptive accuracy.

Even conventional metaphors retain stylistic potency due to their emotional familiarity. Terms like “economic crash” continue to guide reader interpretation despite their ubiquity. Stockwell (2002) posits that repeated metaphorical patterns reinforce schema-based processing, ensuring quick understanding while maintaining affective salience.

This adaptability extends to genre and register. In tech reviews, calling a smartphone “a beast” connotes power and performance in a casual, engaging tone. Crystal (2008) notes that metaphor’s elasticity allows it to function across formal and informal registers. Ritchie (2013) supports this view, suggesting that metaphor’s stylistic value lies in its contextual adaptability.

In environmental reporting, metaphor aids in translating scientific abstraction into digestible public narratives. Concepts like “carbon footprint” or “greenhouse effect” simplify causality and personalize responsibility. Widdowson (1992) identifies this educational role as a key stylistic function. Semino and Demjén (2017) further argue that such metaphors can foster action by emotionally anchoring abstract threats.

Crisis coverage frequently employs war metaphors, transforming environmental, economic, or health-related challenges into existential battles. Phrases like “the war on climate change” or “economic frontline” frame issues as urgent and binary. Kövecses (2002) explains that war metaphors are persuasive due to their grounding in bodily experience and cultural resonance, not because they arise from specialized cognitive domains as conceptual metaphor theory might suggest.

Complementing these are sports metaphors, which render policy decisions dynamic and relatable. Words like “game-changer”, “score”, or “own goal” translate institutional action into individual performance. Gómez-Moreno and Ibáñez (2022) claim that such metaphors offer narrative accessibility, appealing to shared cultural touchstones and enhancing the text’s emotional cadence.

Journalistic storytelling often mirrors literary structure through metaphor. Investigative reporting framed as a “whodunit” engages readers by invoking the familiar logic of mystery and resolution. Kövecses (2005) argues that these metaphors function as macro-schematic organizers, making abstract political or legal narratives more intuitively navigable. Conceptual integration involves the interaction of two or more conceptual structures (domains), resulting in the emergence of new conceptual meanings that go beyond the original input spaces.

Beyond structure, metaphor can serve ideology through subtle representation. Calling asylum seekers a “flood” or “wave” invokes natural disaster imagery, erasing individuality and implying threat. Antonova (2014) warns that such metaphors encode bias while maintaining a facade of

objectivity. Knowles and Moon (2006) concur that metaphors often operate covertly, steering interpretation beneath the surface of journalistic neutrality.

The repeated use of stylistic metaphors in media discourse contributes significantly to processes of language change. As Geeraerts (2006) demonstrates, metaphors often shift from markers of stylistic innovation to elements of lexical convention, thereby facilitating semantic drift and enabling the emergence of new conceptual categories. In this regard, the media functions as a catalyst: through frequent and contextually reinforced metaphorical expressions, it accelerates the entrenchment of figurative language into everyday usage. Once-novel metaphors gradually become normalized, their original rhetorical force diminished but their conceptual impact embedded in common parlance.

This evolution is not purely linguistic – it is also ideological. As metaphors become entrenched in media discourse, they reflect and simultaneously shape dominant cultural narratives. Stern (2000) characterizes metaphor as both a mirror and a mold: it captures prevailing social values while also guiding public perception and consensus. In a similar vein, Ortony (1993) highlights metaphor’s mediating function between cognition and communication, suggesting that metaphors do not simply illustrate thought but actively structure it. Accordingly, metaphor operates not only as a stylistic resource but as a discursive mechanism through which ideology is circulated, contested, and maintained.

Across disciplines, metaphor forms rhetorical infrastructure in public discourse. Its strategic deployment enables clarity, persuasion, and emotional resonance. Littlemore and Taylor (2014) describe metaphor’s interdisciplinary utility as a connective thread in political, educational, and cultural texts.

Furthermore, metaphor modulates emotional tone. For instance, calling a policy failure a “collapse” implies systemic breakdown, while “hiccup” suggests minor error. Glucksberg and Keysar (1990) emphasize that such subtle shifts in metaphorical language guide reader affect more powerfully than literal descriptors.

Nonetheless, journalists must remain attentive to metaphor’s cultural specificity. While spatial metaphors like “up is good” are relatively universal, others are highly context-dependent. Kövecses (2005) warns that uncritical use can obscure or misrepresent meaning in cross-cultural contexts, risking miscommunication. Ashurova and Galieva (2024) note that while some metaphors are grounded in universal cognitive experience, others are shaped by specific sociocultural contexts, which affects their interpretation across audiences.

Conclusion

Metaphor operates as a stylistic linchpin in contemporary English media, performing a multiplicity of roles – from simplifying complex issues to activating emotion and subtly encoding ideology. It bridges cognitive understanding and stylistic ingenuity, helping readers navigate information through familiar imagery and emotional cues. As demonstrated, metaphors in headlines, editorials, and news articles contribute not only to aesthetic value but to the structuring of public thought. Their interactions with hyperbole, irony, and cultural schemas deepen their interpretative power. The integration of metaphor with narrative and ideological framing confirms its indispensable function in shaping journalistic discourse. Moving forward, a critical awareness of metaphor’s rhetorical force is essential, not only for media practitioners but also for readers and researchers engaging with the dynamic landscape of mediated communication.

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