Conceptual metaphors in political discourse: cognitive framing and ideological functions

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Annotation   *This article explores how conceptual metaphors shape political discourse and influence public perception. Drawing on Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the study analyzes how abstract political ideas are made accessible through concrete, familiar imagery. Using examples from media texts, the article shows how metaphors act as powerful framing tools that promote specific ideologies while marginalizing others. Particular attention is given to recurring metaphors such as "war," "family," and "machine," which are deeply embedded in political language and shape how audiences understand complex issues like governance, immigration, or economic reform. The article also highlights cross-cultural patterns, focusing not only on Western discourse but also on contexts including Uzbekistan. These metaphorical frameworks reveal how language can be used to legitimize political agendas and foster emotional resonance with the public. Ultimately, the article argues that analyzing political metaphors is essential to understanding the subtle mechanisms of persuasion, ideological influence, and political communication in today's media-saturated world.*

Keywords   *Conceptual metaphors, political discourse, cognitive framing, ideology, critical discourse analysis*

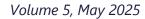# Концептуальные метафоры в политическом дискурсе: когнитивное фреймирование и идеологические функции

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Аннотация   *В данной статье рассматривается, как концептуальные метафоры формируют политический дискурс и влияют на общественное сознание. Автор использует методы концептуальной метафоры (CMT) и критического дискурс-анализа (CDA), чтобы проанализировать, как абстрактные политические идеи превращаются в понятные и наглядные образы в сознании аудитории. На материале медиатекстов показано, как метафоры создают рамки восприятия, укрепляют определённые идеологии и скрывают альтернативные точки зрения. Особое внимание уделяется тому, как метафоры вроде "войны", "семьи" или "машины" внедряются в массовое сознание через СМИ и политическую риторику. Примеры из англоязычного и, в том числе Узбекистана, демонстрируют универсальность и культурную специфику подобных фреймов. Работа подчёркивает, что метафоры – это не просто*

украшения речи, а важные когнитивные инструменты, которые структурируют реальность. Анализ политических метафор помогает глубже понять механизмы манипуляции, идеологического влияния и политической мобилизации через язык.

Ключевые слова *Концептуальные метафоры, политический дискурс, когнитивное фреймирование, идеология, критический дискурс-анализ*

Siyosiy diskursda konseptual metaforalar: kognitiv freyming va ideologik funksiyalar

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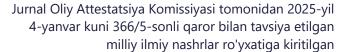
Annotatsiya *Ushbu maqola siyosiy diskursda konseptual metaforalarning rolini tahlil qiladi va ular jamiyat tafakkuriga qanday ta'sir qilishini ochib beradi. Tadqiqot Konseptual metafora nazariyasi (CMT) hamda Tanqidiy diskurs tahlili (CDA) metodlariga asoslanib, siyosiy g'oyalar qanday qilib tushunarli va obrazli shaklda ifodalanishini ko'rsatadi. Maqolada media matnlaridan olingan misollar orqali "urush", "oila" va "mashina" kabi metaforalar qanday qilib siyosiy reallikni shakllantirishda ishlatilishi tahlil qilinadi. Ayniqsa, bu metaforalar orqali jamiyat ongiga ideologik g'oyalar qanday singdirilishi alohida ko'rsatilgan. Tadqiqot G'arb matbuoti bilan bir qatorda O'zbekistondagi siyosiy nutqlarda ham bunday metaforik andozalarning mavjudligini ko'rsatadi. Metaforalar tilning oddiy iboralari emas, balki ijtimoiy ongni boshqarishga qodir kuchli kognitiv vositalardir. Ushbu maqola siyosiy metaforalarni tahlil qilish orqali til orqali amalga oshiriladigan manipulyatsiya va mafkuraviy ta'sirni chuqurroq anglashga yordam beradi.*

Kalit so'zlar *Konseptual metaforalar, siyosiy diskurs, kognitiv freyming, ideologiya, tanqidiy diskurs tahlili*

Journalists, philosophers, sociologists, cognitive scientists, and linguists have long recognized the importance of metaphor in political discourse. Metaphor is more than just a stylistic device or decorative element in political language. It functions as a powerful cognitive and rhetorical tool used to clarify complex ideas, shape public opinion, and sustain ideologies. Political metaphors abound in media texts, and some of these expressions have become so conventional that their figurative nature is often unnoticed. Nevertheless, metaphors act as cognitive scaffolding that structures societal perceptions of controversial issues such as immigration, economic reform, and national security (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Beyond being mere linguistic conventions, political metaphors actively construct reality by promoting certain ideologies and power relations. In order to unravel how this works,

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frameworks such as Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) have been widely applied in analyses of political media texts (Charteris-Black, 2004; Fairclough, 2001).

What makes metaphors uniquely potent in politics is their ability to bypass rational scrutiny. Unlike explicit arguments, which invite counterarguments, metaphors seep into public consciousness almost unnoticed, framing issues in ways that feel intuitive rather than contested. For example, describing a nation as a "family" implies hierarchy and paternalistic authority, naturalizing top-down governance. Similarly, framing economic inequality as a "gap" suggests it can be "bridged" through incremental reform, subtly discouraging radical systemic critique. These metaphors don't just describe reality – they prescribe how we ought to respond to it.

It is also important to recognize that these frameworks, although developed mostly in Western academic traditions, have been successfully applied in different sociopolitical contexts, including post-Soviet regions such as Uzbekistan and Russia. For instance, Uzbek linguist T. Karimova (2017) demonstrates how metaphors of "national home" and "renewal journey" were used in official speeches to legitimize post-independence reforms and reinforce a sense of unity and progress. Similar patterns were found in Russian political discourse, where metaphors like "the strong state" or "Russia rising from its knees" evoke powerful emotional associations and historical narratives, often resonating with collective memory of past hardships (Prokhorov, 2015).

The groundbreaking work Metaphors We Live By by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) marked a turning point in metaphor studies. They argued that metaphor is not just a matter of language but of thought. Their Conceptual Metaphor Theory introduced the notion of mapping abstract concepts (target domains) onto more concrete experiences (source domains). For example, people understand abstract political concepts like governance, democracy, or freedom through tangible schemas such as war, family, or journey. Metaphors like "attacking the opposition" or "defending policy positions" stem from the pervasive conceptual metaphor "politics is war" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Similarly, the phrase "tax relief" frames taxes negatively, portraying them as a burden from which citizens need to be rescued, thereby implicitly aligning with small-government ideology (Lakoff, 1996). When a recession is framed as a "storm," it implies that the event is an uncontrollable natural disaster, deflecting responsibility from policymakers. These examples illustrate how metaphors subtly embed ideological positions in everyday discourse (Musolff, 2016).

The longevity of certain metaphors reveals their cultural entrenchment. Consider how "war" metaphors persist across contexts – whether in "wars" on poverty, drugs, or terror. This framing justifies extraordinary measures, from budget reallocations to civil liberties restrictions, by invoking an existential threat. Yet alternative metaphors, like "public health approaches" to drug policy, remain marginal unless they align with dominant power structures. The metaphors that stick are rarely neutral; they're the ones that serve entrenched interests.

Other scholars expanded this foundation. Kövecses (2002) explored the universality and cultural variation of metaphors, showing how certain metaphorical patterns recur across different societies but with culturally specific nuances. Musolff (2016) emphasized the role of discourse scenarios – recurring metaphorical narratives that structure public debates. Meanwhile, Charteris-Black (2004, 2005) advanced the field by proposing Critical Metaphor Analysis, a methodological approach combining CMT and CDA to expose ideological functions of metaphor in political texts.

According to Charteris-Black (2005), metaphors are persuasive because they frame issues in ways that seem natural and commonsensical to audiences, which makes them resistant to scrutiny.

The language of the media is rarely neutral. As Fairclough (2001) notes, media discourse is often a site of "ideological work" where language is used not only to inform but also to shape attitudes and beliefs. Metaphors thus become ideological vehicles. One of the clearest examples is the metaphor of immigration as a natural disaster: "waves of migrants," "refugee floods," or "immigration storms." Although seemingly descriptive, such expressions carry evaluative implications and evoke images of uncontrollable threat (Van Dijk, 1998). Over time, as these metaphors are repeated in various media outlets, audiences internalize them and adopt the associated frames. Another common example is the "economy is a machine" metaphor, where policymakers refer to actions like "kickstarting the economy," "fueling growth," or "putting the brakes on inflation." Such metaphors imply that the economy is a controllable and mechanical entity, favoring technocratic management approaches (Charteris-Black, 2004).

Less examined are the metaphors that fail to take hold. For instance, progressive attempts to reframe taxes as "membership fees" for a functioning society or climate action as "planetary stewardship" often struggle against more visceral, fear-driven frames. This asymmetry highlights how power shapes metaphor adoption: well-resourced actors (governments, corporations, media conglomerates) can saturate public discourse with their preferred frames, while grassroots movements must overcome inertia to popularize alternatives.
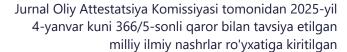
In addition to verbal and visual metaphors, the rise of social media platforms has expanded the landscape of political metaphor usage. As Zappavigna (2012) emphasizes, social media discourse introduces new patterns of interpersonal meaning-making, where hashtags, slogans, and memes function as condensed carriers of ideological metaphors. For example, the hashtag #BuildTheWall, widely circulated in U.S. political discourse, encapsulates a metaphor of the nation as a bounded space threatened by external invasion, aligning with Lakoff's (1996) conceptualization of nation as "home" metaphors. Similarly, slogans like "Drain the Swamp" metaphorically frame political reform as the cleansing of a contaminated ecosystem, casting opponents as corrupt entities. These brief, repeatable expressions exploit metaphor's cognitive economy – allowing complex political stances to be communicated rapidly and memorably.

More recently, media coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic introduced new metaphorical framings. Headlines such as "the war against the virus" or "vaccines as weapons" used militarized metaphors to justify emergency measures and rally public support (Semino, 2021). Likewise, inflation described as "overheating" implied a machine malfunction, implicitly endorsing technocratic interventions. These metaphors are not only descriptive but also persuasive strategies, and their constant repetition in 24-hour media cycles amplifies their impact (Musolff, 2016).

The pandemic also exposed how metaphor choices have real-world consequences. Framing COVID as a "war" encouraged compliance but also legitimized surveillance and punitive measures. Conversely, metaphors of "solidarity" or "shared vulnerability" promoted collective responsibility. This duality underscores that metaphors aren't merely rhetorical flourishes – they're ethical choices with material effects.

Understanding how metaphors operate in political media texts requires more than simply noticing figurative language. Both scholars and ordinary readers often overlook metaphors that

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have become deeply conventionalized. To address this issue, various methodological approaches have been developed for systematically identifying and analyzing metaphorical expressions. One of the most widely used methods is the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) proposed by the Pragglejaz Group (2007). MIP compares a word's basic, historically earlier meaning with its contextual meaning to determine metaphorical use. For example, if the word "flood" usually refers to water overflow but is used to describe a "flood of migrants," it is likely a metaphor. Although MIP offers a systematic procedure, it also has limitations. As Kövecses (2002) noted, cultural familiarity influences interpretation. In regions where wildfires are common, describing protests as a "wildfire" might not always be perceived metaphorically. Nevertheless, MIP remains a valuable tool, particularly when analyzing political texts where metaphors carry hidden ideological meanings.

Metaphors in media discourse rarely appear in isolation. As Musolff (2016) observes, they are often part of broader conceptual scenarios that include assumptions about agency, risk, control, and responsibility. For instance, the European Union may be metaphorically framed as a "house" that risks collapsing or as a "ship" navigating stormy seas. Identifying such patterns requires attention to linguistic regularities, for which corpus-based techniques can be beneficial (Partington et al., 2013). Additionally, Critical Discourse Analysis frameworks, particularly those developed by Fairclough (2001) and Van Dijk (1998), offer valuable tools for situating metaphor within its broader social and political contexts. CDA highlights how language both reflects and reproduces power relations. For example, describing economic reform as "surgery" suggests precision and necessity but also risk and pain, framing austerity policies as responsible, though unpleasant, management.

CDA encourages researchers to ask who benefits from such metaphors, whose perspective is promoted, and which alternatives are excluded (Wodak & Meyer, 2009).

One understudied area is the role of silence in metaphorical framing. What happens when certain metaphors are absent? For example, corporate media rarely frame labor strikes as "demands for fairness," instead preferring "disruptions" or "threats to stability." These omissions are as ideologically charged as the metaphors themselves, naturalizing some perspectives while marginalizing others.

The affordances of digital communication platforms – brevity, interactivity, and virality – amplify the persuasive potential of metaphors. According to Bounegru and Forceville (2011), multimodal metaphors in digital news media and social networks rely heavily on the interplay between text and image, which enhances emotional engagement and ideological alignment. For instance, during the 2016 Brexit referendum, visual metaphors such as images of a sinking ship or breaking chains circulated widely, framing the EU departure as liberation or disaster, depending on the political stance (Charteris-Black, 2019). Such visual-verbal pairings shape public understanding far more viscerally than text alone.

Moreover, the increasing accessibility of corpus linguistics tools enables researchers to track metaphorical patterns across vast quantities of media data. As Baker et al. (2008) demonstrate, corpus-assisted discourse studies (CADS) can reveal diachronic trends and collocational patterns that signal metaphor entrenchment in political narratives. For example, Baker et al.'s (2008) analysis of UK newspaper discourse on refugees identified persistent metaphors of burden and invasion, indicating stable framing strategies over time. Corpus tools like AntConc and large datasets such as the British National Corpus (BNC) or the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) provide

robust empirical foundations for metaphor identification, enhancing methodological rigor (McEnery & Hardie, 2012).

Finally, contemporary metaphor research increasingly recognizes the importance of audience reception and resistance. While much of early CMT emphasized how metaphors structure thought unconsciously, scholars such as Cameron and Maslen (2010) highlight that audiences are not passive recipients. Their Discourse Dynamics Approach to Metaphor emphasizes the interactional, negotiated, and sometimes contested nature of metaphor use in real-life dialogues. This perspective encourages scholars to investigate not only how metaphors are produced in political media texts but also how they are interpreted, appropriated, or rejected by diverse audiences. For example, in online comment sections or social media threads, users often subvert dominant metaphors through irony, parody, or counter-metaphors – a phenomenon that deserves greater scholarly attention in an era of participatory media (Wiggins & Bowers, 2015).

Consider how activists repurpose metaphors: climate protestors adopt "house on fire" to urgency, flipping the script on incrementalist policymakers. These acts of linguistic resistance reveal metaphor as a battleground, not just a tool of domination. Future research could explore how marginalized groups reclaim or reinvent metaphors to challenge hegemony.

As media texts increasingly blend verbal and visual elements, multimodal approaches have gained prominence. Visual metaphors frequently reinforce or extend verbal ones, as seen in political cartoons, memes, infographics, and headlines. According to Forceville (2017), visual metaphors play a crucial role in shaping political attitudes, particularly in digital communication where emotional resonance often overrides rational argumentation. Recent developments in the analysis of political metaphors have also seen the inclusion of cultural and regional perspectives. The role of metaphor in shaping national discourse is important across various regions, including Central Asia. While the specific use of metaphors in Uzbek media discourse has not been as extensively explored in the literature, research into political communication within the region suggests that metaphors related to migration, security, and economic issues are prevalent, reflecting national concerns and ideological trends. For instance, metaphors used in the framing of national security often draw from imagery of control, danger, and fortification, illustrating the way in which language shapes public perceptions of stability and threat. Similarly, economic reforms are frequently discussed using metaphors of growth and renewal, with language evoking imagery of rejuvenation and forward progress. These metaphorical frameworks are essential tools in promoting state-driven narratives, influencing how citizens understand and respond to governmental policies.

Together, these analytical methods provide a robust toolkit for investigating metaphors in political media discourse. They demonstrate that metaphor is not just a linguistic curiosity but a potent cognitive and rhetorical device that deserves close scrutiny, especially in times of political uncertainty and media saturation. As media environments fragment into echo chambers, understanding these linguistic strategies becomes increasingly critical. Future research should explore how metaphors evolve in digital spaces where their effect is amplified by brevity and repetition, such as in TikTok slogans, Twitter hashtags, or meme culture (Zappavigna, 2012). To fully grasp contemporary politics, we must first grasp its metaphors.

Ultimately, the study of political metaphors is the study of power – how it's won, maintained, and challenged. In an age of information overload, metaphors cut through the noise,

offering simplicity at the cost of nuance. Whether they serve democracy or authoritarianism depends not on the metaphors themselves, but on who wields them, and to what ends.

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