

The Most Frequent Metaphors Used in Political Speeches of Presidents' Candidates Donald Trump and Kamala Harris

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Abstract

In the work, there are to be analysed the most frequent metaphors used by Donald Trump and Kamala Harris in their political speeches during the meetings with their supporters and potential voters and in political debates and duels held on TV and other media. By applying metaphors in political discourses, politicians can make abstract concepts specific and vivid to be understood, which is more beneficial for them to shape their images, publicize their policies and convey their political strategy. Metaphors reveal political intentions, help to construct political ideology, convince the masses and shape the image of politicians. Analysing both the metaphorical effects and the relationship between politics and metaphors can provide insight into the study of political metaphors since there is still little research done. I found out important the fact that metaphors directly reflect and express priorities, issues that are of each of the candidates, their political programme, views and standpoints towards the topics considered by them crucial and the most important. Donald Trump and Kamala Harris use metaphors as very efficient and strong tools in persuading the public to give them votes. I also considered important in our work to point at the difference of personalities between these two presidential candidates.

Keywords: metaphors, speech, USA, persuade, public, language, president, candidate.

Introduction

Politics and language are inextricably linked. Politics is stated and reflected by language. Political discourses boast a strong feeling of political purpose. Metaphor serves this kind of purpose. Politicians have a disposition to convey their ideas and beliefs through political discourses. Metaphors have assisted politicians in communicating more effectively by addressing latent symbolic themes residing in segments of the public consciousness.

Metaphors also contribute to processing political information by breaking down abstract and intangible concepts into more simplified patches of messages that the public can easily understand. Traditionally, metaphors are understood and considered as types of rhetorical devices utilized in poems to improve the beauty of poetic language. Metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not only in language but in thought and action (Lakoff, Johnson 1980). According to Lakoff and Johnson, metaphor is considered a powerful cognitive tool for people to conceptualise the world, and it structures how we perceive, how we think and what we do. Since the essence of metaphor is to comprehend one aspect of a concept in terms of another (Sprellman 2022), it can be concluded that there are three basic elements in metaphor consisting of the source concept, the target concept and the metaphorical projection between the two targets. Specifically speaking, metaphor is a cross-domain mapping from the source domain to the target domain and maintains the reasoning structure in the target domain. In my work, I try to analyse the most frequent metaphors used by Donald Trump and Kamala Harris and explain their meanings in concrete contexts.

Use of metaphors in political speeches and political discourses

Speech texts in politics are brightened up and polished by the persuasive effect of metaphors, according to these claims politics without metaphors is like a fish out of water (Thompson 1996), which manifests the profound significance of metaphors in politics, carries out systematic research on metaphors in political discourses (Lakoff 1996) which proves that conceptual metaphors hidden in American politics in an effective way to convey the politicians' intentions and lead their citizens to follow their political stands. Metaphorical expressions guide people to agree with politicians' thoughts and policies to follow their attitudes subconsciously. Taking advantage of metaphors is a strategy to illegalise the policies and political intentions (Antil and Harsh 2020) which gives the idea that politicians are more likely to use stronger languages to get resonated and achieve a persuasive effect. She says that by employing metaphor, political leaders can shape better images and degrade their opponents' ones. To conclude, the views on conceptual metaphor in political discourses vary from scholar to scholar. There is a consensus that making full use of conceptual metaphors helps people understand the abstract political concepts so that the politicians' words can achieve an effect of persuasion.

Political metaphors in Donald Trump's speeches and discourses

Donald J. Trump, a former president, politician, businessman and writer, is a man who has faced a lot of faux pas and even scandals during his political career. His numerous performances and actions after winning have received lots of challenges. For instance, when deciding whether to vote for Donald Trump, a person may use analogy and resort to one's own experience and background knowledge about the Republican Party that this candidate represents, evaluating the policy of this party and assessing previous Republican presidents. This background knowledge is then enhanced by how a particular candidate presents himself and his political persona. As far as Trump concerned, metaphors can help to influence voter preferences as in 'Trump as a Warrior' - „*I will fight for you, and I will win for you* (UCSB Staff, *The American Presidency Project* 2016), *I will fight for you with every breath in my body* (CNN 2017),“ which conceptualises him as a strong, decisive leader and as a warrior who will stand for his people. In general, metaphor in political discourse is described to bear the following functions as supporting political positioning and ideology, creating a 'myth', increasing emotional effects and establishing the speaker as desirable candidate (Charteris-Black 2005). Metaphor can reverberate the rhetorical dimensions of *logos*, *pathos* and *ethos*. The communication of a political ideology is not necessarily based on purely factual reasoning. Instead, it overlaps with the pathos component so that reason is framed in a discourse that can leverage emotions. In Trump's case, this happens when he applies 'animal metaphors' to evoke fear and distrust towards all immigrants, presenting them as dangerous, wild and uncontrolled.

According to Mio (1997), one of the major aims of metaphors is to connect logical *logos* with emotional *pathos*. If a politician embeds metaphors into his or her discourse, they are seeking to frame problems and advocate for a certain course of solutions (Stone 1988). Thus, when Trump, in his acceptance speech says „*Middle income Americans and businesses will experience profound relief*“ (UCSB Staff, *The American Presidency Project* 2016) (metaphor taxes are pain), he understands that it would resonate with the group of citizens tired of paying high taxes. In this case, as well as in the metaphor *immigrants are animals*, Trump diverts attention from other issues and hyperbolises the frames of suffering and fear. According to Van Dijk (2006), this is how manipulation in discourse works: since short-term memory is mostly involved in interpreting the meaning of clauses, sentences, and texts when listening to or reading a message, one can easily influence the order of this processing by selecting a bigger font or reiterating certain ideas many times. Trump's constant reference to the same

domains ensures that his listeners pick up these metaphors as central. While short-term memory is involved in deciphering the meaning of a text, long-term memory plays a role in the formation of attitudes and opinions. Thus, if people hear that *immigrants are animals many times*, they are likely to build this model in their minds. In Trump's speeches metaphors are postulated and divided into respective categories such as *person/object/building/machine* etc. Since Trump's political speeches are carefully planned, the metaphors should be discussed considering the potential aims they pursue such as influencing the audience's attitudes and beliefs, establishing rapport with the public, criticising an opponent, creating an image of a certain type of political persona and so on. In this sense, it is only of secondary importance whether a metaphor is conventional or not, if it can be tried to function in the political speech. Now, it will be provided a brief overview of the most frequent conceptual metaphors found in Trump's speeches.

1) OBJECT METAPHORS

Some of the metaphors in this category (e.g., an *oath* is an *object*) are highly conventionalised, and it is quite unlikely that Trump pursues any particular communicative goal when he uses this metaphor as in: „*when I take the oath of office*“ (UCSB Staff, The American Presidency Project 2016). On the other hand, the statement: „*We cannot afford to be so politically correct anymore*“ (UCSB Staff, The American Presidency Project 2016) where political correctness is an expensive item implies Trump's image of a businessperson. Similarly, the metaphorization of people as objects in: „*to put the great miners and steel workers of our country and out of work*“ (UCSB Staff, The American Presidency Project 2016) and: „*we will put millions of our people to work*“ (CNN 2016) contributes to creating an image which shows that he is in control and can 'move' people back into employment.

2) ANIMAL METAPHORS

a) when talking about immigrants as in immigrants are animals: „*Illegal immigrants with criminal records are tonight roaming free*“ (UCSB 2016);
b) directed against his opponent: „*They are throwing money at her,*“ (UCSB 2016) implying the metaphor of wasting is throwing a precious object to an animal;

c) In relation to success and hard work: e.g.: „*I will harness the creative talents of our people*“ (CNN 2016). In this case, talents are metaphorized as draft horses.

3) FORCE METAPHORS

The dominant metaphor in this category is difficulties are opposing forces. „*The growing threats we face from outside the country*“ (UCSB 2016). „*We will face challenges*“ (CNN 2017). This is another example of a conventional metaphor that is verbalised in very common expressions. The source domain of force shares some similarity to physical suffering in Trump’s speeches. In both cases, he creates negative metaphoric references to immigrants and to problems supposedly created by his predecessors: „*They are being released by the tens of thousands into our communities with no regard for the impact on public safety or resources. ... Not only have our citizens endured domestic disaster, but they have lived through one international humiliation after another.*“ (UCSB 2016) By contrast, the source domain of force bears positive metaphoric implications in relation to patriotism (patriotism is a force), which Trump claims for his political agenda: „*A new national pride will stir our souls, lift our sights, and heal our divisions*“ (CNN 2017).

This phrase is mentioned close to the end of Trump’s brief inaugural address, where he portrays patriots (symbolically captured by the American flag). What might superficially appear as a message of egalitarianism is actually tied to the image of all Americans saluting their national flag. i.e. being united by a common action of greeting a symbol of authority.

4) CONTAINER METAPHORS

The container metaphor implies boundaries that separate the inside from the outside of a container. In politics, the image is often applied in the sense that something is closed and needs to be kept this way (Stone 1988, Chilton 2017) discusses the conceptualisation of a country as a closed container where everything that is inside is presumably good, and anything on or from the outside is bad. The container metaphor is particularly persuasive because it blends the concepts of time and space implying that control over social change is control over movement of people, something that holds true in the case of ‘*refugees*’ ‘*drugs*’ in our data. „*Existing massive refugee flows coming into our country... to stop the drugs from pouring into our communities*“ (UCSB 2016). The movement of people and harmful substances from the outside ‘weakens’ the walls of the container. Examples

show that Trump uses the container metaphor to say that it is safe inside the container of the US and threatening outside, which underlies the physical manifestation of building a wall to protect the US citizens.

5) MACHINE METAPHORS

The machine metaphor is often applied to describe the unity and integrity of components. In his speech Trump evokes the solving problems is fixing a machine, using the lexical expression of fixing something: „*we are going to fix the system*“, and „*we can fix this problem so quickly*“. (UCSB 2016) Describing a nation as *a machine, a mechanism* where every single part matters, is likely to have strong influential power on the people, who want to participate in growth of their nation and feel their own value.

6) CONTAINER METAPHORS

Trump conceptualises money as a plant to speak about abundance as money are crops: „*A small group in our nation’s Capital has reaped the rewards of government*“ (CNN 2017) or „*A lot of money is an abundance of leaves*“- „*Secretary of State rakes in millions and millions of dollars*“ (UCSB 2016) He also falls back on the conventional metaphor of weeds to refer to unwanted entities that are conceptualised as being invasive – *terrorism is a weed* - „*radical Islamic terrorism, which we will eradicate completely*“. (CNN 2017)

7) MONEY METAPHORS

The source domain of money is used to present Trump as a business mogul, who measures everything for its financial value. This is evident in the use of the metaphor „*time is money*“ e.g.: „*time I have spent with the mothers and fathers*“ (UCSB 2016). „*I have spent my entire life in business*“. (CNN 2016) Personal relations are business: „*we will deal fairly with everyone*“ (CNN 2016). Gratitude is money: „*we owe her a major debt of gratitude*“ (CNN 2016). Trump used the money domain non-metaphorically to establish an analogy between his persona as a „successful“ businessman and his function as head of state: „*I have made billions of dollars in business making deals – now I am going to make our country rich again*“ (UCSB 2016).

Political metaphors in Kamala Harris' speeches

Kamala Harris is keenly aware of the potential power that lives in her words, as someone who represents nearly forty million people, who seeks to give voice to the voiceless. The words can empower to deceive, the power to soothe and to hurt. When she speaks, she does so with the knowledge that the words she chooses matter.

To understand her speech better, it is also important to mention her background – her unique position as a reformer, strong experience in the field of justice, person who persuades her audience using language and her personal experiences in politics. Priorities – topics in her speeches: *democratic principles, justice, minority groups, women's rights, immigration, economy, crime etc...*

Kamala Harris' speeches explore how her attitudes, judgements and emotive responses are explicitly presented and how they may be more indirectly implied, presupposed or assumed.

Kamala Harris uses metaphors in order to persuade her audience, her strong experience in the field of justice makes the analysis even more interesting. I want to analyse Kamala Harris not as a woman in politics but as a person, who persuades her audience using language, metaphors that reflect her personal experiences in politics. She set her priorities that are focused on legal and social issues as „*justice*“, „*minority and ethnic groups*“, „*Women's' rights*“, „*immigration*“, „*gender ideology*“ etc. Too often, words are used to degrade our impressions of issues, or of one another. Words matter. She chooses to speak the truth. Even when it's uncomfortable and leaves people feeling uneasy. „*When you speak the truth, people won't always walk away feeling good, and sometimes, you won't feel so great about the reaction you receive.*“ (Harris 2019) Despite the fact that the quote does not refer to the presidential campaign of the candidate, but comes from the period when she worked as the U.S. Senator representing California, I can state that her speech is in a similar vein during the pre-election campaign and captures the essentials that the candidate is trying to present even now. Harris often uses her evaluation of people's morality, truthfulness or veracity. The most frequent lexical words that link all three speeches, are *women, united, immigrants, states, family, president, democracy, country* and *people*. Harris uses the word *women* associated mostly with the word *empowerment* and *participation*. In addition, another frequent word *immigrants* shows how Harris is aware of how America was made – there are words as *children, nation, contribution*. Central is how Kamala Harris persuades her audience through language. Through the language, metaphors I explore how and why Harris emotions, behaviours

and perceptions work. (Wilson and Boxer 2015) The metaphors that are mostly used in Kamala Harris 'speeches are divided into *complex metaphors, creative metaphors, dead metaphors, primary metaphors, conceptual metaphors, and implied metaphors.*

1) COMPLEX METAPHORS

„*You stand on the brink of a new frontier*“ (HARRIS 2022) - „*stand on the brink*“ - you are not about to experience something important, „*new frontier*“ - liberal principles and policies of democratic party under the leadership of former president J.F. Kennedy.

2) CREATIVE METAPHORS (attract attention as a figure of speech)

„*These are the folks who have been by your side literally and virtually since your first day as tiger*“ (HARRIS 2022). The speaker delivers her feelings and ideas in an imaginative way, comparing students whose lives have been accompanied by friends.

„...*let us write the next great chapter in the most extraordinary story ever told...*“ (HARRIS 2024).

3) DEAD METAPHORS

a) „*It is a world where long-established principles now rest on shaky ground*“ (HARRIS 2022/05).

'*shaky ground*' - means about to fail, add more colour to the speech, very common;

b) „*heart of gold*“ - draw a comparison between person's heart and valuable material.

4) CONTAINER METAPHORS

a) „*Some radical fraction that maybe newly resurgent but whose roots run old and deep*“ (RUIZ 2022).

„*Roots run old and deep*“ portray the radical fraction whose existence has been for long and gained a lot of supporters.

b) „*What were they doing when our democracy came under assault.*“ (HARRIS 2022/01);

„*under assault*“ means being attacked or severely criticized.

5) CONCEPTUAL METAPHORS

- a) „*Our personality is our temperature*“;
 „*Personality*“ - complex idea made up of emotions, thoughts, behaviours.
 „*Temperature*“ - general feeling of what is hot and cold
- b) „*You are also a product of education*“ | „*I am a product of a public school education*“ (HARRIS 2023).
 „*Product of education*“ refers to students who have passed their education.

Conclusion

This study has examined the occurrence of conceptual metaphors in several speeches of Donald Trump and Kamala Harris. As far as Donald Trump concerned, we underline plain and uncreative use of language (Degani 2016) which is consistent with his self-ascribed discursive stance that he is an ordinary person. The topic of immigration is the most prevalent one, and Trump uses the conceptual metaphors of „*immigrants are animals and immigrants are flood*“ throughout his discourse (Gibbs 2015) refers to such metaphors as ‘*extended metaphors*’ since they structure the entire discourse and become allegoric to the extent that they might lead to the permanent conceptualisation of a theme in the audience minds, i.e. in Trump’s case immigrants as dangerous people and criminals. On the other hand, business and economy are presented as a way forward for the country’s future once the current state of the nation as a depleted and wounded body is overcome. In addition, a range of conceptual metaphors contributes to Trump’s strong focus on ethos in his speeches. By talking about himself, Trump aspires to be a charismatic leader who will „*fix*“ *it all alone* and „*seal the country from evil and enemies*“. He tries to construct an image of a successful leader and worthy candidate, and conceptual metaphors point to his political persona as that of a warrior, engineer, repairman, healer, saviour, constructor, even tamer of animals. Warrior, saviour and healer are further related facets of his self-ascribed personality, which depict him as a „Robin Hood“ of the US citizens. What features of political discourse can be found in political speeches of Kamala Harris? The politics is persuasion, and persuasion is conducted predominantly through language (Partington and Taylor 2017). Kamala Harris reveals self-identification through pronominal choice, such as whom she supports. Emphasis is put on raising awareness about the topics concerning justice, human rights, gender equality and economy. Her speech uses expressions of appreciation and Harris presents herself as a fellow human being who shares the same feelings as her

audience. She makes knowledge more accessible to any kind of audience, her speeches mainly contribute to reinforce her ideologies through the power of language in the field of politics. Harris and Trump clearly share very little in common. The one thing they do seem to have in common is that they both blink a lot when they hear something they find absurd. We often use repeated blinks to display disagreement or incredulity. It is an effective communicative behaviour because it's highly visual. Observers notice it right away, and it doesn't disrupt the flow of communication. Both candidates displayed that behaviour. Harris notably did it when Trump accused her of copying Biden's policy plans when he said: „It's like four sentences, like run, spot, run.“ It was a way of nonverbally dismissing his argument as unserious.

Corpus Resources

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