

Review

Metaphors in political discourse: A review of selected studies

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Received 22 September, 2015; Accepted 11 January, 2016

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 paper 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 review 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. Apart from being used as a face-saving strategy, the review showed that metaphors also revealed speakers' ideological positions.

Key words: Politics, political discourse, cognitive linguistics, conceptual metaphor.

INTRODUCTION

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. Beard (2000) claimed that by knowing how to use metaphorical language in an influential way, a politician could either gain or keep power. This study therefore reviewed seven studies on metaphor in political discourse both in and outside Kenya to assess the role metaphor played in political discourse.

The reviewed studies were by Wei (2001), The

Pragmatics of Metaphor in Taiwanese Politics; Vestermarck (2007), Metaphors in Politics: A Study of Metaphorical Personification of American Political Discourse, An Extended Essay; Taiwo (2010), Metaphors in Nigerian Political Discourse; Habwe (2010), Dialogue Drama in Kenyan Political Speeches and Its Pragmatic Implications; Sharifi et al. (2012), Role of Body Members in Constructing Metaphors in Persian Political Texts; Clarissa (2012), Mafumbo: Considering the Functions of Metaphorical Speech in Swahili Contexts and Michira (2014), The Language of Politics: A CDA of the 2013 Kenyan Presidential Campaign Discourse.

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LITERATURE REVIEW

Proponents of cognitive linguistics such as Lakoff et al. (1980; 1978; 1982) 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. Lakoff et al. (1980; 1978; 1982) 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 (source area), the source area was transferred to a second, often abstract area (target area).

Wei (2001) 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. 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 (1980, 1996) and Quinn (1991), 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 (2001) further argued that Taiwanese political discussions were inherently and inevitably metaphorical. Wei (2001) analyzed 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 (2001) 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 et al. (1980; 1978; 1982) and used by Wei (2001) 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 (2001) 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. 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 (2001) established just as much in her study. Other studies have identified "business" and "war" as the most frequent source domains for politics.

Unlike Wei (2001) who analyzed metaphorical expressions used in the news coverage of Taiwanese political discourse, Vestermark (2007) 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 (1980). Her study looked specifically at the personification of America in the first inaugural addresses by Ronald Reagan (1981), George H.W. Bush (1989), Bill Clinton (1993) and George W. Bush (2001). 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 (America) was specified as being a human entity and also to account for the probable intention of the speaker.

Vestermark (2007) analyzed the conceptual metaphors *THE WORLD AS A COMMUNITY, NATION AS A PERSON AND NATION ACTING AS HUMAN*. In her findings, she argued that the conceptual metaphors used in political discourse in the inaugurals were highly intentional, but not always as easy to detect. She discovered that America is conceptualized as human. She drew a conclusion that the four presidents used metaphors to personify the nation to make Americans to identify with and understand their beliefs and goals for America.

Even though she argued that the use of conceptual

metaphors in the addresses was intentional, in many cases linguistic metaphors represent sub-conscious choices on the part of the speaker, based partly on the conceptual structures shared by members of their community. Vestermark (2007) study however, clearly demonstrated that features of conceptual sources could be manipulated for positive rather than negative rhetorical ends.

Taiwo (2010) studied metaphors in Nigerian political discourse. His study blended the methods of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) with that of Cognitive Linguistics originated by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) to discuss metaphoric expressions found in the data. Taiwo (2010) mainly focused on the identification of the metaphors and how the discourses conceptually mapped the source and target domains in their metaphoric expressions. Guided by Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) Theory of Conceptual Metaphor, he identified three target domains as sources of conceptual metaphors in his data: the nation, politicians and politics. In his work, he stated that the NATION was conceptualized as a FAMILY and as a PERSON. He also identified the conceptual mappings of *POLITICS AS BATTLE* and *POLITICS AS A JOURNEY*. There was also the conceptual mapping of the *POLITICIAN AS A BUILDER*.

Taiwo (2010) further argued that metaphors help to shape the structure of political categorization and argumentation. Such a conceptual metaphor as *POLITICS IS A GAME*, for instance, shapes our perception about politics. He further stated that the mapping principle of targets and domains was used by Nigerian politicians to fulfill their persuasive and rhetoric goals in political discourse. This could however be used either negatively, or positively. The politicians' ultimate goal is not primarily to present facts, but to be persuasive.

Taiwo mentioned Opeibi (2006) who carried out a study of negative political advertising and observed that many of the political office aspirants abandoned positive, issue-focused advertisement and engaged in rhetorical strategies of direct attacks on their opponents. Attacks of political opponents confirmed that politicians projected positive self-presentation and negative-other presentation. Mensah (2012), examining the bus metaphor in Ghanaian political speeches, however demonstrated that features of conceptual sources could be manipulated for positive rhetorical ends by politicians. Using the 'Yutong' bus metaphor, he demonstrated that politicians in Ghana and elsewhere could employ metaphors to discuss serious political issues without resorting to insults of their political opponents.

In his study, Taiwo (2010) indicated the kinds of socio-political-experiences that Nigeria had been going through and that political discourse in Nigeria had centered on those issues. This resonated well with Wei's (2001) argument that recent social events gave rise to certain benign metaphors to describe the unique socio-cultural

situation of Taiwanese politics.

While Wei (2001) argued that recent social events and specific cultural contexts gave rise to certain benign metaphors to describe the unique socio-cultural situation of Taiwanese' politics, Sharifi et al. (2012) explored how the body parts played roles in Persian political texts as metaphorical expressions. 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. The frequency of each body part was illuminated. At the end, a frequency table was illustrated based on the accumulated data.

The findings revealed that there were fifteen body members by which political metaphors were conceptualized and reflected in Persian political discourse. The results further revealed that among the human body parts which were conceptualized in Persian political texts, the head was the most frequent one.

However, Yu (2008) investigated conceptual metaphors and their interaction between body and culture and stated that while body was a potentially universal source for emerging conceptual metaphors, culture functioned as a filter for selecting them. In other words, metaphors were generated from body experience but formed by culture realization and so were culture-specific. He asserted that the face was the body part by which the Chinese and English made a lot of conceptual metaphors because the face is the most distinctive part of the body by which we identify people.

Use of body parts to conceptualize abstract concepts confirmed another tenet of the Conceptual Metaphor theory: the concept of the experiential basis. In this concept, conceptual metaphors are due to people's experiences in the world and experiences are body-based. Metaphors such as "LIFE IS A JOURNEY" and "POLITICS IS SPORTS" demonstrate clearly the concept of the experiential basis of metaphors. The concept is a confirmation that metaphors are not arbitrary or innate.

Habwe (2010) analyzed speech animation in Kenya. The study used the Gricean inferential model to discuss the pragmatic role of dialogic structures in Kenyan political harangues. In the revised model, the cooperative principle is expanded to include more than the traditional four maxims of manner, relevance, quality and quantity (Grice, 1977) by incorporating the politeness maxim as

one of the constitutive maxims rather than having it operate as a parasitic maxim.

Data for the research were video-recorded in the two main towns of Nairobi (capital of Kenya) and Mombasa, where Kiswahili was mostly spoken owing to the cultural and linguistic diversity of their inhabitants. He stated that Kenya was a Kiswahili speaking country with a political system replete with class, tribal, party, religious, cultural and even racist interests. The political system was therefore endemic to a lot of conflict and show of power that usually played out during rally harangues. Political speech making was therefore a time to calculate, strategize, influence, coerce, promise or even revise and declare party or even government positions.

Habwe (2010) in his study of the role of dialogue in Kenyan political speeches, defined dialogue as discourse activity in which two or more participants took turns. He mentioned that Njogu (1994) argued that the alternating turns could be realized in the present, past or future, making dialogue a highly fluid discourse structure with a retrogressive or progressive trait. Most texts then had the potential feature of dialogic interaction and structure. Habwe's (2010) study was however concerned with a dialogue interaction that was physically present and realized as so, redefining the speaker as animator and audience at the same time and vice versa. His findings revealed that the audience could set the topic of the day in dialogue by rejecting what the speaker wanted to discuss and re-directing the topic to what they desired:

Speaker: sisi ni namba ngapi? (What position are we?)

Audience: ungalungala! ungalungala! (flour! flour! flour!)

In this case, the speaker had to address the issues raised by the audience. Failure to do so would lead to the audience being restless. Citing a speech in his study, the study revealed that a dialogic strategy could be used by a politician to gauge his popularity. In this case, he initiated a dialogue and when the audience replied in the affirmative and support, that became a confirmation of his popularity. This was important in political discourse whose purpose was to persuade the electorate to view issues from the speaker's point of view. When the audience supported a speaker's position, the speaker had managed to project a positive self-presentation. To further popularize a position, agenda, party or political figure, a speaker could initiate what Haugerud and Njogu (1991) called stage-managed drama. In such kinds of drama, the politician planted his 'supporters' among the audience to keep cheering the speaker every time he initiated a dialogue. This however could sometimes work against the speaker. Habwe (2010) further revealed that a dialogue could be initiated via rhetorical questions. In this case, the speaker posed a rhetorical question and the response was given by the audience. In that way, the speaker observed the politeness maxim for not uttering a face-threatening act by himself. He would take cover

under the rhetoric question.

The study concluded that Kenyan political rallies were replete with dialogic structures, which rather than being just normative, served certain pragmatic functions: to retain audience interest, to generate support, act as a politeness strategy and also to monitor the effect of their message to the audience. The dramatic strategy, though of great benefit to the speaker, most times put the speaker at the mercy of the audience who could cheer or jeer him. The Gricean model provided an understanding of this kind of talk where what was to be said was only implied, leaving the audience with varied interpretations. In discourse, this implication constituted an implicit metaphor.

The politeness maxim in Habwe (2010) was further seen in Clarrisa (2012) who studied the function of Kiswahili metaphorical speech under three approaches: the metaphor as a face-saving strategy, the metaphor as a decorative device and the power of ambiguity. These three were stated as hypotheses: the politeness hypothesis, the stylistic hypothesis and the cognitive hypothesis. She addressed the question if and how one could reconcile the sometimes apparently contradictory functions of metaphor by posing the question: was the metaphor a (revealing) conceptual mechanism or a (disgusting) poetic device? Lastly, she dealt with the poetic domains which draw on the poetic metaphor's essential characteristic: ambiguity. On the face-saving hypothesis, Clarrisa (2012) said:

...we can refer to Rose Marie Beck, who has analyzed the use of *kanga*, a wrap with a printed message, as a means of communication, where the intention to pass on an often problematical message is key. She gives the example of a divorced girl whose behavior was considered immoral and promiscuous (Beck 2001a). Thus, she received a *kanga* from her grandmother with a printed message "*Mtungi umevundika*" which literally means "the pot is broken", referring to her lost virginity – according to Beck a harsh form of criticism conveyed through the face protecting metaphor. In terms of Brown and Levinson's politeness theory (1987), the use of the *kanga* described by Beck can be considered as an off-record or indirect politeness strategy, since it removes the speaker from the possibility of imposing, while still voicing the concern.

On political poetry, she asserted that political poetry with critical and provocative messages drew its force from ambiguity. The poetic capacity was grounded in its essential ambiguity. The poetic metaphor had multiple references precisely because it was not part of a common store of idioms. She demonstrated that metaphorical expressions fitted religious and philosophical poetry and that Kiswahili religious poetry was full of metaphors. On erotic poetry, she cited a poem 'Utendi Wa Mwana Mnga' attributed to Fumo Liyongo where the women's body

parts were likened to fruits and other objects found in nature. Fumo Liyongo explained matters in such a way that if they were read in public, no one felt embarrassed, but generally speaking, the matters were not spoken about in public. Thus, he concealed them, making them powerful. There was a sense of speaking while denying the act of speaking. Clarissa's (2012) study is a reminder of the *kanga* and their printed messages. The messages therein are proverbial (and metaphorical) in nature and conceal a lot of information. They are a powerful means of communication that are worthy of a study.

Concealed information is powerful as Clarissa (2012) demonstrated. Michira (2014) carried out a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of the 2013 Kenyan Presidential Campaign Discourse. He applied critical and descriptive methods of CDA to analyze and unpack linguistic persuasive strategies, concealed meanings and ideologies in the presidential campaign discourses in Kenya leading to the 4 March, 2013 General Elections. Primary data (speeches, party manifestoes and campaign video clips) as well as secondary data (newspapers and on-line services) were used to analyze the rhetorical devices and strategies used by the main contenders for the presidency.

The author argued and demonstrated that language was a powerful tool that politicians seeking political power used both to communicate their policies and ideological positions and to create certain perceptions in order to influence and manipulate the voters with a view to gaining advantage over their opponents.

The study analyzed the discourse at the levels of vocabulary/diction, grammar, semantics and pragmatic strategies including implicatures. He analyzed the party and alliance names, contrastive pairs, the young versus the old guard, the digital versus the analogue, Us versus Them, the metaphorical nominalizations "Hustler", Euphemistic Implicatures (Prayer Rallies), rhetorical strategies (riddles, metaphors, allegories, proverbs, Biblical allusions) among others.

On metaphors, he looked at the football commentary metaphors used by two presidential contenders as a rhetoric strategy. He concluded that various rhetorical and semiotic techniques communicated concealed messages. He further concluded that such coded communication techniques could have been used to avoid contravening the provisions of the constitution and the attendant legal challenges. Michira (2014) rightly pointed out what political leaders practice when he stated:

The speakers presented a "national" image (rather than the real "ethnic") identity, disguising party ideologies.

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 (CDA) and Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT). Using CMT, source domains in the studies were mapped onto the target domains where target domains acted as sources of conceptual metaphors. The mapping principle of source and target domains was used to fulfill persuasive and rhetorical goals in political discourse. 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. However, the study of metaphor needs a combination of theories. No one theory is suffice for metaphor study.

Conflict of Interest

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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