Metaphors and their Morality Implications in Political Speeches: a Pragmatic Study

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Abstract:

This research tends to analyze six political speeches: three by president Obama and the other three by king Abdullah the second in an attempt to find out what kinds of metaphors have been used and their underlying morality implications. The conceptual metaphor theory has been used as a methodology of analyzing these speeches.

Introduction:

We may not always know it, but we think in metaphor. A large proportion of our most commonplace thoughts make use of an extensive, but unconscious, system of metaphors (Lakoff, 1995). The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one thing in terms of another (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). In the classical theory the word metaphor was defined as a novel or poetical linguistic expression where one or more words for a concept are used outside of its normal conventional meaning to express a similar concept. But such issues are not matters for definitions;
they are empirical questions (Lakoff, 1992). In the cognitive theory, however, generalizations governing the linguistic expressions referred to classically as *poetic metaphors*? are not in language, but in thought: They are general mappings across conceptual domains (ibid, 1992). Language is the medium used to express these generalizations. This is affirmed by Goatly (2007) who says, from a cognitive perspective, metaphor can be briefly defined as thinking of one thing (A) as thought it were another thing (B), and linguistically this will result in an item of vocabulary or larger stretch of text being applied in an unusual or new way. A is the topic or target and B is the vehicle or source. White (1996) says that the key to understanding the way metaphors work is to understand the way the words have been combined in the metaphorical sentence. The word metaphor has come to mean a cross-domain mapping in the conceptual system (Lakoff, 1992). Conceptual metaphor holds that metaphor is central to thought and therefore to language (Deignan, 2005). Therefore, the analysis of conceptual metaphor demonstrates how human reasoning and behaviour are organized since one of the tenets that can be derived from conceptual metaphor theory is metaphors structure thinking and knowledge (ibid, 2005). Goatly (2007) in his book "Washing the brain: Metaphor and hidden ideology" says that one of the aspects of conceptual metaphor theory is metaphor is everything and it is vital to our conceptualization of abstract ideas. The source of these metaphors is in our bodily infant experience and language is the courier of these metaphors. For example, the conceptual metaphor *Argument is War*. This metaphor is reflected in our everyday language by a wide variety of expressions: (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980)

Your claims are indefensible
He attacked every weak point in my argument

So by conceptualizing the argument as war and the persons we argue as opponents, we reflect the way we conceive of them. We
act accordingly to the way we perceive things. Therefore, to understand metaphor, we have to look thoroughly at the complexity of its words combination. The on-going research of political discourse reveals a variable and complex nature of conceptual metaphors which structure experiences, beliefs and imaginings of a particular culture in the TARGET domain of POLITICS (Lakoff, 1991, 1995). Lakoff (1995) says that one of the most poignant effects of the ignorance of the metaphorical thought is the mystification of liberals concerning the recent electoral success of conservatives. To resolve such vagueness, we must begin with that part of our metaphor system that is used to conceptualize morality. Since morality is an abstract concept, one of the principles to make moral judgments about various human experience is a metaphor (Lakoff, 2002). There are three major models distinguished by political philosophers and scientists that shape the understanding of political events and raise certain moral expectations; namely, Pragmatic, Rational, and Integrated (Arcimavičienė, 2010). Pragmatic morality model, according to Elstain, 2004 as cited in Arcimavičienė, 2010, all people are seen selfish and evil by nature. Moreover, morality is understood as a human invention explicitly devised to control those combative and selfish tendencies in a society. Thus, the use of violence and force is a constituent part of political activity. Moreover, moral politics is associated with coercive and forceful behaviour. The key concepts underlying pragmatic politics are strength, force, control, order, stability etc.

By contrast, the rational approach to morality, led by the maximum use of rationality and rationally calculated political actions (Paul, Miller & Paul 2004, 214, as cited in Arcimavičienė, 2010). To be more precise, the basic moral principle is to establish explicit rules of conduct that will enable cooperation among people. This understanding has shaped the universal understanding of duties, as resulted in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which serves as the major principle to make universal judgments.
Finally, the **integrated approach** to moral politics is based on emotional evaluation and led by sentiments (Katz 2002, 215). The claim that human morality is powerfully influenced by emotional responses and is not always governed by the abstract and intellectual rules was supported by Hume, Smith, Westermarck, Darwin (see Katz 2002, 238). In its framework morality is not seen as a conscious and delineate conscious faculty but rather as a cognitive empathy or sentiment such as sympathy, empathy, community concern, which engenders a bond between individuals. This bond is enabled by an individual’s capacity to be sensitive to the emotions of others.

**Research Aims and Methodology:**

This research tends to identify the conceptual metaphors that have been used by President Obama and King Abdullah the second and their entailments to explore the morality models that prevail in their speeches.

The methodology used in analyzing the data is in the framework of conceptual metaphor theory which follows this direction: metaphorical linguistic expressions → conceptual metaphor then analyzed and classified in accordance with the source domain they represent.

**Research findings:**

After analyzing four speeches; two for King Abdullah the second and President Obama, it has been found that conceptual metaphors of motion, relation, essence, war, and strength prevail in both languages. The conceptual metaphors of motion and ration occur in the same ratio while the conceptual metaphors of relationship, war, and essence occur in different ratios as seen in the table below:
### Table: Metaphorical Linguistic Expressions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source domain</th>
<th>Relation</th>
<th>Essence</th>
<th>War</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>King Abdullah’s speeches</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>President Obama’s speeches</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the table shows that both leaders’ speeches are structured by such metaphors as political activity as interpersonal relationship, political activity as essence, and political activity as war. The frequency of metaphorical linguistic expressions reflects different morality models.

**Interpersonal relationship in King Abdullah’s speeches:**

Politics is as an interpersonal relationship characterizes king Abdullah’s speeches as seen in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Politics is interpersonal relationship</th>
<th>Dear brothers and sisters</th>
<th>[...] and the Arab brethren</th>
<th>[...] what Jordan has endured and is still enduring for the Palestinian cause</th>
<th>[...]to offer support to our Palestinian brethren</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Epistemic correspondence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family relation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendship</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enmity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As indicated in the table, the target domain of politics is structured through the source domain of interpersonal relationship. They are related through the use of conceptual elements of family, friendship, and enmity. The conceptual category of family implies that King Abdullah treats Jordanians as brothers and sisters which, in turn, reflect the equality that prevails in the politics of Jordan. The use of the conceptual category of friendship implies supportive and cooperative behavior among people as in the following examples:
- We could have explained to them, who were after cheap opportunity, what Jordan has endured and is still enduring for the Palestinian cause
- I have worked during the past years in cooperation with our brethren in Saudia Arabia and the Arab republic of Egypt to render all that we can …
- At the same time, we will not abandon our duty and historic role in supporting the Palestinians until they establish their independent state on their national soil

The above examples reflect how Jordan acts towards Arabs who are in plight. They also show the attempts the king has done to step by Palestinians especially after the offensive assault by Israel. Besides, they depict the relation between Jordan and other Arab countries as close and intimate.

Another element of interpersonal relationship metaphor is enmity. Those who are not friends are perceived as enemies. Enmity is reflected in opposition, difference, and brawl as seen below:
-what is even unfortunate is when two people differ and fight , and then without justification this simple difference between two people becomes a brawl between two tribes and two villages.
- But I would like to argue you and the youth across the country that I am proud of that we be as one hand in confronting these alien phenomena and that we oppose them unequivocally.
It can be concluded that friendship linguistic expressions are more frequent than enmity ones which means that Jordanian politicians are engaged in interpersonal relations such as friendship and family.

**Interpersonal relationship metaphor in President Obama’s speeches:**
The interpersonal relationship metaphor is reflected in the elements of friendship and conflict as seen in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Politics is interpersonal relationship</th>
<th>Epistemic correspondence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friendship</td>
<td>America is a friend of each nation and every man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“we are not enemies but friends”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict</td>
<td>[…] who seek to sow conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>We meet at a time of tension between the United States and Muslims</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[…] but also conflict and religious wars</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first element of interpersonal relationship in Obama’s speeches is that of friendship as indicated above. Therefore, it can be inferred that President Obama tends to depict America as friendly and supportive for each nation. The second element of the conceptual metaphor of relationship, however, is that of conflict which implies tension, debate, and mistrust as seen below:

- *We meet at a time of tension between the United States and Muslims, around the world –tension rooted in historical forces that go beyond any current policy debate.*
- *No single speech can eradicate years of mistrust*
- The second major source of tension that we need to discuss is the situation between Israelis, Palestinians and the Arab world.

As it can be inferred from the aforementioned examples, the category of conflict prevails in the speeches of president Obama which, in turn, characterizes negatively the political relations between America and Muslims.

Morality models as reflected in interpersonal relationship metaphor:

The interpersonal relationship metaphor structures the speeches of both leaders. In king Abdullah’s speeches, the interpersonal relationship metaphor is reflected in the elements of family, friendship, and enmity. The use of the first two elements characterizes the relation between the king and Jordanians, on one hand, and other nations, on the other hand, as close and intimate and based on personal likes. The latter, however, describes anyone who tends to tamper with Jordan’s unity and stability as enemies. This gives evidence to the moral values as developed by integrated morality model, according which political activities are determined by emotions and sentiments. That is, politicians play on the ring of emotions to appeal to people. In president Obama’s speeches, however, the interpersonal relationship metaphor is reflected in conflict and friendship. The former is based on moral strength and power, which underlie the moral system of pragmatic morality model. According to this model, American politics is seen as the activity of the powerful who exercises power to control the weak. The element of friendship characterizes American politics as based on coercion and emotional pretence.

Essence conceptual metaphor in King Abdullah’s speeches:

Another conceptual metaphor found in the analyzed data is that of political essence. The metaphor of essence consists of the following elements (Lakoff, 2002):
*Person is an object
*His/her essence is the substance the object is made of
That is, if the person is good, this will be reflected in his morals and vice versa. The frequency of the essence metaphor in leaders’ speeches is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Essence metaphor</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>King Abdullah’s speeches</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>President Obama’s speeches</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As it can be inferred from the previous table, the distribution of essence metaphorical expressions in leaders’ speeches is different. This, in turn, might reflect a hidden message as we will see later.

**Essence metaphor in King Abdullah’s speeches:**
After analyzing the data, it has been found that the essence metaphor is reflected in the elements of hardness and construction as seen below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Politics is essence</th>
<th>Epistemic correspondence</th>
<th>Epistemic correspondence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>hardness</em></td>
<td><em>[…] to provide moral and financial support and we don’t accept others outbidding on our position</em>&lt;br&gt;<em>commitment and devotion in building your country</em>&lt;br&gt;<em>the establishment of an independent Palestinian state</em>&lt;br&gt;<em>establishing many projects</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As it can be inferred, the essence metaphor has been realized in hardness which is realized in being strong and tough which enables politicians to take strong positions as in the following examples:
- We are all partners in shouldering the responsibility, [...] your committed participation to shoulder the responsibility and to carry out the duty, and to place national interests above all considerations
- Our position regarding Iraq is clear and well-known. Jordan’s voice was the strongest and most effective in the western world, when it reiterated the need to put an end to Iraq’s suffering.
- [...] but our position on this issue is clear, which is to emphasize the fight against all forms of corruption[...]
- On this occasion, I salute, with pride and appreciation, the brave comrades in arms[...] the symbol of dedication, sacrifice, and heroism
- We must stand firmly and strongly by Arab nations[...]

The hardness, as we can see, is reflected in the category of being tough and firm which characterize Jordan and its politicians as morally positive. The toughness and firmness include being strong in order to shoulder the responsibility, to put an end to the suffering, and to fight against corruption forms. Moreover, it is included in being brave and a symbol of heroism. Also, the essence metaphor is realized through construction metaphor as seen below:
- It is with pleasure that I extend to you my pride in you[...] and devotion in building your country[...]
- I have complete trust in the awareness of the Jordanian citizens[...] and for completing building the modern state, the state of institution and law[...]
- We have to safeguard our national unity, which is built on the unity of vision and goals[...]
As it can be seen, the most significant element of construction metaphor is *building and establishing* which are also associated with strength. That is, you cannot establish a stable and modern state unless you are strong enough.

**Essence metaphor in President Obama’s speeches:**
The essence metaphor structures President Obama’s speeches, however, is reflected in the metaphor of softness which characterize America as morally negative. The state of weakness is not mentioned explicitly but realized in the words of *restore and reclaim* as seen below:
- [...] to reclaim the American dream and reaffirm that fundamental truth that we are one
- *We will restore science to its rightful place*
As we can see, since America wants to restore and reclaim, this means that now it is in a weak situation and it must work hard to get rid of such a pitfall. The essence metaphor is also included in the construction element which ,in turn, reflects its weakness in opposition to above as seen below:
- *We will act –not only to create new jobs- but also to lay a new foundation for growth*
The previous example also reflects the current weak situation that America suffers from which demands it to do its best to lay a new foundation. In King Abdullah’s speeches the construction metaphor reflects the strength of Jordan since it helps the Palestinians to build their own state not Jordan’s one.

**Morality models in Essence metaphor:**
The essence metaphor structures both leaders’ speeches and is reflected in different elements and in different ratio as we have seen. In conclusion, the use of essence metaphor reflects on the system of the classical moral values which are
generally known as pragmatic morality. Since the state of being strong or weak is not mentioned explicitly and directly, this morality model underlies such kind of metaphor. Moreover, the essence metaphor demonstrates that being firm and strict in politics is morally justified for the purpose of sustaining authority.

**War conceptual metaphor:**

Different social activities are perceived through the conceptual metaphor of war. Seeing political activity as war is a purposeful justification for continuous confrontation and fighting in politics. Within this frame, politicians are seen as good and evil, and the former has the moral rights to fight and manipulate the latter by using coercive means (Arcimavičienė, 2010). The analysis of the data shows the distribution of war metaphor as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>War metaphor</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>King Abdullah’s speeches</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>President Obama’s speeches</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As inferred from the table, the frequency of metaphorical expressions differs in both leaders’ speeches. Moreover, the use of war metaphor uncovers moral expectations which underlie the pragmatic morality model as we will later.

**War metaphor in King Abdullah’s speeches:**

War metaphor in King Abdullah’s speeches consists of the element of **Battlefield** where Jordan seen as a fighter as in the following examples:

- […] which is to emphasize the fight against all forms of corruption
- We must all confront anyone who tries to tamper with this unity[…]
- Despite all the difficult circumstances, and challenges that Jordan faces with its limited resources, […]
- It is to us a defense line against Israeli expansion ideas
- After every defeat faced by the Arab nation, Jordan was the one that opened its heart and arms for our expelled brethren [...] as well as all the war calamities that we face along their side.

As indicated in the examples above, the war metaphor is included in the metaphor of politics is a battlefield where Jordan is perceived as a fighter who attacks anyone violates the national unity of Jordan. Jordan and its ruling authority’s behavior is seen as confrontational, combative, and violent especially against Israel taking into consideration the extent of Palestinians’ suffering.

**War metaphor in President Obama’s speeches:**

The war metaphor in Obama’s speeches is perceived in the element of attack as seen in the following examples:
- I just receive a very gracious call from senator McCain who fought longer and harder for the country he loves.
- The enemy was advancing
- To those tear the world, we will defeat you
- We will relentlessly confront violent extremists
- And I consider it part of my responsibility as president of the United States to fight against negative stereotypes of Islam wherever they appear

As it can be inferred from the examples above, the conceptual metaphor of politics as fight shows politicians as ruthless attackers whose main goal is to win over the enemies. It also discloses that all politicians use various violent and confrontational strategies to save their country’s stability and unity.
Morality model in the war metaphor:

The analyzed data show that war metaphor structure both leaders’ speeches which result in the moral expectation underlying pragmatic morality model. That is, politicians in Jordan and USA. Use different strategies to achieve their country’s security. In Jordan, war metaphor is implied in the element of battlefield where politicians face many challenges and fight against anyone attempts to tamper with its unity. In the USA, war metaphor is also reflected in the element of fight and attack where politicians perceived as fighters who use different violent tactics to preserve America’s sovereignty. Therefore, in both leaders’ speeches, the pragmatic morality model as reflected in war metaphor characterizes Jordan’s and America’s policies as aggressive and combative which are morally justified to achieve their unity and stability.

Conclusion:

The analysis of King Abdullah’s and President Obama’s speeches has disclosed that the metaphors of interpersonal relationship, essence, and war have structured both leaders’ speeches. The underlying morality models, however, differ since these metaphors have been reflected in various elements. Concerning the first conceptual metaphor, interpersonal relationship, it has been reflected in the elements of family, friendship, and enmity in king Abdullah’s speeches. It is reflected in the elements of friendship and enmity in President Obama’s speeches, though. Therefore, it reflects the moral values implied in the integrated morality model in first leader’s speeches while it reflects moral expectations implied in the pragmatic morality model.
Regarding the second conceptual metaphor, essence, it has been reflected in the elements of hardness and construction in first leader’s speeches while it is reflected in the elements of softness in the second leader’s speeches. It reflects, however, in both leaders’ speeches, the moral values implied in the same morality model, the pragmatic morality model. Concerning the last one, war, it is reflected in the element of battlefield and attack respectively. It also reflects the same morality model, pragmatic morality model. Moreover, the research has shown how metaphorical linguistic expressions can reflect different moral values and expectations underlying various morality models.

References:


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