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Analysis of Conceptual Metaphors Used in British Politicians' Speeches

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ABSTRACT

Metaphor has a wide range of applications in everyday speech and allows us to communicate our thoughts vividly. The main functions of metaphor in political discourse are heuristic, argumentative, and interactive, smoothing the most dangerous political speech that touches on controversial political issues. This paper reviewed studies on metaphor in political discourse to assess the role of metaphor in politics. Besides, in this article, we investigated conceptual metaphors used in modern political discourses by British politicians and tried to analyse them from a cognitive point of view.

Keywords:

Metaphor, conceptual metaphor, metaphorisation, political discourse, structural, ontological, and orientational metaphors, Brexit, figurative language

Introduction

Language plays a crucial role in our daily lives as a means of communication. Language is used by people in a variety of ways to express their thoughts, feelings, and experiences. The speaker's expression of those meanings is not always evident; he or she may express them implicitly or vaguely at times. For example, utilizing figurative language to emphasize a point in a speech. According to M.H. Abrams, figurative language is a visible departure from what language users perceive as the conventional meaning of words or the standard arrangement of words in order to produce some specific meaning or effect. There are various types of figurative language; but, one of them is appealing enough to be studied and

thought to play an essential part in cognition, and that is metaphor.¹

Politics is about power, and one of the primary means by which politicians demonstrate their authority is through the language they use and the way language supports their views. Almost every speech given by the highest leaders contains metaphors. Obviously, not just because public speakers like them, but also because they were told at one point that conceptual metaphors might help them be more clear and "closer" to the audience.

In cognitive linguistics, a conceptual metaphor refers to the understanding of one idea, or conceptual domain, in terms of another. Conceptual metaphors are useful for

¹ Abrams, M.H. (2003). A Glossary of Literary Terms (Seventh Edition). United States of America: Heinle & Heinle.

understanding complex ideas in simple terms and therefore are frequently used to give insight to abstract theories and models.

Methodology

Metaphor has stimulated the interest of many linguists, writers, and philosophers since antiquity. Because conceptual metaphors are the topic of this paper, the theoretical framework of the paper only included conceptual metaphor theory in cognitive linguistics. Cognitive linguistics has been studying conceptual metaphors since 1980. The original model of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson emerged at that time, and their book "Metaphors We Live By" is regarded as its starting point. Lakoff and Johnson introduced the concept of how daily life is intertwined with metaphorical expressions and that metaphorisation is actually essential for language comprehension. According to them, conceptual metaphors are common in everyday life, not only in language but also in thoughts and actions.² They classify conceptual metaphors into three categories based on their cognitive role: structural, ontological, and orientational. LIFE IS A JOURNEY and TIME IS MONEY are two examples of structural metaphors in which one concept is realized with the help of the other. The entire system of terms is organized in relation to the other in orientational metaphors, as in the examples HEALTH AND LIFE ARE UP, DISEASE AND DEATH ARE DOWN. Our physical and cultural experiences serve as the foundation for orientational metaphors. Experiences with concrete physical objects, particularly the body, lay the groundwork for developing an ontological metaphor, the third type of metaphor. Reification or personification generates ontological metaphors. The actions and emotions become shaped entities or physical objects through the verification or concretization of the abstract event. As examples of an ontological metaphor based on reification, Lakoff and Johnson mention THE

INFLATION IS THE ENTITY and THE SOUL IS A FRAGILE OBJECT. Personification is also thought to be the most common ontological metaphor: Appearances, associations, social movements, and so on are explained using categories that are shared by all people and are based on our motivation, goals, activities, and characteristics. Personification is an ontological metaphor that "uses for the source domain one of the best, ourselves," according to Kövesces.³ This metaphor is widely used in political discourse. It is used to embody political parties, institutions, or events with human characteristics, which influences the development of positive or negative associations in recipients.

The paper is based on the data from the British politicians' speeches which were published and studied in the reliable media sources and the Internet resources. The technique utilized in the paper implies the utilization of the following methods: narrative – for choosing, arranging and interpreting factual information; descriptive – for evaluating extracts of political speeches.

I analysed the conceptual metaphors which were used by the 2 Prime Ministers of the UK, including Theresa May and Boris Johnson during the Brexit. Brexit is acknowledged as a shorthand way of saying the UK leaving the EU – merging the words **Britain** and **exit** to get Brexit. If an abstract idea is ambiguous and requires further explanation, the issue of conceptual metaphors is explored since our conceptual system is basically metaphorical in nature.

Thus, this article focuses on conceptual metaphors employed in political speech created by both politicians. Political elites use metaphors to express their emotional meaning of Brexit and influence the public and political leaders in the negotiation process, whilst political journalists use metaphors to make a difficult Brexit process more accessible to the audience or to criticize the process. However, in addition to facilitating comprehension, the employment of metaphors implies a certain

² Lakoff, G., Johnson, M. (1980), *Metaphors We Live By*, Chicago: Chicago University Press.

³ Kövesces, Z. (2002). *Metaphor: A Practical Introduction*. New York : Oxford University Press.

point of view on Brexit, which politicians are urged to express.

Results and Discussions

Metaphors are defined as situations of figurative language in which one notion is comprehended in terms of another and traits are transferred from one domain to another for the sake of this study. People can reduce complicated and abstract topics by using and analyzing metaphors. It undoubtedly contributes to the formation of a public opinion on political events in general, and the connotation of such a concept as BREXIT in particular.

Theresa May's speech at the Mansion House on March 2, 2018, set out her vision for Britain's post-Brexit relations with the European Union. For example, she said: "**The United Kingdom which is a cradle for innovation;**⁴ a leader in the industries of the future; a champion of free trade, based on high standards; a modern, outward-looking, tolerant country, proud of our values and confident of our place in the world." In her speech she used a figurative language to strengthen the meaning of her speech. This is because the Prime Minister urges the people not to think that leaving the EU is a new beginning for the United Kingdom and the end of relations with European allies. According to Theresa May, this is an optimistic future that can unite everyone. According to Oxford English Dictionary "a cradle" is "a small bed for a baby that can be pushed gently from side to side". The purpose of using this conceptual metaphor is to show that the UK is always at the forefront of innovation in all areas. The Prime Minister assures the people not to lose industrial leadership and be the most innovative country in the world even after leaving the EU.

"The fact is that every Free Trade Agreement has varying market access depending on the respective interests of the countries involved. If this is cherry-picking, then every **trade arrangement is cherry-picking.**"⁵ The lexical unit "cherry-pick" is

often used to signify that somebody is choosing something just to gain some kind of advantage or prove a particular point. This phrase is a metaphor and comes from the idea of picking through a bowl of cherries to select the best ones for yourself.

"There are other reasons why our future should give us confidence. **We will always be a champion of economic openness;** we will always be a country whose pitch to the world is high standards at home."⁶ In this conceptual metaphor we can exemplify the word "economic openness", in political economy, the degree to which nondomestic transactions (imports and exports) take place and affect the size and growth of a national economy. The degree of openness is measured by the actual size of registered imports and exports within a national economy. According to Cambridge English Dictionary the word "champion" means "someone or something especially a person or animal, that has beaten all other competitors in a competition".⁷ However, in this context we can encounter a conceptual metaphor that the UK will be the winner and at the first stage of the world economy. Theresa May tries to persuade the people to see Britain's bright future. Their fundamental strengths really determine the country's success and that's why Britain's economy will always be strong.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson made a statement in the House of Commons on the priorities for the government on 25 July, 2019. He said "When I fully intend to be around, though not necessarily in this job we will look back on this period, this extraordinary period, **as the beginning of a new golden age for our United Kingdom.**"⁸ According to Merriam-Webster Dictionary "a golden age" means a period of great happiness, prosperity, and

⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pms-florence-speech-a-new-era-of-cooperation-and-partnership-between-the-uk-and-the-eu>

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<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/champion>

⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-statement-on-priorities-for-the-government-25-july-2019>

⁴ <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-43256183>

⁵ <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-43256183>

achievement.⁹ It is also considered a mythical moment of humanity, that of abundance in a generous nature, where everything grows without work. It is also present in Greek literature and mythology. The term "Golden Age" has always had a metaphorical aspect. The Prime Minister assumes that leaving the EU will be the beginning of the new prosperities and developments for the people of the UK.

"The time has come to act, to take decisions, to give strong leadership and to change this country for the better. And though the Queen has just honoured me with this extraordinary office of state my job is to serve you, the people. Because if there is one point we politicians need to remember, it is that **the people are our bosses.**" – said Boris Johnson in his first speech as the Prime Minister of the UK.¹⁰ The politician calls the people, the people of England, our bosses. The purpose of this is that he does not rule the people, but the people rule him, and his duty is to serve those people. His first step as prime minister is to lead the people to better, brighter days after three years of political tension. The politician can express the tasks he has set for himself in the future by using a metaphor. In addition to politics, he was able to convince the people by presenting them the way to the goals that need to be achieved in both the social and educational spheres.

"My job is to make sure your kids get a superb education, wherever they are in the country - and that's why we have already announced that we are going to level up per pupil funding in primary and secondary schools. And that is the work that begins immediately behind that **black door.**"¹¹ On a metaphorical level, a door can become an entrance to nearly anything, but it is most commonly used to symbolize the entrance to another world. It represents the entrance to your home as well as your life. According to the old beliefs and customs, you should bring all the things you want to take into your house through the front door. Boris Johnson

determines the nation to take the advantages of the Brexit with high heart and great confidence. As a new Prime Minister he is convinced to prosper and presents his plans in medical, educational, economical spheres.

"And it is an exciting time for many in Europe too. The European Union is **beginning a new chapter in the story of its development.** Just last week, President Juncker set out his ambitions for the future of the European Union."¹² - said Theresa May in her speech in Italy, on 22 September 2017. Literally, starting a new chapter is ultimately something created in our minds. It means that you attach to the event that allows you to perceive the event as something that changes you or opens up a new door in your life. However, in this context the Prime Minister used the metaphor in order to assure the people the European Union would have benefits from the Brexit. She believes that the EU accept the new perspectives and changes that hold exciting possibilities for its future.

Conclusion

The studies reviewed have shown that a metaphor is a cognitive device and pervades political discourse. The use of metaphor in political discourse is a linguistic strategy used around the world. From the above analysis, it can be said that the metaphor helps the people to understand the various political issues in the society and therefore represents their general attitude towards politics. The use of metaphors not only helps to convince people of a particular point of view, but also influences people's opinion on political issues. The more metaphors are used in political discourse, the more they seem to inspire people. By using colourful conceptual metaphors, politicians call the people to unite as one nation to survive, protect and struggle for their countries' future.

¹²<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pms-florence-speech-a-new-era-of-cooperation-and-partnership-between-the-uk-and-the-eu>

⁹ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/golden%20age>

¹⁰ <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-49102495>

¹¹<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-49102495>

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