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FRAMING CONFLICT AND CRISIS: A COGNITIVE STYLISTIC ANALYSIS OF METAPHOR, FOCALIZATION AND EMOTION IN TRUMP'S SPEECHES ON ISRAEL AND IRAN WAR

SHAMIM AKHTER
INTI INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY, PERSIARAN PERDANA BBN, PUTRA NILAI,71800NILAI, NEGERI SEMBILAN, MALAYSIA, EMAIL: shamim.akhter@newinti.edu.my, ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1815-6973

MUHAMMAD AJMAL
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR, DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE, SHAIKH AYAZ UNIVERSITY SHIKARPUR, PAKISTAN, ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1085-7046

SHAISTA ZEB
ASSISTANT PROFESSOR, QASIM UNIVERSITY, SAUDI ARABIA, EMAIL: muhammad.ajmal@saus.edu.pk

RABINDRA DEV PRASAD
INTI INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY, PERSIARAN PERDANA BBN, PUTRA NILAI,71800NILAI, NEGERI SEMBILAN, MALAYSIA, EMAIL; rabindra.prasad@newinti.edu.my

Abstract

The present research outlines the linguistic construction of conflict and crisis in political text employing the cognitive stylistic approach by focusing on the speeches of a former U.S. President Donald Trump related to the Israel-Iran conflict. Based on the main ideas of cognitive linguistics and stylistics, especially metaphor theory, focalization, and framing of the emotional perception, the study reflects on the process through which the rhetoric elements followed by Trump construct his perception and ideological placement in the minds of the population. The analysis will use Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) together with cognitive models of emotion (Kovcses, 2000) to unveil the ways that the metaphorical language constructs the national identities, moral polarity and narrative of threats. The analysis of focalization means that Trump figures as a moral arbiter and protective force and positions the United States as such as well whereas the adversaries are framed using demeanizing and aggressive metaphors. There is a critical review of emotional language use and how such emotions as fear, patriotism, and anger are incited in legitimating foreign policy and war. These results indicate that the speeches crafted by Trump utilize the closely knit tapestry of metaphorical and emotional appeals supporting the polarized vision of the world and justifying strategic choices in the era of geopolitical tension. This study will help develop a better insight into the ideology, emotion, and cognition poisoning properties of language in the context of international conflict framing in the case such a method is brought to a line between cognitive stylistics, and political discourse analysis.

Keywords: cognitive stylistics, political inclusion, Israel-Iran conflict, freedom of speech, conceptual metaphor theory

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

This is because in the current political world, discourse is the key to influencing perception, legitimation of policy as well as creating social reality. A political discourse in particular when it concerns an international conflict and crisis action tends to employ emotionally appealed language and rhetoricism that makes the happening to be related in terms of an ideologically loaded structure (Charteris-Black, 2011). The speeches of former U.S. President Donald Trump on the issue of the Israel-Iran dispute represent the strategic use of linguistic processes to create stories of threat, security, and moral dichotomy by the political elites.

The cognitive stylistics, an integrative direction at the periphery of cognitive linguistics and literary stylistics, has something to contribute to the study of how language not merely reflects but constructs thought and emotion (Stockwell, 2002; Semino, 2008). In this context, metaphor plays the pivotal role of explaining a process through which abstract conflicts such as geopolitical are put into physical, sometimes militaristic perspective. As an example,

metaphors like axis of evil or battle of good and evil do not imply social neutrality; rather, they trigger certain cognitive frames shaping the opinion of the people and their emotional reaction (Lakoff, 2004; Musolff, 2016).

Besides, the experience of focalization or the angle through which the events are narrated determines the way audiences are positioned in regards to their sentiment and action sets. Self-referential pronouns and perspectival shifts in the speeches of Trump place the American United States in a role of a protector of peace and democracy and position the enemies as an existential threat. Such narrative positioning encourages the viewers to take one of the evaluative standpoints, which is supportive of the ideologies of nationalism (Toolan, 2012; Dancygier & Vandelanotte, 2017).

Another essential element of the political rhetoric is emotion, at least in crisis discourse. According to cognitive linguists, emotion is constructed and manipulated as well as being expressed with the help of language (Kovocses, 2000). Trump has also used rhetoric, which is often filled with fear, outrage, and patriotism to unite the support of harsh foreign policies. Emotional packaging of his speeches usually oversimplifies geopolitical realities into palatable emotionally compelling stories that are easy enough to internalize and implement (Ahmed, 2004).

Within this study, approaches to cognition styles and political discourse analysis are placed at the point where they can be combined to explore the construction of the Israel-Iran conflict by means of metaphor, focalization, and emotion in speeches of Trump. In such a way, it tries to shed light on the cognitive and ideological premises of conflict rhetoric and its effects on the awareness of citizens and the relations between states.

Problem Statement

Language in modern situations of political communication is not merely a transporter of information, but rather an effective means to influence ideologies, to develop stories, and to set an emotional pace. The speech of former U.S. President Donald Trump at the time of the geopolitical tension, in particular, when it concerns Israel and Iran, is an excellent source of study of the rhetorical and stylistic aspects of the conflict framing. Although an increasing number of studies have focused on Trump READ political rhetoric, there is still a serious shortage in the literature on the cognitive stylistic aspects of Trump rhetoric; specifically, how Trump has successfully combined metaphor, focalization and emotional appeal in order to frame persuasive discourses of conflict and crisis. The study aims to fill this gap by examining how these features of cognitive styles work collectively to influence the perception of various populaces and authorise the actions of foreign policy in extreme cases of political escalations.

Significance of the Study

This study helps the field of cognitive stylistics as an interdisciplinary field to use its constructs in examining politics in a situation of international conflict. It also provides knowledge as to the role of metaphorical framing, narrative perspective (focalization) and emotional language as rhetorical tools in justifying the legitimacy of political ideologies and military operations. The discovery will be of use to scholars, as well as students of discourse, cognitive linguistics, political science, media studies, as it will offer them a detailed comprehension of how politicians such as Trump exploit the features of cognitive and emotional aspects of a language to create a convincing narrative. Moreover, it promotes critical media literacy by providing the audience with the means to discern the manipulative attempts of using discourse in the political environment.

Research Questions

1) What do conceptual metaphors employed in the speech of Trump suggest about the presentation of Israel-Iran conflict and defense of the American foreign policy stance?
2) How is focalization used as a help to build ideological views and affinity of the audience in such speeches?
3) What is the role of Trump employing emotional language with the purpose of triggering certain mental effects (e.g., fear, disgust, anger, patriotism) in his definition of conflict and crisis?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The political use of language especially in the conflict and crisis has been the topic of a lot of research in the context of critical discourse analysis (CDA), cognitive linguistics, and also in the context of stylistics. The academic community is united in the belief that political speeches do not just follow reality but also create the way it is being perceived and interpreted (Fairclough, 1995; Wodak, 2015). Against the backdrop of this landscape, the rhetoric of Donald Trump has received a lot of attention amid scholars as resultant of being populist in its delivery, accompanied by the fierce use of metaphors, and, in a sense, emotionally evocative (Lakoff, 2016; Musolff, 2022).

Political Discourse Metaphor

Political rhetoric is the established field of research (especially within the context of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) as defined by Lakoff and Johnson (1980)) that looks into the use of metaphor in the political rhetoric. In the CMT, metaphors are not an added fancy terminology but are primary towards the way individuals think of abstract concepts such as war, morality and national identity. According to Lakoff (2004), practical politicians tend to use the metaphors of WAR, FAMILY and MORALITY to lay the foundations of the transcripts of the unlimited complex topics. As an example, such metaphors as protecting our allies or destroying evil are widely applied when it comes to

interventionist policies. Musolff (2016) also pays much attention to the metaphor scenarios, in which repeated metaphorical figures of speech trigger the culturally directed narratives, which legitimize political ideologies.

Metaphor is a feminine morality that acts as a core part in the establishment of a moral and existential clash of the Israel and Iran combat in Trump rhetoric. His choice of metaphors such as the evil regime or battle, peace through strength, and so on demonstrate his binary thinking of the world that oversimplifies the reality of geopolitical dynamics and strengthens the boundaries of ideologies (Charteris-Black, 2018). Nevertheless, majority of literature has thought it best to consider these metaphors in isolation, without addressing the relationship between these metaphors and narrative structure and emotional framing- a gap that this study will undertake.

Focalization and Narrative Perspective of political Speech

This is a concept of narratology, which aims at describing the focus through which a narrative is written (Genette, 1980). Focalization can be an effective technique in political speeches to influence the perception of the audience by pointing toward the perspective in which the audience shares the same perspective of the speaker. As evidence of this phenomenon, Toolan (2012) as well as Dancygier and Vandelanotte (2017) focus on the task of establishing the use of focalization effects (e.g., we, they, I) to place the speaker and the audience into a moral and ideological field. The personal use of language and inclusive pronouns that mostly consists of repetitions of terms of self-reference, and pronouns, like, we, our allies, which allows developing the communal sense of individuality and at the same time separating the speaker and listeners they belong to and the opponents they are not identified with.

Although focalization has something to do with political discourse, few studies have been done incorporating the focalization with metaphor and emotion within cognitive stylistic settings. Unless there can be a more integrative approach that should consider the interaction between various stylistic tools to construct discourse (Semino and Short, 2004). Starting with this observation, the present research goes beyond it by examining the role of focalization co-functioning with metaphor and emotion in the speeches of Trump.

Framing of Emotion and Affective

Emotion in political language is the part of the language that seems to be emerging as the most important characteristics of the persuasion process (Ahmed, 2004; Kopecses, 2000). Political speeches are highly dependent on emotional appeals: they are designed to raise a following, make the performance justified and establish certain sense of urgency or even moral superiority. The studies of affective stylistics and emotion discourse demonstrate that emotions of fear, anger, and hope can be brought up in language to shape the political situation (Hart, 2018; Demjenen, 2019).

With regard to Trump rhetoric, emotional intensification is also a common occurrence in order to frame Iran as a crooked and reckless foe and Israel as a worthy and ethical ally. There is a tendency to swing between fear-inducing and triumphant speech, which intensifies emotional stimulation and polarizes the moods of the masses (Ott & Dickinson, 2019). Nevertheless, the interaction of emotion, metaphor and focalization has not been extensively discussed by the current research or even in regard to cognitive stylistics.

Literature Gap

Although metaphor, focalization and emotion have been previously considered in the context of political discourse, there has not been much research or work that takes the three strands and puts them within the rubric of cognitive stylistics that can be used to explore what is happening in the international conflict. Such discrepancy is particularly significant in the context of the speeches given by Trump on Israel-Iran conflict that are affluent with metaphorical representations, distortion of perspectives, and the ability to depict emotions. On one hand, approaching this intersection, the current research can introduce a sophisticated and holistic view of the way that the politics of language formulates a politically freighted discourse of conflict and crisis.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this study, the interdisciplinary approach of cognitive stylistics forms a solid basis by relying mainly on the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), theory of focalization (Genette, 1980; Dancygier & Vandelanotte, 2017) and emotion discourse analysis (Kovecses, 2000; Ahmed, 2004). Conceptual Metaphor Theory offers insight into the fact that abstract political phenomena including war, diplomacy and morality are constructed in terms of metaphorical mappings which echo and support ideological stands. The theory of focalization will allow one to comprehend the perspective of the narration and the position of the evaluation that allows seeing how the speeches of Trump direct the emotional and moral orientation of the audience due to the changes of the perspective and the pronouns used. Furthermore, emotive language theories of emotion talk about the process by which collective sensations like fear, outrage and even patriotic pride are constructed by emotional discourses in order to influence the thoughts and actions of the audience. Collectively, these frameworks present the possibility of an inclusive analysis of how language does not only communicate, but further frames conflict and crisis within political communication.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Devoting a qualitative analysis to a text strictly of the paradigm of cognitive stylistics, the study will turn to a purposeful selection of a corpus of official speeches by Donald Trump regarding the country of Israel and the conflict with Iran, which occurred in 2017-2020. The analysis of the speeches relies on a trippronged analytical model (1) metaphor analysis, aimed at determining conceptual metaphors as well as their ideological consequence in respect to the approach discussed by Musolff (2016) and Charteris-Black (2018); (2) focalization analysis, to explore narrative positioning and perspective switching based on the framework elaborated by Toolan (2012); and (3) emotion discourse analysis, to track down emotional terminology and emotional framing drawing on Kövecses (200 Manual coding of the data based on thematic content analysis techniques is applied, and the focus is made on the identification of repetitive patterns in the use of metaphors, construction of views and emotional appeal. The triangulated approach makes possible a comprehensive insight into the process of co-construction of ideologically driven representation of international conflict based on cognitive and stylistic selection.

Data Analysis

This section shows some of the excerpts of the speeches given by Donald Trump on the Israel-Iran dispute. Each piece of speech is then accompanied by an analysis of interpretation based on metaphor theory, focalization and emotional framing.

Excerpt 1: Speech on Withdrawal from Iran Nuclear Deal (May 8, 2018)

"The Iran deal was a horrible, one-sided deal that should have never, ever been made. It didn't bring calm, it didn't bring peace, and it never will. In fact, the deal allowed Iran to continue enriching uranium and, over time, reach the brink of a nuclear breakout."

Trump applies the metaphor of WAR to paint the nuclear agreement as a battlefront in which U.S. was disadvantaged ("one-sided deal"). The metaphor creating the image of the "brink of a nuclear breakout" stimulates the ideas about imminent threat, creating the image of the uncontrollable aggressive aggressor Iran. Imago repetition (never, never, ever) makes emotional tension and evokes the feeling of fear and distrust. Focalization allows Trump to make the reader think in the terms of the U.S., portraying his image of a reasonable judge who helps to amend the misaccessments of the past. This is a binary that supports an ideology of moral superiority and requires action to be forceful.

Excerpt 2: Speech at the United Nations General Assembly (September 25, 2018)

"Iran's leaders sow chaos, death, and destruction. They do not respect their neighbors or borders, or the sovereign rights of nations. Instead, Iran's leaders plunder the nation's resources to enrich themselves and to spread mayhem across the Middle East and far beyond."

This text is based on the metaphorical personification of a government of Iran as bad entities-the one that are able to cause trouble and to rob resources of the country by reference to metaphors of a crime and disease. The created sense of moral disgust and urgency is capitalized on the imagery that portrays Iran as pathological and predatory. Focalization has been employed here in an attempt to dehumanize Iranian leadership with a view to inviting the international audience to unite in a common course of action, which is hostile to Iran. At the emotional level, the speech appeals to anger and moral outrage, urging people to join Trump in his demand to have Iran internationally secluded.

Excerpt 3: Remarks on the Abraham Accords (September 15, 2020)

"The people of the Middle East will no longer allow hatred of Israel to be fomented as an excuse for radicalism or extremism. Today's agreement proves that the nations of the region are breaking free from the failed approaches of the past."

With the metaphor of liberation, Trump presents the normalization of the relations with Israel as a heroic narrative broken free. The metaphor PEACE IS LIBERATION frames the U.S as the designer of the future is possible and of moral clarity. Focalization is extended to the regional level (a perspective of the people of the Middle East) generating a collective mode of change under the influence of the U.S. The emotional framing reinforced by the usage of evaluative terms, such as the words "hatred," "radicalism" or the choice of the term "failed approaches," opposites the positive overtones of peace against the negative connotations of past attack, thus welcome a favorable and moral optimism.

Excerpt 4: Statement Following the Killing of Qassem Soleimani (January 3, 2020)

"Soleimani made the death of innocent people his sick passion, contributing to terrorist plots as far away as New Delhi and London. We took action last night to stop a war. We did not take action to start a war."

This text has metaphorical and emotional dualism. Trump employs a pathologizing metaphor by referring to the motives of Soleimani as a sick passion, proving a moralizing discourse against the man. The heading Stop a war is really a play of words since a war is not presented as something aggressive but rather preventive defense, the metaphor used here is WAR IS A VIRUS OR FIRE THAT MUST BE CONTAINED. This is an inverted focalization whereby the interference of the U.S. military is decomposed as peacekeeping. This is also emotionally appealing to the audience

because they want peace but it is understandable that such justifies the application of deadly force: a case of cognitive dissonance resolution of framing.

DISCUSSION

The results of the current research indicate that the speeches of Donald Trump about the war in Israel-Iran are full of the cognitive and stylistic devices that cumulatively form a polarized, emotive, and ideologically aligned discourse of international relations. These results match those of the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) put forward by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) in that metaphors are not just rhetorical embellishes, but they are key to the thinking of humans and political meaning-making. The overall spillover of WAR metaphors (e.g., battle, fight, defend) and DISEASE metaphors (e.g., sick passion, plague of terrorism) that Trump uses makes an environment in which moral frame is activated as the United States and Israel are presented as defenders of civilization against the threatening Other. This echoes Lakoff (2004) who examined the metaphors used in the conservative discourse and how they create a hierarchy of morals and afford binary flights of thought.

Moreover, this work evidences the theoretical assertions of Musolff (2016, 2022) that metaphor scenarios, i.e., metaphorical narratives with an element of cultural memory, fulfill the role of sustaining long-term ideological worldviews. The continual portrayal of Iran as a rogue, lawless regime and Israel as the epitome of peace and democracy is an effective use of metaphor, Trump in this sense plays upon the dominant geopolitical ideologies of the west. The metaphorical context of GOOD VS EVIL, on which Trump bases his rhetoric, supports militarization and moral exceptionalism those same post-9/11 rhetoric that Charteris-Black (2011) focuses on during the Bush era.

In narratology, the focalization protects the model proposed by Dancygier and Vandelanotte concerning the discourse viewpoint as a network because the speaker can influence the perspective to facilitate the audience according to its cognition and emotions (Dancygier and Vandelanotte 2017). Trump employs very often internal focalization, viewing the American government or himself as righteous focalizers of the narrative (we made these steps to prevent a war), coupled with the external, objectifying sources of focalization, creating enemies (the leaders of Iran create havoc). This selective focalization gives rise to an emotional alignment of views with the speaker, which enhances ingroup-outgroup processes, which Wodak (2015) addresses in her account of the right-wing populist discourse.

Moreover, emotional appeals within the rhetoric of Trump confirm a thesis presented by Kovecses (2000) which asserts that metaphor and emotion are bodily meshed at the brain. Fear and anger as well as pride and hope are also strategically evoked to justify policies and the establishment of affective solidarity. The speech of Trump, that was made after the murder of Soleimani, is one of the prime examples of the use of emotion discourse as a rhetorical appeal that helps combine the sense of terrorism fear with the sense of patriotic pride overcoming the audience with emotion, finally, elevating the military force into the moral duty. This proves the thesis of Ahmed (2004) according to which emotions adhere to language, defining the collective memory and creating affects in the population. Four significant challenges to maintaining cultural identity are identified: modernisation, assimilation, leadership, and attitudes (Khong et al.,2025).

Metaphor, focalization, and emotion form a triangulation where we can find a hidden ideological coherence in Trump discourse, which not only is persuasive but also performative. The speeches are not unique manifestations of political purposes but elements of a broad system of discursive construction that creates the narratives of geopolitics in a form cognitively available and emotionally impressive. It therefore helps the research to give a contribution towards cognitive stylistics by demonstrating the use of the interaction of these components to promote a message that is ideological, more so when used in crisis communication.

CONCLUSION

As this paper has shown, speeches propagated by Donald Trump regarding the Israeli-Iran crisis cannot be described as a single political statement but a text based on metaphor, focalization, and emotional staging. It was demonstrated through the prism of cognitive stylistics that the conceptual metaphors WAR IS A MORAL STRUGGLE and PEACE IS LIBERATION standing at the basis of geopolitical thinking lay at the core of simplifying geopolitical realities by way of bringing them to ideologically palatable dichotomy. Focalization also contributes to this narration by making the audiences adopt a U.S.-centred ethics perspective and alienizing and disenfranchising enemies. These discourses have a greater persuasiveness because of emotion-laden language that appeals to fears, pride, outrage, and hope, making the language urgent and morally obvious. All these rhetorical mechanisms operating together not only frame international conflict but also justify policy actions and guarantee the consent of people to either express or accept them. This study also adds value to the understanding of political language by combining the metaphor theory, narrative perspective, and affective discourse analysis in understanding the creation and maintenance of ideological worldviews in the form of political language through crisis times. The paper emphasizes the need to be critical towards political rhetoric especially in instances where it is employed to promote military action and influence how the world at large perceives.

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