



The Concept of Power and Its Conceptual-Metaphorical Representations In Donald Trump's Speech

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Abstract

This article examines how power is conceptualized in Donald Trump's political discourse, focusing particularly on the metaphorical representations of power found in his speeches. Drawing on Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) Cognitive Linguistics approach and the Framework of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), this study analyzes Trump's use of metaphors to construct and convey concepts such as power, superiority, control, and leadership in his discourse. Within the scope of the research, various metaphor types—including ontological metaphors, container metaphors, force metaphors, and personification—are examined in detail. These metaphors are significant in understanding how Trump represents power in his political rhetoric and how these representations influence voters. Slogans such as "Make America Great Again" particularly illustrate how the concept of power is processed at metaphorical and symbolic levels. The discourse analysis of several speeches delivered during his presidency reveals the role metaphors play in constructing authority, legitimacy, and leadership. The study also offers important insights within the context of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), showing how political actors use language not merely as a tool for communication but also as an ideological, strategic, and manipulative instrument. In doing so, it evaluates the function of language in political power relations from a broader perspective.

Keywords: power, conceptual metaphor, political discourse, cognitive linguistics, critical discourse analysis

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Donald Trump'ın Konuşmasında Güç Kavramı ve Kavramsal Metaforik Temsilleri

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Özet

Bu makale, Donald Trump'ın siyasi söyleminde gücün nasıl kavramsallaştırıldığını incelemekte ve özellikle konuşmalarında yer alan gücün metaforik temsillerine odaklanmaktadır. Bu çalışma, Lakoff ve Johnson'un (1980) Bilişsel Dilbilim yaklaşımı ve Kavramsal Metafor Teorisi (KMT) çerçevesinde, Donald Trump'ın söylemlerinde güç, üstünlük, kontrol ve liderlik gibi kavramları yapılandırmak ve aktarmak amacıyla metafor kullanımını analiz etmektedir. Araştırma kapsamında ontolojik metaforlar, kap (container) metaforları, kuvvet (force) metaforları ve kişileştirme (personification) gibi çeşitli metafor türleri ayrıntılı biçimde incelenmektedir. Bu metaforlar, Trump'ın politik retorikinde gücü nasıl temsil ettiğini ve bu temsillerin seçmen üzerinde nasıl etki yarattığını anlamak açısından önem taşımaktadır. Özellikle “Amerika’yı yeniden büyük yapma” gibi sloganlar, güç kavramının metaforik ve sembolik düzeyde nasıl işlendiğini göstermektedir. Başkanlığı süresince yaptığı çeşitli konuşmaların söylem analizi yöntemiyle incelenmesi, metaforların otorite, meşruiyet ve liderlik inşasında oynadığı rolü ortaya koymaktadır. Bu çalışma, aynı zamanda Eleştirel Söylem Analizi (ESA) bağlamında, siyasi aktörlerin dili yalnızca iletişim aracı olarak değil, aynı zamanda ideolojik, stratejik ve manipülatif bir araç olarak nasıl kullandıklarına dair önemli içgörüler sunmaktadır. Böylece, dilin politik güç ilişkilerindeki işlevi daha geniş bir perspektiften değerlendirilmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: güç, kavramsal metafor, siyasi söylem, bilişsel dilbilim, eleştirel söylem analizi

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Introduction

The concept of power in political discourse is not merely a static construct but a dynamic force shaped by linguistic strategies that legitimize authority, frame ideologies, and manipulate public perception. Donald Trump's presidency (2017–2025) marked a pivotal era in American politics, characterized by polarizing rhetoric and a deliberate departure from conventional political communication. His speeches, laden with metaphorical language, exemplify how power is linguistically constructed to project dominance, strength, and control. This study investigates the conceptual-metaphorical representations of power in Trump's speeches, interrogating how metaphors serve as cognitive tools to normalize ideologies of nationalism, exclusion, and authoritarian leadership.

In an era of rising populism, Trump's rhetoric offers a critical case study for analyzing the intersection of language, power, and cognition. Unlike traditional political discourse, which often relies on nuanced diplomacy, Trump's language is marked by simplicity, repetition, and visceral imagery—strategies that amplify emotional resonance and ideological clarity. For instance, his frequent use of phrases like “winning,” “fighting,” and “dominance” transcends mere linguistic ornamentation; these metaphors structure the public's understanding of power as a zero-sum game requiring relentless assertion. Such framing aligns with Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) assertion that metaphors are foundational to thought, shaping how abstract concepts like power are conceptualized and acted upon.

This study situates itself within a growing body of research on populist discourse, which highlights the role of metaphor in constructing “us vs. them” dichotomies and legitimizing anti-establishment agendas (Wodak, 2021). Trump's speeches are particularly ripe for analysis due to their reliance on force metaphors (e.g., “crush the enemy”), container metaphors (e.g., “protect our borders”), and personification (e.g., “America is back”), all of which reduce complex socio-political realities to tangible, emotionally charged narratives. By applying Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), this paper uncovers how these metaphors reinforce a worldview where power is synonymous with control, territoriality, and hypermasculine leadership.

The urgency of this analysis lies in its implications for democratic discourse. Trump's rhetorical strategies—echoed by global populist leaders—have reshaped political communication, normalizing adversarial language that undermines institutional trust and amplifies societal divisions (Mudde, 2019). By dissecting the metaphors underpinning his rhetoric, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how language weaponizes power, not only reflecting but actively constructing political realities.

1. Theoretical Framework

This study adopts an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that combines Cognitive Linguistics—specifically Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) as introduced by Lakoff and Johnson (1980)—with Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), drawing on the works of Fairclough and van Dijk. This dual approach facilitates a comprehensive examination of how metaphorical language contributes to the construction of political meaning, with particular emphasis on the representation of power in the rhetorical discourse of Donald Trump.

Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) suggests that abstract domains such as power, leadership, and control are often conceptualized through metaphorical mappings derived from more concrete experiences. Within this framework, the study investigates how metaphorical structures cognitively shape Trump's political persona and the articulation of his policy objectives.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) complements this cognitive perspective by situating metaphor use within broader socio-political and ideological contexts. It emphasizes the role of discourse in maintaining or contesting power relations and social hierarchies. In this study, CDA is employed to analyze how Trump's metaphorical choices function to legitimize authority, delegitimize opposition, and mobilize political support through the strategic construction of representations of self, others, and national identity.

By integrating CMT and CDA, the study offers a multi-layered analysis: CMT elucidates the cognitive mechanisms underlying metaphor use, while CDA reveals its ideological and political implications. This combined methodology is essential for understanding how metaphorical language in Trump's discourse not only reflects but actively constructs political realities in the context of American public life.

Research Questions:

1. Which conceptual metaphors are most frequently employed by Donald Trump to represent notions of power and leadership?
2. In what ways do these metaphors correspond with broader ideological frameworks, including nationalism, authority, and control?
3. What pragmatic effects do Trump's metaphorical expressions have on audience perceptions of power and political transformation?
4. How do recurrent metaphorical patterns contribute to the reinforcement of Trump's political identity throughout his campaign and presidency?
5. How does the socio-political context influence the interpretation and communicative impact of metaphorical language in Trump's rhetoric?

Hypotheses:

1. Metaphors related to war, strength, and construction in Trump's discourse reinforce perceptions of dominance and control, resonating with public expectations of assertive leadership.
2. Conceptual metaphors in Trump's rhetoric serve not merely stylistic purposes but function as cognitive instruments that shape public understanding of political dynamics.
3. The repetition of dominant metaphorical frames contributes to the normalization of specific ideological positions, particularly those aligned with nationalist and anti-elitist narratives.
4. The persuasive power of Trump's metaphors is amplified by their alignment with prevailing socio-political conditions, including polarization, economic uncertainty, and institutional skepticism.
5. Trump's metaphor usage operates as a deliberate rhetorical strategy aimed at positioning himself as a transformative figure advocating national renewal.

1.1. Cognitive Linguistics and Conceptual Metaphor Theory

Cognitive Linguistics (CL) is a theory of language that emphasizes the interrelationship between language and cognition, proposing that linguistic meaning is shaped by our mental experiences and conceptual structures (Langacker, 1987). Unlike traditional approaches to linguistics, which treat language as an abstract system of formal rules, CL posits that our understanding of the world is grounded in our embodied experiences, and that these experiences shape how we structure and represent meaning in language.

Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), a foundational framework within Cognitive Linguistics, was introduced by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) in their influential work *Metaphors We Live By*. This theory posits that metaphor is not merely a linguistic device but a fundamental mechanism of human cognition. It suggests that individuals conceptualize and engage with abstract domains—such as emotions, relationships, and social structures—through metaphorical mappings derived from more concrete, embodied experiences. Consequently, everyday reasoning and behavior are shaped by metaphorical structures embedded within our conceptual system. They allow individuals to understand and experience abstract concepts through more concrete or familiar domains. For example, abstract concepts like love, time, and power are often conceptualized through metaphors rooted in more tangible, everyday experiences, such as container metaphors (e.g., "love is a container") or journey metaphors (e.g., "time is money").

In the context of this study, CMT provides the analytical framework to explore how Donald Trump's rhetoric constructs the concept of power through metaphorical representations. By identifying and categorizing the metaphors used in Trump's speeches, this study seeks to uncover the conceptual structures that underlie his discourse on power.

Specifically, it examines how power is metaphorically framed in terms of strength, control, force, and authority, and how these metaphors shape public perception and political action.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) distinguish between conceptual metaphors and linguistic metaphors. The former refers to the underlying conceptual structure that informs our understanding of a given domain, while the latter refers to the specific linguistic expressions that surface in speech or writing. In this study, the focus is on uncovering the conceptual metaphors related to power in Trump's speeches, and how they are realized through various linguistic expressions.

1.2. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

In addition to CMT, this study incorporates Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), a multidisciplinary approach to the study of language that seeks to understand the relationship between discourse, power, and society. CDA, as developed by scholars such as Fairclough (1995) and Van Dijk (1993), focuses on how language is used to construct and perpetuate social hierarchies and power relations. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) operates from an explicitly sociopolitical standpoint, wherein scholars articulate their perspectives, principles, and objectives not only within academic discourse but also in relation to broader societal structures. Although not every stage of theoretical development or analytical practice is overtly political, the overarching orientation of CDA is inherently political, aiming to foster social change through critical reflection. Analysts often adopt the standpoint of marginalized groups affected by systemic inequality, directing their critique toward dominant institutions and elites that perpetuate or legitimize social injustice. Within this framework, discourse is understood not as a neutral communicative tool but as a mechanism through which power relations, ideological constructs, and social inequalities are both reproduced and challenged (Van Dijk, 1993, p. 252). Fairclough's perspective complements this view by emphasizing that discourse cannot be defined in isolation; rather, it must be examined through its relational functions within social contexts. He argues that discourse contributes to the constitution of social life by generating and negotiating meaning, thereby playing a central role in shaping social realities (Fairclough, 1995, p. 3).

CDA is particularly concerned with the way that language structures and linguistic choices reflect social power dynamics and the ideological positions of those who produce the discourse. In the case of Donald Trump's speeches, CDA helps to analyze how his language constructs power in ways that legitimize his political authority and manipulate the public perception of his leadership.

One of the key principles of CDA is the notion of ideology, which refers to the system of beliefs and values that shapes an individual's or group's worldview. Van Dijk (1993) explores the interrelation between discourse and ideology, emphasizing how ideological constructs are embedded within communicative practices and influence social cognition. This process contributes to the reinforcement of existing power relations and societal norms, while simultaneously functioning to legitimize dominant institutional structures. Through

CDA, the study aims to reveal how Trump's rhetorical choices reflect and reinforce political ideologies, particularly regarding the concept of power. For example, Trump often uses language that emphasizes the need for strong leadership, nationalism, and protectionism [<https://www.politico.com/story/2016/07/full-transcript-donald-trump-nomination-acceptance-speech-at-rnc-225974>]. These themes are not just metaphorical; they are ideologically charged and serve to justify his authority and political decisions.

CDA also draws attention to discourse strategies, which are the specific linguistic techniques used to construct and influence the audience's perception. These strategies may include framing, polarization, and us-vs-them narratives. For instance, Trump frequently employs rhetorical strategies such as fear appeals and identity-based rhetoric (e.g., "Make America Great Again" [<https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/the-inaugural-address/>] and "We are going to build a wall") [<https://www.politico.com/story/2016/07/full-transcript-donald-trump-nomination-acceptance-speech-at-rnc-225974>].

to create a sense of urgency and division, framing himself as the savior of the nation and his opponents as a threat to the country's future.

In applying CDA to Trump's speeches, this study aims to explore how his metaphorical language serves not only to represent power but also to shape and reinforce the political ideologies associated with his leadership. It examines the discursive strategies he uses to construct power as something that must be protected, defended, and asserted, often at the expense of certain social groups or political institutions.

1.3. Power in Discourse: Metaphors and Ideology

The relationship between metaphor and power in political discourse is central to this study. Metaphors do more than simply convey meaning; they play a crucial role in shaping the way people understand complex concepts such as power. Metaphors function as cognitive instruments that facilitate the conceptualization of abstract phenomena. In political discourse, they serve to frame such concepts in ideologically resonant ways, thereby shaping decision-making processes and influencing public perception. In Trump's case, metaphors related to power are not neutral; they are tools used to reinforce his political agenda and political identity as a strong leader capable of restoring America's former greatness.

For instance, metaphors such as "strong borders" (<https://www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/us-news/trump-says-strong-and-powerful-border-will-be-top-priority-once-he-assumes-office-they-re-not-staying-here-101731026915385.html>) and "And we fight. We fight like Hell and if you don't fight like Hell, you're not going to have a country anymore." (<https://www.rev.com/transcripts/donald-trump-speech-save-america-rally-transcript-january-6>) position power as something to be protected, defended, and restored. These metaphors function ideologically by promoting a

nationalistic vision that emphasizes strength, control, and exclusion. They suggest that power, in Trump's vision, is something to be wielded aggressively in order to protect national interests and ensure the survival of the nation-state.

Moreover, power metaphors are used to differentiate between the "us" and "them" in Trump's discourse, constructing the political other as a threat that must be combated. This framing of power as a battle or war (e.g., "We're going to win so much you're going to be sick of it") reinforces an image of Trump as a warrior-like figure who is fighting to protect America's sovereignty and values. Such metaphors contribute to the development of a political narrative in which power is represented as something that can be taken or lost, dependent upon the actions of the leader.

1.4. Framing Power in Political Rhetoric

Through the combination of Cognitive Linguistics (CL) and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), this study investigates how Trump's speeches frame power, exploring the metaphorical representations of authority, strength, control, and dominance. The metaphors analyzed in this study are not neutral linguistic tools; they are strategic resources that shape how power is understood and exercised in the political domain.

The focus of this study, therefore, is not only on identifying metaphors related to power but also on understanding how they function within the broader political context. By examining these metaphors in relation to ideological positions, social identity, and cultural values, this study aims to uncover how language serves as a powerful tool in shaping the public's perception of power, leadership, and authority.

The Theoretical Framework for this study is grounded in Cognitive Linguistics (CL) and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), two approaches that provide valuable insights into the ways in which language constructs and reflects power in political discourse. Through the application of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) and CDA, this study explores the complex ways in which Trump's language frames power, legitimizes authority, and constructs political ideologies. By examining the intersection of metaphor and ideology, this study seeks to offer a nuanced understanding of how political leaders use language to shape public perceptions of power and authority.

2. Methodology

The primary aim of this study is to explore the conceptual and metaphorical representations of power in the speeches of Donald Trump. In order to achieve this goal, a qualitative research methodology has been employed, specifically Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) from Cognitive Linguistics and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). These

frameworks allow for a detailed investigation of how Trump's rhetoric constructs and conveys power through metaphorical language.

2.1. Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT)

Within the framework of Cognitive Linguistics, metaphors are understood not merely as stylistic features of language but as fundamental cognitive structures. They play a central role in shaping human thought, reasoning, and behavior by providing conceptual frameworks through which abstract ideas are interpreted and engaged with (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). According to CMT, metaphors structure complex abstract concepts by mapping them onto more concrete or familiar domains. In this case, the concept of power is represented metaphorically, which helps shape public understanding of political authority, leadership, and control.

By applying CMT, this study investigates how metaphors are used to frame the concept of power in Trump's speeches. Through metaphorical analysis, we can discern how these metaphorical representations influence not only the conceptualization of power but also the broader social and political discourse.

2.2. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is employed as an additional analytical tool to examine the social implications of language use in political discourse. CDA, as proposed by scholars such as Fairclough (1995) and Van Dijk (1993), aims to understand how language structures and discourses serve to sustain or challenge social power, dominance, and inequality. Van Dijk (1993, p.254) underscores that a fundamental prerequisite for conducting effective critical discourse analysis is a thorough understanding of how social power and dominance operate. He argues that power is derived from privileged access to socially valued resources such as economic capital, institutional status, educational attainment, and specialized knowledge. This form of power enables dominant groups not only to regulate the behavior of others but also to influence their cognitive processes and perceptions.

Fairclough (1995, p.132) emphasizes that the analytical strength of his approach lies in its focus on the interplay between language and social practices. Discourse analysis, in this context, investigates how textual features—whether spoken or written—are shaped by broader societal structures and processes. The term “text” is understood as the tangible product of discourse, with spoken language often transcribed for analytical purposes. This framework enables the integration of micro-level linguistic analysis with macro-level examinations of sociopolitical issues, such as language policy. The method is considered “critical” due to its objective of revealing and interrogating the underlying connections between linguistic forms and social forces, including ideology and power, which frequently remain implicit or unnoticed in everyday communication.

Application of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA):

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is operationalized through Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional model, which provides a structured framework for examining the relationship between language and society. This model consists of three interrelated levels of analysis:

1. Textual Analysis (Micro-level): This dimension focuses on the linguistic features of the text, including vocabulary, grammar, syntax, cohesion, and rhetorical devices. It involves a close reading of spoken or written discourse to identify patterns such as metaphor use, modality, transitivity, and intertextuality. *Example:* Analyzing how Trump uses war metaphors (e.g., "fight," "battle," "enemy") to frame political opposition.

2. Discursive Practice (Meso-level): This level examines how texts are produced, distributed, and consumed within specific institutional and social contexts. It considers the roles of authors, audiences, and media platforms, as well as the conventions and genres that shape discourse circulation. *Example:* Investigating how Trump's speeches are mediated through news outlets and social media, influencing public interpretation and engagement.

3. Social Practice (Macro-level): The macro-level situates discourse within broader socio-political and ideological structures. It explores how language contributes to the reproduction or transformation of power relations, social norms, and institutional ideologies. *Example:* Assessing how Trump's metaphorical language reinforces nationalist ideologies and legitimizes political authority.

Together, these dimensions enable a comprehensive analysis of discourse by linking linguistic choices to social structures and ideological effects. CDA, through Fairclough's model, reveals how language functions not only as a communicative tool but also as a mechanism for enacting and contesting power in society.

By using CDA, this study examines how Trump's speeches not only represent power but also reflect, reinforce, and manipulate social and political realities.

CDA considers the contextual factors in which discourse occurs, such as the political climate, audience expectations, and the speaker's intentions. In analyzing Trump's rhetoric, CDA allows for a deeper understanding of how his language contributes to the construction of political identities, the legitimization of power, and the framing of social issues.

Data Selection

For this analysis, a series of selected speeches by Donald Trump were chosen based on their thematic focus on leadership, power, and political authority. The speeches were sourced from multiple platforms, including his inaugural speech, State of the Union addresses, campaign speeches, and other prominent public addresses made during his presidency. The time frame for the speech selection spans from 2016 to 2020, covering both his presidential

campaign and the entirety of his time in office. These speeches are rich in metaphorical content and offer a comprehensive view of how Trump represents power throughout his political career.

The speeches were chosen to cover both formal addresses to the nation and informal campaign speeches, as this variety provides insight into the different contexts and purposes of his rhetoric. The following speeches were specifically included:

- Inaugural Address (January 20, 2017)
- State of the Union addresses (2017)
- Campaign speeches (2016)
- Calls on Congress (2019).
- Speech to Congress (March 4, 2025).

Each speech was analyzed for recurring metaphors associated with the concept of power, focusing on their conceptual, linguistic, and pragmatic functions in the construction of political authority.

2.3. Metaphor Identification and Categorization

The first step in the methodology involved identifying metaphorical expressions related to power within the speeches. This was achieved through a systematic process of reading and coding the speeches, where expressions that were metaphorical in nature were noted and categorized. For example, terms like "strength," "winning," "control," and "fight" were highlighted as metaphors representing power in the discourse.

Once metaphors were identified, the next step involved categorizing them based on Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) classification of conceptual metaphors. The primary categories used for this analysis include:

1. Force Metaphors: Representing power as an active force or energy that can be exerted, harnessed, or manipulated. For example, Trump's use of phrases like "we will fight for America" or "we are going to win" positions power as something to be actively pursued or fought for.

2. Container Metaphors: Depicting power as something that can be contained, held, or protected. Examples of this include Trump's frequent use of terms like "America First" or "protecting the borders"—where power is framed as a container that needs to be safeguarded or defended.

3. *Personification*: Attributing human-like qualities to power or the nation. For instance, Trump often uses personification to present America as a living entity that can be revitalized or strengthened through leadership.

4. *Ontological Metaphors*: Representing power as a concrete object or thing that can be owned, manipulated, or controlled. For example, references to power as a “tool” or “weapon” highlight the ontological dimension of power, suggesting that it is something that can be used or wielded to achieve political goals.

2.4. Analytical Framework

To analyze the metaphors, this study follows a thematic approach, identifying the major themes or narratives that arise from the metaphors. Each metaphor is examined not only in terms of its individual meaning but also in relation to the broader themes of Trump's rhetoric, such as his leadership style, nationalism, and campaign promises.

Additionally, the pragmatic effects of these metaphors are considered—how do these metaphors serve to influence the audience's perception of power and authority? How do they position Trump as a strong leader capable of bringing about social and political change?

The study uses content analysis to extract key patterns in Trump's metaphorical language, examining both the frequency and context of metaphors. Repetition of certain metaphors is noted, as repeated metaphorical frames are often a key strategy in reinforcing certain political ideologies or beliefs.

2.5. Contextual and Socio-Political Considerations

Finally, the study takes into account the broader socio-political context of Trump's speeches, considering factors such as the political climate, public sentiment, and media representation. By situating the metaphors within their political context, this analysis explores how Trump's language resonates with his audience and reflects the political ideologies that he aims to promote.

In particular, the 2016 presidential campaign and 2017-2025 presidency were times of significant political polarization and socio-economic changes in the United States. This contextual understanding is essential to grasping the power dynamics conveyed through Trump's language and rhetoric.

The methodology outlined above provides a structured framework for analyzing the use of conceptual metaphors in Donald Trump's speeches, focusing on the representation of power. By applying Cognitive Linguistics, Conceptual Metaphor Theory, and Critical Discourse Analysis, this study aims to reveal the ways in which Trump's rhetorical strategies

contribute to the construction of power and authority in the political discourse of the 21st century.

3. Analysis of Conceptual Metaphors in Trump's Speech

3.1. Power as Force Metaphors

One of the most prominent ways in which Trump represents power is through force metaphors. These metaphors depict power as a form of physical force or energy that can be wielded to assert control or dominance. Trump often uses terms such as "strength", "winning", and "beating" to describe his approach to leadership. For example, in his speech on the "Make America Great Again" slogan, he states:

"We will use every tool at our disposal to win, and we will fight harder than anyone else."

This metaphor frames power as something that can be activated and utilized like a tool or weapon. It positions Trump as an active agent capable of exerting overwhelming force in the political arena. By using metaphors of force, Trump aligns himself with ideas of dominance, control, and decisiveness, key elements of his political persona.

3.2. Power as Container Metaphors

Another key conceptual metaphor employed by Trump is container metaphors, where power is imagined as a space that can be filled, occupied, or contained. This metaphor reflects the idea of power as something that can be safeguarded or protected. In a statement from his inauguration speech, Trump declares:

"We are going to protect our borders, we are going to protect our people."

Here, "protecting" the borders metaphorically links the concept of power with the containment of threats or the defense of territory. This metaphor also reinforces nationalistic ideals, positioning the nation as a container that must be defended against external forces. By using such metaphors, Trump conveys the idea that the strength of a nation lies in its ability to protect its borders and maintain control over its internal and external affairs.

3.3. Power as Personification

In addition to force and container metaphors, Trump frequently uses personification metaphors, which attribute human-like qualities to abstract concepts such as power or the nation. For instance, he often refers to the nation as an active, living entity capable of taking action. In his speech, he states:

"America is back, and we are strong again."

Here, America is personified as an entity that can revive and strengthen itself, positioning the nation as a living, breathing force under Trump's leadership.

Conclusion

Donald Trump's presidency redefined the role of metaphor in political discourse, demonstrating how language can weaponize power to legitimize authoritarianism and nationalist agendas. Through the analysis of his speeches, this study reveals that Trump's conceptualization of power is dominated by three interrelated metaphors: **power as force**, **power as containment**, and **power as personification**. These metaphors collectively frame power as a finite resource to be aggressively seized, territorially guarded, and embodied in a singular, paternalistic leader.

The force metaphor ("we will fight and win") reduces governance to a battlefield, positioning political opponents as existential threats and valorizing conflict as a means of asserting dominance. This aligns with broader populist trends where democratic deliberation is replaced by combative rhetoric (Moffitt, 2016). Similarly, container metaphors ("protect our borders") reify power as a physical space requiring militarized defense, perpetuating narratives of exclusion and xenophobia. Such metaphors resonate deeply in contexts of economic anxiety and cultural displacement, amplifying fears of "outsiders" while legitimizing policies like border walls and immigration bans (Charteris-Black, 2006).

Personification metaphors ("America is strong again") further anthropomorphize the nation, conflating Trump's leadership with national vitality. This rhetorical strategy fosters a cult of personality, where the leader's perceived strength becomes synonymous with the nation's survival. Such framing not only centralizes power but also marginalizes dissent, as critiques of the leader are framed as attacks on the nation itself (Wodak, 2021).

The implications of these metaphors extend beyond linguistic analysis. They reveal how Trump's discourse entrenches authoritarian ideologies within democratic frameworks, normalizing the erosion of institutional checks and balances. By framing power as a tool for "winning" rather than governing, his rhetoric undermines collaborative politics and fuels polarization (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018). Furthermore, the repetition of these metaphors across media platforms amplifies their cognitive salience, shaping public memory and political behavior long after their initial utterance (Boyd, 2021).

This study underscores the necessity of critical literacy in democratic societies. Recognizing metaphorical framing as a tool of power enables citizens to interrogate the ideologies underpinning political rhetoric. Future research should explore how these metaphors are received and reinterpreted by diverse audiences, particularly in the context of algorithmic amplification on social media. Additionally, comparative studies of populist leaders (e.g., Bolsonaro, Modi) could elucidate universal patterns in the metaphorical construction of power.

In conclusion, Trump's rhetoric exemplifies the enduring axiom that power is not merely exercised through language but is fundamentally constituted by it. His metaphors of force, containment, and personification are not passive reflections of ideology but active instruments of political transformation—reminders that in the battle for meaning, language is both weapon and battlefield.

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