

A CORPUS- AND AI-BASED COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF METAPHORS IN AZERBAIJANI AND ENGLISH POLITICAL DISCOURSE

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Abstract. *This study investigates the use of metaphor in Azerbaijani and English political discourse through a comparative, corpus-driven, and AI-assisted approach. Drawing on Conceptual Metaphor Theory and developments in critical discourse analysis, the research examines how metaphor structures political meaning, persuasion, and ideology across linguistic and cultural contexts. A bilingual corpus of political speeches, official statements, and media texts was analyzed using corpus linguistics tools and natural language processing techniques. The findings reveal that while both languages share dominant conceptual metaphors—such as POLITICS IS WAR, POLITICS IS A JOURNEY, THE STATE IS A LIVING ORGANISM and POLITICS IS A GAME—their pragmatic functions and ideological orientations differ significantly. Azerbaijani discourse tends to foreground unity, collective identity, and legitimacy, whereas English discourse emphasizes competition, evaluation, and individual agency. The study demonstrates that metaphor is not only a cognitive mechanism but also an ideological resource shaped by socio-political context. Methodologically, the integration of AI enhances scalability and analytical precision, contributing to emerging intersections between linguistics and digital humanities.*

Keywords: *political discourse, metaphor, corpus linguistics, artificial intelligence, critical discourse analysis, Azerbaijani, English*

Introduction

Political language does more than simply convey information; it shapes how people think about social reality. One of the most powerful tools in this process is metaphor. Rather than being purely decorative, metaphors help structure complex ideas such as governance, conflict, and national identity. This paper explores how metaphors function in Azerbaijani and English political discourse, using both corpus-based methods and artificial intelligence (AI) tools to provide a systematic and modern analysis.

The study is particularly relevant in today's digital research environment, where large datasets can be analyzed more efficiently through computational methods. By combining traditional linguistic analysis with AI-supported techniques, this research aims to offer a more nuanced and data-driven understanding of metaphor use across languages. The relevance of this research lies in its interdisciplinary nature, combining insights from cognitive linguistics, discourse analysis, corpus linguistics, and computational methods. In the context of increasing digitalization, the integration of AI into linguistic research offers new opportunities for large-scale and systematic analysis of language data.

Theoretical Background

This study is grounded in Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), which argues that metaphors are fundamental to human cognition. They argue that

“metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action.” This perspective positions metaphor not merely as a stylistic device but as a fundamental cognitive mechanism through which individuals conceptualize abstract domains such as politics. According to this theory, abstract concepts are understood through more concrete domains. For example, in political discourse, conflict is often conceptualized through war-related language. In other words, this theory conceptualizes metaphor as a mapping between a concrete source domain and an abstract target domain. For example, in *POLITICS IS WAR*, elements such as “attack,” “defend,” and “victory” are mapped onto political processes. Consequently, expressions such as “fight for democracy,” “defend our position,” or “win the election battle” reflect the metaphor *POLITICS IS WAR*. Similarly, phrases like “the country is moving forward” or “we are on the right path” illustrate the metaphor *POLITICS IS A JOURNEY*.

This view is further supported by Elena Semino (2008), who notes that metaphor plays a crucial role in “structuring our experience and influencing how we interpret events and actions.” Consequently, metaphor is central to both cognition and communication in political contexts. However, this study also incorporates insights from Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), particularly the work of Norman Fairclough, who emphasizes the role of language in reproducing power relations and ideology, arguing that it “constitutes social practice.” From this perspective, metaphors are not neutral; they shape how political realities are constructed and interpreted.

Additionally, the methodological framework draws on corpus-based metaphor analysis (Charteris-Black, 2004) and metaphor identification procedures (Steen, 2010), allowing for systematic and replicable analysis.

In addition to widely recognized frameworks such as Conceptual Metaphor Theory, Azerbaijani scholars have also emphasized the role of discourse subjectivity and cultural context. Azad Mammadov argues that discourse is shaped by functional-cognitive factors, where meaning is constructed through interaction between language, culture, and individual perspective (Mammadov & Ziyadova, 2016). This perspective is particularly relevant for political metaphor analysis, as metaphor reflects not only cognition but also ideological positioning.

Methodology

The research is based on a bilingual corpus consisting of political speeches, official statements, and media texts in Azerbaijani and English. The data were collected from publicly available sources and represent contemporary political communication.

The analysis involved three main stages:

1. **Extraction:** Identification of metaphorical expressions using corpus tools
2. **Classification:** Grouping into conceptual metaphor categories or classifying them according to conceptual domains
3. **Comparison:** Cross-linguistic analysis of frequency, function and comparing their usage across the two languages

AI-based natural language processing (NLP) tools were employed to:

- detect metaphorical patterns
- analyze collocations
- identify frequency distributions

This hybrid approach improves both reliability and scalability, addressing limitations of purely manual analysis.

Results and Discussion

The comparative analysis reveals that metaphorical structuring in both Azerbaijani and English political discourse is systematic rather than incidental. Both Azerbaijani and English political discourse rely heavily on similar conceptual metaphors such as *POLITICS IS WAR*, *POLITICS IS A JOURNEY*, *THE STATE IS A LIVING ORGANISM* and *POLITICS AS A GAME / STRATEGY*. While both languages employ similar overarching conceptual metaphors, their frequency, contextual realization, and pragmatic functions differ in meaningful ways.

1. POLITICS IS WAR: Intensification vs. Legitimization

The metaphor *POLITICS IS WAR* is one of the most dominant in both corpora; however, its functional load varies. In English political discourse, war metaphors are often used to frame urgency and mobilize action, particularly in contexts such as economic crises, elections, or public health campaigns. For example:

- “We must fight against inflation.”
- “This is a battle for the future of our nation.”
- “We must defend our democracy.”

Here, the metaphor constructs politics as a competitive arena, emphasizing strategy, opposition, and victory. It frequently serves persuasive and rhetorical purposes, especially in campaign discourse. These are not isolated phrases — they represent a systematic rhetorical pattern where:

- *fight / battle / defend* → map politics as conflict
- political actors → become “fighters”
- policies → become “weapons”

In Azerbaijani political discourse, similar expressions occur:

- “Biz bu mübarizədə qalib gələcəyik.”
- “Bu, dövlətimizin müdafiəsi üçün vacib addımdır.”

However, the metaphor tends to function more as a tool of legitimization and unity, rather than pure competition. The emphasis is often on collective resistance, national strength, and protection of sovereignty, reflecting socio-political and historical contexts. Thus, while the conceptual metaphor is shared, its ideological framing differs:

- English → competition and persuasion
- Azerbaijani → unity and legitimacy

2. POLITICS IS A JOURNEY: Direction vs. Development

The metaphor *POLITICS IS A JOURNEY* appears frequently in both datasets, but again with distinct nuances. In English discourse, journey metaphors often highlight direction, leadership, and decision-making:

- “We are moving in the right direction.”
- “The government has taken the wrong path.”

These examples frame political actors as decision-makers responsible for guiding the nation. The focus is on evaluation and accountability. In Azerbaijani discourse, similar expressions include:

- “Ölkəmiz inkişaf yolundadır.”
- “Biz bu yolda inamla irəliləyirik.”

Here, the metaphor emphasizes progress, stability, and continuity rather than evaluation. The “journey” is less about choosing between alternatives and more about steady advancement toward a shared goal. This suggests a stronger orientation toward collective progress and long-term development.

3. THE STATE IS A LIVING ORGANISM: Emotional Framing vs. Functional Framing

Another recurrent metaphor is THE STATE IS A LIVING ORGANISM, which conceptualizes the state as a body capable of growth, health, and decline. In English political discourse:

- “The economy is recovering.”
- “The system is broken and needs repair.”

These expressions often carry a diagnostic function, identifying problems and proposing solutions. The metaphor is used analytically, aligning with policy-oriented communication.

In Azerbaijani discourse:

- “Dövlətimiz güclənir.”
- “İqtisadiyyatımız inkişaf edir.”

Here, the metaphor tends to evoke emotional resonance and national pride. The state is portrayed as a living entity that grows stronger, reinforcing a sense of collective identity and optimism.

1. POLITICS AS A GAME / STRATEGY

Another significant metaphorical framework, particularly salient in English-language political discourse, is the conceptualization of politics as a game or strategic interaction. This metaphor is especially prevalent in media narratives and analytical commentary, where political processes are framed in terms of competition, calculated moves, and tactical positioning.

Typical formulations frequently observed in English-language media include expressions such as “political players are positioning themselves,” “this move could change the game,” and “he is playing a strategic role.” Such expressions systematically map elements of games—such as players, moves, strategies, and outcomes—onto the domain of politics. In this conceptualization, political actors are construed as rational agents engaged in strategic decision-making, while political processes are interpreted as structured contests governed by implicit rules and objectives.

This metaphorical framing is particularly prominent in analytical reporting and commentary, where emphasis is placed on tactics, negotiation, and competitive maneuvering. It reflects broader characteristics of political culture in English-speaking contexts, especially within pluralistic and adversarial systems, where political success is often associated with strategic skill, adaptability, and the ability to anticipate opponents’ actions.

From a discourse-analytical perspective, the POLITICS IS A GAME metaphor contributes to a representation of politics as a dynamic and competitive arena, foregrounding calculation over emotion and strategy over ideology. It also encourages audiences to interpret political developments in terms of winners and losers, thereby reinforcing a performance-oriented view of governance.

In contrast, this metaphor appears to be considerably less prominent in Azerbaijani political discourse. Political communication in the Azerbaijani context tends to avoid framing governance as a “game,” as such a representation may imply triviality or undermine the seriousness of state affairs. Instead, Azerbaijani discourse more frequently relies on metaphors that emphasize responsibility, stability, and collective purpose, such as those related to unity, development, and national strength.

This divergence highlights an important cross-cultural distinction: while English-language political discourse often normalizes competition and strategic interaction, Azerbaijani discourse prioritizes legitimacy, cohesion, and the symbolic authority of the state. Consequently, the relative absence of game-based metaphors in Azerbaijani political language can be interpreted as reflecting a different set of communicative norms and ideological priorities.

Cultural and Ideological Implications

One of the most significant findings is that metaphor usage reflects broader cultural and ideological orientations. Azerbaijani discourse shows a preference for metaphors that reinforce solidarity, unity, and collective identity. English discourse more frequently employs metaphors that highlight competition, individual agency, and critical evaluation. This difference can be interpreted through the lens of discourse traditions:

- Azerbaijani political communication often prioritizes nation-building and cohesion

- English political discourse tends to emphasize debate, opposition, and pluralism

The findings of this study demonstrate that metaphor is not only a cognitive phenomenon but also a discursive and ideological resource. The use of metaphors such as *POLITICS IS WAR* and *POLITICS IS A JOURNEY* reflects broader patterns in political communication and supports the argument that metaphor plays a central role in shaping public understanding.

This observation aligns with the work of Norman Fairclough (1995), who argues that discourse both reflects and constructs social reality. In this sense, metaphor can be seen as a mechanism through which political actors frame issues, influence interpretation, and guide public perception. Moreover, the differences observed between Azerbaijani and English political discourse support the view that metaphor is culturally embedded. As Elena Semino (2008) suggests, metaphor is instrumental in shaping how individuals “make sense of complex social and political phenomena.” In Azerbaijani discourse, metaphors tend to emphasize unity and collective identity, whereas English discourse more frequently highlights competition and strategic interaction.

These findings also resonate with the functional-cognitive approach proposed by Azad Mammadov, which emphasizes the role of cultural and contextual factors in shaping discourse. The variation in metaphor usage across the two languages suggests that metaphor is not only a universal cognitive tool but also a culturally specific means of constructing political meaning.

Contribution of AI-Based Analysis

The integration of AI tools proved particularly valuable in identifying recurring metaphorical patterns across large datasets. Automated extraction methods revealed:

- higher frequency clusters of war-related lexicon in both corpora
- subtle variations in collocational patterns (e.g., “fight against” vs. “defend”)
- cross-linguistic differences in metaphor density

AI-assisted analysis also reduced subjectivity in metaphor identification, supporting more replicable and data-driven findings.

Overall, the analysis demonstrates that while Azerbaijani and English political discourse share common cognitive foundations, their metaphorical realizations are shaped by distinct communicative goals and cultural contexts. Metaphors are not only linguistic tools but also ideological instruments that influence how political reality is constructed and interpreted. The analysis of authentic political speech and media

discourse demonstrates that metaphor usage is not merely stylistic but systematically reflects ideological positioning. In English political communication, metaphors frequently construct politics as competition, strategy, and evaluation, aligning with pluralistic and adversarial traditions. In contrast, Azerbaijani political discourse tends to employ metaphors that reinforce unity, continuity, and state strength, reflecting a more collective and stability-oriented communicative framework. These differences confirm that metaphor functions as both a cognitive and socio-political instrument shaped by discourse traditions and cultural context.

Conclusion

Metaphor plays a key role in shaping political discourse across languages. The integration of corpus linguistics and AI enhances analytical depth and reflects current trends in linguistic research. This study demonstrates that metaphor is a central mechanism in political discourse across languages. While Azerbaijani and English share common conceptual metaphors, their usage reflects distinct ideological and cultural frameworks.

The research contributes to:

- comparative discourse studies
- metaphor theory
- computational linguistics

Moreover, it highlights the value of integrating corpus methods with artificial intelligence, paving the way for more advanced and interdisciplinary research.

In conclusion, the comparative analysis of metaphors not only contributes to the field of discourse studies but also provides valuable insights into the ways language influences thought, perception, and political communication across different linguistic communities. Future studies may expand the dataset, include additional languages, or explore real-time political discourse such as social media.

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