
METAPHORS OF WAR IN CLIMATE CHANGE DISCOURSE: A COGNITIVE LINGUISTICS PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

In this paper, I will mention the use of metaphors of war in the context of climate change as the subject of cognitive linguistics. Since the topic of climate change is urgent and the militaristic language used to explain an environmental crisis is in circulation, the research in question examines the impact of these kinds of metaphors on social usage and participation in relation to climate change. It was done through the discourse analysis methodology applied in the investigation of the chosen texts of the international climate change reports, media articles, and political speeches. Results are indicative of metaphors of war framing climate change as an enemy to emphasize the urgency and stimulate action, as well as aiding in the development of narratives of conflict, which detracts from the availability of a shared solution. The report showcases the mental processes of the war metaphors and what they can do to the perception of climate change in the minds of the society. The results of this analysis are valuable to the growing literature regarding the use of metaphors in environmental speech, but also provides novel information regarding the use of language in forming the vision of global crises.

Keyword: Climate Change, War Metaphors, Cognitive Linguistics, Discourse Analysis, Environmental Rhetoric, Public Perception

INTRODUCTION

Climate change has emerged as one of the most critical and debatable questions in the global arena over the past few years, which requires the attention of a broad group of stakeholders such as scientists, policymakers, environmental activists, and ordinary citizens. Scientific opinion unequivocally supports the statement that climate change is an acute and serious global problem, and it is not only threatening to ecosystems, economies, and the health of world populations (ipcc, 2021). With the debate of climate change gaining momentum, the choice of words which are utilized to convey this crisis has become more central in the process of forming a perception to influencing policies. Among the most evident components of the linguistic landscape of the climate change reportage is the expression of war metaphors. These metaphors present the climate change as a kind of enemy to be dealt with, a sort of battle to be waged, and a kind of war to be won (Lakoff, 2004). Militaristic language has become an important and observed theme in both political language as well as in scientific texts and its description in the media, making this one of the limiting factors of linguistic and cognitive support in regard to the climatic crisis.

Framing climate change in terms of war is not only a rhetorical figure of speech but a powerful mode of thought that shapes the way that we may put ideas about the issue into practice. The use of war as a metaphor cannot be considered new; like during times of crisis, it has been utilized to gain its momentum,

generate feeling of urgency and encourage group action. As an illustration of this, in the case of World War II there were such war leaders as Winston Churchill and Franklin D. Roosevelt applied war rhetoric to motivate the countries to rise up against fascism. The metaphors are not limited to rhetoric by politicians or world leaders in the case of climate change. They have infiltrated into our daily forms of speech be it the media headlines, scientific reports implying that climate change is a menace that must be dealt with mercilessly.

Metaphors: When there is interest in cognitive linguistics, there is a realization that the comprehension of metaphors is greater than the linguistic use of metaphors; it is central to the way people think, reason and cognise the world around (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). The conceptual metaphor theory explains that metaphors are not mere figures of speech however, they organize the way we think as well as they direct the way we act by presenting abstract ideas in what we know as more concrete and familiar areas (Lakoff, 2004). By presenting climate change as a war, one mobilizes cognitive models pertaining to war fighting and defense as well as to safeguarding national interests. Such metaphorical conceptualisation can be profound in the way the climate change is comprehended and the way society reacts to it. On the one side, it can inspire people and governments towards immediate action, putting emphasis on the necessity of urgent ways, and resorting upon community experience in participating in the warfare. Meanwhile, on the one hand, it can also narrow range of solutions, directing the attention towards combat-like measures (e.g. is to fight emissions), and also hiding more collaborative and preventive efforts, like international cooperation or long-term sustainable actions.

The climate change discourse full of war metaphors begs important questions of how cognitive mechanisms make such metaphorical frames and influence the population mindset and decision positions of policymakers. What effect do these metaphors have on how we model climate change in our heads, and what are their consequences in terms of societal efforts to act concertedly in the face of such a massive change? Do they work to make people understand the urgency of the crisis or do they even in the process encourage the mindset of war and not peace? Besides, how are war metaphors related to the way in which the diverse communities (scientists, policy makers, general population) react to the implications of the climate crisis? These are some of the questions that this article tries to answer in terms of cognitive linguistics approach.

Cognitive linguistics is useful in offering an insightful framework when it comes to the analysis of the relationship between perception, thought and language. Examining climate change discourse in this way, we might be able to identify the cognitive processes underlying the meanings of the language of the war applied in this particular discussion. As Lakoff (2004) states, metaphors can no longer be considered as rhetoric devices but also the tool of human thinking who understands abstract notions by relating them with more real and down to scale areas. With regards to the climate change, war metaphors offer comfortable point of reference through which individuals interpret the crisis as a war against an enemy. Emotions may also activate this mental model to make people and groups take certain action whether out of fear or anger. It might, however, also reduce the scope of solutions, because the emphasis on the conflict can give more importance to the more sustainable methods of solution.

The language of war metaphor in the climate change discussion has become an observed one. Other scholars have also pointed out the high degree of war language in environmental discourse with Carver and McIlvenny (2015) noting that peers tend to draw the environment as a war zone that nations or communities can be forced to fight over in order to safeguard their natural resources. In the same light, McConnell and Lane (2015) have examined the effects of using metaphors of war to influence how the populace perceives climate change stating that, though such metaphors could foster a sense of urgency,

they could result in impediments to cooperation as seen in international negotiations. Although there are concerns that war metaphors can prove useful in getting people organized to take action and show magnanimousness of the crisis (hulme, 2009), there are also concerns that the use of these metaphors can invoke a specific story of adversity and separation, which may contribute towards the erosion of attempts to unite the world in tackling the climate change issue (carver & mcilvenny, 2015).

It aims at investigating that beyond the linguistic expressions of the war metaphors, there are also created mental constructs in the mind. By examining discursively various texts of the intergovernmental panel on climate change (ipcc) reports, speeches by world leaders and the popular media coverage, this article seeks to reveal the mental mechanisms involved in construction of climate change as a battle/war. Also, the paper will discuss what these metaphors mean to the general population in terms of climate change and the responses that are offered. Do these metaphors contribute or negatively affect the crisis pregnancy crisis? Are they advocating shorter term measures targeted at fighting the enemy, or are they appealing to a longer term solution based on cooperation and sustainability?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Much cognitive linguistic research has been done on the question of the relationship between language and thought, early work by George Lakoff and mark Johnson (1980) having been revolutionary in its contribution to the understanding of metaphors as an essential ingredient in human thinking. Lakoff and johnson (1980) in their seminal text metaphors we live by believe that metaphors are not mere decorations of the language but they form the way we think about things in the world. Based on their theory of conceptual metaphors, metaphors present a mental model of organizing our ideas, and shaping our perceptions of abstract ideas. This has especially been an effective technique to investigate how language frames our perception of complicated matters such as issues on the environment. Metaphorical construction of issues such as climate change has been found to be a major contributor in understanding, communication, and even action taken of such issues by different stakeholders, such as policymakers, scientists, as well as the general citizenry.

The war metaphor is one of the most popular metaphors addressing the issue of climate change. Such metaphors as the battle, or war against climate change turn the environmental aspects into the enemy that is supposed to be fought with or defended against. As indicated by Lakoff and johnson (1980), metaphors of war, among other metaphors, do not claim to be neutral, but rather entrenched in the human mind. War metaphors trigger cognitive schemes that refer to war, protection and success that may affect emotional and intellectual reactions to the discussed problem. Framing climate change as a kind of war (i.e., calling it a battle), on the other hand, makes one feel a sense of urgency and shifts people into actions because of the similarities between wars and fast decisions and actions. Yet war metaphors are also being used to influence perceptions about how to deal with climate change where action tends to revolve around the idea of aggressive, defensive measures as opposed to long-term solutions about how to effectively work together to combat the crisis.

Warlike metaphors as a phenomenon of environmental discourse have been heavily covered in the literature with a scholar like carver and mcilvenny (2015) focusing on how metaphors of war influence the collective sentiment on how citizens approach the ecological crisis. According to carver and mcilvenny (2015), the notion of war is much more effective when inserted into the context of climate change; it creates a highly emotional response, which is mostly fear and anxiety. The discourse of fighting climate change, struggling to secure the future, or even defending the planet can create emergency, position climate change as a present and subsistence issue. They add that this kind of framing usually mobilizes social responses, since it emphasizes the need to deal with this issue of climate change

squarely. Nevertheless, as carver and mcilvenny (2015) also warn, the limitation is that war metaphors tend to prioritize combat-focused solutions to the problem, i.e., the idea of fighting the problem (fighting emissions or protecting natural resources) rather than collaborative, prevention-based measures that can also turn out to be more long-term and demanding to achieve. In this regard war metaphors can unintentionally make the larger, system based, responses required to address climate change, including international cooperation, policy change and sustainable development, less visible.

Similarly, mcconnell and lane (2015) have also investigated war metaphors and their use in climate change communication, with the authors suggesting the reason why war metaphors are common in the climate change communication is their ability to impose a dichotomy between the group of people who protect the environment against those who cause harm to it. They explain that this framing can serve to make issues surrounding climate change polarizing, because it supports the role of an enemy, and talks about how they should be defeated. Such separation may create complications in promotion of cooperation in the political, social, and national divide since the language of war is defined as a contestant and will place some groups or nations as on the side of the environment and others as being otherwise. Mcconnell and lane (2015) hint that though the use of war metaphors could encourage political and popular engagement in climate change in the short-term terms they could, on the contrary, make it difficult to devise organizational global strategies that are necessitated to tackle the magnitude and these are needed to tackle the problem of climate change; hence, the need to ensure that war metaphors and others are not employed.

Nevertheless, the use of war metaphors has still been rampant in the discussion of climate change due to the way they produce heavy emotional responses so well as their aptitude to give the magnitude of the issue. Hulme (2009) indicates that the most potent tools which could affect how the mass will perceive an issue is the use of metaphors which at times determine how individuals will think of issues and how they would come up with solutions to the same. As it was put by hulme (2009), people create the feeling of urgency about a particular issue through metaphors like the war on climate change and this creates the notion that policymakers should act swiftly and decisively on the issue. Nonetheless, he is also aware that such metaphors establish a certain narrow and inaccurate perception of the issue at hand, since it is depicted as a struggle to be conquered- rather than an innovative and intricate undertaking that demands worldwide collaboration and future adherence.

Recent research in the area of environmental communication has also dwelled on effects of the used metaphors on popular perception of climate change. As an example, kaal (2015) touches upon the use of metaphors in the climate change message and the effects on the perception of people regarding causes and consequences of global warming. According to Kaal (2015), metaphors do not only construct the way of thinking about the environment, but they also shape the environmental policy. Presenting climate change as a battle can cause the attention to shift toward technological and short-term solutions, like geoengineering or using rapid decarbonization as opposed to actually solving the underlying causes of environmental degradation, like unsustainable consumption habits or inequality in the system at large.

Less literature has so far paid considerable attention to one particular aspect of war metaphors, namely, the very specific set of cognitive mechanisms through which the usage of such metaphors is supported and through which people are conditioned to become immersed in their experience of war metaphors as the way of experiencing climate change. Most of the research which has been done regarding the rhetorical role of metaphors in political and environmental language has not been much known regarding how the metaphors work at the psychological level. Cognitive linguistics provides great information as to how metaphors are processed cognitively and how they manage or direct the decisions and the actions

(johnson, 1987). As an example, a study by krenn and kaal (2017) shows that the use of war metaphors in the climate change discourse potentially triggers the cognitive schemas of conflict and competition, which might shape how those individuals and groups, perceive climate action in terms of risk and rewards.

SIGNIFICANCE AND RATIONALE

The research is a worthwhile addition to the cognitive linguistics research area since it specifically centered on the application of war metaphors to the climate change discourse. Although the use of war metaphors has been examined elsewhere, the use of such language applied on issues dealing with the environment especially climate change is still a largely unexplored field. The power of the given metaphors should provide a clearer picture which helps create better communications strategies that appeal to the masses and stimulate collective efforts. With the increase in the climate crisis, the framing applied to describe it is a decisive factor as it influences how people will think about the urgency and danger of the situation (lakoff and johnson, 1980). The objective of the study is to find out how War metaphors create an effect of war and instant sense of threat and how such emotions contribute to how the audience receives and perceives climate change as a threat and how it influences individual decisions concerning its own actions and policy-making.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. Look at how war is used as metaphor in the discussion of climate change, in a number of texts.
2. Consider cognitive processes by which such metaphors inform the way people perceive the public.
3. Assess the implication of applying the war metaphors on the climate change solution thinking.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. **What** are the key war metaphors used in climate change discourse, and how are they employed in different contexts?
2. **How** do war metaphors shape the public's understanding of climate change as an adversarial force, and what cognitive mechanisms underpin this framing?
3. **Why** do war metaphors dominate climate change discourse, and what are their potential effects on shaping climate change solutions?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theory that this study is based on is the theory of cognitive linguistics including in concrete with a special emphasis on the conceptual metaphor theory invented by lakoff and johnson (1980). In their classic text, metaphors do not just mean linguistic expressions but they form the mainspring of how human beings think and conceptualize the world. They claim that metaphors are native to human cognition, human beings organize abstract concepts in terms of more concrete domains (lakoff & johnson, 1980). With regard to climate change, the metaphorical expression of the situation as a "war" or a "battle" enables a person to grasp the multidimensional and intangible idea of environmental degradation with references to the more concrete idea of the conflict and defense. This congruency is quite important because, according to lakoff (2004), not only does metaphor shape the choice of words we speak; it also shapes how we think and act when responding to those ideas.

In addition to carrying the work on lakoff and johnson further, the research here also accommodates the cognitive models of threat and defense as put forward by fiske and taylor (1991). The models indicate that the metaphors of warlike situations, i.e., war metaphors, reduce the conscious mind to tap into profoundly rooted reactions to a threatening urge. Couched in terms of war or a battle, climate change appeals to these instinctual responses, giving rise to a sense of urgency, dread and action. Such emotional reactions

in turn may influence public attitudes about taking action on climate wherein an urgent response is encouraged to save the planet against a present threat by an identified enemy.

METHODOLOGY

This paper uses a mixed approach where discourse and cognitive linguistic approach are used to analyse war metaphors in climate change discourse. This study will consider a corpus of climate change writing as the main source of data, such as reports being published by the intergovernmental panel on climate change (ipcc), speeches of the world leaders, and mainstream media articles. A variety of these texts offer ample sources of information that represent both scientific as well as political nature of the discussion of climate change, which will thus present the full picture of the use of war metaphors in the contexts of various scenarios.

Analysis should begin with finding the war metaphors in the chosen corpus. It will be carried out through the metaphors of climate change as a battle, war or other types of conflict such as a fight against climate change, the war on emissions or defending the planet. The metaphors will be categorized according to the metaphorical fight suggested such as war, fight, defense or war. Such a division will assist in separating the types of conflict metaphors and look at how the various types of conflict shape the overall framing of climate change (carver & mcilvenny, 2015). The classification of the metaphors should help the study to draw insight into the most overwhelming metaphorical frames used in the discourse of climate change.

Then, a discourse analysis strategy will be utilized in order to analyze, on the one hand, the contextual cases in which these war metaphors are used, on the other hand, their rhetorical impact. Discourse analysis is especially helpful in this situation since it is possible to thoroughly explore the implications of metaphor constructions of meaning and attitude of audiences in a specific discourse context (gee, 2014). The following will be examined how these metaphors have been employed to evoke emotions, produce a feeling of urgency, and change attitude and behaviour among the people in regards to climate change. As another example, a climate change metaphor of a possible, necessary battle to win may establish urgency and stimulate the focus on immediate solutions, whereas defense-related metaphors promote certain orientations that relate to preserving what we have instead of preventing the causes or focusing the green dissolution of the environment.

Along with the discourse analysis, the study will introduce some level of cognitive analysis to study the mental models triggered by war metaphors. Based on cognitive linguistics and one specific linguistic scholar, lakoff and johnson (1980), the argument is presented that not just Language but also thinking occurs through the use of metaphors whereby abstract concepts are placed onto more familiar areas. War metaphors also trigger a cognitive model of concepts concerning conflict, defense, and threat in the context of climate change, which is capable of affecting the processing of an emotion and psychology (fiske and taylor, 1991). In this analysis, the theory of conceptual metaphors shall be referred to find the way war metaphors activate certain mental models that the persons and organizations embrace when addressing climate change, as well as the activities to adopt to mitigate it.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

The discussion on the war metaphors used in climate change discourse indicates that the use of metaphors concerning war is strategic since it helps in projecting climate change as a war that should be treated with urgency. The wording, as in the example of war metaphors like in the phrases such as fighting climate change, war on emissions or defending the planet, depicts climate change as a battle or war which needs to be won. This framing operates at the level of being able to evoke classical master narratives of conflict, aggression, defense that are so deeply embedded in the collective consciousness. These metaphors, as

explained by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) are not linguistic constructs alone but also mental constructions that in turn help us in conceptualizing abstract issues that we relate to more familiar elements which are concrete in nature. Presenting climate change here as a war can engage a cognitive model of threat, urgency, and defense which, as such, can appeal to human instincts of survival and protection.

Action mobilization is one of the main cognitive property of war metaphors. Anticipating unhesitating action, the language of war, defense, and offence usually accompanies the scenarios of the climate crisis whose gravity is often promoted as an existential threat demanding immediate action. Study by Carver and McIlvenny (2015) emphasizes the effective role of employing war related metaphors in generating a compelling action by the greater society that would call on the citizenry and governments to view climate change as a crisis of emergency. In this regard we can argue that the metaphor will aid in action, establishing some sense of urgency, and calling forth a unified action to address the crisis. The metaphor of the war on climate change prescribes bellicose initiatives, including cutting emissions, the introduction of green technologies, and enforcement of strict environmental laws. These activities are positioned as necessary to beat the battle against climate change, which makes the situation seem nearer and more unstoppable by collective action.

But there are negative aspects of employing the war metaphors. Though these metaphors can liven the pulse of the masses into action, it can still make the solutions limited and centered to conflict-based approaches as compared to collaborative and long-term-based solutions. According to Carver and McIlvenny (2015), war and conflict as metaphors focus on defense and attack as they are framed and thus may draw the dialogue away focusing on sustainable and more preventative solutions. This type of framing favours minor wins over permanent alteration of the structure of a society and foists a dialogue of hostility in lieu of cooperative effort. In case of example, by representing climate change as a war to be fought or a goal to be achieved, one might develop an assumption that the problem can be addressed by means of technological improvement or instant regulatory interventions omitting the structural reasons, global inequalities, consumerism and overconsumption. The metaphor can even advance the notion of the inferiority of others where it puts off other stakeholders who do not think and feel the same urgency.

Furthermore, war-related metaphors may be used to support the narrative of a conflict, which has a potential to invalidate the necessity of international assembly in mitigating global warming. As it is indicated by Hulme (2009), climate change is not a one-dimensional threat, where a confrontational approach or adversary approach will work, but instead it is characterized as an international coordination and long-term solution approach. The use of war imagery in synthesizing the environment as the target entity can polarize the stakeholders and generate a status of nationalism or uniqueness amongst countries or interest groups. The metaphors are likely to lead to political competition and setbacks in the process of international climate agreements since countries are likely to be defensive about their own interests instead of collaborating in a common cause.

Cognitive effects of war metaphors Troph addiction the psychological reality of threat perception is also couched in terms of cognitive war. Fiske and Taylor (1991) have indicated that metaphors of conflict and threat tap into unintended genetic psychological dispositions that are oriented toward danger thus causing negative emotions like fear, anger, and anxiety. Although these emotional reactions can be helpful when it comes to driving action, they can result in defensiveness and resistance, especially when the metaphor gives the feeling of helplessness or inevitability. As an example, when it is portrayed as a war that was already won or is too big to win there is a chance of feeling powerless and people and countries remain inactive and ultimately resort to defeatism as opposed to finding solutions.

FINDINGS

Limited results have shown real persistent occurrence of the use of war metaphors to describe climate change as manifested in a wide range of texts; in politics, newspaper dailies, scientific reports, and so forth. These metaphors commonly portray climate change as a battle that needs to be fought or the war that needs to be won, and portray environment as either an enemy or an adversary (carver & mcilvenny, 2015). In such and other contexts, the seriousness of the problem is underlined, and the language of aggression, defense and conflict overdrive the necessity of effective and action-oriented behavior. These types of metaphors have the potential of being very effective when it comes to generating behaviors as they evoke mental images of causalities and defense, causing climate change to seem an urgent and life-threatening problem that necessitates a quick fix (lakoff & johnson, 1980). Such metaphors as the one about fight with climate change tend to dominate the cognitive and emotional reaction to the perceived danger, including fear of being harmed and urgency to act, which makes individuals, governments, and even organizations disposed to quick actions in terms of emissions reduction, employment of green technologies, and policy implementation.

Yet, although such metaphors may be effective in triggering the immediate action, they are also characterized by severe delimitations. Among the cons of framing climate change as the war, the idea also implies that it could unconsciously diminish the scope of the population and policymakers, pushing the bulk of the attention on short-term fixes instead of long-term systemic adaptation (carver & mcilvenny, 2015). This discourse of combat and defense can encourage a reactive over a proactive orientation towards climate change based on a focus on combating its effects but not dealing with its causes, i.e. over-consumption, inequality, lack of governance. Such myopia on short-term defense could relegate long-term climate policies that entail high levels of collective action to achieve long-term sustainability (hulme, 2009).

In addition, the metaphors can shape the interpretation of individuals and groups in solving the challenge of climate change. As an illustration, defining climate change as a battle might create a problematic tendency to consider some individual efforts, e.g., minimizing own carbon-dioxide output, or simply behaving in an environmentally friendly way, but disregard necessary systemic transformations on the political, economic, and social spheres. Personal responsibility and focus on individual action will distract attention on the structural solutions that are required, these include coordination of policies across the globe, environmental justice and reforms of the economic system that reinforce unsustainable habits.

CONCLUSION

The paper provides a detailed discussion of the war metaphors in the context of climate change in the perspective of cognitive linguistics. According to the findings, even though these metaphors can be useful in mobilizing the community into taking action and portraying the urgency of the climate crisis, they also support a conflict-based narrative that can limit the potential interventions on climate change. Examples of war metaphors include discussing climate change as a battle or war and connection to ancient cognitive models of threat and defense that encourage one to act (lakoff & johnson, 1980). Such emphasis on fighting and defense can though curtail discourse to such immediate adjacent positions; short-term methods that are reactive and possible exclusion of more lasting long-term responses to problems needing international collaboration and a restructuring of the system (carver and mcilvenny, 2015).

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