

Communicative Functions of Metaphorical Expressions in English And Uzbek Political Discourse

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Abstract: Political discourse relies on linguistic choices that make complex programmes, conflicts and future projections intelligible to broad audiences. Metaphor is especially important because it organizes political concepts, evaluates events and influences listeners' emotional orientation. This article examines the communicative functions of metaphorical expressions in contemporary English and Uzbek political discourse from a comparative cognitive-pragmatic perspective. The study combines Conceptual Metaphor Theory, Critical Metaphor Analysis, discourse-oriented metaphor research and the principles of MIP/MIPVU. The empirical material is a purposive micro-corpus of official political speeches delivered in Uzbek and English between 2020 and 2024. The analysis shows that JOURNEY, BUILDING, STRUGGLE, BODY/HEALTH and movement-related schemas occur in both discourse traditions, but their communicative realization differs according to rhetorical purpose and institutional context. In the selected English texts, metaphor frequently diagnoses crisis, attributes responsibility and legitimizes difficult policy choices by representing government action as repair, rebuilding or a change of direction. In the Uzbek texts, journey and construction metaphors are particularly productive in representing reform as a collective, historically continuous process and in mobilizing solidarity around national development. The findings demonstrate that metaphor simultaneously simplifies abstract processes, frames evaluation, legitimizes decisions, constructs collective identity, activates emotion and projects desirable futures.

Keywords: Political discourse, metaphor, communicative function, conceptual metaphor, framing, persuasion, English, Uzbek, political rhetoric.

Introduction: Political discourse is a form of public meaning-making through which political actors define problems, assign responsibility, justify decisions, construct identities and invite audiences to imagine possible futures. It therefore depends on linguistic resources that connect abstract institutions and processes with recognizable domains of experience. Metaphor is one of the most productive of these resources. Since Lakoff and Johnson argued that metaphor is a basic mechanism of conceptualization rather than a mere ornament, research has increasingly linked metaphor with cognition, discourse and ideology [1]. Kövecses emphasizes that recurring embodied patterns coexist with contextual and cultural variation [2], while Semino shows that metaphorical meaning in discourse depends on genre, speaker purpose and

textual development [3]. These approaches established the theoretical basis for considering metaphor not as an exceptional rhetorical figure but as a regular mechanism through which complex domains are conceptualized and communicated.

In political language, describing reforms as a path, institutions as foundations, social problems as wounds or political disagreement as a battle does more than make an utterance vivid. The metaphor establishes a frame that foregrounds particular actors, causal relations and desirable actions. Critical Metaphor Analysis therefore treats metaphor as rhetorically and ideologically consequential [4]. Charteris-Black demonstrates that political metaphor contributes to persuasion and leadership by connecting policy positions with evaluative narratives [5]. Musolff's

scenario approach further shows that source domains contain mini-narratives about typical actors, causes, dangers and outcomes [6]. Thus, POLITICS AS JOURNEY can imply direction, progress, leadership and obstacles, whereas NATION AS BUILDING can imply foundations, repair, stability and planned construction.

Political discourse must also be interpreted institutionally. Chilton connects political language with representation, interaction and legitimacy [7], while van Dijk defines political discourse through the relation among political actors, contexts, goals and textual structures [8]. The communicative function of a metaphor consequently changes with context. A journey metaphor may mobilize an audience, criticize an opponent's direction or normalize a gradual policy sequence; a building metaphor may legitimize investment or portray a government as the agent of reconstruction. The relationship between metaphor and political communication is thus pragmatic as well as conceptual: what an expression accomplishes depends upon its position within a particular political action and communicative situation.

Comparative research on English and Uzbek political metaphor has recently expanded. Yakubov's 2026 doctoral research directly investigates metaphor in contemporary English and Uzbek political discourse and emphasizes its cognitive-discursive and pragmatic-communicative characteristics. Ruziyeva and Boltayeva likewise identify journey, war and construction as recurrent metaphorical patterns while stressing differences in their linguistic and cultural interpretation [15]. Building on this scholarship, the present article asks how metaphorical expressions function in selected contemporary English and Uzbek political speeches. Its central assumption is that communicative function arises from the interaction of conceptual mapping, lexical realization, discourse genre, speaker purpose and political context.

The study uses a qualitative comparative design and a purposive micro-corpus of six official political texts produced between 2020 and 2024. The Uzbek material comprises Shavkat Mirziyoyev's 2020 Address to the Oliy Majlis, his 2021 speech on continuing democratic reforms within the Development Strategy of New Uzbekistan, and his 2024 address to the Third Tashkent International Investment Forum [16–18]. The English material comprises Keir Starmer's Birmingham speech

of 28 October 2024, his migration speech of 28 November 2024, and Rachel Reeves's Autumn Budget speech of 30 October 2024 [19–21]. The texts were selected because they represent programmatic, economic and reform-oriented political communication and are available as official transcripts. The corpus is intentionally small and is employed for functional interpretation rather than statistical generalization.

Metaphorical lexical units were identified using the logic of MIP and MIPVU: a lexical unit was treated as metaphor-related when its contextual political meaning contrasted with, but could be understood in comparison with, a more concrete, bodily, spatial or materially basic meaning [9; 10]. Because conventional metaphor does not automatically imply conscious rhetorical choice, deliberateness was treated cautiously in line with Steen's model and subsequent deliberate-metaphor research [11; 13]. Metaphors were then grouped into conceptual domains and interpreted through Critical Metaphor Analysis and scenario-based analysis [4; 6]. Their communicative function was inferred from local co-text and argumentative role, with attention to simplification, evaluation, legitimation, agency, solidarity, emotion and future projection. Framing was treated as a process that may organize agency, evaluation and emotion simultaneously [12].

The analysis reveals substantial conceptual overlap between the two subcorpora. JOURNEY and BUILDING are especially productive, while bodily, conflict-related and movement schemas also recur. The principal contrast lies not in whether these domains exist, but in how they are organized communicatively. In the English material, metaphors frequently cluster around diagnosis and repair. Starmer's Birmingham speech repeatedly presents the economy and country through construction imagery: the government will "fix the foundations," "rebuild Britain," and choose a different "path" [19]. The same speech describes the NHS as getting "back on its feet." These expressions compress complex fiscal and administrative arguments into familiar scenarios. A damaged foundation makes construction unsafe; a person back on their feet has recovered; a path establishes direction and permits the idea of error. Metaphor therefore combines explanatory economy with negative evaluation of the

inherited condition.

The building scenario also legitimizes policy. If economic problems are conceptualized as damaged foundations, disruptive measures can be represented as necessary repair rather than as optional political preference. The government becomes the repairer and present hardship becomes part of reconstruction. Reeves's Autumn Budget speech develops the same frame by linking "fixing the foundations," "rebuilding Britain" and repairing the "fabric of our nation" with investment and public spending [21]. Separate fiscal measures are thereby incorporated into a single narrative of responsible restoration. The metaphor is communicatively effective because the logic of physical construction creates an apparently self-evident sequence: foundations have to be secured before sustainable development can take place.

English journey metaphors organize temporal and political contrast. Starmer's migration speech promises to "turn the page," while the Birmingham speech contrasts the government's chosen direction with a "path of decline" [19; 20]. The first metaphor frames political change as movement from one chapter to another and encourages audiences to treat the previous phase as closed. The second spatializes policy choice: decline becomes a direction from which political actors must depart. These metaphors combine evaluation with prospective action and differentiate the present government from its predecessors without requiring a lengthy causal explanation. The JOURNEY scenario thus serves not merely as a representation of change but as an argumentative mechanism for distinguishing acceptable and unacceptable political trajectories.

The Uzbek material uses the same broad source domains, but their dominant organization is more developmental and collectivizing. In the 2020 Address to the Oliy Majlis, democratic reform is conceptualized as a yo'l, a path from which "we will never turn back," while difficulties are represented through g'ov and to'siqar, obstacles that must be removed [16]. The spatial scenario combines movement, persistence and resistance. Repeated first-person plural forms place speaker and audience within the same trajectory. The metaphor therefore does not simply describe reform; it constructs a collective political subject whose identity is associated with forward movement. Continuity is

encoded spatially, whereas reversal becomes equivalent to abandoning a shared political goal.

Construction imagery performs a related but distinct function. The expression "Uchinchi Renessans poydevori" — the foundation of the Third Renaissance — connects current reform with a longer historical horizon [17]. A foundation is materially necessary before a durable structure can exist, so present educational and institutional work is framed as indispensable preparation. At the same time, Renaissance activates a historical-cultural model of renewal. Contemporary policy is therefore narrated not as isolated administration but as the beginning of a broader civilizational project. The communicative effect combines future projection with historical legitimation: present activity receives value from the envisioned structure that will eventually rise on its foundations.

The Uzbek corpus also contains metaphors of support and collective force. The people are represented as a "tog'dek tayanch," a mountain-like support, while participation in reform is associated with a common saf, or collective rank [16]. Leadership is rhetorically grounded in popular support and citizens are positioned as participants rather than passive recipients of policy. In the 2024 investment forum speech, the forum becomes a "muloqot maydoni," a space or platform for dialogue, while reform is presented as having acquired irreversible momentum [18]. Spatial metaphor assists diplomatic positioning by conceptualizing cooperation as a shared space into which partners can enter and within which common solutions can be developed.

Across both sets of texts, metaphor functions as a device of compression. Foundation, path, obstacle, rebuilding, support and direction condense chains of political reasoning into accessible images. Yet this compression is evaluative rather than neutral. A foundation presupposes something worth building; an obstacle presupposes a legitimate route; rebuilding presupposes damage; an irreversible path makes reversal conceptually less attractive. Metaphor consequently facilitates comprehension while simultaneously selecting which interpretation becomes most salient. This dual function explains why metaphor is especially valuable in political communication: conceptual simplification and persuasive framing take

place through the same linguistic expression.

The findings support an analysis of political metaphor as communicative action rather than as a simple inventory of source domains. JOURNEY and BUILDING metaphors occur in both English and Uzbek materials, which is consistent with the recurrence of embodied spatial and material experience described in cognitive metaphor theory [1; 2]. Their rhetorical scenarios, however, differ. This finding supports Musolff's argument that political metaphor analysis should move beyond abstract conceptual mappings to discourse-specific scenarios in which agency, evaluation and narrative expectations become visible [6].

In the English subcorpus, building imagery is predominantly diagnostic and restorative. Damaged foundations, weak structures and recovery scenarios present the political present as requiring repair. This framing can legitimize controversial choices by presenting them as practical responses to structural necessity. Journey metaphors similarly distinguish governments according to direction and course. The rhetorical emphasis is therefore not movement alone but correction: a declining trajectory must be replaced with a credible path. This corresponds to Charteris-Black's account of political metaphor as a persuasive resource that links policy arguments with evaluative and moral narratives [4; 5].

In the Uzbek material, journey metaphors more strongly foreground continuity, mobilization and collective agency. The reform path is difficult but non-reversible, while obstacles are to be overcome through shared effort. Construction metaphors connect development with historical memory, most visibly in the "foundation" of a Third Renaissance. Educational and institutional reforms are thereby positioned as stages of nation-building with a long temporal horizon. This tendency is compatible with recent Uzbek comparative research [14; 15]. It should not, however, be essentialized as an immutable characteristic of "Uzbek mentality." Metaphor choice is shaped by genre, political institution, speaker, policy topic and historical moment as well as by broader cultural knowledge.

A further result is the multifunctionality of metaphor. "Fixing the foundations" simplifies economic policy, evaluates the previous condition as defective,

legitimizes intervention and constructs government as a competent repairer. "Uchinchi Rennessans poydevori" explains present action through construction, legitimizes long-term investment, evokes historical continuity and mobilizes audiences toward a shared future. This supports the view that metaphorical framing should be examined through agency, evaluation and emotion together rather than by assigning every metaphor to a single isolated function [12].

Methodologically, the comparison illustrates why MIP-style identification and critical-pragmatic interpretation are complementary. Identification procedures provide transparency concerning what counts as metaphor-related [9; 10], whereas critical and scenario analysis explains what those expressions accomplish politically. Deliberate Metaphor Theory adds the necessary caution that rhetorical salience cannot automatically be equated with conscious metaphor production [11; 13]. The present study remains limited by its small qualitative corpus and the asymmetry between British government speeches and Uzbek presidential discourse. Future research should balance genres and speakers, normalize metaphor frequencies, test inter-coder reliability and distinguish translated political texts from texts originally produced in each language.

Metaphorical expressions in English and Uzbek political discourse function as mechanisms of political communication rather than as decorative additions to literal meaning. In the selected corpus, shared domains such as JOURNEY and BUILDING make reform, economic management and national development cognitively accessible, but their communicative force remains context-sensitive. The English texts frequently employ construction, recovery and directional metaphors to diagnose inherited problems, distinguish political alternatives and legitimize repair-oriented policies. The Uzbek texts more often organize journey and foundation metaphors around collective progress, historical continuity, solidarity and developmental future projection.

The central comparative conclusion is that similarity in conceptual metaphor does not imply identity in communicative function. The same source domain can support different political arguments depending on speaker, audience, institution and communicative

purpose. A rigorous comparative analysis should therefore connect lexical metaphor, conceptual mapping, discourse scenario and pragmatic function. Such an approach provides a useful methodological basis for further research in political linguistics, intercultural communication, translation studies and critical media literacy.

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