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“HARRIS-TRUMP SHOWDOWN”
The Use of Metaphor in American Online Newspaper
Coverage of the 2024 US Presidential Election

ABSTRACT

Anette Luomaranta: "Harris-Trump showdown": The Use of Metaphor in American Online Newspaper Coverage of the 2024 US Presidential Election
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The aim of this bachelor's thesis is to examine American online newspaper coverage of the 2024 US presidential election and the use of metaphor in the discussion of the presidential candidates Kamala Harris and Donald Trump. This thesis will aim to answer research questions concerning what types of metaphors and major discourses around the election and the candidates could be found, and whether any major differences could be found in the way the female and the male candidate and their actions were covered in the newspapers. As its theoretical background the study uses Lakoff and Johnson's theory on conceptual metaphors.

This study utilizes a combination of qualitative content analysis and discourse analysis as its research methods. The data was collected from four different American online media outlets, namely CNN, Fox News, CBS News and Los Angeles Times. In total 20 articles were chosen, and out of the articles 43 examples of metaphor usage were identified. The found metaphors were divided into five different categories. The categorisation was based on similarity of themes that the metaphors represented. Examples of metaphors were picked for the analysis from each category coming to total number of 20. Those metaphors that seemed to represent their category the best were included. The examples were then analysed individually by investigating how they were used, how they would be divided according to Lakoff and Johnson's three-part categorisation, as well as what kind of semantic prosody they created in the context of the example sentences.

The study concluded that different types of metaphors are widely used in American newspaper language. Additionally, it was concluded that metaphors can have an impact on how the public construct their understanding of the reported topic and people. In addition, this study proposed that any immense difference in the reporting between the female and the male candidate could not be identified. Regarding the final research question the study aimed to discover what discourses would stem from the news coverage. After the analysis, two major discourses could be identified. They were identified and named based on the most prominent types of metaphors found in the data.

Keywords: US presidential election 2024, metaphor, conceptual metaphor theory, American online newspapers, qualitative content analysis, discourse analysis, semantic prosody

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TIIVISTELMÄ

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Kandidaatin tutkielma

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Tämän kandidaatin työn tavoitteena on tutkia amerikkalaisten verkkosanomalehtien uutisointia 2024 vuoden Yhdysvaltojen presidentinvaaleista ja metaforien käyttöä presidenttiehdokkaisiin, Kamala Harrisiin ja Donald Trumpiin liittyvässä keskustelussa. Tämän työn tutkimuskysymykset liittyvät erilaisten metaforatyyppien ja diskurssien löytymiseen uutisoinnissa, sekä siihen, löytyykö nais- ja miesehdokkaan uutisoinnissa ja ehdokkaiden toiminnan kuvailussa jotain merkittäviä eroavaisuuksia. Teoreettisena viitekehystenä tutkimus käyttää Lakoffin ja Johnsonin käsitteellistä metaforateoriaa.

Tämä tutkielma hyödyntää tutkimusmetodeina laadullisen sisällönanalyysin ja diskurssianalyysin yhdistelmää. Tutkielman aineisto kerättiin neljästä eri amerikkalaisesta verkkolehdistä. Näitä olivat CNN, Fox News, CBS News ja Los Angeles Times. Tutkimukseen valittiin yhteensä 20 uutisartikkelia, joista 43 esimerkissä tunnistettiin metaforan käyttö. Löydetyt metaforat lajiteltiin viiteen eri kategoriaan. Kategoriat perustuivat teemoihin, jotka toistuivat metaforaesimerkeissä. Jokaisesta kategoriasta analysoitaviksi valittiin sellaiset metaforat, jotka edustivat omaa kategoriaansa parhaiten. Tämän jälkeen 20 esimerkkiä analysoitiin yksitellen. Analyysissa tutkittiin tutkimuskysymysten mukaisesti, miten metaforia käytettiin, miten ne jakaantuivat Lakoffin ja Johnsonin kolmijakoisen kategorisoinnin mukaan, sekä millaisen semanttisen prosodian ne loivat esimerkkilauseissa oleviin asiayhteyksiin.

Tutkielman yksi johtopäätös oli, että erilaisia metaforia käytetään laajasti amerikkalaisessa uutisoinnissa. Sen lisäksi tehtiin päätelmä, että metaforat voivat osaltaan vaikuttaa siihen, kuinka yleisö rakentaa oman ymmärryksensä kyseisen aiheen ja henkilöiden uutisoinnista. Lisäksi voitiin tehdä päätelmä, että merkittäviä eroavaisuuksia nais- ja miesehdokkaan uutisoinnista ei noussut esiin. Viimeisen tutkimuskysymyksen osalta tutkimuksen tavoitteena oli selvittää, mitä diskursseja aineistoista löytyisi. Analyysin jälkeen kaksi merkittävää diskurssia pystyttiin löytämään. Nämä diskurssit nimettiin sillä perusteella, mitä metaforatyyppejä aineistosta löytyi eniten.

Avainsanat: Yhdysvaltojen presidentinvaalit 2024, metafora, käsitteellinen metaforateoria, amerikkalaiset verkkosanomalehdet, laadullinen sisällönanalyysi, diskurssianalyysi, semanttinen prosodia

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Contents

1 INTRODUCTION 1

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND 3

 2.1 Methodology: Qualitative Content Analysis, Discourse Analysis, and Semantic Prosody..... 3

 2.2 Conceptual Metaphor Theory 4

 2.3 Earlier Research on Metaphors in Newspapers..... 7

3 DATA AND METHODS 8

4 ANALYSIS OF METAPHORS 10

 4.1 Journey 11

 4.2 Battle..... 14

 4.3 Construction 17

 4.4 Finance 17

 4.5 Gardening 18

5 DISCUSSION OF METAPHORS AND DISCOURSES..... 19

6 CONCLUSION 21

BIBLIOGRAPHY 23

 Primary sources..... 23

 Other references 24

1. Introduction

Newspapers have the power to shape our world view and to give us different angles in which to perceive various phenomena happening in the world. The language used in newspapers is an immense tool to make certain events and people look a certain way. Figures of speech or other specific ways of using language can be a way to make news articles stand out and be interesting. While newspapers can be very effective in delivering information in a certain light by making use of figures of speech, such as metaphors, they can also influence our interpretation of the phenomena or people we are reading about. Newspapers are thus given a huge responsibility to make sure that the language they use is as neutral as possible.

The purpose of this study is to examine the way metaphors are used in American online newspapers from the time of the US presidential election 2024. I will study what type of metaphors are used and how they are used when the two presidential candidates, Kamala Harris and Donald Trump, are the centre of discussion in newspapers. In addition, I will study what major discourses are revolving around the candidates in the newspaper coverage. The subject of this study was chosen out of personal interest in politics, media, and the way language is used to shape our understanding of reality. There has been some research done on language use in the press (Fowler 1991) and metaphor usage in political contexts and the way political issues have been reported in the press (Musolff 2016) as well as the media's role in constructing public opinion (Happer and Philo 2013). Earlier research (Gerrits et al. 2017) has studied descriptive language use in Canadian newspapers covering political events, and how it affected the image of female politicians in Canadian Party Leadership Contests. I believe that this topic of research would benefit from further research, and with this study I aim to provide a new angle to the research of language use in newspaper coverage by examining a current political topic with new data.

The three research questions I will aim to answer in this study:

1. What types of metaphors can be found in American newspaper articles covering the US presidential election 2024?
2. What differences can be found in the way metaphors are used to portray the male and female candidates in newspapers?
3. What major discourses, from the basis of the metaphors identified, could be said to be present in the newspapers?

My hypothesis for the first research question is that several of the metaphors used might relate to or create an image of a race, or a competition. Additionally, based on former research on this subject (Gerrits et al. 2017; Ahmed 2018) I expect that the way women and men are portrayed in news can be different and can sometimes make the power relations lean more towards men having more dominance. For the third research question my hypothesis is that some of the key discourses found in the newspaper coverage could have similar themes that the found metaphors represent.

I will analyse and categorize the data using qualitative content analysis. As theoretical background for the analysis this study will utilize Lakoff and Johnson's conceptual metaphor theory. To support parts of the argumentation, I will use the News on the Web (NOW) corpus to examine and determine the semantic prosody found in the metaphors. By examining the semantic prosody that the words have, it is likely that I will be able to determine whether the language has any positive or negative influence on the candidate's representation. Additionally, discourse analysis will be used to discover any discourses surrounding the news coverage.

2. Theoretical Background

This section will introduce qualitative content analysis and discourse analysis as research methods. In addition, I will discuss the linguistic concept of semantic prosody. Furthermore, conceptual metaphor theory by Lakoff and Johnson will be introduced and some information on earlier studies in this area will be provided.

2.1 Methodology: Qualitative Content Analysis, Discourse Analysis, and Semantic Prosody

This study utilizes qualitative content analysis as the basis for the research. Qualitative content analysis is a method that emphasizes categorisation as the main tool for analysis (Mayring 2021, 63). Hsieh and Shannon (2005, 1278) define qualitative content analysis as a research method for “interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns”. Mayring (2021, 63) explains that instead of looking at the text as a whole, the content of the text is broken down into different groups and categories. The way the categorisation is executed varies depending on the subject of the study as well as the type of data that is being analysed.

Another research method which will be used is discourse analysis. Discourse analysis can be broadly understood as the study of language use, according to Tannen (2015, 1). Vine, in her book *Understanding Discourse Analysis* (2023, 5), explains how discourse analysis can study spoken or written text and can help to “give us information about the social, cultural or political context”. Vine lists newspapers as one possible data source that discourse analysis may examine, and states that they can be studied on multiple levels (2023, 5-6). The levels of research which Vine lists include vocabulary, syntax, sounds, gestures and style, to name a few (2023, 10). Metaphors are mentioned regarding vocabulary and the lexical level of analysing

discourses (2023, 6), which in part justifies the decision to include discourse analysis as a supportive method in this study, and to use the analysis of the metaphors as the base for the discourse analysis.

In the analysis section, this study will apply semantic prosody to examine tones in the language. Semantic prosody is discussed in an article by Alan Partington (2004, 132) where he states that semantic prosody of words is often quite subtle and cannot necessarily be detected from the single word itself but instead by looking at the surrounding words in the phrase that it appears in. Some words can by themselves be neutral but in specific contexts they can gain positive or negative tones. Therefore, it can be said that words may carry positive or negative tones and prosodies based on the associations they tend to form with other words.

2.2 Conceptual Metaphor Theory

Metaphor is usually categorized as a figure of speech, sometimes also called a literary device or a rhetorical device; a tool to enhance language, most often used with narratives and storytelling. The Oxford English Dictionary defines figure of speech as “a form of expression which uses language to achieve a particular effect” or as “an expression which is not intended to be understood literally” (*OED s.v. figure of speech*). Metaphors enable us to talk about abstract or absurd things in concrete ways. Sometimes abstract concepts can be hard to understand, and metaphors can make these abstract ideas more graspable by for example imagining them as physical objects.

Lakoff’s and Johnson’s conceptual metaphor theory (CMT) stems from their book *Metaphors We Live By* (1980). Conceptual metaphor is heavily reliant on the idea of concepts and can be explained as understanding a more abstract concept through another, more familiar and concrete concept (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 5). Another definition given by Lakoff goes

as follows: “In each case you have two domains. A complex structure given by a frame and mapping of more than one element onto another point” (2018, 48). Lakoff also argues that some words or phrases can activate a person to think in a metaphorical way (2018, 52). Conceptual metaphor can be seen as an umbrella term for three different types of metaphors, which Lakoff and Johnson list as structural, orientational, and ontological metaphors. All these three major conceptual metaphor types are not mutually exclusive, and a metaphor can be said to have aspects from all the three types.

Lakoff and Johnson explain that structural metaphors are used in a situation where “one concept is metaphorically structured in terms of another” (1980, 14). The metaphor simply allows us to reason with a complex idea by using a more familiar concept. Lakoff and Johnson demonstrate this with an example early on in their book. They connect concepts of argument and war, stating that the more abstract idea of an argument could be better understood through the use of a conceptual metaphor utilizing the concept of war, which as a simple phrase is stated as follows: “argument is war”. Lakoff and Johnson then give some example expressions which include the conceptual metaphor “argument is war”:

“He *attacked every weak point* in my argument.”

“I’ve never *won* an argument with him.”

“If you use that *strategy*, he’ll *wipe you out*.” (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 4)

The second type of metaphor that Lakoff and Johnson list is orientational metaphor, which includes spatial orientations such as up-down, front-back etc. Some examples from the book are:

“I’m feeling *down*.”

“My income *rose* last year.”

“We hit a *peak* last year, but it’s been *downhill* ever since.” (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 15-16)

Ontological metaphors, which are listed as the third type, are ways of treating abstract or invisible things such as experiences, thoughts and emotions as entities and objects, so that they

are easier to reason with (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 25). Events, actions and states are also included in Lakoff and Johnson's list of things that are oftentimes understood using ontological metaphors (ibid, 30). One example that Lakoff and Johnson mention is that the mind can be seen as a machine (ibid, 27). Some examples regarding that type of conceptual metaphor are listed in the book:

“My mind just isn't *operating* today.”

“I'm *a little rusty* today.”

“We've been working on this problem all day and now we're *running out of steam*.” (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 27)

The book *Ten lectures on cognitive linguistics*, based on Lakoff's lectures given in 2004 in Beijing, discusses linguistics and metaphors from a cognitive perspective. Figures of speech and especially metaphors, which Lakoff discusses in his book, have a connection to our mode of thought. Lakoff says that “Metaphors are part of cognition, the part of the way you think and the part of the way you reason” (2018, 54). Lakoff argues that the way we understand the world around us is mostly due to us acknowledging it through unconscious use of metaphors (2018, 187). Therefore, it could be argued that the way people choose to use different types of metaphors could affect our understanding of the subject being talked about.

To link this theory of conceptual metaphors to the subject of this study – metaphors in newspaper language – we could envision the following situation. If a newspaper chooses to describe a political phenomenon, such as the presidential election, using metaphors that create an image of a journey, that could alter the way we think about and understand the phenomenon ourselves to be a kind of process and not a stagnant event. As Fowler states early on in his book: “language is not neutral, but a highly constructive mediator” (1991, 1). Lakoff also says that “[p]olitical and economic ideologies are framed in metaphorical terms. Like all other metaphors, political and economic metaphors can hide aspects of reality.” (1980, 236) This suggests that metaphors are largely used in political discourse and that the power the metaphors

have is so great that they even have the power to alter the way reality around the discussion is formed.

Happer & Philo (2013, 327) claim that when the public lack personal experience or knowledge about the certain event that is being reported in newspapers, it is likely that the information they read will affect their understanding of the said event. A high-status political event could be said to be an example of such a phenomenon. Most members of the public don't have access to the political discussions and negotiations happening behind closed doors, which could provide the amount of thorough information needed to form opinions. Therefore, the public is heavily reliant on media reports and newspaper articles to determine their beliefs.

2.3 Earlier Research on Metaphors in Newspapers

The use of metaphors in newspapers has been the subject of research in a number of studies. In this section I will present a brief overview of a couple of studies from this area of research.

Umar Ahmed (2018, 89) discusses gendered news coverage in his article. He states that the use of metaphors in discourse can influence how the concept of power is distributed among people and proposes that gender and whether one belongs in a certain type of social group can affect that division. Therefore, it could be argued that in newspapers covering political phenomena the picture of dominance can easily be affected by the choices to use different types of metaphors. This idea has been investigated in the following study conducted by Gerrits et al.

Earlier research (Gerrits et al, 2017) has studied descriptive language used in Canadian newspapers, and specifically how it affected the image of female politicians in past Canadian Party Leadership Contests. It studied the concept of power, and metaphors applied to the political candidates. As its methods, the study used a combination of content analysis and discourse analysis. The research concluded that the language used included gendered

assumptions about the candidates' leadership skills (Gerrits 2017, 1099-1100). It examined the coverage on three different Canadian party leadership contests from the years 1976, 1993, and 2004. The study concluded that the usage of aggressive figures of speech increased over the years (ibid, 1093). Gerrits states that the results are consistent with other research having been done on media coverage of political events (ibid). Gerrits makes a connection to Srömbäck, who suggests in his article that news media prefer to present and cover political events in a certain way, utilizing a more sensational reporting style to attract readers (2008, 238). This suggests that a more entertaining way of using language would be more apparent in newspapers nowadays.

3. Data and Methods

The data for this study was selected from American online newspaper articles covering the elections. The chosen newspaper articles were published between July 26, 2024, and November 6, 2024. The election itself was on the 5th of November. The media outlets from which I chose the data are Fox News, CNN, CBS News, and Los Angeles Times. From those I gathered 20 newspaper articles. Out of the 20 articles six articles are from CBS News, five from both CNN and Fox News, and four from Los Angeles Times. Some American newspapers are generally known to lean more towards the right or the left wing in their political viewings and stance. Therefore, I chose both Fox News and CNN, since Fox News is known to be conservative leaning and CNN to be a liberal leaning newspaper. CBS News is widely followed across the US. The Los Angeles Times is also a newspaper which is quite large and has a prominent readership, but since it is a local newspaper, it might give different angles to the news coverage. I chose articles based on the involvement of either one of the candidates or both. This was the first criterion when selecting the data. The publishing dates of the articles were another key

criterion that affected the selection, since this study concentrates on the news articles from the period of the elections. The third criterion that I had for the data was that it had to include only news articles. I specifically did not choose any columns or opinion pieces, since those would have been evidently subjective and possibly biased towards the candidate.

As Fowler expresses: “There are always different ways of saying the same thing, and they are not random, accidental alternatives. Differences in expression carry ideological distinctions (and thus differences in representation)” (Fowler 1991, 4). Different news outlets report on the same event or phenomena but the way they have decided to structure the text can be different. This could for instance reveal possible ideological favouritism. To illustrate, a newspaper known to be conservative might, intentionally or not, frame the conservative candidate in a more positive light compared to the liberal candidate. To avoid one sided coverage, these four presented newspapers were chosen to have a wider array of different viewpoints.

The data will be analysed and categorised with qualitative content analysis. Utilizing that research method, I am examining and categorising the types of metaphors found in the newspapers. I will then determine whether the language has more negative or positive prosodies when talking about female and male political figures. After the detection of metaphors in the data, I will use the News on the Web (NOW) corpus to support the argumentation where it is needed. The NOW corpus established by Mark Davies is a vast corpus consisting of data from web-based newspapers and magazines (The English-corpora.org). As of 2nd of June 2025 the word count of the NOW corpus is at 22 billion+ words. With the help of the corpus, I will examine and determine the semantic prosody found in the metaphors by looking at word collocations. At the end of this study, I will investigate the major discourses surrounding the presidential candidates in the newspapers. I will execute the discourse analysis from the basis of the found metaphors and their representation of different themes.

4. Analysis of metaphors

From the 20 selected newspaper articles I identified 43 examples of metaphor usage. Using qualitative content analysis, the examples were divided into different categories based on their metaphor type. By metaphor type in this section, I mean the different concepts and themes that the found conceptual metaphors appear to have. I categorised the metaphors based on similarity of concept and theme with each other. These categories are namely *journey*, *battle*, *construction*, *finance* and *gardening*. I will also examine each example metaphor in the light of the three-part categorisation made by Lakoff and Johnson, which was introduced earlier in this study. I will determine whether the metaphor could be said to be structural, orientational, ontological, or possibly a combination of them.

Next, I will analyse a few examples from each category. From each category, those metaphors which seemed to best represent their own category, were chosen to be part of the analysis. Several of the metaphor examples were very similar or practically the same, which is why those were omitted from the analysis and the section will not therefore include all the found 43 metaphor examples. The number of each type of metaphor is illustrated in the table below. In the journey category there were 20 metaphors, which is the highest number of metaphors in a single category. In the battle category there were 18 metaphors found, which is the second highest category. The number of metaphors in the last three categories were divided as follows: construction has 3 metaphors, and finance and gardening each have one instance of metaphor.

Metaphor category	Number of examples
Journey	20
Battle	18
Construction	3
Finance	1
Gardening	1

Table 1: Metaphor categories and number of examples

4.1 Journey

The candidates, their campaign and the election are often discussed in terms of a race. The word ‘race’ appears multiple times in the 20 news articles, many times accompanied by an adjective.

[1] And although most surveys suggest *a tight race*, a more decisive victory for either candidate remains well within the realm of possibility (CNN, November 2024)

In the first example it is metaphorically stated that the two candidates Harris and Trump are in “a tight race”. It is metaphorical, since they are not physically running a race but rather the author is describing the process of the presidential election. A structural metaphor can be identified from that example, because the abstract idea of “running for presidency” is mapped out in the concept of racing in order to give the idea more concrete structure.

In relation to the election being seen as a race and a process, the second example takes the same approach with the phrase “a step Trump refused to take”.

[2] Gore conceded that election, thereby guaranteeing an uncontested transfer of presidential power — *a step Trump refused to take* four years ago (CNN, November 2024)

It is made to seem that the election has multiple stages, and the candidates must take these metaphorical steps in order to move towards the election day. I would say that this is an example of an ontological metaphor, since an invisible action is made physical; different stages of the process are described as physical steps that one can take. I would argue that the metaphor in this example sentence shows Trump in a more unfavourable light, since it highlights Trump's refusal to move forward and take the next step.

The third example has multiple metaphors. The first one is at the beginning of the sentence in the wording "the final stretch". The second can be seen in the phrase "battle against former President Trump", as well as the third in the phrase "path to the presidency". The first and the third one are journey metaphors, making the election seem like a journey which starts and then ends at a destination, the election day. The second one "battle against former President Trump" would fit in the battle category.

[3] In *the final stretch of her battle against* former President Trump, Vice President Kamala Harris is counting on female voters as her most reliable *path to the presidency* (Los Angeles Times, November 2024)

These metaphors are all structural metaphors. They utilise the concepts of racing, making a journey and battle to play with the language and to convey the message of the more abstract concept of campaigning and the process of the election.

In the fourth example the author is metaphorically comparing Trump's campaign to a train, which 'chugs' forward with certainty and clear direction to the final goal, the presidency.

[4] *Trump train chugs* past 2020 margins, particularly among Hispanics, urban North easterners (Fox News, November 2024)

With the metaphor, the headline of the article is giving an optimistic image of Trump and his presidential campaign. This argument is supported by the collocates of the verb 'chug' in the NOW Corpus. The top collocates in the list include adverbs such as *straight, nicely,* and

smoothly. The semantic prosody can therefore be confirmed as positive. I would categorise this metaphor as a structural metaphor, where Trump's campaign is being structured as a train.

In example 5 a connection to a metaphorical train can also be detected in the latter part of the sentence: 'picking up steam'.

[5] Kamala Harris *has widened her lead* over former President Donald Trump in New York, and it attributes the jump to the vice president *picking up steam* in the suburbs and upstate (CBS News, October 2024)

It is as though Harris is thought to represent a steam train which is picking up steam, meaning that Harris is gaining speed in her campaign. In the phrase "vice president picking up steam in the suburbs and upstate" the candidate's abilities of gaining support and votes, invisible qualities of a person, are turned into an entity, making the metaphor an ontological metaphor. In this case an abstract quality is turned into something physical, something that can "pick up steam", hence the correlation to a steam train. Also, as the first part of the example sentence goes "Kamala Harris has widened her lead over former President Donald Trump", it is proposed that Harris is at better odds to be elected at that time. I would state that this is an instance of a structural metaphor, as in this case an abstract idea of Harris being in the lead is understood in terms of the concept of making a journey. Both metaphors in this example provide a rather positive image of Harris and her campaign.

Other references to making a journey are made in the following example.

[6] Harris has made what some would call non-traditional *stops on the campaign trail* to reach Black men (CBS News, October 2024)

In example 6 the campaign is described as a trail, which the candidate is taking. The metaphor in this example is a structural one. Since campaigning is mostly understood as an abstract concept, the author has chosen to structure the idea in terms of a physical journey.

In example 7 Harris' campaign is described as a "bumpy ride", referring that the campaigning has not gone smoothly. Similarly in example 8 Harris' process towards the election is described metaphorically as "a turbulent process". It is debatable whether these two examples are close to neutral in tone or whether they seem to create a more unfavourable image of Harris' campaigning process.

[7] Inside Kamala Harris' *bumpy ride* from near political doom to a rebound that has Democrats hopeful (Los Angeles Times, July 2024)

[8] Democrats have pushed ahead with a virtual vote to nominate Harris, nearing the culmination of *a turbulent process* that was upended by Biden's decision not to seek re-election (Los Angeles Times, August 2024)

Both example sentences include structural metaphors that use the concepts of movement and making a journey. Together with the adjectives both metaphors could be said to have a more negative tone.

4.2 Battle

In addition to the concept of journey in regards the presidential election, the discussion around political elections is often accompanied by metaphors connecting the phenomena to concepts of battle and war. Verbs are often used metaphorically, as can be seen from the following examples. It is also notable that many of the used verbs can be said to have negative semantic prosody, which is in line with the nature of the concept of war and how that is usually narrated.

[9] Vice President Kamala Harris is campaigning on a pledge to toughen border restrictions as Republicans *hammer her* over the Biden-Harris administration's record on immigration (CBS News, October 2024)

In the example 9 the phrase "Republicans hammer her" is creating an image of the Republicans metaphorically using physical measures to make the opposing party's candidate appear in a bad light. I would categorise this metaphor as a structural metaphor. The concept of criticising the other party's candidate and their campaign is mapped out in a more concrete battle-like concept.

Verbs such as *threaten*, *attack* and *battle* could be said to have a negative tone since they tend to appear with other negatively toned words. A few collocates that appear on the list when these three words are put into the NOW corpus are: *threats*, *violence*, *strike*, *abuse*, *cancer*, *injuries*, and *disease*. In the example sentences these metaphorically used verbs create a context of a war-like situation by wording the sentences in a way that creates association with themes of battle.

[10] Trump has *threatened* to escalate his trade war with China (CBS News, November 2024)

[11] This time, Trump and the RNC have made a big push to use early and mail voting, even as Trump has continued to *attack* them (CNN, November 2024)

[12] Harris and Trump are *battling* for the Keystone State's 19 electoral votes (CBS News, November 2024)

The examples 10, 11 and 12 therefore all use structural metaphors. The examples 10 and 11 both give quite a negative image of candidate Trump by using the chosen conceptual metaphors. This negative image does not only apply to one candidate, as aggressive metaphors are used on Harris as well. This can be seen from the following example 13.

[13] Vice President Kamala Harris stood outside the vice president's residence in Washington, D.C., *launching a blistering attack on* former President Trump (Fox News, October 2024)

In this example it is made to seem that Harris is metaphorically trying to attack Trump. It is a clear example of a conceptual metaphor where arguments towards another person are framed as attacks. It is a great illustration that represents one major example that Lakoff and Johnson give in their book; the conceptual metaphor of 'argument is war'. The metaphor in the phrase "launching a blistering attack on" is therefore a structural metaphor. When the word 'launch' was put in the NOW corpus, several negatively toned collocates appeared on the list. A few of these were: *attacks*, *missiles*, *strikes* and *scheme*. Therefore, the metaphor could be argued to have negative semantic prosody.

Relating to the concept of battle, many examples can be seen to create an image of a match or a fight. A phrase in example 14 includes the word “showdown”, meaning a final confrontation or an argument. The Oxford English Dictionary defines ‘showdown’ as an event that is “serving to settle a disagreement or force an issue to a conclusion” or as “a decisive duel between two gunfighters” (*OED* s.v. *showdown*). The example sentence can be understood metaphorically as a final battle between the two candidates. It is metaphoric since the candidates are not actually involved in a violent, physical fight, but rather it is proposed that the “battle” for presidency is coming to an end.

[14] *Harris-Trump showdown*: VP continues to dominate this crucial campaign metric days before the 2024 election (Fox News, September 2024)

I would say that the metaphor in this example is a structural one, since it is clear that the author has chosen to write about the abstract event in terms of battle-like concept.

In example 15 the verb “trigger” is used metaphorically and has qualities of a structural metaphor, broadly stating that politics is warfare.

[15] Harris tries to ‘Gluck’ the vote but *triggers* female gun owners: “She is completely anti-gun” (Fox News, November 2024)

The Oxford English Dictionary defines the word “trigger” as a verb which causes something to start, generally having a negative tone, since it can mean to cause someone a strong, negative emotional reaction (*OED* s.v. *trigger*). Thus, this example can be seen to have negative connotations. A number of collocates that come up for ‘trigger’ in the NOW Corpus are *war*, *reaction*, *recession*, *crisis*, and *anxiety*. Therefore, the semantic prosody can be determined to be negative.

Example 16 can be seen to include a war metaphor in the latter part of the phrase where the author has written that “voters are firmly in Harris’ camp”.

[16] The survey also suggests that older voters are firmly *in Harris' camp* (CNN, November 2024)

In military terms the word camp implies to a military base. This would suggest that Harris' supporters are an army in a battle ready to support and fight for Harris. This gives an image that Harris has a strong and substantial group of supporters and voters backing her up. I would say that the phrase 'in Harris' camp' would be a structural metaphor, since it structures an abstract idea of political support in terms of concepts relating to military and war.

4.3 Construction

A small number of metaphors connected to construction and building could be found within the data.

[17] Trump attempted to *build friendly relations* with Russia while in office (CBS News, November 2024)

[18] Trump is using election lies to *lay the groundwork* for challenging 2024 results if he loses (Los Angeles Times, November 2024)

In example 17 the verb 'build' is used to narrate Trump's attempt to create connections with another country. It is a structural metaphor that uses the concept of building to map out the abstract topic of creating connections. The same observations can be made with the other example 18. It also includes a structural metaphor, since no actual building or construction work is being done, but rather it is metaphorically insinuated that Trump is laying the base for his future political actions and strategies.

4.4 Finance

An instance of a type of finance metaphor could be found and is illustrated in example 19.

[19] Harris has likely *banked more votes* than Trump so far (CNN, October 2024)

The author words the way Harris has gained votes as her having “banked more votes”. It is interesting since the author could have opted for the more common verbs like ‘gain’, ‘got’, or ‘earned’. When looking at the collocates for the word ‘banked’ in the NOW corpus, it is easy to determine that most of the words are associated with financial vocabulary. The top collocates were *million*, *shot*, *gas*, *population*, *money*, and *points*. When examining the collocates none of them appeared to be overly negative so therefore I would determine the semantic prosody as positive. In addition, when taking the context into account, which is implying that Harris has seemingly gained a lot of support from voters, the example is displaying a positive image for the democrat’s candidate. The type of metaphor in this example would be a structural one, implying that votes are money. It is also an ontological metaphor, since it is made apparent that votes are something physical that one can own or obtain.

4.5 Gardening

The final category is connected to the concept of gardening and planting. Example 20 uses a planting metaphor in the phrase ‘sow doubt’. The verb ‘sow’ is usually used in sense of gardening, “sowing seeds”, but here the meaning is bent to fit the discourse.

[20] Here’s a look at Trump’s strategy to *sow doubt* in this year’s election (Los Angeles Times, November 2024)

Here the author makes a point of Trump attempting to insert and create uncertainty concerning the elections. The metaphor is used to convey that doubt is like a seed which could be inserted into people’s minds to make the wanted ideas grow and spread. This metaphor could therefore be determined to be an ontological metaphor, because here the emotion of doubt is regarded as a physical seed that can be planted and then grown. In addition, it is a structural metaphor, where the invisible and abstract act of influencing people is understood through the concept of agriculture and gardening.

When the word ‘sow’ was put in the NOW corpus I found that within the first 20 collocates eight of them were quite negative words. These eight negative collocates for ‘sow’ were *discord*, *division*, *doubt*, *chaos*, *confusion*, *fear*, *distrust*, and *terror*. Therefore, in the context of the example, it could be said that the semantic prosody is negative.

5. Discussion of metaphors and discourses

After examining the data, it can be noted that out of the 20 examples which were analysed, four of them could be said to present Harris in an unfavourable way, and five of them showed Trump in a negative light. The rest of the analysed examples were more positive or even neutral in their tone. It appears that the most neutral media outlet was CBS News. From the total of six examples from CBS News, three of them were neutral, one favoured Harris, and two showed Trump in a negative light. It is also worth mentioning that out of the four media outlets it was clear that CNN, being liberal leaning, was more favourable towards the democrat’s candidate Harris, and more negative towards the republican Trump. Out of the examples from CNN two were neutral, one was positive towards Harris, and two gave Trump a more negative image. In connection to that observation, the analysis additionally showed that the more conservative leaning media outlet Fox News favoured Trump with one positive example and represented Harris more negatively in two examples.

Based on this study’s short analysis, it would seem that the way the newspapers discussed and presented the candidates through metaphors is rather similar. In contrary to the hypothesis, there was not an immense difference in the way the female and the male candidate was described and discussed. It was expected that the male candidate could be presented in a more powerful position. Instead, most of the writing in the examples seemed quite neutral in tone. I believe that the way the newspapers write about the female and male candidates in a neutral

way is partially because they try to retain their credibility and trust with their readers. I would argue that people nowadays are quite aware of the history of women's position in society and how in these modern days it is expected to support the idea of gender equality. Therefore, if a newspaper in an article would emphasize a person, their qualities, and actions through their gender, that it would probably be looked upon with disapproval by the public.

In addition to the metaphor analysis, I will next give a few observations regarding the discourses in the newspapers. I would state that two bigger discourses from the presidential election news coverage can be named based on the analysis of the data. The two major discourses could be named broadly as journey discourse and battle discourse, based on the most prominent types of metaphors found in the newspaper articles. Both discourses frame the narration around the presidential election in a certain way making it appear to the public as more than just a political process. As mentioned earlier, Strömbäck has stated that media makes use of captivating and interesting narrating styles to make their content more engaging and entertaining (2008, 238). That seemed to be true in the analysed examples. I would argue that to be able to tell and sell a news story to a reader, the content of the newspaper article must be as interestingly told as possible. Therefore, it is no surprise that media outlets use linguistic and literary devices to enhance the mundane political event.

In the journey discourse, practically all that leads up to the presidential election is highlighted metaphorically as a race, a path or steps to be taken, all of which is making the presidential election seem like a gradual and progressive process, which might speed up or slow down at stages. As the presidential election is a political event which does take its time, requires campaigning, and does not happen in a day, it is natural that the event is narrated using language which describes its process-like nature.

In the battle discourse the discussion around the presidential election creates an idea of a battle or struggle for power. I would argue that a battle discourse can strengthen the already

polarized nation; by setting the scene as though the presidential candidates are competitors and enemies in a war-like situation. Though, I would say that this type of negatively toned discourse is already quite prominent in newspapers, since most of the events that tend to get broader news coverage are usually impactful but also quite often very gloomy in nature.

6. Conclusion

This study looked at the use of metaphors in various American online newspapers. The study utilized content analysis and the NOW corpus to find out what type of metaphors could be found in American newspaper language and whether the discourse based on semantic prosody could be said to be positive or negative concerning the presidential candidates. In addition, the study used discourse analysis to discover discourses surrounding the newspaper coverage of the presidential candidates. As its theoretical background this study utilised Lakoff and Johnson's well-known theory of the conceptual metaphor, as well as a few research articles from the similar area of metaphor usage in newspapers. This study aimed to find answers to three research questions, which were as follows:

1. What types of metaphors can be found in American newspaper articles covering the US presidential election 2024?
2. What differences can be found in the way metaphors are used to portray the male and female candidates in newspapers?
3. What major discourses, from the basis of the metaphors identified, could be said to be present in the newspapers?

After conducting the analysis, the found metaphors could be divided into different categories based on themes and concepts and therefore the major types of metaphors could be identified. These were *journey*, *battle*, *construction*, *finance* and *gardening*. The news articles seemed to make connections to various concepts such as war and battling, making a journey and moving

forward, building and construction, as well as finance and gardening. The hypothesis was therefore partially correct.

To conclude the results for the second research question, based on the analysis of the data, there did not seem to be a huge difference in the way the female candidate versus the male candidate was discussed, which is contrary to the original hypothesis. As an instance, metaphors that could be determined to have negative semantic prosody were used on both candidates, so at least based on this short study the discourse did not seem to be that dissimilar between the two candidates. I would argue that today's society's pressure on what one can say and what not is too prominent. Thus, it is difficult for newspapers to provide provocative articles which could present a person in a bad light just because of their gender.

The hypothesis concerning the third research question was that the discourses would probably be similar to the themes that the found metaphors would have. After the most significant concepts were identified for the metaphors, it was suggested that the major discourses could be broadly named as journey and battle discourse, which were also the most prominent types of metaphors found.

As this study is a bachelor's thesis, the scope is somewhat restricted. That therefore limits the data and the way that the findings can be generalised. To be able to answer these questions more effectively, I would propose that this subject needs more research being done by examining various other newspapers. This could give the topic new and valuable perspectives. It would also be insightful to research and explore the background to sociocultural change and how it is linked to how language is used in newspapers. It would be an interesting point of view for future research to see whether linguistic choices made in newspapers affect the image and perception that the public receives of political figures. Moreover, whether the image may be altered depending on the type of representation constructed by the media.

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