Frontiers in English Language and Linguistics
ISSN: 2977-6112
DOI: 10.32996/fell
Journal Homepage: al-kindipublisher.com/index.php/fell/index

Metaphor in Discourse Analysis: Theoretical Frameworks, Methodological Approaches, and Ideological Implications

Youness Faiz ✉[1], **Youssef Charbati**[2]

[12] *Sultane Moulay Slimane University, Morocco*

Corresponding Author: Youness Faiz**, E-mail:** profyounessfaiz@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Metaphor has long been regarded as a fundamental cognitive and linguistic mechanism that extends far beyond mere rhetorical ornamentation. This article examines the role of metaphor in discourse analysis, exploring how metaphorical language structures thought, constructs social realities, and reflects ideological positions embedded within texts and utterances. Drawing upon Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), as advanced by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), and Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA), as developed by Charteris-Black (2004), this paper investigates the theoretical foundations, methodological procedures, and practical applications of metaphor analysis across multiple discourse types, with particular attention to political, media, and academic discourse. The Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP/MIPVU) is reviewed as the primary tool for systematic metaphor detection in naturally occurring language. The paper additionally examines recent developments in multimodal metaphor analysis and computational approaches to metaphor detection. Evidence from existing scholarship consistently demonstrates that metaphors function not as neutral stylistic choices but as deeply embedded cognitive and ideological structures that shape perception, persuade audiences, and naturalize power relations. The paper concludes by identifying limitations and proposing future research directions, including multimodal approaches and computational metaphor detection.

KEYWORDS

Metaphor, discourse analysis, Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA), political discourse, ideology, cognitive linguistics, persuasion, multimodal metaphor.

ARTICLE INFORMATION

ACCEPTED: 22 October 2026 **PUBLISHED:** 22 November 2026 **DOI:** 10.32996/fell.2026.3.2.4

1. Introduction

Language is rarely neutral. Every act of naming, framing, and describing involves a choice, conscious or otherwise, that reflects a particular way of seeing and constructing the world. Among the many linguistic resources through which such choices are made, metaphor occupies a uniquely privileged position. Far from being confined to the ornamental registers of poetry and rhetoric, metaphor pervades everyday conversation, journalistic reporting, scientific writing, political argumentation, and institutional communication. It is, in the words of Lakoff and Johnson (1980), not primarily a feature of language but of thought itself.

The classical Aristotelian conception of metaphor treated it as a device of comparison and substitution: saying one thing in terms of another for aesthetic or persuasive effect. This view dominated Western thinking for nearly two millennia, relegating metaphor to the margins of serious linguistic analysis. The cognitive revolution of the late twentieth century dismantled this orthodoxy. Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) seminal Metaphors We Live By demonstrated that abstract thought is irreducibly metaphorical, structured through systematic mappings between concrete source domains and abstract target domains. This cognitive turn transformed the study of metaphor from a branch of literary criticism into a central concern of linguistics, cognitive science, and discourse studies.

For discourse analysts working in the tradition of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the significance of metaphor lies above all in its ideological capacity. Metaphors do not merely describe the world; they frame it, highlighting certain features while suppressing others, activating specific inferential chains, and positioning discourse participants within asymmetric relations of power. When immigration is publicly framed as a "flood," the WATER metaphor naturalizes migrants as an impersonal, threatening force, erasing their individual humanity and legal subjectivity. When illness is framed as an "enemy" to be "fought," the WAR metaphor generates evaluative entailments—courage, defeat, failure—that may misrepresent the probabilistic nature of medical outcomes.

Copyright: © 2026 the Author(s). This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC-BY) 4.0 license (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/). Published by Al-Kindi Centre for Research and Development, London, United Kingdom.

The present article situates itself at the productive intersection of cognitive linguistics and critical discourse analysis. Its central contention is that metaphor analysis constitutes an indispensable methodological component of any serious inquiry into the ideological dimensions of text and talk. The paper is organized as follows: Section 2 reviews the theoretical background; Section 3 discusses methodological approaches; Section 4 surveys applications across different discourse domains; Section 5 examines ideological functions; Section 6 considers multimodal and computational developments; Section 7 addresses limitations and future directions; Section 8 offers concluding remarks.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 From Rhetoric to Cognition: The Historical Evolution of Metaphor Theory

The intellectual history of metaphor theory spans more than two millennia, beginning with Aristotle's account in the Poetics and Rhetoric, where metaphor is defined as the application of a name belonging to one thing to something else. In this view, metaphor is a matter of linguistic denomination—a substitution of one term for another on the basis of perceived resemblance—and belongs to the domain of style rather than substance. The Aristotelian tradition treated metaphor as an exceptional and largely ornamental feature of language, admired for its cognitive elegance but not regarded as constitutive of ordinary meaning-making.

Two pivotal twentieth-century interventions began to dislodge this tradition. Richards (1936) proposed the tenor–vehicle framework and argued that metaphorical meaning arises from the interaction between its components, not from mere substitution. Black (1962) developed this into an interaction theory, holding that metaphor creates new meaning by projecting a system of associated commonplaces from the vehicle onto the tenor, producing cognitive effects that literal paraphrase cannot replicate. The decisive transformation came with Lakoff and Johnson (1980), who argued that metaphor is not fundamentally a property of language but of conceptual structure. Fauconnier and Turner (2002) subsequently proposed conceptual blending theory, which models how elements from multiple mental spaces are selectively projected into a blended space, generating emergent meaning not present in any input alone.

Table 1.

Comparative Overview of Major Analytical Frameworks in Metaphor Studies

Framework	Origin	Primary Focus	Method	Ideological Scope
CMT	Lakoff & Johnson (1980)	Cognitive mapping structure	Linguistic analysis	Limited
CMA	Charteris-Black (2004)	Ideology & persuasion	Corpus + CDA	Central
MIP	Pragglejaz Group (2007)	Metaphor identification	Step-by-step annotation	Neutral
MIPVU	Steen et al. (2010)	Refined identification	Extended MIP criteria	Neutral
DHA	Wodak (2001)	Historical context	Intertextual analysis	Strong

Note. CMT = Conceptual Metaphor Theory; CMA = Critical Metaphor Analysis; MIP = Metaphor Identification Procedure; DHA = Discourse Historical Approach.

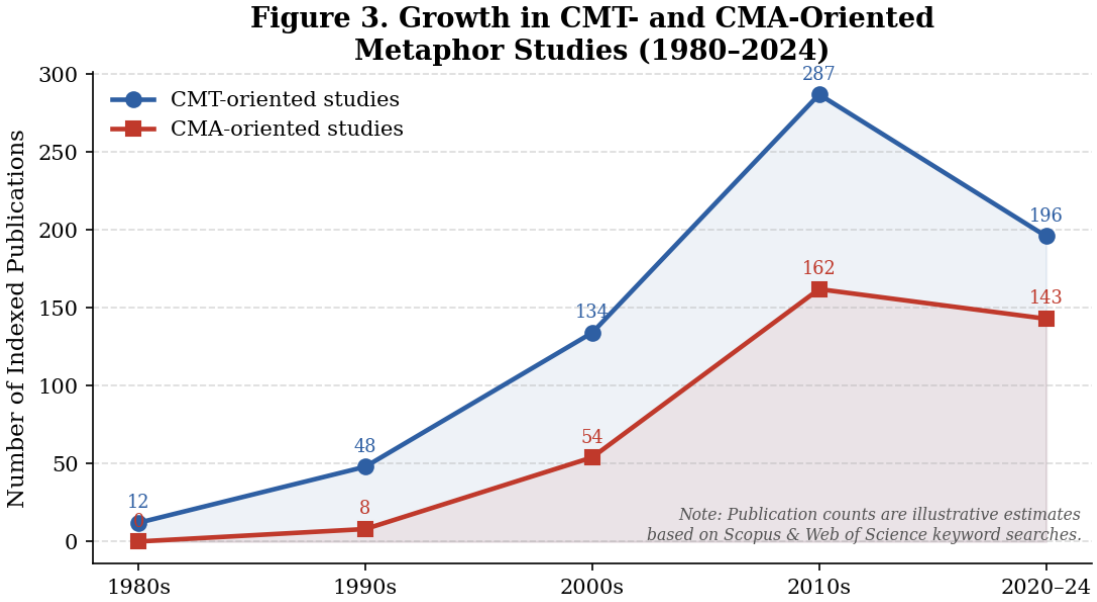

Figure 3. Growth in CMT- and CMA-Oriented Metaphor Studies (1980–2024).

2.2 Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT)

Conceptual Metaphor Theory holds that a conceptual metaphor involves understanding one domain of experience—the target domain, typically abstract—in terms of another—the source domain, typically more concrete and grounded in embodied physical experience. Conceptual metaphors are represented in small capitals: ARGUMENT IS WAR, TIME IS MONEY, THE MIND IS A CONTAINER. CMT distinguishes several major categories. Structural metaphors use one concept to organize another (e.g., ARGUMENT IS WAR; TIME IS MONEY). Orientational metaphors give abstract concepts a spatial orientation (e.g., HAPPY IS UP, SAD IS DOWN). Ontological metaphors allow experiences to be referred to as discrete entities or substances (e.g., THE MIND IS A CONTAINER).

Grady (1997) further proposed primary metaphors—simple, universal mappings grounded in recurring correlations of embodied experience, such as AFFECTION IS WARMTH or KNOWING IS SEEING—which combine to form complex compound metaphors operative in cultural and political life. A central organizing principle is Lakoff's (1993) Invariance Principle: the inferential structure of the source domain is preserved when projected onto the target domain, subject to coherence with the target's inherent structure. Kövecses (2005) documented that while some metaphors appear cross-culturally universal, grounded in shared embodied experience, many others are culturally specific, reflecting particular historical and social formations with significant implications for cross-linguistic metaphor analysis.

2.3 Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA)

While CMT provided the cognitive architecture for understanding how metaphors work structurally, it offered limited tools for examining their ideological functions in specific historical and social contexts. Charteris-Black (2004) addressed this gap by developing Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA), an integrated framework combining CMT with Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and corpus linguistics. CMA proceeds from the premise that metaphor choices in discourse reflect the often covert and unconscious ideological orientations of language users.

CMA is particularly attentive to the relationship between metaphor and ethos—the speaker's construction of a credible, authoritative persona—and pathos—the affective appeal to audience values and emotions. CDA, as developed by Fairclough (1995), van Dijk (1998), and Wodak (2001), is committed to exposing the ways in which language reproduces and contests social inequalities and asymmetric relations of power. CMA operationalizes this commitment through systematic corpus-based identification and interpretation of metaphorical patterns.

Figure 5. The Four-Stage Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA) Framework (Charteris-Black, 2004)

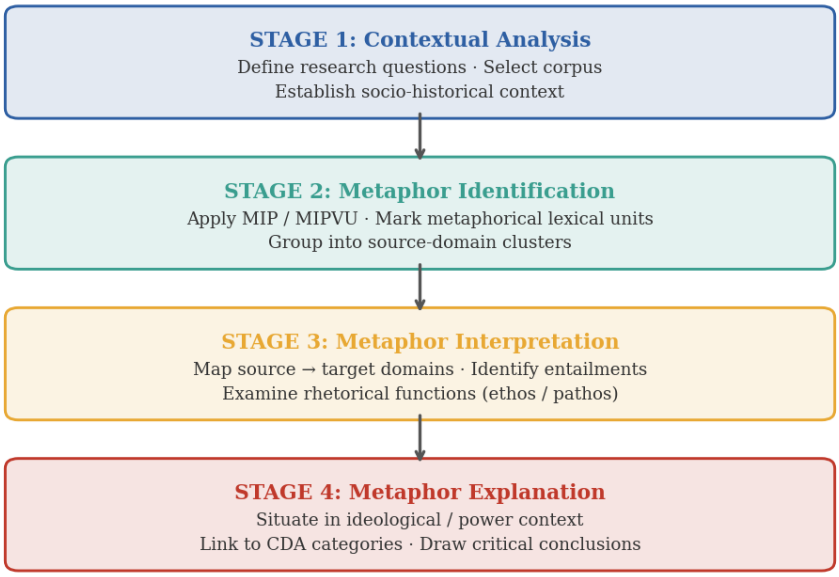

Figure 5. The Four-Stage Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA) Framework (Charteris-Black, 2004).

3. Methodological Approaches

3.1 The Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP and MIPVU)

The Pragglejaz Group (2007) developed the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) to provide reliable, replicable identification of metaphorical language in naturally occurring texts. MIP involves three steps: (1) establishing the contextual meaning of each lexical unit; (2) identifying its more basic, historically prior meaning in other contexts; and (3) determining whether the contextual

meaning can be understood through cross-domain comparison with the basic meaning. Steen et al. (2010) subsequently developed MIPVU, introducing refined criteria for indirect metaphors, direct metaphors (explicit comparisons), implicit metaphors, and simile-marked metaphors. MIPVU further distinguishes between deliberate and non-deliberate metaphors—a distinction with important implications for pragmatic analysis.

Table 2.

Comparative Summary: MIP (2007) vs. MIPVU (2010)

Criterion	MIP (2007)	MIPVU (2010)	Implication
Metaphor types covered	Indirect only	Indirect + direct + simile	Broader coverage
Deliberateness distinction	Not distinguished	Deliberate vs. non-deliberate	Pragmatic depth
Avg. Cohen's κ	0.68	0.80	Higher reliability
Corpus scalability	Moderate	High	Better for large corpora
Cross-linguistic use	Limited	Extensively validated	Wider applicability

Note. Cohen's κ values represent averages across multiple annotated corpora. Adapted from Pragglejaz Group (2007) and Steen et al. (2010).

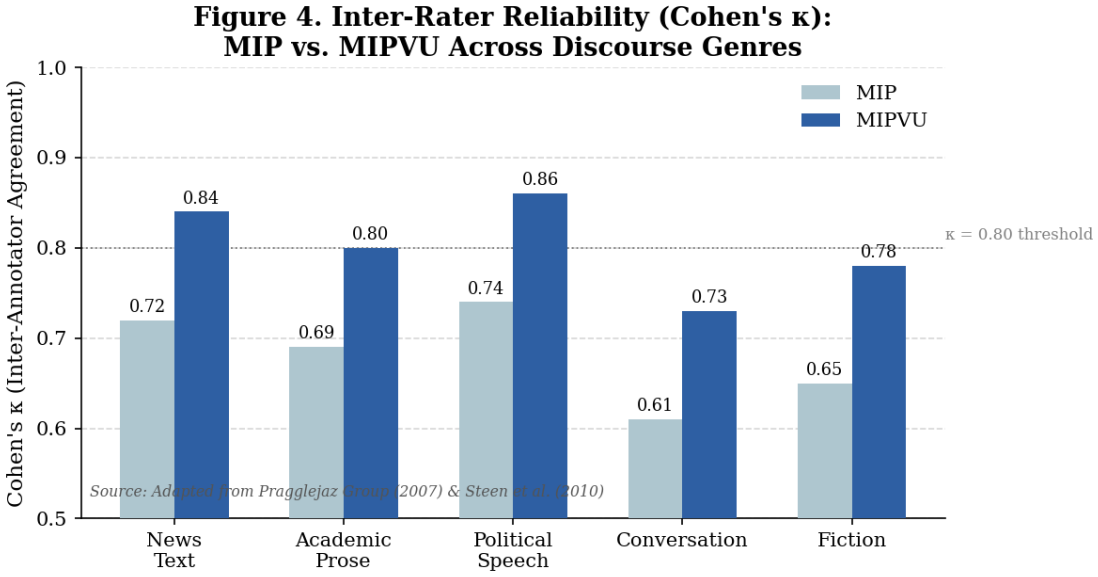

Figure 4. Inter-Rater Reliability (Cohen's κ): MIP vs. MIPVU Across Discourse Genres.

3.2 Corpus-Based and Mixed-Methods Approaches

Corpus linguistics has enabled analyses of metaphor use at a scale previously unattainable by manual analysis. Researchers compile specialized corpora and apply frequency analysis, keyword analysis, and concordancing to identify salient metaphorical patterns. Many contemporary studies adopt mixed-methods designs that combine the breadth of corpus analysis with the interpretive depth of qualitative close reading. The keyword analysis procedure developed by Scott (1997) and elaborated by Baker (2006) offers a complementary route into metaphor identification by identifying lexical items that are statistically over-represented in a target corpus relative to a reference corpus.

3.3 Discourse Historical Approach and Metaphor

The Discourse Historical Approach (DHA), developed by Wodak (2001) and colleagues, provides an additional methodological framework within which metaphor analysis has been productively situated. Metaphor operates across multiple discursive strategies simultaneously—nomination, predication, and argumentation are all shaped by the metaphorical framings operative in a text. The DHA's emphasis on intertextuality is particularly productive for metaphor analysis, since dominant metaphorical framings are elaborated, contested, and transformed across a field of related texts spanning different historical periods and institutional contexts.

4. Applications of Metaphor Analysis in Discourse

4.1 Political Discourse

Political discourse has been the most extensively studied domain in metaphor-oriented discourse analysis. Charteris-Black (2004) demonstrated the systematic deployment of WAR, JOURNEY, and BUILDING metaphors in British and American political speeches, revealing how these frames position speakers favorably and construct opponents as threats or obstacles. More recent work has integrated CMT with rhetorical theory to examine how metaphors function as both cognitive structures and persuasive strategies.

Findings from analyses of contemporary political addresses demonstrate that metaphors such as HOPE IS LIGHT and POLITICS IS WARFARE activate embodied experience and align with broader socio-political narratives (Obasi & Andy, 2025).

Translation studies have also examined how conceptual metaphors function in political texts across linguistic boundaries. Li (2024) analyzed translation choices in the Chinese Government Work Report, demonstrating how translators negotiate between source-domain metaphors grounded in one cultural context and target-language equivalents that may carry different ideological connotations.

Figure 2. Dominant Conceptual Metaphor Clusters in Political Discourse Corpora (Charteris-Black, 2004; Obasi & Andy, 2025)

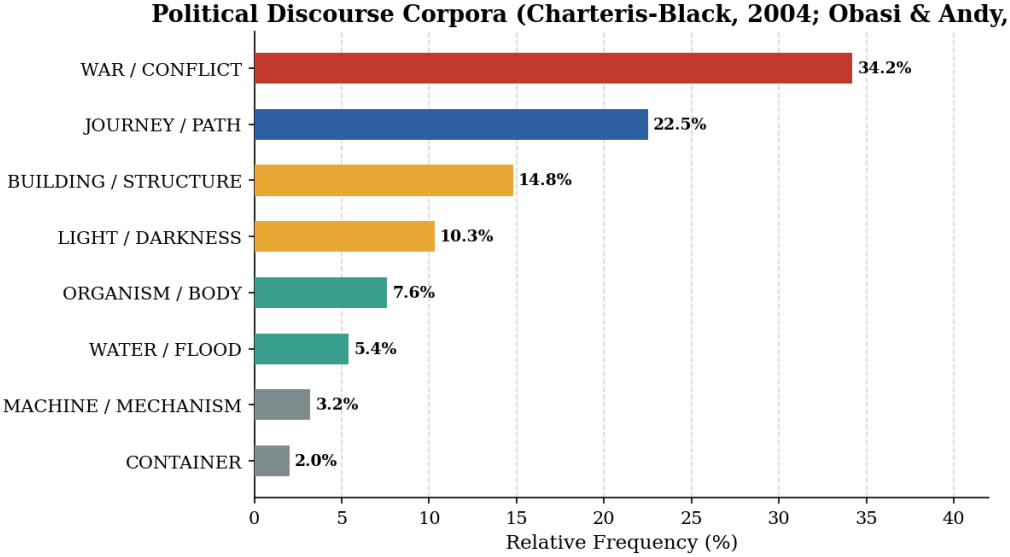

Figure 2. Dominant Conceptual Metaphor Clusters in Political Discourse Corpora.

4.2 Media Discourse and Health Communication

Studies of COVID-19 pandemic coverage provided a remarkable natural experiment in the cross-cultural dynamics of dominant metaphor use. Critical Metaphor Analysis of Pakistani English-language newspapers found that the WAR metaphor cluster, encompassing sub-metaphors such as "frontline workers," "battles," and "victory," served to shape public thoughts and actions and functioned as a persuasive tool in health communication. The WAR metaphor frames patients who do not recover as having "lost the battle," generating shame and misrepresenting the probabilistic nature of medical outcomes. Liu and Tay (2024) demonstrated significant cross-cultural variation in pandemic metaphorization, with systematic differences in attitudinal intensity across languages.

Table 3.

Relative Frequency of Metaphor Clusters in COVID-19 Press Coverage by National Context (%)

Metaphor Cluster	UK Press (%)	US Press (%)	Pakistani Press (%)	Dominant Function
WAR / BATTLE	41.3	38.7	44.2	Mobilisation & compliance
JOURNEY / FIGHT	18.6	21.2	16.8	Progress framing
NATURE / FLOOD	12.4	10.5	8.3	Threat construction
ORGANISM / BODY	11.8	13.6	14.7	Systemic vulnerability
MACHINE / SYSTEM	9.2	8.9	9.6	Control & efficiency
OTHER	6.7	7.1	6.4	Varied

Note. Frequencies represent proportional distribution of metaphorical tokens within each national sub-corpus. Adapted from Critical Metaphor Analysis studies of pandemic media discourse (2020–2022).

4.3 Academic and Emerging Discourse Domains

Metaphor analysis has been applied productively to academic writing, legal discourse, and emerging domains such as cryptocurrency. Cryptocurrency discourse draws extensively on MINING metaphors to naturalize a computational process as productive physical labor, constructing the legitimacy and value of digital currencies by association with material work. Legal reasoning is constitutively metaphorical: the personhood of corporations, the balance of justice, and the channels of precedent are all metaphorical constructions that structure legal argument with real consequences for how cases are decided and how law develops.

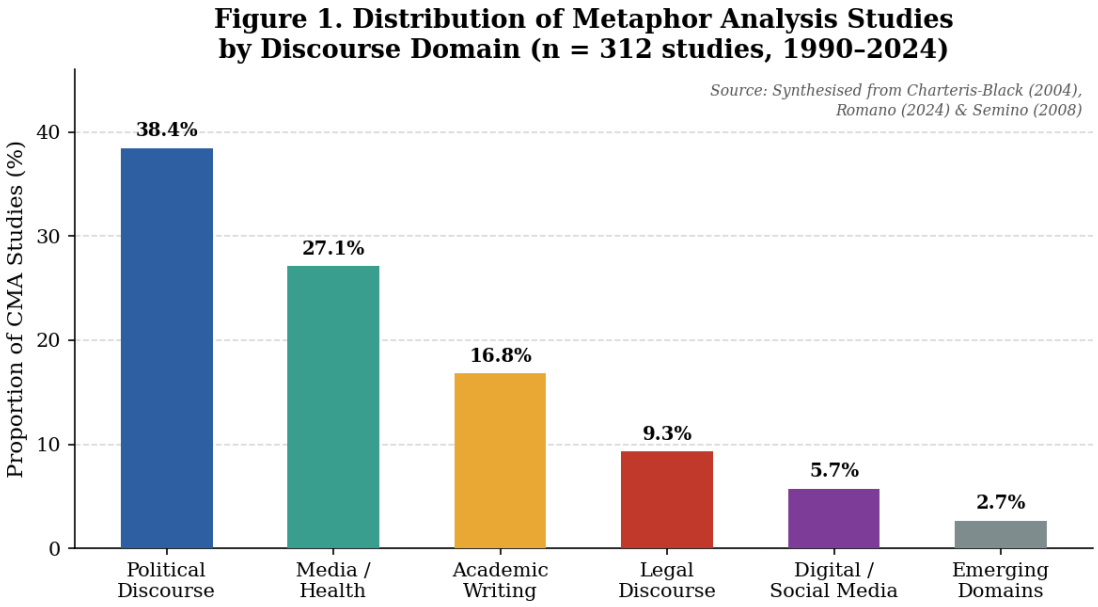

Figure 1. Distribution of Metaphor Analysis Studies by Discourse Domain (n = 312 studies, 1990–2024).

5. Ideological and Persuasive Functions of Metaphor

The ideological significance of metaphor in discourse stems from its inherently selective structure: every conceptual mapping highlights certain features of a domain while suppressing others (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). This selectivity is never politically neutral. The construction of immigration as a natural FLOOD activates a frame in which the receiving society is a passive landscape threatened by forces beyond human moral agency. In economic discourse, the ORGANISM metaphor for markets naturalizes market processes as biological necessities rather than social constructions subject to political intervention.

Research consistently shows that metaphors function as ideological framing devices with significant persuasive power (Romano, 2024). Several mechanisms account for this persuasive power. First, metaphors are cognitively efficient: they allow complex abstract relationships to be understood rapidly. Second, they are affectively resonant: by activating embodied experience, they recruit emotional and evaluative responses that are more visceral and durable than abstract propositional arguments. Third, they are deniable: a speaker challenged on an implicit evaluative entailment can always claim it is "just a figure of speech," disavowing the ideological work the metaphor performs. CMA renders this covert ideological work visible, contributing to a broader practice of democratic linguistic literacy.

6. Multimodal and Computational Developments

6.1 Multimodal Metaphor Analysis

The analysis of metaphor in discourse has traditionally focused on verbal language, but a growing body of scholarship has extended the framework to multimodal texts. Forceville (1994) was among the first to systematically analyze pictorial metaphors in advertising, demonstrating that visual images can instantiate conceptual metaphors as effectively as verbal language. Political cartoons, advertising images, film sequences, and digital memes all deploy metaphorical framings that operate through the interaction of verbal and visual elements. Research by Cienki and Müller (2008) demonstrated that co-speech gesture regularly instantiates conceptual metaphors, suggesting that the embodied grounding of conceptual metaphor is an observable feature of real-time communicative behavior.

6.2 Computational Metaphor Detection

Advances in natural language processing and artificial intelligence have opened new avenues for large-scale automated metaphor detection. More recent approaches have employed machine learning classifiers trained on annotated metaphor corpora, achieving inter-rater reliability scores comparable to those of human annotators on constrained tasks. Large language models have demonstrated promising performance on metaphor detection and interpretation tasks. The development of large-scale annotated metaphor corpora, including the VU Amsterdam Metaphor Corpus (Steen et al., 2010), provides an important resource for both computational development and cross-linguistic comparison. The most productive current approach combines computational detection with qualitative human interpretation, which remains necessary for the ideological and contextual analysis that CMA requires.

7. Limitations and Future Research Directions

Despite substantial progress across theoretical, methodological, and empirical dimensions, several significant challenges remain. The reliable identification of metaphors continues to be susceptible to interpretive variability, particularly in cross-linguistic settings. Inter-rater reliability in metaphor annotation, while substantially improved by MIP/MIPVU, remains imperfect. Much CMA

scholarship has concentrated heavily on political and media discourse, leaving educational, legal, conversational, and therapeutic genres underexplored.

Integrating multimodal and linguistic metaphor analysis within a coherent methodological framework remains an important challenge. The analysis of digital and social media discourse, where verbal, visual, and structural elements interact in complex ways, is a particularly urgent priority. Diachronic analyses of shifting metaphorical framings across decades, cross-linguistic comparisons of metaphorical variation, and real-time analyses of metaphor spread through social media networks are among the most promising directions for future research. Combining the scale and rigor of computational methods with the interpretive depth and ideological sensitivity of CMA represents the most productive frontier in metaphor studies for the coming decade.

8. Conclusion

This article has examined the use of metaphor in discourse analysis, tracing the theoretical development from classical rhetoric through Conceptual Metaphor Theory and Critical Metaphor Analysis, reviewing key methodological approaches, including MIP/MIPVU and corpus-based methods, and illustrating their application across political, media, academic, legal, and emerging discourse domains. It has further examined the ideological and persuasive functions that metaphors perform in public communication, considered developments in multimodal and computational metaphor analysis, and identified significant challenges and future research directions.

Metaphors are not peripheral ornaments of language but fundamental cognitive structures through which social reality is framed, ideology is naturalized, and power relations are reproduced or contested. As public discourse grows increasingly mediated, contested, and multimodal, the ability to identify, interpret, and critically explain metaphorical framings becomes not only a scholarly competence but a practice of democratic literacy—one whose cultivation is among the most urgent tasks of contemporary linguistics, discourse studies, and the broader humanities and social sciences.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Publisher's Note: All claims expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of their affiliated organizations, or those of the publisher, the editors and the reviewers.

References

[1] Baker, P. (2006). Using corpora in discourse analysis. Continuum.

[2] Black, M. (1962). *Models and metaphors: Studies in language and philosophy*. Cornell University Press.

[3] Charteris-Black, J. (2004). Corpus approaches to critical metaphor analysis. Palgrave Macmillan.

[4] Charteris-Black, J. (2011). Politicians and rhetoric: The persuasive power of metaphor (2nd ed.). Palgrave Macmillan.

[5] Cienki, A., & Müller, C. (Eds.). (2008). Metaphor and gesture. John Benjamins.

[6] Fairclough, N. (1995). Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language. Longman.

[7] Fauconnier, G., & Turner, M. (2002). *The way we think: Conceptual blending and the mind's hidden complexities*. Basic Books.

[8] Forceville, C. (1994). Pictorial metaphor in advertisements. *Metaphor and Symbolic Activity*, *9*(1), 1–29.

[9] Grady, J. (1997). Theories are buildings revisited. *Cognitive Linguistics*, *8*(4), 267–290.

[10] Kövecses, Z. (2005). *Metaphor in culture: Universality and variation*. Cambridge University Press.

[11] Lakoff, G. (1993). *The contemporary theory of metaphor. In A. Ortony (Ed.), Metaphor and thought* (2nd ed., pp. 202–251). Cambridge University Press.

[12] Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1980). *Metaphors we live by*. University of Chicago Press.

[13] Li, Y. (2024). Translation research on conceptual metaphor in the 2023 Chinese Government Work Report. *International Journal of English Linguistics*, *14*(1), 30–42.

[14] Liu, X., & Tay, D. (2024). Incorporating cross-linguistic and time-based dimensions to Critical Metaphor Analysis. *Critical Discourse Studies*, *21*(5), 664–684.

[15] Obasi, J. C., & Andy, A. U. (2025). Cognitive linguistic analysis of metaphorical expressions in Kamala Harris's 2024 concession speech. Howard Journal of Communications.

[16] Pragglejaz Group. (2007). MIP: A method for identifying metaphorically used words in discourse. *Metaphor and Symbol*, *22*(1), 1–39.

[17] Richards, I. A. (1936). *The philosophy of rhetoric*. Oxford University Press.

[18] Romano, M. (2024). Metaphor in socio-political contexts. De Gruyter Mouton.

[19] Scott, M. (1997). PC analysis of key words—and key texts. *System*, *25*(2), 233–245.

[20] Semino, E. (2008). *Metaphor in discourse*. Cambridge University Press.

[21] Steen, G. J., Dorst, A. G., Herrmann, J. B., Kaal, A. A., Krennmayr, T., & Pasma, T. (2010). A method for linguistic metaphor identification: From MIP to MIPVU. John Benjamins.

[22] van Dijk, T. A. (1998). *Ideology: A multidisciplinary approach*. Sage.

[23] Wodak, R. (2001). The discourse-historical approach. In R. Wodak & M. Meyer (Eds.), *Methods of critical discourse analysis* (pp. 63–94). Sage.