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Persuasive Strategies in Pakistani Politics: A Corpus-Assisted Qualitative Study of Political Speeches' Influence on Public Cognition

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Abstract
This research paper investigates the role of metaphors in political discourse, focusing on how they reflect the thoughts, beliefs, and ideologies of political leaders. Recognizing that metaphors are inherently persuasive, the study explores their cognitive function in shaping audience perception. The research analyzes political speeches by two prominent Pakistani leaders—Nawaz Sharif (June 2013 – July 2017) and Imran Khan (August 2018 – April 2022). Their speeches were compiled into two corpora: NSPS (Nawaz Sharif Political Speeches) and IKPS (Imran Khan Political Speeches). A mixed-method research design was adopted. For quantitative analysis, a corpus-based approach was used to measure metaphor frequency in the speeches. For qualitative analysis, the study applied Lakoff and Johnson's Conceptual Metaphor Theory to interpret the cognitive processes behind the metaphors and assess their impact on public ideology. The findings reveal that metaphors in political speeches are intentionally employed to express underlying beliefs and project ideological viewpoints. Politicians use metaphors strategically to influence the mindset of the audience and reinforce their own political agendas. However, the analysis in this study is limited to the semantic dimension of metaphor, without consideration of pragmatic elements such as context and speaker intention. The researchers therefore recommend that future studies may incorporate pragmatic aspects to provide a more comprehensive understanding of metaphor use in political discourse.

Keywords: Postmodern Memory, Simulacra, Simulation, Hyperreality, White Noise.

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1. Introduction

Language plays a vital role in shaping human thought and perception, serving as both a reflection of the mind (Chomsky, 2006) and a constraint on worldview (Timrayner, 2014). Linguistic categories influence thought processes (Pinker, 1994), and the structure of a person's language can limit or expand their cognitive experiences. Scholars such as Bowerman & Levinson (2001) and Gleitman & Papafragou (2005) emphasise that language functions as a cognitive framework, shaping concept formation and memory. Cultural and linguistic diversity thus leads to varying perceptions of reality (Holmes, 2013; Boroditsky, 2011). Language is also a tool of social power and persuasion.

Metaphors, in particular, are a powerful persuasive device in political discourse. They allow complex ideas to be simplified and internalized by the public, often shaping ideologies and justifying actions in subtle ways. Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) Conceptual Metaphor Theory introduced the idea that metaphors reflect systematic conceptual mappings—e.g., life is a journey—that structure our understanding of abstract concepts.

Research shows that politicians strategically use metaphors to influence public opinion and reinforce ideologies. Ortony (1975) and Ottati & Wyer (1990) argue that metaphors provide information efficiently, aligning with how the brain processes data through schemas. Studies by Edelman (1971), Stone (1988), and Howe (1988) show how repeated use of simple metaphors (e.g., sports, warfare, machines) shapes public thinking and supports political agendas. Lakoff (1991, 1995, 2002) analyzed U.S. political rhetoric to reveal how metaphorical framing justifies policy decisions and influences public ideology. Similarly, Black (2004, 2005) found that metaphors in political manifestos and speeches reflect moral, religious, and ideological values, identifying common metaphor source domains like conflict, journey, religion, buildings, and light. This research applies such

theories to Pakistani political discourse, particularly the speeches of Nawaz Sharif and Imran Khan. It aims to uncover how metaphors function cognitively and persuasively to influence public ideology. Metaphors are thus seen not just as linguistic tools, but as central to political strategy and public persuasion.

2. Research Questions

1) What kinds of metaphors are commonly found in the political speeches of Imran Khan and Nawaz Sharif?
2) Which source domains are most frequently used in their metaphorical language?
3) How can the source domains used by Imran Khan be compared with those used by Nawaz Sharif—are they more similar or different?

3. Research Methodology

The researchers looked at how metaphors are used in political speeches using Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) Conceptual Metaphor Theory. It is primarily interested in how metaphors show political beliefs and ideologies. This cognitive linguistics theory divides metaphors into three main groups: structural, orientational, and ontological. These groups are based on how they affect how we think. Researchers used a qualitative method to examine the mental processes underlying political speech. The goal was to analyze language rather than to propose direct solutions.

Additionally, corpus linguistics was used as a quantitative method to support the metaphor analysis with real data. To do this, the researchers used AntConc (version 3.4.3), a tool for analysing text corpora, to find and count the number of times metaphors appeared in a large set of speech transcripts. We got these transcripts from the internet, where they were available in both video and audio form. The study provided a comprehensive analysis by combining qualitative depth with quantitative validation. This mixed-methods approach not only made

the results more reliable and objective, but it also gave us a better understanding of how political discourse works.

4. Significance of the Study

This study offers insights into how metaphors shape political beliefs in Pakistani discourse, contributing to scholarly understanding of political rhetoric and influencing public opinion. Using cognitive metaphor analysis as a structured tool for political speech interpretation adds value to the study's methodology. Additionally, it produces a comprehensive list of conceptual metaphors unique to Pakistani politics, which serves as a helpful resource for upcoming political linguistics studies. This top-down analytical approach supports a more systematic and reliable method for spotting metaphorical patterns in political speeches.

The research is pertinent to a broad academic audience due to its interdisciplinary scope, which links disciplines like linguistics, cognitive psychology, political science, and education. The study examines the ideological stances, emotional cues, and cognitive strategies embedded in political rhetoric through figurative language. Analyzing these metaphorical decisions reveals hidden meanings in political discourse and equips readers with the skills to assess political rhetoric more critically. In the end, the study promotes a better understanding of how language influences public discourse and political thought.

5. Literature Review

Taiwo (2010) conducted a study of metaphor use in Nigerian political discourse. Taiwo used the cognitive linguistic approach developed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) in conjunction with critical discourse analysis to conduct this study. A comprehensive framework for examining metaphorical language in political texts was made possible by this combination of approaches. The study aimed to identify recurrent metaphors and examine the relationships between various source domains and specific target domains in political communication. Taiwo

distinguished three main target domains—the country, politicians, and politics itself—by applying the ideas of conceptual metaphor theory. For example, politics was compared to a battle or a journey, politicians were portrayed as builders, and the nation was frequently portrayed as either a family or an individual, according to the research. Additionally, politics was presented as a game. By using these metaphors as rhetorical devices, Nigerian politicians were able to craft convincing messages. Taiwo concluded that political leaders frequently use metaphors to influence and convince their audience, in addition to providing information.

Bibi, Shafiq, and Shah's 2022 study looked at the metaphors used by former Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in his 2018 campaign. The researchers wanted to show how leaders' personal beliefs and political ideas can be reflected through the intentional use of metaphors. They used transcripts as their primary data source and, guided by the conceptual metaphor theory, examined a selection of Sharif's public speeches given between April and July 2018. The study focused on three main metaphor types: human, war, and journey. The findings demonstrated that Nawaz Sharif regularly used these symbolic frameworks to shape public opinion and clarify his political position. These metaphors had a more profound ideological significance beyond being persuasive devices. In the end, the study showed that metaphors are highly effective at influencing public opinion and political behaviour (Bibi et al., 2022).

Ullah and Masroor (2021) investigated how Imran Khan, the prime minister of Pakistan, used cricket metaphors in his political speeches. Their goal was to investigate how political concepts were simplified and conveyed through cricket-related language. They examined transcripts of speeches Khan gave in a variety of settings using the conceptual metaphor theory established by Lakoff and Johnson (1980). The results showed that Khan regularly used cricket jargon to convey a variety of ideas, emphasising authority, justice, optimism, criticism, and

patriotism. He frequently used these metaphors in speeches in which he addressed the nation, reflected on his own life, pledged allegiance to his country, or talked about foreign policy. The study concluded that Imran Khan frequently presents politics as a game of competition, strategically employing cricket terminology to engage the public and effectively express his opinions (Ullah & Masroor, 2021).

6. Data Analysis

Based on Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), this section provides a thorough qualitative and quantitative analysis of the metaphors used in Nawaz Sharif and Imran Khan's political speeches. The Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) assisted in identifying and classifying metaphorical expressions, and AntConc (version 3.4.3) was utilized to measure their frequency in order to support the analysis. Journey, Conflict, Building, Light, and Plant are the source domains from which the identified metaphors are arranged.

6.1. Quantitative Analysis

Using corpus linguistic techniques, the quantitative analysis first identified metaphor-related keywords from a predetermined list and then examined their frequency. The resonance of each source domain—calculated using Black's (2004) formula: Resonance = tokens × types—shows how active each metaphor domain is within the speeches.

Journey Metaphors

These metaphors include words like *walk, step, roadmap,* and *goal*. They are very common in both NSPS (Nawaz Sharif Political Speeches) and IKPS (Imran Khan Political Speeches); they account for more than 60% of all metaphors. The metaphors "life is a journey" and "global peace is a journey" suggest direction, progress, and purpose in policy.

Table: Source domain Journey in NSPS and IKPS

Keywords	Journey	
	NSPS	IKPS
Walk	3	2
Goal	12	3
Step	21	20
Path	8	_
Beginning	3	3
Move	4	11
Reach	5	14
Mobilize	1	4
Roadmap	2	_
track	2	2
Run	_	5
Ways	_	2

The source domain of the journey shows a resonance level of 610 in NSPS and 620 in IKPS.

Conflict Metaphors

Words like *fight, struggle, attack,* and *battle* characterize this domain. It is the second most prominent domain in both corpora, with resonance values of 184 (NSPS) and 222 (IKPS)**.** These metaphors convey determination, resistance, and survival.

Table: Source domain conflict in NSPS and IKPS

Keywords	Conflict	
	NSPS	IKPS
Protect	3	6
Defend	1	_
Attack	7	5
Threat	8	3
Fight	7	13
Destroy	1	2
struggle	6	8
Defeat	5	_

The source domain of conflict has a resonance level of 184 in NSPS and 222 in IKPS.

Building Metaphors

Terms like *build, framework, foundations,* and *corridors* are used to depict political and economic development. Resonance values are 100 (NSPS) and 64 (IKPS). These metaphors represent structure, planning, and cooperation in governance and diplomacy.

Table: Source domain building in NSPS and IKPS

Keywords	Building	
	NSPS	IKPS
Foundations	2	1
Framework	5	6
Build	16	8
Corridors	2	_
Door	_	1

The source domain of building exhibits a resonance level of 100 in NSPS and 64 in IKPS.

Light Metaphors

With words like *transparent, reflect, vibrant,* and *bright*, this domain shows a clear contrast: 88 (NSPS) versus 44 (IKPS). Light metaphors suggest clarity, accountability, and optimism**.**

Table: Source domain light in NSPS and IKPS

Keywords	Light	
	NSPS	IKPS
Vibrant	7	3
Transparent	8	_
Bright	2	_
Reflect	5	4
Dawn	_	2
Highlight	_	2

The resonance of the source domain light in NSPS is 88. In IKPS, the resonance is 44.

Plant Metaphors

Less frequently used, these include terms such *as 'grow'* and *'root*,' with 26 (NSPS) and 22 (IKPS) resonances. They depict foreign policy and long-term partnerships as organically rooted or developing relationships.

Table: Source domain plant in NSPS and IKPS

Keywords	Plant	
	NSPS	IKPS
Grow	8	9
Root	5	2

The plant source domain shows a resonance level of 26 in the NSPS corpus and 22 in the IKPS corpus.

A table is provided that summarizes the source domains and the resonance levels of metaphors found in both the NSPS and IKPS corpora.

Table: Summary of the resonance levels of source domains found in the NSPS corpus.

Source domain	Types	Tokens	Resonance	% of Resonance
Journey	10	61	610	60.5
Conflict	8	38	184	18.2
Building	4	25	100	9.9
Light	4	22	88	8.7
Plant	2	13	26	2.5

Table: Overview of the resonance levels of source domains observed in the IKPS corpus.

Source domain	Types	Tokens	Resonance	% of Resonance
Journey	10	66	620	63.7
Conflict	6	37	222	22.8
Building	4	16	64	6.5
Light	4	11	44	4.5
Plant	2	11	22	2.2

The tables display the types, tokens, and resonance of each source domain. Types denote unique metaphors, each with distinct features, while tokens indicate how often each metaphor appears. The metaphorical expressions identified in the speeches of Nawaz Sharif and Imran Khan are listed separately for each source domain in Appendices A and B, respectively. These expressions are arranged sequentially according to the order in which they appear within each source domain.

6.2. Qualitative Analysis

The qualitative analysis delves into how metaphors function cognitively and rhetorically in each politician's discourse. It interprets metaphorical expressions to uncover conceptual metaphors and image schemas, illustrating the ideological framing and motivational influence of metaphor use.

NSPS Analysis

1) **Journey Domain:** Nawaz Sharif uses terms such *as 'step,' ' goal,*' and *'roadmap*' to frame policies as progress toward peace and cooperation. The metaphor *"Global Peace is a Journey"* highlights the purposeful advancement of global peace.
2) **Conflict Domain:** With phrases like *struggle against terrorism*, metaphors here frame social challenges as survival battles. Metaphors such as *"Life is a Struggle"* and *"Society is a Person"* show emotional and nationalistic appeals.
3) **Building Domain:** Terms like *"build*" and *"corridors*" present diplomatic efforts as collaborative construction, as in *"Peace is a Structure"*. These metaphors convey deliberate, sustained growth.
4) **Light Domain:** Sharif uses *the terms 'reflect*ive' and *'transparent*' to stress UN reform and accountability. Metaphors like *"Organizations are Mirrors"* emphasize visibility, inclusion, and equity.
5) **Plant Domain:** The metaphor *"Foreign Policy is a Root"* indicates strength and stability, suggesting deep-seated diplomatic intentions.

IKPS Analysis

1) **Journey Domain:** Imran Khan extensively employs journey metaphors, with resonance slightly higher than Sharif's (620 vs. 610). Metaphors like *"Global Peace is Purposeful Activity"* frame development goals as missions with moral direction.

2) **Conflict Domain:** Terms like *fight* and *struggle* emphasize Pakistan's sacrifices against terrorism and in support of Kashmir. Metaphors like "Politics is War" and "Nation is a Fighter" are reflected in this.
3) **Building Domain**: Khan frequently highlights themes of combating corruption and building alliances through metaphors such as "build" and "framework." The concept of "Development as Building," for instance, emphasises the value of collaboration and having a well-defined plan.
4) **Light Domain**: Words like "vibrant" and "reflect," which are less common in Sharif's speeches, nevertheless convey concepts of constructive change and lively communication, particularly when discussing the media. The metaphor "Emotions are Mirrors" encapsulates ideas of morale-boosting and leadership.
5) **Plant Domain**: Phrases like "deep-rooted friendship" liken global ties to firmly planted trees, signifying resilience and enduring stability.

Comparative Insights

Both leaders regularly refer to international peace and reform as continuous, deliberate endeavours using journey metaphors. Additionally, they frame opposition and terrorism as enemies to be vanquished, employing conflict metaphors. Khan frequently employs building metaphors to focus on nation-building and combating corruption, whereas Sharif typically favours metaphors of light, which emphasise clarity and reform. Furthermore, both leaders use plant metaphors to represent stability and strong ties in international relations.

Table: Comparison of quantitative findings in NSPS and IKPS

Source domain	NSPS (21386)			IKPS (20388)		
	Types	Tokens	% of Resonance	Types	Tokens	% of Resonance
journey	10	61	60.5	10	66	63.7
conflict	8	38	18.2	6	37	22.8
building	4	25	9.9	4	16	6.5
light	4	22	8.7	4	11	4.5
plant	2	13	2.5	2	11	2.2

These metaphors demonstrate how both politicians organise intricate policy concepts, shape public opinion, and advance their ideologies by relying on shared cultural understandings and mental models. Metaphors have a powerful cognitive and persuasive function in political communication, as this analysis demonstrates. The study shows that metaphors are more than just figures of speech; they are effective instruments for influencing audiences and shaping ideological messages, as demonstrated by the fusion of qualitative and quantitative methods.

The results highlight the value of metaphor analysis across disciplines such as political science, linguistics, psychology, and education, and they also provide valuable insights into the strategic use of language in Pakistani politics. The findings show that journey metaphors are most common, appearing in 63.7% of Imran Khan's speeches (IKPS) and 60.5% of Nawaz Sharif's speeches (NSPS). This dominance aligns with previous work by Lubna & Rasul (2019) and Javaid (2021) and reflects a common theme of purposeful progress, particularly in areas such as peace and humanitarian efforts. Next are conflict metaphors, which comprise 18.2% of NSPS and 22.8% of IKPS and emphasise themes of sacrifice and struggle. This aligns with Black's (2004) theory that political language often presents issues as fights to be won.

Building metaphors (9.9% NSPS, 6.5% IKPS) suggests that diplomacy and foreign relations are seen as structures requiring planning and collaboration, a pattern also identified by Black (2011) in UK political speeches. The light domain, used more by Nawaz Sharif (8.7%) than Imran Khan (4.5%), conveys clarity and positivity, resonating with the idea that leadership mirrors societal values. Plant metaphors are least frequent (2.5% NSPS, 2.2% IKPS) but metaphorically root foreign policy in stability and long-term growth, consistent with Musolff's (2015) interpretation of plant metaphors in international relations. Overall, both leaders use metaphors strategically to frame ideologies, build narratives of progress, and connect with audiences through shared cognitive experiences.

7. Conclusion

The first two research questions addressed the identification and frequency of metaphors. Using AntConc, metaphors were analyzed based on known metaphorical expressions. It was found that both politicians predominantly used simplified metaphor categories rooted in basic human experience, such as the *source-path-goal* schema, involving concepts of movement and direction. This simplicity reflects a broader issue: a general lack of complex cognitive engagement by both speakers and their audiences, attributed in part to limited awareness and education. Contrary to expectations, despite being internationally educated, Imran Khan uses fewer metaphors, suggesting a preference for clear and direct communication. The study highlights various conceptual metaphors, such as *politics is a journey* and *foreign relations are plants*, which reflect common global patterns in political discourse. One unique metaphor identified in Imran Khan's speeches is *that leaders' emotions are mirrors*, mapping the reflective nature of mirrors onto leadership emotions and emphasizing leaders as role models. A shared metaphor in both leaders' speeches was that *global peace is a journey*, reinforcing their commitment to peace. Another frequent metaphor was

that *life is a constant battle for survival*, symbolizing the perseverance needed to achieve lasting values. The third research question explored the selection of metaphors and their source domains. The journey metaphor emerged as the most dominant across both leaders' speeches. While Imran Khan's speeches frequently employed metaphors from the *light* domain, Nawaz Sharif also used light-related metaphors, but to a greater extent. The study concludes that journey metaphors serve as the central narrative strategy for both leaders.

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