Methods for the study of political metaphor in leadership studies.

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Paper presented at the Conference of ECPR, Glasgow, September 3-6, University of Glasgow.

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Abstract.

Until the nineteen seventies metaphors were ornamental style elements with no other functions than embellishment. Scholars became aware since then of the political power of metaphor and its value as a scientific discovery instrument in the political domain. First, the persuasive and propaganda aspect of metaphor was widely given attention. Second, the value of metaphor analysis as a research method for the humanities was revealed. This paper presents an overview of qualitative and quantitative methods to study political metaphor. What does metaphor consist of? How to study metaphor for revealing its persuasive and political meaning? Focus is on social-scientific methods and in particular the quantitative approach by De Landtsheer (2011) entitled the Metaphor Power Index (MPI) method that allows to quantify emotive power in political discourse.
Why study political metaphor in leadership studies? Metaphor is a rhetorical style figure commonly used in politics. For a long time, it was seen as just another, nevertheless import, ornament in political language. The most commonly used metaphor concepts stems from interaction theory by Black (1979). A metaphor is a word or a word group in which one subject (A) is described in terms of another (B). The interaction between the two subjects provides for a new meaning C: \(A+B=C\). As an example we use a metaphor from a financial news article: “There was a megalomaniac enlargement strategy in which a sardine tried to eat a shark and greatly choked” [Er was een megalomane uitbreidingsstrategie waarbij een sardientje een haai trachtte op te eten en zich danig verslikt] (“Fortis”, in De Morgen, 27/09/2013). Subject A is the context of the financial world, subject B is the literal meaning of the sea world, the metaphorical meaning C is that the bank collapsed because it was overambitious.

One of the fathers of political and communication sciences H.D. Lasswell (1948) emphasized the “ornamental” character of political crisis style. So, metaphor in this way could inform scholars in the field of political psychology, leadership and communication about upcoming crisis situations. Also, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) explained how all everyday language use has a political meaning because of the underlying conceptual metaphors that always unnoticed structure people’s perception of life and politics. Especially scholars in international studies were aware since then of the persuasive power of metaphor in politics (Beer & De Landtsheer, 2004). The influential domino metaphor used in US foreign policy to implement the Cold War strategy and ideology was an eye opener to many colleagues- after the publication of the book “Metaphors we live by” by Lakoff and Johnson (1980). Among the many relevant issues in the study area of metaphor and politics, the question this paper wants to address is the following. How to study metaphor in politics, to get insight in its persuasive power, but in the first place how to use metaphor as a tool for inquiry into politics? Here we come in the domain of methods, which in this case, obliges us to think in a multiple disciplines. Within the linguistic sciences, there are a number of approaches to metaphor some of which are relevant for the study of leadership and politics. All of these methods are qualitative, as they tend to focus on extremely small text corpuses. The focus of this paper is on methods that are relevant for political research. The interest is, accordingly, on public opinion formation and the meaning of metaphor in public speech aimed at big audiences. This paper will detail, therefore, the Metaphor Power Index Method, that is a quantitative method from social and political sciences (De Landtsheer, 2009). Before presenting this MPI method,
we will first briefly discuss two qualitative methods from linguistics that are relevant to the study of leadership. The first method is the Metaphor Identification Procedure by the Pragglejaz group (Steen et al., 2010). This linguistic method allows to reflect upon what metaphor consists of. From the classic linguistic angle the (type 1 research) effects of all metaphors to be found in everyday language are examined (Gibbs et al., 2002). Every metaphor is worth examining and the focus is on the combined effect. Furthermore there is the increasingly popular conceptual metaphor theory by Lakoff and Johnson on which some methods from cognitive linguistics are based (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980; Kövecses, 2000) (type 2 research). This theory identifies a few (key, universal) source domains of metaphors; it concentrates on a few metaphors that may act as important framing devices denominated as conceptual metaphors. The Metaphor Power Index (MPI) method (De Landtsheer, 2009) combines these two approaches (type 3 research). MPI is inspired by quantitative semantics from propaganda studies by Lasswell et al. (1949). MPI method is appropriate to investigate the impact of metaphor in the process of public opinion formation by political leaders and elites. MPI method classifies all metaphors in a given text or corpus according to particular source domains that may direct thinking and perception in certain ways (cfr. type 2). For example: “There was a megalomaniac enlargement strategy in which a sardine tried to eat a shark and greatly choked” [Er was een megalomane uitbreidingsstrategie waarbij een sardientje een haai trachtte op te eten en zich danig verslikte] (“Fortis”, in De Morgen, 27/09/2013). The metaphor identified in everyday language is a sardine tried to eat a shark and greatly choked (type 1). The metaphor can be categorized according to the source domain “Nature” (type 2). Qualitative methods that are indirectly relevant for metaphor in leadership studies are inspired by critical discourse analysis (CDA). Critical Discourse Analysis is generally seen as an analytical method that aims at uncovering power and political control. Dominant groups create ideology by using a particular discourse in order to discriminate against other groups, prohibit actions, ban certain interactions and so forth (Wodak, Cillia, Reisigl, Liebhart, 1999, p. 8).

1. **Type 1 research: Linguistic Metaphor**

The Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) was conceived by a team of scholars from various universities that called themselves the Pragglejaz group (Steen et al., 2010). Their aim was to develop a clear and reliable technique to identify metaphors in written messages.
The procedure consists of five stages. Crucial to the procedure are the use of dictionaries and discussion among researchers.

1. One reads the text in order to understand the context (see example)

2. The researcher decides what will be the unit of analysis: the word, the sentence, the alinea, the word group… (see example)

3. For each unit of analysis one investigates the meaning in the given context (contextual meaning). In the example, this is the fact that a small enterprise unsuccessfully merges with a big enterprise. After that, one looks for a different, more concrete meaning (basis meaning). The concrete meaning is the literal meaning of a sardine that eats a shark and shakes.

4. Are both meanings similar or different (contextual meaning versus basis meaning)? In the example, the meanings are different.

5. When both meanings differ, but one of these can be understood in terms of the other, the unit of analysis is considered to be a metaphor. In the example, the contextual meaning can be understood in terms of the literal meaning. This concerns a metaphor.

The problem with MIP is that it is time-consuming and not appropriate for big corpora of texts.

2. **Type 2 research: Conceptual Metaphor**

Conceptual metaphor theory by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) is one of the most used theories for metaphor analysis. According to this theory, we use a series of metaphorical concepts called conceptual metaphors to give meaning to the world that surrounds us. These concepts structure our perceptions and experiences and how we relate to other people. They are at the origin of many metaphors we use in our every-day-life language. This process is mostly unnoticed. The meaning of linguistic sources is transferred to ‘targets’; this meaning determines our attitude toward the target. Metaphor analysis identifies the metaphorical source, the target of the source, the meanings of the source that are relevant to the target, and the implications of these meanings for the target (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). Very often the source of the metaphor is no longer activated or known by the user of the metaphor: in this case we speak of ‘dead metaphors’. In ‘live metaphors’, or ‘conventional metaphors’, the source is still obvious and can be identified by the users. In the example the conceptual
metaphor is the financial world as a sea world in which small fishes are not supposed to eat big fishes. The problem in conceptual metaphor theory is that metaphors can be linked to several conceptual domains and that operationalization is not simple.

3. Type 3 research: The Metaphor Power Index (MPI) method

Effects of metaphor, just like propaganda, rely on emotions. The MPI method allows to quantify emotive power in public discourse (XXX, 2009). The method aims at a quantitative representation of the metaphorical (and emotive, rhetorical) power of a text. For every part of the text a MPI may be calculated. With this index one can distinguish emotional or ‘metaphorical style’ from an actual substantive or ‘content style’. Metaphors are (1) counted and documented, and (2) categorized according to the originality and (3) the content or source domain. The MPI method combines two methodological approaches.

From the classic linguistic angle the (type 1) effects of all metaphors to be found in everyday language are examined (Gibbs et al., 2002). Every metaphor is worth examining and the focus is on the combined effect. MPI method first takes into account all metaphors used in a particular text, because of the mere rhetorical effects of metaphor (type 1). The increasingly popular cognitive metaphor theory (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980; Kövecses, 2000) (type 2) in contrast, identifies a few (key, universal) source domains of metaphors. This theory concentrates on a few metaphors that may act as important framing devices denominated as conceptual metaphors. MPI method classifies all metaphors according to particular source domains that may direct thinking and perception in certain ways (cfr. type 2). For example: “There was a megalomaniac enlargement strategy in which a sardine tried to eat a shark and greatly choked” [Er was een megalomane uitbreidingsstrategie waarbij een sardientje een haai trachtte op te eten en zich danig verslikte] (“Fortis”, in De Morgen, 27/09/2013). The metaphor identified in everyday language is a sardine tried to eat a shark and greatly choked (type 1). The metaphor can be categorized according to the source domain “Nature” (type 2).

The MPI method was conceived to assess emotive and persuasive power of style, and to use metaphor as an instrument for enquiry in the field of politics (XXX, 1994; 2009). This idea of connecting emotions and metaphors is based on theories from cognitive psychology.
that go back to Aristotle. Emotions are the directors of cognition: they select our beliefs, indicate our priorities, determine our attention, even distort the entrance to our memories. Metaphors have similar effects, they guide our knowledge into a specific direction and they help to choose a particular perspective (Feder-Kittay, 1987). MPI investigates the impact and meaning of metaphor in the process of public opinion formation, and it is one of the few quantitative methods used in this field. MPI method in summary can be used for examining the intended and possible effects of social metaphor use and also the social meaning of this metaphor use.

The MPI method offers a quantitative overview of the metaphorical power of discourse (a text or a corpus). Discourse with an elevated MPI is a ‘metaphor style’ discourse. This type of discourse scores high on emotion, persuasion, and rhetoric and it gives an intense and direct contact with the audience. The particular social meaning of this metaphor style discourse can be found by investigating its possible function(s) in the social context. Therefore it is necessary to examine not only the concerned discursive variables but also a number of contextual variables that could interact with them. Low MPI discourse could be labeled as ‘content style’ discourse, that attempts to convince with argumentation and logic, rather than with emotions. The MPI is calculated based on the metaphor frequency index (MFI), the metaphor intensity index (MII) and the metaphor content index (MCI). In this perspective, it is necessary to define and detect a metaphor.

The way metaphors work as conceptual tools can best be illustrated by examining what metaphors consist of. Metaphors firstly consist of a content which is entitled a ‘vehicle’ (Richards, 1936), a ‘focus’ (Feder-Kittay, 1987), a ‘ground’ (Cacciari, 2001), or a ‘subsidiary subject’ (Black, 1979). This content points at the literary device from one semantic domain that is applied to another completely different semantic domain, the ‘subject’ that is discussed. Metaphors thus secondly consist of a subject, which is entitled the ‘tenor’ (Richards, 1936), the ‘frame’ (Feder-Kittay, 1987), the ‘topic’ (Cacciari, 2001) or the ‘principal subject’ (Black, 1979) of the metaphor. Thirdly, there exists a ‘tension’ between this subject and the content of the metaphor (Cacciari, 2001; Feder Kittay, 1987; Richards, 1936). This tension consists at the same time of a bridge between different domains.
A metaphor needs not to be a full sentence; it may be a phrase. On the other hand, a sentence is not always sufficient to distinguish a metaphorical from a literal use of a term. Metaphor is not a unit of discourse, but a use of discourse. Expressions and words do have a first-order (semantic) meaning, like the word 'locomotive'. But they can obtain a second-order (pragmatic) meaning, when context indicates to the reader that the first-order meaning of the expression is inappropriate, as is the case when we use ‘red locomotive’ as follows: “Now that the largest markets of the Red locomotive of the world economy fail, China should in addition, look for a viable and sustainable economy on the domestic front [Nu de grootste afzetmarkten van de rode locomotief van de wereld economie het laten afweten, moet China bovendien op zoek naar een leefbare en duurzame economie op het thuisfront] (“De rode locomotief” in De Tijd, 06/03/2012). In our example from an article on the world economy, we could call ‘red locomotive’ the ‘subsidiary subject’ and the Chinese economy the ‘principal subject’, while the ‘tension’ provides for the interpretation that China is the main economic world power but it is in trouble. The ‘frame' belongs to a different ‘semantic field’ (economy) than the ‘focus’ (technique). It is the ‘contrast’ between these ‘semantic fields’ that creates the metaphor and its power. The more rare, abnormal, novel and surprising the cognitive substitution of meaning is, the more likely that the metaphor can be recognized easily. MFI shows the discursive frequency of metaphors (me) per 100 words (w). The higher the number (n) of metaphors used in relation to the number (n) of words, the higher the MFI.

\[
MF = \frac{me \times 100}{wo}
\]

The Metaphor Intensity Index (MII) deals with the novel and original character of the metaphor. MII represents the degree in which the ‘different sphere of life’ (for instance ‘technique’) still exists in (the new meaning of) the metaphor. Does one still connect “red locomotive” to an actual locomotive (in a technical sense) or is the term that much established in our daily connotation that the association disappeared and that only new meaning is being perceived, i.e. the notion of China as a world economic power? The variable deals with the
novel and original character of the metaphor (Gibbs and Colston, 2012). Black (1979) presents a hierarchical typology of metaphors in which metaphors are either 'strong' or 'weak'. Strong metaphors use effective words that cannot be substituted because of their particular expressiveness. Once the metaphor is understood it lends itself to further elaboration. Weak metaphors do not have these qualities and can be compared to an unfunny joke. As Tsoukas (1991) explains, all live metaphors necessitate creativity on the part of those applying them; they require interpretation and need to be thought through in order to work. Dormant metaphors can be distinguished from dead metaphors in that the metaphorical ground is not obvious, but becomes quickly apparent, so that they still play some role. Dead metaphors, in contrast, are used as literal terms; they have become so familiar that we have ceased to be aware of their metaphorical nature (Mooy, 1976).

The MII is conceived as an ‘originality’ score. MII is based on a combination of Koeller’s (1975) distinction between conventional and original metaphors, and Mooy’s (1976) conception of three dimensions of metaphors one of which is strength of reference to the literary meaning of the metaphor, or as we call it here the first-order meaning of the word or expression, that forms the ‘subsidiary subject’ of the metaphor. In original metaphors, the first-order meaning is still strongly present, and the contrast or incongruity between the semantic field of the ‘subsidiary subject’ and the semantic field of the ‘principal subject’ is considerable, so that the metaphor will be very striking (Gibbs and Colston, 2012). Metaphors receive MII (contrast, incongruity, and originality) values ranging from (1) for ‘weak’ (w), over (2) for ‘average’ (a), to (3) for ‘original’ or ‘strong’ (s) metaphors. MII stands for the sum of the weighed values of metaphor intensity (3-point scale) divided by the total number of metaphors (nme):

\[ MII = \frac{1w + 2a + 3s}{nme} \]

The use of more intense, creative and/or new metaphors leads to a higher MII.

The model also takes into account the content of the metaphors, the semantic field of the source domain of the metaphors, which is represented by the metaphor content index (MCI). A 'semantic field' is a content domain that as Feder-Kittay (1987) wrote is identifiable by a lexical field. Metaphors that belong to particular semantic fields (e.g., disease or sports)
are more powerful than those with such content as nature are or family is. Through the use of particular metaphors, anxiety can be mobilized for destructive purposes. This happens when groups of people are systematically labeled as animals, dirt, or disease – labels, which encourage (ethnic, religious, ideological, nationalistic) 'purification' or 'cleansing'.

For MCI, the MPI method uses an empirically validated scale that ranks content categories in ascending degrees based on their emotional potential and to what extent they confirm or disturb the existing order in life (XXX 2009). The MCI relies on descriptors for semantic fields that are relatively universal: 'every-day life material reality' (popular metaphors, P), 'nature' (nature metaphors, N), 'politics, intellect, technology' (technology metaphors, T), violence and disaster (disaster metaphors, D), sports, games and drama (sports metaphors, Sp) and death, body and illness (medical metaphors, M). Metaphors that fit the descriptors of the semantic fields are given values ranging from 1 to 6. Descriptors were awarded values on a scale according to significance given in psycho-linguistic literature and social-psychological theory, including the 'crisis behavior' model by Gaus (1981) that relates the need for mental escape to economic crisis. Optimistic, material popular metaphors (P) are less appropriate for escape; they receive the lowest score (1), while medical metaphors (M) are seen as utterances and inductors of anxiety and receive the highest score (6). Medical metaphors denominate processes in society as biological and therefore suggest that a doctor (an authoritarian leader) could solve problems through medical treatment rather than by (democratic) negotiation.

Between these two extremes, nature metaphors (N) get the score (2) as they are similar to popular ones (P), but are assumed to have an ambivalent function (optimistic versus pessimistic), so that they are not very reassuring; people under stress need to be reassured. Political, intellectual and technology metaphors (T) that refer to everyday life and that are not that appropriate for escape receive the value (3). Disaster metaphors (D) express despair, depression, and aggression; they are often used in an apocalyptic sense and receive the value (4). Sports, games and drama metaphors (Sp) appeal to many people; they are highly manipulative and get the score (5). The crisis content variable or MCI is calculated with the following formula, in which (nme) represents the total number of metaphors:

\[
\text{MCI} = 1P + 2N + 3T + 4D + 5Sp + 6M/nme
\]
When it is expected that individuals can exert less self-control on the own situation, it is likely that financial, political and media elites will use stronger metaphors. The metaphors that at this content level arouse stronger emotions (categories 4-6) lead to a higher MCI. The lower categories (1-3) lead to a lower MCI. Below is an overview of the content categorization with examples, and the weighed values.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Weighted values</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>(1) Popular or everyday-life metaphors (P)</strong></td>
<td>These metaphors serve the basic function of making the abstract tangible and comprehensible to a large audience</td>
<td>“This company gradually claims the title of being the <em>yoghurt of the financial sector</em>” [Aldus maakt HSBC stilaan aanspraak op de titel van <em>yoghurt van de financiële sector</em> (“FIFO”, in De Tijd, 29/02/2012)]</td>
<td>popular, strong, Ps, value 1x3=3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(2) Nature metaphors (N)</strong></td>
<td>This category of metaphors goes in two ways. The natural order can be confirmed and lead to the suggestion of citizen’s control over the environment, but it can also express the idea of lack of control. In references to flora and fauna we witness both wild and domestic animals</td>
<td>“There was a megalomaniac enlargement strategy in which a sardine tried to eat a shark and greatly choked” [Er was een megalomane uitbreidingsstrategie waarbij <em>een sardientje een haai trachtte op te eten en zich danig verslikt</em>](“Fortis”, in De Morgen, 27/09/2013)</td>
<td>nature, strong, Ns, value 2x3=6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(3) Navigation, construction, technological, political and other ‘sophisticated’ metaphors (T)</strong></td>
<td>This imagery also has an ambivalent character. It allows politicians to show multiple dimensions of complex problems. Metaphors of architecture advance the discussion, whereas mechanical metaphors usually expose the people’s lack of control</td>
<td>“Now that the largest markets of the Red locomotive of the world economy fail, China should look for a viable and sustainable economy on the domestic front,…” [Nu de grootste afzetmarkten van <em>de rode locomotief van de wereld economie</em> het laten afweten, moet China bovendien op zoek naar een leefbare en duurzame economie op het thuisfront] (“The Red locomotive” in De Tijd, 06/03/2012)</td>
<td>technology, strong, Ts, value 3x3=9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(4) Disaster and violence metaphors (D)</strong></td>
<td>This category refers to negative emotions, such as anxiety, despair and aggression. However, these emotions allow citizens to be in control to some extent</td>
<td>“That threatens to put a bomb under the so-called carry trade and low interest rates with us”[Dat dreigt een bom te leggen onder de zogenaamde carry trade en de lage rente bij ons] (“Japan develops stock market bomb” in De Standaard, 17/02/2007)</td>
<td>disaster, strong, Ds, value 4x3=12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(5) Sports</strong></td>
<td>This category about ‘winning’ and ‘losing’, which</td>
<td>“That this has not caused a domino effect, is</td>
<td>sports, average,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Games and Drama Metaphors (Sp)

Provides a very unrealistic image of reality, appeals to many people, because of its perceived harmlessness and the possibility to escape from reality for some moments.

Due to the action of public authorities and central banks” [Dat dit geen domino-effect heeft veroorzaakt, is te danken aan het optreden van de overheid en de centrale banken] (“Create the drip loss” in De Tijd, 22/08/2008)

**Spa, value 5x2=10**

### (6) Body, Disease, Medical and Death Metaphors (M)

This category is attributed the highest power. It concerns very emotional metaphors that leave the suggestion that every control is lost, and that there is a fundamental need for a ‘doctor’ who can restore or cure the current situation.

“‘No country made a deeper fall: the Latvian economy shrank nearly 20% and had to be put to the infusion of the IMF” [Geen land maakte een diepere val: de Letse economie kromp bijna 20% en moest aan het infuus van het IMF worden gelegd] (“Introducing Euro Crown on pruning Latvia” in De Telegraaf, 07/03/2013)

**Medical, strong, Ms, value 6x3=18**
The calculation of the MPI is the result of multiplying MFI, the metaphor frequency per 100 words, by MII, the metaphor intensity index (1-3), by MCI, the metaphor content index (1-6):

\[
\text{MPI} = \text{MFI} \times \text{MII} \times \text{MCI}.
\]

The MPI reveals the metaphorical style character of parts of a specific financial, political or media discourse. Logically, there can be expected a difference between certain actors; those who use less and less intense metaphors; metaphors that arouse no or mild emotions receive lower MP-scores than their counterparts. The average MPI as derived from all research indicates an index number of ‘5′(XXX 2011). This is our ‘breaking point’: MPI’s above 5 are perceived as high and they indicate “metaphor style”; MPI’s below 5 suggest the use of “content style” or low metaphorical power.

The advantage of MPI method is that it can be used for big text corpora of for instance speeches by political leaders or political elites.
References


