A roadmap or a vision? a metaphor analysis of political discourse on peace in the Middle East

Abstract: There have been a number of studies of the metaphors used to talk about war or terrorism, but very little has been published on the metaphors used to describe peace. To this end, this study explores how the three main actors in the Roadmap peace process (Bush, Sharon, Abbas) conceptualize peace/the peace process through metaphorical expressions.

This involves both a linguistic identification and conceptual analysis of the following elements: contextual and basic meanings, metaphor keywords, source domains, and conceptual metaphors. The interpretation and explanation of all these elements is provided within the socio-political context, allowing for a more precise analysis of metaphorical expressions within real data.

The corpus is based on political speeches given in the timeframe 2002-2005, by American President George W. Bush, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas, all regarding the peace process and which are often referred to as 'peace speeches'.

Four main research questions guide the present study. The first asks which metaphorical expressions are used by Bush, Sharon, and Abbas when referring to peace/the peace process. The second considers how these metaphors conceptualize peace and in turn how the politicians frame peace/the peace process in their political discourse. The third question asks if metaphor frequency varies based on the events surrounding the peace process. Finally, the fourth question considers the similarities and/or differences in the use of the metaphorical language used by the three politicians and if this could be linked to their ideology.

The corpus data is analyzed using a combination of different methods in order to answer the above research questions. The tools are mainly Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff and Johnson 1980), the MIPVU procedure (Steen et al. 2010), and Critical Metaphor Analysis (Charteris-Black 2004).

The results show that a total of 596 metaphor keywords were identified in the corpus, which were categorized into 10 source domains. The categories are MOVEMENT/JOURNEY, PERSONIFICATION, FINANCE, BUILDING, DESTRUCTION/DEATH, CONFLICT, LIGHT/FIRE, PLANT, GAME and RELIGION. Having identified the metaphor keywords and source domains, 44 conceptual metaphors were formulated.

This study also investigated possible event and culture variation in metaphor use. The variation can be explained by the different functions each metaphor serves. Some metaphors remain constant, and can be liked to an overall conceptualization of peace. On the other hand, those that vary can be considered topic-triggered, and linked to an experience of peace.

Overall, there are very few metaphors for peace unique to the three politicians. The only differences observed lie not in which metaphors are used, but in what aspects of peace or the peace process they are used to highlight.