

Research Article

# Comparative Analysis of Conceptual Metaphors in Vietnamese and American English Political Discourses

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## Abstract

This study aims to identify and analyze the system of conceptual metaphors in Vietnamese and American English political discourses from Cognitive Linguistics perspective, thereby clarifying the conceptualization mechanisms and cross-cultural differences in the use of political language. The data consists of 200 Vietnamese political discourses and 200 American English political discourses, primarily speeches, addresses, inaugural speeches and official political texts. The available metaphor identification procedures are used to systematically identify, categorize and compare common source domains and typical conceptual metaphors across the two discourse systems. The study applies a combination of conceptual metaphor analysis, discourse analysis and contrastive comparison methods in order to find out the similarities and differences about conceptual metaphors in two discourse systems. The results show that common source domains in both Vietnamese and American English political discourses include HUMAN/HUMAN ACTIVITY, JOURNEY, BUILDING, FAMILY, and WAR. The conceptual metaphors appearing in both discourse systems are NATION IS A PERSON, POLITICS IS A JOURNEY, NATION/POLITICS IS A BUILDING, NATION IS A FAMILY and POLITICS IS A WAR. However, beyond these universally shared similarities, there are significant differences in frequency and discourse framing. These findings contribute to affirming the role of conceptual metaphor as a cognitive mechanism and an important discursive tool in politics.

## Keywords

Conceptual Metaphor, Political Discourse, Cognitive Linguistics, Conceptualization, Discourse Framing

## 1. Introduction

In traditional linguistic research, metaphor has commonly been regarded as a prevalent form of semantic transfer, falling within the scope of lexicology and stylistics. Accordingly, metaphor is understood as the transference of naming based on similarity relationships between objects and phenomena and is generally considered a form of implicit comparison in language, particularly in literature [4, 5, 23]. This conception has persisted throughout the long history of linguistic research, from the time of Aristotle to modern schools of rhetoric [1].

However, alongside the development of linguistics and the cognitive sciences, approaches to metaphor have undergone fundamental changes [24].

An important turning point was established when metaphor was no longer confined to the realm of language but was instead recognized as a mechanism of thought and action. From the perspective of cognitive linguistics, as exemplified by the work of Lakoff and Johnson [12], metaphor is a mapping between two conceptual domains, in which the source domain,

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typically concrete, familiar experiences, is used to understand the target domain, which is abstract and difficult to grasp [11, 12]. This demonstrates that metaphor is not merely a means of expression but also a foundational cognitive tool, reflecting the way humans conceptualize and categorize the world [7, 13]. In other words, humans "live by metaphors," and it is the conceptual metaphor system that structures their thinking across a wide range of domains [18].

In this context, the study of metaphor cannot be separated from the domains of social activity, particularly politics. Politics is a highly abstract field, closely tied to power, ideology, and the processes of social governance [9]. As a result, language in politics does not merely serve an informational function but also performs a powerful role in influencing the cognition and behavior of the public [6, 8, 16]. Political discourse (PD), as a special genre of discourse, becomes a tool through which those in power convey viewpoints, shape public opinion, and build social consensus [27]. In this process, metaphor plays a pivotal role as a means of making abstract concepts concrete, while simultaneously creating interpretive frames capable of shaping the public's understanding of political issues [2].

In practice, within PD, concepts such as the state, development, crisis, and reform are often conceptualized through familiar source domains such as journey, building, family and war [11, 14]. For instance, politics may be envisioned as a journey requiring direction, as a structure requiring construction, or as a struggle/war requiring victory. These metaphors not only enhance the persuasiveness of discourse but also contribute to the construction of ideology and the orientation of social cognition [2, 20]. Accordingly, metaphor can be regarded as a tool of power in PD, as it influences the way people understand and evaluate political reality [25].

In the context of globalization and international integration, studying conceptual metaphors in the PD of different countries has become especially necessary. Vietnam and the United States are two countries with significant differences in political systems, historical backgrounds, and cultural foundations. However, from a linguistic and cognitive standpoint, the PD of both countries simultaneously exhibits universal human characteristics and distinctive features tied to their respective cultural experiences and value systems [19]. For this reason, comparing conceptual metaphors in Vietnamese political discourses (VPDs) and American English political discourses (AEPDs) not only helps clarify the shared cognitive mechanisms of humankind but also contributes to identifying differences in the ways political language is conceptualized and used across the two cultures [10, 17].

Furthermore, this study draws on the theoretical foundations of Cognitive Linguistics, Discourse Analysis, Critical Discourse Analysis, Political Science, and Cultural Studies. In doing so, the application of the analytical framework of conceptual metaphor to PD helps affirm the role of cognitive linguistics in explaining linguistic phenomena associated with thought and culture [21, 24]. From a practical standpoint, the

research findings may support teaching, translation and interpretation, as well as improving the effectiveness of language use in political, administrative, and diplomatic activities [22].

However, despite the existence of numerous studies on metaphor and PD worldwide, within the Vietnamese research context, the approach to conceptual metaphor in PD remains relatively limited. Previous studies have primarily focused on the rhetorical or stylistic dimensions, while the approach from the perspective of Cognitive Linguistics and Discourse Analysis has yet to be fully explored [5, 16]. In particular, to date there have not been many independent works conducting a systematic survey and comparison of conceptual metaphors in VPDs and AEPDs [20]. In addition, in-depth analysis of the mapping mechanisms between source and target domains, as well as the relationship between metaphor and cultural, cognitive factors, remains a gap that needs further clarification [11].

Drawing from the above foundations, this study is conducted with the aim of identifying and analyzing the system of conceptual metaphors in VPDs and AEPDs. On this basis, the study focuses on clarifying common source domains, analyzing the mapping mechanisms between source and target domains, highlighting representative conceptual metaphors, and conducting a contrastive comparison to identify similarities and differences between the two discourse systems. To achieve this goal, the specific tasks include identifying metaphorical expressions in the data; constructing the corresponding conceptual metaphor system; analyzing their structure and function in the discourse context; and conducting cross-cultural comparison to explain the similarities and differences [2, 12].

The subject of this study is the conceptual metaphors used in VPDs and AEPDs, including linguistic expressions containing metaphors, types of metaphors, and the relevant source and target domains. The research scope is limited to a corpus of 200 VPDs and 200 AEPDs, selected from representative speeches, addresses, inaugural speeches, and political texts.

Based on the aforementioned objectives, subject, and scope, the study focuses on answering the following questions: (i) Which source domains are used and which are most common in VPDs and AEPDs? (ii) Which conceptual metaphors appear most frequently in VPDs and AEPDs? (iii) What similarities and differences exist between the two discourse systems? And finally, (iv) how do those differences reflect the relationship between language, culture, and political thought in two distinct political contexts?

By addressing the above questions, the study contributes to clarifying the role of metaphor as a cognitive mechanism and a discursive tool in politics, while also providing deeper insights into the interaction between language, thought, and culture in a cross-linguistic comparative context [13, 25].

## 2. Theoretical Framework

### 2.1. Conceptual Metaphor Theory

In Cognitive Linguistics, Conceptual Metaphor Theory

(CMT) is regarded as one of the most important foundations for explaining the relationship between language, thought, and human experience. This theory was pioneered by Lakoff and Johnson in their seminal work *Metaphors We Live By* (1980), with the central argument that metaphor is not merely a rhetorical device of language, but is first and foremost a basic cognitive mechanism governing the way humans understand and organize the world around them [12]. From this perspective, the conceptual system of human is fundamentally structured through metaphorical models, and consequently, everyday experiences, thoughts, and actions are all profoundly influenced by these metaphorical structures [11, 12]. This means that metaphor does not exist only at the surface level of language, but is deeply embedded in the structure of thought, functioning as a cognitive tool that helps humans understand abstract concepts through more concrete experiences.

The core of CMT is the principle by which humans understand one conceptual domain through another. A classic example is the conceptual metaphor "LOVE IS A JOURNEY," in which knowledge about journeys (point of departure, direction, obstacles, destination) is used to structure and interpret the concept of love [12]. Similarly, metaphors such as "UNDERSTANDING IS SEEING" and "KNOWING IS HEARING" also illustrate how humans draw on sensory experience to understand abstract cognitive processes [11, 12]. Thus, within the CMT framework, metaphor is not only a means of expression but also a mode of thinking, contributing to the way humans perceive and interpret reality.

## 2.2. Source Domain, Target Domain, and Mapping

In order to understand the operating mechanism of conceptual metaphor, three central concepts which must be clarified are source domain, target domain, and mapping. The source domain is the concrete, familiar conceptual domain, typically associated with direct human experience, while the target domain is more abstract and needs to be understood through the source domain. An important characteristic is that the source domain is generally richer in structure and higher in experiential grounding than the target domain [11, 13]. It is precisely this difference in concreteness that enables the mapping process to take place.

Mapping is the central mechanism of metaphor, through which the structural elements of the source domain are projected onto the target domain. This is not a random transfer, but a systematic set of correspondences governed by regularity, in which the relationships between elements in the source domain are preserved when transferred to the target domain [13]. For example, with the source domain JOURNEY, elements such as point of departure, path, obstacles, and destination correspond to stages, difficulties, and goals in the target domain. The systematicity of mapping demonstrates that conceptual metaphor is not an isolated phenomenon but an organized structural network. It is precisely this systematicity that

enables metaphor to structure thought, allowing humans not only to understand but also to reason about abstract phenomena [13]. In other words, mapping functions as a cognitive mechanism that enables the extension of knowledge from the source domain to the target domain, thereby generating new ways of understanding the world.

## 2.3. The Roles of Metaphor in Cognition and Political Discourse

From the perspective of Cognitive Linguistics, metaphor plays a central role in shaping cognition. When abstract concepts are understood through concrete source domains, the way humans perceive reality is also governed by these metaphorical patterns [2, 12]. This leads to the fact that metaphor not only influences understanding but also orientates thought and social behavior.

In the political domain, the role of metaphor becomes even more prominent. PD is a distinctive form of discourse, closely tied to power, ideology, and persuasive goals [3, 6]. In this context, metaphor becomes an effective tool for simplifying complex issues while simultaneously directing public understanding within particular interpretive frames.

Metaphor contributes to building and reinforcing ideology through the selection of specific source domains to interpret political issues [2]. For instance, when politics is metaphorized as a "war," it brings with it conceptions of confrontation, victory, and enemies; whereas if it is viewed as a "journey," the focus shifts to goals, progress, and direction of development. Thus, metaphor not only reflects, but also constructs social reality.

Another important dimension is the role of metaphor in establishing "framing". Through the selection of specific metaphors, politicians can direct the way the public understands and evaluates an issue [15]. Metaphor thus becomes a strategic tool in political discourses (PDs).

## 2.4. Critical Discourse Analysis and Political Framing

To fully analyze the role of conceptual metaphor in PD, CMT must be combined with complementary approaches, particularly Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and framing theory. According to [6], CDA views discourse as a social practice in which language both reflects and reproduces power relations and ideology. Therefore, metaphor is not only a cognitive tool but also an instrument of power. The selection and use of metaphors in political discourse can contribute to maintaining or challenging existing power structures. From a CDA perspective, metaphor plays a role in reproducing ideology by "naturalizing" certain ways of understanding [6]. When a metaphor is used frequently, it may become the default understanding, thereby obscuring its ideological character.

In addition, Lakoff's framing theory emphasizes that cognitive frames play a decisive role in how people understand and

respond to information [15]. Metaphor is one of the key tools for activating and reinforcing these frames. When an issue is placed within a specific metaphorical frame, it leads to corresponding ways of interpreting and evaluating that issue. The integration of CMT, CDA, and framing allows metaphor to be analyzed not only at the level of conceptual structure but also at the social and ideological levels. This is particularly important in the study of PD, where language is always bound up with power and persuasive strategy.

## 2.5. Theoretical Framework and the Study

In this study, CMT is selected as the central theoretical framework for its capacity to explain the cognitive mechanism of metaphor and its role in structuring thought. Through concepts such as source domain, target domain, and mapping, CMT provides the tools to identify and analyze the system of conceptual metaphors in PD [12, 13]. However, to fully understand the meaning and function of conceptual metaphors in a political context, supplementing CMT with CDA and framing theory is necessary. CDA helps clarify the relationship between metaphor and power, while framing allows analysis of how metaphor shapes public cognition and evaluation [6, 15].

This integration creates a multi-dimensional analytical framework, enabling the study to go beyond merely describing conceptual metaphors to also explaining their function in constructing and sustaining different PDs. On this basis, the theoretical framework will be applied to analyze and compare the metaphor systems in VPDs and AEPDs, thereby clarifying their similarities and differences from the perspective of cognitive linguistics.

## 3. Research Methodology

### 3.1. Data

The data for this study is built upon 200 VPDs and 200 AEPDs, consisting primarily of political speeches, addresses, inaugural speeches, and official political declaration texts. These are representative text types of PD, where language is used as a tool for cognitive orientation, persuasion, and ideology construction. The American English data was collected and presented in its original form accompanied by Vietnamese translations, in order to ensure content accuracy and to fully reflect the cultural and linguistic characteristics of the data source. This indicates that the data selection criteria extend beyond political content to also emphasize the capacity for cross-linguistic and cross-cultural contrastive analysis.

Regarding selection principles, the data was ensured to meet three main criteria. The first is authenticity, reflected in the fact that all texts have clear origins and belong to official utterances in political life. The second is representativeness, reflected in the texts' capacity to capture the typical features of PD in both countries. The third is relevance, meaning that

all texts contain content capable of expressing conceptual metaphors, particularly systematically structured metaphorical constructs.

In addition, the study demonstrates that data selection is oriented toward serving comparative objectives, by focusing on metaphors with high frequency in both discourse systems. The construction of the data corpus in this study is therefore clearly goal-directed, ensuring both reliability and the conditions necessary for analysis and comparison between the two different PD systems.

### 3.2. Methods

The study applies a combined qualitative and quantitative analytical approach, in which qualitative analysis plays the primary role in clarifying the cognitive nature of conceptual metaphors, while quantitative elements serve a supporting role in determining the prevalence and typicality of metaphorical patterns. First, the metaphor identification process is carried out by examining linguistic expressions appearing in PD. For example, in VPDs, idiomatic expressions are often treated as initial formal markers for identifying metaphorical expressions. From these markers, expressions that potentially reflect semantic transfer between conceptual domains are identified, thereby recognizing instances of metaphor.

Following the identification stage, metaphorical expressions are generalized into conceptual metaphors at a more abstract level. This process involves clearly identifying the source domain and target domain of each expression. The transition from specific linguistic expressions to conceptual metaphor models allows the cognitive mechanisms underlying the ways of expressing ideas in PD to be clarified. Subsequently, conceptual metaphors are classified according to source domain. Based on the survey results, the focus is placed on a number of prototypical source domains with high frequency. This classification is not arbitrary but is based on the principle of grouping metaphors sharing the same cognitive origin, thereby clarifying the cognitive patterns governing discourse. Another important step in the analytical process is establishing the mapping between source and target domains. This process aims to show how the structural elements of the source domain are projected onto the target domain, thereby clarifying the systematicity of conceptual metaphor. The mapping analysis goes beyond merely listing correspondences to also explaining how these structures contribute to shaping understanding and reasoning in PD.

Alongside qualitative analysis, quantitative elements are employed through examination of metaphor frequency. High-frequency metaphors are selected as the basis for comparative analysis, as they reflect cognitive patterns that are prevalent and stable in discourse. However, the statistical method in this study is primarily supportive in nature, aimed not at absolute precise measurement but at identifying the analytical focus. The entire analytical process is carried out in a sequential and systematic manner, from identifying linguistic expressions to

generalizing conceptual metaphors, classifying source domains, and analyzing mapping, thereby ensuring the consistency and replicability of the study.

### 3.3. Classification Criteria

The classification criteria in the study are constructed based on two main factors of source domain and frequency while also being tied to the comparative objective between VPDs and AEPDs. First, the source domain criterion plays a central role. Metaphors are classified based on the domain of experience from which they originate, such as HUMAN, JOURNEY, BUILDING, FAMILY, WAR or other source domains. This classification approach enables the identification of dominant cognitive patterns in PD, while also providing a basis for comparing similarities and differences between the two discourse systems.

Second, the frequency criterion is used to determine the prevalence of metaphors. High-frequency metaphors are considered more typical and more influential in structuring discourse. For this reason, the study focuses on the source domains with the highest frequencies for contrastive comparison. This not only helps narrow the research scope but also ensures analytical focus and effectiveness.

Finally, the comparative criterion is applied by contrasting corresponding source domains across the two discourse systems in order to clarify points of similarity and difference. On this basis, the study aims to explain these differences in relation to cultural factors, political institutions, and social context.

Overall, the classification criteria are constructed in a manner consistent with the selected theoretical framework, while also ensuring flexible applicability in data analysis, thereby contributing to the scientific rigor and reliability of the study.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1. Common Source Domains in VPDs and AEPDs

The research findings indicate that the system of conceptual metaphors in VPDs and AEPDs is structured around a number of common source domains, most notably: HUMAN/ HUMAN ACTIVITY, JOURNEY, BUILDING, FAMILY, and WAR, along with several other source domains such as PLANT, LIVING ORGANISM, WEATHER, DISEASE and ANIMAL. In particular, the study focuses on the 7 most prevalent source domains in both VPDs including HUMAN/ HUMAN ACTIVITY, JOURNEY, BUILDING, FAMILY, DISEASE, PLANT, LIVING ORGANISM and the 7 most prevalent source domains in AEPDs including HUMAN BEING/ HUMAN ACTIVITY, JOURNEY, BUILDING, FAMILY, WAR, WEATHER and ANIMAL.

First, the source domain of HUMAN / HUMAN ACTIVITY occupies a central position in both discourse systems.

This is a source domain with a low degree of abstraction but high generalization capacity, enabling political entities (nations, governments, organizations) to be interpreted as agents possessing will, action, and emotion [12]. The role of this source domain lies not only in its high frequency but also in its function of personification, through which political concepts are made more accessible and easier to understand [26].

Next, the source domain of JOURNEY also appears with considerable frequency in both discourse systems, where political processes such as national development, reform, and integration are structured as journeys with a point of departure, a route, and a destination. The cognitive significance of this source domain lies in providing a linear cognitive schema that helps audiences envision political progress as a directed process.

In addition, the source domain of BUILDING reflects the view of politics as a process of building. Concepts such as institutions, the economy, and society are conceptualized as structures that need to be "built," "consolidated," or "developed." This creates a cognitive frame that emphasizes stability, foundation, and accumulation.

Besides, the source domain of FAMILY is commonly used to express political relations in terms of familiarity and solidarity, where a nation may be envisioned as a family and its people as members. The political significance of this source domain is to create a sense of unity and shared responsibility.

In AEPDs specifically, the source domain of WAR stands out as a distinctive feature with high frequency. Political issues are often framed as wars involving enemies, strategies, and goals of victory. This reflects the adversarial and competitive nature of the American political system. In contrast, in VPDs, the source domain of DISEASE stands out as a distinctive feature with high frequency. Political issues are often framed as diseases that need to be cured.

Additionally, source domains such as PLANT, LIVING ORGANISM in VPDs, WEATHER, and ANIMAL in AEPDs, though less frequent, contribute to enriching the metaphor system and demonstrate the diversity of ways in which political concepts are structured [11].

Viewed as a whole, the above source domains do not exist in isolation but form an organized cognitive system in which each source domain contributes to constructing different interpretive frames for political reality.

### 4.2. Conceptual Metaphors in VPDs

The analyzed findings show that VPDs tend to draw on source domains characterized by harmony, stability, and community, most notably HUMAN / HUMAN ACTIVITY, JOURNEY, BUILDING and FAMILY.

A representative example within the source domain of HUMAN / HUMAN ACTIVITY is the way in which a nation is described as a person. The conceptual metaphor A NATION IS A PERSON/ A HUMAN is archetypal here. Linguistic ex-

pressions may include phrases such as "Our country is developing" or "The Homeland is facing both opportunities and challenges." In these cases, the linguistic metaphors are the verbs and states inherently associated with human beings, such as "standing" and "developing," while the conceptual metaphor is NATION IS A HUMAN / PERSON. The mapping is established as follows:

- 1) Human → nation
- 2) Maturation → socioeconomic development
- 3) State of health → national condition

The cognitive significance of this mapping is that it helps audiences and readers understand the nation as a living entity capable of growth or decline. Politically, it generates empathy and a sense of responsibility, since if the nation is a "living body," every citizen has a role in maintaining its "health".

Within the source domain of JOURNEY, VPDs commonly employ expressions such as "the path of development," "steady steps forward," and "moving ahead." Here, the conceptual metaphor is POLITICS/ DEVELOPMENT IS A JOURNEY. The mapping includes:

- 1) Point of departure → historical past
- 2) Path → development strategy
- 3) Destination → national goals

The cognitive significance of this metaphor lies in creating a linear schema that helps audiences envision the development process as a clearly directed journey. Politically, it emphasizes the continuity and stability of policy.

The source domain BUILDING also plays an important role. Expressions such as "building the country" and "consolidating the foundations" reflect the conceptual metaphor POLITICS/ NATION IS A BUILDING. The mapping includes:

- 1) Foundation → political system
- 2) Construction → development
- 3) Consolidation → strengthening stability

This metaphor carries the cognitive meaning of treating politics as a structured process requiring durability and long-term planning. Politically, it generates a sense of certainty and trustworthiness.

Notably, the source domain of FAMILY clearly expresses a distinctive Vietnamese cultural characteristic. When a nation is conceptualized as a family, the mapping is:

- 1) Parents → leaders
- 2) Children → the people
- 3) Family → nation

This metaphor creates an interpretive frame grounded in emotional and moral relations, thereby reinforcing the spirit of solidarity and collective responsibility.

Furthermore, the presence of idiomatic expressions in VPDs also contributes to increasing metaphor density, reflecting the cultural-linguistic characteristics of Vietnamese in its use of image-rich expressions to convey political concepts.

### 4.3. Conceptual Metaphors in AEPDs

AEPDs display a rich system of conceptual metaphors,

most notably drawing on the source domains HUMAN/ HUMAN ACTIVITY, JOURNEY, BUILDING, FAMILY, and especially WAR.

A representative example is the conceptual metaphor NATION IS A HUMAN / PERSON, similar to that found in VPDs. However, in AEPDs, this metaphor is typically deployed with expressions such as "America stands strong." and "The nation must act." The linguistic metaphors reside in the action verbs of "stand" and "act", while the conceptual metaphor is NATION IS A HUMAN / PERSON. The mapping is similar to that in Vietnamese, but is extended to emphasize agency and capacity for action:

- 1) Action → policy
- 2) Decision → leadership
- 3) Strength → national power

The political significance of this metaphor is to highlight the active role and responsibility of the nation on the international stage.

The source domain of JOURNEY in AEPDs is similar to that in VPDs but tends to emphasize choice and competition. Expressions such as "our path forward" and "moving ahead" reflect the conceptual metaphor POLITICS IS A JOURNEY, with a similar mapping but carrying a more dynamic connotation.

The source domain of BUILDING also plays an important role. Expressions such as "building the country" and "restore the country", "rebuild America" reflect the conceptual metaphor POLITICS/ NATION IS A BUILDING. The mapping also includes:

- 1) Foundation → political system
- 2) Construction → development
- 3) Consolidation → strengthening stability

The source domain of FAMILY in AEPDs is similar to that in VPDs but tends to emphasize on the role of citizens in building, protecting and developing country, also the love among citizens in the same country and the lovely treatments to the whole world, reflecting the conceptual metaphor NATION IS A FAMILY, with a similar mapping but carrying a more dynamic connotation.

Within the source domain of WAR, AEPDs employ expressions such as "fight against poverty" and "war on terror." The conceptual metaphor is POLITICS IS A WAR. The mapping includes:

- 1) Enemy → social problem
- 2) Fighting → political action
- 3) Victory → problem resolution

This metaphor carries the cognitive significance of framing political issues as confrontations, thereby activating cognitive schemas related to conflict and victory. Politically, it generates public mobilization and a fighting spirit.

Additionally, source domains such as WEATHER and ANIMAL also appear, reflecting diversity in framing. For example, political upheavals may be described as "storms," creating an image of instability requiring control. Undocumented immigrants are likened to "roaming animals."

Notably, conceptual metaphors in AEPDs tend to carry a high degree of adversariality, reflecting the characteristics of a multi-party and competitive political system. This is clearly evident in the use of war and competition metaphors as a discourse strategy.

#### 4.4. Comparative Analysis of Conceptual Metaphors in VPDs and AEPDs

Regarding similarities, the comparative findings reveal numerous points of similarity between the two discourse systems, particularly in common source domains such as HUMAN/HUMAN ACTIVITY, JOURNEY, BUILDING, and FAMILY. This reflects the universality of cognitive structures, as people across different cultures draw on basic experiences to understand abstract concepts. Representative conceptual metaphors such as NATION IS A HUMAN / PERSON, NATION IS A FAMILY, POLITICS IS A JOURNEY, and POLITICS / NATION IS A BUILDING all appear in both discourse systems with similar mappings. This indicates that the tendency toward personification is a universal cognitive strategy. In particular, the conceptual metaphor POLITICS IS A JOURNEY is widely used, reflecting the way humans conceptualize processes as sequences of directed events.

Alongside these similarities, the study also identifies a number of significant differences. First is the difference in source domains. While VPDs tend to favor harmonious source domains such as FAMILY and BUILDING, AEPDs are distinguished by the WAR source domain and other adversarial source domains. Second is the difference in frequency. Certain source domains such as WAR appear with high frequency in AEPDs but are not common in VPDs. Finally, there is a difference in framing. VPDs tend to emphasize stability, solidarity, and sustainable development, while AEPDs emphasize competition, conflict, and action. These differences can be explained by cultural factors, political institutions, and social context. While the Vietnamese political system prioritizes unity, the American political system with its multi-party and competitive nature creates conditions conducive to the development of adversarial metaphors.

### 5. Discussion

This section aims to interpret and explain the results presented above, focusing on two main questions: (i) why similarities exist in the conceptual metaphor systems of VPDs and AEPDs, and (ii) why significant differences arise between the two discourse systems. On this basis, the discussion clarifies two important theoretical directions in cognitive linguistics of universality and cultural specificity while also drawing connections to theoretical frameworks on framing and CDA.

#### 5.1. Explaining the Similarities

One of the key findings of the study is the existence of

shared source domains such as HUMAN/ HUMAN ACTIVITY, JOURNEY, BUILDING, and FAMILY in both VPDs and AEPDs. This convergence is not coincidental but reflects the universal nature of human cognition.

From the perspective of Cognitive Linguistics, particularly CMT, conceptual metaphors originate from embodied experience. People across all cultures experience the world through the body, interacting with both the physical and social environment. Consequently, source domains such as JOURNEY (grounded in the experience of movement), BUILDING (grounded in the experience of physical building), FAMILY (grounded in close, bonded relationships), and HUMAN/ HUMAN ACTIVITY (grounded in self-perception) become foundational cognitive structures for understanding abstract concepts such as politics.

For instance, the conceptual metaphor A NATION IS A PERSON reflects personification as a universal cognitive mechanism. Humans have a tendency to understand complex entities through the model of themselves. Attributing to a nation properties such as "acting," "developing," and "facing challenges" simplifies complex political structures while also creating cognitive familiarity.

Similarly, the conceptual metaphor POLITICS IS A JOURNEY, appearing in both discourse systems, reflects a universal image schema that humans understand progress as a sequence of directed movement. This allows political entities to be conceptualized as agents "moving forward," "following a path," or "heading toward a goal." The universality here lies in the fact that every culture shares the experience of moving through space, which is then mapped onto abstract domains.

Furthermore, the conceptual metaphor POLITICS IS A BUILDING also reflects a shared cognitive structure, in which political systems are understood as constructions with foundations, structures, and building processes. This demonstrates the human tendency to use concrete material experiences to organize abstract knowledge.

In addition, the conceptual metaphor POLITICS IS A FAMILY also reflects a shared cognitive structure, in which political systems, parties, and mechanisms are considered as citizens living in the same family and originating from the same root. They must love each other and contribute their parts in building, protecting and developing the country.

Thus, the similarities between VPDs and AEPDs can be explained by the universality of human cognition, specifically the sharing of embodied experiences and basic cognitive schemas. This reinforces the central argument of CMT that metaphor is not merely a linguistic phenomenon but a foundational cognitive mechanism.

#### 5.2. Explaining the Differences

Besides the similarities, the study also identifies clear differences, most notably the prominence of the WAR source domain in AEPDs and the FAMILY source domain in VPDs. These differences can be explained on several levels of culture,

ideology and discourse strategy.

First, cultural factors play an important role. VPDs reflect a cultural value system that prizes community, harmony, and hierarchical social relations. This explains why the FAMILY source domain is widely used because it creates an interpretive frame grounded in affection, responsibility, and solidarity. Within this frame, the nation is conceptualized as an extended family in which members have obligations to support and protect one another.

By contrast, American political culture is more individualistic and places greater emphasis on competition and adversarialism. This is reflected in the widespread use of the WAR source domain. When political issues are framed as "wars," they are placed within a confrontational structure involving enemies, strategies, and goals of victory. This is an effective discourse strategy in a multi-party political context where political forces compete for public support.

Second, ideology and political models also influence metaphor selection. In the Vietnamese context, where the political system emphasizes unity and stability, source domains such as BUILDING and JOURNEY are favored because they highlight continuous and sustainable development. In the American political system, by contrast, where debate and adversarialism are characteristic, the conflict-laden source domain such as WAR becomes more prominent.

Third, discourse strategy also plays a decisive role. Metaphor is not only a reflection of cognition but also a framing tool. The selection of a particular source domain shapes the way the public understands and evaluates an issue. For example, when a policy is described as a "war," it activates cognitive frames of urgency, sacrifice, and victory, thereby generating stronger public support.

Thus, differences in metaphor systems are not merely matters of language but deeply reflect cultural factors, ideology, and political context. This demonstrates the flexibility of conceptual metaphors in adapting to different social environments.

### 5.3. Universality and Cultural Specificity of Conceptual Metaphors

The research findings show that the system of conceptual metaphors in PDs operates along two parallel axes of universality and cultural specificity.

Regarding universality, conceptual metaphors such as NATION IS A HUMAN/ PERSON, POLITICS IS A JOURNEY, NATION IS A BUILDING, and NATION IS A FAMILY express shared cognitive structures common to all of humanity. These are conceptual metaphors that can be found across many languages and cultures, as they are grounded in the basic experiences of human beings. The existence of these conceptual metaphors reinforces the view that human cognition has common foundations that transcend cultural boundaries.

Regarding specificity, source domains such as FAMILY in VPDs and WAR in AEPDs reflect cultural specificity. They mirror the values, beliefs, and social organization distinctive

to each community. This demonstrates that although cognition has shared foundations, the deployment of conceptual metaphors in discourse is strongly influenced by cultural and social context.

The interplay between these factors creates the diversity and flexibility of the conceptual metaphor system. On one hand, universal structures provide the foundation for understanding the world. On the other hand, cultural factors shape how these structures are employed in actual discourse.

### 5.4. Framing, CDA and Political Power

The research findings also carry important implications for framing, CDA and political power.

First, from the framing perspective, metaphor is a powerful tool for shaping public understanding. The selection of a source domain is not merely a linguistic matter but a political act. It determines whether an issue is perceived as a journey requiring perseverance, a structure requiring construction, or a war requiring victory.

Second, from a CDA perspective, metaphor contributes to structuring power and ideology. When a metaphor system becomes prevalent, it can unconsciously shape the way a society thinks. For example, the frequent use of the conceptual metaphor POLITICS IS A WAR in AEPDs may reinforce adversarial thinking, while the conceptual metaphor A NATION IS A FAMILY in VPDs may reinforce communal thinking and collective responsibility.

Finally, the study demonstrates that metaphor does not merely reflect reality but also participates in the construction of social reality. Metaphors not only reflect but also reproduce structures of power and ideology within each society, especially political power [6]. This underscores the central role of language in politics, while also opening up an interdisciplinary approach bridging cognitive linguistics, political science, and sociology.

## 6. Conclusion

This study has identified and analyzed the system of conceptual metaphors in VPDs and AEPDs from the perspective of Cognitive Linguistics, with a focus on contrastive comparison between the two discourse systems.

First, the findings show that both discourse systems draw on a number of common source domains such as HUMAN/ HUMAN ACTIVITY, JOURNEY, BUILDING, and FAMILY. These are universal source domains reflecting shared cognitive structures grounded in human embodied experience. However, alongside these similarities, the study also identifies significant differences. VPDs tend to favor harmonious and community-oriented source domains such as FAMILY, while AEPDs are distinguished by adversarial metaphors such as WAR. These differences reflect the cultural factors, ideological orientations, and distinctive political models of each country.

On the theoretical level, the study contributes to clarifying the relationship between universality and cultural specificity in the conceptual metaphor system. The findings reinforce the cognitive linguistics argument that metaphor is a foundational cognitive mechanism, while also demonstrating how these cognitive structures are adapted and deployed across different cultural and political contexts [12]. Furthermore, the study contributes to extending the application of CMT to the field of PD analysis, particularly in a cross-linguistic comparative context.

On the practical level, the research findings can be applied across a number of fields. In discourse analysis, the identification and analysis of metaphors help clarify framing strategies and ideological manipulation in political texts. In political research, it provides a tool for understanding how language is used to persuade and mobilize the public. In teaching, the study can support the teaching of language and culture through analysis of metaphorical structures.

However, the study also has certain limitations. First, the data scope is limited to particular text types and does not cover the full range of PD. Second, the analytical method relies primarily on a qualitative approach, while quantitative tools could be further developed to enhance precision. In addition, the comparison is confined to two discourse systems and does not fully reflect the diversity of political systems worldwide.

In the future, research may be extended in several directions. One is to expand the corpus to include a wider variety of discourse types such as media, social media, or political debates. Another is to conduct multi-country comparative studies to further clarify the relationship between metaphor and culture. A third is to incorporate other analytical methods such as computational linguistics or advanced quantitative analysis to complement the current approach.

Finally, viewed as a whole, the study affirms the central role of conceptual metaphor in structuring PD, conceptualization and categorization, while also demonstrating the potential of the cognitive linguistics approach in explaining complex linguistic and social phenomena.

## Abbreviations

PD	Political Discourse
VPDs	Vietnamese Political Discourses
AEPDs	American English Political Discourses
CMT	Conceptual Metaphor Theory
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis

## Author Contributions

**Nguyen Xuan Hong:** Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal Analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Resources, Supervision, Validation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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