

Exploring the Persuasive Function of Metaphorical Proximization Mechanism in Speech Discourse

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Keywords: Proximization theory, metaphor analysis, legitimization, STA model, speech discourse

Abstract: Speech discourse often uses a lot of metaphors to strengthen persuasive effect and win listeners support, which is worthwhile to study. This paper attempts to analyze the self-constructed corpus of speech discourse from the perspective of proximization theory and the multiple fusion of critical metaphors. It is found that the combination of metaphorical elements and proximization strategies not only helps to highlight the heterogeneity of different entities within the proximization strategy, strengthen the fearfulness of the proximization process, but also helps speech discourse to achieve the function of admonition. The results of the study can not only deepen the audience's understanding of the proximization theory and provide a useful perspective for better presenting the research results of speech discourse, but also help to explore the path to achieve the persuasive function of speech discourse.

1. Introduction

Metaphors can simplify complex concepts and make abstract concepts concrete, so that listeners can understand the exact meaning of the discourse. Some conventional metaphors have already been integrated into the shared values and belief systems of the public, and the expression of conventional metaphors with the property of "common ground" can reduce the tension between the interpretation of the source domain and the target domain, and effectively arouse the audience's psychological resonance and gain acceptance and recognition. Common ground, as a collection of shared knowledge and common value beliefs, is a social-cognitive interface between the speaker and the addressee, and is also indispensable in the implementation of proximization strategies. Proximization theory is one of the latest theoretical achievements in the field of critical cognitive linguistics proposed by Cap [1].

Proximization has become a constant perspective in the dissection of discourse. Since its introduction, the research results of proximization theory have been relatively fruitful, including (1) the combination of proximization theory and social cognition model [2,3]; (2) the combination of proximization theory and discourse space theory [4-8]; (3) proximization theory applied to the interpretation of discourse legitimation strategies to dynamically present the legitimation construction process of discourse to enhance the legitimacy of discourse behavior [9,10]. However,

few studies from the perspective of proximization have involved critical metaphor analysis and explore the persuasive function of speech discourse.

Both Hart's [11] and Cap's [12] studies show the reinforcing effect of metaphors on proximization. However, quantitative and qualitative mixed research on metaphorical expressions should receive more attention. Metaphorical expressions are more easily accepted by listeners than non-metaphorical expressions because metaphors adopt an agreed-upon and almost indisputable mode of operation. Cap[12] proposed that the three dimensions of proximization theory should not neglect to involve metaphorical expressions and should enhance proximization effect with the help of metaphorical keywords whenever possible, introducing metaphorical analysis into the Spatial-Temporal-Axiological (STA) model to present the realization and reinforcement of metaphor on proximization process.

In view of this, this paper attempts to integrate the theories of proximization and critical metaphor analysis and build a small corpus based on speech discourse, aiming at integrating metaphorical elements into the proximization model to explore how metaphor analysis can strengthen the opposition between the internal and external centers of the proximization model, intensify the sense of fear and value conflict in the proximization process, and thus realize the admonishing function of speech discourse.

2. Literature Review

Proximization theory is a theory about constructing crises and threats. Its primary purpose is to interpret how speakers construct a three-dimensional discourse space in the minds of the audience and legitimize their precautions through discourse strategies. The three-dimensional discourse space is constructed by the three axes of space, time and value, namely spatial proximization, temporal proximization and axiological proximization. In this space discourse, the inside-deictic-center entities (IDCs) usually refer to speakers and listeners, and beyond IDCs are the outside-deictic-center entities (ODCs) that pose threats to IDCs. Through words, speakers use spatial proximization, temporal proximization and axiological proximization to depict a scenario that ODCs impend over IDCs so as to evoke fear and oppressive feeling in listeners, and eventually legalize their own words.

As a strategic construal operation, spatial proximization refers to the process in which peripheral entities (ODCs) continually approach central entities (IDCs) in physical space [12]. The de-similarity between center and periphery can be related with geographic and geopolitical distance. The central and peripheral entities are opposing, so in spatial proximization, speakers intentionally make listeners be aware of the threat generated by peripheral entities, which can only be avoided by taking the necessary actions.

Temporal proximization is centered on the present, reflecting the conceptual movement of time. For instance, speakers forcibly shift the negative impact of past events to the present and the negative impact of possible future events to the present [12]. The purpose is to make a cognitive panic to the recipient of the discourse, thereby justifying the action that the discourse and the speaker take.

Axiological proximization refers to an artificially coercive conflict caused by the ideological confrontation between the central and peripheral entities in the discourse space. The ideological conflict accumulated between the IDC and ODC is a real conflict, and it can actually affect the IDC [12].

Critical metaphor analysis integrates corpus analysis, pragmatics and cognitive linguistics in discourse analysis, aiming to make implicitly hidden ideological and political motives explicit [13]. Proximization theory and critical metaphor analysis theory have at least three aspects in common.

First, both proximization and metaphor have a coercive persuasive function, with proximization legitimizing preventive measures by eliminating growing external threats [12]. Metaphors quietly convey ideology, which in turn persuades others and achieves the post-verbal effect of refreshing cognition and emotion [11]. Second, both proximization and metaphor rely on certain cognitive foundations. Proximization theory constructs peripheral entities (ODCs) with the help of the three axes of time, space, and axiological (STA proximization model) to perceive the movement tendencies of ODCs while metaphor conceptualizes the unknown and unfamiliar domain with the help of what is known and familiar. Again, both proximization and metaphor are based on the analysis of lexical items, and the proximization effect and the admonition function are achieved by analyzing key words.

3. Research Material

Political speeches are speeches made by politicians based on certain positions in order to gain public support, which usually close the relationship with the audience with the help of rich reasoning and persuade the audience to accept the speaker's attitude and position and turn it into practical action. Speech discourse is often carefully selected and polished, and from the linguistic point of view, it is necessary to study the language of speech discourse.

In this paper, we use the State of the Union address delivered by President Biden in 2023 as the research object, build our own small corpus, and use the corpus method (UAM Corpus Tool 3.3 software) to collect and analyze the metaphorical lexical items representing proximization strategies in the corpus with the help of Cap's [12] three dimensions of proximization theory and critical analysis theory to obtain the spatial, temporal and value-related.

To ensure the reliability of the data, the corpus was quantified and categorized three times, and the frequency of each item was precisely determined and used as the basis for the final study. To this end, based on the above-mentioned literature review and problem solving, this study focuses on answering the following two questions.

1. What critical metaphor strategies are used in the State of the Union Address to enhance the proximization effect of political discourse?
2. How does the State of the Union address achieve the function of political discourse through the use of critical metaphors?

4. Analysis and Discussion

4.1. Spatial Proximization

Spatial proximization focuses on the disruptive effects of ODCs, allowing collective perception of threat pressure and can negatively affect individuals, legitimizing preemptive behavior in response to collective threats. According to Cap's analytical framework, the results of this paper's identification of spatial proximization terms in the corpus are detailed in Table 1.

Guided by the theory of critical metaphor analysis, the words in Table 1 are analyzed as follows from five aspects: container, plant, conflict and crime metaphor.

Table 1: The spatial proximization in state of the union address

category	Key lexical-grammatical items	frequency
1	the United States, American people, world, we, our allies	86
2	Putin, war, COVID-19, virus, pandemic, inflation, deficit	67
3	deteriorate, pose dangers, erode, accelerate, aggravate	23
4	create threats, hurt, undercut, threaten, prevent	18
5	economic crisis, danger, conflict, aggression, chaos	21
6	weaker economic growth, more isolated, long-term pressure, crisis, threats	25
total		240

4.1.1. Container Metaphor

As an important way of conceptualizing space in discourse, container metaphor has the role of framing inter-subjective relationships and conveying corresponding ideas and values in speech discourse. The container metaphor takes space as the origin domain, and speakers often construct ideas with spatial features such as containers having boundaries, having interior and exterior, and being able to enter and exit.

According to Table 1, the collective pronoun “we” is repeatedly used to construct in-group attributes within the same container (IDCs) to strengthen the connection between members and expand the support surface (n = 86). In addition, the othering referential strategy constructs “Putin”, “epidemic”, and “inflation” as external members of the container (ODCs), with a relatively small number of ODCs compared to IDCs (n = 67), making the speech present a positive and clear tone. For example:

(1) We never will just accept living with COVID-19, we will continue to combat the virus as we do other diseases.

In example (1), with the help of the container metaphor, the internal members of the container are “we” (IDCs) and the external members are “COVID-19 and other virus and diseases” (ODCs), and the value orientation between IDCs and ODCs converge and the boundary is clear, which are independent of each other. Example (1) eliminates the differences of IDCs’ members within the container imagery by constructing in-group attributes, and forms a clear self-other dichotomy with members belonging to ODCs’ camp, and constructs a negative other’s image of ODCs to strengthen the effect of spatial opposition and gain recognition from a wider audience as much as possible.

4.1.2. Plant Metaphor

Speakers often use the metaphorical thinking of “the threat is a plant” to justify their position. In speech discourse, the plant metaphor focuses on the movement and growth of a negative issue, giving the audience the impression that a threat is looming and needs to be defended accordingly.

According to Table 1, the movement verb vocabulary is used to present the proximization process of ODCs to IDCs (n = 23), which reflects the movement and growth of ODCs by projecting the growth process of plants to the proximization process of ODCs, depicting that the gradually strong ODCs are encroaching on the IDCs. The proximization effect is reinforced by projecting the plant growth process onto the proximization process of ODCs, reflecting the motility and growth of ODCs, and depicting the scenario that the growing ODCs are eating the IDCs to achieve the purpose of admonishing function. For example:

(2)Because this virus mutates and spreads, we have to stay on guard.

Example (2) uses the plant metaphor to reflect the movement and growth pattern of the virus by using the two behavioral actions of “spread” and “mutate”, presenting the framework of thinking that “viruses are plants”. The growth of plants is mapped to the field of pneumonia, and is metaphorically represented as the unbridled growth and spread of the virus (ODC), which is as vigorous as a plant and will not only mutate and strengthen, but also spread around to affect the life and health of IDCs.

4.1.3. Conflict Metaphor

Conflict metaphors tend to reflect an antagonism, presenting the importance of joint self-defense from the source domain perspective, where the enemy poses a threat to our side in various ways.

According to Table 1, the influence verb-like vocabulary is used to describe the proximization influence (action) of ODCs on IDCs (n = 18), viewing the target domain as a battle and ODCs as threatening opponents in the battle. Therefore, IDCs have to join together to eliminate these threats (ODCs). For example:

(3)The pandemic also disrupted the global supply chain.

Example (3) presents the persistent non-harmony between ODCs and IDCs with the help of conflict metaphor, indicating the irreconcilability of interest orientation between ODCs and IDCs. Therefore, IDCs should unite to prevent and control the epidemic (ODC) without delay. In addition, Charteris-Black (2004: 100) argues that the originating domain “conflict” emphasizes the need for individual struggle. Example (3) emphasizes the need for the audience to protect the global supply chain at all costs in order to fulfill their own demands by presenting the conflict between the epidemic and people’s demands for a better life. Example (3) is conducive to gaining public support and achieving the function of advising.

4.1.4. Crime Metaphor

The metaphor of crime helps the target domain to construct the virtual environment of “being threatened” successfully, and uses the emotional color of language to arouse the inner emotion of the audience, so as to realize the remonstrance function of metaphor.

It can be seen from Table 1 that potential contact terms are used to describe the anticipated impacts of ODCs on IDCs (n = 21). Non-fixed anticipated threats will highlight the damage of ODCs on the living space of IDCs through approaching strategies and enhance the approaching effects. For example:

(4)Dictators keep moving and cause more costs, threats to the America, to the world.

Example (4) marks “dictator” and “American people and the world” as ODCs and IDCs in the proximization framework, and in terms of semantic rhyme, the target domain “dictator” expressed through semantic fusion is negative, that is, dictators have dangerous properties. The rhetoric of crime is used to construct a “threatened” virtual environment, using language to guide the audience’s perceptions, attitudes and evaluations of the dictator and to gain support.

4.2. Temporal Proximization

Temporal proximization can be used as a form of strengthening spatial proximization, which has a double effect: on the one hand, it helps to establish a collective memory of past time and alert the audience; on the other hand, it relies on the current context to prepare for the future. The identification results of temporal proximization words in the corpus are detailed in Table 2.

Using the theory of critical metaphor analysis as a guide, the vocabulary in Table 2 is analyzed in terms of both anthropomorphic and journey metaphors as follows.

Table 2: The temporal proximization in state of the union address

category	Key lexical-grammatical items	frequency
1	did, have done, had done, be doing, will	19
2	in the past years, for more than 2 years, last year, future	15
3	will, can, should	18
total		52

4.2.1. Anthropomorphic Metaphor

The anthropomorphic metaphor draws on the origin domain of “human being” to serve as a standard for measuring things around us and to identify the world in this way. The anthropomorphic metaphor helps speakers enhance the persuasiveness impact of their speeches.

According to Table 2, the metaphorical thinking of “history as a person” is used to present the proximization of ODC in the temporal dimension with “history” acting as a master and made some actions like verb “tell” and other verbs, warning the audience that they should learn from history in today’s political actions, which corresponds to the temporal proximization of past-now (n = 19) in the temporal proximization strategy to strengthen the proximization effect and to achieve the function of admonition. For example:

(5)For the past 40 years, we were told that tax breaks for those at the top and benefits would trickle down and everyone would benefit. But that trickle-down theory led to a weaker economic growth, lower wages, bigger deficits, and a widening gap between the top and everyone else in the-in nearly a century.

Example (5) reinforces the effect of temporal proximization with the metaphorical mode of thinking “history as a person”, which guides us to understand the relationship between the past and the present, to clarify the “already happened” and “ongoing” evolutionary processes, and to draw on the lessons of the past for the purpose of comparison with reality.

4.2.2. Journey Metaphor

The journey metaphor involves the connotation of moving towards a stated positive goal [13]. However, according to Table 2, the combination of modal verbs and journey metaphor keywords points to a negative outcome for ODCs, presenting a situation where the journey deviates from its original route. This corresponds to the temporal proximization meaning of future-now in the temporal proximization strategy (n = 18), which is used to reinforce the temporal proximization effect and achieve the advising function. For example:

(6)Covid-19 will lead to mental health and economic crisis.

Example (6) uses the journey metaphor by combining the journey metaphor “lead to” with the modal word “will” to present the end of the journey as a “psychological problem and economic crisis” with negative value orientation. In addition, example (6) proposes a preventive policy based on the clear impact of ODCs and implies the need for IDCs to implement defensive measures, which stimulates trust and is more likely to gain audience support and eventually achieve the goal of advising.

4.3. Axiological Proximization

The meanings conveyed by metaphors can be both positive and negative, and discourse producers choose different metaphors to express different evaluative meanings according to their

communicative intentions, trying to influence and dominate listeners' cognitive and reasoning processes, presenting and continuously reinforcing the proximization of values of IDCs and ODCs so as to achieve their discursive effects of persuading listeners. The identification results of the axiological proximization words in the corpus in this paper are detailed in Table 3.

Using the theory of critical metaphor analysis as a guide, the vocabulary in Table 3 is now analyzed in terms of crisis and journey metaphors as follows.

Table 3: The axiological proximization in state of the union address

category	Key lexical-grammatical items	frequency
1	economic strength, lower costs, safety, secure, freedom, trust, equal justice	38
2	insecurity, poverty, economic downturn, inequality, disruptive	55
total		93

4.3.1. Crisis Metaphor

Language influences people's thinking and cognition, and the shaping of many crises begins with language first. Speakers often use crisis metaphors for verbal interaction to construct different levels of threat, which subliminally affects the audience's cognitive framework of something, generates discourse pressure, and creates a discourse crisis.

According to Table 3, the negative keywords are used to present the negative other image of ODCs (n = 55), and by constructing ODCs as the evil "other" in contrast to the "I" (IDCs), it strengthens the proximization effect. For example:

(7) Inflation crisis is robbing them of gains they thought otherwise they would be able to feel. I get it. That's why my top priority is getting prices under control.

Example (7) compares inflation to the process of crisis based on the metaphorical thinking of "inflation is a crisis", and the metaphor has a clear framing effect. The crisis metaphor first frames the audience's conceptual definition of inflation and stimulates its negative cognitive effects, presenting the negative value of inflation (ODC). The victims of inflation easily accept the negative evaluation conveyed by the metaphorical thinking of "inflation is a crisis" and develop antipathy toward inflation (ODC).

4.3.2. Journey Metaphor

The journey metaphor involves the process of moving towards a predetermined goal and suggests a positive evaluation of the proposed political act [13]. The journey metaphor helps the speaker to successfully construct a positive and positive image and enhances the audience's confidence and expectations of the speaker.

According to Table 3, the journey metaphor is used to intentionally emphasize the two elements of journey leaders (IDCs) and journey endpoints, repeatedly highlighting the journey destination as "safe" and "secure", presenting a positive image of the tour leader (IDCs). For example:

(8) It's going to transform America to put us on a path to win the economic competition of the 21st century that we face with the rest of the world.

Example (8) uses the metaphor of "path" to emphasize "journey leader" and "journey's end" in the framework of the journey. From the viewpoint of the "end of the journey", the United States will have an advantage in the economic competition in the 21st century; from the viewpoint of the "leader of the journey", the speaker points out that he will carefully plan the blueprint for the

economic development. These intentional perceptions activate the audience's sense of solidarity and confidence in the future, trying to build the speaker's image as a responsible leader. The journey metaphor helps to strengthen the speaker's affinity for the audience and the sense of identity in choosing the right path to move forward together.

5. Conclusion

In the State of the Union address, speaker represents the image of the country and his speech has a strong goal-oriented and admonitory function. The study found that the Biden administration has automatically made a clear distinction between IDCs and ODCs in the construction of discourse space, not only by using container metaphors to delineate the internal and external boundaries, but also by using personal pronouns such as "we" to draw a closer relationship between IDCs and to show the audience the opposing positions of the two without any hesitation. In addition, the Biden administration's construction of ODCs in the discourse space follows the principle that it is committed to showing the audience that ODCs have caused serious impacts on IDCs or will cause great threats to IDCs. Therefore, in rendering that ODCs are closing in on IDCs, the Biden administration relies on the plant metaphor and the crime metaphor to present the process of the spreading crisis, present the expected threat of ODCs, and make the audience perceive the imminence of the threat of ODCs to IDCs. Similarly, the Biden administration uses conflict metaphors and war metaphors to present the threatening effects of ODCs on IDCs, stimulating audiences' sense of crisis and urgency to take immediate measures.

Temporal proximization follows the logic that people's past perceptions influence their judgment of new information, and involves two temporal shifts: one focuses on the fact that the catastrophic consequences of past events are still ongoing at this point in time; the other focuses on the assumption that future crises must be addressed immediately at this point in time. The Biden administration uses anthropomorphic metaphors to create fear from the past, constantly using past events to stimulate the audience's reflection of the present with the intention of awakening the audience's sense of crisis and shaping their fear of threats. In addition, the Biden administration uses the journey metaphor to create a fear of the future, and to exaggerate the possibility of future crises to provoke the public to resist.

To a certain extent, positive values represent a country's positive national image and allude to the justice and legitimacy of political actions taken by the state. The value proximization dimension is mainly reflected in two aspects: first, the positive ideology of IDCs highlights the legitimacy of "our" policies; second, the negative ideology of ODCs highlights the illegitimacy of "the other". The Biden administration is committed to using journey metaphors to create a positive image of freedom, equality, and stability in the United States to lay the foundation for its political actions. Positive values always need negative values as a backdrop, so the Biden administration uses the crisis metaphor to highlight the positive attributes of IDCs against the negative ideology of ODCs, creating favorable conditions for the construction of discursive legitimacy.

In conclusion, metaphors interpret abstract concepts such as nation, history, and value into concrete and more easily understood source domains, making it easier to locate them on the spatial, temporal, and axiological axes of discourse, and the metaphors identified in each proximization framework contribute to specific proximization strategies that reinforce the proximization effect and achieve the function of admonition. Therefore, this study integrates and optimizes the research methods of proximization theory and critical metaphor analysis, provides a comprehensive interpretation and comparison of conceptual metaphors in political discourse, enriches the research results in this field, extends the previous academic views, and enhances the readers' understanding

of proximization and critical metaphor analysis theories, which receives the desired effect and achieves the expected goal.

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