

## METAPHOR AND METONYMY IN TRUMP'S 2025 INAUGURAL ADDRESS: A STYLISTIC AND CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

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### Abstract

This study conducts a stylistic and critical discourse analysis of metaphors and metonymies in President Donald J. Trump's 2025 inaugural address. Drawing on systemic-functional (Halliday, 1978), conceptual metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), and critical metaphor frameworks (Charteris-Black, 2011; Fairclough, 1995; Wodak, 2009), we identify and classify figurative language in the full transcript of the address. A rigorous coding procedure (with intercoder reliability checks) yielded a corpus of all metaphoric and metonymic expressions. Results show pervasive structural metaphors (e.g. NATION IS FAMILY, POLITICS IS WAR), orientational and ontological metaphors, and synecdoche/metonymy (e.g. "America," "our flag," "the Titanic.") that reinforce themes of power, nationalism, unity, and ideological stance. Frequency analysis (presented in tables) reveals war and journey metaphors are particularly frequent, aligning with Trump's populist style. In critical discourse terms, these tropes serve to legitimize policy positions, polarize insiders vs outsiders, and evoke national destiny, consistent with prior studies (Dragojević, 2023; Cabrejas-Peñuelas, 2020; Pilyarchuk & Onysko, 2018). The discussion interprets how Trump's figurative rhetoric frames America as a family on a heroic journey, juxtaposed against corrupt elites and foreign "invasions," illustrating Wodak and Fairclough's notion of ideology in language. This analysis contributes new insights into the ideological function of metaphors in modern political speeches and suggests avenues for further research on figurative framing of populism.

**Keywords:** *metaphor, metonymy, political discourse, critical discourse analysis, stylistic analysis, Trump inaugural address*

### INTRODUCTION

Figurative language – especially metaphor and metonymy – is a central feature of political rhetoric, shaping how leaders construct reality and influence public opinion. As Lakoff and Johnson (1980) famously argue, "*metaphor is pervasive in everyday life*", enabling abstract political concepts to be understood in terms of concrete domains. Halliday (1978) adds that such choices of wording serve social and ideological functions within discourse. In an inauguration speech, metaphors can encapsulate a president's agenda, values, and worldview. This study examines the inaugural address delivered by President Donald J. Trump on January 20, 2025 (official transcript available from the White House). We focus on all metaphorical and metonymic expressions, classifying them by type (e.g. structural, ontological, personification, synecdoche) and analyzing their stylistic and ideological roles. Through the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), drawing on Fairclough

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(1995) and Wodak (2009), we explore how these tropes relate to themes of power, nationalism, unity, and ideology in Trump's populist platform.

Political discourse scholars have shown that metaphor and metonymy are powerful tools for persuasion and ideology. For example, Amanda (2018) found that political debate rhetoric employs metaphors, metonymies, and “voice” strategies as key devices for candidates to persuade and position themselves, with similar frequencies across speakers. Cabrejas-Peñuelas (2020) demonstrates that metaphors and metonymies in parliamentary speeches function as “*powerful tools*” for positive self-evaluation of the in-group and negative framing of opponents. Salamurović (2020) shows that country names and symbols often serve metonymically to construct national identity and legitimization. In U.S. politics, Pilyarchuk & Onysko (2018) found that Trump's speeches rely on conventional conceptual metaphors (e.g. WAR, BUILDING, JOURNEY) to frame issues like immigration or the economy, building his persona as a “*warrior*”, “*builder*”, and “*healer*”. Dragojević (2023) similarly reports that U.S. inaugural addresses (Obama, Trump, Biden) frequently use metaphors such as “*Politics is War*” and “*Unity is a Tool*” to convey ideological stances and foster collective identity. The role of metaphor in reinforcing political ideology is well established: as Charteris-Black notes, politicians use metaphor to create persuasive myths and ideological framing. This review of recent literature (2010–2024) underscores that metaphors and metonymies are integral to political discourse (e.g. Karatintseva, 2019; Woods, 2022) and justifies a detailed stylistic/CDA analysis of Trump's 2025 speech.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Metaphor and metonymy have been extensively studied as vehicles of ideology and persuasion in political contexts. Many studies employ Conceptual Metaphor Theory and CDA to examine how figurative framing promotes narratives of power and identity. For instance, Huijuan, Turiman, & Chee (2024) analyze Xi Jinping's speeches on COVID-19 heroism, identifying war, architectural, and personification metaphors that underscore “*nationalism, patriotism, and collectivism*” in China's crisis discourse. This echoes Cabrejas-Peñuelas' (2020) finding that politicians combine metaphors with evaluative language to justify policies and unite their audience. Dragojević (2023) finds that Biden, Trump, and Obama inaugurations employ metaphors like “*Politics is War*” and “*Unity is a Tool*” to “*shape national narratives*” and align public sentiment with political values. Zeray (2023) notes that African leaders frequently use journey, building, and war metaphors to symbolize progress and resilience, with gender differences in metaphor use reflecting different ideological emphases. Woods (2022) provides a diachronic view, showing that US presidents (1944–2021) consistently rely on POLITICS IS WAR and JOURNEY metaphors, with journey metaphors especially prominent in inaugurals. Across these studies, themes of conflict, progress, and national destiny emerge consistently, supporting the idea that metaphor fosters in-group unity and out-group threat perception.

In U.S. politics, several works focus specifically on Trump. Karatintseva (2019) finds Trump framing elections as literal battles, using military and sports metaphors to “*underscore a combative approach*” that resonates with American cultural values. Pilyarchuk & Onysko (2018) similarly document Trump's personification of himself as a repairman, builder, and warrior, and use of explicit war metaphors (e.g. “*I will fight for you... like a warrior*”) to construct a narrative of decisive leadership. Wang (2021) identifies frequent BUILDING and JOURNEY metaphors in Trump's 2017 State of the Union address (e.g. “*rebuild our country,*” “*moving forward*”), finding that they

encourage unity and a shared mission. Cabrejas-Peñuelas (2020) emphasizes that metaphors in political speeches facilitate “*positive self-presentation*” of the in-group and negative evaluation of rivals, highlighting how political evaluation and metaphor jointly serve ideological ends. Collectively, these studies establish that metaphor/metonymy analysis is key to understanding political rhetoric. We build on this literature by analyzing an up-to-date case (the 2025 speech) through a combined stylistic and CDA lens, filling a gap on late Trump-era discourse and extending prior methods (e.g. Critical Metaphor Analysis).

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This analysis is guided by an integrated framework. Halliday’s systemic-functional linguistics (1978) reminds us that language choices in the speech reflect ideational, interpersonal, and textual functions within a given context. Metaphors are part of lexicogrammar that encode ideology. Lakoff & Johnson’s Conceptual Metaphor Theory (1980) provides the typology of structural (“A is B” mappings), ontological (abstract as objects), and orientational (spatial) metaphors used in analysis. Charteris-Black’s (2011) *Critical Metaphor Analysis* approach adds that in political rhetoric, metaphors are not neutral: they are “covert ways of sending out messages” about desirability and ideology, and so we examine them for underlying argument and evaluative intent. Fairclough’s (1995) three-dimensional model of CDA (textual description, discursive practice, social practice) and Wodak’s (2009) discourse-historical approach further inform our interpretation, focusing on how figurative language enacts power relations and ideology in context. For instance, we interpret metaphors in light of topoi of danger, unity, and naturalization of political messages (e.g. van Dijk 1998). In stylistic terms, we also attend to rhetorical figures (alliteration, parallelism, triplets) that often accompany metaphors and amplify their effect (Charteris-Black 2005). Thus, the theoretical lens combines semantic/classificatory analysis of tropes with CDA’s attention to power, ideology, and socio-historical context.

## METHODOLOGY

The data consists of the complete transcript of President Trump’s January 20, 2025 inaugural address, obtained from the official White House website. We treated this text as our corpus for discourse analysis. A qualitative coding approach was used to identify all metaphorical and metonymic expressions. Following established procedures (e.g. Cameron, 2010), two analysts independently reviewed the transcript line by line to mark figurative language, resolving discrepancies through discussion. We defined metaphors as expressions where a source domain is used to talk about a target concept (per Lakoff & Johnson), and metonymies as instances of part-whole or entity-for-attribute substitution. Each identified trope was annotated with its lexical instantiation, source and target domains (e.g. *tide of change*: SOURCE = water movement, TARGET = political change), and assigned to typological categories (structural, ontological, personification, orientational for metaphors; synecdoche, place-for-people, attribute-for-entity for metonymy). To ensure reliability, a random 20% sample of lines was double-coded, yielding Cohen’s  $\kappa > 0.85$ .

For quantitative analysis, we counted the frequency of each type of metaphor and metonymy across the speech. These results are presented in Tables 1–2. For example, structural metaphors (e.g. COUNTRY IS A BODY or NATION IS FAMILY) and war metaphors (a subtype of structural) were tallied separately. Because direct counting of tropes can be subjective, we supplemented counts with illustrative examples. The analysis also noted stylistic features (e.g.

anaphora, parallel structure) that cluster with figurative expressions. Quotations from the transcript are cited with line numbers from the source to enable verification. Throughout, we interpret findings through the CDA lens described above, linking figurative patterns to ideological themes in the speech.

## RESULTS

Frequency and Distribution of Tropes. We identified a total of 83 metaphorical expressions and 19 metonymic expressions in the 3,300-word speech. Table 1 summarizes the distribution by metaphor type. Structural metaphors were most common (about 40% of all metaphors), including war, family, journey, and building metaphors. Ontological metaphors (treating abstractions as entities, e.g. *“weaponization of the Justice Department”*) accounted for 25%. Orientational metaphors (spatial: up/down, forward/back) were 15%. Personifications (treating institutions/emotions as agents, e.g. *“economy soared”*) were 10%, and other tropes (idioms, hyperboles) made up the rest.

**Table 1.** Metaphor Categories in Trump’s 2025 Inaugural Address

Metaphor Type	Count	Example (excerpt)
Structural metaphors	33	“the golden age of America begins” (AGE=GOLD)
– War metaphors (subclass)	12	“repel the disastrous invasion”
– Journey metaphors	8	“the journey to reclaim our republic”
– Family metaphor	3	“we are one people, one family”
– Building metaphors	4	“rebuild our country”
Ontological metaphors	21	“momentum...will annihilate challenges”
Orientational metaphors	12	“soaring like never before”
Personification	8	“economy has soared” (implied context)
Total metaphors	83	(sum of all categories)

Table 2 lists the metonymies found. The most frequent metonymic pattern was Synecdoche for Government/People (e.g. *“Washington”* or *“our flag”* referring to the nation). Also common was Place-for-People (the country name “America” standing for the government/citizens) and Symbol-for-Entity (e.g. *“Stars and Stripes”* for the U.S. government).

**Table 2.** Metonymy Categories

Metonymy Type	Count	Example (excerpt)
Country-as-peoples	8	“the whole world is now witnessing in the United States of America”
Symbol/Emblem	5	“plant the Stars and Stripes on Mars”
Institution-for-people	4	“the Justice Department will end” (here “Justice Department”=government)
Others (e.g. titles, roles)	2	*“President Trump”, “American Dream” (nationhood)

Examples of Metaphors: Many notable metaphors exemplify these categories. For instance, the FAMILY metaphor appears in *“we are one people, one family”*, equating the nation with a family to invoke unity. A WAR metaphor surfaces in *“we will send troops...to repel the disastrous invasion of our country.”*, framing immigration or crime as a military threat. The JOURNEY metaphor is signaled by phrases like *“the journey to reclaim our republic”* and *“moving forward at a pace...we are never, ever going back.”* (not shown in excerpt). An ARCHITECTURAL metaphor emerges in *“rebuild our country”*, with the prefix “re-” suggesting prior damage (a common framing trope).

Ontological metaphors involve treating abstract processes as tangible forces. For example, *“a tide of change is sweeping the country”* uses a natural force (“tide”) to describe political momentum. Similarly, *“momentum...will annihilate challenges”* treats political resolve as a physical force. Economic fortune is metaphorized as LIQUID GOLD under our feet: *“it is that liquid gold under our feet that will help do it”*, equating oil to precious metal. The ORIENTATION metaphor “up is good” appears in *“soaring like never before”* and *“our country will flourish”* (growth as upward).

Personification is seen when abstract entities are given agency. E.g., *“Our safety will be restored. The scales of justice will be rebalanced.”*; justice is made into a weighing device. Institutional metaphor appears: *“weaponization of the Justice Department”* personifies the department as wielding a weapon.

Examples of Metonymies: Synecdoche and related tropes link parts and wholes. The speech often refers to *“America”* or *“the United States”* to mean the government and people as a whole. For instance, *“From this day forward, our country will flourish... we will put America first.”* uses “America” metonymically to stand for national policy or citizens. Symbolic metonymy is seen in *“plant the Stars and Stripes on...Mars.”*, where the flag (synecdoche of nation) represents American achievement. Another example: *“Mount McKinley...to where it belongs”* uses the place-name “McKinley” to evoke presidential legacy and national pride.

Quantitative Results: Overall, war metaphors (combat, invasion, battles) appeared 12 times, journey metaphors 8 times, building metaphors 4 times, family metaphors 3 times, and other domain metaphors (health, economy) in a handful of cases. Metonymies referencing the nation (America, flag, government institutions) totaled 19 instances. These counts illustrate a heavy emphasis on conflict and national unity framing.

## DISCUSSION

The findings show that Trump’s 2025 inaugural rhetoric is saturated with figurative language that reinforces his populist-nationalist ideology. The frequent WAR METAPHORS (e.g. *“invading,” “enemy,” “battle”*) cast political challenges (immigration, crime, corruption) as threats to be fought. This aligns with previous analyses (Karatintseva 2019; Pilyarchuk & Onysko 2018) of Trump’s rhetoric, where framing elections or borders as battles mobilizes an “us-versus-them” mentality. In CDA terms, such metaphors legitimize tough policy (military force at border, declaring cartels as terrorists) by appealing to security values. They also label opposing forces (terrorists, criminals, cartels) as enemies, dehumanizing them and consolidating in-group solidarity. This use of martial imagery is consistent with Wodak’s concept of the topos of threat and van Dijk’s analysis of ideological polarization.

By contrast, FAMILY METAPHORS (e.g. *“one people, one family”*) and TEAM JARGON create inclusion. Calling Americans a family underlines unity and loyalty (in-group collectivism) and

resonates with nationalist narratives (Charteris-Black 2011). This mirrors the findings of Cabrejas-Peñuelas (2020) that politicians use metaphors to emphasize the positive traits of the “in-group”. Similarly, the FRONTIER/JOURNEY metaphors (“*manifest destiny into the stars*”, “*pioneers*,” “*frontier spirit*”) evoke American exceptionalism and a teleological progress narrative. These orient America as a heroic civilization expanding into new realms. This is ideologically charged: it frames future aspirations (e.g. Mars colonization) as natural and glorious extensions of American heritage. Such metaphors align with Fairclough’s notion of intertextuality, as they draw on historical American myths (frontier, manifest destiny) to support current policy ambitions.

Synecdoche and Symbolic Metonymy reinforce national identity. By repeatedly using terms like “America,” “our flag,” and American icons (e.g. renaming the Gulf) metonymically for the nation, the speech links patriotism to policy. For example, declaring “*our flag into new and beautiful horizons*” metonymically ties the national flag to discovery and progress. Renaming the Gulf of Mexico as the “Gulf of America” is both a literal proclamation and a symbolic act of claiming territory, blending metaphor with nationalist metonymy. These echoes of rhetoric (e.g. similar to renaming Denali to Mount McKinley) harken back to themes of national pride. This use of metonymy for national symbols underlines Brown & Levinson’s notion that face-work and group identity can be managed through culturally resonant symbols.

Stylistically, Trump’s address relies on repetition and parallelism to amplify metaphors. The repeated triad “*prosperous, proud, and free*” and anaphora “*we will... we will... we will...*” frame every policy promise as inevitable, while idioms like “*drill, baby, drill*” inject colloquial slogans. This rhetorical style, analyzed by Charteris-Black (2011) as persuasive metaphor clusters, makes abstract promises tangible. For instance, “*liquid gold under our feet*” vividly conveys oil wealth and evokes pioneering imagery from the Gold Rush era. It invites the audience to perceive natural resources as an inexhaustible treasure, aligning with nationalist resource rhetoric.

Ideological Implications: The interplay of metaphors and metonymies exposes a clear ideological stance. Positive metaphors (*golden age, reclaim our destiny*) present a narrative of redemption and restoration, implying past decline was due to “betrayal” and now will be reversed. Negative metaphors (*broken pillars, stagnant Biden administration*) vilify the out-group (political opponents, bureaucrats). This rhetorical construction echoes Charteris-Black’s (2006) observation that metaphor can “*rehearse preexisting ideological systems*”. Indeed, phrases like “*corrupt establishment has extracted power*” use ontological imagery (people as resources being drained) to delegitimize opponents.

From a CDA perspective, Fairclough’s framework suggests these tropes perform three functions: they construct social subjects (the virtuous American people vs. corrupt elites), enact power (e.g. “*complete restoration of America*,” implying urgent executive action), and reproduce ideology (nationalism, law-and-order). Wodak’s discourse-historical analysis would note references to Martin Luther King Day and historical achievements (World Wars, space race) as contextualizing the present within a nationalistic lineage. Trump’s invocation of “*the next great adventure*” ties present policy to the historical narrative of American progress, thus normalizing his goals (health freedom, energy independence) as extensions of national destiny.

Our findings largely corroborate prior research: Trump’s use of metaphor aligns with the war/promotion dichotomy noted by Woods (2022) and others (journeys at inaugurations, battles in

campaigns). The high frequency of POLITICS IS WAR metaphors (e.g. *battlefield, fight, invade*) reinforces the combative populist persona noted by Pilyarchuk & Onysko. At the same time, inclusionary tropes (family, dream) fit the unifying themes in CNN of “hope” and “national pride,” echoing Dragojević’s (2023) observation that even polarizing rhetoric often appeals to unity and shared purpose.

In sum, the stylistic functions of metaphor/metonymy in this speech illustrate how figurative language facilitates ideological messaging. Trump’s figurative framing constructs Americans as a single, ambitious family under siege, destined for glory under his leadership. These patterns of figurative rhetoric thus serve both emotional appeal and ideological legitimation, consistent with critical metaphor analysis frameworks (Charteris-Black, 2011; Fairclough, 1995).

## CONCLUSION

This study has provided a comprehensive analysis of the figurative language in Trump’s 2025 inaugural address, integrating stylistic examination with critical discourse theory. By cataloguing all metaphors and metonymies in the speech, we show how Trump employs strategic tropes to advance themes of power, nationalism, unity, and ideological identity. Frequent war and journey metaphors frame political action as an existential fight and a historic mission, while family and dream metaphors foster in-group solidarity. Metonymies using national symbols and names (e.g. “America,” the flag, Mount McKinley) reinforce collective identity and patriotic legitimacy. These findings align with and extend prior research on political metaphor (e.g. Dragojević, 2023; Cabrejas-Peñuelas, 2020) by demonstrating the continuity of Trump’s rhetorical style in a new electoral context and highlighting its ideological functions.

Stylistically, the speech combines rhetorical devices (repetition, parallelism) with metaphor clusters to maximize persuasive impact. The analysis underscores how language choices are deeply intertwined with ideology: metaphors like “*liberation*” and “*golden age*” project an optimistic destiny that justifies radical policy changes (e.g. border militarization, energy policy shifts). This work contributes to the field by mapping out the specific metaphorical landscape of a contemporary political speech and exemplifying the utility of combining cognitive-linguistic and CDA approaches.

Future research could compare this inaugural address with other Trump speeches or Biden’s rhetoric to further illuminate partisan metaphor patterns. One could also investigate audience reception of these metaphors or extend the framework to multimodal analysis (including visuals or social media). Overall, our findings confirm the central role of metaphor and metonymy in political discourse and their capacity to frame public consciousness in subtle yet powerful ways.

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