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Images in President Trump's 2025 Inaugural Speech

ABSTRACT

The present study analyses the speech delivered by President Trump on 20 January 2025 as his Inaugural Address. The discussion briefly addresses the features of linguistic worldview as well as the significance of metaphors in language. The text is scrutinised to present President Trump's figurative language use. Such an approach attempts to identify recurrent imagery which reflects the worldview represented by the speaker. The conducted analysis aims at showing the observed salient aspects of metaphorical language use and those images that are repeatedly represented in the speech delivered during inauguration. The analysis identifies recurrent imagery and metaphorical patterns.

KEYWORDS

linguistic worldview; metaphor; Donald Trump; inaugural address: political discourse

1. Introduction

It has been a long tradition for political leaders to address the nation or groups of supporters to convey messages: either presenting their programme, pleading for support, criticising opponents or expressing gratitude for backing and support. Presidents are the representatives of whole nations, and their decisions affect all citizens, irrespective of whether a given individual is of a similar political background or not. After a long presidential campaign in 2024 the final decision of the American people was to choose Donald Trump over Kamala Harris. The first speech a newly elected president delivers is known as the Inaugural Address. It was delivered by President Donald Trump on January 21, 2025. In his speech, the recently elected president presented his views, opinions and his stand on several issues pertaining to the current political situation in the United States.

Figurative expressions are present in all forms of human communication, and the language of politics is no exception. The considerations in the present article will focus on the images and metaphors employed in Trump's speech, the most frequent images hidden within the figurative language used and the linguistic worldview they are likely to reflect.

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2. Linguistic worldview

It has been noted by Locke (2014, p. 387) while considering words and language, that "besides articulate sounds", it is essential for a language user to "be able to use these sounds as signs of internal conceptions; and to make them stand as marks for the ideas within his own mind, whereby they might be made known to others, and the thoughts of men's minds be conveyed from one to another". Any words uttered in communicative acts carry meaning. Some words carry additional meanings, conveying hidden messages through the images they evoke.

As rightly stated by Tokarski (2014, p. 35) behind every lexeme or expression a certain, more or less set/established cognitive structure is hidden; it shows how language users perceive and understand a given object in the external world, together with processes and actions that take place. Each language expression creates a unique, individual 'microworld' reflecting human needs, aspirations as well as the manners of subordination and evaluation of reality.

The linguistic worldview is considered by Underhill (2015, p. 231) as a construct of a semantic, anthropological and cultural character, which is grounded on

> the assumption that language codes a certain socially established knowledge of the world and that this knowledge can be reconstructed and verbalized as a set of judgements about people, objects and events. The knowledge results from the subjective perception and conceptualization of reality by the human mind; it is anthropocentric and relativized to languages and cultures.

Therefore, the imagery reflecting and expressing a worldview that will be produced by members of diverse language and culture communities in varied cultural and/or social settings is likely to differ significantly.

Underhill (2011, p. 3) stresses the fact that "worlds and worldviews are intertwined, and that language and thought are related". Moreover, "each language system is in itself a conceptual 'world'", hence "each language system opens up for us 'a whole new world', a world in which the 'objects of understanding', the concepts with which we think and speak, are shaped differently" (pp. 4–5). Therefore, the following three factors of worldview are significant here (p. 6):

> 1. The worldview of the language system, that mode of understanding which provides us with concepts and which organises the relationships between those concepts.
> 2. The worldview of each cultural mindset, a worldview which paradoxically must take root within a given linguistic worldview but which can migrate between the language systems (as the spread of Catholicism, Protestantism, Buddhism and communism clearly demonstrates).
> 3. The worldview of the individual which finds its highest expression in the works of great writers who cultivate their language as Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, Goethe, Shakespeare or Orwell have done.

The features specified above cannot be considered as categories but should be taken as "a means of discerning different conceptions of the relationship between language and thought, between words and worldviews" (p. 6).

Nonetheless, as pointed out by Underhill (2011, p. 7), we can differentiate between "the worldview of the language system and the worldview attributed to writers and individual speakers", as a result of which the following types can be identified:

> 1. World-perceiving, designating the frameworks of understanding which direct and shade our perception of the world.
> 2. World-conceiving, designating, the conceptual frameworks which enable us to communicate with others and engage in the discussion of ideas, impressions and feelings.
> 3. Cultural mindset, designating the worldview specific to a political regime or religion (and the concepts of 'man', 'woman', 'family', 'organisation', 'social stratification', 'social objectives', 'history', 'destiny', and so on, which take their place within the 'logic' of that mindset).
> 4. Personal world, designating the fairly stable system of concepts which organise and structure the worldview we can attribute to individuals and writers […].
> 5. Perspective, designating the fluctuating conceptual and emotional response we have in interacting with the world, whose shape is constantly being reaffirmed and reinvented by each one of us as we ourselves change and develop.

Langauges are the tool for encoding interpretations of reality in which their speakers' cultural experiences are shaped and created (Głaz, 2021). As succinctly noted by Takahashi (2025, p. 284), the language and culture interrelation "is deep and intricate, reflecting the intertwined nature of human communication and social norms […]. Language serves as a reflection of cultural values, beliefs and practices". This is true of all language varieties, including the language of politics.

Political discourse is characterised by the use of tropes that enable language users to present their ideas and opinions in a more vivid way in order to convince or manipulate the audiences to see their point, support or follow them. The choice of words is essential to show their worldview, convey messages and standpoints, with metaphorical language use lending itself well in this capacity.

3. Metaphors and their significance

Figurative and euphemistic language use has long been employed in speeches and public appearances to convey messages implicitly rather than explicitly (Uberman, 2020, 2022, 2024a, 2024b). Metaphors have ceased to be treated as a poetic device (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, 1999; Lakoff & Turner, 1989) and have occupied the realm of language use in its diverse areas of expression, medical, economic, legal, social, political, academic, religious and many other (Charteris-Black, 2017; Fabiszak 2007; Hartmann-Mahmud, 2002; Lakoff, 1990; Musolff, 2004, 2016a; Uberman, 2024b, 2025, and many others).

Traditionally metaphors are a reflection of how humans conceptualise reality, and they are utilised in language in place of straightforward messages (Barcelona, 2000; Kövecses, 2002, 2005, 2006, 2010, 2015, 2018; Lakoff, 1987; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Lakoff & Turner, 1989). Musolff (2016b, p. 12) stresses the fact

that the salience of metaphors for creating and advancing concepts is considerable. "Not only are they ubiquitous in everyday speech and across most registers of human communication but they are also systematic in the sense that they concern not just lexical items but also whole areas of (popular) knowledge that are applied to the respective meaning 'targets'".

As noted by Hartmann-Mahmud (2002, p. 427), "metaphors are more than just literary devices used to evoke an image or emotion. They constitute powerful forms of language that can influence how a concept is perceived and understood". As a classical rhetorical trope, metaphor is a figure in which one can observe "a shift in the sense of the word or phrase from its earlier more concrete or more embodied sense to a later sense that is more abstract or less embodied" (Charteris-Black, 2018, p. 51), or "a word or phrase that is used with a sense that differs from another more common or more basic sense that this word or phrase has". It is also essential to stress the fact that metaphors result from the way in which language is applied, i.e. "*any* word can be a metaphor if the way that it is used makes it so. So metaphors come into being when there is a *change* in how a word is *used*: this is why metaphor is a feature of language use or 'discourse'" (Charteris-Black, 2011, p. 31). Chilton (2004) points out that a metaphor is not only a linguistic expression found in written and oral texts as well as literary works, but an element of how humans conceptualise the reality and world in which they live; "metaphor works by mapping well understood source domains of experience onto more schematic ones. The source domains may be innate or acquired in development; they provide a source for conceptualisation" (pp. 51–52).

Steuter and Wills (2008, p. 3) identify the essence of metaphors employed in public discourse by stating that:

> Metaphors matter. We choose our words from within a dominant system or frame of metaphor that offers us a specific lexicon of language, that defines words in certain specific ways, and that shapes both the "what" and the "how" of our communication. In this way, figuratively and often literally, through metaphor we make meaning. Our most common metaphors help us to understand problems and conflicts in certain ways, offering us certain available responses, and negating or obscuring others. Metaphor operates in the realm of thought, but its workings reverberate in concrete, active, tangible ways. Metaphor operates through the interplay of language's denotative value, what it says clearly and obviously, and its connotative value, what it evocatively and often subjectively calls up, its overtones, allusions, and associations. Public discourse, which relies on metaphors both obvious and tacit, can harness its power to shape opinion, set or justify policy, and direct action.

Linguists analysing political discourse (cf. Beard, 2000; Charteris-Black, 2004, 2011, 2017, 2018; Chilton, 2004; Musolff, 2004, 2016a; Thornborrow, 2002; Uberman, 2024a) agree that language is used for persuasive purposes. Charteris-Black (2018, p. 49) notes that by applying tropes in their utterances the speakers effect audiences "by turning the sense of words away from what is expected to draw attention to other possible meanings". In so doing, by relying

on the substantial associatory property of language, the speaker attempts to assign a positive or a negative value to someone/something or to strengthen said value.

It is essential to note that the process of metaphor identification is based on Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) later developed into MIPVU. As pointed out by Nacey et al. (2019, pp. 4–5) "the main difference between MIP and MIPVU is that, while the former is restricted to the identification of *indirect metaphor* only, the latter procedure also allows analysts to identify two additional types of metaphor: *direct metaphor* and *implicit metaphor*". The metaphor-related words are identified from the text by examining it word by word (Steen et al., 2010).

In the following discussion an attempt will be made at pinpointing possible metaphorical readings for the linguistic expressions voiced by President Donald Trump in his Inaugural Address in January 2025. The words uttered will be quoted and a possible interpretation for the expression will be provided. The analysis will also identify the most recurrent metaphors and images in order to name the possible cultural mindset and, more specifically, 'personal world' expressed by the current American President.

4. Trump's worldview: Interpretation of metaphorical expressions used in the Inaugural Address

This section of the discussion is focused on identifying possible metaphorical readings of the expressions employed by President Trump to present his standpoint, voice his opinions and convince the American people that they had made the right choice by electing him for office.

The expressions will be presented in the order they appear in the address; an extract from the speech is provided in quotes, and the metaphors underlying and embedded in the choice of words will be indicated immediately afterwards. Whenever possible, two or more metaphors or two or more variants of the same image are identified.

"the golden age of America begins right now" – THE TRUMP PRESIDENCY IS THE TIME OF NATIONAL PROSPERITY

"our country will flourish" – THE TRUMP PRESIDENCY IS DEVELOPMENT // THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION IS STAGNATION

"we will not allow ourselves to be taken advantage of any longer" – THE TRUMP PRESIDENCY IS FIGHTING INSIDIOUS CONTROLLING FORCES // THE BIDEN PRESIDENCY IS BEING ABUSED

"Our sovereignty will be reclaimed" – THE TRUMP PRESIDENCY IS INDEPENDENCE / THE TRUMP PRESIDENCY IS REGAINING LIBERTY // THE BIDEN PRESIDENCY IS DEPENDENCE

"Our safety will be restored" – THE TRUMP PRESIDENCY IS SECURITY // THE BIDEN PRESIDENCY IS LACK OF SECURITY // SAFETY IS A MISSING OBJECT

"The scales of justice will be rebalanced" – THE TRUMP PRESIDENCY IS JUSTICE // THE BIDEN PRESIDENCY IS LACK OF JUSTICE // (THE PRESENT STATE OF) JUSTICE IS AN OBJECT OUT OF BALANCE

"weaponization of the Justice Department and our government will end" – TRUMP TAKING OVER POWER IS LIBERATING GOVERNMENT / TRUMP TAKING OVER POWER IS RESTORING SECURITY // THE BIDEN PRESIDENCY IS USING GOVERNMENT AS WEAPON

"A tide of change is sweeping the country" – CHANGE IS A FORCE OF NATURE / A NATURAL PHENOMENON (A STRETCH OF WATER)

"sunlight is pouring over the entire world" – KNOWLEDGE / INFLUENCE IS LIGHT

"they [challenges] will be annihilated" – OVERCOMING CHALLENGES IS FIGHTING A WAR

"annihilated by this great momentum that the world is now witnessing" – THE WORLD IS A LIVING ORGANISM / A SPECTATOR / A WITNESS TO AN EVENT

"a radical and corrupt establishment has extracted power and wealth from our citizens" – THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION IS A DISASTROUS ENTITY AND A THIEF

"the pillars of our society lay broken and seemingly in complete disrepair" – THE SOCIETY IS A BUILDING // THE CURRENT SOCIETY IS A DILAPIDATED BUILDING // THE SOCIETY IS A LIVING, FEELING ORGANISM

"a government that cannot manage even a simple crisis at home" – THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION IS AN INCOMPETENT MANAGER

"a government […], at the same time, stumbling into a continuing catalogue of catastrophic events" – THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION IS A HUMAN WALKING UNSTEADILY / CLUMSILY // A SET OF EVENTS IS A PAMPHLET OR A BOOK

"(the government) provides sanctuary and protection for dangerous criminals, many from prisons and mental institutions, that have illegally entered our country from all over the world" – THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION IS A PROTECTOR OF MISFITS

"My recent election is a mandate to completely and totally reverse a horrible betrayal and all of these many betrayals that have taken place" – THE WORK OF BIDEN ADMINISTRATION IS TREASON

"America's decline is over" – THE NATION IS AN INDIVIDUAL ON A DOWNWARDS SLOPE

"Our liberties and our nation's glorious destiny will no longer be denied" – USA IS A CHOSEN NATION

"we will immediately restore the integrity, competency, and loyalty of America's government" – THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION IS AN INCOMPETENT, DISLOYAL INDIVIDUAL

"The journey to reclaim our republic has not been an easy one" – WINNING A PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION IS AN ARDUOUS JOURNEY

"Those who wish to stop our cause have tried to take my freedom and, indeed, to take my life" –FREEDOM IS A MOVABLE OBJECT // HUMAN LIFE IS A MOVABLE OBJECT

"my life was saved for a reason; I was saved by God to make America great again" – TRUMP IS A CHOSEN ONE / THE ONE CHOSEN BY GOD

"we will be working to meet every crisis with dignity and power and strength" – CRISIS IS AN ADVERSARY / AN OPPONENT

"For American citizens, January 20th, 2025, is Liberation Day" – TRUMP'S PRESIDENTIAL INAUGURATION IS REGAINING INDEPENDENCE FOR USA

"I want to thank you for the tremendous outpouring of love and trust that you have shown me with your vote" – VOTING IS A DEMONSTRATION OF FEELING

"National unity is now returning to America" – UNITY IS A MOVING OBJECT

"we will begin the complete restoration of America" – A NATION IS A BUILDING / STRUCTURE

"to defeat what was record inflation and rapidly bring down costs and prices" – BRINGING DOWN INFLATION IS WINNING A FIGHT

"The inflation crisis" – ECONOMIC SITUATION IS AT BREAKING POINT / AN EMERGENCY

"national energy emergency" – THE LEVEL OF ENERGY IS A CRISIS

"We will bring prices down, fill our strategic reserves up again right to the top, and export American energy all over the world" – PRICES OF GOODS ARE MOVABLE OBJECTS // FINANCIAL RESERVES ARE CONTAINERS // ENERGY IS A COMMODITY

"it is that liquid gold under our feet" – OIL IS LIQUID GOLD // NATURAL RESOURCES ARE VALUABLES

"I will immediately begin the overhaul of our trade system" – TRADE SYSTEM IS A BUILDING TO BE RESTORED

"massive amounts of money pouring into our Treasury" – MONEY IS LIQUID // TREASURY IS A CONTAINER FOR LIQUID

"restore competence and effectiveness to our federal government" – THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION IS AN INCOMPETENT AND INEFFECTIVE INDIVIDUAL

"Never again will the immense power of the state be weaponized to persecute political opponents" – POLITICAL POWER IS A WEAPON

"we are going to bring law and order back to our cities" – LAW AND ORDER ARE MOVABLE OBJECTS

"We will forge a society that is colorblind and merit-based" – SOCIETY IS A PIECE OF METAL (TO BE SHAPED) // SOCIETY IS A HOMOGENOUS GROUP (DESPITE RACE DIFFERENCES)

"Our armed forces will be freed to focus on their sole mission" – THE MILITARY ARE NON-SELFGOVERNING INDIVIDUALS

"we will again build the strongest military the world has ever seen" – THE MILITARY ARE A BUILDING STRUCTURE

"America will reclaim its rightful place as the greatest, most powerful, most respected nation on earth" – THE AMERICAN PEOPLE ARE THE CHOSEN NATION // THE POSITION OF USA IS A LOST TROPHY / A LOST PIECE OF LAND

"We gave it to Panama, and we're taking it back" – THE PANAMA CANAL IS A TRANSFERABLE OBJECT

"as we liberate our nation" – THE AMERICAN PEOPLE ARE NON-SELFGOVERNING INDIVIDUALS

"we will lead it to new heights of victory and success" – GAINING PROSPERITY IS CLIMBING A MOUNTAIN

"The United States will once again consider itself a growing nation – one that increases our wealth, expands our territory, builds our cities, raises our expectations, and carries our flag into new and beautiful horizons" – THE AMERICAN NATION IS A CONQUEROR

"American astronauts to plant the Stars and Stripes on the planet Mars" – PLACING THE AMERICAN FLAG IS GROWING A PLANT

"There's no nation like our nation" – THE AMERICAN PEOPLE ARE THE CHOSEN NATION

"The call of the next great adventure resounds from within our souls" – THE AMERICAN NATION IS AN EXPLORER / ADVENTURER

"No one comes close" – THE AMERICAN PEOPLE ARE THE CHOSEN NATION / THE BEST NATION / AN UNPARALLELED UNIQUE NATION

"untamed wilderness" – THE NATURE IS A WILD ANIMAL

"lifted billions from poverty" – POVERTY IS A FALLEN INDIVIDUAL

"harnessed electricity" – ELECTRICITY IS A CONTROLLED POWER (A WILD HORSE)

"launched mankind into the heavens" – THE HUMAN RACE IS A SPACE ROCKET

"put the universe of human knowledge into the palm of the human hand" – KNOWLEDGE IS COSMOS // WISDOM IS A MOVABLE OBJECT

"our country was forged and built by the generations of patriots" – A NATION IS A BUILDING STRUCTURE // A NATION IS A PIECE OF METAL TO BE SHAPED

"we will rebuild the nation that we love" – A NATION IS A BUILDING THAT REQUIRES RENOVATION

"our nation has suffered greatly" – A NATION IS A FRAGILE INDIVIDUAL

"Our power will stop all wars and bring a new spirit of unity to a world that has been angry, violent, and totally unpredictable" – THE TRUMP PRESIDENCY IS AN UNPARALLELED POWER / A POWERFUL FORCE / AN UNPREDICTABLE FORCE

"From this day on, the United States of America will be a free, sovereign, and independent nation" – THE PRESIDENTIAL INAUGURATION IS LIBERATION

"our golden age has just begun" – FUTURE PROSPERITY IS A VALUABLE JEWEL // AMERICAN FUTURE IS PROSPERITY

5. Discussion and concluding remarks

The language politicians employ is characterised by the strategy of obeying the principle of keeping face. It is related to the concept of 'face', i.e. "the image that a person projects in his social contacts with others" (Renkema, 2004, pp. 24–25). According to Goffman (1956, (as cited in Renkema, 2004, p. 25).), who was the proponent of the concept, "every participant in a social process has the need to be appreciated by others and the need to be free and not interfered with", hence the former is considered 'positive face', while 'negative face' is the need to "not be disturbed".

Trump seems to abide by one of Greene's 48 laws of power (2000, pp. 200–213), i.e. *Keep your Hands Clean* – in constantly criticising his predecessor, blaming him for everything and trying to portray him in his speech as a scapegoat (p. 203): "The use of scapegoats is as old as civilisation itself, and examples of it can be found in cultures around the world. The main idea behind these sacrifices is the shifting of guilt and sin to an outside figure – object, animal, or man – which is then banished or destroyed". Greene (2000, p. 203) further explains this *key to power* as "an extremely human response to not look inward after a mistake or crime, but rather to look outward and to affix blame and guilt on a convenient object. […] this profound need to exteriorize one's guilt, to project it on another person or object, has an immense power, which the clever know how to harness".

By attacking his predecessor – Joe Biden and his administration, Donald Trump appears to consider and portray himself as a saviour and redeemer: the American nation is potentially going to be resurrected and revived. The image of USA as a chosen nation is repeatedly stressed in the Inaugural Address. Additionally, this great chosen nation is revived from oppression and liberated from the dependence

of the former administration. The nation is frequently compared to a building structure which requires renovation and restoration to function properly and successfully. The age of prosperity is about to begin for American citizens owing to the change of power at presidential level. The incompetent administration is about to be substituted with experts who are to revive the stagnant economy and life of the American society. The day of presidential inauguration marks the stage of regaining independence. No references in the address were made to unison, no call for unity of the society and the nation; instead, the picture was painted of a corrupt, weak government soon to be replaced, and the Oval Office to be taken over by the man whom God saved "to make America great again".

Most of the images presented by Trump that create his 'personal world' and reflect his worldview focus on his greatness and denounce his predecessors and their achievements. This conviction is mirrored in the saviour imagery, also by referring to God sparing Trump's life for America and its citizens. The USA is portrayed as a chosen nation. The nation is also considered a living organism as well as a building structure to be restored and revived. Trump's predecessors are criticised and condemned as treacherous and incompetent, causing chaos and stagnation. Trump's administration, on the other hand, is presented as the saviour, while the time to come under his rule is shown as the time of the overall greatness: prosperity and security, freedom of speech and independence. To crown it all, Trump (2025) in the final words of the Inaugural Address proclaims the beginning of the unique era and the American land of opportunity for generation to come: "We will stand bravely, we will live proudly, we will dream boldly, and nothing will stand in our way because we are Americans. The future is ours, and our golden age has just begun".

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