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**CONCEPTUAL FRAMING OF DONALD TRUMP IN THE CONTEXT  
OF CLIMATE CHANGE IN THE GUARDIAN AND THE SUN  
BA thesis**

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## ABSTRACT

Climate change-related debates are ongoing in the UK media. The (re)election of Donald Trump as the US president motivated a rigorous critique of his views on climate change by the left-leaning UK media. Studying such debates is crucial as they influence people's perception of climate change. So far, there is little research on how left-leaning UK newspapers respond to Donald Trump's sceptical views on climate change. Discourse metaphors provide a useful framework for studying climate change-related debates in the media, as they are often used as rhetorical tools, allowing an author to conceptually frame an issue in a preferred way. This thesis aims to contribute to the research on climate change representation in the UK media by analysing discourse metaphors used to conceptually frame Donald Trump in the leading UK newspapers.

Relying on the Conceptual Metaphors Theory (Lakoff and Johnson 1980) and the work by Zinken et al (2008) on discourse metaphors, this thesis analyses metaphors used to conceptually frame Donald Trump in the context of climate change in the UK newspapers *The Guardian* and *The Sun*. Articles published in the period from Donald Trump's presidential victory to his inauguration were read. Metaphorical expressions in the articles conceptually framing Donald Trump were identified and analysed using Critical Metaphors Analysis (Charteris-Black 2004). This thesis is divided into two sections. Section one establishes the theoretical background, defines relevant terminology, reviews relevant studies, and introduces the implications for this thesis. Section two provides a detailed description of the methodology used, reports the number and purposes of the metaphors analysed and discusses the findings.

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## INTRODUCTION

Climate change remains a highly politicised topic. Despite its effects already being visible in the form of rising temperatures and natural disasters, people are still arguing whether climate change is a real phenomenon. People who recognise climate change argue about the amount of action needed for its mitigation. Studying such discussions in the media is crucial as they influence the public opinion as well as public action.

A topic currently occupying a central place in the UK media's climate change coverage is the newly reelected US president, Donald Trump. Mr Trump's view on climate change could be described as sceptical or denying climate change. For instance, such view is visible both in his X (previously Twitter) storyline, which "questions global warming as a scientific fact" (Nordensvard and Ketola 2021: 871), and in his actions, for example, withdrawal from the Paris Climate Accord (The White House 2025: para. 12). Mr Trump's views on climate change challenge the climate activist narrative and thus receive much critique, especially in the left-leaning media. Studying how left-leaning newspapers frame Donald Trump in the context of climate change can provide insight into the dynamics between climate activists and climate change sceptics. Despite the value of such research, the framing of Donald Trump in the UK newspapers remains underresearched.

Conceptual metaphors are recognised to be useful object for research in discourse analysis for their ability to privilege one understanding of reality over other by foregrounding some aspects of a concept and hindering other (Koteyko 2012: 26). Discourse metaphors which will be the focus of this thesis are especially useful conceptual metaphors for analysing the arguments pursued by a certain publication. The concept was introduced by Zinken et al (2008), building on Conceptual Metaphor Theory by Lakoff and Johnson (1980). Zinken et. al (2008: 241) define discourse metaphors as "relatively stable metaphorical mappings that function as key framing devices within a particular

discourse over a certain period of time”. Not only are discourse metaphors the most frequent conceptual metaphors in discourse, but they are also more variable than other conceptual metaphors, allowing speakers to change them in pursuit of their rhetorical goals (Zinken et al 2008: 243, 253). Discourse metaphors were an object of research in several studies on the UK newspapers’ framing of climate change (e.g. Atanasova and Koteyko 2017, Renzi et al 2016). However, the mentioned studies concentrated on the general trends in the use of metaphors or on the framing of climate change mitigation strategies. None of the studies researched the conceptual framing of Donald Trump.

To fill the research gap, this thesis aims to describe and analyse how metaphors are employed in the coverage of Donald Trump’s first (8.11.2016-20.01.2017) and second (6.11.2024-20.01.2025) presidential victories in the climate change opinion section in The Guardian. The author selected the periods from presidential victories to inauguration as the events happening during that period (presidential victory, inaugurational speech, etc) were expected to motivate numerous publications on the topic. Additionally, in order to determine whether the identified trends depend on the political position of the publication (left-leaning or right-leaning), the metaphors used in the second presidential victory’s coverage in the left leaning publication The Guardian (6.11.2024-20.01.2025) are compared to the metaphors employed by the right-leaning publication The Sun (6.11.2024-20.01.2025). The thesis addresses the following research questions:

- (1) How are metaphors employed to conceptually frame Donald Trump in the context of climate change in the periods of his first (8.11.2016–20.01.2017) and second (6.11.2024-20.01.2025) presidential victories in The Guardian?
- (2) How does the use of metaphors to conceptually frame Donald Trump in the context of climate change in the period of Mr Trump’s second presidential victory (6.11.2024-20.01.2025) in The Guardian differ from the metaphors used in a similar context in The Sun?

To answer the questions, a qualitative analysis of all the climate change opinion content by the newspapers The Guardian and The Sun in the period 6.11.2024–20.01.2025 and only The Guardian in the period 8.11.2016–20.01.2017 was conducted. The metaphors used to conceptually frame Donald Trump were identified and analysed using the Metaphor Identification Procedure. The findings of the earlier studies on metaphors in the UK newspapers (Atanasova and Koteyko 2017, Woods et al 2016) allowed the author to hypothesise that The Guardian war metaphors will be frequent in The Guardian and religion metaphors will be frequent in The Sun. However, taking into consideration the changes in discourse that happened after the mentioned studies were published (Gillings and Darrell 2023), the author expected to record changes in the use of metaphors in the climate change coverage of the newspapers.

This thesis is divided into two main sections. The first section provides a theoretical background for using Conceptual Metaphor Theory in analysing media discourse and reviews relevant literature for this thesis. The second section is divided into methodology, results, and discussion.

## **1 METAPHORS IN THE UK NEWSPAPERS**

This section will outline a theoretical background and explore the notions relevant to this thesis. Additionally, it will review the studies on metaphors in UK newspapers in the context of climate change. A special emphasis will be placed on the studies by Atanasova and Koteyko (2017) and Woods et al (2012) that, similar to the topic of the current thesis, analysed religious and/or war conceptual metaphors in UK newspapers.

### **1.1 Metaphors in Discourse**

It is necessary to clarify the difference between the two main approaches to metaphor: the classical theory of metaphor and the cognitive linguistic view. This thesis uses the cognitive

linguistic view as a theoretical base. The classical view of metaphor dates to fundamental works, *Poetics and Rhetoric*, by the Greek philosopher Aristotle (Ortony 1993: 3). Metaphor was defined as concepts used outside of their conventional meaning to express a similar concept (Lakoff 1993: 202). In the 20th century, the classical view of metaphor was replaced by the cognitive linguistic view of metaphor.

The cognitive linguistic view of metaphor suggests that metaphor plays a much more important role in our lives than the classical view of metaphor recognises (Lakoff 1993: 202-203). More specifically, according to this view, metaphor is a matter of not only language but also thought. The earliest mention known to the author of this thesis is Black's interaction view of metaphor, which suggested that metaphor requires a speaker to use a system of implications (Black 1962: 46). In other words metaphors may function as "cognitive instruments," creating and allowing us to access new aspects of reality (Ortony 1993: 5). A theory that took a step further was introduced by Michael Reddy (1992) and theorised by Lakoff and Johnson as Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) in *Metaphors We Live By* (1980) (Lakoff 1992: 203-204).

The CMT redefines metaphor, claiming it "is a mode of thought, defined by a systematic mapping from a source to a target domain" (Lakoff 1992: 208). According to CMT, people "understand" abstract concepts (target domain) in terms of concrete concepts (source domain) (Kövecses 2010: 4). Such understanding is possible because of the presence of correspondences, often referred to as mappings between the two conceptual domains (Kövecses 2010: 4,7). The relationship CONCEPTUAL DOMAIN A IS CONCEPTUAL DOMAIN B is called conceptual metaphor (CM), written in small capital letters (Kövecses 2010: 4). Metaphorical entailments refer to mapping additional knowledge about the source domain to the target domain (Kövecses 2010: 122). Metaphorical expressions should not be confused with CMs. The former refer to a word or expression used not in the literal sense

(metaphorically), whereas CMs “underline conceptually all the metaphorical expressions listed underneath it” and do not occur in the text (Kövecses 2010: 4).

CMs are widely accepted as a useful object for study in discourse analysis because they are often used to make the text coherent (Kövecses 2010: 286), and, more importantly, because metaphors are often exploited for rhetorical functions (Kövecses 2010: 288). Lakoff and Johnson (1980) first explored applying CMs to analyse discourse. They argue that CMs are useful for researching discourse because of their partial representation of reality (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 10). CMs draw our attention to one aspect of a concept and thus draw our attention away from another aspect. The ability to represent reality partially, “may create social realities for us” and thus influence our actions (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 156). Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 156, Lakoff 1991: 1) noted that because CM represents reality partially, it could be used to mislead the audience.

The more recent study by Zinken et al (2003, 2008) suggests that CMT does not account for social and cultural influences on CMs (Zinken et al 2003: 5). They also argued that, the CMT accounts for only a small part of CMs employed in discourse (Zinken et al 2008: 253). They proposed a useful notion to add to the cognitive view of metaphor – a discourse metaphor. Zinken et al (2008) distinguish between two CMs: primary CMs and discourse metaphors. According to this view, primary CMs are independent of time and universal conceptual mappings acquired as a result of “recurrent correlations between sensor-motor experience and subjective judgement of this experience’ (Zinken et al 2008: 246, 252). It is hypothesised that there is a limited number of primary conceptual metaphors from which all the other metaphors are derived from (Zinken et al: 252). Examples of such metaphors are KNOWING IS SEEING or AFFECTION IS WARMTH. Despite being fundamental, primary conceptual metaphors are rarely present in discourse. Derived from primary CMs discourse metaphors, however, they are widely used (Zinken et al 2008: 253).

Zinken et al (2008: 241) define discourse metaphors as “relatively stable metaphorical mappings that function as key framing devices within a particular discourse over a certain period of time”. Unlike primary conceptual metaphors, which are considered universal and independent of time, discourse metaphors evolve in time and are influenced by the cultural component (Zinken et al 2008: 253). Discourse metaphors are secondary conceptual metaphors, which implies that they are derived from several primary metaphors (Zinken et al 2003: 15, Zinken et al 2008: 253). Despite that, it is argued that the meaning of discourse metaphors is shaped mostly by the time and context in which the linguistic expression occurs. Which primary CMs a discourse metaphor is composed of has a minimal influence on the meaning of a discourse metaphor (Zinken et al, 2008: 253).

Discourse metaphors are very frequent and culturally widespread tools of communication. They provide a useful framework for analysing discourse. Discourse metaphors “can resonate across a wide variety of discourses, topics and over time”, making them effective communication tools (Zinken et al 2008: 247). They have become an object for study among media researchers (e.g. Koteyko 2012, Nerlich and Jaspal 2013, Atanasova and Koteyko 2017) as they allow one to analyse what understanding of an issue is being highlighted or downplayed by the author. This thesis adopts the notion of discourse metaphors to study the conceptual framing of Donald Trump.

## **1.2 Climate Change Coverage in the UK Newspapers**

The studies on climate change in UK newspapers show that a distinction must be made between the media coverage of climate change before the Paris Agreement in 2015 and after, due to a shift in the UK media discourse. Ruiu (2020: 23), who studied scepticism of climate change before the year 2016 in the UK media, found that the ‘balanced’ coverage of climate change, or inclusion of both climate activist and climate change sceptical views, was present both in left-leaning and right-leaning newspapers. A later study that examined the extended

period of 2003–2019 (Gillings and Dayrell 2023: 128) confirmed Ruiu’s findings. Gillings and Darrell add that after 2015, media coverage shifted from providing ‘balanced’ coverage of climate change to encouraging action for mitigating climate change. The change in media is likely to be because in 2015, the international goals to mitigate climate change were set in Paris (Gillings & Dayrell 2023: 114). The study also reports that although both tabloid and broadsheet newspapers have switched from a sceptical view, they differ in coverage. When broadsheet newspapers emphasise the issue's urgency, tabloid newspapers concentrate on the “levy for businesses” (Gillings & Dayrell 2023: 128). The findings show that after 2015, the UK newspapers generally promoted climate activist views, although differing in the support for the approach in the actions needed for climate change mitigation. This directly impacts the extent to which literature on metaphors in the context of climate change in UK newspapers could be used in this thesis. The majority of related studies were conducted before 2015, which might make their results no longer applicable to the current situation.

According to the analysis of the climate change coverage by British newspapers in 2011–2021, The Guardian has published “the most climate-relevant editorials” among the main UK newspapers, which largely supported climate action (Gabbatiss et al.: para. 31). Moreover, in January 2025, after the BBC, the Guardian attracted the most online traffic by audience among the left-leaning British Newspapers (Press Gazette 2025). The publication actively promotes the cause of climate activists. Starting in 2019, the newspaper pledged: “to report relentlessly on this emergency each day – its causes, consequences and solutions” (The Guardian 2024: para. 1). Attracting high online traffic and being the most active publisher of articles promoting the climate activist cause makes The Guardian the most suited for analysing climate change discourse as a representative of climate-activist UK broadsheet newspapers.

The right-leaning tabloid newspaper *The Sun* ranked fourth in January 2025 among the UK newspapers attracting the most online traffic (Press Gazette 2025). Additionally, *The Sun*, despite its commitment to support the cause of reducing global temperatures (Gabbatiss et al.: para. 14), is recorded to show scepticism towards the “kind of action being undertaken” in reaching climate mitigation goals (Gabbatiss et al.: para. 57). High online traffic and sceptical views on climate activism make the newspaper useful for this thesis to contrast with *The Guardian*’s climate activist language.

The use of metaphors in the UK newspapers in the context of climate change is an understudied topic. In the last two decades, only six studies that analysed the use of metaphors in the climate change discourse of UK newspapers were published. All the studies analysed the discourse before the Paris Agreement in 2015, which indicates that the result of the studies may no longer apply. The studies could be divided into two groups: the ones that analysed the general trends in the use of particular source domains in the climate change coverage (Woods et al. 2012, Atanasova and Koteyko 2017) and the studies that analysed the coverage of an important climate change-related subject (Nerlich and Koteyko 2009, Koteyko 2012, Nerlich and Jaspal 2013, Renzi et al. 2016). The subject-oriented studies focused on various climate change-related subjects, including the conceptual framing of market-driven sustainability (Koteyko 2012) and the conceptual framing of nuclear power (Renzi et al. 2016). None of the studies covered the conceptual framing of politicians.

Apart from being dated, a significant shortcoming of the studies is the incomparability of their results. The studies used different procedures for the identification and interpretation of CMs, making the results challenging to compare. For instance, Renzi et al. (2016) used Type Hierarchy Analysis, whereas Koteyko (2012) used Critical Metaphor Analysis. Both procedures are suitable for identifying and analysing discourse metaphors; however, they invite the researcher to concentrate on different aspects of metaphor and thus

influence the results. Critical Metaphors Analysis procedure (Charteris-Black 2004) was the only procedure shared by some studies. In addition, the procedure was employed in the study by Atanasova and Koteyko (2017), which is used by the current thesis to evaluate the trends. Critical Metaphor Analysis is thus the best suited procedure for analysing metaphors for the current thesis.

Two studies on the general trends in the use of metaphors in UK newspapers (Atanasova and Koteyko 2017, Woods et al 2012) were selected for the review. In the study on religious metaphors in the UK newspapers in the context of climate change in the period 2003–2008 Woods et al. (2012: 335–336) found that the right-leaning newspapers (such as The Daily Mail, The Sun, etc.) employed religious metaphors to denigrate climate change by representing climate science as religion or faith, or by representing climate activism as religious extremism. For example, they report that “heresy” and “blasphemy” were frequently used to describe the claims of climate change critics from the perspective of climate activists (2012: 332). Woods et al. (2012: 334) observed that in 2007 and 2008, there were singular instances of left-leaning newspapers using religion conceptual domain to respond to the criticism from climate sceptics. They described two approaches employed. One approach used was to “reverse the assignment of the target domain” through, for example, presenting climate change scepticism as religious behaviour; another approach is to describe the source domain sympathetically, for instance, by calling climate scientists ignored prophets with true predictions (Woods et al. 2012: 334–335). Such instances of climate activists applying religious metaphors were an exception in 2003–2008. However, they provide a useful foundation for further analysis.

The study by Atanasova and Koteyko (2017) looked at what metaphors were used in climate change coverage in the opinion content of the Guardian and Mail newspapers. Looking at the period 2006–2013, the study found that The Guardian used war and The Mail

used religion as the most frequent source domains (Atanasova and Koteyko 2017: 455,457). Religion was mainly used to downplay the urgency of the issue by undermining the authority of climate scientists. For instance, climate change activists were described as religious fanatics (Atanasova and Koteyko 2017: 458–462). The findings agree with those of Woods et al. However, Atanasova and Koteyko did not report any cases of left-leaning newspapers using religious metaphors. The war conceptual domain was used to communicate the urgency of climate change mitigation and describe the discourse around the issue (Atanasova and Koteyko 2017: 458–462).

Both studies emphasise that religious and war metaphors have been prominent in the UK newspaper coverage of climate change. The discussed studies present a general overview of the fluctuations in the use of war and religion metaphorical expressions in the UK newspapers. The studies, however, paid little attention to the conceptual framing of a particular climate change-related subject (like Donald Trump). Discourse metaphors are flexible; in other words, their meaning could change depending on the context, time and rhetorical goals of the author. Evidently, there is a need to examine not only the general trends in the use of religion and war metaphors, but also how they are used to frame a specific subject. This thesis aims to contribute to filling the gap in the research by analysing the use of discourse metaphors to frame Donald Trump.

### **1.3 Implications for the Present Study**

Discourse metaphors provide a useful framework for the analysis of discourse. Discourse metaphors are frequent in discourse and they can change depending on time and context. In addition, the framings promoted by the discourse metaphors can resonate beyond the text they are used which makes them effective rhetorical tools. Studying the discourse metaphors used in the media allows one to analyse the argumentation pursued by an author and the possible implications of that.

Despite Mr Trump being a frequent topic in the UK media, none of the studies analysed how he is conceptually framed. The source domain-oriented studies of the metaphors used in the context of climate change in the UK newspapers provide a useful insight into the general tendencies in the coverage of climate change. However, they are insufficient for analysing the conceptual framing of particular subjects such as Donald Trump. Consequently, this thesis aims to fill the gap by analysing how discourse metaphors are used to conceptually frame Donald Trump by The Guardian and The Sun. The findings of the context-oriented studies (Atanasova and Koteyko 2017, Woods et al 2012) allow to hypothesise that the source domain war will be frequent in the newspaper The Guardian and the source domain religion will be frequent in The Sun.

## **2 CONCEPTUAL FRAMING OF DONALD TRUMP IN THE GUARDIAN AND THE SUN IN THE CONTEXT OF CLIMATE CHANGE**

This thesis aims to describe and analyse how metaphors are employed in the coverage of Donald Trump in the climate change opinion section in The Guardian. In addition, the study aims to establish possible trends by comparing the metaphors found in The Guardian to the metaphors found in The Sun. The section is divided into three main parts: methodology, results and discussion. The methodology section will explain the most important choices made during analysis, including article selection, narrowing down the study's focus and identifying metaphorical expressions. The result section reports the identified metaphors and lists their possible purposes with examples. In the last section, the findings are discussed in the context of previous research on the topic and the possible implications of the results are suggested.

## 2.1 Methodology

Articles published during the period from Donald Trump's first and second presidential victories to his inaugurations were selected for analysis. The periods will be further referred to as: the first period (06.11.2024–20.01.2025) and the second period (8.11.2016–20.01.2017). Presidential victories were selected for analysis. The mentioned periods were chosen because the author of this thesis expected the events of the periods (Mr Trump's presidential victories, Mr Trump's inauguration speeches, etc.) to motivate numerous publications on Donald Trump. The articles were selected from The Guardian's "Climate Crisis" opinion section and "Climate Change and Environment" opinion section in The Sun. The articles were around 1000 in The Guardian and around 150-800 words in The Sun. The articles were selected from the opinion section because such writing is "ranked among the best examples of persuasive writing" and therefore serves as especially useful material for researching how the media conceptualises specific issues, like climate change (Atanasova and Koteyko 2017: 455).

The selected 106 articles were read to identify metaphorical expressions that were used to conceptually frame Donald Trump. For identifying metaphorical expressions, the author used the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) (Pragglejaz Group 2007). MIP involves examining each lexical unit closely to identify whether the word is used in its literal sense (meaning recorded in a dictionary) or metaphorically. The author referred to the Meriam-Wester English Dictionary when needed. Metaphorical expressions were then grouped under their source domains (e.g. religion and war/violence). The author also analysed the conceptual framing of the concepts thematically related to Donald Trump, such as the presidency of Donald Trump, the electorate of Donald Trump, climate change in the context of Donald Trump's presidential victory, etc.

The next step included identifying and analysing the discourse metaphors used to conceptually frame Donald Trump. The author relied on the identification, interpretation, and explanation steps of Charteris-Black's (2004) Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA). Assisting templates and questions for the analysis were used as described in Imani's (2022) "Systematic Step-by-Step Guideline."

The CMA identification step involves identifying: the source and target domains, conceptual metaphors, and conceptual keys. The step will be illustrated with an example: "His [Donald Trump's] evangelical base, eager to advance the biblical apocalypse, will love him for it." (Monbiot 7.11.2024). Using MIP, the author identified that *biblical apocalypse* is used not in its literal sense but metaphorically. The identified source domain is *biblical apocalypse*, and the target domain is *climate change*. In other words, the author of the article uses biblical apocalypse to talk about climate change. Several other metaphorical expressions with similar source and target domains were identified (see Appendix 1). The mentioned metaphorical expressions were then grouped under the discourse metaphor, CLIMATE CHANGE IS BIBLICAL APOCALYPSE. Grouping the mentioned discourse metaphors with the other similar to it discourse metaphors, the author of the article then proposed the conceptual key: DONALD TRUMP'S CLIMATE INACTION IS RELIGIOUS BEHAVIOUR. Conceptual key is a discourse metaphor that includes several other discourse metaphors (Imani 2022: 9-10).

The interpretation step connects discourse metaphors to the context and prepares for the explanation of the metaphor. The step includes interpretation of tones, purposes, mappings, and topics related to the metaphors. The final step is the explanation of the metaphors. The step requires the identification of ideological motivations based on the results of the previous steps. The results were then grouped according to the shared purposes. For example, the author of the article proposes that the motivation behind the discourse

metaphor DONALD TRUMP'S CLIMATE INACTION IS RELIGIOUS BEHAVIOUR is to undermine the authority of Donald Trump by presenting his actions as being guided by faith and not reason.

Lastly, the author of the thesis compared the metaphors used by the newspapers in different periods. The metaphors identified in the first presidential victory were compared to the metaphors identified in the period of the second presidential victory in the Guardian. The purpose of the comparison was to evaluate whether the metaphors used to frame Donald Trump changed in time, if yes then how. In addition, the period of the second presidential victory in The Guardian was compared to the same period in The Sun. The purpose of the comparison is to evaluate whether the established trends depend on a publication's political position (left-leaning or right-leaning).

## **2.2 Results**

In total, 106 articles were analysed: 36 published in the period of the first presidential victory in The Guardian, 55 published in the period of the second presidential victory in The Guardian, and 15 published in the period of the second presidential victory in the Sun. The most common source domains of the metaphors were war/violence and religion.

In the 36 climate change opinion articles published in The Guardian during the first presidential victory, war/violence, religion, infancy, magic and criminality source domains were recorded to conceptually frame Donald Trump (Table 1). The source domain war/violence was the most frequent. In the 55 articles published in The Guardian during the second presidential victory, only the source domains war/violence and religion used to conceptually frame Donald Trump were recorded. The number of metaphorical expressions identified in each period in The Guardian is reported in Table 1.

Table 1. Metaphorical expressions with Donald Trump as the target domain in The Guardian

	Number of articles	Source Domain	Number of recorded metaphorical expression(s)	Number of articles containing metaphorical expression(s)
The period of the first presidential victory in The Guardian	36	War/violence	9	6
		Criminality	3	3
		Religion	1	1
		Infancy	1	1
		Magic	1	1
The period of the second presidential victory in The Guardian	55	War/violence	17	15
		Religion	16	5

In the 15 articles published in The Sun during the second presidential victory, no metaphors used to frame Donald Trump were recorded. However, metaphors with the source domain religion were used to conceptually frame a climate activist UK politician, Ed Miliband.

### 2.2.1 Metaphors and Arguments in The Guardian in the Period of Donald Trump's First Presidential Victory

The analysis of the metaphors used in the period of Mr Trump's first presidential victory in The Guardian showed that war/violence metaphors were the most frequent. The purposes of the identified war/violence metaphors in The Guardian in the context of climate change could be grouped under the purposes of portraying Donald Trump as an enemy and as a cruel figure. A religion metaphor was used to portray Donald Trump as a threat. The purpose of criminality, infancy, and magic metaphors was to undermine Donald Trump's authority.

War/violence metaphors were used to portray Donald Trump as an enemy. War/violence language is extensively used to conceptually frame Donald Trump, for instance: "They give me hope, in some portion of humanity, the portion that will **resist** Trump and **defend** our ideals [bold mine]" (Solnit 29.12.2016) and "But it looks as if the

only swamps he'll drain will be real ones, as his team launches its **war** on the natural world [bold mine]"(Monbiot 30.11.2016). In the first example, Donald Trump is framed as an enemy in the war with the climate activists. The abstract calls for 'protecting' climate activists' ideas against Mr Trump. The second example frames climate change as a war in which Donald Trump is the enemy of the 'natural world'.

War/violence metaphors were used to portray Donald Trump as a cruel figure. The metaphors were used to frame his actions as acts of violence, for instance, "**smash** the global architecture of the Paris accords [bold mine]" (McKibben 18.11.2016) and "other politicians, as well as ordinary citizens, tried to get the **juggernaut** to stop [bold mine]" (Solnit 20.01.2017). In the first example, Donald Trump's actions are portrayed as cruel, and in the second example, Donald Trump is conceptualised as a destructive and unstoppable force.

A religious metaphor was used to portray Donald Trump as a threat. There was one instance of religious metaphor being used to frame the presidency of Donald Trump as a Biblical apocalypse:

Paul Krugman identifies it as a creed of quietism, conceding: "It's definitely tempting to conclude that the world is going to **hell**, but that there's nothing you can do about it, so why not just make your own garden grow?" Ultimately, he chooses engagement **to save the soul**: "I don't see how you can hang on to your own self-respect unless you're willing to stand up for the truth [bold mine]." (Williams 14.11.2016)

Such conceptual framing uses the concept of Rapture. According to Christian teachings, the rapture implies that the faithful will be saved before the apocalypse. Williams (14.11.2016) uses religious metaphor to construct an argument that Donald Trump poses a threat to the world, and the only way to avoid such a threat is through climate action.

Infancy, magic and criminality metaphors were used to undermine the authority of Donald Trump. Donald Trump was conceptually framed as a child, a criminal and a magician to portray him as unprofessional and unsuitable for the role of a president. For instance, Donald Trump was framed as a criminal in: "But wrecking it would be an act of political vandalism, one that would define Trump's legacy before he has even taken office."

(McKibben 18.11.2016) and “Deliberately manufacturing doubt about climate science in order to protect the profits of a few fossil fuel companies might just turn out be the biggest crime in human history” (McGibbon 21.11.2016). Mr Trump was framed as a magician and as a child in:

Wave the **magic wand** and the problem goes away. Those pesky pollution laws, carbon caps and clean-power plans: swish them away and the golden age of blue-collar employment will return [bold mine]. (Monbiot 23.11.2016)

Think, if you will, of the Paris agreement as a toy painstakingly assembled over 25 years by many of the world’s leading lights. It has now been handed, as a gift, to the new **child-emperor**, and everyone is waiting to see what he’ll do [bold mine]. (McKibben 18.11.2016)

The above examples use metaphors to frame Donald Trump in different ways; however, all the framings serve to undermine Mr Trump's authority.

## 2.2.2 Metaphors and Arguments in The Guardian in the Period of Donald

### Trump’s Second Presidential Victory

The analysis of metaphors used in the period of Donald Trump’s second presidential victory showed that *war/violence* and *religious* metaphors were used to conceptually frame Donald Trump. War/violence metaphors were used to construct arguments similar to those in the article published during the first presidential victory. However, the argument pursued with the religious metaphors changed.

War/violence metaphors were used to portray Donald Trump as an enemy. *War/violence* metaphors were used to portray Donald Trump as an enemy both to the ecosystem and to the climate activists. For instance: “Trump has pledged to **wage war** on planet Earth – and it will take a progressive revolution to stop him [bold mine].” (Monbiot 7.11.2024) and “The system I propose offers far more than a **defence** against Trumpism [bold mine]” (Zucman 20.01.2025). In both examples, Mr Trump’s opposition to climate activists’ views and actions regarding climate change mitigation are being framed as a military offence.

War/violence metaphors were used to portray Donald Trump as a cruel figure. Often, concepts referring to violence or destruction were used when referring to Mr Trump. For instance, consider the two abstracts: “Wu has already shown how action by a Green New Deal from Below can resist the coming Trump **onslaught** [bold mine]” (Brecher 21.11.2024) and “...making his [Donald Trump’s] **assault** on Earth systems much harder to reverse [bold mine]” (Monbiot 07.11.2024). In the two examples, Mr Trump is in the role of the assaulter, and the ecosystem is in the role of victim. Violence language highlights the cruelty of Donald Trump’s climate change denying views in relation to the ecosystem.

Religion metaphors were used to undermine Donald Trump’s authority. Religious metaphors portrayed Donald Trump as an irrational figure whose actions regarding climate policy are based on Christian faith. The argument is constructed based on the widespread understanding in the UK that science is rational, whereas religion is “irrational and faith-based” (Inwood, 1995 in Woods et al: 330, Smith, 1997 in Woods et al: 330). For instance:

The majority of US voters have now chosen the destructive path. The message of Trump’s victory seems clear: to hell with your reasoned arguments. Give us reassuring **homilies** and **blood sacrifice** [bold mine] (Monbiot 7.11.2024).

In this passage, Monbiot uses religious metaphors to promote the argument that Donald Trump and his supporters prefer religious teaching over scientific facts in the context of climate change.

Moreover, *religious* metaphors were also used to conceptually frame Donald Trump as a religious fanatic.

His [Donald Trump’s] evangelical base, eager to advance the **biblical apocalypse**, will love him for it. Most simply deny climate breakdown. Others perceive events such as floods and fires not as warnings, but as joyous portents of the end of times: a great cleansing, in which the righteous will be **uplifted to sit at the right hand of God**, while their enemies will be cast into the fiery pit. What we will see under a new Trump presidency is a neat alignment of the interests of fossil fuel companies and a constituency gunning for Armageddon...[bold mine] (Monbiot 07.11.2024)

Similarly to the previous argument, Donald Trump was framed as a Christian believer. In addition, the author used the entailments of the metaphor to develop the argument undermining the authority of Donald Trump. Climate change was framed as a biblical

apocalypse, and Donald Trump's inaction to mitigate climate change was framed as the behaviour of a religious fanatic in anticipation of the end of times. An employed in the abstract discourse metaphor, CLIMATE CHANGE IS BYBLICAL APOCALYPSE has an entailment, which is especially useful for understanding the argument behind the metaphor – the Christian rapture. For instance, consider:

The Christian **rapture** and the tech rapture are essentially the same belief. Both are examples of “substance dualism”: the idea that the mind or soul can exist in a realm separate from the body. This idea often drives a desire to escape from the grubby immanence of life on Earth. Once the rapture is achieved, there will be no need for a living planet [bold mine]. (Monbiot 21.11.2024)

In the framing of Donald Trump, rapture is presented to offer a solution to climate change. Thus, it provides a religious explanation for the inaction of Mr Trump and his supporters to lower the effects of climate change.

Evidently, the conceptual framing of Donald Trump during the first and the second presidential victories in The Guardian differs. There was much more variety in the metaphors used to conceptually frame Donald Trump during the first presidential victory, whereas the conceptual framing of the second presidential victory is limited to war/violence and religion metaphors. Religion metaphors seem to become much more prominent in the coverage of the second presidential victory as opposed to the first. In addition, the target domain of the religious metaphors was reversed: climate activists were the target domain of the religious metaphor during the period of the first presidential victory to bring forward the good qualities of the faithfulness to ones beliefs whereas in the second presidential victory the target domain was assigned to Donald Trump to portray him as illogical and unreliable. Lastly, it must be noted that the use of war metaphors to conceptually frame Donald Trump remained stable during the two periods.

### **2.2.3 Metaphors and arguments in the Sun**

Although Donald Trump was a frequent subject in the opinion articles by The Sun in the context of climate change, the author of this thesis found no metaphorical expressions

conceptually framing Donald Trump. However, there were four metaphorical expressions (in three articles) that used *religion* as a source domain to conceptually frame UK climate activist politician Ed Miliband. Consider: “This COP **crusade** might mean that Miliband can say the UK is a world leader on clean energy [bold mine]” (Armstrong 12.11.2024) and “while other oil-rich nations are also ramping up production, we are saddled with an **eco zealot** Energy Secretary winding down North Sea drilling to rely mostly on unreliable wind and solar [bold mine]” (The Sun 21.01.2025). Both examples use religious metaphors to undermine Ed Miliband's authority by conceptually framing him as a religious fanatic. Framing a climate activist politician negatively could be explained by the fact that the Sun opposes radical action to mitigate climate change. The Sun’s use of religious metaphors to negatively frame a politician with conflicting to the Sun’s views is similar to The Guardian’s use of religious metaphors to conceptually frame Donald Trump.

### 2.3 Discussion

The Guardian used a variety of metaphors to conceptually frame Donald Trump during his first presidential victory: *war/violence*, *religion*, *criminality*, *infancy*, and *magic*. The framing of Mr Trump during the second presidential victory by The Guardian was limited to *war/violence* and *religion* metaphors. The use of religious metaphors by left-leaning newspaper The Guardian in the context of climate change seems to be a new phenomenon. In previous studies, left-leaning newspapers have not been observed using religious metaphors in the context of climate change (with the exception of Woods et al. 2017). This study, however, has recorded several instances of the use of religious metaphors to respond to Donald Trump’s climate-denying views. The war/violence metaphors were found in The Guardian’s coverage of both presidential victories, which suggests the continuity of the trend recorded by Atanasova and Koteyko (2017) of using the conceptual domain of war to advance climate activists’ views.

All the metaphors seem to be employed with the same rhetorical purpose: to portray Donald Trump in an unfavourable light. Donald Trump's views on climate change could be described as sceptical or denying climate change. Such views challenge the Guardian's climate activist position. It could be argued that The Guardian advances the climate activists' viewpoint by undermining their opponent, Donald Trump. In logic, the act of attacking the opponent instead of his claims is called an Ad Hominem fallacy (Govier 2014:157). Such a tactic is considered to be a poor argumentation strategy; nevertheless, it is considered to be convincing. (Govier 2014:157).

The right-leaning newspaper, the Sun, was not recorded to use metaphors to conceptually frame Donald Trump. The publication seems to be continuing the trend of using religious metaphors to undermine climate activists' authority. The trend is an old phenomenon recorded in the earlier studies by Atanasova and Koteyko (2017) and Woods et.al (2012). After the 2015 Paris Agreement, the newspapers were observed to abandon climate change scepticism and advocate for more climate action (Gillings & Dayrell 2023). For that reason, the author of the thesis expected to record the change in the climate change discourse of The Sun. However, the study found that the tendency to use religious metaphors to undermine the authority of climate activists seems to continue despite The Sun's change of its official position in 2015 (Gabbatiss et al.: para. 14).

Conceptually framing Donald Trump in radical terms might contribute to the polarisation of the climate change issue, making collaboration between climate activists and sceptics challenging. In prior studies, polarisation was foregrounded as a consequence of using religion and war metaphors in climate change discourse (Atanasova and Koteyko 2017, Woods et al. 2012). The results of the current thesis show that both climate activists and climate change sceptics continue to use metaphors to undermine their opponents, which

could be a sign of continuing or even worsening polarisation regarding the issue of climate change in the UK newspapers.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Conceptual Metaphors Theory developed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) provided a foundation for understanding how people think and communicate. However, the theory was critiqued for failing to account for the less stable metaphorical mappings often used as rhetorical tools in discourse — discourse metaphors. Zinken et al (2008) introduced the notion of discourse metaphors to account for the less stable (than the primary conceptual metaphors) conceptual mapping that depends on the time and context. Discourse metaphors were recognised as a useful object for research for analysing discourse.

Discourse metaphors were successfully used by several studies on the climate change discourse in the UK media (e.g. Renzi et al 2016). The studies by Atanasova and Koteyko (2017) and Woods et al (2012) provide insight into how UK newspapers promote their arguments in support or against climate action. More specifically, they report that, in general, war metaphors are used to communicate climate activist views (Atanasova and Koteyko 2017), whereas religious metaphors were used to communicate climate change sceptical perspectives (Woods et al 2012, Atanasova and Koteyko 2017). The studies provide a useful insight on how the newspaper's tendencies of using metaphors, however they do not explain how discourse metaphors are used to frame a particular subject, like Donald Trump.

With the reelection of Donald Trump as US president, Mr Trump became a frequent topic in the UK media in the context of climate change. His view on climate change could be described as sceptical which probably motivated the critique of him in the climate change context. Despite him being a frequent subject for discussions in the UK media, the conceptual framing of Mr Trump in the context of climate change in the UK media remains

understudied. To fill the research gap and contribute to the research on discourse metaphors used in climate change discourses, this thesis analysed the use of discourse metaphors to conceptually frame Donald Trump by the leading UK newspapers: the left-leaning newspaper The Guardian and the right-leaning newspaper The Sun in the context of climate change.

The periods from Donald Trump's presidential victory until the presidential inauguration in the first and second presidential terms were selected for the analysis. The discourse metaphors were identified and analysed using Critical Metaphor Analysis (Charteris-Black 2004).

The results of the study indicate that The Guardian used *war/violence*, *religion*, *magic*, *infancy* and *criminality* metaphors to conceptually frame Donald Trump during the first presidential victory and *war/violence* and *religion* metaphors during the second presidential victory. The metaphors mentioned seem to have the purpose of undermining Donald Trump's authority and presenting him in an unfavourable light. Taking into consideration the sceptical views of Mr Trump on climate change and the climate activist agenda of The Guardian, the purpose of presenting Donald Trump in an unfavourable light seems to be to advance climate activist views. The right-leaning publication The Sun was not recorded to use metaphors to conceptually frame Donald Trump. However, religious metaphors were used in The Sun to undermine the authority of climate activist Ed Miliband. Religious metaphors were used to advance the opposite arguments by the newspapers by assigning them to different target domains (Donald Trump in The Guardian and Ed Miliband in The Sun).

This study illustrated how metaphors, primarily religion and war/violence, may be used as a rhetorical tool to advance arguments supporting climate action or advocating for less climate action. The thesis draws attention to the possible consequences of using such

radical discourse metaphors to negatively frame the opponent in the climate change debates. Undermining the opponent may have a poor effect on collaboration that is needed to mitigate climate change. This thesis examined short periods of the coverage of Donald Trump by the UK newspapers. The quantitative study examining the trends in the use of metaphors to frame Donald Trump over the longer periods of time may be needed to confirm the present findings.

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# APPENDICES

## Appendix 1

Abstracts (The Guardian 6.11.2024 - 20.01.2025)	Metaphorical words/ expressions	Target domain	Source domain	Features of target domain represented by source domain	Source domain	Target domain	Source domain	Conceptual metaphor
<p>His evangelical base, eager to advance the biblical apocalypse, will love him for it. Most simply deny climate breakdown. Others perceive events such as floods and fires not as warnings, but as joyous portents of the end of times: a great cleansing, in which the righteous will be uplifted to sit at the right hand of God, while their enemies will be cast into the fiery pit. What we will see under a new Trump presidency is a neat alignment of the interests of fossil fuel companies and a constituency gunning for Armageddon (and hoping that Benjamin Netanyahu will assist its delivery). (Mombiot 7.11.2024)</p>	<p>Biblical apocalypse; end of times; great cleansing; righteous; uplifted; Armageddon; portents of the end of times</p>	<p>Climate change</p>	Biblical apocalypse	<p>Is biblical apocalypse</p>	<p>Climate change</p>	<p>Biblical apocalypse</p>	<p>Climate change</p>	<p>CLIMATE CHANGE IS BYBILICAL APOCALYPSE</p>
			End of times					
			Great cleansing					
			Armageddon					
<p>The majority of US voters have now chosen the destructive path. The message of Trump's victory seems clear: to hell with your reasoned arguments. Give us reassuring homilies and blood sacrifice. (Mombiot 7.11.2024)</p>	<p>Blood Sacrifice</p>	<p>floods and fires</p>	proteins of the end of times	<p>Have a religious significance; are signs of the end of times</p>	<p>proteins of the end of times</p>	<p>Are victims of not a natural disaster, but of a religious</p>	<p>Have a religious significance; are signs of the end of times</p>	
			blood sacrifice					
<p>Something the majority of Australians want to see continue regardless of what a Trump administration chooses to do. Indeed, this emerges as a general response to the second coming. (Lewis18.11.2024)</p>	<p>second coming</p>	<p>Donald Trump</p>	Jesus Christ	<p>Connected to the Biblical apocalypse</p>	<p>Jesus Christ</p>	<p>Connected to the Biblical apocalypse</p>	<p>Connected to the Biblical apocalypse</p>	
			Jesus Christ					
<p>Today, on the back of record fossil fuel profitability, a protracted backlash against "woke capital" and the second coming of Trump, the calculus has changed. (Buller 15.01.2025)</p>	<p>second coming</p>	<p>Donald Trump</p>	Jesus Christ	<p>Connected to the Biblical apocalypse</p>	<p>Jesus Christ</p>	<p>Connected to the Biblical apocalypse</p>	<p>Connected to the Biblical apocalypse</p>	
			Jesus Christ					
<p>The Christian rapture and the tech rapture are essentially the same belief. Both are examples of "substance dualism": the idea that the mind or soul can exist in a realm separate from the body. This idea often drives a desire to escape from the grubby immanence of life on Earth. Once the rapture is achieved, there will be no need for a living planet. (Mombiot 21.11.2024)</p>	<p>Rapture</p>	<p>Escape from/ solution to climate change</p>	Christian Rapture	<p>Lies in following the Christian teachings</p>	<p>Christian Rapture</p>	<p>Lies in following the Christian teachings</p>	<p>Lies in following the Christian teachings</p>	
			Christian Rapture					

## RESÜMEE

TARTU ÜLIKOOL  
ANGLISTIKA OSAKOND

**Alisa Zaitseva**

**Conceptual framing of Donald Trump in the context of climate change in The Guardian and The Sun. Donald Trumpi kontseptuaalne raamistamine kliimamuutuse kontekstis The Guardianis ja The Sunis.**

bakalaureusetöö

2025

Lehekülgede arv: 32

Annotatsioon:

Käesolevas uurimistöös vaadeldakse ajalehtede The Guardian ja The Sun kliimamuutusega seotud aramusartiklitest diskursuse metafoore (discourse metaphors). Uurimistöö eesmärk on tuvastada ja analüüsida diskursuse metafoore kasutatud Donald Trumpi raamistamiseks. Uuring tugineb Lakoffi ja Johnsoni (1980) mõistmetafooride teooriale ning Zinken et al (2008) hilisemale tööle diskursusmetafooride kohta.

Töö autor valis välja ajavahemikud Donald Trumpi presidendivalimiste võidust novembris kuni tema ametisseastumiseni jaanuaris. Välja valiti artiklid, mis ilmusid ajalehes The Guardian Donald Trumpi esimese ja teise presidendivalimiste ajal. Selleks, et välja selgitada, kas tuvastatud metafoorid sõltuvad väljaande hoiakust (vasakpoolne või parempoolne), analüüsiti teise presidendivõidu ajal parempoolses väljaandes The Sun avaldatud artikleid. Kriitilise metafoorianalüüsi (Charteris-Black 2004) kasutati Donald Trumpi raamistamiseks kasutatud metafooride tuvastamiseks ja analüüsimiseks.

Kokku analüüsiti 106 artiklit. Esimesel perioodil The Guardianis tuvastati Donald Trumpi lähtevaldkonnad: sõda/vägivald, religioon, maagia, kuritegevus ja laps ja teises: sõda/vägivald ja religioon. Guardian kasutas loetletud metafoore Donald Trumpi autoriteedi õõnestamiseks. The Guardianis Donald Trumpi kujutati ohtliku, ettearvamatu inimesena, kellega on võimatu vaielda. The Sunis ei tuvastatud ühtegi metafoori, mida kasutati Donald Trumpi raamistamiseks. Töö autor juhib tähelepanu sellele, et selliste radikaalsete metafooride kasutamine (mõlema väljaande poolt) võib muuta koostöö globaalsete temperatuuride vähendamiseks keeruliseks.

Käesolev uurimistöö on jagatud kaheks põhiosaks. Esimeses osas luuakse teoreetiline taust, defineeritakse kasutatud mõisted ja vaadeldakse asjakohast kirjandust. Teises osas selgitatakse meetodikat, esitatakse tulemused ja lõpetatakse tulemuste aruteluga.

Märksõnad:

Inglise keel ja keeleteadus, mõistmetafooriteooria, metafoor, The Guardian, The Sun, Donald Trump

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**Lõputöö on lubatud kaitsmisele.**

Reeli Torn Leesik  
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