COGNITIVE METAPHORS OF PEACE IN MASS MEDIA: A LINGUISTIC-CULTURAL ANALYSIS OF NEWSVALUE COVERAGE (2020–2025)

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Abstract

This paper investigates the metaphorical representations of the concept of "peace" in international mass media between 2020 and 2025. Employing the theoretical lens of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) and the linguistic world view framework, this study analyzes fifty news articles from NewsValue-affiliated media outlets including The Guardian, BBC News, CNN, Al Jazeera, and Reuters. The primary aim is to identify how metaphors construct, frame, and influence public perceptions of peace within conflict reporting and diplomatic journalism. The findings indicate that peace is predominantly conceptualized through metaphors such as peace as a journey, peace as a fragile object, peace as emotional comfort, and peace as balance or equilibrium. These metaphors reveal deeper cognitive structures and cultural ideologies that shape public understanding of peace, diplomacy, and international relations. Moreover, variations in metaphor usage across regional outlets reflect differing cultural world views and geopolitical contexts.

Keywords

conceptual metaphor, mass media, cognitive linguistics, peace discourse, metaphor analysis, framing, journalism, world view

Introduction

In modern media discourse, peace is not a self-evident or universally understood term but rather a constructed narrative shaped by linguistic choices. As the dominant storyteller in the digital age, mass media plays a central role in shaping public opinion and framing sociopolitical events. From 2020 to 2025, the global geopolitical scene was characterized by intense conflict and negotiation: the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war, tensions in the South China Sea, instability in the Middle East, and post-pandemic efforts at global reconciliation. Within this volatile context, the term "peace" has featured prominently across media coverage, though its meaning often varies depending on political alignment, cultural perspectives,

and journalistic intent. While prior research has extensively documented the metaphorical construction of war (e.g., Chilton, 2004; Musolff, 2006), relatively less attention has been paid to the metaphors used to frame peace. This study seeks to fill this gap by analyzing how international media use metaphors to frame peace as a cognitive and cultural construct. Grounded in Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) and supported by the linguistic world view theory developed by scholars such as Telija (1988), Rezanova et al. (2003), and Kornilov (2002), this research explores how abstract notions of peace are communicated through concrete metaphorical schemas. Such metaphors not only frame how peace is perceived but also influence emotional and ideological engagement with diplomatic efforts. Theoretical Background Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) asserts that human understanding of abstract concepts is fundamentally metaphorical. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), metaphors map knowledge from concrete source domains onto abstract target domains, thereby rendering complex ideas more cognitively accessible. In the case of peace, commonly observed metaphorical mappings include PEACE IS A JOURNEY, PEACE IS A FRAGILE OBJECT, PEACE IS A BALANCE, and PEACE IS A COMMODITY. These metaphors shape how individuals process and evaluate political narratives, negotiations, and diplomatic outcomes. Kövecses (2002) extends this analysis by emphasizing cultural variation in metaphor usage, which complements the linguistic world view framework. This approach posits that language reflects culturally embedded worldviews and serves as a repository of collective knowledge (Telija, 1988). The metaphorical choices made by journalists thus function not only as rhetorical devices but also as cultural signifiers that reflect underlying ideologies, historical narratives, and national identities. For instance, metaphors of fragility in Al Jazeera's reports on Gaza or Ukraine emphasize the precarious nature of peace in conflict zones, often highlighting external pressures and local vulnerabilities. Charteris-Black (2004) further underscores the rhetorical power of metaphor in political discourse, arguing that metaphor influences not just what people think but how they think about it. This study synthesizes these theoretical perspectives to conduct a multidimensional analysis of metaphorical expressions related to peace in global media.

Methodology

This research employs a qualitative content analysis methodology, grounded in conceptual metaphor theory and linguistic world view analysis. The data corpus consists of fifty news articles published between 2020 and 2025 by five major NewsValue-affiliated international outlets: The Guardian, BBC News, CNN, Al Jazeera, and Reuters. The selection was guided by systematic keyword searches

using terms such as "peace talks," "ceasefire," "reconciliation," "diplomacy," and "conflict resolution. Articles were chosen to ensure diverse geographical coverage, including events in Europe (e.g., Ukraine), the Middle East (e.g., Gaza and Iran), Asia (e.g., South China Sea), and Africa (e.g., Sudan peace accords). Each article was examined for metaphoric language related to peace. Expressions were first analyzed for literal and contextual meaning, then classified based on metaphorical contrast and source-target domain mapping. The typology of metaphors followed Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) distinction between structural, ontological, and orientational metaphors. The process also incorporated the MIPVU procedure (Steen et al., 2010) for metaphor identification to ensure analytical consistency.

Findings and Analysis

The analysis revealed a rich tapestry of conceptual metaphors framing peace as an elusive, multifaceted, and ideologically loaded concept. Five dominant metaphorical schemas were identified across the corpus:

1.Peace as a Goal or Destination Peace is frequently portrayed as an end-point in a complex journey. Examples include "still striving for peace," "path to peace," and "a step toward reconciliation." These expressions reinforce the metaphor PEACE IS A JOURNEY, implying progressive, goal-oriented movement. The journey is often fraught with obstacles, detours, and uncertainty, emphasizing both the effort required and the distant nature of peace.

2.Peace as a Commodity or Gift Metaphors such as "Putin's brutal peace offering," "appetite for peace," and "giving us peace of mind" depict peace as a transactional item. The metaphor PEACE IS A COMMODITY suggests that peace can be offered, withheld, or consumed. In political contexts, this frames peace as conditional or strategic, highlighting power dynamics and negotiation tactics. In humanitarian contexts, peace is seen as emotional nourishment or closure.

3.Peace as Emotional Comfort In several articles, especially those dealing with personal or community-level experiences, peace is described in affective terms. Statements like "It gives us peace knowing that…" emphasize the metaphor PEACE IS EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING. This framing was particularly prevalent in post-pandemic and refugee-related articles, where peace is seen as a source of relief, psychological healing, and stability.

4.Peace as a Hostage or Prisoner This metaphor emerges in phrases such as "Russia is the only obstacle preventing peace" and "We don't have a peace." Such language personifies peace as a captive or hostage, denied or obstructed by aggressive actors or failed diplomacy. The metaphor PEACE IS A CAPTIVE ENTITY conveys a sense of injustice and urgency, often appealing to moral and ethical sensibilities.

5.Peace as Diplomatic Balance Diplomatic expressions such as "broker peace," "maintain peace and stability," and "delicate balance of power" illustrate the metaphor PEACE IS BALANCE. This metaphor emphasizes equilibrium, interdependence, and fragility, suggesting that peace exists only when various forces are carefully aligned. It is particularly prevalent in Reuters and CNN coverage of geopolitical negotiations in Asia and the Middle East.

Discussion

These metaphors are not merely stylistic choices but serve essential cognitive and ideological functions. By framing peace as a journey, journalists evoke a narrative of hope, struggle, and eventual triumph. By portraying peace as fragile, they emphasize its vulnerability and the need for careful handling. As emotional comfort, peace becomes personally meaningful, connecting macro-political events to micro-human experiences. Moreover, metaphorical framings carry ideological weight. Presenting peace as a commodity implies commodification and transactional logic, often aligning with neoliberal or realist diplomatic discourses. Viewing peace as a hostage positions conflict actors as moral villains, evoking public outrage or sympathy. These metaphors influence audience perception, emotional engagement, and even policy preferences. According to Thibodeau and Boroditsky (2011), metaphors can shape reasoning and decision-making by framing issues in emotionally resonant ways. Ottati et al. (2014) argue that metaphoric framing in media discourse activates specific cognitive schemas, leading to biased or selective interpretation. In this sense, the media's use of metaphor in peace discourse shapes not only what readers understand but also how they feel and respond to international events.

Conclusion

From 2020 to 2025, NewsValue-affiliated media outlets have portrayed peace through a diverse set of conceptual metaphors that reflect broader cultural, emotional, and ideological narratives. These metaphors—journey, fragility, balance, emotional comfort, and opposition to war—function as cognitive blueprints through which peace is understood, desired, or contested. Recognizing these metaphorical structures enhances our critical literacy and deepens our understanding of how mass media frames sociopolitical realities. Future research should explore metaphor usage across non-Western languages, visual representations of peace in digital media, and the impact of metaphor on public opinion and policymaking. Such investigations would contribute to a more nuanced and globally inclusive understanding of peace discourse in media.

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