

Interpreting Discourse Metaphors in Media: Focusing on News Coverage of Election Campaign

¹Ban, Hyun, ²Noh, Bokyung

¹Prof., Dept. of Mass Communication, Incheon National Univ., Korea

²Prof., Dept. of Korea-English Interpretation and Translation,
Seoul University of Foreign Studies, Korea
hban@inu.ac.kr, james1130@hanmail.net

Abstract

This paper aims to analyze discourse metaphors by paying attention to Seoul mayoral by-election, mainly focusing on election campaign and its related news articles. The 2021 Seoul mayoral by-election was held because the former mayor died in an apparent suicide after he was accused of years of sexual harassment to a former secretary. But in the run-up to the by-election, the newly coined word 'alleged victim' from the ruling party caused a big controversy because the party attempted to deny the authenticity of the secretary's claim by calling her "an alleged victim," instead of "a victim" to defend the former mayor who is a member of the ruling party, implying that the woman's claim is just an allegation with no proof. Thus, this paper has analyzed how news stories were reported with regard to the word 'alleged victim' poser on news stories in two Korean quality newspapers, a conservative newspaper (Chosun Ilbo) and a liberal newspaper (Hankyoreh) from March 1 to April 1, 2021 and analyzed them with the framework of Lakoff and Johnson's Conceptual Metaphor Theory(1980). The findings are as follows: (i) the conservative newspaper reports this issue much more than the liberal newspaper; (ii) both quality newspapers follow the metaphor principles by Conceptual Metaphor Theory; (iii) the conservative newspaper is more likely to follow the Strick Father model (a conservative model) while the liberal newspaper is to follow the Nurturant Parent model (a liberal model), thus indicating that each newspaper's ideology is well represented by the models of Conceptual Metaphor Theory.

Keywords: By-election, Alleged victim, Metaphors, Translation, Media

1. INTRODUCTION

Metaphors is one of literary expressions used in reflecting one's intention to deliver a certain message. In political discourse, metaphors make abstract concepts clear for people to understand the concepts which might otherwise be rarely understood by bring the concepts closer to the 'physical world,' and to persuade people in one's favor over a certain argument (Cox, 2012)[1]. The effective usage of metaphors can be found in election campaign because political candidates have to win over voters within a fixed time period.

The 2021 Seoul mayoral by-election was held because the former mayor committed a suicide just before he would be accused of sexual harassment to his secretary by police. It shocked Seoul citizens because he had

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Corresponding Author: james1130@hanmail.net

Tel: 02-2182-6000, Fax: 02-2182-6050

Professor, Dept. of Korean-English Interpretation and Translation, Seoul University of Foreign Studies, Korea

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been credited with his sincerity, moral integrity and caring for the minority while he had taken office for the last ten years. The cause of his death leads mayoral candidates from opposition parties to focus on morality and ethics in their election campaign. Given this, this paper employs Lakoff and Johnson (1980)'s[2] conceptual metaphor theory in order to analyze metaphors used in election campaign in order to know how the metaphors influence the election result. In particular, within the theoretical framework, only related theoretical concepts such as conservative metaphor and liberal metaphor will be discussed for effectiveness. In the analysis process, it will be discussed that some metaphorical expressions from a ruling party affect negatively the public while those from an opposition party affect positively the public, which consequently lead to an overwhelming victory of the opposition party in the election.

2. THEORETICAL REVIEW

Lakoff and Johnson (1980)'s Conceptual Theory of Metaphor made a shift in the concept of a metaphor by looking at the metaphor as a sustained feature of thought and cognition from a mere feature of language, based on the assumption that "human conceptual system is metaphorically structured and defined." (p.6). According to Kovecses (2010)'s[3] summary about Lakoff and Johnson's Conceptual Theory of Metaphor, metaphor is a property of concepts, and not of words; metaphor has function to make us better understand certain concepts, accompanied by the process of human thought and reasoning; metaphor is also used in everyday life by ordinary people.

Regarding political thought and discourse, metaphors act as a strong conceptual tool. In particular, it is frequently used to the extent that "no field is richer in metaphor than political theory." (Ankersmit, 1993, p.155)[4]. The central metaphor derives in a set of conceptual metaphors which are utilized by conservatives as well as liberals, following "two opposing models of the family," (Lakoff, 1996, p.33)[5] which the author summarizes in two broad groups: conservative morality, which obeys a "Strict Father" morality system; and liberal morality, following a "Nurturant Parent" morality system. First of all, both systems share a particular "worldview" of way of understanding the world. This metaphor is based on the following principles: (1) "The Nation Is a Family," (2) "The Government Is a Parent, and (3) and "The Citizens Are the Children."

However, these principles are materialized differently in Lakoff (1996)'s conservative and liberal morality system. In the conservative morality following the so-called Strict Father (SF) morality system, metaphor of moral strength is of great importance. The SF system is characterized by the idea of the world as an inherently dangerous place, from which the 'children' -that is, the citizens- must be protected, by father. The family is "nuclear" and the father holds all the authority and power, supports his family and sets rules. Metaphor of moral essence assumes that people are born with virtues, which should be maintained for life which are contrastive with immortal properties called vices, implying that both virtues and vices are also attributes to a person(Ban & Noh, 2021)[6]. Likewise, in this view, immorality is degeneration, while morality is wholeness. On the other hand, the liberal category following the so-called Nurturant Parent (NP) morality system focuses on empathy, respect and communication. For example, in the case of empathy, the idea is that when we think of others, we can wish for them to be well, just as we do for ourselves. To be moral, we have to be emphatic. So, since empathy is an essential prerequisite for nurturance, a parent who nurtures a child with empathy is moral, whereas a parent who fails to do so is immoral.

3. THE 2021 SEOUL MAYORAL BY-ELECTION

The 2021 Seoul mayoral by-election was held due to the former mayor's death. The mayor was a member of the ruling Democratic Party(DP). However, ardent supporters of the former mayor have openly brought into question the authenticity of the victim's claim. For example, three female lawmakers from the ruling party

coined a new word called ‘alleged victim’, questioning the authenticity of the victim’s claim. Furthermore, they joined the election camp as representatives for the mayoral candidate of the DP. This shocked voters because the DP has always vowed to a “no-tolerance” stance toward any party members’ guilty of sexual misconduct. Finally, So, after severe criticism from the public, the three lawmakers resigned from the Seoul mayor by-election and the ruling party apologized to the victim. However, it was too late. As a result, a mayoral candidate of the ruling DP failed in the election. Oh Se-hoon, the Seoul mayor candidate for the main opposition party, won 57.50 percent of the votes, overwhelming his opponent candidate of the ruling DP, who won 39.18 percent of the votes. Oh also won in all 25 administrative districts of Seoul. Oh won 73.54 percent of the vote, more than three times Park’s 24.32 percent.

4. METHODOLOGY AND FINDING

This paper aims to analyze the 2021 by-election campaigns and its related news coverage with a new word called ‘alleged victim’. For this aim, we have used news articles covering the election campaign posted on the newspapers-*Chosun Ilbo* and *Hankyoreh* from March.1 to Apr. 31. The newspapers were chosen because the former’s ideological stance is well notably toward conservatism while the latter’s on is toward progressivism. For example, the former favors news events which are positive to the conservative ruling party, while the latter favors ones which have negative effects on the ruling party. Key words were found in each newspaper’s portal site, defining words such as ‘alleged victim,’ ‘three female lawmakers,’ ‘apology,’ and ‘resignation’. The death of the late former mayor directly comes from the expose from a former secretary who had claimed to suffer from his habitual sexual harassment. In this situation, one of the worlds heavily criticized from the public was for the ruling party to designate the former secretary as an ‘alleged victim’ of the sexual harassment, questioning the authenticity of her claim. The criticism grew intensified in that the DP’s three female lawmakers serving in the parliament coined the word and persuaded other policymakers to use the word.

- (1) They put three people in the camp who proposed the rare word of an alleged victim, denying the existence of the victim (Mar. 15, *Hankyoreh*) [7]
- (2) The lawmaker from DP, Ko Min-jung who resigned from the camp for Seoul mayor by-election for calling the victim as an alleged victim, causes again the controversy by posting the message that voting for the opposition party is a greedy act. (Mar. 25, *H*) [8]

The word ‘alleged’ means ‘said or thought by some people to be stated bard or illegal thing, although there is no proof (Cambridge dictionary) and ‘accused but not proven or convicted’ (Marriam-Webster). (1) is what the opposition party’s candidate, Oh Se-hoon, said when he hit a stamp. Here three females were heavily criticized for making the word and persuading other policymakers to officially use the word together. In (2), Ko Min-jung was one of the three lawmakers. (2) is part of straight news articles. Here, calling the former secretary as an alleged victim shows that there is no concrete proof for the former mayor to commit a sexual harassment, denying her claim, and treating it as her personal feeling. They sent these messages to other lawmakers though Kakao Talks. Even one of the three female lawmakers were appointed as a gender special inspector of the DP. Regardless of their own ideologies, both newspapers criticize the ruling DP for using such an acceptable works, as shown in (1) and (2). The phrase ‘denying the existence of the victim’ indicates that the three lawmakers ignore the victim’s claim. Similarly, by using the phrase ‘causes again the controversy’, (2) clearly shows that the proposal of using the word was problematic.

However, as shown in Table 1, the frequencies of the news articles including the word ‘alleged victim’ differ in each newspaper. *Chosun Ilbo*, which is a landmark conservative newspaper posted news articles including the word ‘alleged victim’ 137 times, whereas that was 97 times in *Hankyoreh*, which is a landmark liberal

newspaper. Considering that the ruling DP is a liberal party whose ideology is similar to that of *Hankyoreh*, and the opposition party is a conservative party whose ideology is similar to that of *Chosun Ilbo*, the frequency difference implies that the conservative newspaper attempts to cover the issue more than the counterpart in order to blame the ruling DP for defending such a terrible act and even coining the rare word without apology and neglect.

Table 1. Frequencies of Key Words Between Two Quality Newspapers

	alleged victim	3 female lawmakers	resignation	apology
<i>Chosun Ilbo</i>	137	42 (30%)	14 (10.2%)	74 (54%)
<i>Hankyoreh</i>	97	16 (16%)	12 (12%)	12 (12%)

Furthermore, out of 137 news articles, the phrase ‘three female lawmakers are more frequently included in the news coverage at 30% in *Chosun Ilbo* than in the news articles at 16% in *Hankyoreh*. In the same condition, the word ‘apology’ was used 74 times (54%) in *Chosun Ilbo* and 12 times (12%) in *Hankyoreh*. However, the word ‘resignation’ was almost equally used in news coverage in both newspapers. Even the percentage for the word ‘resignation’ in *Hankyoreh* was slightly higher than that in *Chosun Ilbo* at 12%, and 10.2% respectively.

Here we need to pay attention to the fact that in *Chosun Ilbo*, the two expressions called ‘three female lawmakers’ and ‘apology’ were used much more than in *Hankyoreh*. It can be said to show the media outlet’s intention to remind voters of the fact that three female lawmakers began to use the word ‘alleged victim’ without shame. Thus, they finally apologized voters and stepped down from representatives in the election camps, accepting the public’s criticism. Such reminders seem to be influential to voters in that they explain why the by-election was held since the former mayor’s act is brutal and is not acceptable in any case.

The campaign strategies can be well explained in terms of Conceptual Metaphor Theory. In the theory, the metaphor is based on Lakoff (1996)’s three metaphors which assume that citizens are protected from the government within a country. The word ‘alleged victim’ causes a big controversy among the public because the woman who should be protected from the government was sexually abused from the local government represented by the mayor.

- (3) a. The Nation Is a Family,”
- b. The Government Is a Parent
- c. The Citizens Are the Children (p.154)[9]

Here the conservative newspaper, *Chosun Ilbo* follows Lakoff’s (1996) Strick Father modality system. As in (4), the following principles in the model can be applied to the news story. That is, the principle strongly claims that parents should be moral and guide children to be moral, in that children rely on their father and believe that they are protected from their father whose moral act is also a standard. So, when we apply the metaphors to this election, we can easily lead voters to think that the former mayor is not a protector, but an offender, and violates a standard. For example, (5a) clearly shows that morality should be kept to the extent that it is specified in the party constitution, using the Metaphor of Moral Authority of the SF system. This emphasizes that all the members should not be engaged in sexual harassment. Similarly, (5b) highlights that the three female lawmakers show a socially unacceptable behavior by using the expression ‘inflicting a second and cruel assault’ on the victim. This also violates a standard.

- (4) Metaphor of Moral Authority (Strick Father model)
community is a family; moral authority is parental authority; a person subject to moral authority is a child; moral behavior by someone in authority is setting standards and enforcing them.
- (5) a. The Democratic Party praised former Mayor Park Won-soon as a “clear person” and called the victim an “alleged victim.” They even changed the party constitution, which says that no candidates who are engaged in sexual harassment won’t be nominated in the elections (*Chosun Ilbo*, March 9)[10]
b. Women lawmakers from the Democratic Party, who were proud of their efforts for gender equality, coined the term ‘alleged victim’ and did not hesitate to inflict a second and cruel assault on the victim of Park Won-soon (*Chosun Ilbo*, March 15)[11]

On the other hand, even though the liberal newspaper, *Hankyoreh*, takes an adamant attitude to the immoral act, it seems to publicize the issue as a social issue where all the citizens roll up their solutions to resolve this issue. In this sense, the newspaper tends to follow Lakoff(1996)’s the Nurturant Parent (NP) model.

- (6) Metaphor of Moral Authority as the Nurturance or Social Ties (Nurturant Parent model)
moral agents are nurturing parents; social ties are children needing care; moral action is the nurturance of social ties
- (7) a. In the end, the three lawmakers resigned belatedly from the camp, when the victim held a press conference during the election and complained, “Many people have hurt me in the current election camp, In this situation, it was difficult to find a serious social consensus and solutions about power-based sex crimes. (April 9, *Hankyoreh*)[12]
b. In the press conference, the victim almost cried when she asked people to stop any impermissible negative speaking and action toward herself and her family. She also strongly asked people to help herself to return to her daily lives. (April 9, *Hankyoreh*)[13]

(7a) and (7b) deliver the victim’s feelings toward the public and politician, leading readers to have empathy to her, as shown in the underlined words such as ‘hurt,’ ‘a serious social consensus and solutions’ in (7a) and ‘almost cried’ in (7b). This is well explained by Metaphor of Moral Authority as the Nurturance or Social Times. First, ‘a social consensus and solutions’ refers to the nurturance of social ties because the social action can be a necessary step toward moral action and the social ties is the social care the victim needs to return to her normal life. Second, the quotation of hurting the victim in the election camp can be said to show the intention to make readers share empathy toward the victim. Such sentences are used to highlight that the victim is just one common people and deserved to be protected from the society. So, through these, we can say that empathy is an essential quality to care for and protect the victim.

5. CONCLUSION

This paper focuses on analyzing news articles related with election campaigns published in two Korean quality newspapers, *Chosun Ilbo* and *Hankyoreh*, paying attention to some metaphoric concepts based on the news articles regarding Seoul mayoral by-election for two months. The by-election was held due to the former mayor’s suicide after he was accused of habitual sexual harassment to a former secretary for years. This shocked voters because he was respected as a clean, moral and social worker for his entire life. However, the ruling party made a shift from the party’s no-tolerance stance to sexual harassment and abuse. Instead, the party willingly defended the late mayor by calling her “an alleged victim,” rather than “a victim,” in order to emphasize that her claim is subjective, totally based on her allegation with no proof, and to hide the late mayor’s wrongdoings.

This paper has mainly found three things: First, both newspapers-conservative and liberal newspapers follow three main metaphor principles by Conceptual Metaphor Theory, which is called a “a Nation is Family,” “a Government is Parent,” and “a Citizen is a Child.” That is, since this issue is related with morality, the metaphor claims that the victim as a citizen should be protected from a government and from a country. This explains why the word “alleged victim” was much discussed in the conservative newspaper. It is to highlight that the woman should have been protected from the offensive mayor from the newspaper’s ideological perspective. This also answers the question of why the conservative newspaper deals with this issue much more than the liberal newspaper. However, each newspaper differs in their methodology within the Conceptual Metaphor Theory. The conservative newspaper (*Chosun Ilbo*) seems to employ the Strick Father model where moral strength is of great importance and moral behavior by someone in authority is setting standards and enforcing them which is favored by conservatives, as mentioned in Section 2. So, the newspaper highlights that the ruling party violates its own party constitution to defend the late mayor based on the Metaphor of Moral Authority of the SF morality system. On the other hand, the liberal newspaper (*Hankyoreh*) tends to employ the Metaphor of Moral Authority as the Nurturance or Social Ties of the Nurturant Parent model which highlights that moral action is the nurturance of social ties, which is preferred by progressivists, as mentioned in Section 2. That is, this metaphor put an emphasis on the claim that social attention and consensus will be prioritized in order to resolve the issue. Thus, we can conclude that the conservative newspaper follows the conservative SF model, while the progressive one does the progressive NP model, thus proving that the two models of the Conceptual Metaphor Theory are effectively used in the Seoul mayoral by-election.

This research has some limitations: The study rationale is predominantly based on the data from the 2021 Seoul mayoral election within a limited time period. More data need to be collected with ideologically diverse newspapers in order to make this conclusion convincing. However, this study sheds light on the effective usage of the Conceptual Metaphor Theory in terms of the Strict Father model and the Nurturant Parent model, focusing on the newly coined word “an alleged victim. So, for future research, more data regarding election campaigns need to be collected and analyzed for more accurate conclusion.

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