

On metaphor, persuasion and framing: a comparative study of the Mexican migration debate in the US written press

Authors

Laurence De Backer & Renata Enghels

Abstract

Various experimental studies have proven that metaphors can represent potent tools to persuasively frame controversial social and political issues in such a way as to stimulate the reader to adopt a particular stance on said topic (e.g., Thibodeau and Boroditsky, 2011). However, as of late, researchers have started to question this assumption (e.g. Steen, Reijniere & Burgers, 2014), as identical metaphorical domains seem to appear in a wide range of discourses, regardless of their specific social, political, geographical and/or ideological context (e.g., Joris et al., 2014, p.616; Joris et. al, 2018, p.14). In the light of these observations, this communication aims to clarify the persuasive nature of metaphor and its potential impact on public opinion formation. Using the Mexican migration debate in the US written press as an empirical case study, it will be demonstrated that different stakeholders in this polemic discussion (La Opinión, The Washington Post and Foxnews.com) can *negotiate* similar metaphors according to their respective ideological stance and group alignment. Hence, its compelling character may be located not only in the *type* of metaphor but also, and perhaps more importantly, in the selection and application of what we have termed ‘semantic roles’. On a methodological level, this observation leads us to conclude that, for scholars interested in metaphor for its potential social impact, it may be wise to explore metaphorical frames on a deeper level, examining how they are applied in discourse.

Sources cited

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