

A STUDY INTO METAPHORICAL PHRASES IN AMERICAN AND VIETNAMESE DECLARATIONS OF INDEPENDENCE

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to describe the similarities and differences between American and Vietnamese Declarations of Independence with regard to the use of metaphorical phrases. The method was to analyze metaphorical phrases in the two corpora separately as well as comparatively. It is argued in this study that both corpora use metaphorical phrases as a rhetorical device to serve political purposes, namely, reinforcing the strength of indictment and denunciation of the oppressive rulers, portraying the citizens' sufferings and encouraging them to support their new government. It is further suggested that metaphorical phrases of supernatural beliefs seemed to dominate in the American corpus, which might be explained by the unique historical American feature, while in Vietnamese one, such kind of metaphors was not found.

Keywords: *American Declaration of Independence (1776), metaphorical phrases, Vietnamese Declaration of Independence (1945)*

1. Introduction

“Mastering the art of presenting something to the audiences and convincing them that what is said is correct and true has been a sought-after skill since the ancient Greeks” (Eriksson, 2010) [1]. Accordingly, to spread the political messages to audiences and be able to bring the political issues forward in different media and arenas, politicians, for a long time, have used a wide range of rhetorical devices in their speeches. Among rhetorical devices, metaphors emerge to be an effective tool used in all political documents and speeches. Studies of metaphors in political discourse, therefore, have become quite frequent, and especially comparisons between different political rhetoric are of great interest.

The major objective of this study is to describe the similarities and differences between American and Vietnamese Declarations of Independence with regard to the use of metaphorical phrases. By studying metaphorical phrases in the two typical political speeches composed by professional writers, it is possible to learn more about the use of metaphors in political contexts, which helps to increase the readers' awareness of great influence of figurative language on public speech and improve their speaking and writing skills.

The primary source of this paper was two famous rhetorics: American and Vietnamese Declarations of Independence [2], [3]. They were chosen for the reason of sharing similar

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objectives, values and importance in the history of the two countries.

Adopted on July 4, 1776, the American Declaration of Independence has been undoubtedly considered to be one of the most historical masterpieces in American history. It announced the birth of a new nation as well as laid down philosophies of basic human rights, which have had a great influence on other later declarations of independence, including Vietnamese one.

As for the Vietnamese Declaration of Independence, no documents in Vietnamese history can compare with it in the place that it not only presented the idea of all people being equal but also officially promulgated the right of freedom of Vietnamese people and established the democratic republic system in Vietnam.

There are a huge number of different rhetorical tools to be used in two target corpora, which means there are many variables available for comparison. However, because the paper space does not permit it, a limitation had to be made and only metaphorical phrases were chosen. The method was to analyze the two corpora separately as well as comparatively as regards the contents and usage of metaphorical phrases. There are two questions to be answered by this study:

- What are purposes of using metaphorical phrases in the American and Vietnamese Declarations of Independence?

- Are there any similarities and differences in the use of metaphorical phrases the American and Vietnamese Declarations of Independence?

2. Background

2.1. Brief history leading to the birth of American Declaration of Independence (1776)

Beginning in 1764, Great Britain began passing acts to exert greater control over the American colonies. In response to the intolerable acts of the Mother Country (Great Britain), all thirteen colonies were represented to form the Continental Congress and prepare necessary procedures to fight for the separation. The formal break from the Mother Country was complete with the adoption of Declaration of Independence composed by Thomas Jefferson and finally approved on July 4, 1776.

2.2. Brief history leading to the birth of Vietnamese Declaration of Independence (1945)

Vietnam became a colony of France in the late nineteenth century and then by Japan during the Second World War. When Japan surrendered to the Allies in the mid-1945, the Viet Minh took advantage of this opportunity to regain independence. On 2 September 1945, Ho Chi Minh, on behalf of the Provisional Government, solemnly read the Declaration during a public meeting in front of thousands of people, at what is now Ba Dinh Square, Hanoi, announcing the birth of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.

2.3. *Metaphors*

According to Hai (2014) [4], so far in the history of metaphorical research, there have been diverse approaches, accompanied by different philosophical foundations. From the traditional perspective, metaphors are regarded as a hidden comparison. However, Hai (2014) [4] believed that there are some issues that the conventional views on metaphors just cannot justify and the concept of homogeneity cannot explain the metaphorical meaning of the metaphor. For example, we cannot justify things like “The groom family is a gold mine” simply by finding a common characteristic between *the groom's family* and *the gold mine*.

It seems that comparability or similarity cannot play the role of a concept that can be explained, but rather needs to be further analyzed. To deal with this dilemma, this paper chose the definition of metaphor suggested by Lakoff. Regarding metaphors, Lakoff in the famous work named *Metaphors we live by* (1980) [5] proposed the concept spoken of the TARGET and the referred to the SOURCE. This gives THE TARGET DOMAIN IS THE SOURCE DOMAIN or TARGET DOMAIN AS SOURCE DOMAIN mapping. Approaching metaphors from this perspective, Lakoff believed that metaphors refer to the understanding of one idea, or conceptual domain, in terms of another.

An example of one of the commonly used conceptual metaphors is “argument is war”. This metaphor shapes the language in the way we regard *an argument* as *a war* or as *a battle* to be won. It is common to hear someone say, “He won that argument” or “I attacked every weak point in his argument”. *An argument* can be seen in other ways than *a battle*, but this concept is utilized to shape the way we think of *an argument* and the way we begin arguing.

Hence, it is evident that metaphor is not just a linguistic phenomenon. Instead, metaphors reflect how concepts are organized in our minds. We not only *describe*, but also *understand* one thing in terms of another by transferring, or ‘mapping’ knowledge about one concept (the ‘source concept’) to another (the ‘target concept’) (Dennis, 2014) [6].

When it comes to the relationship between metaphors and political documents and speeches, metaphors are widely believed to “effectively explain something difficult and, instead of using abstract terms perhaps only experts understand, metaphors can make the language more understandable and lively.” (Eriksson, 2010) [1].

Similarly, Charteris-Black (2005) [7] argued that metaphors are a very “effective tool which potential leaders can communicate with the ‘voice within’ because it creates evocative representations of the speaker and their policies by arousing emotions and forms part of the process by which an audience

reconstructs the casual relationship of an argument.” Previously, Coe (1996) [8] took the argumentation one step further claiming that discourse is rooted in metaphor and changing a community's or an audience's metaphors is a superbly effective way to redirect their attention, persuading them to “see it your way”.

3. Analysis

The analysed metaphorical phrases in this study are distinctly metaphorical, and phrases in which any uncertainty in the classification occurred were removed from this analysis. The

italicized phrases are metaphorical and the rest of the sentences is there to make the metaphor more understandable and to put them in the context.

3.1. *Metaphorical phrases in American Declaration of Independence (1776)*

The following is the presentation of metaphorical phrases in American Declaration of Independence which are categorized into three items for their similar purposes. The last item consisting of metaphorical sense in low frequencies is labeled Miscellaneous.

Table 1: *Metaphorical phrases in American Declaration of Independence*

<p>Metaphorical phrases about inhuman actions of the British King and attitudes towards his inhumanity</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>A long train</i> of abuses and usurpations 2. He sent his <i>swarms of officers</i> 3. And <i>eat out</i> their substance 4. He has constrained our fellow citizens [...] to <i>bear arms</i> against their country 5. He has constrained our fellow citizens [...] to become the <i>executioners</i> of their friends and brethren 6. <i>Throw off</i> such government
<p>Metaphorical phrases of Supernatural Beliefs</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Law of nature</i> 2. <i>Law of nature's God</i> 3. Their <i>Creator</i>
<p>Miscellaneous metaphorical phrases</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Course</i> of human events 2. Political <i>bonds</i> 3. The <i>powers of the earth</i> 4. <i>Pursuit</i> of happiness 5. <i>Secure</i> of these rights 6. Laying it <i>foundation</i> 7. <i>Pursuing</i> invariably the same object 8. Provide <i>new guards</i> for their future security 9. We have conjured them by <i>ties</i> of our common kindred to disavow these usurpations

American Declaration describes sharp grievance to the inhumanity and the injustice that the present British King was committing against the American colonies through a wide range of metaphorical images.

First and foremost, the high level of abuses and usurpations of the British Emperor is hiddenly compared with the metaphorical image of “*long train*” which is illustrated by a long list of other metaphorical phrases portraying the oppressive emperor’s inhumanity, such as “*eating out* their [American people’s] substance”, constraining American citizens “to *bear arms* against their country, to become the *executioners* of their friends and brethren, or to *fall themselves by their hands*”, and so on. Therefore, it is high time to “*throw off* such government”. The phrase of *throw off* evokes a strong determined action and show the necessity of dissolving an old-fashioned helpless British authority in American territory.

The authors’ attitudes towards the absolute tyranny of the King were animated through the metaphor of “*hither swarms*” which clearly evokes the image of “*group of animal*”. This adds emphasis on the drastic condemnation throughout the declaration and convinces that Americans needed to destroy their “*political bonds*” – a very strong solid connection between American citizens

and British brethren – and “*lay a foundation*”, a new basis, for a new government.

Finally, there exists in American Declaration metaphorical sense regarding supernatural beliefs which root from the notion that “All the people in the earth are endowed by their *Creator* with certain unalienable right” and the fight for independence is to protect “the *law of nature* and of *nature’s God*”. The Revolution for American separation, therefore, was impelled by the natural force. In other words, it was not merely preferable and defensible, but inescapable, inevitable and unavoidable within the “*course of human events*”.

It can be seen that those above mentioned metaphorical phrases were effectively used in terms of arousing emotional appeals as well as encouraging people to fight for their rights established by the natural laws and for their “*new guard* for their *future security*”.

3.2. *Metaphorical phrases in Vietnamese Declaration of Independence (1945)*

The metaphorical phrases in the Vietnamese Declaration of Independence are presented in the table below. The classification is also decided on the basis of similar contents and purposes of the metaphorical phrases.

Table 2: *Metaphorical phrases in Vietnamese Declaration of Independence*

<p>Metaphorical phrases about outrageous actions of the French imperialists</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Bọn thực dân Pháp lợi dụng lá cờ tự do, bình đẳng bác ái, đến <i>cuớp</i> đất nước ta The French imperialists, abusing the standard of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity have <i>violated</i> our Fatherland 2. Chúng <i>tắm</i> các cuộc khởi nghĩa của ta trong những <i>bể máu</i>. They have <i>drowned</i> our uprisings in <i>rivers of blood</i>. 3. Chúng bóc lột nhân dân ta đến <i>xương tủy</i>. They have <i>fleeced</i> us to the <i>backbone</i>. 4. Chúng <i>cuớp không</i> ruộng đất, hầm mỏ, nguyên liệu. They have <i>robbed</i> us of our rice fields, our mines, and our raw materials. 5. Chúng không cho các nhà tư sản của ta <i>ngóc đầu lên</i>. They have <i>hampered the prospering</i> of our national bourgeoisie. 6. Trong năm năm, chúng <i>bán</i> nước ta hai lần cho Nhật. They had twice <i>sold</i> our country to the Japanese.
<p>Metaphorical phrases about ashamed actions of the French imperialists</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Bọn thực dân Pháp <i>quỳ gối, mở cửa</i> nước ta <i>rước</i> Nhật. The French imperialists went down on their <i>bended knees</i> and <i>handed over</i> our country to them.
<p>Metaphorical phrases about Vietnamese sufferings</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Từ đó nhân dân ta chịu <i>hai tầng xiềng xích</i>. Our people were subjected to the <i>double yoke</i>. 2. Dân ta đã <i>đánh đổ các xiềng xích</i> thực dân gần 100 năm... Our people <i>have broken the chains</i>, which for nearly a century have fettered them...

As seen in the presentation, there is a domination of metaphorical phrases condemning the outrageous actions of the French invaders to Vietnamese people.

For the first condemnation and critical attitude towards alien invaders, the French imperialists were described as the robbers with a long list of

inhuman actions such as “*violating* our [Vietnamese] Fatherland”, fleecing Vietnamese people to their “*backbone*” and “*robbing* them of their rice fields, mines, forests, and raw materials”.

What is more, they were regarded as cruel killers who mercilessly slain Vietnamese patriots when the declaration

indicated, “They have *drowned* our uprisings in *rivers of blood*”. Touching the audience’s imagination, the metaphorical image of *drowning in river of blood* presented a vivid portrait of the French bloody murderers.

Noticeably, the ashamed actions of surrendering of the French troops were clearly portrayed through the metaphorical phrases of “*going down on their bended knees and handed over Vietnam to the Japanese*”.

Besides the metaphorical images showing the inhumanity and crimes of the French imperialists are the metaphorical phrases about Vietnamese sufferings and miseries under the French and Japanese oppression. Being regarded as an exchangeable item making benefits, in the span of five years, Vietnam had been *twice sold to*

the Japanese by the French”, which also means Vietnamese people were “subjected to the *double yoke*”.

It can be said that thanks to the use of metaphors, the inhumanity and injustices of the French invaders as well as Vietnamese sufferings were clearly described with a limit of words. More importantly, this helps to create the emotional appeals in the audience and encourage them to “*break the chain*”, regain the national sovereign and win the independence for the Fatherland.

3.3. Summary and comparison

Below is a summary of the most frequently occurring source concepts of the presented metaphorical phrases from both corpora. The figures show the number of metaphorical phrases deriving from each source concepts.

Table 3: Summary of metaphorical phrases in American and Vietnamese Declarations of Independence

Metaphors Corpus	Metaphorical phrases of condemnation of the ruler’s crimes & fellow citizen’s sufferings	Metaphorical phrases of supernatural beliefs	Miscellaneous metaphorical phrases
American Declaration	6	3	9
Vietnamese Declaration	9	0	0

As shown in the table, metaphorical phrases deriving from the concepts of

condemnation of the ruler’s crimes and fellow citizen’s sufferings were clearly

the most frequently occurring in both corpora. This might be explained by the similar objectives of these two political documents. The fact is that they both aimed to awake the fellow citizen to realize the inhumanity of the present government and their sufferings under its oppression, help them understand the necessity of fighting for the new independence and give supports to the new government.

However, the concept touching the supernatural beliefs were only found in American corpus. This might be explained by the American history in the eighteen century when America comprised thirteen separate colonies under the common rule of British empire which was called "Mother Country" by its loyal colonies. There existed a strong "bond" connecting them with the British brethren in terms of politics, race and culture. Separating from Mother Country, therefore, seemed to be something unloyal. By using the concepts of *natural laws* and *nature's God*, the Declaration clearly indicated the necessity and unavoidability of breaking the *bond* tying them with the injustices and inequality they were

suffering and protecting their rights their supernatural beings acknowledged.

4. Conclusion and recommendations

This study examines the similarities and differences between American and Vietnamese Declarations of Independence in regarded to the use of metaphorical phrases. The method of the study was to analyze metaphorical phrases in each document separately and comparatively. The paper is also hoped to serve a small example on how metaphorical phrases are effectively used for political purposes. The conclusions to be drawn from this paper are that metaphor is a significant rhetorical device which was used to support political goals in both corpora. The paper further suggests that in the American corpus, there is a domination of metaphorical phrases about supernatural beliefs, which were not found in Vietnamese one. The paper's author is aware of the fact that there exist a number of rhetorical devices in the two declarations, such as Parallelism, Anaphora, and Metonymy, etc. which need further thorough investigations by concerned pens.

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NGHIÊN CỨU VỀ CỤM TỪ ẨN DỤ TRONG BẢN TUYÊN NGÔN ĐỘC LẬP CỦA HOA KỲ VÀ VIỆT NAM

TÓM TẮT

Nghiên cứu được tiến hành nhằm mô tả những điểm tương đồng và khác biệt giữa Tuyên ngôn độc lập của Hoa Kỳ và Việt Nam trong việc sử dụng các cụm từ mang nghĩa ẩn dụ. Nghiên cứu đã chỉ ra cả hai bản Tuyên ngôn đều sử dụng các cụm từ ẩn dụ như là một thiết bị tu từ để phục vụ mục đích chính trị, cụ thể là tăng cường sức mạnh của các cáo buộc và tố cáo các nhà cai trị áp bức, miêu tả những đau khổ của người dân và khuyến khích họ ủng hộ cho chính quyền mới của họ. Nghiên cứu cũng phát hiện ra rằng các cụm từ ẩn dụ về niềm tin siêu nhiên dường như nổi bật trong Tuyên ngôn của Hoa Kỳ, điều có thể được lý giải bằng đặc điểm lịch sử riêng biệt của đất nước này, trong khi trong Tuyên ngôn của Việt Nam, những kiểu ẩn dụ như vậy không được tìm thấy.

Từ khóa: *Bản Tuyên ngôn độc lập Hoa Kỳ (năm 1776), phép ẩn dụ, Bản Tuyên ngôn độc lập của Việt Nam (năm 1945)*

(Received: 2/2/2018, Revised: 1/4/2018, Accepted for publication: 24/12/2018)