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### **A Review of the Habilitation Dissertation**

*Metaphors and Image Schemas in Barack Obama's Discourse on the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant*

by Mgr. Marek Hampl, Ph.D.

The habilitation dissertation submitted by Dr. Marek Hampl, titled *Metaphors and Image Schemas in Barack Obama's Discourse on the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant*, is an ambitious study situated within the field of cognitive linguistics and political discourse analysis. The work demonstrates the author's substantive knowledge of metaphor theory, discourse-oriented approaches, and the dynamics of political communication, while also offering a structured and methodologically grounded investigation of President Barack Obama's discourse on ISIL during the years 2014–2016. The dissertation is organized into an introductory chapter, three theoretical and methodological chapters, and three analytical chapters, concluding with a synthesis of the main findings.

#### **The content of the dissertation**

The Introduction successfully positions the topic within its political, social, and linguistic context. The author clearly explains the emergence of ISIL, the geopolitical relevance of the period under investigation, and the role of political rhetoric in shaping public perception and legitimizing governmental actions. The chapter provides a compelling justification for studying metaphor and image schemas in this discourse and outlines the structure of the dissertation in a clear and logical manner. While occasionally somewhat verbose and containing certain redundancies, the Introduction effectively prepares the reader for the theoretical and analytical work that follows and displays an impressive command of relevant literature.

Chapter 1 presents a comprehensive theoretical overview of metaphor theory. The author demonstrates extensive familiarity with both classical and contemporary approaches to metaphor, including Conceptual Metaphor Theory, discourse-oriented perspectives, and pragmatic and ideological dimensions of figurative language. The discussion is richly referenced and supported with clear examples – such as ARGUMENT IS WAR and LIFE IS A JOURNEY – which help illustrate the basic principles of metaphorical mapping.

At times, however, the chapter becomes overly detailed, occasionally repeating explanations or definitions that could be presented more concisely. Some parts of the chapter read more like a general textbook overview than a critical engagement with current debates in metaphor research. The chapter would be stronger if it addressed more recent methodological developments, such as the MIPVU (Metaphor Identification Procedure Vrije Universiteit) procedure for identifying metaphor or corpus-linguistic approaches to metaphor analysis. For example, in the section introducing Conceptual Metaphor Theory on pp. 10–12, the discussion relies mainly on classic works such as Lakoff & Johnson (1980) and Johnson (1987), without considering later refinements such as Steen’s (2011) updated version of CMT or Kövecses’s (2020) Extended Conceptual Metaphor Theory. Despite these limitations, the chapter still provides a clear and reliable foundation for the analyses that follow.

In addition, several sections of Chapter 1 contain long enumerations of scholars without critical synthesis, which makes parts of the literature review appear descriptive rather than analytical. For example, on page 6, the author lists a long sequence of studies without explaining how they differ or what each contributes: “Studies that focus on American presidential discourse that investigate metaphorical language and image schemas include e.g., Cap (2017), Chilton (1996, 2003), Charteris-Black (2014), Ferrari (2007, 2018), Hampl (2019, 2021, 2022a, 2022b), Neagu (2013), Lakoff (2012) or Berberović and Džanić Belibegović (2022).” This is followed immediately by another list for a different president, again with no synthesis: “Studies that focus on the use of metaphor in Barack Obama’s political discourse include e.g., Ferrari & O’Loughlin (2018), Lakoff (2013), Ritchie & Thomas (2015), Degani (2015), Charteris-Black (2011, 2014).”

Similar patterns appear elsewhere in the theoretical framework. For example, on page 8, the phrase “metaphor in authentic discourse (Cameron, 2007; Cameron & Deignan, 2006; Gibbs, 2014; Gibbs & Cameron, 2008)” again lists several authors without explaining how their perspectives align or diverge. The same issue appears in the methodological overview on page 17 (“According to Gibbs & Cameron (2008), Cameron (2007), Cameron & Deignan (2006)...”) where references are presented consecutively but not critically discussed.

These issues do not detract from the overall usefulness of the chapter but suggest that the theoretical review could be more focused and analytically integrated. Overall, Chapter 1 demonstrates solid scholarly grounding and offers a dependable starting point for the empirical analyses that follow, even though some parts would benefit from more critical synthesis and engagement with recent developments.

Chapter 2 offers an equally thorough treatment of image schemas, drawing on Johnson, Lakoff, Chilton, and more recent scholarship. The definitions and properties of such schemas as CONTAINER, SOURCE-PATH-GOAL, PART-WHOLE, CENTER-PERIPHERY, and LINK are explained with clarity and accuracy. The chapter convincingly demonstrates the relevance of embodied schematic structures for the analysis of political discourse. As in the previous chapter, the exposition is occasionally repetitive and heavily descriptive, with limited engagement in theoretical critique or discussion of more recent perspectives on the dynamic and multimodal nature of image schemas. Nevertheless, the chapter succeeds in establishing the conceptual tools needed for the analytical sections.

Chapter 3 describes the dataset and methodological orientation of the study. The selection of 31 political speeches delivered by President Obama between 2014 and 2016 is well justified, and the author is attentive to contextual and register-related factors. The discussion of tenor, mode, and field contributes to a richer understanding of how metaphor emerges in political communication. Still, the chapter could benefit from a more explicit explanation of the procedures employed for identifying and annotating metaphors, including a clearer methodological account of how specific examples were extracted and categorized. While concise, the chapter effectively situates the analytical work.

The analytical chapters (4, 5, and 6) constitute the strongest part of the dissertation and reflect the author's ability to apply theoretical models to authentic political discourse in an insightful way. Chapter 4 examines metaphors related to direct confrontation, including PLANT, CANCER, HUNT, and WAR metaphors. The author successfully employs the framework of Critical Metaphor Analysis to illustrate how such metaphors construct ISIL as a pathological, invasive, or predatory entity, thereby legitimizing military action and strategic intervention. The analysis is well supported by textual evidence and demonstrates a strong awareness of the ideological and persuasive dimensions of political rhetoric. At the same time, some metaphor categories—particularly WAR metaphors—could be separated more carefully from highly conventional expressions typical of political and security discourse. For example, in several places (e.g., pp. 73–74), terms such as *fight*, *defeat*, or *counter* are grouped together with more explicitly metaphorical phrases like *strike crippling blows* or *win the battle of ideas*.

While the former are often fixed collocations or routine policy vocabulary, the latter involve a clearer and more productive projection from the WAR domain. Distinguishing more systematically between conventionalised terminology and genuinely metaphorical extensions would strengthen the analytical precision. Nevertheless, the overall interpretation remains clear, consistent, and convincing.

Chapter 5 explores metaphors related to radicalization and preventative measures, focusing primarily on the SOURCE-PATH-GOAL and CONTAINER schemas. This chapter is particularly effective in demonstrating how abstract processes such as radicalization, recruitment, and ideological dissemination are conceptualized through spatial and containment imagery. The analysis of metaphors such as MINDS AS CONTAINERS, POISONED COMMUNITIES, or RADICALIZATION AS A JOURNEY is persuasive and theoretically well motivated. While some sections could be structured more tightly and the methodological procedure more explicitly stated, the chapter provides a valuable contribution to understanding metaphorical representations of extremism and counter-extremism.

In Chapter 6, the use of spatial image schemas – such as CONTAINER, PART-WHOLE, CENTER-PERIPHERY, and LINK – is original and generally well explained. The chapter shows convincingly how Obama presents ISIL's territory as divided, shrinking, and ultimately unsustainable. However, some schema combinations are presented in a very dense way, and a few examples would benefit from more contextual detail from the speeches themselves. For example, the discussion of ISIL's territorial system as a combination of four schemas at once (CONTAINER + PART-WHOLE + CENTER-PERIPHERY + LINK) on pp. 107–109 introduces several abstract ideas, which makes the explanation harder to follow. The analysis of infrastructure metaphors – such as “highways,” “supply lines,” and “transit routes” as LINK elements within a PART-WHOLE structure (pp. 111–112) – would also be clearer with more explicit reference to the specific lines from Obama's speeches. The same applies to the interpretation of the verb “squeeze” in relation to Raqqa (p. 116), which could be explained more directly with the surrounding context. These are minor issues of clarity rather than interpretation, and the overall analysis remains coherent, methodologically solid, and insightful.

The concluding chapter summarizes the main findings and reiterates the value of analyzing metaphor and image schemas in political discourse. The author demonstrates a clear understanding of how metaphors contribute to framing security threats, legitimizing political action, and shaping ideological positions. The conclusions could, however, be strengthened by a more explicit discussion of methodological limitations and broader implications for future research. Dr. Marek Hampl is welcome to address these issues during the defence of his thesis.

## **The language and editorial aspects of the dissertation**

From a linguistic and editorial standpoint, the dissertation maintains a formal academic register and is written in clear and competent English. There are, however, instances of stylistic heaviness, overly long sentences, nominalizations, and occasional typographical inconsistencies. Minor editorial issues include uneven referencing format, inconsistent capitalization of schema labels, and sporadic redundancies. These do not significantly detract from the overall quality of the work but should be addressed before final publication.

### **Examples of editorial inconsistencies:**

- Inconsistent referencing format (sometimes “Lakoff, 1987, p. X”, sometimes “Lakoff (1987)”, occasionally missing page numbers).
- Occasional spacing and formatting problems (double spaces, uneven line breaks in headings, em dashes vs. hyphens inconsistently used, sometimes round quotation marks are used “ ”, sometimes straight ones " ").
- Inconsistent capitalization of image schema labels (“PART-WHOLE”, “Center-periphery”, “SOURCE-PATH-GOAL”) – they should follow one convention.
- Typographical errors in citations, e.g. on page 9 (Lakoff and Johnson, 1987, p. 73) should be (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 73).

### **Examples of mistakes and minor errors – language and grammar issues:**

1. “The aim of the habilitation thesis that guides the research that is presented in analytical chapters of the habilitation thesis...”, page 5 – a redundant phrase.
2. “The activity included military operations and also the measures whose objective was to prevent the organization...”, page 10 – the phrase “The activity included” could be reworded as “These actions included”.
3. “... and this combination also enables to investigate the intentions and scope of actions of the actors that were involved in the actions against ISIL”, page 11, a repetition of the word “actions”.
4. “These aspects of Barack Obama’s discourse can be explored with metaphors and image schemas...”, page 11 – a better choice of a word would be “through”, not “with”.
5. A frequent shift between British and American spelling (e.g., “behavior” vs. “behaviour” depending on author citations, but internal style should be consistent).

## **Conclusion**

In sum, Dr. Hampl's dissertation is a valuable contribution to research on metaphor in political discourse. It offers original observations, a solid theoretical foundation, and careful qualitative analysis. Although the work's methodology could have been more explicitly presented, it clearly shows the author's strong analytical abilities, thorough knowledge of cognitive linguistics, and skill in applying complex theories to real political data. The dissertation meets the academic standards required of a habilitation thesis and represents a significant scholarly achievement. I therefore give it a positive evaluation and propose to award the title of habilitated doctor/associate professor to Dr. Marek Hampl.