

Tracing Social Change through Metaphor: A Diachronic Corpus-Assisted Analysis

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Abstract

This paper examines how conceptualizations of 'election' have changed in post-colonial Hong Kong. Drawing on Burgers' (2016) approach to model how metaphors change their focus on social topics over time, we study the uses of ELECTION metaphors in speeches by government leaders. These changes are classified as either fundamental changes (the use of metaphorical terms from a different domain) or incremental changes (changes in mapping principles within the same domain). We found a reliance on JOURNEY metaphors in framing ELECTION issues. Incremental changes within the ELECTION IS A JOURNEY metaphor highlight a change between the first (1997-2007) and second decades (2008-2017) after the handover from Britain to China. Our study shows that analysing changes in metaphorical frames in discourse is a practical approach to reflect the conceptualizations of social change.

The selection of a source domain highlights specific aspects of the target domain and simultaneously downplays other aspects (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980/2003, p. 10). This function makes metaphor an important linguistic device for framing in both communication and cognition (Burgers et al., 2016; Semino, Demjén, & Deramen, 2018). Since metaphor has the ability to reason about abstract concepts and has been used to frame various issues ranging from national politics in the US (Lakoff, 1996/2002; Cienki, 2004) and Europe (Chilton, 1996; Chilton and Ilyin, 1993; Musolff, 2017), to trade (Burgers and Ahrens, 2020), free economy (Zeng, Burgers, & Ahrens, 2021), and gender issues (Kollet, 2004a, b; Zeng, Toy, & Ahrens, 2020), analysing changes in metaphorical frames in discourse is a practical approach to reflect the conceptualizations of social change (Burgers, 2016).

This study focuses on the diachronic changes in ELECTION metaphors in order to conceptualize the social changes in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HK) over a two-decade period. We elaborate on the metaphorical frames

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