



FRAMING HEALTH IN PRESIDENTIAL DISCOURSE: A COMPARATIVE COGNITIVE STUDY OF THE U.S. AND UZBEKISTAN DURING COVID-19

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Abstract

This article presents a comparative cognitive analysis of the concept of health in American and Uzbek presidential discourse during the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on speeches by Donald Trump, Joe Biden, and Shavkat Mirziyoyev, the study applies cognitive linguistics, conceptual metaphor theory, and discourse analysis. The findings show both similarities and cultural differences: American discourse frames health through war, individual responsibility, and national security, while Uzbek discourse emphasizes health as a collective social value and moral responsibility. The study highlights the role of cultural and cognitive models in shaping political representations of health.

Keywords: Cognitive analysis, political discourse, health conceptualization, COVID-19, conceptual metaphors, presidential discourse, cross-cultural linguistics.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly transformed global political communication, placing the concept of health at the center of presidential discourse. Political leaders not only managed public health policies but also shaped public understanding of health, risk, and responsibility through language. From a cognitive-linguistic perspective, health is viewed as a socially and culturally constructed concept, expressed through language, metaphors, and

conceptual frames. In political discourse, leaders use these cognitive mechanisms to influence, persuade, and reassure society during crises.

Presidential speeches during the pandemic reveal different cultural approaches to conceptualizing health. In the United States, discourse often emphasizes war metaphors, individual responsibility, and national security, while in Uzbekistan, it highlights collective responsibility, social unity, and the role of the state.

Despite existing research, cross-cultural cognitive analyses of health in English and Uzbek political discourse remain limited. This study aims to fill this gap by examining how health is conceptualized in both contexts, identifying key metaphors and patterns, and contributing to a deeper understanding of political communication during global crises.

Methods

This study uses a qualitative, comparative cognitive-linguistic approach to analyze how the concept of health is represented in presidential speeches during the COVID-19 pandemic. It combines conceptual metaphor theory and discourse analysis to identify patterns of conceptualization, linguistic framing, and cross-cultural differences between American and Uzbek political discourse.

The corpus includes public speeches by U.S. presidents Donald Trump and Joe Biden, and Uzbekistan's president Shavkat Mirziyoyev, delivered between March 2020 and December 2021. Around 15–20 speeches from each country were selected based on their relevance to health, pandemic response, and public communication.

The analysis is conducted at three levels: (1) identification of conceptual metaphors such as HEALTH IS WAR and HEALTH IS RESPONSIBILITY; (2) lexical and syntactic analysis of key terms and structures that reflect agency and responsibility; and (3) cross-cultural comparison to determine dominant patterns and cultural differences in health conceptualization.

Data were collected from official sources and verified media. Uzbek speeches were translated into English for comparison, and key elements were manually coded and grouped into conceptual categories. Reliability was ensured through analysis of multiple texts, cross-checking, and use of supporting examples.

Results

The analysis of presidential speeches during the COVID-19 pandemic revealed both universal and culture-specific patterns in the conceptualization of health.

American presidential discourse predominantly framed health through war, national security, and individual responsibility metaphors. Donald Trump described the virus as “an invisible enemy we are fighting together”¹ and highlighted frontline workers as “leading the battle”². Joe Biden emphasized personal action: “Wear a mask to protect yourself and others”³. These metaphors reflect an agentive cognitive model, emphasizing personal duty and national mobilization, consistent with conceptual metaphor theory, which explains how abstract concepts like health are understood via familiar domains such as WAR⁴. Lexical analysis confirmed frequent use of words like fight, defeat, protect, and frontline, often in the active voice, highlighting agency.

Uzbek presidential discourse framed health as a collective social value and moral responsibility. Shavkat Mirziyoyev stated: “Barchamiz sog‘lom turmush tarzini saqlashimiz kerak” (We must all maintain a healthy lifestyle)⁵ and “Davlatimiz barcha fuqarolarimizni himoya qilmoqda” (Our state is protecting all citizens)⁵. Metaphors such as HEALTH IS VALUE and HEALTH IS PROTECTION emphasize communal duty. Lexical items like himoya (protection), mas’uliyat (responsibility), and birdamlik (solidarity), along with inclusive pronouns and imperatives, reinforce collective engagement.

Comparative analysis indicates that both American and Uzbek leaders aimed to promote public health, but cognitive models differed: American discourse emphasizes individual action and confronting threats, while Uzbek discourse emphasizes collective responsibility and state protection.

Discussion

The cross-cultural differences highlight that political discourse constructs health as a cognitive and cultural concept.

In the U.S., the HEALTH AS WAR metaphor frames health threats as external enemies to be actively confronted, aligning with individualistic cultural values. Lexical choices like fight, frontline, and defeat encourage citizen engagement and justify government measures¹. For example, Trump’s March 11, 2020 address stated, “We are facing a war against an invisible enemy”¹. Biden reinforced

personal responsibility during his July 2021 briefing: “Your actions matter—get vaccinated to protect your family and community”³.

In Uzbekistan, health is framed as a shared societal responsibility, supported by the state. Metaphors emphasizing protection, unity, and collective duty convey that health is a communal priority. Lexical items such as *himoya*, *birdamlik*, and *mas’uliyat*, combined with inclusive pronouns, foster social cohesion⁵. Mirziyoyev emphasized this in April 2020: “The state is ensuring protection of all citizens; together, we will overcome this challenge”⁵.

These findings align with Lakoff and Johnson’s conceptual metaphor theory⁴ and Fairclough’s discourse analysis framework⁶, showing that metaphors and linguistic strategies not only communicate information but also shape social realities and cognitive frames.

Overall, health in political discourse is deeply influenced by cultural, ideological, and cognitive frameworks. American leaders emphasize action, agency, and confrontation, whereas Uzbek discourse foregrounds solidarity, moral obligation, and collective responsibility. Recognizing these patterns is crucial for understanding how language shapes public perception during global health crises.

Conclusion

This study provides a comparative cognitive analysis of health in American and Uzbek presidential discourse during the COVID-19 pandemic, revealing both universal and culture-specific patterns. In the United States, health is framed through war, individual responsibility, and national security metaphors, reflecting cultural values of personal agency and strategic action. In Uzbekistan, health is represented as a collective responsibility and moral-social value, emphasizing social solidarity and state protection.

These differences illustrate how cultural, ideological, and cognitive frameworks shape political representations of health. Metaphors, lexical choices, and grammatical structures not only convey information but also construct cognitive models that guide public understanding and behavior during crises.

Overall, the study demonstrates that political language functions as both a mirror and a constructor of cultural cognition, reflecting societal values while influencing citizen perception and action. These insights contribute to cognitive linguistics, political discourse analysis, and cross-cultural communication,



offering a framework for examining how abstract concepts like health are framed and mobilized across diverse sociopolitical contexts.

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