

Linguistic Structures and Power in Martin Luther King Jr. 's Lincoln Memorial Speech: An FDG and CMT Analysis

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Abstract- This study aims to explore the linguistic structures and the concept of power underlying King's speech through structural - emotional perspectives, adopting the dual lens of Functional Discourse Grammar (FDG) and Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT). FDG provides a robust framework to examine the functional structures of King's language at the syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic levels, while CMT allows for a nuanced understanding of how metaphors in the speech contribute to the construction of power, social change, and collective identity. The study employs a mixed quantitative -qualitative research method. Findings reveal that King prefers using linguistic structures at the phonological and morphosyntactic levels more than at the representational and interpersonal levels. He further emphasizes concepts of power using 15 instances of metaphors in his speech. His masterful employment of linguistic structures and metaphors brings ideology, stance, and power to his political discourse, grasping the attention of his audiences and making significant efforts in demanding rights for freedom, justice, equality, and job opportunities, as well as in promoting business in the Black community, which is being oppressed by the White Society. Future research could further explore King's linguistic structures and metaphors by utilizing digitalization in the modern era.

Keywords – Concept of Power, Conceptual Metaphor Theory, Functional Discourse Grammar, Linguistic Structures, Lincoln Memorial Speech, Martin Luther King Jr.

I. INTRODUCTION

Research Background

Martin Luther King Jr.'s Lincoln Memorial Speech is not merely an emotional and moral plea for racial equality but a masterpiece of linguistic and rhetorical skill. Delivered in August 1963 in Washington for Jobs and Freedom, it became a cornerstone of the Civil Rights Movement and continues to resonate in contemporary discussions on race, equality, and justice. Prior research has examined the speech from various perspectives, including historical, ideological, and rhetorical analyses, yet it has overlooked the deep-rooted examination of linguistic structures and the concept of power within the critical framework of Functional Discourse Grammar (FDG) and Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT).

Addressing this gap is the focus of the current study. FDG provides a robust framework to analyze the linguistic levels, including syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic aspects. CMT allows for analyzing the conceptual metaphors reflecting King's political ideology and power found in his speech. By integrating these theories, the study seeks to uncover how King's strategic use of linguistic structures and metaphors

reflects and challenges the power dynamics of his time, while also influencing the political and social landscape of the 21st century. This aligns with the research aim and objectives to generate the study, alongside the follow-up research questions.

Aim and Objectives

Aim

To explore linguistic structures and the concept of power underlying at levels of language, including syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic, and metaphors found in King's speech, influencing American history and society. This aim sets the overarching goal of the study.

Objectives

To investigate the linguistic structures underlying at the syntactic, semantic and pragmatic levels of King's use of language in his iconic speech.

To identify the concept of power embedded in metaphors found in that speech.

To examine how these linguistic structures and metaphors influence the American History and Society.

Research Questions

What categories of linguistic structures underlying at the syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic levels of King's use of language are present in his iconic speech?

What types of metaphors reflecting concepts of power are embedded in that speech?

How do these linguistic structures and metaphors influence American history and society?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter underscores two fundamental parts: literature of related research and previous studies in political discourse.

Literature of Related Research

Concerning literature of related research, we will present three parts: overview of Functional Discourse Grammar Theory, and Conceptual Metaphor Theory, and their synergy.

Overview of Functional Discourse Grammar (FDG)

Functional discourse grammar (FDG) is a functionalist theory that emphasizes the relationship between discourse and grammar, focusing on how grammatical structures support the communicative functions in discourse (Dik, 1997; Hengeveld & Mackenzie, 2008). Within FDG, phonology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics are interconnected through different layers of discourse, enabling a nuanced understanding of how language organizes information for communication. For instance, in the Lincoln Memorial Speech, King's use of language leverages the intermingling across these levels of language—phonological, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic—to systematically organize the linguistic structures, allowing the audience and readers to gain a comprehensive understanding of the language he employs in his speech. FDG provides the structural backbone of discourse: how language is organized to serve communicative goals (Butler & González - Alvarez, 2009).

Overview of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT)

Conceptual metaphor theory (CMT), introduced by Lakoff & Johnson (1980), posits that metaphors shape our conceptual understanding of abstract ideas. In political discourse, metaphors often help to conceptualize abstract concepts such as freedom, justice, power, and violence in terms of more concrete experiences. For example, the metaphor "war on drugs" conceptualizes an abstract social issue as a battle or conflict (Lakoff, 2002). CMT provides a framework for understanding how metaphors in political language help shape the ideological and power relationships within discourse (Charteris - Black, 2004).

Synergy of FDG and CMT

When combined, FDG and CMT reveal how metaphors are not just linguistic devices but are intricately woven into the structure of discourse to either reinforce or challenge power

dynamics (Goatly, 2007). For example, a politician might employ a "nation as a family" metaphor to evoke solidarity through specific grammatical structures (FDG) that help foreground the metaphor (Musolff, 2004).

Previous Studies in Political Discourse

The study of political discourse emphasizes analyzing how language is used to construct, maintain, and challenge power relations (van Dijk, 1997). Functional Discourse Grammar (FDG) and Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) provide robust frameworks for examining the linguistic structures and metaphorical concepts that underpin power dynamics in political communication (Chilton, 2004). Existing research has extensively examined political discourse from various perspectives, including social, cultural, historical, and aesthetic points (Fairclough, 1995; Wodak, 2001). However, it has overlooked the study of linguistic structures that speakers use in their speech, limiting our ability to gain a comprehensive understanding of political discourse. Some prior studies have highlighted grammatical metaphors to seek the construction of political identity, adopting FDG (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). For instance, Butler (2003) identified instances of grammatical metaphor such as normalization and verbalization in shaping political identity, yet neglected to underscore the linguistic structures found in political discourse. This becomes the problem statement of the present study.

Other studies have focused on the social, cultural, and historical awareness of the speakers, using figures of speech (Lakoff, 2006). Most of these studies emphasized the thematic depth of the metaphorical language but fell short in analyzing concepts of power influential upon the audiences (Musolff, 2016). Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) provides a framework to explore how power concepts affect interlocutors (audiences), reflecting the cognitive power of the speakers (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). This study centres on an in-depth discernment of the power that can attract the audience. By focusing on the robust framework of integrating Functional Discourse Grammar (FDG) and Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), the present study endeavours to investigate linguistic structures and power concepts.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a mixed quantitative-qualitative research approach to investigate linguistic structures and the concepts of metaphors in King's iconic speech. The close reading method is grounded as the fundamental technique, with the speech as the primary data source. The famous speech in American history, "Lincoln Memorial Speech" serves as the primary data source. The study integrates Functional Discourse Grammar Theory (FDG) and Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) to analyze the data. FDG examines language structures at four levels: phonology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics, though

the study primarily focuses on syntactic, semantic and pragmatic structures. CMT is used to identify and interpret metaphorical concepts in the speech. The synergy of FDG and CMT enables an analysis of how linguistic structures and metaphors influence audience engagement and interpersonal dynamics between the speaker and the listeners. Data collection and analysis follow a dual approach: Quantitative analysis employs a systematic coding scheme to count the frequencies of linguistic structures and metaphors. Qualitative analysis interprets the meaning and impact of these structures and metaphors. In conclusion, this methodologically rigorous approach ensures a comprehensive examination of King’s rhetorical strategies.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Linguistic structures shaping ideology and stance of Martin Luther King

(RQ1: What categories of linguistic structures underlying at the syntactic, semantic and pragmatic levels of King’s use of language are present in King’s iconic speech?)

One of the most famous American political leaders, Martin Luther King significantly employs linguistic structures in his iconic speech, “Lincoln Memorial Speech,” which is influential and powerful in American History. It primarily demands the racial equality, jobs and freedom. This study attempts to seek linguistic structures found in King’s speech at four levels: phonological, syntactical, semantics, and pragmatics, adopting Functional Discourse Grammar (FDG). FDG is a comprehensive model of grammar that focuses on the functions of language in communication. It consists of four hierarchical levels: the Interpersonal level (pragmatics), the Representational level (semantics), the Morphosyntactic level (syntax), and the Phonological level. Each level has its own set of rules and interacts with the others to produce meaningful linguistic expressions. These linguistic structures are analyzed through a FDG model across systemic coding scheme as follows.

Table 4.1 Frequencies of Coded Linguistic Structures found in King’s Speech

No	MONOLOGUE	P.NO	SYN	SEM	PRAG
1.	One Hundred Years Later.... In The Midst Of A Vast Ocean Of Material Prosperity	3	3	2	2
2.	So, We Have Come Here...Every American Was To Fall Heir.	2	2	2	2
3.	This Note Was A Promise.... Great Vaults Of Opportunity Of This Nation.	2	3	2	2
4.	So, We Have Come To Cash This Check... .. The Solid Rock Of Brotherhood.	4	2	2	2
5.	It Would Be Fatal For The Nation.... Is Granted His Citizenship Rights.	3	4	2	2
6.	The Whirlwinds..... The Cup Of Bitterness And Hatred.	3	4	2	2
7.	We Must Forever Conduct.....Physical Force With Soul Force.	2	1	2	2
8.	The Marvellous New Militancy.... Bound To Our Freedom.	4	3	2	2
9.	We Cannot Walk Alone... The Hotels Of The Cities.	3	3	2	2
10.	We Cannot Be Satisfied Like A Mighty Stream.	3	3	2	2
11.	I Am Not Unmindful... Unearned Suffering Is Redemptive.	3	3	2	2
12.	Go Back To Mississippi.... It Is A Dream Deeply Rooted In The American Dream.	4	4	2	2
13.	I Have A Dream That One Day This Nation..... At A Table Of Brotherhood.	3	3	2	2
14.	I Have A Dream That One Day... I Have A Dream Today.	3	3	2	2

15.	I Have A Dream That One Day Together As Sisters And Brothers.	3	3	2	2
16.	I Have A Dream That One Day..... This Is Our Hope.	2	4	2	2
17.	This Is The Faith..... We Will Be Free One Day.	2	2	2	2
18.	This Will Be The Day..... Hilltops Of New Hampshire.	2	3	2	2
19.	Let Freedom Ring From The Mighty Mountains.... From Every Mountainside, Let Freedom Ring.	4	2	2	2
20.	When We Let Freedom Ring... We Are Free At Last!	3	3	2	2
Total Frequencies For Each Level: Phonological, Morphosyntactic (Syntax), Representational (Semantics), And Interpersonal Level (Pragmatics)		58	56	40	40

In accordance with the raw frequencies for coded linguistic structures, the speaker Martin Luther King (Jr.) employs different layers of structures in his political discourse. By analyzing the framework of Functional Discourse Grammar (FDG), it is clearly seen that King uses various types of linguistic structures at four levels.

The above coding table reveals that King employs phonological elements in his language most frequently. This level reveals that Kings uses regular rhyming system (segregation/discrimination, lonely/ poverty, prosperity/ society, etc.), stresses (appalling, architects, promissory, etc.), repetition (check... a check/ we will be able to.... / we will be able to..., etc.) and intonation in his speech to grasp the audience’s attention.

The morphosyntactic level stands at the second most in his speech. His use of multiple syntactic structures such as assertive expressions like “I have a dream; It would be fatal for the nation; This is the faith; Let freedom ring from the mighty mountains, and others”. He often uses imperative forms such as “Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst; Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst”. Additionally, King uses simple sentence structures (“I have a dream that one day; This is our hope, etc.”) to convey his messages to the audiences directly. He frequently deploys the passive form to transcend his messages to the audiences straightforwardly.

His use of noun phrases, such as “sadly crippled by the manacles, the chains of discrimination, a vast ocean of material prosperity” are syntactically well-structured and they contribute to overall meaning of the sentences. Furthermore, his use of verb tenses “simple present forms (I have a dream)” “will infinitive (Active & Passive Form) (It will/ it will be)” convey the overall meaning of the sentences.

At representational level, King’s speech uses several metaphors (“Manacles of segregation” and “chains of discrimination”)

that compare segregation and discrimination to physical restraints, suggesting that they hold the Negro back and prevent them from achieving freedom and equality. “Lonely island of poverty” and “vast ocean of material prosperity” create a contrast between the Negro’s economic situation and that of the rest society, highlighting the inequality. The semantic fields of oppression (“crippled”, “manacles”, “claims”, “discrimination”), poverty (“lonely island” and social exclusion (“languishing”, “corners of society”, “exile”) are used to convey the negative aspects of the Negro’s life.

At interpersonal level, King is addressing a general audience, likely including both supporters and opponents of civil rights. The use of emotional language and vivid metaphors is intended to evoke empathy and a sense of urgency in the audience. The overall speech act is one of accusation and lamentation. Here, King is accusing society of failing to address the ongoing injustice faced by the Negro and lamenting the fact that after one hundred years, little has changed. The purpose is to raise awareness and mobilize support for civil rights.

In conclusion, King’s language in his iconic speech is very powerful and influential in American history. His masterful language conveys power and ideology at distinctive four linguistic levels: phonological (rhyming system, stress, and intonation), morphosyntactic level (syntax), representational level (semantics), and interpersonal level (pragmatics), highlighting linguistic structures mentioned above.

2. Types of Metaphors reflecting concepts of power found in King’s Speech

(RQ2: What types of metaphors reflecting concepts of power are embedded in that speech?)

Table 4.2 Metaphors conveying concepts of power found in King’s Speech

No.	Types of Metaphors	Source Domain	Target Domain
1	The life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation.	Physical restraint (manacles and chains)	Social and institutional power structures
2	The Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity.	Geographical isolation (lonely island) and vast expanse (ocean)	Economic and social power distribution
3	The Negro is still languishing in the corners of American society and finds himself an exile in his own land.	Spatial marginalization (corners) and forced separation (exile)	Social and political power
4.	We have come here today to dramatize an appalling condition.	Theatre (dramatize)	Social and political activism
5.	We have come to our nation’s capital to cash a check.	Financial transaction (cashing a check)	Fulfilment of social and political promises
6.	Every valley shall be exalted; every hill and mountain shall be made low.	Topography (valleys, hills, mountains)	Social hierarchy (oppression vs. equality)
7.	The rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight	Terrain (rough, crooked paths)	Social injustice (barriers, discrimination)
8	Hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope.	Mining/carving (mountain → stone)	Overcoming oppression (despair → hope)
9	Transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood.	Music (discord → symphony)	Social conflict → unity
10	Let freedom ring from every mountainside.	Let freedom ring from every mountainside.	Freedom’s spread
11	The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.	Theology (divine glory)	Social justice
12	Work together, pray together, struggle together, go to jail together, stand up for freedom together.	Collective labour (working, praying, struggling)	Racial unity
	All of God’s children... will be able to join hands.	Kinship (siblings, children)	Freedom’s spread

King employs the different types of metaphors in his iconic speech which is influential to demand the engagement of the audiences as these metaphors not merely convey the deep messages of the speaker straightforwardly to the audiences but remains the memory and power in American history. To specifically address the title, this section focuses on how these metaphors reflect concepts of power. Grounded in Table 4.2, King uses colourful metaphors (16 instances) in his speech which are the wealth of political awareness and insights mirroring the well-being of the Blacks and harmony with the Whites. In this section, we will present how metaphors reflect the concepts of the power that can motivate the audiences and invite their engagement in the effort of victory in justice, hope, freedom, jobs and racial equality, highlighting three instances of these metaphors King uses in his speech.

The metaphor “The life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation portray the concept of power: segregation and discrimination as powerful forces physically and metaphorically bind the Black (Negro). Manacles and chains are symbols of physical restraint (imprisonment and lack of freedom) associated with the exercise of power by those in authority. Here, the White dominated society is seen as wielding power through these discriminatory practices to restrict the movement, opportunities, rights of the Black. The term “crippled” emphasizes the debilitating effect of this power, suggesting that the Black is powerless and unable to fully participate in society.

In this metaphor the concept of power: “the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity,” the “lonely island of poverty” represents the marginalized and powerless position of the Black in the economic landscape. The island is isolated, cut off from the resources and opportunities available in the surrounding “ocean of material prosperity.” The ocean symbolizes the dominant economic power held by the majority of society, while the island shows the lack of access to that power of the Black. This metaphor highlights the unequal distribution of economic power, where the Black is left in a state of deprivation, while the others enjoy abundance.

Additionally, in this metaphor “the Negro is still languishing in the corners of American society and finds himself an exile in his own land,” the concept of power “being in the corners of American society” implies that the Black is pushed to the periphery, away from the centres of power, decision-making, and influence. The concept of “exile” suggests that the Black is made to feel like an outsider in their own country, despite being a citizen. This emphasizes a form of social and political power being used to exclude and marginalize the Black, denying the full rights and status that should come with citizenship.

In conclusion, King’s metaphors in his iconic speech “Lincoln Memorial Speech” are powerful tools for reflecting concepts of power. They effectively grasp the attention of the audiences and endeavour to announce the rights of the Blacks, negotiating with the White authorities harmoniously. All his metaphors convey insightful messages that highlights power, urging readers to sympathize with the Blacks and recognize the injustices they face.

3. King’s Linguistic Structures and Metaphors influencing The American History and Society

(RQ3: How do King’s linguistic structures and metaphors influence the American History and Society?)

One of the outstanding and influential political leaders in American History, Martin Luther King (Jr.) had the endeavour to gain Rights for Freedom, Jobs, Justice, Racial Equality among the Black community. He was skilful in the use of language for public speaking and often employed metaphors, which are powerful tools for reflecting concepts of power. His masterful use of language conveyed insightful messages to his audiences, underscoring four linguistic levels.

Through the lens of Functional Discourse Grammar (FDG), King profoundly used rhythms (segregation/discrimination), stress, repetition (check...check), and intonation in his political discourse at the phonological level. At morphosyntactic level, he employed various types of sentence constructions (neither--nor), noun phrases (The glory of the Lord) and verb tenses (future will) which generate ideology and stance of his speech. Additionally, at representational level, King’s employment of metaphors (Let freedom ring from every mountainside/ Every valley shall be exalted; every hill and mountain shall be made low) portrayed the powerful rhetorical strategies influential in grasping the attention of the audiences. The semantic field (“crippled”, “manacles”, “claims”, “discrimination”) utilized in his speech preserved the strong and meaningful insights to the audiences.

Additionally, King interpersonally addressed his audience (Negros), likely including both supporters and opponents of civil rights. At this level, his use of emotional language and vivid metaphors was intended to evoke empathy and a sense of urgency in the audience. The overall speech act was one of accusation and lamentation. King is accusing society of failing to address the ongoing injustice faced by the Negro and lamenting the fact that after one hundred years, little has changed. The purpose was to raise awareness and mobilize support for civil rights.

In accordance with Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) analysis, King’s metaphors significantly contributed to the victory for the Blacks community, who were being suppressed by the White authorities in every sector, especially opportunities for employment and business, racial equality,

justice, and freedom. For instance, the metaphor “The life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation portray the concept of power: segregation and discrimination as powerful forces physically and metaphorically bind the Black (Negro). Manacles and chains are symbols of physical restraint (imprisonment and lack of freedom) associated with the exercise of power by those in authority. Here, the White dominated society is seen as wielding power through these discriminatory practices to restrict the movement, opportunities, and rights of the Black community. The term “crippled” emphasizes the debilitating effect of this power, suggesting that the Black is powerless and unable to fully participate in society.

In conclusion, King’s prevalent skill of utilizing language in his iconic speech brought great benefits for the Black community. His skilful employment of language in those speeches brought ideology, stance, and power to the political discourse, which remains as powerful and influential tool for demanding the rights for freedom, justice, racial equality, and job opportunity in the Black Community frequently oppressed by the White authorized society. This influence is evident in the lasting impact of his speeches on American history and society.

4. Discussion on King’s linguistic structures and metaphors reflecting ideology and power to political discourse

In this section, we will elaborate how King’s linguistic structures and metaphors reflect ideology and power to political discourse, comparatively with findings of the prior research.

Existing research has extensively examined political discourse from various perspectives including social, cultural, historical and aesthetic points (Fairclough, 1995; Wodak, 2001). However, it has overlooked in the study of linguistic structures that speakers use in their speech. Butler (2003) identified instances of grammatical metaphor such as normalization, verbalization shaping political identity, yet neglected underscoring linguistic structures found in political discourse. This becomes the problem statement of the present study.

Lakoff (2006) highlighted social, cultural and historical awareness of the speakers, using figures of speech. Most of these studies (Musolff, 2016) emphasized thematic depth of the metaphorical language, but fell back in analyzing concepts of power influential upon the audiences.

The findings of the present study fill this gap by examining King’s language used in “Lincoln Memorial Speech,” drawing the synergistic Framework of Functional Discourse Grammar (FDG) and Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT). Through the lens of Functional Discourse Grammar (FDG), King profoundly used rhythms (segregation/discrimination), stress, repetition (check...check), and intonation in his political discourse at the phonological level. He employed various types of sentence constructions (neither---nor), noun phrases (The

glory of the Lord) and verb tenses (future will) to generate ideology and stance in the political discourse at morphosyntactic level, and metaphors (e.g., Let freedom ring from every mountainside) and the semantic field (“crippled”, “manacles”, “claims”, “discrimination”) portraying the powerful rhetorical strategies and strong/ meaningful insights influential in grasping the attention of his audience at representational level. At interpersonal level, King addressed his audience (Negros), evoking empathy and a sense of urgency in the Black community. Here, he accused society of failing to address the ongoing injustice faced by the Negro and lamenting the fact that after one hundred years, little has changed. The purpose was to raise awareness and mobilize support for civil rights.

In accordance with Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) analysis, King’s metaphors significantly contributed to the victory for the Blacks community, who were being suppressed by the White authorities in every sector, especially opportunities for employment and business, racial equality, justice, and freedom. For instance, the metaphor “The life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation portray the concept of power: segregation and discrimination as powerful forces physically and metaphorically bind the Blacks (Negros). Manacles and chains are symbols of physical restraint (imprisonment and lack of freedom) associated with the exercise of power by those in authority. Here, the White dominated society is seen as wielding power through these discriminatory practices to restrict the movement, opportunities, and rights of the Black community. Ultimately, all findings of the present study address the gap in prior studies, which have overlooked analyzing linguistic structures and concepts of metaphors found in the speakers’ (King’s) language in their speeches.

V. CONCLUSION

The present study investigates linguistic structures and metaphors in Martin Luther King Jr.’s renowned speech “Lincoln Memorial Speech.” By integrating Functional Discourse Grammar (FDG) and Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), this study analyzes how King’s language effectively conveys ideological messages and influence to audience engagement. Using a mixed quantitative-qualitative research approach, this study identifies four linguistic levels: phonological, morphosyntactic, representational level and interpersonal. King predominantly employs phonological and morphosyntactic structures, alongside 16 instances of power-related metaphors. These rhetorical devices reinforce his demands for freedom, justice, equality, and economic opportunities for the Black community. The findings demonstrate that King’s strategic use of language structures and metaphors enhances the persuasive impact of his political discourse. This study contributes valuable insights for future research in political rhetoric and critical discourse analysis.

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