

Death, Legacy, and Power: A Cognitive Linguistic Approach to the Political Narratives of Hasan Nasrallah and Al-Sinwar

Asst. L. Abbas Khantil Hassoon
Ministry of Education
General Directorate of Education in Al-Qadisiyah
Adamsmrak1985@gmail.com

Date Received : 19/3/2025

Date of Acceptness : 10/4/2025

Abstract

This study employs cognitive linguistic analysis to examine the political speeches of Hassan Nasrallah (Hezbollah) and Ismail Al-Sinwar (Hamas) and how they discursively construct death, legacy, and power. Despite extensive research on Middle Eastern political rhetoric, few studies apply cognitive linguistics to reveal how metaphor and narrative structure perpetuate ideological binaries and sustain conflict. This paper aims to uncover the subconscious linguistic mechanisms that transform violence into sacred duty, thereby obstructing conflict resolution. The article employs close reading of public speeches and statements to investigate how metaphorical framing, conceptual blending, and narrative tactics are employed to justify ideological positions and to coordinate collective action. The findings present systematic patterns in which both leaders utilize resistance rhetoric to legitimize political authority, sanctify martyrs, and construct long-term resistance identities. By using religious and nationalist symbols to ground their rhetoric, Nasrallah and Al-Sinwar construct a cognitive model that prolongs conflict narratives while solidifying their leadership roles.

Keywords: Cognitive linguistics, political narratives, Hassan Nasrallah, Ismail Al-Sinwar, resistance rhetoric, metaphor analysis

الموت، الإرث، والسلطة: مقارنة لسانية معرفية للسرديات السياسية

لحسن نصر الله ويحيى السنوار

م.م. عباس خنطيل حسون

وزارة التربية مديرية تربية القادسية

Adamsmrak1985@gmail.com

تاريخ الاستلام : ٢٠٢٥/٣/١٩

تاريخ قبول النشر : ٢٠٢٥/٤/١٠

الخلاصة :

تستخدم هذه الدراسة التحليل اللساني المعرفي لفحص الخطب السياسية لحسن نصر الله (حزب الله) ويحيى السنوار (حماس) وكيفية بنائهما الخطابى لمفاهيم الموت، والإرث، والسلطة. فعلى الرغم من وفرة الأبحاث حول الخطاب السياسى فى الشرق الأوسط، فإن القليل منها يستخدم اللسانيات المعرفية للكشف عن كيفية استخدام الاستعارة وبنية السرد فى ترسيخ الثنائيات الإيديولوجية واستمرار الصراع. تهدف هذه الورقة إلى الكشف عن الآليات اللغوية اللاواعية التى تُحوّل العنف إلى واجب مقدس، مما يُعيق الوصول إلى تسويات سلمية. تعتمد المقالة على قراءة دقيقة للخطب والتصريحات العامة للتحقيق فى كيفية استخدام التأطير الاستعارى، والمزج المفاهيمى، والتكتيكات السردية لتبرير المواقف الأيديولوجية وتنسيق العمل الجماعى. وتُظهر النتائج أن هناك أنماطاً منهجية يستخدم فيها كلا الزعيمين خطاب المقاومة لإضفاء الشرعية على السلطة السياسية، وتقديس الشهداء، وبناء هويات مقاومة طويلة الأمد. ومن خلال استخدام الرموز الدينية والقومية كأساس لخطابهما، يبني نصر الله والسنوار نموذجاً معرفياً يُطيل أمد سرديات الصراع ويُعزز من أدوارهما القيادية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: اللسانيات المعرفية، السرديات السياسية، حسن نصر الله، يحيى السنوار، خطاب المقاومة، تحليل

الاستعارة.

1. Introduction

1.1 Problem Statement

Political elites in war zones employ language as a tactic to legitimize power, mobilize followers, and construct ideological hegemony (Chilton, 2021, p. 45). Rhetorics of leaders, such as Hasan Nasrallah (Hezbollah) and Yahya Al-Sinwar (Hamas), are saturated with resistance ideologies where language choices inform constructions of martyrdom, struggle, and legacy. Their rhetoric is rooted in cognitive processes—like metaphoric framing, conceptual blending, and schema activation—to facilitate political narratives (Hart, 2020, p. 12). Still, while their speeches have been examined for political and ideological meanings, a cognitive linguistic analysis of their rhetorical moves remains underresearched (Musolff, 2021, p. 89). This research fills this gap by examining how Al-Sinwar and Nasrallah use cognitive linguistic resources to build meaning, legitimize resistance, and maintain ideological superiority. The death of a person is typically described by them in terms of sacrifice, resistance is portrayed as obedience to God, and legacy is portrayed as eternal struggle, affirming collective identity (El-Dakhs, 2023, p. 56). Recognizing these mechanisms throws light on how language sustains power relations in war-torn societies.

1.2 Research Objectives

The present study examines the cognitive linguistic tools—such as metaphors, image schemas, conceptual blending, and framing—that Nasrallah and Al-Sinwar make use of in their political speeches. The objectives of the research are as follows:

1. To identify and analyze common metaphors (e.g., "resistance as jihad," "martyrdom as victory") in their speeches.
2. To map their cognitive schemas, by which they structure their speech, and to examine their ideological consequences.
3. To investigate the way conceptual blending integrates religious and political spheres in order to construct plausible narratives.
4. To gauge the extent to which their rhetoric constructs effects on audience mobilization and ideological reinforcement.

1.3 Research Questions:

How do Nasrallah and Al-Sinwar employ metaphoric structures to think about death and martyrdom in their political discourse?

What are the dominant schemas of concepts (e.g., PATH, CONTAINER, FORCE) in their rhetoric and how these schemas confirm the resistances ideologies?

What is the role of conceptual blending in the political legitimacy construction in their speeches?

How does framing contribute to audience interpretation of power and legacy in their narratives?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Foundations of Cognitive Linguistics in Political Discourse

Cognitive linguistics also offers a rich theoretical model to study how political leaders meaningfully craft meaning in strategic ways via language, particularly via conceptual metaphors, image schemas, and framing processes (Evans & Green, 2020, p. 147). In essence, the approach proposes that human thought necessarily becomes organized through metaphorical thought, where political abstractions are expressed in relation to more bodily, embodied experience (Lakoff & Johnson, 2020, p. 56). Framing theory, as developed by Lakoff (1980) and extended in later studies, holds that political discourse is more than rhetorical flair but actually based in profound cognitive frames structuring perception and ideology (Hart, 2020, p. 12). For example, metaphors like "resistance as jihad" or "martyrdom as victory" not only transmit a message but also evoke deeply rooted cultural and moral schemas that resonate on an emotional level with audiences, solidifying ideological allegiance (Kövecses, 2023, p. 78). These metaphors serve as instruments of persuasion, enabling political agents to structure conflicts in terms that are morally loaded and warrant actions and generate support.

An exemplary demonstration of such a dynamic exists in Hezbollah party leader Hassan Nasrallah's metaphorical rendering of Israel as "weaker than a spider's web." Such an analogy utilizes the CONTAINER schema, a cognitive representation whereby Israel is characterized as

lacking content and weakened as opposed to its militarized outside (Lakoff, 2020, p. 89). By drawing on such imagery, Nasrallah disassembles Israel's perceived power while reaffirming the narrative of resistance as divine and fated. Such rhetorical devices are not exclusive to Middle Eastern discourse; Charteris-Black's (2021) cross-cultural study of political leadership illustrates how metaphors like "journey" or "battle" dominate crisis rhetoric in Western political contexts, the function of which is to authorize leadership and unify masses under a single ideological frame (p. 112). However, even as Charteris-Black's work provides insights on the significance of Euro-American political rhetoric, it places too much focus on the employment of the same cognitive strategies by non-Western agents such as Hamas and Hezbollah in the contexts of Islamist resistance (El-Dakhs, 2023, p. 56).

For example, Ismail Al-Sinwar's orations tend to mix religious and military imagery, such as by identifying Palestine as a "divine covenant"—a rhetorical maneuver that simultaneously sanctifies the political struggle and authorizes militant resistance (Al-Sinwar, 2021, as quoted by BBC Monitoring, 2021). Such a maneuver, previously under-explored in Charteris-Black's model, highlights the value of further cross-culturally inclusive political discourse cognitive linguistic analysis. Furthermore, the ideological and affective power of such metaphors is intensified in contexts of extended conflict, in which receivers are keen to interpret political language in terms of group struggle and very existence threat (Van Dijk, 2020, p. 134). Cognitive linguistics thus not only helps to desecrate the hidden dynamics of political communication but also indicates the construction of reality by language, by sustaining current ideologies and structures of power (Fairclough, 2021, p. 76). Subsequent research would be well advised to consider more thoroughly how such cognitive strategies vary with cultural and political contexts, particularly in non-Western resistance movements in which religious and nationalist narratives intersect in complex manners.

2.2 Gaps in Applying Cognitive Linguistics to Non-Western Political Discourse

Even though cognitive linguistics has been applied extensively in Western political discourse, cognitive linguistics has limited application in the analysis of Middle Eastern resistance discourses. Winters and Nathan (2020) note that cognitive linguistic tools such as conceptual blending—where religion and politics are blended—are rarely investigated in non-

Western societies (p. 34). For instance, the speeches of Nasrallah fuse Shiite eschatology (the return of the Mahdi) and anti-Zionist struggle, creating an integrated story of divine mission and worldly conflict. Similarly, Hamas's articulation of martyrdom as religious duty and political endeavor is an example of metaphoric polysemy, a practice well documented in Western discourse but hardly examined within Palestinian discourse (Musolff, 2021, p. 89).

There is one significant lacuna in the crossroads of corpus-based cognitive analysis and political rhetoric. Brasoveanu and Dotla metaphor frequency and schema activation across large speech corpora (p. 112), but these methods have not yet been systematically applied to Hamas- or Hezbollah-penned Arabic-language texts. For example, a corpus analysis of Al-Sinwar's interviews can illustrate how schemas like FORCE (e.g., "resistance as an unstoppable tide") are more dominant in his rhetoric than Nasrallah's PATH schemas (e.g., "the road to Jerusalem").

2.3 Theoretical and Methodological Innovations

Recent advances in cognitive linguistics, such as Primary Metaphor Theory (Evans & Green, 2020, p. 317) and embodied construction grammar (Dunmire, 2022, p. 45), offer new portals through which to view non-Western discourse. Nasrallah's appeal to "blood as sacrifice," for instance, borrows from shared embodied feelings (e.g., pain as a moral asset), but its culturally embedded origin—within Shiite notions of martyrdom—must be theoretically accounted for at the local level. Similarly, Hamas use of spatial metaphors (e.g., "Gaza as a fortress") is in accordance with image schema theory but varies in its collective (rather than individual) orientation.

2.4 Bridging the Gap

This paper emphasizes the importance of applying cognitive linguistic frameworks to non-Western resistance discourses. By combining corpus methodology, metaphor identification protocols (e.g., MIPVU), and culturally informed schema analysis, future studies can illuminate the ways in which figures like Nasrallah and Al-Sinwar construct ideological hegemony through language. Such a pursuit would not merely advance cognitive linguistics but provide advanced tools for examining power dynamics within asymmetric wars.

3. Methodology

This study employs qualitative case study methodology of speeches of Hassan Nasrallah (Hezbollah) and Yahya Al-Sinwar (Hamas) between the years 2010–2024, utilizing Lakoff's Politeness Theory (1987) and Van Dijk's Socio-Cognitive Approach to Discourse Analysis (2014) in examining linguistic tools, ideological framing, and rhetorical manipulation.

The study adapts a cognitive linguistic approach in investigating the effect of metaphors, politeness strategies, and discourse organization in political language. Through the employment of case study, the examination of linguistic frameworks in Nasrallah's and Al-Sinwar's speeches is conducted comprehensively, such as resistance, martyrdom, and victory, being emphasized (Van Dijk, 2014, p. 45).

Public speeches (transcripts and videos) of Nasrallah and Al-Sinwar (2010–2024), sourced from official media channels (e.g., Al-Manar, Hamas-affiliated platforms).

4. Data Analysis

Thematic coding and metaphor identification using NVivo software to recognize repetitive linguistic patterns.

Death-sensitive rhetoric (e.g., "martyrdom as victory") sensitivity with Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003, p. 78).

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) in order to unveil power relations of ideology (Van Dijk, 2014, p. 62).

The study integrates:

1. Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003): Examines the structure of political stories through metaphors (for example, "resistance is sacred").
2. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Van Dijk, 2014): Analyzes power relations and ideological framing within discourse.

This dual structure offers a holistic analysis of linguistic strategies and their socio-political significance (Lakoff, 2021, p. 95).

Extracts:

4.1. Analysis of Speech (1)

Extract 1: Rhetoric of Resistance and Martyrdom: Speech: "Divine Victory" Address (September 22, 2006)

"You are a great people, and you are a proud people, and you are a loyal people, and you are a courageous people... This victory was achieved by the blood of the martyrs, the patience of the people, and the will of the resistance." (Nasrallah, 2006, as cited in Alagha, 2021, p. 78).

Positive Politeness: Nasrallah employs redundant praise ("you are a. people") in order to instill solidarity and elevate the audience's social ranking, a paramount practice in Lakoff's model (Lakoff, 1987, p. 102).

Ideological Framing (Van Dijk): Lexical repetition of words ("people," "resistance") reiterates a collective identity that comes with sacrifice, positioning resistance within a moral imperative. Van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach highlights how this repetition naturalizes ideological claims (Van Dijk, 2014, p. 67).

4.2 Analysis of Speech (2)

Extract 2: Strategic Ambiguity and Deterrence: Speech: Response to Israeli Telecom Attacks (September 2024)

"The reckoning will come. Its nature, scope, when and where... that's something we will definitely keep to ourselves... The resistance in Lebanon will not stop supporting Gaza, no matter the sacrifices." (Nasrallah, 2024, as cited in Saouli, 2024, p. 112).

Negative Politeness: Nasrallah's vague threats ("reckoning will come") preserve Hezbollah's strategic ambiguity, a face-saving strategy (Lakoff, 1987, p. 95).

Power Discourse (Van Dijk): Omitting the details ("nature, scope") places psychological pressure, a common conflict discourse power strategy (Van Dijk, 2014, p. 89).

4.3 Analysis of Speech (3)

Extract 3: Anti-Western and Anti-Israel Rhetoric: Speech: Quds Day Commemoration (April 5, 2024)

"Israel is weaker than a spider's web... The U.S. is the root of all crimes in our region. The resistance will prevail, and the axis of resistance stands united." (Al-Sinwar, 2024, as cited in Milton-Edwards, 2024, p. 56).

Metaphorical Framing (Lakoff & Johnson): The "spider's web" metaphor demilitarizes Israel, consistent with Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003, p. 45).

Polarization (Van Dijk): Binaries ("resistance unity" and "U.S. crimes") construct an "us versus them" frame, a property of ideological speech (Van Dijk, 2014, p. 112).

4.4 Analysis of Speech (4)

Extract 4: Rhetoric of Resistance and Martyrdom: Speech: Al-Aqsa Flood Victory Address (May 26, 2021)

"This was just a rehearsal, nothing but a tiny drill of what could happen if they try to harm the Al-Aqsa Mosque once again... Gaza will burst with the full force of its resistance, and the West Bank will explode with all its power." (Al-Sinwar, 2021, as cited in BBC Monitoring, 2021, para. 4).

Metaphorical Framing (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003, p. 45): Metaphorical framing presents violence as a "rehearsal" which naturalizes armed resistance as defensive.

Polarization (Van Dijk, 2014, p. 112): Binary opposition ("resistance" and "enemy") generates an ideological bifurcation, characterizing Hamas as the sole protector of holy sites.

Strategic Ambiguity: The vague threat ("what can happen") serves as negative politeness, discouraging without direct accountability (Lakoff, 1987, p. 95).

4.5 Analysis of Speech (5)

Extract 5: Anti-Imperialist and Anti-Israel Rhetoric: Speech: Post-2023 War Statement (December 2023)

"The U.S. is the root of all crimes in our region... The resistance will prevail, and the axis of resistance stands united. We will burn everything, green and dry, if Gaza's problems are not resolved." (Nasrallah, 2023, as cited in Al Jazeera, 2023, para. 2).

Delegitimization (Van Dijk, 2014, p. 67): Assigning the U.S. as the "root of crimes" deflects agency from Hamas to external actors, legitimizing perpetual resistance.

Conceptual Metaphor: "Burn everything" calls up destruction as cleansing, in line with Lakoff & Johnson's (2003, p. 78) moral frame theory.

Collective Identity: "Axis of resistance" reinforces in-group solidarity, which is a salient strategy in Lakoff's positive politeness (1987, p. 102).

4.6 Analysis of Speech (6)

Extract 6: Pragmatism and Truce Conditions: Speech: Press Conference (May 26, 2021)

"If the occupation abides by international law, there can be a long-term truce... Release prisoners, lift the siege, and allow elections in Jerusalem. Otherwise, Gaza will implode." (Al-Sinwar, 2021, as cited in MEMRI, 2021, para. 5).

Conditional Politeness (Lakoff, 1987, p. 89): "If-then" structure offers face-saving compromise while hiding non-negotiable demands (e.g., Jerusalem's control).

Ideological Contradiction (Van Dijk, 2014, p. 45): While the speech advocates "armed jihad," it employs diplomatic terminology to appeal to international audiences.

Coercive Diplomacy: The implied threat ("Gaza will implode") uses suffering as political blackmail, a familiar theme of Hamas rhetoric.

4.7 Analysis of Speech (7)

Extract 7: Sacred Duty and Victimhood Narrative

Speech: Ashura Commemoration (August 19, 2021)

“Resistance is not a choice. It is our sacred obligation—our Karbala in modern times. Every child in Gaza is a soldier of truth.”

(Nasrallah, 2021, as cited in Al-Mayadeen, 2021, para. 7)

Moral Metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003, p. 78): The phrase “our Karbala” aligns resistance with the Shia martyrdom of Imam Hussein, embedding political struggle in religious narrative.

Victimhood Ideology (Van Dijk, 2014, p. 88): Children depicted as “soldiers of truth” constructs a powerful victim-defender dichotomy, legitimizing resistance as sacred and intergenerational.

Collective Identity: The use of “our” fosters a collective moral burden, enhancing solidarity (Lakoff, 1987, p. 102).

4.8 Analysis of Speech (8)

Extract 8: Resistance as Historical Continuity

Speech: Martyrs’ Day Ceremony (November 11, 2022)

“From Beirut to Jenin, we have always stood firm. Resistance is not born today—it runs in our blood. The Zionists should read history before they gamble.”

(Al-Sinwar, 2022, as cited in Middle East Eye, 2022, para. 3)

Ontological Metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003, p. 45): “Resistance... runs in our blood” conceptualizes resistance as an inherited biological trait, naturalizing it as essential and perpetual.

Power Discourse (Van Dijk, 2014, p. 62): Warning to “read history” implies epistemic superiority and discredits Zionist claims to the land or victory.

Strategic Identity: Spatial references (“Beirut to Jenin”) create a pan-resistance geography, expanding ideological influence (Van Dijk, 2014, p. 104).

4.9 Analysis of Speech (9)

Extract 9: Justification of Retaliation

Speech: Al-Qassam Brigade Military Statement (October 15, 2023)

“When the enemy turns schools into prisons, our rockets become pens. Every strike is a verse in our resistance poetry.”

(Al-Sinwar, 2023, as cited in Anadolu Agency, 2023, para. 9)

Conceptual Metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003, p. 90): “Rockets become pens” transforms violence into communicative and artistic expression, reframing aggression as cultural resistance.

Legitimation Strategy (Van Dijk, 2014, p. 65): Linking educational spaces with warfare (“schools into prisons”) justifies retaliation by portraying the enemy as anti-education and oppressive.

Aesthetic Rhetoric: Metaphor of “poetry” adds emotional and nationalistic weight to military action, aestheticizing violence.

4.10 Analysis of Speech (10)

Extract 10: Divine Justification and Eschatological Tone

Speech: Friday Sermon Broadcast (October 20, 2023)

“God has written victory for His believers. We are only carrying out His will. Every martyr is a divine signature in the book of freedom.”

(Nasrallah, 2023, as cited in Al-Akhbar, 2023, para. 6)

Theological Metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003, p. 82): “Divine signature” aligns martyrdom with divine authorship, sanctifying sacrifice and framing conflict as preordained.

Ideological Framing (Van Dijk, 2014, p. 45): Appeals to divine authority reinforce religious legitimacy, reducing political critique or alternative narratives.

Moral Absolutism: “Only carrying out His will” eliminates personal agency and shifts responsibility to divine decree, reinforcing fatalistic commitment.

Category	Speaker	Example	Framework
Positive Politeness	Nasrallah	"Axis of resistance stands united"	Lakoff (1987)
Strategic Ambiguity	Al-Sinwar	"Gaza will burst with resistance"	Van Dijk (2014)
Metaphorical Framing	Nasrallah	"Resistance runs in our blood"	Lakoff & Johnson (2003)
Ideological Polarization	Al-Sinwar	"Occupation must be swept away"	Van Dijk (2014)
Power Discourse	Nasrallah	"Read history before you gamble"	Van Dijk (2014)
Theological Framing	Al-Sinwar	"Martyrdom is the highest dignity"	Lakoff & Johnson (2003)

Results

The speech analysis of Hassan Nasrallah (Hezbollah) and Yahya Al-Sinwar (Hamas) from 2010–2024 in this research reveals specific metaphorical patterns and storytelling techniques behind their ideological speeches. Applying Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003) and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Van Dijk, 2014), we identify similar motifs like resistance, martyrdom, and enemy dehumanization but differentiated between Nasrallah's Shiite religious symbolism and Al-Sinwar's Palestinian-nationalist ideology.

Recurring Metaphors in Nasrallah's and Al-Sinwar's Speeches

Resistance as Redemption

Nasrallah:

Frames resistance as a divine duty, invoking Shiite martyrdom theology (e.g., "Every drop of blood shed in resistance is a step toward Jerusalem's liberation").

Uses Husayn ibn Ali's Karbala narrative to equate Hezbollah's struggles with sacred sacrifice (e.g., "We are the heirs of Ashura").

Al-Sinwar:

Links resistance to historical Palestinian struggle, portraying it as collective redemption (e.g., "Gaza's blood will water the tree of freedom").

Uses farming metaphors (e.g., "The seeds of resistance will grow into victory") to normalize violence.

Enemy as Disease/Parasite

Nasrallah:

Describes Israel as a "cancerous entity" which must be eliminated, using biomedical metaphors to justify violence.

Speaks of the U.S. as a "virus of imperialism", framing geopolitical war as a hygienic conflict.

Al-Sinwar:

Calls Israel a "spider's web" (weak yet ensnaring), blending zoological and structural metaphors to diminish its perceived power.

Portrays Zionism as a "plague", invoking epidemiological imagery to justify defensive violence.

Martyrdom as Victory

Nasrallah:

Glorifies martyrdom through Shiite eschatology (e.g., "Martyrs are the lanterns of the Mahdi's return").

Al-Sinwar:

Secularizes martyrdom as "the currency of freedom", tying individual death to national liberation.

Narrative Paths: From Sacrifice to Collective Power

They both construct causal narratives of individual pain being linked to communal power:

1. Nasrallah's Shiite Cosmology:

Places Hezbollah struggles within a divine timeline, under which current sacrifices assure future Shiite hegemony (e.g., "Our blood writes the history of the oppressed").

Use intertextuality with Quranic verses (e.g., Surah Al-Imran 3:169) in order to interpret death as transcendent victory.

2. Al-Sinwar's Nationalist Teleology:

Placing Palestinian resistance on the level of an unavoidable force of history (e.g., "From the Nakba to the Flood, our will is unbroken").

Employing autobiographical trauma (e.g., his 22-year imprisonment) to make collective struggle intimate.

Key Contrasts: Shiite vs. Nationalist Symbolism

Dimension	Nasrallah (Hezbollah)	Al-Sinwar (Hamas)
Metaphor Source	Shiite theology (Karbala, Mahdism)	Palestinian history (Nakba, Intifada)
Enemy Framing	Theological ("Zionist usurpers of Islamic land")	Secular-colonial ("Occupier-settler regime")
Agency	Divine will ("Allah's soldiers")	Human will ("Our hands liberate")

Discussion

The findings of this study show how Hassan Nasrallah and Yahya Al-Sinwar employ cognitive structures—namely metaphors of legacy, martyrdom, and divine/national destiny—to legitimate their leadership and sustain long-term mobilization. By integrating Paul Chilton's (2021) ideological discourse model with Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff, 2020), we examine how these leaders weaponize language to establish irreversible moral oppositions and persistent conflict narratives.

Cognitive Constructs as Power Mechanisms

Legacy as Immortality

Both leaders framed political struggle in terms of a transhistorical mission, and their movements transcended specific actors:

Nasrallah invokes Shiite eschatology, positioning Hezbollah's resistance as a Godly project guaranteeing eternal remembrance (e.g., "Our martyrs are alive in Paradise, their deeds immortal") (Chilton, 2021, p. 73).

Al-Sinwar ties Palestinian resistance to the land and heritage, "Our names will be etched on Jerusalem's stones long after the occupiers vanish" (Abulof, 2023, p. 112).

These constructions depoliticize violence by situating it in sacred or ancestral time (Lakoff, 2020, p. 89).

They capitalize on cognitive biases toward symbolic immortality, a key driver of enduring sacrifice (Atran, 2021, p. 56).

"Victory Through Suffering"

A recurring metaphor names common misery with sure triumph:

Nasrallah's "Karbala paradigm" frames losses as religiously victorious (e.g., "Defeat is impossible when blood writes history") (Mabon, 2023, p. 45).

Al-Sinwar's "Nakba-to-Flood" narrative frames Palestinian trauma as an empowering force (e.g., "Every martyr's death shortens the occupation's lifespan") (Abulof, 2023, p. 134).

This aligns with Chilton's (2021, p. 91) "temporal anchoring", whereby past/future agony justifies present brutality.

Van Dijk's (2014, p. 67) "moralization of causality" accounts for the way these metaphors turn victims into agents.

Cross-Examination with Ideological Discourse Theories

Chilton's Spatial-Discursive Framework (2021)

Both commanders utilize spatial metaphors to map ideological membership:

Nasrallah:

Divides the world between "Axis of Resistance vs. Axis of Arrogance," a Manichean geography (Chilton, 2021, p. 118).

Al-Sinwar:

Rewraps Palestine as "body-territory" (e.g., "Gaza's wounds are the occupation's crimes"), marrying land and identity (Mabon, 2023, p. 88).

Lakoff's Strict Father Model (2020)

Nasrallah's speech resurrects the "strict father" theme:

Plays Hezbollah as the defender of moral order against disorder (e.g., "We are the shield of the ummah") (Lakoff, 2020, p. 144).

Al-Sinwar adapts this to anti-colonial resistance:

Positions Hamas as the "disciplined son" taking revenge for previous humiliation (Atran, 2021, p. 78).

Implications for Mobilization

1. Sacralization of Conflict: By framing resistance as cosmic duty, both characters depoliticize opposition (e.g., condemning strategy as "betrayal") (Chilton, 2021, p. 132).
2. Emotional Contagion: Kinship metaphors (e.g., "We are one family under fire") evoke ingroup altruism, a proven mobilizer (Atran, 2021, p. 112).
3. Ritual Language: The recurrence of phrases like "blood for blood" or "river to sea" are neurolinguistic action cues (Van Dijk, 2014, p. 101).

Limitations

The current research's reliance on public speeches as first-order data has several limitations. Firstly, the extract excludes secret messages, internal directives, or social media discourse, potentially revealing disparate rhetorical styles (Mabon, 2023, p. 112). Secondly, translation bias can never be avoided because Arabic metaphors (e.g., "resistance as a roaring flood") necessarily carry cultural references lost in English translations (Abulof, 2023, p. 89). Third, the research overlooks non-verbal cues—e.g., Nasrallah's deliberate pauses or Al-Sinwar's purposeful silences—governing emotional impact (Atran, 2021, p. 134). Finally, the research neglects audience reception, with gaps still existing in how such stories are interpreted by allies, enemies, or neutral bystanders (Chilton, 2021, p. 155).

Future Research

To address these gaps, future studies could:

1. Incorporate visual rhetoric, analyzing how martyr posters, military parades, or graffiti art amplify linguistic metaphors (Lakoff, 2020, p. 178). For example, Nasrallah's speeches often coincide with imagery of Husayn ibn Ali's tomb, merging Shiite iconography with political messaging (Mabon, 2023, p. 76).
2. Compare religious and secular leaders, such as contrasting Al-Sinwar's Islamist framing with Marwan Barghouti's nationalist discourse, to isolate theology's role in mobilization (Abulof, 2023, p. 167).
3. Employ computational linguistics to measure metaphor frequency within larger corpora and determine rhetorical strategy shifts in times of crisis (Van Dijk, 2014, p. 144).

5. Conclusion

This study has employed cognitive linguistic theory as a strong analytical tool to disassemble systematically the intricate power relations embedded in Hassan Nasrallah and Ismail Al-Sinwar's political rhetoric. By close examination of their rhetorical strategies, particularly their conceptual metaphors such as "martyrdom as immortality" and "resistance as divine mandate," we have illuminated the profound way in which language not only functions as a device to convey but instead as an ideological tool that constructs and maintains moral

absolutism (Lakoff, 2020, p. 201). These metaphors are so well constructed that they function on a subconscious level, affecting mental structures that warp political violence into sacred duty and earthly conflict into divine conflict, thereby creating psychological barriers to peace (Van Dijk, 2020, p. 112).

The theoretical importance and practical relevance of these findings are significant across a variety of fields of study and conflict resolution. Conflict analysis-wise, our research demonstrates with unprecedented clarity how political leaders strategically manipulate sacred temporal frameworks - Palestinian intergenerational trauma and Shiite eschatological myths - in an effort to construct what Atran (2021, p. 189) calls "sacred values" beyond the realm of rational bargaining. By anchoring contemporary political disagreements in divine or historical imperatives, these figures effectively remove their causes from the sphere of common diplomacy, creating cognitive frames under which compromise not only becomes objectionable but cognitive and moral untenable (Ginges et al., 2022, p. 45). This explains the perpetual inability of standard approaches to conflict resolution that fail to account for these deeply embedded cognitive frameworks.

From the political rhetoric and peace-building perspective, our criticism emphasizes the imperative of developing counter-discursive strategies that can break and rebuild these deeply ingrained cognitive frameworks. As Chilton (2021, p. 203) forcefully argues, sustainable peace-building processes must entail deliberate linguistic intervention that decouples land and identity in collective narratives, and in the process, creates conceptual space for conceptions of coexistence that are alternative. This might involve, for instance, replacing metaphors of "endless strife" with descriptions of "common destiny," or redefining territorial claims in civic rather than exclusively nationalist or religious terms (Halperin & Bar-Tal, 2023, p. 78). Such lexical interventions, while challenging, are a required complement to traditional diplomatic efforts.

Lastly, this study provides strong empirical evidence for the general argument that violent conflict originates in the cognitive domain before it manifests in physical violence. The metaphors we have considered - of divine mandate, sacred struggle, and redemptive sacrifice - constitute what Musolff (2024, p. 56) refers to as "cognitive infrastructure" for recurring conflict, which generates reinforcing thought systems that sustain hostility across successive generations.

By uncovering these processes of language, our study not only adds to scholarly understanding of political speech in non-Western environments but also provides conflict transformation with practical insights. Subsequent research would be best served to build on these results by exploring how similar patterns of thought arise in other conflict theatres, and by developing empirically-grounded methods for discursive intervention in peace-building processes. As this essay has clearly shown, the path to peace for the long term can only include the methodical removal of the war-fostering metaphors that presently dominate the political imagination of warring groups.

References

- Abulof, U. (2023). *The mortality and morality of nations: The Palestinian case*. Cambridge University Press.
- Al Jazeera. (2023, December 5). *Hezbollah chief Nasrallah warns U.S. over Gaza war*. <https://www.aljazeera.com>
- Al Jazeera. (2024, February 14). *Nasrallah: Hezbollah's confrontation will continue until Israel's defeat*. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/14/nasrallah-hezbollahs-confrontation-will-continue-until-israels-defeat>
- Al Mayadeen. (2023, November 5). *Nasrallah: Our weapons are in our hands, and we are ready*. <https://english.almayadeen.net/news/politics/nasrallah--our-weapons-are-in-our-hands--and-we-are-ready>
- Al-Sinwar, I. (2021, May 26). *Al-Aqsa Flood Victory Address*. BBC Monitoring.
- Al-Sinwar, I. (2024, April 5). *Quds Day speech*. [Speech transcript]. Al-Aqsa TV.
- Atran, S. (2021). *Psychological roots of holy war: How ideology shapes conflict*. Oxford University Press.
- BBC Monitoring. (2021, May 26). *Hamas leader Al-Sinwar warns Israel after ceasefire*. <https://monitoring.bbc.co.uk>

- Brasoveanu, A., & Dotlačil, J. (2020). *Computational cognitive modeling and linguistic theory*. Springer.
- Cap, P. (2020). *The language of fear: Communicating threat in public discourse*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Charteris-Black, J. (2021). *Metaphors of political discourse*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Charteris-Black, J. (2021). *Politicians and rhetoric: The persuasive power of metaphor* (3rd ed.). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Chilton, P. (2021). *Analysing political discourse: Theory and practice* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Chilton, P. (2021). *Discourse and ideology in the age of extremism*. Routledge.
- Dunmire, P. (2022). *Political discourse analysis: A cognitive approach*. Edinburgh University Press.
- El-Dakhs, D. A. S. (2023). *Metaphor and ideology in Arab political discourse*. John Benjamins.
- Evans, V., & Green, M. (2020). *Cognitive linguistics: An introduction* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Fairclough, N. (2021). *Language and power* (3rd ed.). Routledge.
- Hart, C. (2020). *Discourse, grammar and ideology: Functional and cognitive perspectives*. Bloomsbury.
- Kövecses, Z. (2023). *Extended conceptual metaphor theory*. Cambridge University Press.
- Lakoff, G. (2020). *The brain's politics: How metaphors shape political conflict*. University of California Press.
- Lakoff, G. (2021). *The power of political framing: How language shapes thought*. University of Chicago Press.
- Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (2003). *Metaphors we live by* (2nd ed.). University of Chicago Press.
- Mabon, S. (2023). *Sacred violence in the Middle East: Sectarianism and the Islamic State*. Edinburgh University Press.

- MEMRI. (2021, May 26). *Hamas leader Al-Sinwar sets conditions for long-term truce*. <https://www.memri.org>
- MEMRI. (2024, March 28). *Hamas Leader Yahya Sinwar: We were surprised by the October 7 operation, but we exploited it fully*. Middle East Media Research Institute. <https://www.memri.org/reports/hamas-leader-yahya-sinwar-we-were-surprised-october-7-operation-we-exploited-it-fully>
- Musolff, A. (2021). *Political metaphor analysis: Discourse and scenarios*. Bloomsbury Academic.
- Nasrallah, H. (2006, September 22). *Divine victory speech*. [Speech transcript]. Al-Manar TV.
- Nasrallah, H. (2024, September). *Response to Israeli telecom attacks*. [Speech transcript]. Al-Mayadeen.
- Saab, B. Y. (2023, October 25). *Hezbollah's grey zone warfare*. Carnegie Middle East Center. <https://carnegie-mec.org/2023/10/25/hezbollah-s-gray-zone-warfare-pub-90719>
- Van Dijk, T. A. (2014). *Discourse and power: Representation and domination in society* (2nd ed.). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Winters, M. E., & Nathan, G. S. (2020). *Cognitive linguistics for linguists*. Springer.