

AMERICAN IDENTITY CONCEPTUAL METAPHORS IN THE DISCOURSE OF PRESIDENT TRUMP

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Abstract

The present paper studies the projection of conceptual metaphors WAR IS A GAME and AMERICAN IDENTITY IS AUTHORITY in the discourse of President Donald Trump, during the heated discussion with Volodymyr Zelenskyy that took place in the Oval Office on Friday, March 1st 2025. Relying on cognitive metaphor theory (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980; Turner, 1989; Gibbs, 1994; Fauconnier, 1997, et al.), the study decodes the crucial role of cognitive processes in the construction of identity within the political discourse. The article seeks to point out how discourse reveals self-representation and social action, how preferences for certain vocabulary contribute to the construction of the speakers’ or a nation’s identity, how certain discourses are more permeated by cultural hegemony (Gramsci, 1929) than others and more precisely about American hegemony.

Key-words: *American Identity, cultural hegemony, sovereignty, conceptual metaphors, mappings.*

Introduction

On February 28th 2025, the American President Donald Trump together with his assistant, Vice-President J. D. Vance held a contentious meeting with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in the Oval Office, at the White House. The meeting was expected to come to a happy end with the signing of the Ukraine – United States Mineral Agreement, due to the ongoing Russian invasion and the supposed American support to Ukraine. Unfortunately, the meeting ended abruptly with no conclusion because of the heated critique addressed to President Zelenskyy by both President Trump and Vice-president Vance, thus confirming the previous tensions between the two administrations. As Donald Trump wanted Ukraine to agree on a ceasefire with Russia, Volodymyr Zelenskyy demanded strong security guarantees against future Russian aggression, which provoked a heated exchange of replies.

During the following days, the meeting was widely criticised for its fiery, confrontational and antagonistic tone: “Never has anyone seen in such a setting such a tense and contentious meeting of the kind that erupted between Trump, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and Vice President JD Vance. Never would anyone have imagined the tone and tenor of the words aimed by the president at an American ally, at the leader of a sovereign country that was invaded on orders of Russian President Vladimir Putin and whose military and civilians have fought heroically in response. Nor has anyone seen a world leader punching back at a U.S. president, in this case a president who has so clearly tilted toward the Russians.” (Balz, March 1st 2025).

1. Theoretical Background

The present paper seeks to pursue two theoretical frameworks –Cultural Hegemony and Conceptual Metaphor Theory – which will blend in order to analyze both the linguistic layer of the discourse and the socio-political stance that led to that particular communicative situation. Therefore, the study blends instances of hegemonic discourses in the expression of the American political discourse as a powerful instrument of ideological control. Thus, President Donald Trump revamps American identity as a world hegemon. The Marxist intellectual Antonio Gramsci developed cultural hegemony in order to explain the social-control structures of society. Thus, he defined hegemony as the ruling class’s ability to manipulate people shaping society’s ideas, beliefs and culture through consent so as to maintain power easily than by conflict or by force. Gramsci demonstrated that capitalist societies use civil society, as well as institutions such as schools, media and churches to disseminate their world view, normalizing social inequalities and rendering one group’s dominance as innate. Here is where hegemony springs, as the people willingly accept the ruling class’s point of view and become complicit in maintaining the system. Gramsci also explained how the ruling class imposes their cultural norms and ideology and making sure that their ideas are perpetuated as common sense, morality and individual responsibility. In this respect, institutions like universities, newspapers, and religious organizations are crucial in reproducing the ruling class’s hegemony, by spreading their beliefs and ideas. To support Gramsci’s opinions, Fairclough insists that institutions such as the media, education, politics, and law employ particular discourses that influence how people perceive the world. For instance, political speeches and media reporting can normalize certain ideologies, making them appear natural or commonsensical.

The United States and the European powers promoted systems of imperial governance that viewed white men, whether administrators or soldiers, as the embodiment of the masculine virtues of strength, courage, and resourcefulness needed to govern the overseas possessions. These practices led to imperialist assumptions that non-white peoples needed the protection of white men, they cast themselves as heroic defenders of both national honour and the rights of non-white peoples, thus propagating their powerful image as the right one and leading to cultural hegemonic discourses.

Conceptual Metaphor Theory represents the third framework applied to deepen the analysis of encoded messages and implicit meanings. From this perspective, metaphors operate through a mapping process between two domains: *the source domain*, which supplies metaphorical expressions, and *the target domain*, which receives them. Within the broader field of cognitive semantics, several principles are central: conceptual structures are embodied, semantic structures correspond to conceptual ones, meaning is encyclopedic in nature, and meaning construction is understood as a process of conceptualization.

The groundbreaking work of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (1980), revolutionized our understanding of language by demonstrating its inseparable connection to human experience. Their research argues that metaphors extend far beyond poetic or rhetorical ornamentation, forming an essential component of the human conceptual system. In this view, metaphoric projection functions as a fundamental cognitive mechanism that allows individuals to make sense of themselves, their actions, and their interactions with others and the surrounding world.

Lakoff and Johnson emphasize that the essence of metaphor lies in comprehending one concept through another. Far from being restricted to artistic or stylistic usage, metaphors play a central role in shaping thought, structuring communication, and articulating lived experiences. As they observe, “The concepts that govern our thoughts are not matters of the intellect. They also govern our everyday functioning, down to the most mundane details. Our concepts structure what we perceive, how we get around the world, [and] how we relate to other people” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, 3). Building on this foundation, Gilles Fauconnier (1977) expanded the cognitive framework by introducing the theory of mental spaces and conceptual mappings in *Mappings in Thought and Language*. According to the linguist, meaning construction is not limited to fixed domain to domain correspondences, but involves the dynamic creation of temporary cognitive models, the mental spaces that the interlocutors construct and manipulate during discourse. These mental spaces are partial representations of possible situations, allowing speakers to project, connect, and integrate information across contexts. The mapping process, therefore, operates within and between mental spaces, establishing correspondences (cross-space mappings) that enable conceptual blending and emergent meaning. In political discourse, such as the one under analysis, Fauconnier’s theory helps explain how speakers dynamically create and negotiate meaning through multiple conceptual spaces, for example, constructing hypothetical, moral, or power-related scenarios that overlap with real-world events. Fauconnier’s model complements Lakoff and Johnson’s Conceptual Metaphor Theory by accounting for the flexible, context-dependent nature of metaphorical reasoning in discourse. While conceptual metaphors establish stable, systematic mappings between domains, Fauconnier’s mental space theory emphasizes the fluidity of meaning construction in real-time interaction, capturing how new metaphors emerge, evolve, and acquire ideological significance within specific communicative situations.

To conclude, Conceptual Metaphor Theory demonstrates that metaphors are not merely decorative linguistic features but fundamental cognitive tools that

structure human thought, communication, and perception. By framing one domain of experience in terms of another, metaphors enable individuals to construct meaning, interpret reality, and articulate even the most abstract aspects of human experience. This perspective underscores the inseparability of language and cognition, illustrating how deeply metaphoric processes are embedded in everyday life and how they shape both individual understanding and social interaction.

2. The Context - The analysis of President Trump's discourse

Since national identity is expressed in political discourses so as to define a particular nation according to politicians and governments' views, this article seeks to interpret how the American present discourse projects shared values, traditions and culture, or rather deviates from these notions in order to construct new images and map a new American identity worldwide. The study also attempts to point out how discourse reveals self-representation and socio-political action in the current ongoing war.

Classically, national identity is expressed in political discourses in order to create a sense of belonging and solidarity among people of the same nation, or to encourage active participation, loyalty and sacrifice in critical situations, such as wars, or even define who does not belong to the great mass of a homogenous society, so as to define otherness. This negative aspect of division fractures national groups and often draws boundaries around minorities and immigrants, thus increasing happenstances of conflictual behaviour. Unfortunately, this analysis deals with the political discourse advanced by President Donald Trump, whose populist framing offers an antagonistic vision of "us – the people" vs. "them – the corrupt elite", a blurry term that might also include the speaker, but who's belonging the very speaker tries had to diverge from. More importantly, the binary opposition "us" vs. "them" sometimes also triggers the interpretation "the real Americans" vs. "outsiders – i.e. immigrants, foreign nations, or political opponents".

3. Conceptual Metaphor Analysis

On March the 1st 2025 the American President Donald Trump, Vice-president JD Vance and the Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy met in the Oval Office allegedly to discuss a resource plan involving minerals, gas, oil and the revenue-sharing investment fund, which was supposed to guarantee US support for Ukraine and a possible ceasefire with Russia. However, the conversation took a rather conflicting turn, as JD Vance accused Zelenskyy of being disrespectful to the US in his engaging with the media: "Right now, you guys are going around and forcing conscripts to the front lines because you have manpower problems, you should be thanking the president for trying to bring it into this" (JD Vance). With this suggestion, Vice-president Vance exposes his hegemonic discourse by demanding or expecting gratitude, thus asserting moral authority over the Ukrainian president and projecting the conceptual metaphor AMERICAN IDENTITY IS HEGEMONY.

According to Fauconnier, such metaphorical reasoning relies on cross-space mappings, through which elements from one conceptual domain (authority, power, gratitude) are projected into another (international diplomacy). In this interaction, the source domain or moral hierarchy is mapped onto the target domain of interstate relations, producing the emergent meaning that America is not only a partner but a superior moral actor. This selective projection reinforces the hegemonic frame while suppressing notions of equality or partnership.

Then, Vice-president Vance immediately started scolding the Ukrainian President for questioning the superior stance and leading power of the American administration: "...and do you think that it's respectful to come to the Oval Office of the United States of America and attack the administration is trying to prevent the destruction of your country?" (JD Vance) with this rhetorical question, JD Vance is triggering the conceptual mapping AMERICAN HEGEMONY IS UNDER ATTACK. From Fauconnier's perspective, Vance's utterance builds a mental space in which the United States embodies the protector role, while Ukraine occupies the beneficiary space. The accusation of "disrespect" works as a space connector, reinforcing asymmetrical relations and cognitively legitimizing America's authority. When Vice-president Vance accuses President Zelenskyy of a lack of gratitude, as well as of undermining the negotiation process, he frames Zelenskyy's actions as improper, or counter-productive, attempting to shift blame and force the Ukrainian to take responsibility for the lack of collaboration.

Then, President Zelenskyy challenged the Vice-president's view by pointing out that agreements had been broken and that Ukraine was suffering due to incoherencies in the American diplomatic actions: "He (Putin) occupied our parts, big parts of Ukraine, part of East and Crimea. So, he occupied in 2014. So, during a lot of years. So, I not speaking about just President Obama, then President Trump, then President Obama, now President Trump, God bless now President Trump will stop him" (V Zelenskyy). In this intervention, the Ukrainian President started questioning the American power and its constant support during any war against Russia, projecting the conceptual metaphor AMERICAN POWER IS ABSENT: "But during 2015 nobody stopped him. He just occupied and took. He killed people" (V Zelenskyy).

Zelensky's framing of Ukraine as an autonomous agent establishes a mental space in which American power appears unreliable or insufficient, highlighting a tension between Ukraine's survival needs and United States' hegemonic expectations. This tension is complicated when president Trump enters the discourse, asserting that American military support was decisive in prolonging the conflict, thereby positioning United States' power as materially present and consequential. President Trump emphasised that without American military equipment the war would have been over sooner, thus implying that AMERICAN POWER IS PRESENT in the war supplies sent to Ukraine, so as to fight Russia. Nevertheless, throughout the conversation, President Trump posed as a superhero, a good diplomat, but he projected a lot of confusion and contradiction, leading to a metaphorical effect and inducing the reverse.

In the beginning, President Trump was asked by a reporter to confirm his diplomatic position as the historical American identity of a world power that helps

other nations fight for good causes: “I looked at the United States not only as a most powerful country, richest country in the world, the country that has great music, great movies, great muscle cars, but also as a force for good” (reporter). But then, he attacked the American President by implying a secret agreement with the Russian President: “I’m talking with my friends in Poland, and they are worried that you align yourself too much with Putin” (reporter).

President Trump’s response cast a veil of contradiction, projecting the conceptual metaphor AMERICAN IDENTITY IS CONFUSION, as he tried to explain his double game – “Well, if I didn’t align myself with both of them, you’d never have a deal” – only to state that he has no agreement with anyone – “I’m not aligned with anybody” – and then seconds after, to declare his allegiance to the US – “I’m aligned with the United States of America” – which only became more puzzling, as in the end President Trump declared that: “...and for the good of the world, I’m aligned with the world, and I want to get this thing over with”. Then a few seconds later, he stated that “it’s not a question of alignment” in the Ukrainian-Russian conflict because they hate each other, but then he said: “I want to get the thing said. I’m aligned with Europe”.

Fauconnier’s notion of dynamic meaning construction helps explain the shifts: as the dialogue unfolds, Trump continuously creates and modifies mental spaces of heroism, rationality, confusion – attempting to stabilize one dominant identity frame. These constant reconfigurations exemplify Fauconnier’s idea that meaning is not static but constructed in real time through the building and linking of mental spaces. Trump’s contradictory response triggers cross-space blending between political alignment, global harmony and personal authority. This blend yields an emergent structure that allows Trump to claim both moral universality and strategic autonomy, an instance of conceptual integration where incompatible spaces merge into a self-glorying hybrid.

To increase the state of confusion, after projecting an image of indecision, Donald Trump mapped himself a tough human being, thus constructing the conceptual metaphor THE AMERICAN PRESIDENT IS A SUPERHERO: “You want me to be tough? I could be tougher than any human being you’ve ever seen”. This can be interpreted as a conceptual blend since elements from the political space, such as leadership, decision-making, produce the emergent meaning of Trump as a superhuman authority, bringing cognitive associations and increasing the persuasive power of discourse.

Following the president’s contradictory terms, JD Vance took the floor to reconstruct the American power and to project Donald Trump as a good diplomat by criticising the former president’s lack of action: “We tried the pathway of Joe Biden of thumbing our chest and pretending that the President of the United States’ words mattered more than the President of the United States’ actions. What makes America a good country is America engaging in diplomacy. That’s what President Trump’s doing” (JD Vance). This way, the conceptual metaphor THE AMERICAN PRESIDENT IS A GOOD DIPLOMAT is attempting to restore the American identity of the world’s leader.

Vice-president Vance was immediately contradicted by President Zelenskyy, who explained that the war kept on going despite any agreement, and

that the Americans did not take any action against the Russian invasion: “But during 2014 till 2022. The situation the same that people are been dying on the contact line. Nobody stopped him” (V. Zelenskyy). And by stating these facts, president Zelenskyy reiterated the conceptual metaphor AMERICAN POWER IS ABSENT.

In the same line of thought, continuing the mapping of the absence of American power, President Zelenskyy confesses about his multiple actions against the Russian invasion undertaken with European leaders and points out that American diplomatic actions were non-existent: “You know that we have conversations with him, a lot of conversation, many bilateral conversations, and we signed with him. In 2019 I signed with him, the deal, I signed with him, Macron and Merkel, we signed ceasefire. Ceasefire. All of them told me that he will never go. We signed him, gas contract. Gas contract, yes, but after that, he broke the ceasefire. He killed our people and he didn't exchange prisoners. We signed the exchange of prisoners, but he didn't do it. What kind of diplomacy JD you are speaking about? What do you mean?” (V. Zelenskyy) With these rhetorical questions, the Ukrainian President clearly explains the Russian disregard of all agreements and projects the conceptual metaphor AMERICAN DIPLOMACY IS USELESS.

When president Zelenskyy pointed out that nothing that was undertaken by the American diplomacy succeeded in ending the war, which also implied that AMERICAN DIPLOMACY IS USELESS, Vice-president Vance counterattacked with a hegemonic discourse of shaming the Ukrainian President: “I think it's disrespectful for you to come to the Oval Office to try to litigate this in front of the American media. Right now, you guys are going around and forcing conscripts to the front lines because you have manpower problems, you should be thanking the president for trying to bring it into this” (JD Vance).

Later in the confrontation, President Zelenskyy reminded the Americans that a war situation is a problematic one and dared to suggest that problems will be felt by the Americans in the future too, which triggered Donald Trump to assume a Hegemonic position, as if he were a fatherly figure scolding his child, warning the Ukrainian President not to predict gloomy outcomes: “You don't know that” / “Don't tell us what we're going to feel. We're trying to solve a problem. Don't tell us what we're going to feel, because you're in no position to dictate that exactly” (D. Trump).

By taking this hegemonic position, President Trump is reconstructing the American power and is projecting the conceptual metaphor AMERICAN IDENTITY IS FORCE / AUTHORITY. BY the use of anaphora – he is repeating the same idea several times – Donald Trump reinforces his image of an authoritative world power: “You're in no position to dictate what we're going to feel” (D. Trump).

The following conceptual metaphors that are mapped in the American President's discourse deviate from the hegemonic image of the American leader and move towards the mapping of war. First, we come across the conceptual mapping WAR IS A GAME, which deconstructs the concept of war and deletes the disastrous effects it has on ordinary people. The American President implies

that WAR IS A CARD GAME in his utterance: “You’re not in a good position. You don’t have the cards right now.”

President Zelenskyy is aware of the disparagement created by the American President and instantly replies that he is not playing cards, as this would be a huge understatement of the Ukrainian situation. But President Trump insists: “You are playing cards. You’re gambling with the lives of millions of people” – which moves the projection further to the conceptual metaphor WAR IS GAMBLING. Since gambling is seriously more irresponsible than playing cards, this conceptual metaphor emphasises once again the negligence displayed by the American administration in the case of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict.

Continuing on the same line of thought, President Trump accuses President Zelenskyy of irresponsibly inviting World War III: “You’re gambling with World War II. You’re gambling with World War III, and what you’re doing is very disrespectful to the country, this country, that’s back to you far more than a lot of people say they should.” After reinforcing the conceptual metaphor WAR IS GAMBLING, Donald Trump proceeds once again to express superiority in his American hegemonic discourse by scolding the opponent for not behaving submissively. The gambling metaphor is also a means to undercut President Zelenskyy’s power to negotiate and to portray him as weaker, since he has no choice but to align with the American interests.

Trump’s statement extends the mapping to WAR IS GAMBLING, blending notions of chance, recklessness, and danger. Through this conceptual integration, the moral responsibility for escalation is shifted onto Ukraine, as if Zelenskyy was the reckless risking global destruction. New meaning arises from combining elements of war and gambling, producing a frame that naturalizes American control and Ukrainian irresponsibility.

After the second round of reprimands towards the Ukrainian lack of gratitude towards the American administration, expressed by JD Vance, President Trump openly dismisses President Zelenskyy, thus inducing the conceptual metaphor AMERICA IS THE AUTHORITY:

“Zelenskyy: Can I answer?

Trump: No, no, you’ve done a lot of talking. Your country is in big trouble.”

By the end of the conversation, President Trump tactically proceeds to construct the conceptual metaphor AMERICA IS THE SAVIOUR, by first implying that the Ukrainians can only win the war with American support – “You’re not winning. You’re not winning this. You have a damn good chance of coming out okay, because of us” – and secondly, by boasting the American military support – “We gave you, through this stupid president, \$350 billion we gave you military equipment.... if you didn’t have our military equipment, if you didn’t have our military equipment, this war would have been over in two weeks.” By employing this metaphor, Trump emphasises America’s role from mere ally to *saviour*, implying not just support but indispensability. This sets up a hierarchical relationship: Ukraine is dependent and passive, America is active and powerful.

Thus, Trump positions America, and implicitly himself, as the heroic actor whose intervention changes the course of history. The metaphor suggests Ukraine cannot achieve victory without America's aid, downplaying its resilience or independent capacity. By boasting about the financial and military aid, Trump underlines America's moral and material superiority reinforcing America's image of *global rescuer* able to help any other nation.

By choosing saviour instead of partner, businessman, or power, Trump magnifies American indispensability; Ukraine is unable to survive without U.S. support. At the same time, Trump claims credit for orchestrating such a rescue, thereby asking his weaker partner for recognition and gratitude. In what follows, Trump plays the role of a powerful businessman, who frames political negotiations as *business deals*. "It's going to be a very hard thing to do business like this", he says.

The saviour metaphor is reinforced; Trump frames American aid not as altruism but as a *deal*. By doing this, he turns the "gift of rescue" into a conditional bargain framing politics as a business transaction: POLITICS IS BUSINESS/HEGEMONY. Trump establishes an asymmetrical relationship of power, signalling that deviation from U.S. expectations would result in withdrawal of support. In this way, the metaphor naturalizes American hegemony: aid is not altruistic, but transactional, and Ukraine must pay in obedience or gratitude.

The metaphor POLITICS IS BUSINESS functions to frame the relations between America and Ukraine as unequal, transactional, and dependent, thereby reinforcing the central metaphor AMERICA IS THE SAVIOUR. The rescue America offers is not portrayed as a gift of solidarity, but as a business decision imposed under hegemony: "accept our terms, or lose our support", granting aid only under its own terms.

When President Trump compares the war to a card game, he introduces the metaphor WAR IS A CARD GAME which represents a cross-space projection from a familiar, rule-based source domain (game playing) to a complex target domain (warfare). The structure of control is transferred, while the human cost and ethical dimension are omitted. The mapping trivializes conflict and reinforces the cognitive illusion that war can be managed like a strategic contest controlled by the hegemon. In what follows, the popular "game frame" is used to emphasize who is winning versus who is losing: "You have to be thankful you don't have the cards. You don't have the cards." (D Trump)

The WAR IS A GAME metaphor undervalues the existential stakes of Ukraine's war, casting it instead as a contest controlled by America. This reinforces the earlier metaphor AMERICA IS THE SAVIOUR, because the only way Ukraine can remain in the game, and avoid total defeat, is by relying on the cards (that is the military sources) that America provides. Trump's subsequent *blame-shifting* intensifies this hierarchy; not only is Ukraine powerless, but it is also held responsible for its failures, which in turn, justifies America's authority.

By trying to put the blame on the other and by weaving together the conceptual metaphor WAR IS A GAME and the concept of *blame-shifting*, President Trump constructs a narrative in which Ukraine is both dependent and culpable: "People are dying. You're running low on soldiers." (D Trump) The

moral obligation shifts towards the weak player who is also “buried”. That is, Ukraine must be thankful for Trump’s support, rather than America being morally bound to help.

Trump: “You’re running low on soldiers. It would be a damn good thing. Then you tell us, I don’t want to ceasefire. I don’t want to ceasefire. I want to go and I want this... Look, if you could get a ceasefire right now, I tell you, you take it so the bullets stop flying and your men stop being killed...”

Zelenskyy: “Of course, we want to start the war, but I ...”

Donald Trump’s utterances foreground Ukraine’s weakness by employing metaphors of burial and depletion. Semantically, these lexical choices evoke images of entrapment and failure. Buried suggests immobility, defeat, and being overwhelmed by insurmountable forces: once buried, one cannot escape. Running low draws from the semantic field of exhaustion and scarcity, here transferred to human soldiers. Without replenishment, the end result is emptiness. People dying, while literal, is strategically mobilised as evidence of Ukrainian weakness rather than as a humanitarian tragedy. Death is depersonalized; soldiers are counted as resources expended, not as individuals.

Through these entailments, Donald Trump constructs Ukraine not as a resilient nation but as a failing entity whose collapse is inevitable. When connected to the earlier saviour metaphor, this imagery deepens Ukraine’s dependency. If Ukraine is *buried and depleted*, the only way out of burial is external intervention – namely, the American rescue. Thus, the blame-shifting paradoxically strengthens the saviour frame: Ukraine cannot save itself because of its inherent weakness, therefore America must assume the role of indispensable rescuer.

Trump: “You are saying you don’t want to ceasefire. I want a ceasefire because you get a ceasefire faster than...”

Zelenskyy: “Ask our people about ceasefire. What they think... (inaudible)...”

These vividly opposite views on the war and the ceasefire operation are obvious – the Americans treat the war as a trivial game, where a stop is preferred no matter the consequences, while the Ukrainians would like an end to this war, but without losing strategic resources and territories.

Donald Trump cycles through different metaphors and rhetorical strategies (from burden/depletion to ceasefire and from blame-shifting to game) but all of them revolve around the same master frame: AMERICA IS THE SAVIOUR. President Trump highlights Ukraine’s weakness, framing the war as an unsustainable burden. This prepares the ground for the ceasefire metaphor. Trump casts himself as the rational authority who knows the solution (*I want a ceasefire*). President Zelenskyy resists, grounding his response in democratic legitimacy (*Ask our people about ceasefire*). The semantic contrast is clear: Trump

frames the war as something that can be switched off by external will, whereas Zelenskyy frames it as an existential struggle tied to national sovereignty. Ukraine is portrayed as too weak and irrational to know what is best for itself, so America must intervene as the rational saviour who offers the right path. Nevertheless, when challenged, Trump shifts responsibility “That wasn’t with me, that was with a guy named Biden who was not a smart person.” Thus, projecting the conceptual metaphor: TRUMP IS A COWARD. His strategy of escaping by blaming the other emphasizes his cowardness, whereas, this blame-shifting strategy reframes past failures as the fault of others.

President Trump’s remarks are not isolated speech acts but draw upon pre-existing discursive traditions, such as Cold War rhetoric, populist nationalism, and the recurring American self-perception as a global survivor. By recycling familiar narratives of “strong leadership” and contrasting them against alleged weakness (whether embodied by Zelenskyy, Biden, or Obama), Trump situates himself within a longer ideological continuum. This reliance on established discursive patterns strengthens the persuasive force of his statements, as audiences recognize and resonate with the underlying ideological frames.

By invoking Obama and Biden, Trump constructs a contrastive metaphor of incompetence versus saviourship. Even cowardice is rhetorically redirected into self-glorification when Trump distances himself from weakness and magnifies his own role as the provider of salvation. By passing from cowardice back to the game, Trump returns to the conceptual metaphor WAR IS A GAME.

Zelenskyy: “It was your president...”

Trump: “That was with Obama who gave you sheets and I gave you javelins. Yes, I gave you the javelins to take out all those tanks. Obama gave you sheets.”

In fact, “the statement is Obama gave sheets and Trump gave javelins, you got to be more thankful, because, let me tell you, you don’t have the cards. With us, you have the cards, but without us, you don’t have any cards.” This reframing trivializes war as a competition where America controls the rules. From a semantic point of view, the cards metaphor ties military aid to resources in a game while, from a pragmatically, it reinforces that Ukraine’s only chance of survival comes from the American intervention. By dealing the cards, America rescues Ukraine, and therefore deserves gratitude.

Taken together, these metaphors work cumulatively to construct a discourse of American hegemony in which salvation is both granted conditionally (through business transaction and game rules) and morally demanded (gratitude owed to the saviour). The key metaphor is AMERICA IS THE SAVIOUR, which is reducing Ukraine to a powerless player, portrayed as weak, irrational, and dependent, while America, embodied in Trump, is indispensable, rational, and heroic. This conceptual metaphor blends concepts like salvation and gratitude with political space. The emergent structure presents America as both benevolent rescuer and indispensable authority. The blend fuses morality with hegemony, legitimizing control as altruism.

The analysis of Donald Trump's metaphorical discourse reveals a systematic pattern in which metaphors like POLITICS IS BUSINESS, WAR IS A GAME, BURDEN/BLAME, etc., legitimize the overarching conceptual metaphor AMERICA IS THE SAVIOUR. Although each metaphor draws from a distinct source domain (business transactions, games of chance, exhaustion, rational authority) serve the same ideological function, that of minimizing Ukraine and to shift responsibility for the war's difficulties away from the United States and to boost America's role as indispensable rescuer. The contrast between Trump's leadership and that of his predecessors, effectively individualise and appropriate his role of survivor. In doing so, he produces a hegemonic discourse that normalizes Ukraine's dependency and refines American intervention not as discretionary assistance but as the indispensable prerequisite for Ukraine's continued survival. The analysis highlights the central role of discourse in shaping international relations, illustrating how rhetorical strategies and metaphorical framing contribute to the construction of political narratives. In this context, the metaphor AMERICA IS THE SAVIOUR emerges as the dominant framing device, encapsulating the broader discursive pattern through which America's hegemony is legitimized and Ukraine's dependency naturalized.

The repeated mappings and blends reveal how American hegemony is cognitively produced and legitimized in discourse. By tracing these mental-space connections, one can notice how ideology operates through cognitive mechanisms that render asymmetrical power relations conceptually coherent and morally acceptable.

Conclusions

American identity as a diplomatic and political good figure has long been an issue. Nevertheless, President Donald Trump has turned the wheel, and the USA is no longer perceived as the altruist benefactor, but rather as a transactional entity that will not support the fight against its historical enemy unconditionally. On the other side, President Zelenskyy has to balance between maintaining Ukrainian sovereignty, ensuring that peace terms are not harmful to his country and that international backing is still present.

The present study has demonstrated the various conceptualisations of American identity in the discourse employed by all three participants: positive images AMERICAN IDENTITY IS HEGEMONY, AMERICAN IDENTITY IS FORCE / AUTHORITY, AMERICAN POWER IS PRESENT, THE AMERICAN PRESIDENT IS A SUPERHERO, THE AMERICAN PRESIDENT IS A GOOD DIPLOMAT, AMERICA IS THE SAVIOUR and negative images AMERICAN HEGEMONY IS UNDER ATTACK, AMERICAN POWER IS ABSENT, AMERICAN IDENTITY IS CONFUSION, AMERICAN DIPLOMACY IS USELESS, THE AMERICAN PRESIDENT IS A COWARD. On the other hand, the situation was also conceptualised by viewing war in terms of a game of cards, or as gambling.

This analysis has proven that the discourse employed in the communicative situation on March the 1st 2025 underscores the asymmetry of dependence – as Ukraine need the US support in the attempt to stop the ongoing

war, and no the other way around. Due to this unequal levelling, the American President appears to display bullying and coercive behaviour towards his counterpart, through constant interruptions and by showing the Ukrainian President his place. Thus, President Zelenskyy's attempts to counter attack are constrained by President Trump and Vice-president Vance. These findings reveal the power of discourse in shaping international relations. Metaphor becomes a cognitive and ideological instrument through which global hierarchies are legitimised and dependency is normalised. The American political discourse, as exemplified by president Trump, redefines traditional notions of leadership and moral authority, replacing cooperative diplomacy with a transactional, self-centred hegemony. Such metaphorical constructs contribute to a reimagined American identity that prioritizes power assertion over collective responsibility.

By integrating Conceptual Metaphor Theory with Critical Discourse Analysis and Cultural hegemony, this study has highlighted how metaphorical structures sustain ideological dominance. The metaphors identified in Trump's discourse do not merely reflect political realities, they build them. Through linguistic strategies, the American identity is reframed from benevolent leadership into transactional hegemony, transforming diplomacy into negotiation, aid into business, and morality into competition.

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