A critical metaphor analysis of the symbolic violence in the *Roe v. Wade* news discourse

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Abstract:

In June 2022, the US Supreme Court overturned the landmark 1973 *Roe v. Wade* ruling, sparking significant media attention. In this paper, we consider what themes can be analysed from the news discourse and how they are constructed. Based on corpus technology, Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA) makes subtle and covert ideologies and political motives clear and explicit by the identification, interpretation and explanation of conceptual metaphors (Charteris-Black 2004). Bourdieu (1991:164) regarded this kind of power exertion as "symbolic violence". This paper aims to reveal the violence in conceptual metaphors in key themes of the event.

   The corpus includes 567,300 tokens from *Washington Post* and *The New York Times*, two influential US newspapers with the largest number of publications in May and July of 2022 in the world, according to the retrieval result using "abortion" in Factiva, the world's largest digital news database. Using the semantic analysis tool Wmatrix (Rayson 2008), six key themes are sorted out as the target domain of the metaphors: *abortion*, *court*, *Roe*, *women*, *republican* and *democratic*.

   Based on the Metaphor Identification Procedure VU (MIPVU) (Steen et al. 2010), the analysis show four key findings. Firstly, conflict and competition metaphors emerge with the highest frequency around *abortion*, *republican*, and *democratic*, simplifying the complex attitudes towards abortion into incompatible binary positions. For example, anti-abortion is a "fight", "campaign" or "war", in which two parties "assault" each other as "opponents". Secondly, personification metaphors, like "decide", "consider" and "resolve", are predominantly present in the *court* theme, significantly undermining the impartiality of the Supreme Court as the highest legislative body. Thirdly, metaphors related to *Roe* primarily fall into the ontological and event-structure categories, like "overturn" and "post-Roe world", provoking the critical reflection and perception of regression. Lastly, in metaphors related to *women*, associations with colour and direction are prevalent, making women a political tool in bipartisan battles to win votes due to the significant imbalance in the attention paid to different races.

   In conclusion, the conceptual metaphors in each theme reflect the invisible symbolic violence to intensify conflicts and manipulate public opinions and actions when the focus of this event is supposed to be human right. It contributes to studies on abortion by highlighting conceptual metaphors from a

critical and sociological perspective. In addition, the corpus-based method can facilitate the identification of conceptual metaphors and make the large-scale metaphor analysis possible.

References

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