



Cinematic Metaphors in Jokowi's International Political Speeches: A Conceptual Metaphor Theory Analysis

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Abstract

Metaphor plays an important role in political communication by framing complex issues in ways that audiences can easily understand. This study examines cinematic metaphors in two international speeches delivered by President Joko Widodo in 2018. Using a qualitative discourse-analytic approach grounded in Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Kövecses, 2015; Lakoff & Johnson, 2003) and Critical Metaphor Analysis (Charteris-Black, 2004), the study analyzes metaphors derived from *Avengers: Infinity War* and *Game of Thrones*. Metaphorical expressions were identified using the Metaphor Identification Procedure Vrije Universiteit (MIPVU) (Steen et al., 2010) and subsequently interpreted in relation to their conceptual mappings and rhetorical functions. Fourteen cinematic metaphors were identified and categorized into four conceptual mappings: ECONOMIC CONFLICT IS WAR, LEADERS ARE HEROES, ECONOMIC UNCERTAINTY IS NATURAL DISASTER, and INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS ARE A GAME OF POWER. The analysis shows that these metaphors frame global economic tensions, leadership roles, and geopolitical competition through widely recognizable narrative structures. In doing so, they function not only as linguistic devices but also as rhetorical strategies that shape audience interpretation and emphasize the need for international cooperation. Although based on a limited corpus of two speeches, the findings illustrate how cinematic narratives can operate as conceptual resources in political discourse, linking global political issues with familiar cultural imagery. The study contributes to metaphor research by demonstrating how popular culture references may structure political meaning and persuasive framing in contemporary international speeches.

Keywords: cinematic metaphor; critical metaphor analysis; Jokowi; political speech; conceptual metaphor theory

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1. Introduction

Language is one of the most powerful tools in politics because it can be utilized to communicate to people, persuade them, and change the way they think. Politicians use language on purpose to change minds of individuals, build identities, and make their authority



appear legitimate (Chilton, 2004). (Perrine & Arp, 1992) states that figurative language amplifies persuasion by incorporating depth and emotional resonance, whereas Rozakis (1995) characterizes it as articulating one concept through the lens of another. In political contexts, figurative language, particularly metaphor, is essential for leaders to articulate intricate realities and engage with their audiences. Lakoff & Johnson (2003) highlight that metaphor is not merely for display; it is a key part of how people think and act.

Metaphors help politicians convey abstract social and economic issues in terms that people can understand and relate to (Charteris-Black, 2004). Taiwo (2009) likewise illustrates that political language—when examined through rhetoric, stylistics, and discourse strategies—serves as a fundamental resource for the construction of meaning, legitimacy, and power. Although his analysis extends beyond metaphor, his recognition of metaphorical expressions, illustrated by Obasanjo's identification as a "kingmaker," demonstrates the role of figurative language in shaping ideological stances. These insights collectively emphasize the function of metaphor as both a linguistic and cognitive tool that shapes public interpretation and reinforces persuasive intent in political discourse (Charteris-Black, 2004; Lakoff & Johnson, 2003; G. Steen, 2008).

In this digital age, metaphors from popular culture, especially movies, are becoming increasingly prevalent (Coëgnarts, 2017). Cinematic metaphors use common visual and story elements from movies to make political situations more vivid and relatable (Katsaridou & Kostopoulou, 2024). Bateman & Schmidt (2013) suggest that film meaning is constructed through multimodal narrative frameworks that audiences instinctively comprehend, whereas Forceville (2006) emphasizes that multimodal metaphors depend on culturally recognizable imagery to enhance understanding. In political speeches, cinematic metaphors dramatize issues, elicit emotional reactions, and situate leaders in recognizable narrative archetypes such as heroes, strategists, or guardians, thereby enhancing persuasive impact (Charteris-Black, 2011; Musolff, 2016).



President Joko Widodo (Jokowi) puts forth a strong case for studying cinematic metaphor. He is known for his casual and friendly style, and he often uses humor, well-known imagery, and cultural references to connect with his audience (Tewarat & Triyono, 2019). He used metaphors from *Avengers: Infinity War* and *Game of Thrones* to talk about the state of the world economy and political rivalry at two international events: the 2018 World Economic Forum on ASEAN in Hanoi and the IMF–World Bank Annual Meetings in Bali (Sihaloho & Simatupang, 2020). These movie references show how creative Jokowi is with his words. He makes abstract economic talk interesting and easy to understand for people in Indonesia and around the world.

Despite the growing body of research on metaphor in political discourse, studies examining cinematic or popular-culture references remain relatively limited and tend to treat such expressions primarily as stylistic or figurative devices. For example, the study by Sihaloho & Simatupang (2020) identifies movie-related expressions in Jokowi's speeches and classifies them as allusions or metaphors; however, the analysis remains largely descriptive at the lexical–semantic level, focusing on what the expressions refer to rather than how they structure political meaning. Consequently, the cognitive and ideological functions of such metaphors in shaping audience perception and framing national or global issues remain underexplored. Addressing this limitation, the present study moves beyond figurative language classification by applying Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003) and Critical Metaphor Analysis (Charteris-Black, 2004) to investigate the underlying source–target mappings and their persuasive functions. In doing so, it reconceptualizes cinematic references not as decorative elements but as systematic conceptual resources that structure political reasoning and legitimize particular interpretations of crises, leadership, and international relations.

Previous research has established that metaphor is a fundamental instrument in political communication, enabling the conceptualization and persuasive framing of intricate issues (Charteris-Black, 2004; Musolff, 2016). Recent computational research indicates that metaphor



utilization in political discourse substantially affects public engagement and mirrors ideological positions (Prabhakaran et al., 2021). Research on media discourse reveals that conceptual metaphors persist in political news, facilitating the simplification of abstract political phenomena for broader audiences (Surip & Lubis, 2022). In Indonesia, studies of mass media coverage demonstrate that structural, ontological, and orientational metaphors are frequently employed to depict political constructs (Surip & Lubis, 2022), signifying a robust metaphorical landscape. However, although the utilization of metaphors in political discourse is extensively documented, the utilization of cinematic or film-inspired metaphors is still inadequately investigated. The absence of focused analysis on cinematic metaphor in Indonesian political speeches underscores a significant research deficiency. This study seeks to address the gap by examining cinematic metaphors in selected speeches of Joko Widodo, investigating the cognitive and rhetorical functions of cinematic depictions in international political discourse. Examining the Indonesian context is analytically important because political communication in emerging democracies increasingly incorporates global popular culture, providing a distinctive site for understanding how transnational media symbols are localized to construct national political narratives.

This research examines cinematic metaphors in Jokowi's chosen international speeches through the lens of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003) and Critical Metaphor Analysis (Charteris-Black, 2004). These frameworks facilitate the examination of how metaphors embody cognitive mappings and rhetorical strategies. The research is directed by the following questions:

1. What types of cinematic metaphors are employed in Jokowi's selected speeches, and how can they be categorized within the framework of Conceptual Metaphor Theory?
2. How do these cinematic metaphors construct contextual meanings that reflect Jokowi's rhetorical strategies in international political discourse?

In theory, this study enhances metaphor research in political linguistics by broadening the discourse to include cinematic metaphors, a relatively unexamined domain. It also shows



how popular culture can affect political speech and how people perceive it. The study offers practical insights into the communicative strategies employed by modern political leaders who incorporate familiar cultural references to render global economic issues accessible and emotionally impactful. The study analyzes Jokowi's cinematic metaphors, illustrating the interplay of language, cognition, and culture in the creation of persuasive political communication on a global scale.

2. Method

This study employed a qualitative discourse-analytic design to examine the use of cinematic metaphors in political speech. The analysis draws on Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003) to identify systematic source–target mappings and Critical Metaphor Analysis (Charteris-Black, 2004) to interpret the rhetorical and ideological functions of metaphors in context. These complementary approaches enable the investigation of metaphors not only as a linguistic form but also as a cognitive and persuasive resource in political discourse.

2.1 Data Source and Selection

The data consisted of two international speeches delivered by President Joko Widodo in 2018: the World Economic Forum on ASEAN (Hanoi, September 12, 2018) and the IMF–World Bank Annual Meetings (Bali, October 12, 2018). These speeches were selected through purposive sampling because they explicitly contain references to popular films and television series, which are central to the focus of this study.

Rather than aiming for statistical generalization, this study adopts an information-rich case approach typical of qualitative discourse research, in which texts are chosen for their analytical relevance and depth. Both speeches represent major international addresses in which the president strategically employed cinematic imagery to frame global economic and political issues. As such, they provide suitable and representative cases for examining how cinematic metaphors function in political rhetoric.



Official videos and transcripts were obtained from publicly available government and online sources. The recordings were reviewed and manually checked to ensure transcription accuracy.

2.2 Metaphor Identification Procedure

Metaphorical expressions were identified using an adapted version of the Metaphor Identification Procedure Vrije Universiteit (MIPVU) developed by (G. J. Steen et al., 2010). This procedure was employed to ensure that metaphor identification was systematic, transparent, and replicable rather than based solely on intuitive judgment.

Following MIPVU, the analysis involved five steps:

- (1) reading the entire text to establish general understanding,
- (2) segmenting the text into lexical units,
- (3) determining each unit's contextual meaning,
- (4) comparing this meaning with its more basic or literal meaning, and
- (5) marking the unit as metaphorical when a contrast exists but the contextual meaning can be understood through cross-domain mapping.

The identification process yielded numerous metaphorical expressions across the speeches. However, only metaphors containing explicit cinematic or popular-culture source domains were included in the final dataset. Consequently, the fourteen metaphors reported in this study refer specifically to cinematic metaphors rather than the total number of metaphors present in the speeches.

2.3 Data Analysis

After metaphor identification, the selected expressions were analyzed using procedures adapted from Critical Metaphor Analysis (Charteris-Black, 2004). The analysis was conducted in three stages: identification, interpretation, and explanation. In the identification stage, metaphorical expressions confirmed through the MIPVU were compiled (Steen et al., 2010).



In the interpretation stage, each metaphor was examined according to its underlying source and target domains based on Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003). Through this process, several recurring conceptual mappings were identified, including **ECONOMIC CONFLICT IS WAR, LEADERS ARE HEROES, ECONOMIC UNCERTAINTY IS NATURAL DISASTER, and INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS ARE A GAME OF POWER**. These mappings reveal how cinematic imagery is used to frame complex political and economic issues through familiar narrative structures. In the explanation stage, the rhetorical and ideological implications of these mappings were analyzed to understand how such metaphors shape audience perception of global crises, leadership roles, and international competition within the speeches.

To ensure the credibility of the analysis, all identified metaphors and their interpretations were cross-checked with the original speech videos and official transcripts to verify contextual accuracy and meaning. In addition, the metaphorical status of the expressions was double-checked using the MIPVU to ensure that each identified metaphor met the established criteria for metaphor identification (G. J. Steen et al., 2010). This verification process helped minimize subjective interpretation and ensured that the analysis remained consistent and systematic. Such procedures are commonly recommended in qualitative research to strengthen the credibility and trustworthiness of findings (Lincoln, 1990).

3. Findings and Discussion

3.1 Identification of Cinematic Metaphors

The analysis identified fourteen cinematic metaphors across two international speeches delivered by Joko Widodo in 2018. These metaphors were coded using the format CM.n/Tm/sn (Cinematic Metaphor number/Text number/Sentence number). Each metaphor was analyzed according to its cinematic reference, conceptual mapping, and contextual meaning. The references were derived primarily from the film **Avengers: Infinity War** and the television series **Game of Thrones**.



Across the dataset, the metaphors clustered into four conceptual mappings consistent with Conceptual Metaphor Theory: **ECONOMIC CONFLICT IS WAR, LEADERS ARE HEROES, ECONOMIC UNCERTAINTY IS NATURAL DISASTER,** and **INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS ARE A GAME OF POWER.** The distribution of cinematic metaphors identified in the speeches can be seen in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Distribution of Cinematic Metaphors in Jokowi’s Speeches

No.	Conceptual Mapping	Cinematic References	Metaphor Occurrences
1.	ECONOMIC CONFLICT IS WAR	Infinity War, Thanos	4
2.	LEADERS ARE HEROES	Avengers	1
3.	ECONOMIC UNCERTAINTY IS NATURAL DISASTER	Winter is Coming, Evil Winter	4
4.	INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS ARE A GAME OF POWER	Game of Thrones, Great Houses	5

3.2 Contextual Analysis of Cinematic Metaphors

In the World Economic Forum on ASEAN speech, Jokowi introduced the metaphor “we are heading towards an Infinity War.” By invoking the narrative conflict of Avengers: Infinity War, the speech frames global economic tensions as a large-scale battle. Within the conceptual mapping ECONOMIC CONFLICT IS WAR, trade disputes and protectionist policies are conceptualized as destructive forces that threaten the stability of the global economic system. As Lakoff & Johnson (2003) argue, WAR metaphors structure understanding by highlighting conflict, strategy, and the possibility of victory or defeat. In this context, the metaphor dramatizes the urgency of preventing economic confrontation.

This framing is reinforced through references to the Avengers and the villain Thanos. Jokowi describes world leaders as “fellow Avengers” who must cooperate to defeat destructive forces. In contrast, protectionism is metaphorically represented by the figure of Thanos, the antagonist seeking to disrupt universal balance. Through this narrative contrast, the speech constructs the mapping LEADERS ARE HEROES, positioning political leaders as morally



responsible actors who must collaborate to protect global stability. According to Charteris-Black (2004), such metaphors contribute to persuasive rhetoric by constructing moral narratives that legitimize leadership and collective action.

In the IMF–World Bank Annual Meetings speech, Jokowi shifted to a different cinematic frame by referencing the famous line “Winter is Coming.” Originating from *Game of Thrones*, the expression signals the arrival of an unavoidable threat. In Jokowi’s speech, it metaphorically represents the possibility of global economic crisis. Within the mapping ECONOMIC UNCERTAINTY IS NATURAL DISASTER, economic instability is conceptualized as an external force comparable to seasonal change or natural catastrophe. Natural-disaster metaphors emphasize unpredictability and collective vulnerability, encouraging audiences to prepare for shared challenges (Kövecses, 2015).

The speech further expands this metaphor by introducing the notion of an “Evil Winter,” intensifying the depiction of global recession as a threatening and unpredictable phenomenon. By framing economic downturn as a natural force rather than the result of individual policy failure, the metaphor encourages a cooperative rather than accusatory interpretation of crisis.

Another recurring metaphorical frame draws from the political dynamics of *Game of Thrones*. Jokowi compares major global powers to “Great Houses,” a reference to competing noble families within the series. Through this imagery, international relations are framed as a strategic contest for power. The resulting conceptual mapping, INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS ARE A GAME OF POWER, highlights rivalry, shifting alliances, and competition among major states. As Musolff (2016) notes, GAME metaphors commonly portray political interaction as rule-governed competition involving winners and losers.

3.3 Rhetorical and Ideological Functions

Beyond their cognitive role in simplifying complex issues, Jokowi’s cinematic metaphors perform important rhetorical and ideological functions. By drawing on globally recognizable narratives from popular culture, the speeches transform abstract economic and



political concepts into vivid story-like scenarios. This strategy enhances audience engagement and makes complex global dynamics more accessible.

From a Critical Metaphor Analysis perspective, the metaphors also serve to position Indonesia within global political discourse. By presenting world leaders as “Avengers,” Jokowi frames international cooperation as a moral responsibility and implicitly situates Indonesia among the actors committed to maintaining global stability. Similarly, the metaphor of “Great Houses” subtly critiques geopolitical rivalry by suggesting that competition among major powers can destabilize the entire international system.

However, cinematic metaphors may also carry potential limitations. While they make political communication more engaging, the use of entertainment-based imagery risks simplifying or trivializing complex economic realities. For instance, framing global economic tensions as a battle between heroes and villains may obscure structural causes of economic conflict. Similarly, the dramatic imagery of “Evil Winter” may amplify perceptions of crisis while reducing attention to specific policy mechanisms. Recognizing these limitations allows for a more balanced interpretation of the rhetorical strategy.

3.4 Implications for Global Political Communication

The findings suggest that cinematic metaphors operate as powerful discursive tools in contemporary political communication. By integrating popular culture references into formal diplomatic speeches, Jokowi bridges the gap between global political discourse and widely shared cultural narratives. This strategy reflects broader trends in political rhetoric in which leaders draw on familiar cultural symbols to enhance persuasion and relatability.

From the perspective of Conceptual Metaphor Theory, the speeches demonstrate how cinematic narratives provide rich source domains for structuring political reasoning. From the perspective of Critical Metaphor Analysis, these metaphors also reveal ideological positioning, particularly in the way they frame cooperation, rivalry, and global responsibility.



4. Conclusion

This study examined cinematic metaphors in two international speeches delivered by President Joko Widodo in 2018 using the framework of Conceptual Metaphor Theory and Critical Metaphor Analysis. Fourteen cinematic metaphors derived from *Avengers: Infinity War* and *Game of Thrones* were identified and categorized into four dominant conceptual mappings: **ECONOMIC CONFLICT IS WAR, LEADERS ARE HEROES, ECONOMIC UNCERTAINTY IS NATURAL DISASTER, and INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS ARE A GAME OF POWER**. These mappings demonstrate how popular cinematic narratives are employed to structure complex global issues through familiar cultural imagery.

In relation to the first research question, the findings indicate that Jokowi uses cinematic narratives as cognitive resources that help audiences conceptualize abstract economic and political developments. In line with Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003; Kövecses, 2015), the metaphors translate complex global dynamics into accessible narrative frames. Rather than appearing as isolated rhetorical flourishes, the cinematic references form coherent conceptual patterns that structure the interpretation of global economic conflict, uncertainty, and cooperation.

Addressing the second research question, the analysis shows that these metaphors also perform persuasive and evaluative functions within political discourse. Through the lens of Critical Metaphor Analysis (Charteris-Black, 2004), the metaphors frame economic tensions as battles, depict leaders as cooperative heroes, portray instability as an approaching natural threat, and represent international relations as strategic competition. Such metaphorical framing not only simplifies complex issues but also legitimizes particular interpretations of global economic challenges and encourages collective action among international actors (Musolff, 2016).

At the same time, the use of cinematic metaphors may carry potential rhetorical risks. While popular cultural references can make political communication more relatable and engaging, they may also simplify or dramatize complex economic realities. As a result, such



metaphors may simultaneously enhance audience engagement while reducing the perceived seriousness of certain issues. Recognizing this dual function provides a more balanced understanding of how metaphor operates in contemporary political rhetoric.

Nevertheless, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the corpus of this study is relatively small, consisting of two speeches delivered in specific international forums. While these speeches are influential and widely circulated, the limited dataset means that the findings should be interpreted as exploratory rather than fully representative of Jokowi's broader rhetorical style. Second, although the identification process was guided by the MIPVU procedure (Steen et al., 2010) and supported by conceptual metaphor analysis, metaphor interpretation remains partly interpretative in qualitative discourse research.

Future studies could expand this research in several directions. A larger corpus of political speeches across different years could provide a more comprehensive picture of cinematic metaphor use in Indonesian political discourse. Comparative studies examining other international leaders may also reveal whether similar popular-culture metaphors are employed in global political communication. In addition, future research may explore audience reception or media responses to such metaphors in order to better understand how cinematic references influence public interpretation and engagement with political messages.

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