

## WEAVING IDEOLOGY THROUGH WORDS: THE ROLE OF METAPHORS IN THE NDC 2020 MANIFESTO

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### Abstract

Metaphors are significant rhetorical tools that shape public perception and construct political identities (Charteris-Black, 2014). This study examines how metaphorical framing functions as an ideological instrument in the National Democratic Congress's (NDC) 2020 manifesto. It aims at uncovering how metaphorical framing functions as an ideological tool in political discourse. Using a descriptive content analysis and qualitative interpretive research design grounded in a Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA) approach, the study identifies five dominant metaphorical constructs—building (most prevalent), growth, journey, war, and health metaphors—each serving distinct rhetorical purposes. Additionally, the study reveals five key ideological functions of metaphor in the manifesto: constructing legitimacy, projecting development and vitality, naturalizing crisis and delegitimizing the incumbent, mobilizing collective identity, and contesting power and framing opposition. The study provides unique insight into how opposition parties in African democracies strategically deploy metaphorical language in manifestos to critique incumbents, frame alternative visions, and mobilize public support.

*Keywords: critical metaphor analysis; Ghanaian politics; metaphor; political discourse; NDC manifesto; political ideology.*

### 1. Introduction

Language is never neutral and cannot be confined to a single phenomenon (Fairclough, 2015; Nawaz et al., 2013). This implies that language always carries meaning beyond just the words themselves; it reflects power dynamics, cultural values and assumptions. One area where language plays a key role is political discourse. According to Van Dijk (1998), political discourse is a class of genres that politics defines. It relates to the use of language in discussions, debates, and communication related to politics. Because language is inherently ideological, contextual, and multifaceted, its role in politics becomes more than just communication. In other words, political language is a carefully crafted instrument of persuasion, designed to frame issues, construct identities, and mobilize public sentiment (Fairclough, 2015; Nwaoboli, 2025).

As established earlier, language is inherently ideological, which means it is a vehicle through which ideologies are expressed, reinforced, and challenged. These ideologies are structured systems of dominant ideas and beliefs that shape and influence every aspect of human social interaction and organization, including the political, economic, scientific,

educational, and cultural spheres (Zajda, 2014). Through language, these ideologies become embedded in everyday discourse, subtly influencing how people think, speak, and act.

The communication of political ideologies relies on the use of specific linguistic and rhetorical strategies. One most potent rhetorical device in political discourse is the metaphor. Metaphors are universally acknowledged as powerful rhetorical tools in political discourse, which shape public perception, construct ideological positions, and influence political outcomes across global democracies. Scholars like Lakoff (1980) argue that political parties rely on deep-seated metaphorical frames to make abstract policies relatable. For example, an economy can be described as “broken” to imply a need for repair, while governance can be framed as “stewardship” to suggest responsibility and care.

Given the influential role of metaphors in shaping political meaning, extensive research has examined their use across diverse political genres, such as presidential speeches (Charteris-Black, 2014; Cox, 2012; Ngula, 2021; Wiredu, 2021), party manifestos (Charteris-Black, 2004; Kovar, 2019; Musolff, 2016; Ofosu & Washew, 2024), protest rhetoric (Hart, 2018), and media discourse (Semino, 2008). However, while analyses of political manifestos are predominantly centered on western democracies, limited scholarly attention has been devoted to understanding how opposition parties in African contexts, specifically Ghana’s NDC, strategically employ metaphors within manifestos to construct ideological narratives and promote counter-hegemonic discourses. This gap highlights the need for closer scholarly examination of political manifestos, which are key texts through which parties articulate their visions, negotiate political meaning, and engage in ideological contestation.

Election manifesto is defined as “the official statement of intended policy by political parties at the beginning of election campaign” (Robertson, 2004, p.295). Thus, manifestos set out the policies a political party would deliver if they were to win a general election. The 2020 Ghanaian election marked a pivotal moment in the nation’s democratic trajectory, characterized by intense rivalry between the opposition National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the incumbent New Patriotic Party (NPP). The NDC’s manifesto, therefore, emerged as a critical rhetorical instrument for articulating dissent, advancing alternative policy visions, and galvanizing electoral support. Titled “The People’s Manifesto: Jobs, Prosperity and More”, the manifesto was crafted in response to unique socio-political conditions, as the incumbent NPP government faced growing public discontent over economic management, rising unemployment, and the hardships brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. As seen above, the subtitle of the manifesto – Jobs, Prosperity and More” – foregrounds its metaphorical framing: Ghana as a project in need of revival. This metaphorical frame aligns with the NDC’s broader narrative of “rescuing” the nation from decline, a recurrent theme in oppositional discourse. By employing vivid and “weaponized” metaphorical language to legitimize the opposition’s ideological position and contest the authority of the incumbent, the manifesto presents itself as a particularly compelling subject for scholarly analysis.

Building on global metaphor theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Charteris-Black, 2014), and addressing the contextual vacuum in Ghanaian manifesto studies, this paper aims to provide a detailed Critical Metaphor Analysis of the NDC’s 2020 election manifesto. The study aims to unravel how the NDC employs metaphors to construct its vision of governance, frame policy debates, and position itself against its main rival, the New Patriotic Party (NPP).

## 2. Literature Review

In this section, I first explain key concepts relevant to the discussion. I then discuss the theoretical framework—Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA)—that underpins this study, while also engaging with previous scholarship on metaphors in political discourse.

### 2.1 Key Concepts

Burkholder and Henry (2009) posit that metaphors compare two things that are from “different classes of experience”, which in turn creates a new understanding through the specific use of language. This implies that metaphors connect unrelated ideas or experiences in a way that helps us understand one concept through the familiar features of another, using language creatively to shape meaning. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), metaphor is a linguistic mechanism that allows abstract policies and ideologies to be communicated through familiar, emotionally resonant concepts.

The term ‘ideology’, within the framework of discourse analysis, is conceptualized as a set of shared beliefs, values, and assumptions that underpin group identities and justify social practices (Van Dijk, 1998). Ideology is realised through discourse, and it shapes how political actors frame reality, construct social identities, and legitimize particular actions or policies. In political genres like manifestos, metaphors function as powerful tools for the naturalisation and legitimation of ideological positions. For instance, they make abstract social and political concepts concrete, familiar, and seemingly self-evident, thereby rendering certain worldviews and value systems ‘natural’ or unquestionable. Thus, through metaphors, political parties are able to present their policies as logical, desirable, or inevitable, while simultaneously delegitimizing alternative perspectives. In this study, ideology is not used just as a background concept but is critically examined as a discursive effect produced and reinforced through strategic metaphor use in the NDC 2020 manifesto.

### 2.2 Theoretical Framework

As previously noted, this study is grounded in the framework of Charteris-Black’s (2004) critical metaphor analysis. It is worth mentioning that, in this study, I view metaphor in its basic sense of conceiving one thing in terms of another (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) and also as a rhetorical resource that makes possible a recontextualization and reconceptualization of experiences (Cameron & Stelma, 2004). Lakoff and Johnson’s (1980) Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) posits that metaphors are not merely linguistic flourishes but reflect deeper, systematic ways in which individuals and communities structure their understanding of reality. Thus, CMT focuses on identifying recurring mappings between source and target domains, which reveal how abstract political concepts are conceptualized through more concrete or familiar experiences. It is important to state that, while CMT has been significant in exposing these underlying cognitive structures, it largely focuses on how metaphors shape thought, often bracketing out broader rhetorical and ideological concerns. Charteris-Black’s (2004, 2014) Critical Metaphor Analysis builds on the foundation of CMT but goes beyond conceptual mapping to investigate the persuasive, ideological, and manipulatory functions of metaphors within discourse.

According to Charteris-Black (2004), critical metaphor analysis (CMA) is a blend of cognitive semantic and pragmatic approaches and can be defined as “an approach to metaphor analysis that aims to reveal the covert intentions of language users” (p.34). It helps in analysing metaphorical expressions, descriptions and categories in order to uncover ideologies underlying language (Charteris-Black, 2005). Consequently, CMA posits that

metaphor in political discourse serves specific ideological functions, such as creating illusions, enabling resistance, offering heuristic insights, and reinforcing political myths. It is important to mention that CMA consists of three primary stages: metaphor identification, metaphor interpretation and metaphor explanation. Charteris-Black (2005) maintains that metaphor identification is based on semantic tension caused by linguistic processes such as personification, de-personification and reification. Following metaphor identification is metaphor interpretation, which involves establishing a relationship between metaphors and the cognitive and pragmatic factors that determine them. The final stage of CMA, metaphor explanation, is concerned with identifying the social agency and social role of metaphor in persuasion. A central premise of CMA is that metaphor shapes thought, meaning its use in political discourse is deliberate and structured, rather than accidental or arbitrary.

The NDC's 2020 manifesto, like other forms of political discourse, is neither neutral nor value free – it is imbued with ideology. Thus, CMA is ideal for analysing the NDC manifesto's ideological metaphors as it combines linguistic scrutiny with critical discourse inquiry, exposing how language legitimizes policy agendas and constructs political enemies.

### 2.3 Previous Studies

Sabir (2015) explores the role of metaphors in political language. He aimed to investigate metaphors used in modern political discourse in the English language, proceeding from the cognitive point of view. Sabir identifies these functions of metaphors in political discourse: cognitive, communicative, pragmatic, and aesthetic functions. Thus, metaphors help simplify complex political ideas, enhance persuasion and emotional appeal, support strategic goals, and enrich the style of political language. Sabir's concept of metaphors as ideological reinforcement aligns with the present study as the present study explores how the NDC's 2020 manifesto utilizes metaphorical framing to establish and normalize its political worldview.

Using critical metaphor analysis, Nartey (2019a) explores the discourse of resistance in the rhetoric of Kwame Nkrumah. He demonstrates how war and conflict metaphors ("ruthless war," "monsters") functioned as discursive tools of resistance against colonial oppression. The findings reveal that Nkrumah strategically deployed metaphors to construct binary ideological identities—framing independence activists as heroic liberators and colonial forces as dehumanized "monsters". Although Nartey's work focuses solely on historical discourse without connecting to contemporary Ghanaian politics, it establishes critical precedents for understanding metaphor's political utility in Ghana, creating a scholarly basis for investigating how similar rhetorical strategies manifest in the NDC's modern manifesto discourse.

Similar to the study above is Nartey's (2019b) discourse-mythological analysis of Kwame Nkrumah's "Unite or Perish" rhetoric. The paper demonstrates how political leaders construct national identity through metaphorical storytelling. Specifically, Nartey explores how Nkrumah blended Pan-Africanist ideology with existential threat framing, using the conceptual metaphor NATION-AS-FAMILY to naturalize his vision of continental unity. The analysis reveals that Nkrumah strategically employs war, religious, and journey metaphors as part of a (de)legitimation strategy aimed at both opposing colonialism and imperialism, and promoting the idea of a Union Government of Africa. While the paper demonstrates how crisis framing ("perish") can be combined with unity appeals to create powerful political narratives, it also provides an opportunity to explore whether and how the NDC's 2020 manifesto adapts these nation-building metaphors for contemporary electoral politics.

While Nartey (2019b) focuses on the “Unite or Perish” mythology, Wiredu (2021) takes a broader approach by examining multiple metaphorical patterns across Nkrumah's oratory, including conceptualizations of nation-building as “construction work,” independence as “awakening,” and colonialism as “disease”. Her findings reveal how Nkrumah strategically alternated between different metaphor systems depending on his rhetorical purpose and audience – a finding that enriches our understanding of how political metaphors operate in Ghanaian contexts. Although both studies converge in demonstrating how Nkrumah's metaphors served ideological functions, Wiredu emphasised their situational adaptability rather than their mythological consistency. Unlike Nartey (2019b) and Wiredu (2021) who foreground either mythological consistency or rhetorical flexibility, this study emphasizes the strategic deployment of metaphors by the NDC to both legitimize its platform and contest the dominance of the incumbent.

In another research, Ngula (2021) examines the range of (conceptual) metaphors used in the speeches of President John Dramani Mahama. Unlike qualitative-focused studies above, Ngula employs corpus linguistics to systematically identify and categorize metaphorical patterns in Mahama's 2016-2020 speeches, revealing how modern Ghanaian politicians adapt traditional metaphorical frameworks to current political realities. The study reveals that Mahama draws on many conventional metaphors but uses them in creative and unconventional ways to depict culturally relevant situations, and to convey his political ideologies to his audience. For instance, the study reveals that Mahama strategically uses “sports/competition” metaphors (e.g., “riding a lame horse into a race”) to critique the incumbent NPP government's competence while positioning himself as a viable alternative.

Ofori et al. (2021) argue that the use of metaphors and similes is a subtle means by which citizens expose politicians and question their competence in handling national issues. Also, it enhances citizens' participation in the day to-day political discussions and contribute to the deepening of multiparty democracy in Ghana, without resorting to insults and vituperations. From the findings of Ofori et al., we can conclude that metaphorical discourse in politics operates dialogically - while politicians employ metaphors strategically, citizens similarly utilize figurative language to evaluate and challenge political leadership. On the part of politicians, the findings of Mensah (2012) demonstrate that features of conceptual sources can be manipulated by politicians to achieve positive rhetorical ends. He states that, in general, the use of metaphors can minimize direct vilification in Ghanaian political communication. This is in line with Taiwo (2010) who argues that metaphors help to shape the structure of political categorization and argumentation. According to Taiwo, a conceptual metaphor like POLITICS IS A GAME, for instance, shapes our perception about politics.

Sarfo-Kantankah et al. (2021b) explore the metaphorical conceptualisation of COVID-19 in parliamentary discourse. The study applies corpus linguistic techniques to examine how Ghanaian parliamentarians conceptualized the pandemic through three dominant metaphorical frames: war (fighting the invisible enemy), natural disaster (tsunami of infections), and journey (path to recovery). The study reveals the conceptualisation of COVID-19 in Ghanaian parliament is dominated by war metaphors, which aligns with global pandemic discourse patterns. The study's use of corpus-assisted methodology provides empirical rigor missing in earlier qualitative studies like Nartey (2019a), providing practical techniques that can be applied to the analysis of manifestos. However, the study's exclusive focus on parliamentary discourse limits its applicability to other political genres like manifestos, the focus of the present study.

Lastly, Sarfo-Kantankah (2021a) conducted a corpus-based functional analysis of the manifestos of two political parties in Ghana, examining the extent to which these texts prioritize policy issues over the persona of the political candidate. The study compares the NDC and NPP manifestos across six election cycles (1996-2016), which provides empirical rigor missing from previous qualitative analyses of Ghanaian political texts. The analysis reveals that while the NPP target both policy and the personalities of their opponent candidates, the NDC appear to focus mainly on policy. He concludes that, be it a focus on policy or personality, contextual relevance is the key. The study's theoretical framework, drawn from Benoit's Functional Theory of political campaign discourse, is valuable for analysing how manifestos serve dual purposes as both policy blueprints and campaign tools.

While existing studies highlight the role of metaphors in political discourse, Ghanaian party manifestos remain understudied, particularly the NDC's use of figurative language. Also, the literature reveals a limited application of Critical Metaphor Analysis in the exploration of political manifestos within the Ghanaian context. Furthermore, past research frequently underscores the predominance of war and journey metaphors in Ghanaian political speeches and discourse. However, there remains insufficient examination of whether and how different or additional metaphorical frameworks—such as building and family metaphors—are strategically featured in opposition party manifestos. This gap is significant because manifestos uniquely combine policy substance with persuasive appeals. By employing the CMA approach, the current study addresses this by analysing metaphors in the NDC's 2020 manifesto to reveal how opposition parties frame ideologies.

### **3. Research Method**

#### **3.1 Research Design**

This study employs a descriptive content analysis and qualitative interpretive research design grounded in Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA) to examine how the NDC used metaphors to convey ideological messages in their 2020 election manifesto. This approach is especially appropriate for systematically examining how metaphorical language in the NDC's 2020 manifesto functions to construct and legitimize ideological meanings.

#### **3.2 Corpus and Data Source**

The primary corpus for this study is the official 2020 manifesto of the National Democratic Congress (NDC), titled "People's Manifesto: Jobs, Prosperity and More.". The selection of the NDC 2020 Manifesto as the primary text for this study is informed by both contextual relevance and academic significance. First of all, political manifestos, as stated earlier, are key sites for ideological expression, particularly during election periods when parties seek to shape public perception, frame national issues, and persuade voters. Since the NDC was the main opposition party during the 2020 presidential election, they were tasked with presenting a counter-narrative to the ruling government (the New Patriotic Party). This oppositional stance offers fertile ground for the use of metaphor to critique existing power structures and articulate ideological position on key issues.

The manifesto was downloaded in pdf format from the official website of the NDC ([www.ndc.org](http://www.ndc.org)). For the purposes of this research, the entire manifesto text has been included, comprising approximately 35,263 words and covering all chapters and thematic sections relevant to party ideology, policy proposals, and rhetorical positioning. However, for manageability and depth, the study may focus on specific thematic sections such as

Economy, Health, Education, Governance and Leadership. These sections are often rich in metaphorical language and ideological framing.

### 3.3 Data Analysis Procedure

The analysis was done in stages, combining manual reading with the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) established by the Pragglejaz Group (2007). First, the manifesto was read thoroughly to identify metaphorical expressions, with particular attention paid to linguistic patterns indicating conceptual mappings between source and target domains. In applying MIP, each lexical item and phrase was checked for its basic, concrete meaning, and its contextual meaning within the political discourse. An expression was classified as metaphorical if its contextual meaning contrasted with its basic sense yet could be interpreted through comparison to the basic meaning. Each metaphorical expression was systematically coded by mapping its linguistic form to an underlying source domain (e.g., BUILDING, JOURNEY, FAMILY, GROWTH, HEALTH). For instance, expressions such as “laying a strong foundation” were classified under the BUILDING domain.

Following identification, metaphor interpretation involved establishing links between the identified metaphors and the cognitive as well as pragmatic factors shaping their use (Charteris-Black, 2004, p. 37). And finally, the social roles of these metaphors were evaluated, explaining how the embedded ideologies both position the NDC in opposition to its political rivals (specifically the NPP) and project the NDC’s vision of change or continuity for national development. In identifying the ideological functions, expressions that negatively framed the incumbent were classified as delegitimizing; those invoking communal concepts were seen as mobilizing collective identity; and metaphors presenting the NDC’s policies in constructive terms were marked as legitimizing.

To enhance the credibility of coding and interpretation, I employed the analytic triangulation procedure. Here, a colleague independently reviewed a sample of coded metaphors to check for consistency in identifying source domains and ideological functions. Any discrepancies were discussed and resolved, strengthening the validity of the analysis.

### 3.4 Ethical Consideration

As per general ethical standards for discourse studies, this research analyses publicly available political texts and does not involve human subjects or confidential data. It is important to state that the study acknowledges the potential for subjective interpretations in metaphor analysis and commits to maintaining academic neutrality and rigor throughout the research process. For instance, the analysis is based on the established theoretical framework (CMA).

## 4. Results and Discussions

In this section, I present the findings of the metaphor analysis conducted on the NDC 2020 Manifesto. The analysis identifies and categorizes the various types of metaphors employed throughout the document, interprets their underlying conceptual frameworks, and examines their ideological significance.

### 4.1 Types of Metaphors Based on Their Conceptual Domains

The data revealed the following types of metaphors based on their conceptual domains: building, growth, journey, war, and health metaphors. The Table below illustrates both the frequencies and relative percentages of each metaphorical construct:

Metaphor Type	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Building	31	36.5
Growth	20	23.5
Journey	14	16.5
War	13	15.3
Health	7	8.2

The table presents the frequencies and relative percentages of the metaphorical constructs identified in the NDC 2020 manifesto. It is evident that building metaphors are the most prevalent, followed by growth, journey, and war metaphors, with health metaphors occurring less frequently. The prominence of building and growth metaphors underscores the manifesto's emphasis on construction and development as central rhetorical themes. Further analysis of these metaphor types and their ideological implications is provided below:

### Building Metaphors

These metaphors draw from the conceptual domain of CONSTRUCTION/ARCHITECTURE to frame abstract concepts (such as society, governance, economy) as physical structure that require design, materials and maintenance. It is imperative to mention that the manifesto is dominated by building metaphors. The pervasive use of building metaphors enables the NDC to frame governance as a process of construction, stability, and collective progress. Also, it frames the NDC as competent architects or engineers of state progress, suggesting expertise, foresight, and the capacity to design and construct sustainable solutions. Examples:

1. In our quest to build a sustainable society with opportunities for all, we will continue to prioritise quality education and skills development as the cornerstone of progress. (p.1)
2. In addition, we will build an environment for digital transformation and domestic manufacturing to support job creation. (p.1)
3. Infrastructure development has always been important to the NDC as the foundational blocks needed to stimulate economic growth and improved quality of life (p.88).

Charteris-Black (2005) reveals that building/construction metaphors in manifestos imply competence, long-term vision, and communal labour. The dominance of building metaphors in the NDC manifesto, for example, both supports and extends observations in some studies of African political rhetoric where metaphors of construction and national development frequently symbolize competence, vision, and progress (Wiredu, 2021). It is imperative to mention that this strong emphasis on BUILDING metaphors contrasts with the global trend observed in the work of Musolff (2004), Nartey (2019b) and Semino (2008), where war metaphors often predominate—framing politics as conflict, competition, and struggle for power.

### Growth metaphors

Growth metaphors represent the second most prevalent metaphorical construct in the manifesto. They frame abstract concepts (like economies, relationships, or knowledge) in terms of biological growth. In political discourses, growth metaphors are sometimes used to

signify that progress is natural, gradual, and requires nurturing. Also, the use of growth metaphors positions politicians as nurturing leaders who guide organic development, rather than authoritarian figures. Example;

4. We will build a Digital Innovation Ecosystem to support start-ups and encourage Ghanaian entrepreneurs to start, build and grow businesses in the digital space. (p.98)
5. A higher level of financial inclusion will not only benefit the poor, create jobs and reduce inequality but will also grow the formal sector. (p.99)

### **Journey metaphors**

Rooted in the conceptual domain of MOVEMENT/TRAVEL, journey metaphors frame political progress, governance, or national development as a path or movement from one state to another. Cameron (2007) notes that journey metaphors frequently occur in English as highly conventionalized language. Examples:

6. Vote for John Dramani Mahama for President and let us, together, move Ghana forward. (p.9)
7. We will move Ghana from its current 19<sup>th</sup> Century social services to a forward-looking 21<sup>st</sup> Century Next-Generation system... (p.100).

### **War metaphors**

War metaphors are rooted in the conceptual domain of CONFLICT/BATTLE as they frame political challenges, policies, or societal issues as battles, conflicts, or military campaigns. They frame these issues to imply a sense of urgency, moral duty and collective mobilisation. Example;

8. The next NDC government will resource and capacitate the Financial Intelligence Centre as well as other key agencies engaged in the fight against money laundering and terrorist financing. (p.33).
9. The next NDC government will establish strict accountability and ethical measures to regulate State and individual activities in the fight against corruption and state capture. (p.110).

### **Health metaphors**

Health metaphors, in political discourse, frame societal, economic, or political issues as medical conditions. Rooted in the conceptual domain of MEDICINE/BODY, these metaphors serve to communicate the perceived well-being or dysfunction of a system, which influences public perception and policy priorities. Example;

10. The COVID-19 pandemic has already made a tremendous impact on life in Ghana. It has exposed the deep weaknesses in our healthcare system and brought an inadequate system to its knees. (p.13)
11. The next NDC government will create and maintain healthy and resilient forests to support habitat for wildlife, carbon sequestration and opportunity for outdoor recreation. (p58).

## **4.2 The Ideological Roles of Metaphors in the Manifesto**

In this section, I explore the underlying ideological functions of the various metaphorical constructs employed in the manifesto.

#### 4.2.1 The BUILDING Metaphor: Constructing Legitimacy

Legitimization refers to making something legal or legalized. It is the process by which speakers accredit or license a type of social behaviour (Reyes, 2011). When legitimizing, we provide arguments that explain our social actions, ideas, thoughts, declarations, etc. Essentially, it is typically goal-oriented, often aiming to gain the support and approval of others. In its 2020 manifesto, the NDC deploys building metaphors as an ideological instrument to construct political legitimacy and cultivate voter approval. Examples from the data include:

12. ...this this People's Manifesto lays the foundation for its tackling and the renewal of my resolve to deliver Jobs, Prosperity and More for all Ghanaians (p.5).
13. We must fully embrace digital technology, but with efficiency, in order to build a knowledge-based economy (p.96).
14. The NDC resolves to build strong institutions by taking bold steps to ensure increased and adequate funding and engaging well-qualified and staff of proven integrity to manage and lead existing anticorruption agencies (p.108).
15. We also believe that Ghana can fully progress if we make integrity and transparency the cornerstone of our workforce at every level (p.108).

Examples 11-14 indicate instances where the NDC uses building metaphors to legitimize its policies. In example 11, for instance, "lays the foundation" frames the manifesto itself as the bedrock or starting structure for national progress. Also, "Build a knowledge-based economy" in Example 96 uses construction imagery to present economic transformation as a tangible, engineered project—one requiring expertise, effort, and vision. This metaphor positions the NDC as the capable architects of societal modernization, which legitimizes their policy proposals and paints them as forward-thinking leaders who can systematically create new opportunities. Expressions such as "build strong institutions," and making "integrity and transparency the cornerstone" serve to construct legitimacy by framing the party as skilled architects of national progress. These examples demonstrate how the NDC strategically employs metaphors to legitimize its claims and enhance their persuasive impact. In other words, the NDC positions its policies as the essential groundwork for sustainable development and prosperity. This aligns with Chilton (2004), who argues that metaphors in political discourse go beyond stylistic expression to actively shape reality and justify ideological stances and policy decisions.

#### 4.2.2 The GROWTH Metaphor: Projecting Development and Vitality

According to Terban (2025), metaphors related to growth serve multiple purposes: they help clarify ideas, elicit emotional responses, and enrich the way we communicate. In the manifesto, growth metaphors utilise words such as "growth", "grow", "development", and "thrive" to describe policy outcomes and national progress as organic processes. Thus, these metaphors project the NDC's plans to imagery of gardens, plants, and harvest, representing the party as careful stewards of progress. Examples;

16. We, in the NDC, re-dedicate ourselves to the expansion of economic freedom and opportunities by providing incentives for small businesses to grow, as well as, encourage local community development (p.1).
17. ...the next NDC Government from 2021 through to the medium-term, will redirect Government expenditure towards high growth areas to create the necessary and sufficient conditions for social spending to thrive (p.24).

18. We will strengthen the capacity of the National Board for Small-Scale Industries (NBSSI) to assist SMEs by facilitating their growth and development in every corner of the country (p.40).
19. A higher level of financial inclusion will not only benefit the poor, create jobs and reduce inequality but will also grow the formal financial sector (p.99).

The Examples above are instances of growth metaphors in the manifesto. The use of expressions such as “small businesses to grow,” “community development,” “redirect expenditure towards high growth areas,” “social spending to thrive”, “facilitating growth and development,” and “grow the formal financial sector” project an image of ongoing vitality and advancement. The use language associated with organic growth, cultivation, and thriving enables the NDC to frame its economic and social policies as nurturing environments where prosperity naturally flourishes. Again, the use of these metaphors frames the NDC party as stewards committed to expanding opportunities, fostering improvement, and triggering positive change throughout the nation (Terban, 2025).

#### **4.2.3 The JOURNEY Metaphor: Mobilizing Collective Identity**

Charteris-Black (2005) states that metaphors can reveal “a shared system of belief as to what the world is, and culture-specific beliefs about mankind’s place in it” (p.43). In political discourse, in particular, metaphors often frame shared struggles or goals to unite voters under a common purpose. In the NDC 2020 manifesto, metaphors are used to frame national development as a shared journey or mission, uniting citizens under a common cause. Specifically, journey metaphors use terms like “journey”, “progress”, and “move” to foster a sense of collective movement toward a shared goal. Examples:

20. We must build a knowledge-based economy and move faster into the new world of smart manufacturing and digital services. (p.4).
21. It is time to unite as one people, resume our journey towards building the future of Ghana. (p.20).
22. The next NDC government will set Ghana on the path to achieving production of one million barrels of oil per day (1mbpd) by 2030. (p.43).
23. ... we promise a fair deal for persons with disabilities, greater opportunities for employment, productivity and the ability to contribute to the welfare of their families and the progress of our nation. (p.79).

‘Move faster’ in Example 19 positions national development as a forward-moving journey. Also, “resume our journey” in 20 metaphorically represents the nation’s history and destiny as an on-going excursion. The call for unity encourages citizens to see themselves as fellow travellers with common goals, which reinforces a sense of collective identity and purposeful movement toward national growth. It also indicates that past progress was interrupted (by NPP governance), and so there should be collective action to restart it. Similarly, expressions like “set Ghana on the path,” and “progress of our nation” are used to mobilize collective identity by framing national development as a shared voyage. In all, each citizen is portrayed as a contributor along the nation’s journey, reinforcing solidarity and communal participation in the pursuit of progress and a better future.

#### **4.2.4 The WAR Metaphor: Contesting Power and Framing Opposition**

Flusberg et al (2018) opine that war metaphors are common in conversations about a wide range of issues, including political elections, struggles with cancer, efforts to fight crime, drug abuse, and poverty, and even debates over salad. In the manifesto, war metaphors use terms such as "struggle" and "fight" to frame political and social challenges as battles that require determination, resilience, and collective action. The choice of the language helps emphasize the seriousness of the issues at hand. Examples:

24. The NDC has always pursued good governance and accountability, having been borne out of the popular struggles for probity and accountability and in line with our firm belief in 'Freedom and Justice' (p.109)
25. We will fight the deleterious effects of the poor economic management of the Akufo-Addo Government (p.19).
26. The next NDC government will set up a system of legal aid for creative artistes to help fight creative/intellectual theft and plagiarism by others. (p.55).
27. As part of our commitment to the fight against corruption, we shall adequately empower and resource the office of the special prosecutor and other anti-corruption agencies to do their work effectively.

In the examples above, expressions such as "popular struggles," "fight the deleterious effects," "help fight creative/intellectual theft," and "commitment to the fight against corruption" serve to dramatize the contest for power and sharpen the distinction between the NDC and its opponents. Terms such as "struggles" and "fight" portray the NDC party as active, courageous participants in ongoing battles for probity, justice, and national well-being. Again, the promise to empower anti-corruption agencies and fight harmful practices further frames the NDC as determined defenders of the public interest, while implicitly portraying the incumbent government and wrongdoers as adversaries. Finally, through these metaphors, the NDC portrays itself as an agent of positive change, ready to contest power and confront opposition in the pursuit of justice, integrity, and progress.

#### **4.2.5 The HEALTH Metaphor: Naturalizing Crisis and Delegitimizing the Incumbent**

In political discourse, metaphors are sometimes used to present a situation as an urgent, inevitable crisis requiring immediate intervention. One significant effect of naturalizing crisis is that it makes a political response seem not only necessary but morally or logically imperative. Also, metaphors are used in delegitimizing political opponents. According to Bamigbade and Dalha (2020), delegitimization in political discourse is an act of linguistic hostility intended to discredit political opponents and influence electoral outcomes. Thus, in delegitimization, we present others negatively through strategies like insults, blames and accusations (Agyekum, 2004). In the manifesto, health metaphors, which utilize terms like "health", "healthy", "bleeding", "massage" and "recover" are used to naturalise crisis and delegitimize opponents. Examples:

28. The NPP massaged COVID-19 statistics to create a false sense of security and the impression of leadership. (p.14).
29. The NPP has left Ghana bleeding from reckless borrowing. (p.26)
30. ...the NDC Government will offer several tax reliefs to the private sector, especially MSMEs to enable them to recover and get back to their full operating capacities. (p.23)
31. ...an Assets Quality Review (AQR) exercise was launched in 2015 to ascertain the true State of health of banks in the industry. (p.28).

The metaphors used in Examples 28-31 strategically naturalize economic and social crises while delegitimizing the incumbent (NPP) government. For instance, by claiming that “The NPP massaged COVID-19 statistics to create a false sense of security” (28), the NDC portrays the crisis as a concealed illness, suggesting that the government’s actions are akin to a misleading doctor, thereby undermining public trust in the incumbent’s competence. Again, the expression “Ghana bleeding from reckless borrowing” (29) vividly presents the nation as a patient suffering internal injury, which implies that the government’s fiscal mismanagement has inflicted real harm. In the same way, offering tax reliefs to help businesses “recover and get back to their full operating capacities” makes it seem like these businesses are sick and need help to get better. This, however, positions the NDC as the rightful healer who can restore economic vitality. Finally, the “Assets Quality Review ... to ascertain the true state of health of banks” likens the financial system to a body subject to medical diagnosis. While this emphasizes transparency and care on the part of the NDC, it further critiques the incumbent's negligence. Otieno et al. (2016) posit that metaphors function as discursive mechanisms through which voters decode political narratives and crystallize ideological stances. Following this idea, the NDC party uses metaphors to make the opposing NPP party seem less trustworthy, hoping to gain more public support. Thus, through these metaphors, the NDC claims medical authority and presents itself as the only agent capable of curing the country’s ailments.

## 5. Conclusion

This study investigated the role of metaphors in the National Democratic Congress (NDC) 2020 manifesto, with particular focus on how metaphors function ideologically to construct political meaning and mobilize support. Drawing on the critical metaphor analysis approach, the study revealed five dominant metaphorical frames – building, journey, growth, war, and health metaphors – each serving distinct rhetorical purposes in shaping the party’s narrative. This study demonstrates that metaphorical constructs, most notably BUILDING, GROWTH and JOURNEY metaphors, functioned as powerful rhetorical tools in the NDC manifesto. In particular, these metaphors serve to establish the NDC’s legitimacy by framing the party as visionary architects and mobilizers of national progress, while simultaneously delegitimizing the NPP through representations of crisis, struggle, and exclusion.

Ideologically, rather than simply conveying information, metaphors actively shape the public’s understanding of political reality by naturalizing crisis narratives, mobilizing collective identity, legitimizing the NDC, and delegitimizing its opponents. This corroborates Van Dijk’s (1998) theoretical perspective, indicating how language is strategically employed to construct, mediate, and reinforce ideological meanings and power relations. It is evident that metaphors are not neutral; they are deeply implicated in the formation of public opinion and the normalization of party positions within the socio-political landscape.

This study fills a significant gap in the literature by applying detailed Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA) to an opposition party’s manifesto in West Africa. Thus, the study demonstrates the effectiveness of CMA in uncovering how metaphors not only structure policy narratives but also serve as tools for establishing legitimacy, delegitimizing opponents, and mobilizing collective identity.

These findings advance our understanding of how political language operates within opposition discourse, and open up avenues for future research in African and comparative political communication. Despite the valuable insights provided, this study is limited by its

exclusive focus on the NDC manifesto and a single election cycle. Future research could extend these findings by comparing metaphor usage in the incumbent NPP manifesto, helping to determine if rhetorical strategies vary between opposition and ruling parties. Additionally, audience reception studies could investigate whether the metaphorical framing identified actually influenced voter perspectives and behaviors. Finally, a diachronic analysis comparing NDC manifestos across multiple election cycles (e.g., 2012, 2016, and 2020) would illuminate the evolution of ideological metaphors in Ghanaian political discourse. In all, this paper establishes that Critical Metaphor Analysis is not merely an analytic tool but a crucial means for understanding and engaging with the evolving patterns of political representation and power in African democracies.

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