

# CONCEPT *UP* IN THE SPEECHES OF THE US PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA

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## Introduction

The linguistic analysis of politicians' speeches in the US and the UK started during the second part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The British writer George Orwell discussed the usage of metaphors, the special vocabulary in his essay "Politics and the English Language" written in 1946. American linguists started analysing political speeches of the US presidents since 1950s (Wilson, 1955; Goetsch, 1993). The linguistic analysis of political speeches grew into a serious question in linguistics since 1970s and was discussed by linguists specialising in stylistics (Galperin, 1981; Crystal, 2003), sociolinguistics (Beard, 2000), cognitive linguistics (Lakoff, Johnson, 1980). Efficient functioning of political speech in rhetoric, which depends on arrangement of facts, allusions, statistical data, persuasive arguments, ritual phrases, combination of syntactical, lexical and phonetic peculiarities and sometimes classical disposition of the speech were discussed by many linguists (Galperin, 1981; Koženiauskienė, 1999, 101; Beard, 2000; *Encyclopedia of Rhetoric*, 2001; Crystal, 2003).

Therefore, the need arises to analyse political speeches of politicians focusing on the discussion of metaphor interpretation.

The speeches of the US president were taken from the website of the White House archive (*SP*).

The political speeches of the US president Barack Obama were chosen to show distinctive use of concept *up* in the political speeches.

**The aim of the work** is to discuss concept *up* in the speeches of the US president Barack Obama using the semantic aspect.

In order to achieve **the aim**, these **objectives** have been set:

1. To collect examples of English conceptual metaphors in the speeches of the US president Barack Obama.
2. To divide them into mental spheres.
3. To compare these spheres.
4. To find similarities and differences.
5. To analyze the axiologic aspect of *up*.

The following **research methods** were used in the article:

1. Descriptive-analytical method to analyse and describe conceptual metaphors.
2. Statistical method to show distinctive features of

US president's speeches.

**The scope of the research** consisted of 15 speeches of the US president Barack Obama delivered in 2009 and 2010.

The following speeches of Barack Obama were chosen:

1. Remarks by President Obama and President Preval of the Republic of Haiti (Obama, March 10, 2010).
2. Remarks by the President on Health Insurance Reform in St. Charles (Obama, March 11, 2010).
3. Remarks by the President at a Fundraising Dinner for Senator Claire McCaskill (Obama, March 10, 2010).
4. Remarks by the President at the Export-Import Bank's Annual Conference (Obama, March 11, 2010).
5. Remarks by the President on Health Care Reform in Strongsville, Ohio (Obama, March 15, 2010).
6. Press Briefing on the President's Upcoming Trip to Guam, Indonesia and Australia by Denis McDonough, NSC Chief of Staff, Jeff Bader, NSC Senior Director for Asian Affairs, and Ben Rhodes, Deputy National Security Advisor for Strategic Communications (Obama, March 15, 2010).
7. Press Conference by the President (Obama, June 23, 2009).
8. Remarks by President B. Obama at Town Hall Meeting with Future Chinese Leaders (Obama, 11, 2009).
9. Remarks by the President at Hampton University Commencement (Obama, May 09, 2010).
10. Remarks by the President at Cinco de Mayo Reception (Obama, May 05, 2010).
11. Remarks by the President to the Business Council (Obama, May 04, 2010).
12. Remarks by the President to the Travel Pool Aboard Air Force One (Obama, 04, 2010).
13. Remarks by the President at White House Correspondents Association Dinner (Obama, 05, 2010).
14. Remarks by the President at University of Michigan Spring Commencement (Obama, May 01, 2010).
15. Remarks by the President on the Economy (Obama, May 13, 2010).

The speeches were chosen according to topical issues dealing with important political questions (financial matters, comments on political situation in other countries).

### Theoretical background

Cognitive Linguistics grew out of the work of a number of researchers active in the 1970s who were interested in the relation of language and mind, and who did not follow the prevailing tendency to explain linguistic patterns by means of appeals to structural properties internal to and specific to language (quoted from: Kemmer, 2010). Cognitive linguistics was largely mapped out by Rosch E., Langacker R. W., Lakoff G., Johnson M., etc. It is a new approach to the study of language that emerged in the 1970's as a reaction against the dominant generative paradigm, which pursues an autonomous view of language. It is a branch of linguistics and cognitive science, which aims to provide accounts of language that mesh well with current understandings of the human mind. The guiding principle behind this area of linguistics is that language use must be explained with reference to the underlying mental processes (*CL*). Some important areas of cognitive linguistics are: all standard areas of linguistics; conceptual metaphor theory, heavily influenced by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson; conceptual blending theory, heavily influenced by Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner; frame semantics, heavily influenced by Charles Fillmore; some versions of Construction Grammar, notably the one put forth by Adele Goldberg (*Ibid.*). According to Black M. (1962), metaphors act as 'cognitive instruments'. This means that metaphors are not just a way of expressing ideas by means of language, but a way of thinking about things. Moreover, in cognitive linguistics the metaphor is defined as understanding of one conceptual domain in terms of another conceptual domain, e.g. one person's life experience versus another's. A conceptual domain is any coherent organization of experience. This idea and detailed examination of the underlying processes was first explored in detail by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in *Metaphors We Live by* (1980). Conceptual metaphors underlie the metaphorical expressions. They tend to be pre-linguistic and make basic assumptions regarding space, time, moving, counting, controlling, and other core elements of human experience. Thus, conceptual metaphors typically employ a more abstract concept as target and a more concrete or physical concept as their source. In the linguistic context, they are called a source domain and a target domain. In this context source domain is understood as a concept that is metaphorically used to provide

the means of understanding of another concept, while target domain is semantic domain that is structured and understood metaphorically in terms of another domain (Lakoff, 1987). Therefore, the need arises to define concept, which is an abstract, universal psychical entity that serves to designate a category or class of entities, events or relations. According to Lakoff and Johnson (Lakoff, Johnson, 1980), the concepts that govern man's thought are not just matters of the intellect. They also govern one's everyday functioning, down to the most mundane details. Man's concepts structure what he/she perceives, how he/she gets around in the world, and how he/she relates to other people. In addition, man's ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which he/she both thinks and acts, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature. According to Aloyzas Gudavičius, concepts are the result of the understanding of the world and everything what happens in it (Gudavičius, 2009). He presents the axiologic aspect of the metaphor in his book "Etnolinguistics" (Gudavičius, 2009). The mentioned linguist states that in the cognitive paradigm the trend of metaphorisation is understood as the manifestation of the particular strategies of thinking. The trend of metaphorisation is related with the axiology. In a metaphor, we face a double axiology. Firstly, the descriptive situation is evaluated – subject or other actants are named as good or bad; secondly (it is the most important), the source situation (thing, phenomenon) is acknowledged as good or bad. Therefore, the metaphor and the axiology «good / bad» may be closely related. Originally, the value of the concept *up* is positive, i.e. it is good.

As it is presented in "An Introduction to Cognitive Linguistics" political speech is one of the recognized types of classical rhetoric, of which metaphors are an integral part (Ungerer, Schmid, 1996). Since the purpose of political rhetoric is persuasion, or, more bluntly, the manipulation of the public, the explanatory potential of metaphors is often less important than their emotional impact. Indeed, the metaphors favoured by many politicians combine a very simple explanation with strong emotional effects.

### Semantic fields of conceptual metaphors with the concept *up*

Semantic field is a big group of the system of the language, made up of the words which are related by at least one feature of the meaning (Klijūnaitė, 1995).

All in all, 70 samples of conceptual metaphors with the concept *up* have been found in Obama's speeches which are divided into the following semantic fields:

1. Economic matters. This is the largest group of metaphors. It comprises the matters related to prices, profit, expenses, etc. as shown in the following examples:

<...> *take very concrete steps to reduce **high price** of energy on the island* <...> (Obama, March 17, 2010).

<...> *the insurance companies kept on **jacking up** her rates, year after year* (Obama, March 17, 2010).

*The only problem is that **premiums** have been doubling every nine years, **going up** three times faster than wages* (Obama, June 23, 2009).

<...> *but the most important thing I can do is to **lift the economy** overall* (Obama, June 23, 2009).

<...> *as **costs** keep on **going up**, employers are going to start making decisions* (Obama, May 13, 2010).

2. Social matters. The group presents the examples on different social matters that people face:

<...> *but that's a smart way to **increase the prosperity** of your own people* (Obama, June 23, 2009).

<...> *and emerging partners for the United States on many of our **top priority** issues* (Obama, March 15, 2010).

*We've got a lot of **built-up challenges** that we're going to have to work hard to solve* (Obama, March 10, 2010).

*Last fall he was even able to **increase his workforce*** (Obama, May 13, 2010).

<...> *including Hispanics among whom the **unemployment rate** remains unacceptably **high** and who are ready to go back to work* (Obama, May 05, 2010).

As it is apparent from the samples collected, the most numerous group is the first one, i.e. economic matters. It shows that President Obama stresses the economic side. More examples prove this:

<...> *I set a goal of doubling our **exports** over the next five years to **increase*** <...> (Obama, May 04, 2010).

<...> *who is working hard every day with businesses like this to help **grow economy*** <...> (Obama, May 13, 2010).

*And so each year what's happened is, as **inflation goes up*** <...> (Obama, May 13, 2010).

<...> *meaning that the more you make the **higher your tax rate goes*** <...> (Obama, May 13, 2010).

The first group consists of more 40 examples, while the rest group consists of 30 samples.

The following words denoting economic matters have been used: *economy, premiums, costs,*

*prices, expenses, rates, exports, capital, loan, inflation, insurance, credit, deficit, etc.* According to two monolingual dictionaries (*Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English* (1995) and *Longman Contemporary English* (2003)) it has been found that the words mentioned above belong to the semantic group of economic matters. The same has been done with the second group, i.e. social matters. But it is a less numerous group. The following words denote social matters: *unemployment, workforce, prosperity, priority, challenge, etc.*

### Semantic groups of the words including the element *up*

As the group of social matters is concerned with people, their matters, the words defined above prove it.

Since the focus of the work is on the concept *up*, it means that we are dealing with the orientational metaphor which is a metaphor in which concepts are spatially related to each other, as in the following way:

- *Up or down.*
- *In or out.*
- *Front or back.*
- *On or off.*
- *Deep or shallow.*
- *Central or peripheral* (Lakoff G., Johnson M., 1980).

These spatial orientations arise from the fact that we have bodies of the sort we have and that they function as they do in our physical environment. Orientational metaphors embody three-dimensional spatial awareness in various concepts. Vertical measure is a basis to describe health, mood, costs, inflation, etc. The expressions of good mood, courage, self-confidence include the element *up*, while sadness, fear, etc. include *down* (Marcinkevičienė, 1994).

The following words including the element *up* are used in the samples collected: *up, upwards, above, upper, to rise, to raise, to climb, to increase, to rocket, to jump, high, sky-high, top, peak, towering, the sky, lift, grow, growth, etc.* The definitions were taken from *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (2003). According to the meanings of the words above they fall into the following semantic groups:

1. '**Vertical movement in order to reach a high position**', since the main meanings of the words have one common seme, i.e. 'to move (from a lower) to a higher position'. For example:

Up – 'from below towards a higher position; away from the floor, the ground, or the bottom' (*The boy climbed up to a higher branch on the tree*).

*Upwards* – ‘towards a higher level, position, or price’ (*The missile rose slowly upwards into the sky*).

*To rise* – ‘to move from a lower to a higher level or position’ (*Smoke rose from the factory chimneys*).

*To climb* – ‘to go up towards the top of’ (*They climbed the hill*).

*To lift* – ‘to raise sb/sth to a higher position or level’ (*Lift me up, mummy – I can’t see*).

*To grow* – ‘to increase in size or quantity; to become greater’ (*You must invest if you want your business to grow*).

## 2. ‘The quality of being above the ground’.

For example:

*High* – ‘having the top that is some distance, esp. a large distance, above the ground’ (*It’s a very high building*).

*Upper* – ‘in a higher position (than something lower)’ (*Passengers may smoke only on the upper deck of the bus*).

*Top* – ‘of or at the highest or upper part’ (*the top floor of a building*).

*Above* – ‘in or to a higher place’ (*My bedroom is immediately above*).

## 3. ‘Something above the ground’.

For example:

*The sky* – ‘the upper air; the space above the Earth where clouds and the sun, moon, and stars appear’ (*The rocket shot up into the sky*).

*Top* – ‘the highest or upper part’ (*The mountain tops were hidden in mist*).

Furthermore, indirect meanings of the English words can name phenomena belonging to some other spheres. So, according to their meanings, they belong to the semantic groups as follows.

## 4. ‘The process of becoming greater in amount’.

*Up* – ‘at or towards a higher level, e.g. in price or quantity; from a smaller to a larger amount’ (*The price of stamps has gone up*).

*To rise* – ‘to move from a lower to a higher level or position’ (*The price of bread has risen sharply*).

*To climb* – ‘to rise or slope continuously’ (*The value of imports has climbed sharply in the past year*).

*To increase* – ‘to make or become larger in amount, number, or degree’ (*The population of this town has increased*).

## 5. ‘The action of a sudden increase in an amount’.

*To rocket* – ‘(esp. of an amount, price, etc.) to rise quickly and suddenly’ (*The price of sugar has suddenly rocketed up*).

*To jump* – ‘(esp. of money or quantity) to rise suddenly and by a large amount’ (*Their profits jumped from \$3.5 million to \$22 million in a single year*).

*Growth* – ‘an increase in economic activity, profit, etc’ (*Japan’s growth rate*).

## 6. ‘Something great in quantity’.

For example:  
*High* – ‘above the usual level, amount, rate, or degree’ (*an area of high unemployment*).

*Sky-high* – ‘very high, esp. unacceptably high; at a very high level’ (*sky-high interest rates*).

*Above* – ‘more; higher’ (*the numbers 20 and above*).

## 7. ‘The quality of being the best or the most important’.

For example:  
*High* – ‘of great rank, importance, or influence’ (*She held high office in the last government*).

*Top* – ‘highest, best, most important’ (*He’s one of this country’s top businessmen*).

*Peak* – ‘at the point of greatest activity, value, power’ (*Athletes have to train continuously to stay in peak conditions*).

*Towering* – ‘of great importance’ (*one of the towering intellects of our time*).

The following words: *high, up, grow, top* with their forms are used in the most numerous way, e.g.:

<...> *the more that we have, for example, higher capital requirements, less leverage in the system* <...> (Obama, April 28, 2010).

<...> *that they got when copper prices were high* <...> (Obama, June 23, 2009).

<...> *he talked about the high birth rates in neighbouring poor countries* <...> (Obama, March 11, 2010).

*It’s a letter telling Natoma that her premiums would go up again by more than 40 percent* (Obama, March 15, 2010).

*Costs, family expenses went up, but wages – they flatlined, they didn’t go up* (Obama, May 13, 2010).

*Government is not the true engine of job creation and economic growth in this country* <...> (Obama, May 13, 2010).

<...> *but it can create the conditions for small businesses to grow and thrive* <...> (Obama, May 13, 2010).

<...> *we’ve taken steps like these to help companies grow and add jobs* (Obama, May 13, 2010).

*What I’ve said is, our top priority has to be to control costs* (Obama, March 11, 2010).

<...> *with respect to salaries and bonuses awarded to top executives* <...> (Obama, May 04, 2010).

<...> one of my **top priorities** as President has been to make sure that we're initiating education reform from top to bottom (Obama, May 13, 2010).

In this article conceptual metaphors the meanings of which reveal the concept *up* in the speeches of the US president Barack Obama are analyzed. As a matter of fact, the value of the concept *up* is positive, i.e. it is good. For example: *A child grows up quickly. The buildings gradually rise in the city.* These sentences prove that their value is «+» (it is good): it is good that a child grows, it is good that the buildings rise. Furthermore, what concerns the spheres distinguished according to the target domain, it should be stated that in the first sphere (economic matters) the value of the conceptual metaphors with the concept *up* is negative, e.g. *high price, expenses rise, premiums go up, costs go up, inflation goes up, higher tax rates, higher capital requirement, costs, expenses went up*, etc. It results from the point of view of ordinary people. What concerns the second sphere (social matters), the value of the conceptual metaphors with the concept *up* is positive: *increase prosperity, top priority issues, built-up challenges, high birth rates*, etc. However, a few conceptual metaphors found in the sphere of economic matters such as *grow economy, consumption goes up, economic growth, business grows, companies grow* show that their value is positive as well. From the point of view of an ordinary person, his/her better life, working conditions, education depend on the economy of the country. If it grows, every member of the nation will feel it, his/her life will become easier and more comfortable.

## Conclusions

1. Conceptual metaphors with the concept *up* are divided into two semantic fields: economic matters and social matters in the political speeches of Barack Obama.
2. The sphere of economic matters is the most numerous one. It depicts the following matters related to economy: the rise of prices, profit, expenses, costs, exports, imports, capital, loan, inflation, etc.
3. The sphere of social matters is less numerous. The group presents the examples on different social matters that people face: unemployment, workforce, challenge, prosperity, etc.
4. The following words with the element *up*: *high, up, grow, top* are used in the most numerous way. They present conceptual metaphors with the words denoting economic matters: *economy, premiums, costs, prices, expenses, rates, exports, capital, loan, inflation, insurance, credit, deficit*, etc. and the words that denote social matters:

*unemployment, workforce, prosperity, priority, challenge*, etc.

5. The axiologic aspect of both groups is not similar. In the first sphere (economic matters) the value of the conceptual metaphors with the concept *up* is negative, while the second sphere (social matters) presents the positive value of the conceptual metaphors with the concept *up*. Although, there may be a few exceptions, i.e. some examples of the first group may present the positive value of the metaphors (*the economy grows*), while of the second group – the negative one (*high unemployment*).

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## CONCEPT UP IN THE SPEECHES OF THE US PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA

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### Summary

The article presents the results of linguistic research into American political speeches. Descriptive-analytical and statistical methods have been used to discuss *concept-up* in the speeches of the US President Barack Obama. The scope of the research consisted of 15 speeches of Obama delivered in 2009 and 2010. Theoretical comments on cognitive linguistics, semantic fields enabled to identify 70 samples of conceptual metaphors with the concept *up*. The samples were grouped into two semantic fields: economic matters (40 samples) and social matters (30 samples). It was found that the sphere of economic matters depicts the following phenomena: the rise of prices, profit, expenses, costs, exports, imports, capital, loan, inflation, etc. The sphere of social matters dealt with unemployment, workforce, challenge, prosperity. In the first sphere (economic matters) the value of the conceptual metaphors with the concept *up* is negative, while the second sphere (social matters) presents positive value. The findings of the study have implications for cognitive linguistics, sociolinguistics in terms of the research being a type of attempt to identify axiological aspects of semantic fields important for linguistic analysis of political discourse.

**Keywords:** cognitive linguistics, conceptual metaphor, *concept up*, political discourse.

**KONCEPTAS *AUKŠTYN* JAV PREZIDENTO BARACKO OBAMOS KALBOSE*****Ramunė Radžiūtė, Aurimas Nausėda*****Santrauka**

Straipsnyje pristatomi Amerikos politinių kalbų tyrimo rezultatai. Aprašomasis-analitinis, statistiniai metodai buvo panaudoti aptariant konceptą *aukštyn* JAV prezidento Baracko Obamos kalbose. Tyrimo imtis buvo penkiolika Obama kalbų, pasakytų 2009 ir 2010 metais. Komentarai apie kognityvinę lingvistiką, semantinius laukus leido identifikuoti 70 konceptualiųjų metaforų pavyzdžių, turinčių konceptą *aukštyn*. Pavyzdžiai buvo suskirstyti į du semantinius laukus: ekonomikos reikalų (40 pavyzdžių) ir socialinių reikalų (30 pavyzdžių). Pastebėta, kad ekonomikos reikalų sritis aprašo tokius reiškinius: kainų kilimą, išlaidas, kaštus, eksportą, importą, kapitalą, paskolas, infliaciją ir kt. Socialinių reikalų sritis susijusi su nedarbu, darbo jėga, gerove. Pirmoje srityje (ekonomikos reikalų) konceptualiųjų metaforų vertinimas su konceptu *aukštyn* yra neigiamas, o antroje srityje (socialinių reikalų) pateikia teigiamą reikšmę.

Tyrimo rezultatai reikšmingi kognityvinei lingvistikai, sociolingvistikai, nes atliktas tyrimas yra susijęs su siekiu identifikuoti aksiologinius semantinių laukų aspektus, svarbius lingvistinei politinio diskurso analizei.

**Prasminiai žodžiai:** *kognityvinė lingvistika, konceptualioji metafora, konceptas aukštyn, politinis diskursas.*

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