

Between conflict and control: the ambivalence of lexical metaphors in shaping alternatives within Ibrahim TRAORÉ's sahelian governance discourse

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Abstract

This article describes the ambivalent role of lexical metaphors in shaping discourse on governance in the Sahel. The cycle of crises, including insecurity, political instability, and socio-economic collapse, leads politicians to regularly frame their speeches using metaphorical language, specifically lexical metaphors. Expressions like “war on terror”, “battleground of development”, or “path to stability” are not just rhetorical devices. They unveil mental representations that influence both public perception and policy direction. Drawing on a mixed-methods approach grounded in G. Fauconnier’s (1994) Mental Space Theory (MST), the study shows that ambivalent lexical metaphors, while facilitating understanding, often obscure structural causes, reduce complex realities, and constrain the imagination of alternatives. Through a critical analysis of Ibrahim TRAORÉ’s speech, this study reveals how ambivalent lexical metaphors can enable and limit transformative political thinking. The findings uncover the need to question recurrent lexical metaphors and open up discursive space for multiple constructive alternative visions of governance in the Sahel.

Keywords: Ambivalent, Governance, Lexical, Mental, Metaphors

Entre conflit et contrôle : l’ambivalence des métaphores lexicales dans la construction d’alternatives dans le discours de gouvernance sahéenne d’Ibrahim TRAORÉ

Résumé

Cet article décrit le rôle ambivalent des métaphores lexicales dans la structuration du discours sur la gouvernance au Sahel. Le cycle de crises, notamment l’insécurité, l’instabilité politique et l’effondrement socio-économique, conduit les politiciens à recourir régulièrement à un langage métaphorique, en particulier aux métaphores lexicales, pour formuler leurs discours. Des expressions telles que « guerre contre le

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terrorisme », « champ de bataille du développement » ou « chemin vers la stabilité » ne sont pas de simples procédés rhétoriques. Elles révèlent des représentations mentales qui influencent à la fois la perception du public et l'orientation des politiques. En s'appuyant sur une méthode de recherche mixte fondée sur la Théorie des Espaces Mentaux de G. Fauconnier (1997), l'étude montre que les métaphores lexicales ambivalentes, tout en facilitant la compréhension, tendent souvent à occulter les causes structurelles, à simplifier des réalités complexes et à limiter l'imagination d'alternatives. À travers une analyse critique du discours d'Ibrahim Traoré, cette étude met en lumière la manière dont les métaphores lexicales ambivalentes peuvent à la fois favoriser et restreindre une pensée politique transformatrice. Les résultats soulignent la nécessité de remettre en question les métaphores lexicales récurrentes et d'ouvrir un espace discursif permettant l'émergence de visions alternatives et constructives de la gouvernance au Sahel.

Mots-clés : ambivalent, gouvernance, lexicale, mental, métaphores

Introduction

In Africa, many regions are impacted by multiple crises and conflicts. Among these areas, one could mention the Sahel, which is facing persistent insecurity linked to political instability and terrorism. These situations are a crucial global threat to peace in the entire world. In this conflictual Sahelian landscape, political leaders' actions are doubly oriented. Politicians use military power and discourse, particularly political discourse, to seek alternatives and solutions to overcome these difficult issues. In fact, discourse is a means of communication based on written or spoken language, a way of speaking that unveils people's socio-political situations or practices. According to N. Fairclough (1992, p.63), "Discourse is not only a linguistic unit but also a form of social practice". Most of the time, this tool is used by politicians as a verbal weapon to reach a particular goal in a given society.

Political discourse is characterised by its complexity and controversial meanings that mislead listeners or audiences in its interpretation. The analysis of politicians' speeches by people can either weaken or strengthen a state. Indeed, if it is well understood, it can bring stability. But its misunderstanding can lead to complete disorder and confusion, a situation out of control. Political leaders, being aware of the power of communication through language, precisely the relevance of discourse, use it to make their power deep-rooted. Discourse in the political domain is often marked by the use of multiple figurative languages, particularly lexical metaphors, which are linguistic devices used by politicians to persuade their audiences. However, the use of these linguistic tools can be a source of ambivalence and ambiguity.

According to N. Fairclough (2003, p.35), “ambivalence in discourse lies in the simultaneous use of lexical items and metaphors which both sustain and contest relations of power. The same linguistic choice may articulate conflicting positions”. For C. Müller (2008, p.22), “Metaphorical expressions are often ambivalent, because they activate multiple domains of meaning. This ambivalence in language use is not a flaw but a resource for negotiation and interpretation”. Thus, ambivalence in the use of lexical metaphors becomes a rhetorical strategy used by political leaders.

Ibrahim Traoré’s political speeches are coloured and impacted by these particular rhetorical devices. The speeches delivered by him reveal the realities and difficulties of the Sahelian countries where conflicts are permanent, and alternatives for a better life are always sought. Lexical metaphors in his political speeches bring to light the notions of struggle, resistance, sovereignty and governance with diverse messages and images. The relevance of the topic lies in its ability to reveal the paradoxes of political leadership in conflictual environments. This study focuses on ambivalence in the use of lexical metaphors in connection with alternatives in Sahelian governance discourse. The corpus is one of Ibrahim Traoré’s speeches delivered at the first summit of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) on July 6th, 2024, in Niamey, Niger.

A considerable amount of research has been conducted on lexical metaphors within political discourse. Researchers such as G. Lakoff (2004), J. Charteris-Black (2014), and A. Musolff (2016) have shown the persuasive effects of metaphors and the way they are used by politicians to impact audiences. However, they did not point out the relationship between ambivalence and lexical metaphors in political domains. Indeed, research on the ambivalence of lexical metaphors in politicians’ speeches shows their ambivalent way of speaking; precisely, in the Sahelian alternative governance context. So, this aspect is the focus of this study.

The study reveals that Ibrahim Traoré uses ambivalent lexical metaphors to establish confidence among his audience and show Sahelian countries' control over conflictual situations. This perspective opens the way to the following research question: How does Ibrahim Traoré’s use of lexical metaphors reveal ambivalence in shaping alternatives and exercising control within the conflictual Sahel? The main objective is to find out ambivalence in Ibrahim Traoré’s Sahelian

governance alternatives speech through his use of lexical metaphors. Indeed, it is to show how these metaphors frame conflict and control, and construct governance alternatives in an ambivalent way. Secondly, it is to show what would happen if any ambivalence is not found in his speech. Integrated in the broad theoretical framework of discourse analysis, the work is conducted under G. Fauconnier's (1985) Mental Space Theory (MST) to analyse ambivalence in the use of lexical metaphors in Ibrahim Traoré's political discourse. The theory helps explain aspects of meaning construction in natural language through people's cognitive activities, focusing on their daily life realities. It is important because it reveals ambivalence in lexical metaphors, showing multiple meanings and dual or opposing meanings in the construction of governance alternatives in Ibrahim Traoré's Sahelian discourse. The work focuses on a qualitative research method for the data analysis.

1. Theoretical framework

1.1. Mental Space Theory in Political Discourse

The conceptual framework of mental spaces emerged from research in artificial intelligence conducted by Gilles Fauconnier in the early 1980s. G. Fauconnier (1985) was interested in modelling dynamic meaning construction in natural language. Through examples like counterfactuals "If I were you" and fictional scenarios "Imagine a land where", he observes that people fluidly construct spaces of meaning that depart in crucial ways from reality. These discovered mental spaces prompted a rethinking of semantics. Rather than fixed mappings between language and the world, meaning derives from evolving spaces and the connections across them. Fauconnier developed mental spaces theory in a series of publications in the 1980s, including his book "Mental Spaces" in 1985.

G. Fauconnier (1985) defines mental spaces as small conceptual packets constructed in the moment for purposes of local understanding. They contain elements and relationships that may diverge from those in other activated spaces. In this way, they allow language users to conceive of possibilities beyond the present real situation. Mental spaces interconnect with each other and with more enduring knowledge structures. So, while novel meanings emerge, they remain grounded in understanding. G. Fauconnier (1985) outlines the essential properties of this proposed theoretical (Mental Spaces) construct, situating it as an

advance over prevailing truth-conditional semantics. Mental Spaces (MS) gain recognition by analysing phenomena like counterfactuality, conditionals, tense, noun phrases, and coherence (Fauconnier, 1994).

1.2. Key Conceptual Principles in Mental Space Theory

Mental spaces theory, as developed by G. Fauconnier and M. Turner (2002), puts forth a set of core theoretical principles that explain the underlying cognitive mechanisms that enable human meaning construction. These principles characterise both the structure of mental spaces as conceptual packets built up rapidly during thinking and discourse, as well as systematic processes governing their interconnections into integrated networks called conceptual integration networks. By formulating constraints and optimality principles on mental space integration, the theory seeks to formally model imagination, analogy, inference, emotion, and dynamic meaning-making ranging from mundane to highly creative.

In delineating Mental Spaces (MS) and their relations as the crux of meaning production, G. Fauconnier (1985) advances core postulates that continue to shape mental spaces theory decades later. The first is the partiality principle, which states that mental spaces only ever capture aspects of what is being represented, foregrounding certain elements and relations while backgrounding others. In fact, this principle explains how smooth communication persists despite disparities in individuals' conceptualisations of the same referent events, ideas, plans, goals, and more. Via shared cues, connectors, and inherited structure, agents construct spaces that align near enough to support functional understanding and coordination. The second is the connectivity principle, whereby connections link spaces to compress disparate meanings together into integrated wholes.

While mental spaces foreground selected aspects of structure, critically they connect bidirectionally to long-term schematic knowledge known as base spaces. For instance, consider how people interpret metaphors like "Juliet is the sun." To comprehend this, readers quickly construct a base space representing background knowledge about the celestial sun, its warmth, light-giving properties and central position high overhead. Simultaneously, they spark a secondary space to capture salient aspects of Juliet's identity based on cues in surrounding discourse. Perhaps her radiant blonde hair, glowing smile, and personality light up a room. All discourse processing continually sprouts new spaces tied firmly into older structures. As a story progresses, its expanding cast of characters

becomes embedded in memory in such a way that mention of their names cues rich associated spaces. Spaces tracking evolving goals, values, and emotional dynamics also accumulate progressively greater connectivity over time. Eventually, the most salient spaces tie so tightly into the refuge of enduring background schemata that merely glancing cues reflexively spark vast networks; as when longtime spouses communicate through the raise of an eyebrow.

1.3. Methods of Analysis in Mental Space Theory

1.3.1. Mental Spaces in Political Discourse Analysis

The core construct of MST is Mental Spaces (MS). They are not fixed locations in the mind. They are rather temporary, dynamic, and partial representations of scenarios, situations, or conceptual domains evoked by language. G. Fauconnier (1985, p.16) describes them as “very partial and temporary conceptual constructs which proliferate when we think and talk, allowing a fine-grained partitioning of our discourse and knowledge structures”. This means that as people encounter language, they build multiple spaces that represent different aspects of the situation being described. For example, a sentence like “If I were a rich man, I would buy a yacht” activates at least two mental spaces: one representing the speaker’s current, non-rich reality, and another representing a hypothetical scenario where the speaker is rich.

1.3.2. Space Builders in Political Discourse Analysis

Mental spaces are not randomly constructed but rather built and elaborated upon using various linguistic and cognitive cues called space builders. These cues can take many forms, including:

1. Prepositional phrases: Phrases like “in Len’s picture”, “in John’s mind”, or “in 1929”, “at the factory”, “from her point of view” explicitly signal the construction of a new space separate from the current reality; (G. Fauconnier, 1994, p.17)
2. Subject-verb constructions: Sentences like “Max believes”, “Mary hopes” or “Gertrude claims” signal the creation of spaces corresponding to Mary’s beliefs or John’s imagination; (G. Fauconnier, 1994, p.17)
3. Adverbs and adjectives: Words like “possibly”, “probably”, “theoretically”, “really”, or “apparently” can introduce spaces that represent varying degrees of certainty or source of information; (G. Fauconnier, 1994, p.17)

4. Tenses and moods: The use of different tenses (past, present, future) or moods (indicative, subjunctive) can activate spaces corresponding to different timeframes or hypothetical scenarios.

These space builders provide scaffolding for mental spaces, specifying their relationships to each other and to the broader discourse context.

1.3.3. Conceptual Blending in Political Discourse Analysis

A crucial aspect of MST is conceptual blending, where elements and relations from multiple input spaces are selectively projected and integrated into a blended space, creating new meanings and inferences. G. Fauconnier and M. Turner (2002) show that this blending process is a fundamental cognitive operation. It underlies a wide range of linguistic and conceptual phenomena, from metaphor and analogy to counterfactuals and humour.

1.3.4. Access Principles in Political Discourse

Access principles govern how information flows between mental spaces. They regulate which elements and relations from one space can be accessed and integrated into another, ensuring coherence and consistency in meaning construction. G. Fauconnier (1985) identifies several key access principles, including identity, analogy and role value. The access principles ensure that mental spaces are not isolated entities but rather interconnected parts of a larger network. Mental spaces enable dynamic and fluid construction of meaning. MST offers an analytical lens for understanding the ambivalence in the use of lexical metaphors within Traoré's political speech.

1.3.5. Applying Mental Space Theory to Political Governance Discourse

Mental Spaces Theory (MST) focuses on the dynamic construction of meaning. It offers a particularly insightful lens to analyse political discourse. This political realm is characterised by the strategic use of language, multiple audiences, and the ever-present potential for ambiguity and ambivalence. It reveals how speakers strategically use language to shape perceptions, evoke emotions, and navigate the intricate terrain of political persuasion. The relevance of MST to political discourse lies in its capacity at different levels. Firstly, it accounts for ambiguity and multiple interpretations. Secondly, it analyses strategic language use. Thirdly, it reveals hidden ideologies. Fourthly, it explains the dynamics of persuasion. Mental Space Theory (MST) provides a framework for understanding meaning construction.

It offers valuable insights into the dynamics of persuasion. Lexical metaphors activate multiple mental spaces, evoke strong emotions, and create new conceptual blends that can be used by politicians to influence audiences' attitudes and beliefs. By analysing how politicians construct and manipulate mental spaces, one can gain a deeper understanding of how they strive to achieve their persuasive objectives.

2. Concept of ambivalence in lexical metaphors

2.1. Lexical Metaphors in Governance Discourse

Lexical metaphors involve remapping meaning onto a form, where there is one signifier with multiple signifieds. They are recognised as a resource for enacting interpersonal meaning in discourse and can propose bonds of affiliation to a readership. Lexical metaphors pervade political discourse, subtly conveying conceptual representations through seemingly innocuous lexical choices. Unlike salient conceptual metaphors, lexical metaphors manifest at the word or expression level. They implicitly project analogical mappings between concrete source domains and abstract target domains. Though more discreet than their phrasal counterparts, these lexical metaphors exert an insidious yet potent influence on how citizens apprehend complex political issues.

Lexical metaphors lend themselves to strategic rhetorical implementation by political elites. For E. Semino (2008) and A. Musolff (2016), thanks to their versatility and relative metaphorical opacity, these expressions can be selected, modulated, and articulated to resonate with varying audiences. For instance, when addressing a progressive constituency, a leader might metaphorise a social initiative as a “springboard towards equality”, evoking progress and upward mobility. Then, when engaging a more conservative audience, the same policy could be qualified as the “cornerstone” of society, capitalising on connotations of stability and tradition instead. This rhetorical malleability makes lexical metaphors an invaluable tool of political communication for courting diverse demographic segments.

2.2. Taxonomy of Lexical Metaphors in Political Discourse

On a formal linguistic level, lexical metaphors can be categorised based on their lexical class membership. According to Saragih (2001, p.190-192), lexical metaphors are divided into 5 (five) categories such as “Lexical Metaphor Nominal-Nominal, Lexical Metaphor Nominal-

Verbal/Verbal-Nominal, lexical Metaphor Nominal-Adjective, lexical Metaphor with social-ideology concept, and lexical Metaphor used as a sign of sound". The predominant category encompasses verbal metaphors, where metaphoricity is lexicalized into verb forms mapping physical actions onto abstract political processes (e.g. "dismantling policies", "pushing agendas"). Nominal metaphors constitute another salient class, recruiting noun-based concepts from concrete domains to codify political abstractions as reified entities (e.g. "policy pillars", "immigration waves"). Adjectival metaphors use property-denoting adjectives to ascribe source domain qualities to target phenomena (e.g., "sick economy", "fractured diplomacy").

2.3. Ambivalence in Lexical Metaphors within Political Discourse

Etymologically, the term ambivalence, according to M. Scully and D. Meyerson (1995), derives from the combination of two Latin words, which are *ambo* (*ambi-*) standing for "both" and *valere* (*valence*), which means "to be strong". It refers to indecisiveness or uncertainty, or the coexistence of opposing forces, attitudes or feelings experienced by individuals in a given situation or context. The term ambivalence is at the centre of different concepts and trends in human society. Ambivalence in lexical metaphors is defined as the duality and contradictions expressed through lexical items' meanings in communication. Metaphor plays a key role in facilitating and perpetuating ambivalence in political discourse. G. Lakoff and M. Johnson (1980) underline that metaphor, as a fundamental mechanism of human cognition, allows abstract complex concepts to be comprehended through concrete embodied experiences.

For J. Charteris-Black (2011), metaphors shape how issues are framed, arguments are constructed, and ideologies are disseminated in political rhetoric. L. Gurevich's (2022) analysis reveals how metaphors can be strategically employed in the "Falsity domain" to obfuscate ulterior motives and justify undesirable policies. According to L. Gurevich (2022, p.153), for instance, Trump's characterisation of COVID-19 as the "Chinese virus" invokes xenophobia. For him, the us-vs-them metaphor deflects responsibility and escalates tensions with China. Similarly, he cites instances where the metaphor of the virus as a "bioweapon" or "formidable weapon" is leveraged to legitimise draconian restrictions on civil liberties under the guise of national security.

3. Methodological approach

3.1. Presentation of the Corpus

The corpus is the English version of Ibrahim Traoré's speech delivered at the AES first summit. It is a call for African liberation and self-determination on 6th July 2024. The English text used in this study is the online translation², as no officially published English version was available at the time of analysis. The translation adopted is a sense-for-sense (communicative) translation. The objective is to preserve the pragmatic force, rhetorical strategies, and ideological nuances of the original speech rather than providing a strictly literal rendering. The selection of this specific speech is guided by several criteria ensuring a comprehensive representation of his political rhetoric. Firstly, the topical diversity covers a range of central topics including economic recovery, education, security, foreign policy, self-determination and social justice. Secondly, there is the national and international significance. The speech represents a pivotal moment in Traoré's political tenure. Thirdly, there is the speech's rhetorical richness. It is considered for its eloquence, its rhetorical sophistication, and its use of figurative language, particularly metaphors. The analysis of this speech sheds light on how Ibrahim Traoré uses lexical metaphors as a strategic tool to frame complex issues, evoke emotions, and navigate ambivalence in addressing the AES population. The corpus offers a longitudinal perspective on Traoré's political discourse.

3.2. Research Type and Method of Data Analysis

A research type sets up the plan for the researcher to answer the research question, whereas a method of data analysis is a strategy used to implement the data analysis. Discourse analysis has its particularities with specific orientations. Scholars such as John Muncie point out the particularities of discourse analysis and how to analyse data when dealing with discourses, specifically politicians' speeches. According to V. Jupp (2006, p. 74):

Discourse analysis is a generic term...It derives, in the main, from linguistics, semiotics, social psychology, cultural studies and post-structural social theory. It is primarily a qualitative method of 'reading' texts, conversations and documents which

²Here can be found the official French version:

<https://trueafricanhistory.com/2024/07/21/ibrahim-traoré-delivers-a-call-for-african-liberation-and-self-determination-at-the-aes-1st-summit>.

explores the connections between language, communication, knowledge, power and social practices. In short, it focuses upon the meaning and structure (whether overt or hidden) of acts of communication in context.

The research outline is based on a qualitative analysis. The qualitative analysis deals with investigating and understanding societal and human issues. This work draws upon Mental Spaces Theory (MST), a cognitive linguistic framework developed by G. Fauconnier (1985) and further elaborated by G. Fauconnier and M. Turner (2003), as its primary analytical lens. MST offers a dynamic and nuanced model of meaning construction, particularly well-suited for analysing the subtle yet potent ways in which lexical metaphors can illuminate and obscure meaning, fostering ambivalence in audience interpretations.

4. Collection of data and analysis

The data in this study are selected from the online video of the English version of Ibrahim Traoré's speech delivered at the AES first summit. The data collected from the speech are types of lexical metaphors that are sources of ambivalence. The analysis of these data is based on content analysis and uses the qualitative method analysis. The analysis also uses Mental Spaces Theory (MST) to unpack the conceptual structures, emotional valence, and rhetorical functions of Traoré's metaphorical language. The identified lexical metaphors are categorised based on their source domains and grammatical structure. There are many types of lexical metaphors apart from those mentioned by A. Saragih (2001). But, not all of them are used in this study. The analysis explores the rhetorical implications of these ambivalent spaces, considering how Traoré manages conflictual situations.

4.1. Kind of Lexical Metaphors in Ibrahim Traoré's AES Speech

This section of the study shows the different types of lexical metaphors in Traoré's speech. The objective is first to present and analyse them according to their categories and functions in language use. Lexical metaphors play a key role in Ibrahim Traoré's discourse in the context of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES). These metaphors are not merely ornamental, but they function as ideological and cognitive tools that reveal people's perceptions of power relations between the Sahel and external forces. The analysis of lexical metaphors allows people to

understand how language is used as a strategic tool of persuasion and a political positioning within the AES discourse.

4.1.1. Noun-Noun Lexical Metaphors

Noun-noun lexical metaphors, a common linguistic tool, subtly convey conceptual mappings by juxtaposing two nouns, the first acting as a modifier of the second. The juxtaposition activates multiple interpretations and highlights potential tensions between different frames of reference. As B. Aarts et *al.*, (2014, p.96) note, “compound nouns often consist of two nouns, e.g. bookcase, handlebar, laptop, mind-set, windscreen”, where the first noun modifies the second. The following examples are from Ibrahim Traoré’s address at the first AES Summit:

- (1) “This continent has suffered so much and continues to suffer because of imperialists. These imperialists have only one cliché in mind: “Africa is the **empire of slaves**.” (p.1, L.2-3)
- (2) “There are many other examples (...) we were approached by some **salon slaves** to pass on the message of their master because they had created this kind of **polymer chain** that rises to the heads of our states to serve them...” (p.1, L.32-35)

4.1.2. Verb- Noun Lexical Metaphors

Verb-noun lexical metaphor, a pervasive linguistic tool, aims at transforming actions represented by verbs into tangible entities, symbolised by nouns. This metaphorical construction allows speakers to reify abstract processes, making them more concrete and conceptually graspable. B. Aarts et *al.*, (2014, p.117) point out that deverbal nouns derived from verbs often “denote an action, idea, quality, or state”, capturing the essence of the verb in a noun form. When paired with other verbs, these deverbal nouns can create a sense of tangible outcome or consequence, impacting how one perceives and evaluates the actions they represent. The following examples are from Ibrahim Traoré’s address at the first AES Summit:

- (3) “...we were approached by some salon slaves to pass on the message of their master (...) we came to **break the chain**, and it is inconceivable for them”. (p.1, L.31-35)

- (4) “We refuse to enter their ranks, and then the hostilities began. They have sent several mercenaries and trainers to our area. The agents have descended into the Sahel to **carry out barbaric, cowardly attacks against our people**, hoping to revolt them.” (p.2, L38-41).

4.1.3. Adjective-Noun Lexical Metaphors

Adjective-noun lexical metaphors are subtle yet pervasive rhetorical devices, shaping political discourse by imbuing abstract entities represented by nouns with specific qualities denoted by adjectives. B. Aarts et al., (2014, p.10) highlight the diverse nature of adjectives, noting that they “may express properties or attributes of the noun they modify, or aspects of the way in which that noun is perceived or evaluated”. The following examples are from Ibrahim Traoré’s address at the first AES Summit:

- (5) “But the **master slave** has always known how to identify these individuals. They are always ready to betray their brother to satisfy the master.” (p.1, L.16-17)
- (6) “We will fight for **real independence**, for our freedom, because to scare the people of the AES, these individuals have only three terms in their mouths: democracy, freedom, human rights.” (p.2, L.49-51).

4.1.4. Noun-Verb or Adjective and Circumstances Lexical Metaphors

As B. Aarts et al., (2014, p.11) note, adjectives can occupy different syntactic positions, appearing “attributively in a noun phrase (e.g. an old man)” or “following be or another copular verb, and thus occur in predicative position (e.g. He looks old)”. In a metaphorical context, the resulting meaning can be significantly influenced by the circumstances surrounding their utterance when these adjectives are paired with nouns. The following examples are from Ibrahim Traoré’s address at the first AES Summit:

- (7) “They **have just placed local valets at the head**, according to them, of their sub prefecture **to be able to continue to feed them**. These local valets, which we are going to call today the slaves of the salon, have other goals.” (p.1, L.7-8)
- (8) “**we have decided to take responsibility**. Do you know why? On June 26, 2023, when Niger decided to turn the

page, the slaves of the salon and their masters got on the big horses.” (p.2, L.54-56).

5. Results and interpretations

This section presents the results and interpretations of ambivalence in the use of lexical metaphors in President Ibrahim Traoré’s speech delivered at the first summit of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES). The analysis reveals that lexical metaphors function as a discursive strategy used simultaneously by Ibrahim Traoré to construct meanings of resistance and cooperation, threat and protection, rupture and continuity. While these metaphors overtly convey firmness, sovereignty, and ideological rupture with former hegemonic powers, they also implicitly accommodate calls for unity, legitimacy, and collective destiny within the Sahelian space. Such ambivalence allows the discourse to operate on multiple interpretive levels, addressing both internal audiences seeking reassurance and mobilisation, and external actors positioned as adversaries or observers. By examining lexical metaphors and their contextual use, this section shows how ambivalence enhances the persuasive force in discourse and reflects the complex political, military, and symbolic stakes underlying the AES project.

5.1. Ambivalence Triggered by Traoré’s Political Speech

This work digs into the interpretation of the findings presented in data collection and analysis. It explores the broader significance of lexical metaphors and their ambivalence within Traoré’s political discourse. It is based on qualitative analyses. It synthesises the key insights of analysis, connecting them to the Mental Space Theory (MST), political rhetoric, lexical metaphor, and ambivalence. The work provides an understanding of how Ibrahim Traoré uses metaphorical language to achieve his persuasive goals and the impact of circumstances on the meaning.

5.1.1. Ambivalence Triggered by Noun-Noun Lexical Metaphors

Noun-noun lexical metaphors frequently appear in Traoré’s speech. Throughout his speech, Traoré strategically uses noun-noun lexical metaphors, often employing them to show African people's manipulation by Westerners and foster awareness in AES. The metaphors “**Empire of slaves**” in **DATUM (1)** and “**salon slaves**”;

“**polymer chain**” in **DATUM (2)** invoke a metaphorical mapping from the concrete domain of physical or emotional energy to the abstract domain of oppression and manipulation. These metaphors evoke a sense of shared suffering and domination in AES, showing a lack of freedom with the supremacy of white people on blacks one.

These seemingly straightforward metaphors can also introduce ambivalence. In fact, through **DATUM (1)** and **DATUM (2)**, Ibrahim Traoré’s speech implicitly reveals how not all African people in AES are under Western slavery. It shows that there are people who are free from bondage. These people are not ready to go back to centuries of domination and slavery. These lexical metaphors can be interpreted in multiple ways, ranging from a collective national ethos to more sacrifice in waging war, fighting Western slavery and their military branch considered as being Sahelian Terrorism. This ambiguity allows for diverse interpretations and potentially conflicting understandings of what Traoré advocates.

5.1.2. Ambivalence Triggered by Verb-Noun Lexical Metaphors

Verb-noun lexical metaphor, a pervasive linguistic tool, transforms actions represented by verbs into tangible entities, symbolised by nouns. This metaphorical construction allows speakers to reify abstract processes, making them more concrete and conceptually graspable. While seemingly enhancing clarity and concreteness, these metaphors can also contribute to ambivalence by imbuing actions with qualities that are opened to multiple interpretations. B. Aarts et al., (2014, p.117) point out that deverbal nouns derived from verbs often “denote an action, idea, quality, or state”, capturing the essence of the verb in a noun form.

Throughout his speeches, Traoré skilfully uses verb-noun metaphors like “**break the chain**” in **DATUM (3)** and “**carry out barbaric**” in **DATUM (4)** to frame complex issues, evoke emotional responses, and subtly shape public perceptions. In **DATUM (3)**, the verb **break** signifies a deliberate, brutal act of separation and interruption and is juxtaposed with the noun **chain**, representing a vast and complex narrative captivity or dependence. In **DATUM (4)**, the verb **carry out** signifies the fact of executing, performing or putting into operation, whereas the word **barbaric** shows the notion of savage, cruel or excessively brutal actions against the noun **people**, signifying the AES people. This metaphorical construction in **DATUM (3)** and **DATUM (4)** frames it as a set of options, suggesting that the nations of AES can

consciously decide which aspects of their past to embrace and which to reject. This framing seeks to inspire a sense of agency and optimism, suggesting that the nations of AES can shape their future development by learning from their past. The alternative in Traoré's speech through these data is to stand and struggle to change things by building peaceful societies where people are free, where their sovereignty and rights are respected. However, these metaphors show an ambivalence and reveal the problems faced by AES countries. The analysis of these lexical metaphors shows the social instability and permanent insecurity they undergo.

5.1.3. Ambivalence Triggered by Adjective-Noun Lexical Metaphors

Adjective-noun lexical metaphors are subtle yet pervasive rhetorical devices, shaping political discourse by imbuing abstract entities represented by nouns with specific qualities denoted by adjectives. This construction allows speakers to frame issues, evoke emotional responses, and subtly influence how audiences perceive and evaluate complex concepts. However, it can also contribute to ambivalence, as the qualities invoked by the adjectives often carry multiple connotations. This potential for ambiguity can activate conflicting interpretations and highlight the inherent subjectivity in ascribing characteristics to abstract political realities. B. Aarts *et al.*, (2014, p.10) highlight the diverse nature of adjectives, noting that they “may express properties or attributes of the noun they modify, or aspects of the way in which that noun is perceived or evaluated”. When paired with nouns, these descriptive or evaluative adjectives can subtly shape our understanding of those nouns, particularly when the nouns represent abstract concepts.

Throughout his speech, Traoré masterfully uses adjective-noun metaphors through **DATUM (5)** and **DATUM (6)** to frame complex issues, evoke emotional responses, and subtly shape public perceptions. The nouns **slave** and **independence**, unveiling the notion of lack of freedom and liberty, are modified by the noun **master** used as an adjective and the adjective **real**. This construction seeks to create a sense of urgency for change, portraying traditional political practices as deceptive, outdated, and ultimately harmful to the AES nations' well-being.

The word **master**, applied to **slave**, evokes connotations of betrayal and disappointment, potentially activating a sense of frustration and

cynicism among the new generation symbolised by the three Presidents who are: Ibrahim Traoré, Assimi Goïta, and Abdourahamane Tiani. The adjective **real**, applied to the noun **independence**, similarly suggests a sense of exhaustion from fake, imaginary independence and a need for fresh ideas, potentially appealing to a desire for change and renewal to be totally independent by focusing on togetherness as an alternative to solve problems. This metaphorical framing can also contribute to ambivalence in the sense that it activates multiple mental spaces that can confuse listeners. Indeed, the hidden side of Traoré's message is that some people in AES countries are continuing to be manipulated, persuaded by some political leaders, and this aspect makes independence difficult to handle. It also shows that for the time being, AES countries are far from the freedom they are looking for **real independence**, not the fake one guided by foreign countries, and for that they are always fighting.

5.1.4. Ambivalence Triggered by Noun-Verb or Adjective and Circumstances

As B. Aarts et al., (2014, p.11) note, adjectives can occupy different syntactic positions, appearing “attributively in a noun phrase (e.g. an old man)” or “following be or another copular verb, and thus occur in predicative position (e.g. He looks old)”. P. Peters (2013, p. 10) further elaborates on this versatility, stating that adjectives “may express properties or attributes of the noun they qualify, or aspects of the way in which that noun is perceived or evaluated”. In a metaphorical context, the resulting meaning can be significantly influenced by the circumstances surrounding their utterance when these adjectives are paired with nouns. The same principle applies to noun-verb combinations as explained by B. Aarts et al., (2014, p.117) when they acknowledge that deverbal nouns, deriving from verbs, often “denote an action, idea, quality, or state”, capturing the essence of a verb in a noun form. When these deverbal nouns are paired with other verbs, the action evoked by the verb can take different connotations depending on the context.

Traoré uses noun-verb or adjective metaphors, strategically tailoring their meaning and emotional resonance to the specific contexts in which they are uttered. In **DATUM (7)**, words such as **valets**, **sub prefecture** and **slaves** of the **salon**, paired with the phrases “**have just placed and to be able to continue to feed**”, show the functioning of some political leaders' systems of domination. Ibrahim Traoré unveils how African

countries go through instability, conflicts, wars and face terrorism, which are a consequence of greed and irresponsibility on the part of some, but also our collective failure to make difficult choices and get prepared for a new age. In **DATUM (8)**, the verb phrase **have decided to take responsibility**, the adjective **Big** and the noun **masters** with their metaphorical mapping, show a physical or structural vulnerability that AES countries went through, which led them to fight today for their real independence. This metaphor, mapping from the concrete domain of physical deterioration of the social to the abstract domain of bondage and economic decline, conveys a sense of urgency and a need for decisive action. The interplay of targeted blame, actional awareness, and collective responsibility can contribute to ambivalence about the causes of the crisis in AES countries and the appropriate solutions, potentially motivating action and hindering a nuanced understanding of complex political issues in Traoré's governance.

The ambivalent use of lexical metaphors leads to the implicitness of political discourse. Indeed, with this nature, politicians' speech always becomes complex and uneasy to understand, grasp and reach agreement with people. It is in this same context that Toh (2019, p.107)³ asserts "il faut souligner, les discours politiques constituent un spectre de sous-entendus, de non-dits. Ce qui signifie que les pensées réelles du politique sont fréquemment voilées, biaisées, masquées". By exploring these strategic functions of ambivalence, this study highlights the dynamic interplay between language, cognition, and persuasion in political discourse. It shows how Traoré's masterful use of lexical metaphors allows him not only to reflect but also to shape public opinion, contributing to his effectiveness as a communicator and a leader.

Conclusion

Ibrahim Traoré's call for African liberation and self-determination at the AES first summit is a multi-coloured masterpiece speech in the study of ambivalence in metaphorical language, precisely in the use of lexical metaphors. In his speech, Traoré underlines the conflictual situations AES people go through every day and how their leaders can

³ It should be noted, political discourses constitute a spectrum of understatements, unsaid. Which means that the real thoughts of politicians are frequently veiled, biased, hidden. (translation mine)

overcome these issues by taking control over them through efficient alternatives in their Sahelian governance. The study reveals a consistent pattern of Traoré's use of lexical metaphors activating both positive and negative mental spaces, evoking a range of emotions and interpretations, and creating a sense of ambivalence. The patterns used in this study are noun-noun, verb-noun, adjective-noun, and noun-verb or adjective, and circumstance lexical metaphors.

Mental Space Theory, using lexical metaphors and cognitive processes, is used in the study to unveil the persuasive and ambivalent nature of politicians' speeches. The study breaks new ground to advance understanding of political discourse, figurative language and power dynamics; underpinning public communication in several major respects. It inaugurates the integrated analytical technique of applying Mental Spaces Theory (MST) to the manifestation of rhetorical ambivalence through lexical metaphors.

The article reveals that this ambivalence is not a rhetorical flaw but a deliberate strategy, allowing Traoré to appeal to a broader audience by creating a sense of shared values while simultaneously accommodating diverse perspectives; navigate sensitive and controversial issues by avoiding definitive stances and allowing for multiple interpretations; and frame complex realities in a way that both acknowledges challenges and inspires hope, motivating action while also recognising limitations in Sahelian people search for alternatives. The study also reveals that Ibrahim Traoré uses ambivalent lexical metaphors to establish confidence among his audience about the conflictual situations they go through. Thus, Ibrahim Traoré's use of lexical metaphors unveils ambivalence in shaping alternatives and control within a conflictual Sahel. However, while the interpretation of lexical metaphors provides valuable insight into Traoré's discursive strategy, the qualitative analysis of these samples remains insufficient to fully capture the representativeness and systematic weight of ambivalence across the entire speech. For a complete analytical process, a quantitative and qualitative mapping of metaphorical occurrences throughout the discourse would be necessary to show the ideological load and strategic consistency of ambivalence in Traoré's overall rhetorical positioning.

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