

Conceptual Metaphors in Official Documents of International Organizations

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Abstract

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is the most important agenda of the United Nations. However, previous research on UN documents from the perspective of conceptual metaphors is still limited. This study identifies and analyzes conceptual metaphors in the Agenda, and employs qualitative and quantitative approaches to construct a CMA framework. The study finds that: First, conceptual metaphors are abundant in the documents, with a total of 5905 occurrences. Second, the text delineates 17 conceptual metaphors: orientational metaphor, target metaphor, biological metaphor, team metaphor, architectural metaphor, journey metaphor, war metaphor, stage metaphor, identity metaphor, moral metaphor, dialogue metaphor, factory metaphor, body metaphor, game metaphor, color metaphor, nature metaphor, and burden metaphor. Third, the CMA recursive model of context analysis can critically analyze the above 17 metaphor types with effect.

Keywords

Conceptual metaphor, critical metaphor analysis, the United Nations documents.

1. Introduction

In September 2015, the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit adopted Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development [1](referred to The Agenda below). Since then, it has gathered global consensus and become the most important agenda of the United Nations. However, with the impending acceptance inspection of the Agenda, the current accomplishment is not optimistic, and how to promote the development of the agenda by improving the understanding of the people of all countries is of great significance. Most of the published papers on the Agenda come from political science, economics, sociology, ecology and other disciplines, and few foreign language and literature researchers have published relevant papers.

With the continuous exploration of the academic community, metaphor has been transformed from a simple linguistic phenomenon into an important tool to study the cognitive orientation and thinking mode of discourse groups[2]. Conceptual metaphor, with its cross-domain mapping, can facilitate people to understand unfamiliar conceptual systems. Therefore, the study of conceptual metaphors in the agenda text can deepen the understanding of the participants and the public to the agenda, and thus promote the development of the agenda. Theoretically, it can improve the conceptual metaphor types in the official documents of international organizations and provide reference for later researchers.

This study identifies conceptual metaphors in the Agenda documents, classifies them, and then uses the critical metaphor analysis paradigm to analyze them, demonstrating whether conceptual metaphors can still play a cross-domain mapping and convenient role in the official discourse dominated by politics, and exploring different types of conceptual metaphors' proportion in the agenda texts, and their roles in specific contexts.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Previous Studies on Metaphor and Conceptual Metaphor

Metaphor has always been the subject of research and discussion in academia. Starting from Aristotle's theory[3], the development of metaphor has gone through theories such as Black's theory of metaphor interaction[4], Lakoff and Johnson's theory of conceptual metaphor[5], and Fauconnier's blending theory[6]. As Li Guonan wrote, Metaphor is no longer just a rhetorical phenomenon, but more importantly, a universal way of thinking for humans, a cognitive tool, and also the main means by which humans name everything[7].

American cognitive linguists George Lakoff and Mark Johnson first proposed conceptual metaphor in *Metaphors We Live By*, suggesting that conceptual metaphor, as a fundamental way of human survival and thinking, is rooted in the concept system of cross-cognitive domain mapping[5]8. People apply knowledge from a familiar domain to another unfamiliar domain, understand one concept through another concept, and disclose the complex cognitive thoughts behind the literal meaning of a single, isolated word.

Conceptual metaphors are ubiquitous, and human concept systems rely on metaphorical thinking. Besides, people use conceptual metaphors for thinking, reasoning, explaining to others, and organizing discourse. Therefore, conceptual metaphors can not only reveal the conceptualization results of discourse producers, but also reflect their positions and values[8]622. In conclusion, most current research and findings focus on exploring the classification and function of conceptual metaphors at a general level, while there are relatively few researches digging them in international organization official documents to study their specific functions and types in different contexts.

In conclusion, this study identifies conceptual metaphors in the agenda documents, categorizes them into specific types and analyzes them. It examines whether these conceptual metaphors accurately reflect the official intentions, whether the recipients can understand them, and whether successful cross-domain mappings are achieved. Eventually, the study attempts to explain why and how the agenda documents use conceptual metaphors to persuade countries and people to popularize and accept the concept of sustainable development.

2.2. Previous Studies on Critical Metaphor Analysis

Based on the previous research results of metaphor and critical discourse analysis, Charteris-Black first proposed a new method of discourse analysis - critical metaphor analysis, CMA, which introduces research methods from cognitive linguistics, pragmatics, and corpus analysis into the analysis of metaphors, opening up a new path for discourse analysis[9]. CMA integrates society, thought, and language into its research scope to reveal the underlying ideologies, power relations, and cognitive patterns behind discourse. In 2014, he proposed a recursive model in *Analyzing Political Speeches: Rhetoric, Discourse and Metaphor*, which combines context analysis, metaphor identification, metaphor description, and metaphor interpretation into one[10].

Domestic scholars have gradually begun to dabble in it as well, such as Ji Yuhua and Chen Yan, after analyzing the metaphors in more than 20 speeches of British and American politicians, believe that critical metaphor analysis combines linguistic analysis with cognitive understanding and social knowledge well, and opens up a new way of discourse analysis[11]. Wu Jianguo believes that in the process of CMA's research on the metaphorical phenomenon that goes beyond the traditional scope of linguistics, metaphor is no longer just a simple linguistic phenomenon, but more on behalf of a persuasion and a way of thinking. Concerning the future development of CMA, Wu suggests that it should strengthen micro-level language analysis, focus on emerging domain discourses, and discuss them in a broader social and cultural context, so that the complexity and timeliness of metaphors can be more

comprehensively grasped[12]93. The agenda texts chosen for this study align with the expected direction of previous CMA research.

In Wu's article *Critical Metaphor Analysis: Frontiers and Prospects*, he points out that political discourse, as the most common research object in the CMA field, frequently uses metaphors. These metaphors not only make abstract issues concrete but also reshape social reality to strengthen viewpoint identification, playing an important role in political life[12]89. That is probably why most current CMA research focuses on political texts. However, due to the richness of the Agenda content mentioned below, the Agenda texts inevitably contain other types of metaphors from different domains. This study aims to expand CMA to multidomain discourse.

The study asks the following questions in anticipation of filling research gaps. First, are conceptual metaphors prevalent within the Agenda documents, and how many subcategories of conceptual metaphors are there? Second, why do some types of conceptual metaphors appear more frequently than others? Third, can the existing CMA paradigm effectively analyze the conceptual metaphors in the Agenda?

3. Research Methodology

Step one, select and organize the texts. Read the documents related to the Agenda on the United Nations official website, and select the most recent documents, which means they were issued within the last year and hardly studied in the currently published papers, and the most general documents, which means they contain various domains, such as politics, economy, culture, society, and ecology. Eventually, six documents were selected and downloaded: Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators[13] (referred to as Expert Group below), Long-term Future Trends and Scenarios: impacts on the Realization of the Sustainable Development Goals[14] (referred to as Future Trends), New governance insights to advance the Sustainable Development Goals and eradicate poverty[15] (referred to as New governance insights), Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals: towards a rescue plan for people and planet[16] (referred to as Progress), Summary by the President of the Economic and Social Council of the high-level political forum on sustainable development convened under the auspices of the Council at its 2023 session[17] (referred to as Political Forum), Work on the review of progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals[18] (referred to as Review). After organizing into plain text format and cleaning, import them into the AntConc software, building a corpus with a total of 57,411 words (referred to as The Text).

Step two, read The Text intensively and identify conceptual metaphors carefully. This study follows the MIPVU to identify conceptual metaphors in The Text, with the main steps as follows: firstly, confirm the word in The Text and its contextual meaning; secondly, confirm the basic meaning of the word according to Oxford Dictionary; thirdly, confirm whether there is a difference between the basic meaning of the word and its contextual meaning; fourthly, confirm whether there is a similarity between the referent of the basic meaning and the referent of the contextual meaning, if so, the word is a metaphor[19]. Afterward, take words that carry metaphorical meanings as metaphor carriers.

Step three, classify the selected conceptual metaphors. In order to help readers understand the various types of conceptual metaphors in the agenda documents, this study does not classify the conceptual metaphors in The Text according to structural, ontological, or orientational metaphors, but directly divides them based on the specific source domains of these metaphors, highlighting the important role of cross-domain mapping in interpreting The Text and then the Agenda.

Furthermore, in order to visually demonstrate the quantity of various conceptual metaphors in The Text, in the fourth step, this study uses the KWIC function in the AntConc to search for the

word frequency of metaphor carriers. It is noteworthy whether the same metaphor carrier is used with its literal or metaphorical meaning in different contexts.

Step five, use the aforementioned CMA model, context analysis, metaphor identification, metaphor description, and metaphor interpretation, to analyze the conceptual metaphors and their frequency of occurrence.

4. Conceptual Metaphors in The Text

The study identified a total of 17 types of conceptual metaphors in The Text.

4.1. Orientational Metaphor

Orientational Metaphor links two independent and complete conceptual systems through human physical and cultural experiences[5]13, allowing the source domain to be successfully mapped onto the target domain, enabling people to easily understand the concepts the metaphor producer intends for them to understand. This type of metaphor appeared 1939 times in The Text, ranking first among all other types.

Example 1:

At the midpoint on our way to 2030, the Sustainable Development Goals are in deep trouble.
(Review)

The metaphor of orientation appears frequently in The Text mainly because there are many directional prepositions, especially “in”, a clear carrier word for container metaphor. For example, in Example 1, “trouble”, an abstract concept or condition is metaphorically seen as a physical container, and the expression of a deep container vividly expresses the difficulty of solving this “trouble”. Here, the container is System 2, while System 1, the abstract concept of “the Goals”, is viewed as a physical entity. The connection between the two complete systems comes from the directional metaphor carrier word “in”, with System 1 being in System 2, and the goals are in trouble, as if a person is stuck in a swamp and unable to get out.

The orientational metaphor, with its natural advantage, can effectively reflect the current development status of the Agenda, how far it is from achieving the Goals, and what should be taken into account in order to achieve them.

4.2. Target Metaphor

The meaning of the word “target” has evolved from its original specific destination to metaphorically encompass all desired outcomes, whether concrete or abstract. The target metaphor refers to treating abstract things as concrete targets that people shoot at. The Goals pursued in the Agenda are not random goals, but a common goal of positive development, just like a bullet hitting its own predetermined target, not someone else’s, otherwise it will have a counterproductive effect. Treating abstract specific tasks as having barriers separates them from other tasks with boundaries.

Common words representing target include “goal”, “target”, “aim”, and “objective”, all of which indicate the subject’s willingness to strive for or achieve something. These four words are also the four high-frequency target metaphor carriers in The Text. Among them, goal and target can also refer to tangible objects that can be used in sports projects. In this sense, their ontological concepts and metaphorical meaning are more obvious than aim and objective.

Example 2:

Goal 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere.

Target 1.1: By the end of 2022, nowcasting suggests 8.4 per cent of the world’s population, or as many as 670 million people, could still be living in extreme poverty today and that the figure will drop to 575 million by 2030 – a fall of less than 30 per cent since 2015. (Progress)

“Goal” is often brought up when comes to a distant future. It is general and implies that long-term efforts are needed to achieve it. However, “target” usually involves a specific number, indicating what needs to be reached in terms of quantity. As shown in Example 2, “Goal” is overarching, showing what should be achieved in a certain field, while “target” is a sub-goal under this overall “Goal”. As one of the thematic words in the name of the Agenda, the Sustainable Development Goals, “goal” appears frequently in The Text, but it is worth noting that “target” is also a core term in the Agenda which includes 17 goals and 169 targets, showing the inevitable charm of “target”.

Ultimately, the Agenda emphasizes achieving certain accomplishments, most of which are not tangible objects but rather a state of being. The perfect ending of the Agenda should be the achievement of the SDGs at a macro level, which requires, however, setting and achieving specific small goals, namely targets, aims, and objectives, so that relevant parties can clearly understand what specific efforts should be taken in the short term. Thanks to the use of target metaphors, the efficiency of agenda advancement will not be wasted on guessing vague requirements, but will directly strive towards concrete goals.

4.3. Biological Metaphor

This study classifies plant metaphors and animal metaphors into one, biological metaphor. Plants hold a special position among numerous source domains, becoming a mirror for humans to reflect on and improve themselves^[20]. Animals are often regarded as a source domain as well. The characteristics of animals, including human health status, life cycle, various social relationships, emotional characteristics, and so on, are mapped to describe the activities, operations, and development of things^[21].

Example 3:

Inequalities in access to public goods and services continue to grow. (New governance insights)
In the Oxford Dictionary, the basic meaning of “grow” is to become bigger or taller and develop into an adult that only living creatures can become. Nevertheless, in The Text, the subject of “grow” is often not a living organism.

For example, in Example 3, the subject of “grow” is non-living, even an abstract noun, the inequality in access to public goods and services. There is an obvious difference between the basic meaning and the contextual meaning, but structurally, inequality is indeed widening and seems to be maturing soon. New governance insights uses this biological metaphor to alert everyone that if action is not taken immediately on the growing inequality, the consequences will be unimaginable.

Example 4:

There is a need to develop a regulatory framework that nurtures such innovations while also putting in place all the necessary guardrails to protect against abusive uses of such technologies. (Future Trends)

In the Text, in addition to “develop” and “grow”, the two most frequently used carriers of the biological metaphor, there are also some sporadic carriers, such as “nurture” and “fruit”. The basic meaning of “nurture” is to care for and protect somebody or something while they are growing and developing. But in Example 4, the agent of “nurture” is a regulatory framework, and the outcome is innovation. Innovation is undoubtedly difficult, and this process requires careful nurturing and protection, which is a structural similarity between the two.

The result of nurture is fruit, such as the fruits of science and innovation mentioned above. In the *Oxford Dictionary*, the basic meaning of “fruit” is a part of a plant or tree that is formed after the flowers have died and in which seeds develop. However, the fruits of science and innovation do not grow from the ground and fall from trees; they are the precious result of scientists’ tireless “nurturing”. Through these two biological metaphors, the report indicates that

innovation is essential to achieving the Goals, and what governments or other relevant parties can do is “nurture” it well until it bears “fruit”.

Biological metaphors emphasize the growth process of living things: plants sprouting, growing, flowering, bearing fruit, and withering; the growth process of animals including humans being born, growing, aging, and dying. However, this study finds that in The Text, there are almost no metaphors of aging and dying, with “die” only used literally; instead, The Text uses a large number of metaphors in the first half of the biological growth process from nothing to prosperity, a total of 847 times. Since conceptual metaphors are systematic, users may intentionally or unintentionally highlight or hide some parts in the source domain system^{[5]10}, that is, parts that users want or do not want the readers to know. This may imply that The Text wants to emphasize that the Agenda is still on the up and up, still developing positively, and at the same time, hides or suppresses the inevitable fate of anything reaching its peak and declining, eventually leading to extinction.

4.4. Team Metaphor

The high frequency of team metaphors and the highest number of metaphor carriers among all conceptual metaphor types identified in The Text show that the Agenda emphasizes the spirit of international solidarity and cooperation, and firmly believes that only through close international cooperation can the SDGs be achieved on schedule.

Example 5:

All participants noted that collaboration and partnerships among countries and stakeholders, including civil society, the private sector and young people, were pivotal. (Political Forum)

Example 5 contains several carriers of team metaphor. The first one is “participant” whose original meaning is a person who is taking part in an activity, but participants in The Text do not refer to specific people usually, but rather to countries and institutions. In addition, “participant” appears in the plural throughout The Text, suggesting that the Agenda is different from other smaller goals in that their advancement is not enough having a few participants, and that multiple participants are necessary to create an interaction and achieve advancement.

The second team metaphor carrier is “collaboration”, which originally means the act of working with another person or group of people to create or produce something, with a high degree of cooperation. Its frequency of occurrence in the text is also high. Same as the first carrier, the agent is often not literally people, but the team metaphor makes relevant parties cooperate like people. Using the word “collaboration”, the ambiguous relationship between multiple parties seems to become a tangible bond, making it clear that the parties in the Agenda are not in confrontation, but in cooperation, and that as we move forward with the agenda, we must be mindful of what is happening to the cooperator on the other end of our bond. If he is slower, we can lend a hand, and if he is quick, we can get a hand.

The third one is “partnership”, which in its original sense can mean one of the person who owns a business and shares the profits or a person that you are doing an activity with, and in The Text it combines these two meanings. All the Agenda’s parties are in pursuit of the Goals together, sharing one stake and living or dying together. If the Goals are successfully achieved, all countries will prosper together; if we fail, the world will sooner or later become wreckage, and human civilization will face the possibility of withering away. In addition, compared with words like “coworker”, “partner” is less serious. It implies a friendly and intimate relationship in which parties confide in each other and solve problems. Partnership, on the other hand, makes this concrete connection a little more abstract.

Example 6:

In other words, unless developing countries and disadvantaged communities are fully integrated into the new world economy driven by research and development, modern science,

technology and innovation will fall far short of making a positive difference for the Sustainable Development Goals, and the development of the new world economy will not be possible. (Future Trends)

The original meaning of “integrate” is to combine two or more things so that they work together. It is more intimate than the word “cooperation”, and is often used exaggeratedly. In Example 6, it does not really mean that the economies of the least developed regions and the new world become one, but rather that they should actively use research and development to guide their economy like other countries at the forefront. The same kind of expression like “integration” is also used in The Text. These words connote a strong entity meaning, treating two abstract things as bounded entities, then breaking down the boundaries and fusing the two entities into only one bounded entity with exclusivity. However, they are rarely used in the context of two countries, but rather, as in Example 6, in the context of goals. The probable reason may be that even though the Agenda emphasizes cooperation, it also focuses on the sovereign integrity of each country, each as an individual, which then works together collaboratively to move the Agenda forward.

The Text uses plenty of words that denote team and cooperation, and encompasses most lexical properties of the words, almost exhausting the expression of the team metaphor. Moreover, this use of the team metaphor in The Text is consistent and complete, starting with gathering the countries, convincing them to join, then cooperating, and finally becoming family members with intertwined interests, and all working together for the same goal.

4.5. Architectural Metaphor

The domain of architecture, as an important source domain, conceptualizes abstract and complex systems from everyday experiences, representing theories, societies, careers, creations, relationships, and events as a building in various discourses. In The Text, not only are there a large number of architectural metaphors, but the carriers of these metaphors are also very rich, with as many as sixteen different types. The reason for this may be that architectural metaphors have a complex structure, including buildings, builders, construction, foundations, and other parts, each of which is expressed accordingly.

Previous empirical studies of government documents, political debates, and politicians’ speeches have shown that governments attempt to influence the current behaviors of the public by constructing inevitable futures, and have revealed underlying core values and highlighted the relationship between discourse, power, and ideology[22][23].

Example 7:

Modernization of the information technology architecture to support the implementation of innovative approaches was included as a cross-cutting area of support. (Review)

There are two obvious architectural metaphors in Example 7. To begin with, the original meaning of “architecture” is the art and study of designing buildings, but in the example, information technology is intangible in reality. Because it is like a building with different levels and different content between each section, similar to different houses in a building with different rooms. The structural similarity allows people to attribute the architectural characteristic of structure to information technology.

Next, similarly, the original meaning of “support” is to hold something in position; to prevent something from falling, but in the example, it is not supporting a building, but the implementation of innovative approaches, which is also an abstract behavior that is difficult to understand. How can intangible innovation be achieved? Upgrade the architecture of information technology to modernize it, because only with a solid framework and support can information technology support innovation and continue to develop in its initial way. Likewise, the word “support” at the end of the sentence is the same metaphorical usage, only in the form of a noun. This example uses the metaphor of architecture to summarize that the modernization

of information technology provides strong support for promoting innovation, while also implying that future innovation development needs to continue to draw strength from information technology.

Most noun concepts in The Agenda can be structurally mapped through architectural metaphors, reflecting that sustainable development is a complete system, with each part having a framework and logic, which can be increasingly solidified.

Moreover, it is noteworthy that these nouns are often accompanied by verbs, such as “support” and “architecture”, indicating that the mere action of construction is not enough, as it is necessary to know what one is striving for; and mere buildings to be constructed are also not enough, as it requires willing and dedicated builders. In the agenda text, these builders are often all countries and people, working together to contribute to the development of their countries and the whole world.

The function of political discourse is to construct a certain future, inspiring the public to take corresponding actions to achieve goals or avoid threats^[24]. The extensive use of architectural metaphors in The Text indicates that global sustainable development, like building construction, takes a long time and requires participants to follow the basic framework and work together to build a better future.

The above five types of conceptual metaphors of orientation, target, biology, team, and architecture each appear more than 600 times in The Text, a number that surpasses the other metaphor types below in a cliff rise, and it can be concluded that through the use of orientational metaphors, The Agenda finds the current stage it is in, uses the metaphorized goal as a guide, draws on the attributes of biological growth and the division of labor among the various subjects of the architecture, jointly advancing the development of the Agenda.

4.6. Other Metaphors

In addition to the five metaphors analyzed in detail above, the study also identifies other twelve conceptual metaphor types that play a significant role in The Text, including journey metaphor, war metaphor, stage metaphor, identity metaphor, moral metaphor, dialogue metaphor, factory metaphor, body metaphor, game metaphor, color metaphor, nature metaphor, and burden metaphor.

4.6.1. Journey Metaphor

Based on the mapping “a purposeful social activity is a journey”, the journey metaphor is a source domain concept frequently discussed in Western political discourse studies^[25]. Because the destination is seen as a goal with social value, journey metaphors are often positively evaluated in relation to social behavior. The metaphor also implies that society needs to make efforts, be patient, and suffer through difficulties in order to achieve valuable goals.

Example 8:

African countries, least developed countries and landlocked developing countries: turning the tide, regaining lost ground, and embarking on the road to the Sustainable Development Goals. (Political Forum)

In Example 8, the road is not an actual, tangible path for walking on, but an abstract path to the future. For developing countries, the road to sustainable development is inevitably more difficult and winding, but the Goals and the future after achieving it are bright. Only by embarking on this path with anticipation and patience is the right choice for underdeveloped areas and people. In The Text, expressions such as “path”, “pathway”, “way”, “trajectory”, etc., all metaphorically depict the process of achieving sustainable development as a practical and feasible path.

Example 9:

Of 200 countries and areas analysed, only 54 countries are not on track to meet the target of fewer than 25 deaths per 1,000 live births. (Progress)

In the expression “on track”, the original meaning of “track” is “rails that a train moves along”, but in Example 9, “on track” is used as a typical metaphor, where “track” no longer simply refers to railroad tracks, but to the planned methods and intended goals. Unlike other roads, a train moves rapidly forward, and it is very dangerous if a carriage derails at the time. As the deadline for 2030 approaches, the process of sustainable development is progressing rapidly. If some countries do not implement the planned methods, achieve the expected achievement, or develop at a slower pace than other countries, it is very dangerous for the Agenda as a whole. The Agenda may not be achieved as scheduled, lives that should not have been lost may still perish, and economies that should have thrived may remain lifeless. The metaphor of journey serves as a reminder to all parties involved to take the Agenda seriously and work diligently to advance it.

4.6.2. War Metaphor

The war metaphor contains rich political potential and cultural implications. It often emerges in major social crises, serving as a medium signal of national governance and a demonstration of state power, not only responding to public anxiety and media questioning, but also implying the beginning of a crisis management practice^[26]. For the media, war metaphors help to increase the speed of news communication^[27]. Similarly, in promoting understanding and popularization of the Agenda, war metaphors play a significant role in speeding up the process.

Example 10:

Eighty per cent of countries have some form of strategy, vision or action plan on the Goals, again across all income categories. (New governance insights)

The first example is the strategic metaphor of war. In the face of what kind of opponent in the war, the military adviser will come up with appropriate fighting method. For example, in this context, “strategy” refers to the response strategies formed by a country to achieve sustainable development goals, which is different from its original meaning, the skill of planning the movements of armies in a battle or war. The strategy here is not meant for actual use on the battlefield amidst gunfire nor for military use. In addition, after these strategies and action plans, it is specified that they are applicable to all groups. It can be seen that sustainable development is not a horseplay. The plans formulated by participants and promoters should be universal. It is gratifying to see that the country has already given it due attention.

Example 11:

The report presents the latest evidence on gender equality across all 17 Goals, indicating that the world is failing to achieve gender equality, making it an increasingly distant goal. (Review)

Example 11 is an outcome metaphor of war. Does one win or lose the war? This example regards achieving gender equality as a war, indicating that achieving equality between men and women is considered a very serious and important part, even the most important part in the Agenda, as it is in the first part of Transforming Our World^[14]⁵. However, through this example, we regretfully understand that so far we have failed in this war and have not achieved gender equality. Using war metaphors at this time is intended to alert all parties that the war is not over yet and to promote gender equality as soon as possible before 2023 arrives.

Example 12:

The crisis in education, however, is a ticking time bomb. (Progress)

Example 12 contains a weapon metaphor of war. What are the deadly weapons used in war and what serious consequences will they have on whom? This example compares an educational crisis to a weapon designed to explode at a particular time or when it is dropped or thrown, causing serious consequences. This is one of the few metaphors presented in The Text in such

an obvious way as “A is B”, indicating the importance of the agenda attached to education. Ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all is the fourth goal of the SDGs.

Research has found that commonly used war metaphor carriers, such as war, conflict, battle, and other words, do not appear in a metaphorical sense in The Text, but are used literally. The reason may be due to the currently frequent occurrence of wars in the world, and the focus is not on war, but on resisting war, advocating for peace, and exploring corresponding solutions. The reasons for triggering wars are threats and challenges, and the consequences of wars result in wins and losses. Through the use of three war metaphors - weapons, strategies, and outcomes, the examples above construct invisible crises as visible, clear, and tangible wars, evoking readers’ similar historical experiences and collective memories that are crises and reconstruction. This cross-domain establishment implies that there may be various ups and downs in the process of achieving the SDGs, but with the joint efforts of all countries, victory will eventually be achieved, indicating that the agenda hopes that all parties will realize the urgency of promoting progress and achieving the goals.

4.6.3. Stage Metaphor

Society is, in fact, like a stage, and various parties are actors playing their roles on the stage. Therefore, analyzing the content of the Agenda from this perspective is appropriate.

Example 13:

This is a direct result of global injustices that go back hundreds of years but are still playing out today. (Progress)

“Playing out” contextually means occurring or existing, which is inconsistent with the original meaning of performing a play. The implementer of this action, “result of injustices” is abstract, but The Text employs metaphors to understand it as a tragedy that brings the feeling of trauma and the desire to escape. Nevertheless, at this time, the performance is not over, the audience can not leave, and the inner torment will continue. If it is just a flat narrative that the effects of injustice still exist, it will seem that all one can do is to feel despair. However, through the stage metaphor, in addition to showing the great trauma that injustice brings to people around the globe, it is also a call to action to stop this tragedy.

Viewing society as a big stage, where everyone has their own roles and the Agenda provides the script for them to follow, all parties act together to perform a good show.

4.6.4. Identity Metaphor

Personification helps people understand the experiences of various non-human entities through human motives, characteristics, and activities. It covers a variety of metaphor types, and identity metaphor is one of them. Identity metaphors directly assign human identity to non-human entities.

Example 14:

Human capital is a key driver of progress, not only on Sustainable Development Goal 16 but across all Goals. (New governance insights)

The literal meaning of “driver” is a person who drives a vehicle, but the contextual meaning is obviously not a real driver, as the abstract noun “human capital” is not a person, and the Agenda’s progress is not a vehicle, but through identity metaphor, non-human entities such as countries, institutions, and groups in The Text are given human identities, indicating that although the agenda is guided and demanded through them, the actual concern is people, and the Goals are to ensure that every person on Earth can benefit from it.

4.6.5. Moral Metaphor

The processing of moral metaphors essentially involves mapping bodily sensory experiences on moral cognition and behavior. Cramwinckel, Cremer, and van Dijke found that self-interest acts as a moderating variable in the embodied effect of moral judgments[28].

Example 15:

The world is not on track to achieve gender equality by 2030. (Progress)

The values rooted in our culture generally reflect the concept of equality of all things, and achieving fairness in various fields is also one of the core SDGs. However, “equality” is an abstract moral concept that can hardly be achieved. Through transforming moral fairness into a tangible entity, countries can treat it as a concrete goal and achieve it. On the contrary, inequality does exist and is something we strive to eliminate, so The Text also mentions inequality, treating it as a tangible entity that can be easily eradicated like removing a physical object.

The moral metaphor uses personal experiences to understand abstract moral concepts as tangible entities, gaining advantages for agenda development and eliminating harmful aspects. At the same time, the use of moral metaphors also reveals the moral responsibility that all countries must bear to achieve the Goals.

4.6.6. Dialogue Metaphor

Dialogue refers to the exchange between two or more parties, and the metaphor of dialogue gives certain non-human entities the power to speak and engage in so-called communication, revealing the relationships within.

Example 16:

It (Sustainable Development Goal 17) should become the standard for voluntary national reviews and voluntary local reviews to include well-planned participatory processes, facilitate open discussions and integrate dissenting voices of stakeholders. (New governance insights)

The first type of dialogue metaphor is two-way. The original meaning of “discussion” is the process of talking about something with somebody, especially in order to decide something. It is noteworthy that it is “with somebody” rather than “to somebody”, emphasizing that multiple parties are taking turns to speak and exchange views. There is no explicit mention of who the subject of the dialogue is, but given that the United Nations’ modus operandi often involves coordination between countries or institutions, the subject of the speech here should also be a non-human entity. Participating in exchanges among countries, these dialogues can promote agenda development, so not only the content, but the exchange itself also transforms into an entity.

Another type of such dialogue metaphor is one-way, but still included in the dialogue, which implies there are more than one parties, because the so-called one-way is not that the whole process involves only one party, but that this party is responding to a party that has already appeared earlier. For example, “voices” in Example 16, we cannot confirm if the voices are from participants engaged in a conversation, but it is certain that there are “people” making sounds. Hence, we tentatively classify it as one-way. Nevertheless, these voices are not useless. The Agenda values these voices during the development process and incorporates them as entities into the Goals, so there is a second party hidden in the dialogue.

Example 17:

Since 2015, Governments have responded to the Sustainable Development Goals in a variety of ways. (Progress)

Similarly, “respond” is also a carrier for the metaphor of one-way dialogue, and related to the Goals. If the discussion in Example 16 is conducted actively under the guidance of the Goals, then Example 17 is a direct dialogue with the Goals, which is actually the outcome produced.

The Goals are the initiators of the discourse, and the efforts and achievements made by countries are the responses of the discourse, which also include the two parties seen as entities. The dialogue metaphors used in The Text, whether one-way or two-way, reflect the necessary cooperation of the participating parties and their understanding of the Agenda, which is beneficial for agenda development. On the other hand, if the current cooperation has not been in place, the use of metaphor in dialogue can also be understood as promoting dialogue and thus cooperation.

4.6.7. Factory Metaphor

Factories often represent efficient and uniform production processes with regulations, injecting vitality into economic and social development. Factory metaphors derive from that construct.

Example 18:

Many countries struggle to produce data relevant to the Goals. (Political Forum)

The original meaning of “produce” is to make things to be sold, especially in large quantities and in factories. In The Text, the country is not a factory, and the resulting data is not for sale. However, by using the word “produce”, it is reflected that like a factory production, the country is the well-trained producer of standardized products; the production process also involves a series of fixed procedures, such as research, collection, analysis, and report writing; the ultimate outcome is data related to the goal, which can bring practical benefits, providing useful data for the sustainable development process and people’s understanding of it.

By establishing the factory metaphor, the SDGs themselves and the process of achieving them have a framework, and practical methods can be found, just like a machine. When something goes wrong, relevant parties can identify the problem and repair it without affecting the overall operation of the machine.

4.6.8. Body Metaphor

Because each body part has specific attributes that can be used separately, body metaphor refers to using these parts of the body to understand or refer to abstract things, making it the closest conceptual metaphor to embodied philosophy.

Example 19:

In the face of many global challenges, there was a need to focus on mutual humanity, recovery, resilience, preparedness and unity, with an eye on younger and future generations. (Political Forum)

“Face” in Example 19 departs from its literal meaning of the front part of the head, but is used metaphorically to mean facing something. The characteristic of face is front, and there are multiple sensory organs such as eyes, nose, and mouth. Thus, when encountering something, we are facing it directly, seeing it, smelling it, or even tasting it, indicating that these challenges are very close to us, to the point where we have to solve them, otherwise it will harm us. The use of this word in The Text is usually metaphorical, referring to facing challenges head-on. At this moment, all parties cannot escape, they can only bravely confront it and then solve it.

The original meaning of “eye” is the two organs on the face that you see with, but in this context, “with an eye on” is more similar to the meaning of “pay attention to”, also borrowing the characteristic of eyes, to look, that is to focus on the next generation.

The use of body metaphors directly triggers the feelings or memories of most people, effectively promoting people’s understanding of abstract concepts. Therefore, using this metaphor in the Agenda can enhance everyone’s understanding of the current situation and the SDGs, including both leaders of participating countries and ordinary people.

4.6.9. Game Metaphor

The game source domain has goal orientation and competitiveness[29]. Therefore, constructing the goal domain through game metaphors can reflect users' intention.

Example 20:

The global community was still in the game, but the time had come for the game itself to be changed. (Political Forum)

"Game" here refers to the realization of the SDGs, rather than an activity or a sport with rules in which people or teams compete against each other. In this game of the Agenda, the parties are not competing against each other, but against the current problems existing on Earth. Countries all over the world are still working to solve these problems, but based on the current progress, it is not enough to achieve them by 2030. Therefore, according to different situations, parties should adjust their implementation methods, just as in a sports competition, where if a team is losing in the first half, the coach may adjust the attacking style. Employing the metaphor of games to encourage the audience to actively promote the achievement of the SDGs, and advance sustainable development, as if participating in sports and games.

4.6.10 Color Metaphor

Goethe, in his *Theory of Color*, argues that subjective experience about color is paramount^[30]. Colors hold significant social meanings, as humans often use colors to make sense of their surroundings. Color metaphor refers to using colors and their hidden meanings to represent certain characteristics of abstract things, making it easier for people to understand.

Example 21:

The green economy has emerged very rapidly since 2018, driven by a technological revolution in advanced digital production technologies, green and low carbon technologies, electric vehicles, solar photovoltaics, hydrogen, smart grids and digital consumer technologies. (Future Trends)

Green no longer just carries the attribute of color. Due to being the color of most things in nature, it has become closely associated with the protection of the environment. As in Example 21, "the green economy" has been a commonly used term in recent years, referring to an ecological economic concept that emphasizes economic development without harming nature, but rather focusing on its preservation. Green technologies in Example 21 are the promoting factor of the green economy, referring to environmentally friendly technologies.

Using "green" to express environmental friendliness is a common color metaphor. Its use is identified as having a beneficial orientation, and the ecological concept it conveys is completely in line with the ecological philosophy of "green development, harmonious coexistence", making it a type of beneficial metaphor that should be encouraged and respected^{[8]629}.

4.6.11 Nature Metaphor

Nature metaphor refers to using natural objects in the natural world to map and understand the abstract experiences formed in human society. Human civilization is born in nature, with an intimate feeling towards nature and the ability to understand it. The use of natural metaphors can be seen as a way for humans to harness the power of nature as well.

Example 22:

Much of our lives and health depend on nature. (Progress)

The original meaning of "nature" is all the plants, animals, and things that exist in the universe that are not made by people, so nature is not an entity in reality. It is a general noun, an abstract concept. For example, one can say trees belong to nature or are a part of nature, but one cannot say nature equals trees. In Example 22, our lives and health are both abstract concepts. However, through metaphorically linking them to nature in treating both as entities, nature is like a tree and we are like the leaves on this tree. Moreover, through the use of "depend on", it

can be seen that rather than saying that the fate of humans is closely related to the fate of nature, it is more accurate to say that humans cannot do without nature. Like leaves, the time of appearance is much later, and the lifespan of humans is much shorter than the years that nature has existed as a tree. Nature can function without humans, but humans cannot exist without nature in turn. Therefore, the use of nature metaphor in the example is a call for us on Earth to cherish nature as much as or even more than we cherish our own lives.

4.6.12 Burden Metaphor

The burden metaphor refers to treating insignificant and abstract events or things as heavy entities.

Example 23:

Furthermore, low and lower-middle income economies bear the greatest burden of stunting, wasting, low birth weight and anemia. (Progress)

The literal meaning of “burden” is a heavy load that is difficult to carry, but in Example 23, it refers to stunting, wasting, low birth weight, and anemia, which are abstract concepts. The original meaning of “bear” collocating “burden” is to support the weight of something, reflecting the heaviness of the burden. Metaphorically, it reflects the difficulty of overcoming these difficulties. The heavier the burden, the harder it is to overcome. Fortunately, the burden metaphor helps implementers to perceive these difficulties as tangible entities, so the solution is no longer a struggle against nothingness in vain, but rather finding specific steps to unload the burden.

5. Discussion

The current study finds that conceptual metaphors not only exist but are also quite numerous in official documents of international organizations, which confirms the axiom of the metaphor theory that metaphors are ubiquitous.

Conceptual metaphors have long been infiltrated into every aspect of people’s lives and academic research, and have become the “constituent elements” of our discourse system. Their widespread popularization has made the “living metaphors” degenerate into “dead metaphors”. Therefore, its spiritual significance has replaced its sensual significance to a considerable extent, which is why it has become more necessary to re-problematize it and find out its intriguing points. The more commonplace and unsurprising things are, the more fundamental they are, and the more they need to be scrutinized^[31].

This study firmly agrees with the idea. Many metaphors have become “dead metaphors” which brings the research much trouble at the initial stage, and there is still controversy over the research scope and related source domain retrieval words of some metaphors. Therefore, this study has constructed its own corpus of nearly 60,000 words from the Agenda documents, and artificially recognized all conceptual metaphors in The Text, excluding metaphors that have completely died, meaning the basic meaning is equivalent to its metaphorical meaning, and counted the frequency of these conceptual metaphors. Based on this, the CMA paradigm has been used for analysis.

Moreover, conceptual metaphors have cultural variability^[4], and the expression and understanding of metaphors vary in different societies or groups. As one of the most important agendas of the United Nations, the text of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development must be understandable to all countries in the world, including the language used and the fact that each report has multiple languages such as Chinese, English, French, and Russian. The metaphors used in it must also be universally applicable, such as religious metaphors being less common in the selected Agenda texts, because not every country in the world believes in religion, and even in countries where people do believe, the religions they follow are different.

If a religious metaphor is used casually, not only will non-believers in other countries not understand it, but it may also offend other countries and damage friendly cooperative relations, arouse suspicion of the UN, and undoubtedly hinder the development.

6. Conclusion

In this study, a total of 17 conceptual metaphors have been identified in The Text, with a total of 5905 occurrences, which are categorized according to the source domain as orientational metaphors (1939), target metaphors (867), biological metaphors (847), team metaphors (673), architectural metaphors (622), journey metaphors (184), war metaphors (150), stage metaphors (126), identity metaphors (121), and moral metaphors (103), dialogue metaphors (81), factory metaphors (49), body metaphors (48), game metaphors (28), color metaphors (27), nature metaphors (20), and burdensome metaphors (20). Among these 17 conceptual metaphors, 5 of them have been created for the first time: identity metaphor, dialogue metaphor, factory metaphor, nature metaphor, and burden metaphor.

This study has constructed a special critical metaphor analysis framework for the Agenda in the process of analyzing the conceptual metaphors in The Text. The study has analyzed them according to the CMA paradigm of context analysis, metaphor identification, metaphor description, and metaphor interpretation in general. Moreover, the study expands the scope of metaphor identification and describes and interprets metaphors in the very context of the Agenda text.

The study has found that through various specific types of conceptual metaphors, abstract and difficult-to-understand concepts in agenda texts can be deconstructed and reconstructed, which can well reflect and evaluate the development status of the Agenda, promote the participants and other observers' understanding of the Agenda, and to some extent eliminate the inefficiency caused by ambiguity in the development of the Agenda. This finding proves that using conceptual metaphors in the Agenda documents is efficient and convenient, as people no longer need to rack their brains to explain a word, they just need to use a metaphor, and readers can easily understand.

There does exist some limitations in this thesis. Firstly, only 6 agenda documents were selected as the research objects, and the corpus is not rich enough. Secondly, although the 6 chosen documents are comprehensive documents and are up-to-date, they cannot, after all, represent the usage situation of conceptual metaphors throughout the entire agenda process and all fields. Thirdly, this study identifies conceptual metaphors artificially and does not employ Wmatrix4.0, which can be used for automatic online semantic annotation of corpus. Therefore, the identification process is slow, and due to the differences in the basic meanings of metaphorical carriers in each dictionary and individual understanding, the metaphor identification in this study may be subjective. Finally, due to the limitation of text length, the last 12 types of conceptual metaphors were not analyzed in detail.

Therefore, future researchers can enrich the research objects, expand the corpus, use software like Wmatrix4.0 to accelerate the identification process, and conduct a detailed analysis of all conceptual metaphors.

The theoretical significance lies in constructing a critical metaphor analysis framework for the conceptual metaphor of the Agenda, which is identifying various types of conceptual metaphors in the text and analyzing with the CMA paradigm, and supplementing many types of concept metaphors that previous researchers have not identified and analyzed, which can provide references for future related research. The practical significance of this study lies in the fact that the Agenda is a current hot topic, and that this study can enhance the public's understanding of the Agenda and contribute to accelerating the development of the Agenda.

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Appendix

Conceptual Metaphors In The Text

Number	Metaphor Types	Frequency	Metaphor Carriers
1	Oriental Metaphor	1939	in(1617); high(127); further(45); align(25); fall(23); below(23); far(19); cover(15); back(12); contain(12); margin(9); involve(6); scope(4); ahead(1); distant(1)
2	Target Metaphor	867	goal(625); target(208); aim(21); objective(13)
3	Biological Metaphor	847	development(563); develop(188)*; growth(63); growing(18); grow(13); nurture(1); fruit(1)
4	Team Metaphor	673	group(162); participant(64); partnership(62); cooperation(43); community(43); collaboration(33); team(32); collaborative(30); integrate(30); integration(29); participation(24); coordination(24); partner(24); engagement(16); engage(16); coordinate(9); joint(7); jointly(7); join(6); participate(6); collaborate(3); force(3)
5	Architectural Metaphor	622	support(140); build(104); base(80); strengthen(80); framework(72); establish(27); architecture(26); form(18); structure(17); basis(16); enhance(10); repository(9); reinforce(8); establishment(7); foundation(6); constitute(2)

6	Journey Metaphor	184	pathway(38); way(37); track(31); road(22); road map(19); guide(17); path(12); trajectory(6); midway(1); navigate(1)
7	War Metaphor	150	plan(84); strategy(39); strategic(14); failure(7); fail(5); bomb(1)
8	Stage Metaphor	126	scenario(87); platform(29); performance(8); play out(1); storyline(1)
9	Identity Metaphor	121	stakeholder(55); Member(47); driver(14); game changer(4); user(1)
10	Moral Metaphor	103	commitment(47); equality(24); trust(19); inequality(13)
11	Dialogue Metaphor	81	express(21); discussion(16); communication(14); respond(12); discuss(11); ask(5); communicate(2)
12	Factory Metaphor	49	mechanism(26); produce(15); pivotal(8)
13	Body Metaphor	48	face(33); head(5); footprint(3); arm(2); hand(2); fingertip(1); heart(1); eye(1)
14	Game Metaphor	28	play(21); game(7)
15	Color Metaphor	27	green(25); red(2)
16	Nature Metaphor	20	nature(17); star(1); cloud(1); sea(1)
17	Burden Metaphor	20	burden(17); bear(3)

*The inflections of the same word in different tenses and active passive situations are classified in the original word, for example, develop includes develop, developing, developed