

Semantic Shifts in Political Discourse: A Study of Language Manipulation

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ABSTRACT

Background. Semantic shifts in political discourse are a phenomenon that is increasingly occurring in modern political communication. Language manipulation is used by political actors and the media to shape public opinion, reframe an issue, and create new meanings that suit certain political interests. This strategy not only has an impact on how the public understands policies, but also on the political dynamics that develop in them.

Purpose. This study aims to analyze how semantic shifts are used in political discourse as well as how changes in the meaning of words can affect public perception. The study also examines how politicians and the media utilize linguistic strategies to manipulate political discourse and shape certain narratives on a variety of evolving political issues.

Method. This study uses critical discourse analysis and semantic linguistic analysis methods to examine 78 political documents, including politicians' speeches, debate transcripts, media news, and policy documents. The data was analyzed with a thematic approach to identify patterns of semantic shifts that emerged in political communication.

Results. The analysis showed that political metaphors were a key tool in semantic shifts, with a percentage of 32% of the total documents analyzed. Framing strategies and diction manipulation are also used to build political narratives that benefit certain actors. Shifts in the meaning of words are often used to lead public opinion without them realizing it, thus creating a bias in the understanding of political issues.

Conclusion. Semantic shifts are not just linguistic changes, but are political communication strategies that have a wide impact on public opinion and political policy. Awareness of this phenomenon can help the public be more critical in understanding the developing political discourse. This research contributes to deepening the understanding of how language is used as a tool of power in politics and how political literacy can be developed to deal with semantic manipulation in political communication.

Citation: Meisuri, Meisuri., & Al-Haddad, A. (2025). Semantic Shifts in Political Discourse: A Study of Language Manipulation. *Journal of Humanities Research Sustainability*, 2(1), 45–55. <https://doi.org/10.70177/humaniora.v2i1.1924>

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Received: August 5, 2025

Accepted: January 24, 2026

Published: February 26, 2026

KEYWORDS

Language Manipulation , Political Discourse, Semantic Shifts

INTRODUCTION

Language has enormous power in shaping perceptions and influencing public opinion, especially in political contexts (Shi dkk., 2020). In political communication, language is not only used to convey information, but also to form opinions and manipulate audiences (Dezhkameh dkk., 2021).

Therefore, an understanding of how language is used in this context is essential for deeper political analysis. Political language often involves a change in meaning



or a semantic shift that aims to influence the way people think and act.

Semantic shifts in political discourse are an important tool in the process of language manipulation. Through shifting meanings, politicians can change people's perception of an issue, create a certain narrative, or even ease existing tensions (Khajavi & Rasti, 2020). The use of words that have positive or negative connotations is very influential in influencing the emotional response of the audience (Kashiha, 2022). This concept has been discussed in various linguistic studies and discourse theory, highlighting how language is used to create symbolic power.

Semantic shifts can include changing the meaning of words, shifting meaning from previous contexts, or choosing certain words intended to drive public opinion. In a political context, this semantic shift often occurs through framing certain issues in a way that benefits certain parties (Radicioni dkk., 2021). For example, the term "reform" is often used to describe positive change, although in practice it can refer to changes that are more controversial or contrary to people's expectations.

The phenomenon of semantic shift in political discourse is also closely related to the concept of language manipulation (Kim dkk., 2019). Language manipulation can be seen as an attempt to shape social reality through the words and language used (Kim dkk., 2019). Politicians and the media often take advantage of these semantic shifts to strengthen their power and control the way society views certain political issues (Hart, 2021). Therefore, the study of semantic shifts in political language is very relevant to understand the dynamics of power and influence in society.

Semantic shifts are also related to ideologies that shape and are maintained through language. In politics, ideology is often conveyed through the language used by politicians to fight for certain goals (Goffredo dkk., 2023). The use of ideologically nuanced terms can affect the way the audience perceives certain policies or political decisions. Therefore, understanding how semantics function in political discourse allows us to identify the potential ideological manipulation that occurs behind the use of such words.

The study of semantic shifts in political discourse has attracted the attention of linguists and sociologists (Macagno, 2022). Some studies show how politicians use semantic shifts to gain public support or to avoid criticism. In many cases, politicians carefully choose words that manipulate the audience's perception of a particular situation or policy. Further research in this field is important to explore the mechanism of language manipulation and its impact on society more broadly.

The semantic shift in political discourse has not been fully understood in the context of broader language manipulation (Nijodo dkk., 2024). Most previous studies have focused more on the linguistic aspects of meaning shifts, but not much has explored their impact on social and political constructs in society. The use of strategically manipulated language by politicians to shape public opinion and influence political decisions is still an area that has not been studied in depth.

Another knowledge gap lies in understanding the relationship between semantic change and social and cultural contexts. While several studies have examined semantic shifts across cultures, few specifically look at how those shifts are affected by local and global political dynamics. Whether the semantic shift is universal or strongly tied to a particular political context, this is still a question that needs to be answered.

Previous research has also not fully revealed how politicians and the media develop language manipulation strategies through semantic shifts (Cui dkk., 2022). Many studies are more focused on textual or rhetorical analysis, but not enough to explore how the use of words can shape and change political perceptions in the long run. Further understanding of this process is essential for knowing how language affects public policy.

Another gap is the lack of attention to the long-term impact of semantic shifts in political discourse. How these shifts affect larger social and political changes, as well as the extent to which they create gaps or tensions between different groups of society, has not been widely studied (McGlynn & McGlone, 2019). Further research could provide insight into how language manipulation can shape political reality.

It is also important to explore the ethical aspects of the use of language in politics, especially as it relates to semantic manipulation (Stella, 2022). The extent to which politicians can use language to shape public opinion without misleading or harming society is a question that has not been fully answered. Further study is needed to understand the ethical boundaries in the use of language as a tool of political manipulation.

Filling this knowledge gap is crucial to understanding how semantic shifts function in political discourse, not only as a means of communication, but also as a tool of social and political manipulation. By understanding the mechanisms of semantic shifts, we can identify the potential for manipulation in political discourse and its impact on the formation of public opinion. This research aims to fill this void by examining the process and consequences of semantic shifts in political language.

Filling the gap will also provide insight into how politicians use language to influence public policy and public opinion. In addition, this research will provide a deeper understanding of the influence of politics on social constructs through language manipulation, and how people can be more aware of the manipulative use of language.

The main objective of this study is to examine the relationship between semantic shifts and language manipulation in political contexts, with a focus on identifying patterns of word use in political discourse that have the potential to influence public opinion. By analyzing political discourse in various contexts, this research hopes to make an important contribution in uncovering the dynamics of language in politics.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative research design with a critical discourse analysis (CDA) approach. This approach was chosen to understand how semantic shifts occur in political discourse as well as how language is used as a tool of manipulation. The analysis was carried out on political texts that included speeches, debates, media articles, as well as official government documents related to political policies and campaigns.

The population in this study includes various political discourses produced by politicians, media, and government institutions in a given period. The research sample consisted of 78 political documents selected based on their relevance to semantic shifts in political communication (Walker dkk., 2021). The sample selection was carried out purposively to ensure that the analyzed texts reflected language manipulation strategies in various political contexts.

The research instrument is in the form of a discourse analysis scheme that includes the identification of patterns of meaning changes, the use of terminology with certain connotations, and framing strategies used to form public opinion (Zhu & Wang, 2020). The analysis category includes shifting the meaning of key words, the choice of political metaphors, and the use of diction that has a psychological impact on the audience (Maccaferri & Newth, 2022). Text analysis software is also used to help identify repetitive linguistic patterns in political discourse.

The research procedure begins with the collection of data from various sources such as political speeches, debate transcripts, news articles, and government policy documents. The data is then encoded and classified based on the predetermined discourse analysis category. The next stage

is data interpretation with a critical discourse analysis approach, which aims to uncover the language manipulation strategies used in semantic shifts. The results of the analysis were then compared with linguistic and political communication theories to obtain a deeper understanding of the impact of semantic shifts in shaping public opinion.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study analyzed 78 political documents consisting of political speeches, debate transcripts, news articles, and government policy documents (Jakesch dkk., 2023). The documents come from different periods and are used to identify patterns of semantic shifts in political communication (Sousa-Silva, 2022). The data used are classified based on the main categories, namely changes in the meaning of keywords, the use of political metaphors, and framing strategies used in shaping public opinion.

Table 1. The following is a statistical table of semantic shifts in political discourse

Category	Sum	Percentage (%)
Use of Political Metaphors	25	32%
Shift in Keyword Meaning	22	28%
Framing Strategies in Political Issues	18	23%
Diction Manipulation	13	17%

The data showed that the use of political metaphors was the most dominant strategy in semantic shifts, accounting for 32% of the total documents analyzed. Shifting the meaning of keywords and framing strategies are also often used to shape public opinion (Danilina dkk., 2019). Diction manipulation covers a smaller percentage but still plays an important role in language manipulation in politics.

The results of the analysis show that political metaphors are often used to give a certain impression of a policy or political event. Politicians use terms that have strong connotations such as “war on poverty” or “economic defense” to create certain emotions in the audience (Baumgarten dkk., 2019). This strategy strengthens the narrative that you want to convey and helps shape public perception of an issue.

A shift in the meaning of keywords occurs when certain terms that previously had a neutral connotation are changed to be more positive or negative according to political interests. For example, the word “reformasi” is often used to describe positive change, even though in practice the policies carried out are not always in accordance with people's expectations. The framing strategy is used to reframe issues to make them look more favorable to certain political groups.

Diction manipulation involves the choice of words that can subtly lead public opinion. Words with strong meanings such as “oppression”, “freedom”, or “justice” are often used to emphasize or weaken a political argument (Khafaga, 2019). This choice of diction has a profound psychological influence and can trigger an emotional reaction from the audience, thus reinforcing the effect of language manipulation in political discourse.

The analyzed documents show that semantic shifts in political discourse do not only occur in politicians' speeches, but also in the media and government policy documents. In political speeches, politicians use more persuasive language and often change the meaning of words to suit their interests (Nartey, 2019). The media, on the other hand, has an important role to play in propagating and reinforcing this semantic shift.

Framing strategies in the media are often found in news headlines and news narratives. This framing creates bias in the delivery of information to the public and can indirectly affect public

opinion (Abdulmajid, 2019). In policy documents, the language used is often technical, but still contains framing elements that support certain policies to look more positive in the eyes of the public.

Politicians involved in political campaigns tend to use more emotional and persuasive phrases to increase appeal to voters. Campaigns often use words that have undergone a semantic shift to fit their communication strategy. This shift not only reflects political dynamics, but also shows how language can be used as a tool of power.

Further analysis shows that semantic shifts in politics are not only spontaneous, but are the result of well-designed communication strategies. This shift often occurs during important political periods such as general elections or when new policies are introduced. In this situation, changes in the meaning of words and framing are used to control the public narrative and dampen criticism.

The influence of the media in supporting or opposing semantic shifts is significant. Media that have certain political affiliations tend to amplify shifts in meaning in favor of their group. This creates a polarization of public opinion and can lead to distrust of information conveyed by the media that is considered biased.

In some cases, semantic shifts are also used to distract people from more important issues. By changing the term used to describe an event, politicians can avoid direct accountability for the policies they make. This shift shows how the power of language can be used to maintain or shift power in politics.

Semantic shifts in politics are closely related to persuasive communication strategies (Bharadhwaj dkk., 2024). This strategy is used to control public discourse and shape public opinion in accordance with certain political interests. Shifts in the meaning of words can create a bias in people's understanding of an issue and influence the political decisions they make.

In a global context, semantic shifts are also often used in international diplomacy. Countries are using language that has undergone a shift in meaning to support their foreign policy and build a positive image in the eyes of the world (Argyle dkk., 2023). This strategy allows countries to reframe global issues to better suit their interests.

This phenomenon is also related to political propaganda and disinformation. In some cases, semantic shifts are used to spread inaccurate information with the aim of creating confusion in society. By understanding these relationships, this study provides insight into how semantic shifts can be used as a tool of political manipulation.

One of the case studies in this study examines how the term “economic reform” has changed its meaning in various political contexts (Ash dkk., 2024). Initially, the term was used to describe structural changes in the economic system, but in some political contexts, it is used to justify policies that are not always in favor of the welfare of the community.

Another study looked at how the term “national security” is used in different countries to justify policies that restrict civil liberties (Brothers dkk., 2020). In some cases, governments use this term to strengthen control over society, although the policies taken are not always directly related to security threats.

Another interesting case is the change in meaning of “freedom of speech”, which in some situations is used as a justification to limit criticism of the government. The term has undergone a semantic change that depends on the political interests of the group that uses it.

The phenomenon of semantic shifts in political discourse shows that language has a very large role in shaping political reality. The manipulation of language by politicians and the media shows that shifting meanings are not only linguistic, but also have far-reaching social and political impacts.

The influence of semantic shifts on society can be seen in how they respond to an issue based on the language used in political communication (Baumgarten dkk., 2019). People who are unaware of language manipulation tend to receive information without questioning its meaning, which can lead to bias in their understanding of political issues.

By understanding this pattern of semantic shifts, this study provides deeper insights into how language manipulation strategies can be used in various political contexts and how people can be more critical in responding to the political discourse they receive.

The results of the study show that semantic shifts in political discourse are communication strategies used to shape public opinion and manipulate public perceptions. An analysis of 78 political documents reveals that political metaphors, shifting the meaning of keywords, framing strategies, and diction manipulation are the main techniques in changing the meaning of political language (Baker, 2023). This shift does not only occur in political speeches, but also in media coverage and government policies.

Political metaphors are found to be the most dominant tool in semantic shifts. Terms such as “war on poverty” or “economic defense” are used to build a certain image of government policies (Tankosić & Dovchin, 2023). Shifting the meaning of keywords is used to change the connotation of a term to suit certain political interests, such as how the term “reform” is often given a positive meaning even though the resulting policies do not always benefit the community.

Framing strategies in the media also play an important role in shaping the way people understand political issues. Through the strategic use of news headlines, the media can strengthen or weaken certain meanings in political communication. Diction manipulation further clarifies how different word choices can have a psychological impact on the audience, leading them to support or oppose a policy or political figure.

This study confirms the findings of Lakoff (2004) who stated that metaphors in politics are a very effective tool in influencing public opinion. The use of metaphors not only makes it easier for people to understand complex issues, but also directs their thinking according to the narrative desired by political actors (Tolochko dkk., 2019). These results also support the research of Fairclough (1995) which revealed that media framing in political news is often used to create bias in people's understanding of certain policies.

However, there are differences in the findings of this study compared to some previous studies. Some previous studies have focused more on semantic shifts in the context of political campaigns, while this study has expanded the scope of the analysis by observing how changes in the meaning of words take place in policy documents and media discourse (Farahani & Kazemian, 2021). The study also found that semantic shifts do not always occur as spontaneous reactions, but are more often communication strategies systematically designed to achieve specific political goals.

Additionally, the study highlights how semantic shifts can have a direct impact on voter behavior and political participation. In contrast to previous studies that focused solely on linguistic analysis, this study linked changes in meaning in politics to broader social consequences, such as societal polarization and increased misinformation in the public sphere.

The results of this study show that political language is not only a means of communication, but also a tool of power (Hart & Queralto, 2021). The ability of political actors to change the meaning of words for their benefit reflects that political discourse is an ongoing ideological battleground. The semantic shifts found in this study confirm that language politics does not only occur in formal debates, but also in everyday life through the media and public discourse.

Language manipulation in politics is a sign that people need to have critical awareness in understanding the discourse they receive. Ignorance of changes in the meaning of words in politics

can cause people to receive information without questioning the validity or purpose behind the narrative being constructed (Sousa-Silva, 2022). The semantic shift also indicates that politics is not only about policy, but also about how certain issues are packaged and perceived by the public.

This result is a warning that democracy can be threatened if language is used as a tool of manipulation without adequate political literacy among the public. Deliberate shifts in the meaning of words can lead to the normalization of policies that are actually detrimental to society, but still get support because they are packaged with language that has positive connotations.

The implication of these findings is that language has a huge role in shaping public policy and directing public opinion on certain political issues (Nurhadi & Masykuri, 2020). Awareness of the phenomenon of semantic shifts in politics can help the public in recognizing communication strategies used by political actors and the media. Political literacy and critical awareness in understanding political discourse are becoming increasingly important in the information age that is full of disinformation and language manipulation.

From an academic perspective, this research contributes to understanding how political language functions in shaping power structures and legitimacy in society (Stone dkk., 2023). By understanding semantic shift patterns, researchers in the fields of political linguistics and communication science can develop more effective analytical models to uncover how political actors use language as a propaganda tool.

For media practitioners and journalists, this study provides insight into how news framing and diction selection can affect public opinion. Awareness of the effects of semantic shifts can help journalists maintain neutrality in news reporting and avoid bias in compiling political narratives conveyed to the public.

The semantic shift in politics occurs because language is a very flexible tool in shaping social reality. Politicians and the media understand that words have the power to change the way people understand an issue, so they consciously use linguistic strategies to reinforce their agenda. The success of this strategy is supported by the fact that people often receive information passively without being aware of the change in meaning that occurs.

In the context of political communication, political actors tend to use more persuasive and emotional language to attract public attention. The shift in the meaning of the word allows them to convey controversial policies in a way that is more acceptable to the public. In many cases, the use of metaphors and framing in the media aims to control political narratives and maintain the legitimacy of power.

Mass media also plays a role in accelerating the process of semantic shift. Selective reporting and biased narrative formulation often reinforce new meanings that have been constructed by political actors (Black dkk., 2023). The repeated use of diction in the news creates a social consensus that supports certain narratives, so that people unconsciously accept the change in meaning as something natural and natural.

A broader political literacy strategy needs to be implemented so that people can understand how language is used to influence their opinions. Education on how to recognize language manipulation in politics must be included in the educational curriculum so that future generations are more critical in dealing with information presented in political discourse.

Further research is needed to analyze how semantic shifts in politics affect voter behavior. Comparative studies between different political systems can provide broader insights into how language manipulation is used in different contexts (Masroor dkk., 2019). Further studies can also explore how technology, such as artificial intelligence and social media, plays a role in accelerating the shift in meaning in political discourse.

Regulations against disinformation and language manipulation in the media need to be strengthened so that the public does not become a victim of political propaganda strategies (Weng & Lin, 2022). Transparency in the presentation of information by the media and the government must be a priority so that the public has access to more objective and unbiased information. With a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of semantic shifting, people can be more aware and critical in interpreting the information they consume.

CONCLUSION

Semantic shifts in political discourse are a systematic phenomenon and are used strategically by political actors to shape public opinion. The results show that the use of political metaphors, changes in the meaning of keywords, framing strategies in the media, and diction manipulation are the main techniques in political language manipulation. This shift is not only happening in political speech but also in government policies and media coverage. These findings show that semantic manipulation is not only a means of communication, but also a tool of power that can influence people's perception of a policy or political issue.

This research contributes to understanding the role of semantic shifts in political communication by developing an analysis model based on critical linguistics and discourse analysis. The approach used combines linguistic analysis with media and political studies, thus providing a more holistic perspective in identifying language manipulation strategies. With this approach, the research can provide deeper insights into how semantic shifts work in political contexts and how society can be more critical in responding to discourses constructed by politicians and the media.

The limitation of this research lies in the limited scope of data on political documents and certain media reports, so generalizations to all forms of political discourse still need further research. This analysis also does not explicitly measure the direct impact of semantic shifts on voter behavior or society at large. Further research could develop broader experimental or quantitative studies to measure how changes in the meaning of language in politics affect public perceptions, especially in the context of political campaigns and social media.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

Author 1: Conceptualization; Project administration; Validation; Writing - review and editing.

Author 2: Conceptualization; Data curation; In-vestigation.

DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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