Multimodal Metaphors Representing US Tariffs Policy 2025 in Cartoons Archive: A case study

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Abstract: This study analyzes multimodal metaphors in a collection of American political cartoons to investigate how US tariff policy is conceptualized, particularly focusing on potential implications that can be discerned within the dataset for the year 2025. Using ideas from cognitive linguistic theory about metaphor and multimodality, the research finds the main sources used to explain the complex idea of tariffs. The methodology involves a systematic examination of visual and textual elements within the cartoons to reveal underlying metaphorical mappings and their classification. Key findings highlight the prevalence of metaphors that frame tariffs as burdens, weapons, or dangerous medical treatment, influencing the perception of their economic and political impact. The analysis reveals how these multimodal metaphors shape the discourse surrounding US trade policies. Tariffs are portrayed as war, destruction, heavy load, and noxious substance. Powerful visual images, careful making and placement of works, little language and/or labeling, and active body language help create these metaphors. The application of cognitive linguistics provides valuable insights into how abstract economic policies are understood and communicated through visual media.

1. Introduction

In a global context where political and economic developments are

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interconnected, a nation's trade policy significantly impacts interstate commerce, foreign relations, and the everyday lives of its residents. The tariff policy in the United States is a highly contentious issue that has garnered significant public attention and debate. In 2025, tariff decisions have once more become prominent news, featured extensively across various media platforms, including political cartoons.

Cartoons, by their integration of imagery and text, have emerged as a potent rhetorical instrument for articulating social and political critique, thereby becoming a reflection of contemporary society. Metaphorical methods are frequently employed to render complex subjects more comprehensible, to elicit the viewer's emotions, and to persuade them (Forceville, 2005). In cognitive linguistics, metaphor transcends mere figurative language; it serves as a fundamental cognitive principle and significantly influences the formation of our conceptual framework and our perceptions and behaviors in the environment (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Such frameworks allow us to think about complex concepts by attuning our thoughts with less abstract, more concrete, and familiar experiences, and as a result exert powerful effects on our attitudes, beliefs, and policy preferences (Gentner & Markman, 1997).

Though there has been extensive analysis into metaphors of editorial cartoons - how they are employed and where they are found - there has not been as much research on how metaphors (including complex economic policies like the future U.S. tariff policy of 2025) describe them in political cartoons. This article aims to address these gaps by examining the multimodal metaphors present in the U.S. tariff policy of 2025 as depicted in American political cartoons. This article addresses certain research questions:

1. What are the primary multimodal metaphors used to represent US tariffs in 2025?

2. How do textual and visual modes interact to construct these metaphors?

This article underlines the function of multimodal metaphors in communicating intricate politico-economic matters to the public. The cognitive linguistic and artistically oriented approach to the utilization of linguistic resources in cartoons for the creation of metaphorical meaning, as well as the interpretation of this meaning by viewers, offers significant insights for both cognitive linguistics and political communication research. It can illuminate political caricature as an effective medium of social and political critique.

2. Literature review

2.1. Metaphor

For a couple of thousand years, metaphor was more or less exclusively seen

through a rhetorical prism, the figure of speech - a decorative effect that ornamented and enhanced language. Theorists such as Aristotle, who in the Rhetoric, described metaphor as "giving the thing a name that belongs to something else" (Aristotle, 2004: 1405b). This understanding treated metaphor as figurative language, something that was used as a poetic device by speakers or writers to create evocative images or feelings. Metaphor is more than just an efficient and colorful means of communicating our ideas. It is one of our most basic modes of thought. Metaphor is not merely a matter of language but an integral part of our conceptual system, as convincingly argued by Lakoff and Johnson who explain that it enables us to understand and experience one kind of thing in terms of another. This involves an association between two domains of concepts: the source domain, which is the more concrete and well-understood, and the target domain, which is the more abstract or less familiar (Kövecses, 2010: 5). For example, the metaphor "Argument is war" appropriates the well-understood field of war to organize our comprehension of the more elusive concept of argument. This mapping is not just an arbitrary one; it is a systematic one that allows us to understand a variety of things about some target domain in terms of some source domain (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980: 46).

Metaphor involves a mapping of knowledge from the source domain to the target domain, including entities, attributes, and relationships (Kövecses, 2010: 16). Lakoff describes the Invariance Principle, which is the idea that whenever we map the concepts from one domain onto another, we preserve the basic organization of the concepts but mold them to fit with the organization of the new domain. However, the source-target adjunctivity is not a straightforward transfer. Conceptual blending theory, as introduced by Fauconnier and Turner, proposes a more dynamic process in which elements from various input spaces are blended into a "blend" - a new mental space with novel structure and content. Compression can result from this blending operation, in which intricate structures in the blend are regarded as simple, thus aiding cognition (Fauconnier & Turner, 2000).

Metaphors occur in so many guises and so many roles. There is a difference between ordinary, commonplace metaphors, which are so deeply embedded in the language that we are hardly conscious of their use or even their meanings (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980: 13), and novel (conceptual) metaphors, a little more "literary," if you will, and less frequent, typically used for artistic or rhetorical purposes (Gibbs, 2006: 9). In addition, metaphors can be classified according to their role. Orientational metaphors structure our ideas about the world in spatial terms, "HAPPY IS UP, SAD IS DOWN" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980: 14), while ontological metaphors help us materialize abstract ideas as beings or substances, "the mind is a container" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980: 25). Structural metaphors give more elaborate scaffolding to the target by mapping a more intricate source onto it, as in the "argument is war" metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980: 77). And finally, metaphors are not just linguistic; they affect how we think, how we reason and infer, how we

construe abstract ideas, and how we act (Gibbs, 2006: 4). They even participate in second language acquisition/in learning a second language (Lakoff, 2008: 179).

The examination of metaphor has developed and given rise to some extensions and controversies in the field. Extended conceptual metaphor theory (ECMT) takes the fundamental concepts of conceptual metaphor theory (CMT) and examines specific issues such as the attitude toward context, our knowledge of metaphor processing in real time, and the way in which metaphor interacts with literal language (Kövecses, 2020: 2). ECMT challenges the traditional notion that there is a complete distinction between metaphorical and literal language, arguing that metaphor is much more pervasive in our use of language than previously believed. Although conceptual metaphor theory has been accepted as valid by many, it has also been criticized. Some scholars, as Gibbs mentions, have challenged whether metaphors dictate thinking to so great an extent, emphasizing the complex relationship between metaphor 36 and other cognitive functions (Gibbs, 2006: 1).

2.2. Conceptual Metaphor Theory

The term 'metaphor' is also used as a technical term in cognitive linguistics or CMT, a cornerstone of the cognitive viewpoint, proposes that metaphors are not mere linguistic embellishments, but that they also underpin systematic mappings between conceptual domains (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980: 5). According to CMT, a target domain (the concept we want to understand) is understood relative to a more concrete source domain (the experience to which we refer). This mapping is obtained by a collection of mapping correspondences between the source and the target domain items (Kövecses, 2010: 16).

Take the omnipresent conceptual metaphor "Argument is war". This understanding isn't only evident in phrases like "Your points are indefensible," "He attacked my position," or "She shot down my arguments." Instead, it indicates a deeper conceptual map where participants in an argument are considered combatants; their claims are weapons, and the end is victory or defeat (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980: 77). And this metaphorical schema guides our thinking and arguing - it tells us both how we should argue and how we should react to the arguments we hear.

Another classic example would be "Time is money". This metaphorical concept is exemplified in various idiomatic expressions, including "I've spent a lot of time on this," "Don't waste my time," and "He is living on borrowed time" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980: 68). The source domain of "money", in a nutshell, gives us a physical model for the abstract notion of "time" - something we can measure, spend, save, or squander as if it were a tangible thing. These examples show how systematic conceptual metaphors are, in that they can give rise to a variety of linguistic expressions and, more significantly, organize our thinking about the target

domain (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980: 46). CMT further stresses that these mappings are primarily monosemic, with the ABSTRACT conceptualization being informed by the CONCRETE domain, and not the other way around (Lakoff, 2008: 182).

2.3. Previous studies on multimodal metaphor

The notion of metaphor becomes even more complicated when it is taken into account in relation to multimodality. Multimodality encourages us to think outside the linguistic box and to recognize that there are other modes of communication, such as the visual, the gestural, the musical, and the layout that enact meaning (Bezemer & Jewitt, 2010: 180). Each mode realizes particular kinds of meaning: images are very good at representing relationships of space; language is very good at representing relationships of time, cause, and response (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006: 20). Multimodal analysis tends, in many cases, to rest on social semiotics and 'the ways in which meaning in, with, and through semiotic resources is socially and culturally defined' (Bezemer & Jewitt, 2010: 182).

Forceville proposes that a multimodal metaphor is a metaphor that two or more modes materialize in coordination to produce its metaphorical sense (Liu & Li, 2022: 2). It is not enough that one brings together metaphors in different modalities; rather, it is the interaction among these metaphors that leads to a single metaphorical meaning (Liu & Li, 2022: 3). I do not say that there are already figurative meanings in two modal modes, but that "a coherent metaphorical meaning" is constructed in the interaction of them (Liu & Li, 2022:3). Multimodal metaphor analysis has to be multifaceted. Instead, we are faced with locating temperature-related source and target domains that can be realized across different modes and investigating how they map onto one another (Liu & Li, 2022: 5). This analysis, in the visual mode, comprises the following: composition (how the elements are arranged), color (and symbolic meaning of the same), and vectors (lines that direct the viewer's eye) (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Linguistic features are analyzed by identifying metaphorical expressions and examining the narrative structure into which they are incorporated. Vital to multimodal analysis is, however, an understanding of the intermodal relations, that is, how visual and textual elements, and possibly other modes, combine to make up the full metaphorical meaning (Bezemer & Jewitt, 2010: 185).
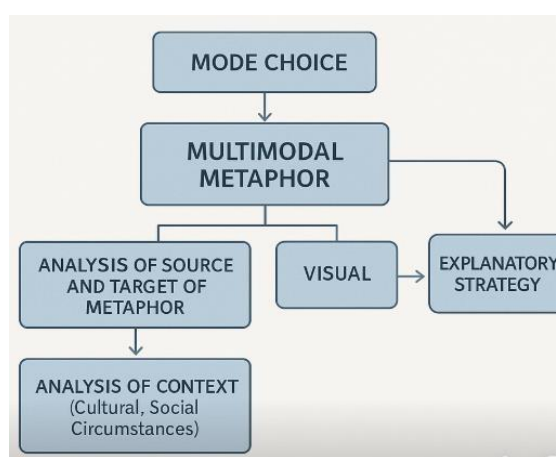
The research on multimodal metaphor has important implications for our knowledge of cognition and communication. Therefore, multimodal metaphors can provide more direct, intuitive, and flexible ways of understanding abstract concepts, taking advantage of various modes to help create a complete, more comprehensive understanding (Liu & Li, 2022: 4). When used effectively, they can be extremely powerful tools of persuasion because they utilize visual as well as cognitive processing, maximizing both the emotional and intellectual dimensions of the

message. Summing up, investigating multimodal metaphors might be used to explore cultural values and ideologies, thereby uncovering what is taken for granted and believed to be true, which influences the way a society makes sense of the world. Forceville & Urios-Aparisi (2009) further explained clearly types of multimodal metaphors:

Pictorial Metaphor: The metaphor is mainly expressed visually.

Verbal Metaphor: It is the way of expression of the metaphor through words.

Pictorial-Verbal Metaphors: The metaphor emerges through the collusion of the visual and the verbal.

Analytical Framework of Multimodal Metaphor. Source: Forceville & Urios-Aparisi (2009).

The study of multimodal metaphors in cartoons necessitates careful attention to how different modes contribute to the overall metaphorical meaning. This requires analyzing the visual components, the linguistic components, and most importantly, how they interact to generate a viable metaphorical expression.

3. Methodology

The article examined if and how various metaphors were employed in the sample of political cartoons selected to represent US tariff policy of 2025. The review examines closely individual visual elements (the objects depicted, the actions suggested, their sizes, where they are, and the colors) as well as the accompanying textual elements (the main titles, captions, dialogue) and the arrangement of these elements (how the elements are related to each other and where the viewer is directed to look). The goal of this phase was to make explicit the modes of metaphorical expression which are operating and the complex relations between these modes in meaning making.

The data material used in the content analysis was five (5) political cartoons. These cartoons were selected following strict criteria: they had to clearly refer to the United States' tariffs policy in 2025 (evident through clear text or image), have been published in reputable American news sources and the images made easily accessible online (to validate their authenticity and cultural background), include both images and text (crucial for the analysis of how these two work together to create meaning), and also represent diverse artistic styles, political opinions, and different features of the tariffs policy. A systematic and comprehensive search was carried out on relevant online databases with pre-specified specific keywords, which was subsequently followed by a rigorous screening process to guarantee a rigorous conformity to the above-mentioned criteria.

3.1. Data collection methods

The cartoons investigated in this research were collected in a systematic fashion from the 'open' online archives of leading American newspapers and magazines known to influence public affairs. The search terms used related to US tariffs in the year 2025, and specific genre terms for which political cartoons were classified. A strict selection process was then applied to ensure the cartoons obtained fully complied with the established criteria. Every chosen cartoon was meticulously re-captured as a high-quality digital image with detailed meta-data referencing the original source and the identified author (where available), as well as the exact date of publication.

3.2. Data analysis method and procedure

The author conducted a detailed "reading" of each cartoon, systematically coding relevant visual, textual, and spatial features. Among these, the detailed coding process involved a close scrutiny of the: objects depicted, actions implied, salient attributes, spatial arrangement, and language features (e.g., individual words, important phrases and unique text style) and apparent cultural symbols found in the cartoon.

From some of the elementary coded building blocks, we meticulously examined relationship between clear source domains (e.g. weapons, weight, war) and the target domain (i.e. the concrete file tariffs policy, the general national economy, international trade) to find potential metaphorical expressions. The insights from Conceptual Metaphor Theory and Conceptual Blending Theory guided the meticulous selection and analysis of these intricate metaphor relations.

The interaction and collaboration among the varied modes of communication (e.g. pictures, text, and the spatial environment) in constructing and consolidating the named metaphors was closely scrutinized. This examined how text can reflect or add to the suggested meanings in images, and vice versa - how images can assist us

in understanding text's meanings. This included the elaboration of the manner in which textual extracts could potentially serve as annotations, explanations, or even expansions upon the metaphorical meanings predominantly conveyed by visual representations, as well as the means through which visual elements could assist in the interpretation of textual metaphors. Layout was also heavily considered for how it could create and reinforce the deeper metaphorical connections such as those representing contrast, proximity, importance.

The metaphorical expressions found were categorized according to the overall source domain theme, yet not necessarily by war, as main types of this metaphor, body metaphors, obstacle metaphors etc.

Elaborated visual and textual schemas were prepared in order to represent the specific and subtle mappings between the source and target conceptual domains in the frame of each cartoon under study.

4. Results

4.1. General Analysis

Initial examination of the U.S. Tariffs cartoons from 2025, we can see a process of how different modes can chain together to form strong multimodal metaphors. Each cartoon employs a blend of visual, spatial, textual, and gestural modes to translate complex trade ideas into simple and forceful pictures. The **visual mode** of representation is the key, through symbols including torpedoes, cannons, and blankets - used to represent tariffs. These symbols enable us to make sense of the cartoon's content at a glance. The special mode decides where you control risk or power by means of the situation of figures or anything in the picture. Depicting Uncle Sam trapped under falling containers or in a hospital bed means a signifier that the economy is weak or threatened. The **textual mode** utilizes text in the form of labels or speech bubbles that reinforce the message of the image. "TARIFFS" and "PRICES" help clear up the metaphor. Finally, emotion is added by the gestural mode, for instance, the facial expression or body posture. A character displaying fear, anger, or fatigue effectively conveys the cartoonist's intention to the viewer. In combination, these kinds of modes are the sources of poignant imagery that is effectual yet easily comprehended. These cartoons demonstrate how visual media can employ multimodal metaphors to unpack big topics like trade policy in innovative and critical ways.

4.2. Specific Analysis

Figure 1 depicts U.S. tariffs in 2025 as a cascade of heavy shipping

containers falling from the sky. There is one big container with "TARIFFS" written in blazing letters on it, and a whole bunch of other containers are tumbling down around it. Uncle Sam stands beneath them, his smoking jacket bearing the word ECONOMY, a common personification of the U.S. economy. He has a small black umbrella, attempting to shield himself from the raining containers. The central metaphor here is TARIFFS ARE FALLING BURDENS, or more briefly, TARIFFS ARE DANGERS FROM ABOVE.

1. **Figure 1: "Tariffs are a heavy weight."**

This suggests that the economy is currently at risk due to its tariff policy, which is represented by large, heavy objects that can cause serious injuries. The visual elements in this cartoon are particularly striking. That the containers are so large makes the small Uncle Sam seem all the more in danger. Dark shadows below the containers depict their rapid and forceful descent. Its space mode also matters. The depiction of Uncle Sam at the bottom, in the middle, conveys his victim status and the absence of escape. The language is basic but effective. The words "TARIFFS" and "ECONOMY" both help viewers grasp the meaning within seconds. Uncle Sam's tight grip on the umbrella and his terrified gaze indicate that he is aware of an impending disaster, yet he is powerless to prevent it. The umbrella is also a symbol: it is too small to shield him from such large dangers. This cartoon employs a combination of these modes to defame the 2025 tariffs. It suggests that, rather than protecting the U.S. economy, the tariffs might actually be putting it at risk in a grave way.

Target/Source Domain Mapping	
Target domain	Tariffs
Source domain	Heavy weight
Mapping	Container-sized shipping is written as tariffs.
	The economy is placed onto the Uncle Sam model.

| | The action of levying tariffs is superimposed over the container's drop. |
| | The insufficient umbrella is where economic vulnerability is occulted. |

2. Figure 2: "Tariffs are a War"

Figure 2 deploys the metaphor "Tariff is a War" to depict a trade conflict between the U.S. and Canada in 2025. In the middle, Uncle Sam (an American symbol) and a beaver (a Canadian symbol) face off next to a pair of giant cannons that are labeled "TARIFFS." The guns are both aimed point blank at each other. And above them, a huge speech bubble says, "READY… AIM…" The title above that bubble, of course, is "TRADE WAR." This arrangement makes the notion of tariffs a military action: Both sides are engaged in a preparation to attack, even if that attack is not with bullets or bombs, but changes to trade policy. Therefore, we prioritize the visual mode above all else. National symbols - the American flag, Canadian flag, as well as Uncle Sam and the beaver - are the cartoon's visual shorthand, so that viewers can readily identify who is who. The guns, depicted in a frivolous but serious style, want to remind us how dangerous such matters can be. Now, the fuses ignite, instilling a sense of urgency and danger. The spatial mode is also of importance. In each, the figures are shooting the cannons themselves, indicating that they're not just firing the weapons, they are within the line of fire. The characters' gestures and facial expressions are vital as well. Uncle Sam, on the left, and the beaver, on the right, both appear nervous, a sign, perhaps, that neither side truly desires a full-blown trade war. The image is supported by the textual mode with the command "READY… AIM…" funneling in, straight from the battlefield. By blending those modes - visual, spatial or gestural and linguistic - the cartoon demonstrates, as actual wars do, that tariff wars can escalate, and both sides

may feel some pain. The picture attacks the combative strategy of tariffs, and claims that it is a mistake to make trade policy a battlefield.

Target/Source Domain Mapping	
Target domain	Tariffs
Source domain	War
Mapping	Taxes are superimposed on missiles. Trade policies are being overlaid with acts of war. A spat between countries is transposed to the context of a war. The tariff is mapped on to the missile blast.

3. Figure 3: "Tariffs are a Blanket upon Price."

Figure 3 uses the metaphor "Tariffs are a blanket that covers and distorts prices" to interpret the impact of U.S. tariff policy in 2025. (For a caption that is cute, in one image there is a person who looks like a king, crowned and whose facial features resemble President Trump, raising a large blanket labeled "BLANKET TARIFFS"). The blanket is draped over a large green form labeled "PRICES" as if shaking or rising from beneath. The metaphor implies, rather, that tariffs, particularly broad or "blanket" ones, are not sheltering prices, holding them even. But no, they're covering them in a way that obscures the actual impact and destabilizes us. Visual mode predominates in this cartoon. Solving its blanket over the price object suggests that there is something going on beneath. The italicized stretching and bending of the word "PRICES" serve to perpetuate the notion that the prices of goods are somehow manipulated. The image is a night scene, with stars and a moon, which may be taken to mean that this activity is done under the cover of darkness, not out in the open light. The figure gripping the blanket is confidently and seriously drawn in such a manner that it may be both looking

confident and even stubborn at the same time - because they are a bit shaky, the results. The spatial mode reveals the pressure as the price is being shoved down by the blanket, giving the appearance that pressure is used. The linguistic method reinforces the visual metaphor, presenting the viewer with unambiguous headwords such as "BLANKET TARIFFS" and "PRICES" to inform our interpretation. The gestural mode contributes to the meaning through the fact the character has the blanket coiled around his arm, which indicates control. This cartoon critiques the concept of universal tariffs. It raises the possibility that these policies are more harmful than beneficial, and particularly so in the case of the price distortions that are difficult to manage or predict.

Target/Source Domain Mapping	
Target domain	Tariffs
Source domain	A blanket on price
Mapping	Tariffs are laid over a heavy blanket.
	By bilinear map, prices are transferred to the smothered entity. The action of imposing a tariff is superimposed on the act of smothering.
	The rising prices are charted onto the choking.

Figure 4: "Tariffs are a weapon."

The visual mode is excellent for Figure 4. The bat is much larger than other bats you would find, and it is based on an object designed to do more than just knock. The word on the bat is "TARIFFS," and the order definitely includes the intended   symbolic meaning. The figure's pose is also significant. It looks angry, arms crouching and ready to lash out, with sinewy muscles and a serious face -

strength and resolve. Gestural mode carries emotion through physical expression, and this photograph is no exception. The spatial mode depicts the figure as occupying the most part of the image's space, suggesting that his actions and methods are the primary focus. The code is simple and declarative. The New Torpedo Bat humorously critiques idioms related to weary war. It has the feel of a neat product or an invention, which is irony personified because a weapon like this should never be considered a positive and something for trade. Altogether, these modes construct a metaphor that denounces tariffs as dangerous tools instead of smart policies. It implies that this tack is too blunt and perhaps as dangerous as it is helpful, certainly if used without sufficient care or strategy. The cartoon is a warning about wielding economic power as if it were a weapon - and the unintentional and destructive consequences that follow.

Target/Source Domain Mapping	
Target domain	Tariffs.
Source domain	A weapon
Mapping	Tariffs are hit by the torpedo/bat.
	The tariffs are superimposed over an aggressive act with a weapon.
	The weight on the economy from tariffs is laid out like the destructive potential of a weapon.

Figure 5: "Tariffs are a dangerous medical treatment"

Figure 5 presents a powerful metaphor comparing tariffs to a risky medical procedure.

In the

image, Donald Trump is wearing what looks like a doctor's coat next to Uncle Sam, who personifies the United States. As you may have seen, Uncle Sam is sick in the hospital - looking frail and pale. He is connected to an IV drip labeled "TARIFF Bleach," juxtaposing the word "tariff" with what is unmistakably a household bottle of bleach, a poison. What Trump is saying to Uncle Sam is, "Just a little discomfort you feel will pass…" Ironically, Uncle Sam evidently experiences a significant amount of discomfort. The metaphor is of tariffs in 2025 as medicine for the economy, but the medicine itself is harmful, perhaps even lethal. The cartoon lampoons the notion that tariffs are good for the economy by portraying them as something poisonous being injected into the system.

Visual mode is fundamental. The expressions on the faces, the colors, and the body language do all the work. Trump appears strong and in control, but Uncle Sam is in a cold sweat, pale and obviously in distress. The bleach bottle on the IV tube doesn't belong in a hospital setting, signaling that something is off. The textual mode, particularly the phrase "Just a little discomfort you feel will pass…" contributes to the sarcasm as well as to the way in which the speaker (Trump) is not recognizing the real pain that is being inflicted. The gestural mode also has a part to play - Uncle Sam's limp hand and drooping mouth render him helpless and ill, and Trump's raised body and serene face demonstrate that he does not see or care. That spatial mode puts Uncle Sam in the lower right, below, weak and small, while Trump stands tall, above, highlighting the imbalance in the power dynamic. This cartoon is a stark cautionary reminder: the use of tariffs as a "cure" can boomerang and damage the very economy they seek to make immune. The cartoon humorously and with exaggeration depicts a number of possible bribery schemes that could occur if tariffs are given as a solution to the transshipment problem.

Target/Source Domain Mapping	
Target domain	Tariffs
Source domain	Dangerous Medical Treatment
Mapping	Uncle Sam is a sick patient
	The IV drip monitoring "Tariff bleach" The figure resembling Trump as a doctor

Figure	Target	Source	Key Mapping Examples

	Domain	Domain	
1	Tariffs (Textual)	Heavy objects (Visual)	Tariffs → Heavy containers; Economy → Uncle Sam; Imposing tariffs → Falling containers
2	Tariffs (Textual)	War (Visual)	Tariffs → Missiles; Trade war → Warfare; Imposing tariffs → Launching missiles
3	Tariffs (Textual)	Blanket (Visual)	Tariffs → Heavy blanket; Prices → Smothered entity; Imposing tariffs → Smothering
4	Tariffs (Textual)	Destructive weapon (Visual)	Tariffs → Torpedo/bat; Imposing tariffs → Using a weapon; Negative impact → Destructive power
5	American Tariffs (Textual)	Dangerous Medical Treatment (Visual)	"TARIFF Bleach" → a toxic treatment. Uncle Sam's ill appearance → weakened state of the US economy.

Table 1: *Conceptual and Modal Mapping of Multimodal Metaphors in Political Cartoons on*

U.S. Tariffs (2025)

Referring to Table 1, the prominent modes employed in these characters are visual because very single cartoon draws a huge amount from the visual to communicate meaning metaphorically. Also, the target domain is always the tariffs depicted in the text is used to name items, to explain concepts (such as "TARIFFS," "TRADE WAR," "ECONOMY," and "PRICES"), and occasionally to supply context or the speech of a character. From the individual perspective, the best metaphors emerge from a combination of visual and textual constructs. The visual grounds the text, and the text makes the visual vivid and powerful.

5. Discussions

The above political cartoons show that the cartoonists use different modes together to create strong and meaningful visual metaphors about U.S. tariffs in 2025. The visual mode is particularly important and most commonly used. In these cartoons, each cartoon effectively uses clear symbols, exaggerated shapes, and recognizable figures to help the audience quickly understand the metaphor. In the case of the cartoon with the shipping containers, the tariffs are represented as heavy objects falling from the sky, and the U.S. economy appears weak and at risk. In the 3rd figure, tariffs are power and destruction represented by a torpedo-shaped baseball bat. These visual signals can help make abstract policies more tangible, facilitating our ability to think, feel, and act on issues we previously considered distant abstractions.

There is also an important spatial mode. This is about how things are laid out in the cartoon. American characters, such as Uncle Sam or Donald Trump, are generally placed in the middle, or at the bottom, of larger and more dangerous objects, such as wasp nests, weapons, or poisonous IV drips. This position indicates a power struggle and danger or urgency. The spatial decisions assist in directing the viewer's gaze and upholding the metaphoric message.

The textual mode is also useful. The words "TARIFFS," ''ECONOMY," and the phrases "Ready... Aim..." or "Just a little discomfort you feel will pass…" are employed to describe, or to add to the metaphor. This phrasing typically includes irony or sarcasm to reflect the cartoonist's stance on the policy.

And lastly, the gestural, especially the facial and body, language of the characters, brings in emotion. For instance, Uncle Sam tends to look terrified or ill - Mr. Trump seems confident, angry, or nonchalant. The cartoonists use these motions to evoke the message's emotional resonance.

One limitation of the present study was the small size of the sample, and that the sample might not include the full range of multimodal metaphors that are employed in media about U.S. tariffs in 2025. The selection of cartoons is subjective and may not cover all political or artistic views or publications. The culture-related issue is a second limitation of this research. This study is mainly focusing on the interpretation of metaphors but does not investigate how different groups, specifically non-American groups, consume the same metaphors and interpret them. Finally, four dominant modes - visual, spatial, linguistic, and gestural - were analyzed, but less attention was paid to other potential modes, such

as color symbolism or typography. Further studies can enlarge the dataset and include more varied cultural perspectives to allow a more complete picture of how multimodal metaphors operate in political communication in differing circumstances.

6. Conclusion

The article has demonstrated that multimodal metaphors in political cartoons contribute strongly to how the general public comes to understand complex trade policies such as U.S. tariffs in 2025. Using a combination of visual, spatial, linguistic, and gestural modes, they not only tell stories or communicate ideas but also establish what can be argued as a creative and communicative project that is both easy to understand and deeply moving. Analysis of the cartoons like those we chose will show that the prevalent metaphorical concepts through which tariffs are portrayed are war, destruction, heavy load, and noxious substance. They are complemented by powerful visual images, careful making and placement of works, little language and/or labeling, and active body language that help create these metaphors.

Every way adds another layer of meaning and helps to make abstract economic concepts more tangible and understandable. The integration of these modes enables a deeper "emotional connection" with the audience. This article demonstrates the utility of applying such cognitive linguistic and multimodal theoretical analysis to visual media. And it sheds light on how cartoons are not just fun but also tools for social and political critique. To sum up, visual multimodal metaphors are powerful devices to discuss political and economic issues with a broad audience in an unproblematic, convincing, and thought-provoking way.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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