The role of metaphor in shaping the identity and agenda of the United Nations: The imagining of an international community and international threat

This article examines the representation of the United Nations in speeches delivered by its Secretary General. It focuses on the role of metaphor in constructing a common ‘imagining’ of international diplomacy and legitimizing an international organizational identity. The SG legitimizes the organization, in part, through the delegitimization of agents/actions/events constructed as threatening to the international community and to the well-being of mankind. It is a desire to combat the forces of menace or evil which are argued to motivate and determine the organizational agenda. This is predicated upon an international ideology of humanity in which difference is silenced and ‘working towards the common good’ is emphasized. This is exploited to rouse emotions and legitimize institutional power. Polarization and antithesis are achieved through the employment of metaphors designed to enhance positive and negative evaluations. The article further points to the constitutive, persuasive and edifying power of topic and situationally motivated metaphors in speech-making.