



A Critical Pragmatic Study of Contextual Metaphors as Covert Identity Markers in Closed Discourse Communities

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Article Info

ISSN (Online): 2582-7138

Impact Factor (RSIF): 8.04

Volume: 07

Issue: 03

May-June 2026

Received: 22-02-2026

Accepted: 24-03-2026

Published: 26-04-2026

Page No: 114-120

Abstract

The study explores the function of metaphors as indexical diacritics of identity in closed groups. It considers the function of local parlances in shaping identity, membership and boundary for small groups like corporate teams, gaming guilds, activist organisations and first responders. The importance of metaphors for meaning transfer and construction has been acknowledged. The function of metaphor in society has not been adequately investigated, particularly with respect to small group interactions and their impact on society. The study investigates the use of metaphors regarding membership and boundaries by resorting to notions from conceptual metaphor theory, pragmatics and critical discourse analysis. The analysis showed that metaphors are crucial for creating a cohesive group and contributing to well-interacting members. But, this positive side has a negative flipside - it nurtures elitism and exclusion that poses ethical dilemma for its proponents including leaders of organizations. The paper is a contribution to the field of sociolinguistics and society as well as future research on online groups and subcultures.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.54660/IJMRGE.2026.7.3.114-120>

Keywords: Contextual metaphors, closed discourse communities, pragmatics, social identity, critical discourse analysis, in-group cohesion, exclusion mechanisms

1. Introduction

1.1. Problem Statement

Language is not just a tool of communication; it is a dynamic medium of communication through which social identity is constructed, negotiated, and maintained, especially within tightly bound groups of people who share a common pool of knowledge that helps define who they are, how they maintain their identity, and how they achieve internal cohesion. Within these groups of people, metaphors have also transcended their usual cognitive functions and have assumed the status of covert identity markers that help define who the "insiders" and the "outsiders" are. Despite the extensive research that has gone into the cognitive functions of metaphors (Lakoff & Johnson 4; Kövecses 10), there has been very little attention given to the identity functions of metaphors within tightly bound groups of people where the understanding of metaphorical expressions has assumed the status of an initiation rite into the group. This has created a lacuna in sociolinguistic and pragmatic studies that needs to be filled if the functions of metaphor as a subtle tool of social control and identity within both the physical and virtual worlds is to be understood. The ethical implications of the power of insiders over outsiders have not yet been fully understood. The outsiders may include new members who are just joining the group. Insiders have power over outsiders, which poses various ethical issue related to unfair hierarchies and the newcomer's experiences in a group. The ethical consequences of the power relation between insiders and outsiders have not been sufficiently considered, and this problem merits further investigation from an ethical, sociological, linguistic and organisational perspective. Such research might help explain the role of power in small, cohesive groups.

1.2. Aims of the Paper

The purpose of the study is to examine how highly contextual metaphors serve as indices of an identity in closed communities. And it attempts to show the role metaphorical communication plays in creating group coherence, social norms and power dynamics. It is also an investigation of how the comprehension of metaphors functions as both a cognitive and social instrument. It builds out from the insights of Conceptual Metaphor Theory as well as pragmatic conceptions of context and meaning. It also examines how concealed signs operate in domains such as corporate teams, the military and on web.

1.3. Procedures of the Paper

The study is a mixed-methods study. The concept metaphor theory provides principles of how metaphors influence on the languages of groups. Pragmatic contexts and effects help to make sense of how the metaphors are being interpreted beyond their literal content. Discourse critical analysis is employed to assess power relations, dressing-in and coming-out issues in the metaphorical language of closed groups. Additionally, the study draws on examples of corporate culture, military and first responder organizations, as well as online gaming and fandom. It also examines the virtual and physical consequences of these metaphorical identity markers.

1.4. Scope and Structure

The study focuses on concrete discourse communities where metaphors are adopted as local, socially constructed identity-signs. The analysis also provides a discussion of specific discourse communities, such as companies, military organizations or online discourse communities, in which the role of language is paramount for group cohesion and regulation. 2 Chapter 1 Introduction The structure of the paper is as follows: In Chapter 2, we introduce the theoretical background. In Chapter 3 metaphor is viewed as unarticulated sign of identity. Chapter 4 includes case studies. The matters of power and ethics are addressed in chapter 5. Chapter 6 concludes the article by emphasizing the findings, limitations, and directions for future research.

1.5. Value of the Paper

Although this research is narrow in scope, it creates a link between linguistics, sociolinguistics, and social psychology. There are also some interesting insights into organizational communication, leadership, and online community management. Additionally, this research helps to illuminate the role of metaphorical language in social interaction.

2. Theoretical Framework

In order to investigate how metaphors function as hidden markers of identity in closed discourse communities, it is necessary to have a strong theory. This theory should be based on conceptual metaphor theory, pragmatics, and critical discourse analysis. These theories, in a combined sense, will offer a means of exploring the cognitive nature of metaphors and their social and pragmatic use, and this will enable us to realize how power, identity, and group membership are being mediated through language.

2.1. Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT)

According to the Conceptual Metaphor Theory developed by Lakoff and Johnson, metaphor is not only used as a figure of

speech but is rather an essential tool to comprehend the world. According to Lakoff and Johnson, “Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature” (4). Metaphorical understanding in closed discourse communities extends beyond the way the world is understood. It also extends to the way the social world is understood. In this regard, metaphors in closed discourse communities’ function as signs of shared knowledge among the members. Kövecses expanded the metaphor concept by emphasizing the importance of context in metaphors. He asserts that metaphors can be culture-bound or contextual. They can also reflect the values, beliefs, and practices of specific groups (Kövecses 10). In closed communities, metaphors may arise naturally. They can be used to express shared experiences in the groups. These metaphors may function as a way of understanding the world but also function as a way of identifying the members of the group. In this case, metaphors function as a way of identifying the ‘other’ or the ‘insider.’

Although the initial theory of conceptual metaphor focuses on the idea of universality, the later theory focuses on the idea of variability. Gibbs states that “people’s metaphorical understandings are deeply influenced by cultural models and social interaction” (32), which shows that the idea that the metaphor used in closed communities is not only a cognitive device but is also socially constructed. Charteris-Black argues that metaphor is often used to serve an ideological purpose, especially when routinized in institutional discourse (21).

Furthermore, the conceptual metaphor theory provides a means to analyze how these metaphorical expressions may be operating on different levels. The expressions may be tapping into cognition, culture, and social hierarchies. By examining the relationship between the source and target domains in these metaphors, it is possible to uncover the apparent and hidden meaning behind these metaphorical expressions.

2.2. Pragmatics: Context and Implicature

Although the conceptual metaphor theory aids in the explanation of the cognitive process of the metaphor, pragmatics aids in the explanation of the role of context in the interpretation of the metaphor, thus emphasizing the social aspect of the use of the metaphor. In closed discourse communities, the interpretation of the meaning of the metaphor depends on the shared knowledge of the context of the situation. Grice’s cooperative principles of communication and the theory of implicature are also important in the explanation of the interpretation of the meaning of the metaphor in discourse communities. According to Grice, “What is said and what is implicated are two distinct aspects of communication, and listeners rely on context and shared knowledge to infer the latter” (45).

The use of pragmatics would also help to clarify the manner in which the members of the discourse community would interpret the meaning of the metaphor to identify themselves as members of the discourse community, which would highlight the social aspect of the use of the metaphor in the discourse community. For instance, the interpretation of the meaning of the metaphor used in the discourse community of a particular corporate organization or gaming clan would require the members of the discourse community to have shared knowledge of the context of the situation, which would not be available to outsiders, thus acting as a cognitive filter as well as a sociolinguistic filter. Levinson states that,

“pragmatic meaning is a function of both linguistic form and contextual factors, including the interlocutors’ knowledge, beliefs, and social goals” (112), thus highlighting the social aspect of the interpretation of the meaning of the metaphor in the discourse community.

Moreover, the use of pragmatics would allow us to explore the dynamic relationship between metaphor, context, and power. In this sense, the processes of inclusion and exclusion become visible. At the same time, power relations embedded in the social aspect of discourse become visible.

2.3. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

The methods and theory of CDA enable the analysis of metaphors as tools for social power, ideology, and identity. According to Fairclough, “language is a social practice. As social practice, language is shaped by social structures and at the same time shapes social structures, including social institutions and relations of power” (Fairclough 2). In closed discourse communities, metaphors control social groups. They identify who belongs and who does not. Van Dijk adds that discourse is more than just a way to share knowledge. It has power, ideology, and identity, particularly in cases where access to knowledge is unevenly distributed (van Dijk 54). By using the theory of conceptual metaphors and pragmatics together with CDA, it is possible to analyze metaphors and their control over social identity.

CDA can be used to analyze the ethical dimension of metaphors in group communication. Although metaphors can be used to enhance group cohesion and communication, they can also be used to promote elitism and social exclusion. This indicates that metaphors in language are not neutral and have ethical implications for closed discourse communities.

2.4. Synthesis of Theoretical Framework

This research aims to develop a wide framework using conceptual metaphor theory, pragmatics, and critical discourse analysis. This framework will allow us to investigate local metaphors as invisible markers of identity in closed discourse communities. Conceptual metaphor theory, pragmatics, and critical discourse analysis can aid in developing an overall framework, which can be used to explore the different dimensions of metaphor as a linguistic, social, and cultural phenomenon, after which case studies can be discussed with respect to their practical applications.

3. Metaphors as Covert Identity Markers

Within the confines of a closed discourse community, metaphor is not used ornamentally but is a significant social tool for negotiating identity. Unlike regular metaphors that anyone can understand, contextual metaphors are only understandable by people who have the same background as the metaphor. This is what makes the metaphors become the hidden markers of identity. In closed societies, metaphors are often used as tests for membership in the community. Being able to understand the metaphors is often an unstated requirement for active participation.

3.1. The Initiation Test

Contextual metaphors in closed societies are also used as initiation tests. The ability to understand and use metaphors specific to the group is an implicit requirement for participation. This is a form of initiation. It supports the idea that metaphors are not only involved in thinking but also in action. Lakoff and Johnson show that concepts formed

metaphorically can inform future actions (156). This is how metaphor helps to distinguish the member from the non-member.

From a pragmatic perspective, initiation metaphors rely on the process of implicature. It is clear that Grice’s assertion that meaning is often based on the use of implicature, rather than the actual stated meaning, is particularly significant in this case. It is the failure to understand the implicature of the metaphor that is used to determine whether the person is an outsider. In this way, the ability to understand the meaning of the metaphor is used to determine whether the person is on the inside or the outside.

3.2. Creating a Sociolinguistic Barrier

Besides the initiation process, contextual metaphors also play a role in the building of sociolinguistic barriers that separate those who are part of the community from those who are outside. This is especially the case since the metaphors are likely to be incomprehensible or even nonsensical to those who are outside the community, thus creating a linguistic boundary that mirrors the social boundary. According to Bucholtz & Hall, identity is not something that is fixed but is rather an interactional process, achieved through repeated linguistic practices that create a sense of belonging or non-belonging (586). In closed discourse communities, metaphor is such a repeated linguistic practice that creates a boundary of who is allowed to communicate within the community and who is not.

This linguistic boundary is not created intentionally, but rather through organic development as the discourse community creates its own shorthand for complex experiences. According to Kövecses, the choice of metaphor is influenced by “salient experiences and shared cultural models” (102), which means that the metaphors created through such experiences are likely to be resistant to interpretation by outsiders. This creates a linguistic boundary that is protective of the community’s internal coherence, as well as limited in accessibility. Metaphors are thus the linguistic boundary that is both functional for communication within the community, as well as socially distant from outsiders.

The use of metaphors as a sociolinguistic barrier corresponds with social identity theory, which asserts that an individual’s identity is shaped by membership in a group. Tajfel describes that in-group linguistic practices are critical in sustaining a positive social identity because they emphasize differences as well as create cohesion among group members (63). In a closed discourse community, metaphors are a linguistic practice that subtly reinforces difference without necessarily enforcing it.

3.3. Solidifying In-Group Cohesion

Although metaphors also exclude, metaphors have an essential role to play in fostering in-group bonding by providing members with a common symbolic base for understanding their reality. The repetition of metaphors creates a common sense of reality, which enables members to identify one another as members of the same group. As Steen indicates, metaphors in discourse can be useful in “establishing common ground and aligning perspectives” (88), especially in situations where members must cooperate at a very high level.

In closed groups, such as high-stress professional groups or online subcultures, metaphors can function to reduce

complex emotional or situational realities to communicable linguistic forms. This reduction of reality to language creates bonding among members as they identify their common reality through metaphorical language. From a critical discourse analysis point of view, this bonding is not only emotional but also ideological, as metaphors subtly support dominant ideologies of thinking and acting within the group. In this sense, metaphor is a means of expressing social unity.

3.4. Policing Boundaries and Exclusion

At the same time, the unifying effect of metaphor also implies a marginalizing effect with regard to those who do not grasp or use the group metaphors correctly. Critical discourse analysis also points to the role that language practices play in the reproduction of power relations without any obvious use of coercion, especially through the reproduction of patterns of inclusion and exclusion. Fairclough also points out that discourse can “naturalize particular social relations, making them appear inevitable or commonsensical” (67). This is also evident in the use of metaphor within closed groups.

Metaphors that function as hidden identity markers can also function as a means of regulating behavior by indicating what is appropriate and what is not. Misuse or misinterpretation of these metaphors can lead to social correction or exclusion. van Dijk also points out that “those who control the discourse have a monopoly over social knowledge” (55). In the context of the use of metaphor as a means of social exclusion or inclusion, it is evident that metaphorical competence is a means of gaining access to both linguistic and social capital within the group.

3.5. Interim Analytical Synthesis

In sum, the various functions discussed in this chapter demonstrate that contextual metaphors in closed discourse communities function as cognitive, pragmatic, and social tools at the same time. They serve as tests of initiation, as sociolinguistic barriers, as cohesive devices, and as boundary regulators, and yet they remain natural and unmarked to members of these discourse communities. The above functions serve to reinforce the point that metaphor, as a linguistic concept, should not be studied in isolation from its social embeddedness, and that the following chapter should be seen as providing practical case studies that complement the above discussion.

4. Case Study Analyses

As a matter of fact, it will be easier to see these abstract mechanisms at work by looking at them in a particular discourse setting. Communities in closed environments do not merely think about metaphors; they live by them as they continually inject metaphors in a particular setting until such a point when they become a natural part of identity markers. In this chapter, there are three different but similarly structured environments: corporate culture, military/first responder teams, and online gaming/fandom communities.

4.1. Corporate Culture

In the context of the corporate world, metaphor often functions as a managerial and cultural device that carries values, expectations, and status hierarchies in its seemingly plain language. Terms such as “moving the needle,” “low-hanging fruit,” or “owning the battlefield” may seem clear and plain on the surface, but only make complete pragmatic sense to those who are familiar with the daily routines and

ideological underpinnings of the corporate world. Lakoff and Johnson argue that organizational metaphors do not only influence the ways in which organizational activities are talked about but also the ways in which they are actually understood, since “the metaphor highlights certain aspects of the concept and hides others” (10). In the discourse community of the corporate world, such highlighting is used for alignment and differentiation.

The new employees find it hard not because the metaphors are hard to understand, but because understanding the metaphors’ meaning depends on the employees’ implicit knowledge of the institution. In a practical sense, the metaphors are similar to expressions of implicature, whose meaning depends on shared knowledge of productivity, competition, and efficiency. The argument by Levinson, which states, “What speakers take for granted as common ground is the site of pragmatic meaning” (118), can also explain how the metaphors are fast tests of professional membership. Those who can use the metaphors naturally are likely to be accepted as members of the corporate culture, while those who cannot are likely to be considered outsiders, even if they are competent in their work.

In a critical sense, corporate metaphors are also important because they can hide power relations in organizations by representing managerial actions as natural and inevitable processes. The argument by Fairclough, which states, “Discourse can colonize everyday practices through naturalized language” (75), can also be applied to corporate metaphors, which can hide power relations in organizations under the guise of common purpose and efficiency. In a sense, therefore, metaphor in corporate culture can be a unifying and a controlling element.

4.2. Military and First Responder Units

Military and first responder groups are among the most closely knit discourse communities, with their experiences of shared danger, urgency, and responsibility. In such groups, metaphors tend to be drawn from combat, machine, or kinship domains, offering a compressed linguistic form of complex emotional and operational realities. According to Kövecses, the use of metaphor is more prominent in situations of heightened emotions or stress, as this enables the speaker to think of complex experiences in more easily manageable forms: “Metaphor is more prominent in situations where the speaker is under some emotional stress, because in such situations he or she can think of the complex experience in more easily manageable forms” (124). However, in the military discourse community, metaphor is also used as an important identity marker.

Phrases such as brotherhood, the line, or watching each other’s six are used to convey meaning that is more than the literal meaning of the words used. These metaphors pragmatically assume shared experience and understanding, thus being largely opaque to those who are not part of the discourse community. Another aspect of Grice’s work that is relevant to this discussion is his distinction between what is said and what is meant. However, the significance of the metaphor in this case is emotional. Grice emphasizes that the distinction between what is said and what is meant is critical (46). Thus, it is not only about mastering the metaphor from the perspective of group identity. It is also about emotional affiliation with the values of the group.

From the critical discourse analysis perspective, the metaphors serve to increase internal cohesion and exclusion.

Van Dijk's argument that elite groups use discourse to sustain their ideological power also holds for groups that claim to be egalitarian. In these groups, fluency in the metaphor acts as symbolic capital (van Dijk 60). Those who do not use the metaphors or use them incorrectly are considered to be untrustworthy.

4.3. Online Gaming and Fandom Communities

Digital communities, such as gaming communities or fandom communities, are interesting places to examine the spread and evolution of contextual metaphors. In these communities, there is often no hierarchy. However, there is a rich linguistic system. For example, metaphors such as "carrying the team," "nerfing," or "endgame" function as a kind of shorthand to common experience. It is only understandable to those who are immersed in these communities. According to Bucholtz and Hall, identity is created through repeated interactions. This is particularly true in communities in which language is an important marker of membership (594).

In terms of pragmatics, metaphors in the gaming community rely on a rich contextual understanding, such as knowledge of the game, the gaming community, and their shared history. The concept of implicature is highly dense in the interpretation of metaphors in the gaming community, as this interpretation is collectively negotiated rather than explicitly instructed. Steen's argument on metaphor in discourse as a dynamic interaction rather than design is particularly applicable to metaphors in the gaming community, as these metaphors are in constant flux and function as a shorthand to shared culture.

Critically, metaphors also function to regulate boundaries, often excluding new or peripheral participants through ridicule or silence rather than hostility. The idea of "discursive exclusion through normalization" that is presented by Fairclough (82) can be used to clarify how metaphors, as a repeated practice, can create an unstated hierarchy between the core members and the peripheral participants. As such, metaphors in the online community serve as gatekeeping devices in the digital age, promoting identity and cohesion at the same time as social stratification. Online communities show that physical co-presence is not a condition for the development of closed discourse. Discourse communities in the digital media develop "dense indexical systems" through which language conveys stances, affiliations, and legitimacy. Metaphorical language in gaming cultures is a good example of the density of such discourse, as its meanings are based on complex histories of participation rather than the dictionary.

4.4. Comparative Observations

However, as we move through the world of corporations, the military, cyber space, etc., we see a common thread: contextual metaphors are used as a compressed means of carrying identity, experience, and power. The content of the metaphors differs depending on the context, but the pragmatic and critical use of the metaphors is quite similar across the board. In every case, metaphor is used to test initiation, facilitate communication among the initiated, and control social boundaries without direct enforcement. This similarity implies that metaphorical identity marking is not context-dependent, but rather is structurally embedded in the way humans are socially organized, particularly in closed or semi-closed social groups.

4.5. Transition to Critical Discussion

The case studies in this chapter demonstrate how contextual metaphors can unite and divide. They foster group identity but also stratify and exclude. These two sides of contextual metaphors make us wonder about power, especially in the hands of a leader or organizer of discourse. The next chapter will specifically deal with power. It will explore how metaphorical identity markers can both empower and lead to elitism.

5. Critical Discussion: Power Dynamics

The examination of the use of contextual metaphors in different discourse communities has revealed that these language forms are never really neutral. It may appear that the use of contextual metaphors is naturally grounded in shared experience. However, the use of such metaphors is actually deeply embedded in issues of power and authority. In this chapter, the use of contextual metaphors in issues of empowerment and exclusion will be examined.

5.1. Empowerment versus Elitism

Contextual metaphors can be a source of empowerment for discourse communities because they facilitate efficient communication, emotional solidarity, and group identity. The use of metaphorical language creates a sense of understanding between the members of the group because they can effectively communicate their experiences. As Lakoff and Johnson explain, metaphors "provide coherence to experience" by creating a framework for perception and action (85). Therefore, metaphors can be a source of empowerment for discourse communities.

However, the empowering effect of metaphors is closely tied to the elitist effect that favors those with metaphorical competence over those without. The ability of the members of a discourse community to use metaphors effectively can be a source of exclusion for those who cannot. The elitist effect of metaphors is evident in the statement by van Dijk that "whoever controls the discourse also controls the social knowledge" (63). The ability of the members of a discourse community to use metaphors effectively can determine the social knowledge that is acceptable in the group.

Such a dichotomy of empowerment and elitism, therefore, brings to light the ambiguous nature of metaphorical identity markers. Although it is true that it is because of such identity markers that collective power is consolidated, it is also true that it is because of such identity markers that inequality is perpetuated, in a subtle form of linguistic familiarity and inference. The idealized notion of a community as being inclusive in nature is thus undermined.

5.2. Implications for Leadership and Integration

The importance of the role of leadership in the creation and sustenance of metaphorical discourse is of particular interest because the leader often acts as a linguistic model for the group. The role of leadership in the corporate world or any institution is to introduce, reinforce, or legitimize metaphors that define the group's goals, problems, or identities. Fairclough points out that "the discourse of the powerful is of critical importance because it has the power to set the terms under which others speak and act" (92). The discourse of leaders who are dominated by the use of metaphors may inadvertently act as a barrier to the active involvement of group members, especially the new or the marginalized.

From a pragmatic viewpoint, leaders who are dominated by the use of metaphors may inadvertently act as a barrier to the integration of the new or the marginalized into the group. Levinson's work on pragmatic competence indicates that leaders should be sensitive to the knowledge that the audience brings to the conversation. The work suggests that pragmatic competence is critical in understanding the reception of metaphorical implicatures, rather than the creation of the implicatures. Inclusive leadership requires leaders to be reflexive in their use of language.

At the same time, metaphor can be strategically employed to enable integration when it is employed in a deliberate and reflexive manner. Thus, implicit metaphors can be made more explicit, or new bridging metaphors can be employed, which are shared across subgroups. This two-fold potential of metaphor thus emphasizes the need to see metaphor as a dynamic, rather than static, phenomenon.

5.3. The Ethical Dimension

The ethical issue in the use of contextual metaphors is the potential for exclusion without appearing exclusionary. Since the use of metaphors is likely below the level of awareness, the potential for exclusion and the maintenance of social boundaries may go unnoticed and unchallenged. As Fairclough points out, the naturalization of discourse practices can lead to "masking relations of domination behind common sense" (67), which is the case in the use of metaphors in the marking of identity within closed communities.

The ethical issue in the use of metaphors as identity markers is the question of responsibility and fairness. Since the use of metaphors results in the exclusion of certain individuals from the group without being openly exclusionary, the individuals who are being excluded have no say in the matter. They cannot openly dispute the fact that they are being excluded because the exclusion is not openly stated. However, the use of metaphors results in the exclusion of certain individuals from the group without being openly exclusionary. Thus, the ethical issue in the use of metaphors is the question of responsibility and fairness. As van Dijk points out in the discussion on discourse ethics, the use of language must be examined from the point of view of whom it benefits and whom it excludes (71).

The invisible nature of metaphorical exclusion also recalls Bourdieu's concept of symbolic power, in which domination takes the form that is "misrecognized as natural and benign." As Bourdieu explains, symbolic power is most powerful when it is "exercised with the complicity of those who do not want to know that they are subject to it" (164). Contextual metaphors, in their very natural and communal appearance, illustrate this type of symbolic power in language.

5.4. Toward a Critical Reframing of Metaphor Use

Rather than calling for a disbanding of contextual metaphors, this study contends that there should be a critical reframing of metaphors. Metaphors are an integral part of cognition and community organization, but there should be a critical examination of metaphors due to their significance. The critical reframing of metaphors as a site for ideological negotiation will encourage a critical evaluation of community language.

The reframing of metaphors as a site for ideological negotiation is in line with the general objectives of critical discourse analysis. Critical discourse analysis goes beyond

merely describing discourse use in a community. The critical reframing of metaphors as an instrument for both unity and division will encourage discourse use that holds on to the positive attributes of community identity without the negative connotations of exclusion.

6. Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to explore the way in which contextual metaphors work as implicit identity markers within closed discourse communities. The research treated metaphor not only as a cognitive and stylistic process but as a socially situated practice through which issues of belonging, power, and exclusion are being negotiated. The research has shown that conceptual metaphor theory, pragmatics, and critical discourse analysis can work together to reveal that metaphors work simultaneously on cognitive, interactional, and ideological levels. The research results have shown that metaphorical language, through shared experience and shared knowledge, is a subtle but powerful means of identity creation and social boundary maintenance.

6.1. Restatement of Thesis and Findings

The main claim of this study is that contextual metaphors in closed discourse communities are "covert identity markers that facilitate cohesion as well as inequality." Through theoretical inquiry and case study in various settings including the corporate world, the military, and the online world, the study has revealed that contextual metaphors serve as initiation tests, sociolinguistic barriers, cohesion builders, and boundary policers. While they help facilitate effective communication and emotional bonding among members of the same community, they also serve to marginalize those outside the community who do not have access to the necessary frameworks for metaphorical comprehension. Thus, the study also reveals the two-edged nature of metaphor as a tool for bonding and exclusion.

6.2. Answering the Research Questions

The first research question was related to how contextual metaphors function pragmatically in closed discourse communities. The results of the analysis indicated that contextual metaphors are highly dependent on implicature and background knowledge. Thus, their interpretation is dependent on the members of the community. The second research question was related to the role of metaphor in identity construction. The results indicated that metaphorical fluency acts as symbolic capital. The third research question was related to the power effects of metaphor. The results indicated that metaphorical practice often naturalizes exclusion. Thus, the results of the research questions confirm that contextual metaphors are essential in maintaining social structure in closed communities.

6.3. Limitations of the Study

However, the present study has some limitations. Firstly, despite the depth and breadth of the theory, the study is based on conceptual and exemplary studies rather than empirical data. Secondly, although the communities selected for the study vary and cover diverse settings, the study cannot be generalized to all kinds of closed discourse settings, especially those that involve non-Western linguistic styles and settings. In this respect, further studies that use ethnographic and corpus approaches could be conducted to refine the theoretical claims.

6.4. Avenues for Future Research

The findings of the current study open several research avenues. One potential line of research is to investigate the development of metaphors in digital communities over time, which might show how identity markers change as social and technological worlds change. Another potential line of research is applied research on leadership communication, which could, for example, investigate the role of reflexive metaphors in balancing group cohesion and inclusiveness. Another potential line of research is a cross-linguistic investigation of whether the identity effects of metaphors are universal or depend on context and pragmatic inference.

6.5. Concluding Reflection

The basic argument that this study makes is that metaphors, apart from being important in the formation of thought, are also important in the formation of society. In closed societies, they operate behind the scenes, controlling membership, power, and exclusion, often without the people in the society being aware of it. The realization of this power does not diminish the importance of metaphors; on the contrary, it calls for their use in a responsible manner. The contribution that this study makes, apart from the contribution that contextual metaphors make to the formation of identity, is to the discussion on how language can unite people or separate them, as discussed in pragmatics, discourse analysis, and sociolinguistics.

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How to Cite This Article

Kadhim BJ. A critical pragmatic study of contextual metaphors as covert identity markers in closed discourse communities. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Growth Evaluation.* 2026;7(3):114–120. doi: <https://doi.org/10.54660/IJMRGE.2026.7.3.114-120>

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