



# Metaphors in Japanese News Coverage of the Middle East Conflict in 2024

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**Abstract.** Figures of speech that compare one concept to another without using a conjunction are called metaphors. Metaphors are crucial components in the construction of mass media narratives, which have a significant influence on public opinion. The Middle East, a region of strategic importance due to the region's geographical location and natural resources, has long been a focal point of global attention because of ongoing conflicts. Given Japan's involvement in global discussions and its position in international organizations, such as the UN Security Council, the way the Japanese media portrays the Middle East conflict can influence both domestic and international perspectives. Therefore, it is important to research the metaphors used in news coverage of the Middle East conflict, as the conflict has a substantial impact on global stability. This study aims to analyze the classification and meaning of metaphors used in Japanese news coverage of the 2024 Middle East conflict. Utilizing a descriptive-qualitative method, data were collected from Japanese news websites from January to June 2024. The analysis focused on identifying and interpreting metaphors according to Ullman and Knowless & Moon theories. From the 15 data points analyzed, 12 were anthropomorphic metaphors, while the rest were abstraction metaphors. The findings reveal that anthropomorphic metaphors dominate, reflecting a tendency in Japanese media to humanize non-human entities involved in the conflict.

**Keywords:** Semantic, Metaphor, Meaning, News, Middle East conflict.

## 1 Introduction

Having a territory that is directly adjacent to other countries does not necessarily ensure positive relationships between them. This is exemplified by the Middle East, a region that has periodically captured global attention. Connecting three continents (Asia, Africa, and Europe), the Middle East plays a crucial role in global trade. Additionally, this area is also important because of potential natural resources such as coal and petroleum. While the region's geographical position offers substantial benefits, it also leads to conflicts and various issues [1].

The right to freedom of information has been universally recognized. On December 10, 1948, the United Nations (UN) issued the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Therefore, Japan guarantees freedom of the press and expresses opinions in the constitution that has been in place since November 3, 1946. In Article 21 it is explained

that: "freedom of assembly and association as well as speech, press and all other forms of expression are guaranteed. No censorship shall be maintained, nor shall the secrecy of any means of communication be violated [2]. This article reinforces the general assumption that Japan is among the most liberal countries in Asia regarding press freedom, as evidenced by the ease of disseminating international information, such as the Middle East conflict, through mass media, particularly news websites.

To engage public interest, news narratives must be crafted effectively. Therefore, news narratives often employ figurative language, including metaphors, to convey their content. Metaphor or *inyu*, is a linguistic style that compares one concept to another without using comparative conjunctions. Ullman classifies metaphors into four types: anthropomorphic metaphors (where inanimate objects are depicted as human), abstraction metaphors (which describe abstract concepts in concrete terms), animal metaphors (which use animals or their parts to represent other concepts), and synesthetic metaphors (which involve transferring sensations from one sense to another) [3].

In 2020, Fauzah conducted a study titled "Oriental Metaphors in the Japanese Halo Bulletin (Cognitive Semantic Study)." This research analyzed data from the July and August 2017 editions of the Japanese Halo Bulletin using Lakoff and Johnson's theory. The study identified five concepts from ten analyzed data points: four of the "up" concept, two of the "down" concept, one of the "front" concept, one of the "outside" concept, and two of the "deep" concept. However, this study lacked a specific theme and was limited to a single news bulletin published in 2017 [4]. A similar study by Mustaqim and Nur in 2022 analyzed metaphors in news coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic. This research used conceptual theories and described imagery schemes with Croft and Cruse's theory. Out of 13 data points analyzed, ontological metaphors were most prevalent (six data points), followed by orientation metaphors (four data points) and structural metaphors (three data points). The imagery schemes identified included five power schemes, four scale schemes, one space scheme, one existence scheme, and one container scheme. Covid-19 is described as an enemy, government policies as a medicine, and the process of handling Covid as a way forward on the road [5].

Metaphor studies have undergone many developments. Linguistic experts are of the view that metaphor is not just a rhetorical tool, but has permeated people's daily lives [6]. In other words, metaphors are present across various fields, including the press and mass media. However, metaphorical language in news narratives can pose challenges, as it is often indirect. Metaphors are used to express and understand complex concepts, requiring the public to interpret their meanings, which can lead to varied interpretations [7]. Therefore, researching the types and meanings of metaphors in reporting on Middle

East conflicts is essential to understand how Japanese mass media employs metaphors to influence public perception of complicated events that occur in the Middle East.

## 2 Methods

This research is a semantic study focused on the types and meanings of metaphors using descriptive-qualitative methods. Data were collected using the *Simak Bebas Libat Cakap (SLBC)* method, which involved reading news related to the theme of the Middle East conflict. This was followed by note-taking technique, carried out by recording metaphors in Japanese-language news articles published in January-June 2024. The 15 data points collected were sourced from several Japanese-language news websites, including [www.tokyo-np.co.jp](http://www.tokyo-np.co.jp), [www.yomiuri.co.jp](http://www.yomiuri.co.jp), [www.cnn.co.jp](http://www.cnn.co.jp), and [www.bbc.com/japanese](http://www.bbc.com/japanese). The data are presented using informal methods or plain language to ensure ease of understanding [8].

## 3 Result and Discussion

After making observations on Japanese-language news articles published in January-June 2024, the author conducted an analysis to find out the types and meanings of metaphors contained in the news articles. The results are as follows.

**Table 1.** Analysis of the Types and Meanings of Metaphors

No.	Vechile	Literal Meaning	Topic	Ground	Types of Metaphors
1	<i>Korosu</i>	to kill	Aggravating the situation	Dangerous, unwanted	Anthropomorphic
2	<i>Me wo tsuburu</i>	Closing eyes	No matter	Not paying attention	Anthropomorphic
3	<i>Gaza no koe</i>	Voice of Gaza	Opinions, needs, and hopes of the population of Gaza	Worth listening to	Anthropomorphic
4	<i>Oten</i>	Stain	UN Security Council Decision	Bad, unacceptable	Abstraction
5	<i>Ōkina kādo</i>	Big cards	Benefit of recognizing the state of Palestine	Asset, trump card	Abstraction
6	<i>Bo-ru</i>	Ball	Responsibility	Control	Abstraction

This table presents a sample dataset analyzed by the author. The columns in the table represent the elements used to analyze the meaning of metaphors and their types. "Vehicle" refers to the metaphor used in the news sentence, "Literal Meaning" is the actual meaning of the metaphor, "Topic" is the metaphor's intended meaning, and "Ground" denotes the relationship between the vehicle and the topic.

### 3.1 Types and Meanings of Metaphors in Japanese News Related to Middle East Conflicts

#### 3.1.1 Anthropomorphic Metaphor

This metaphor refers to something inanimate but depicted like a human being, through the use of limbs, senses, feelings or attitudes.

(1) 沈黙は「ガザの人々を2度殺す」。

*Chinmaku wa "Gaza no hitobito wo ni do korosu".*

Silently **killed** the people of Gaza twice.

<https://www.tokyo-np.co.jp/article/312541>

According to the Japanese dictionary, *korosu wa nabi ka houhou de, site wo shi ni itaraseru*. *Korosu*/killing is the act of taking a life in some way [9]. In this sentence, one of the human behaviors, namely *korosu*/killing, is carried out by an abstract concept, namely *chinmoku*/silence. The silence or indifference to the genocide experienced by the people of Gaza can make the situation worse, as if killing them twice. In this situation, Japan, which is currently serving as the president of the UN Security Council, has not been able to reach a ceasefire resolution. This is because the United States often uses its veto power to reject the proposal. In addition, the Japanese government's decision to suspend UNRWA funding was in line with the United States, which resulted in the Japanese government losing its reputation as a neutral party.

(2) ところが、イスラエルの戦争犯罪が疑われる行動には目をつぶる。

*Tokoro ga, Israel no Sensouhanzai ga utagawareru koudou ni wa me wo tsuburu.*

However, they **turned a blind eye** to Israel's alleged war crimes.

<https://www.yomiuri.co.jp/choken/kijironko/ckworld/20240122-OYT8T50124/>

In this sentence, *me wo tsuburu*/turning a blind eye to Israel's war crimes was committed by *oubei*/western countries, namely the United States and Europe. *Oubei*/western countries are described as if they are living beings who can close their eyes. Turning a blind eye in this case shows that the United States and Europe are watching but choosing not to care about the war crimes committed by Israel in Palestine. In this situation, Japan is among the member countries of the UN Security Council that approved a draft resolution on a temporary ceasefire so that humanitarian aid can enter Gaza.

(3) ガザの声を聞いて下さい。

*Gaza no koe wo kite kudasai.*

Please listen to **the voice of Gaza**.

<https://www.tokyo-np.co.jp/article/324481>

According to the Japanese dictionary, "*koe wa hito ya doubutsu ga hatsuon kikan wa tsukattari shite, sorezore dokutoku no houhou de desuon*", sounds are produced by humans and animals with their own characteristics using sound-producing organs [9]. In this sentence, the word *koe*/voice represents the opinions, needs, and hopes of the people of Gaza. At first, Japan, along with the United States and Britain, opposed the ceasefire resolution proposed by Russia at the UN Security Council meeting. Considering its diplomatic relations with Palestine and Israel, the Japanese government advocated for a two-state solution, hoping for peaceful coexistence between the two.

### 3.1.2 Abstraction Metaphor

This metaphor describes the abstract into concrete things. The word abstract refers to a nature, concept, and/or idea. While concrete refers to the reality of objects that can be seen, touched, smelled, and felt by the human senses.

(4) イスラエルのエルダン国連大使は、ガザ地区を実効支配するハマスを非難しない安保理の決定について「汚点であり、絶対に忘れられることはない」と強調した。

*Israel no Erdan kokuren taishi wa, Gaza Chiku wo jikkou shihai suru Hamas wo hinan shinai anpori no kettei ni tsuite "oten de ari, zettai ni wasurerareru koto wa nai".*

Erdan, Israel's ambassador, stressed that the UN Security Council's decision not to condemn Hamas, which controls the Gaza Strip, was a "**stain** that will never be forgotten".

<https://www.cnn.co.jp/world/35216844.html>

According to the Japanese dictionary, *oten*/stain is not only a "spot that causes dirt," but also something dishonorable that can harm one's reputation [9]. This news sentence translates the abstract concept of *kettei*/decision, into a concrete term, *oten*/stain. The Israeli Ambassador employs a metaphor in this sentence to underscore the severity and embarrassment of the UN Security Council decision from his own perspective. Since 2023, Japan has been a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, and it has served as president since March 2024. Therefore, the UN Security Council's decision reflects Japan's voice and viewpoints on this situation.

(5) 「これは西側諸国が切ることになる大きなカードだ」と、西側当局者の1人は言った。

*Kore wa seigai shokoku ga kiru koto ni naru ōkina kādo da," to seigai tōkyokusha no hitori wa itta.*

"This is a **big card** that Western countries will play," said a Western official.

<https://www.bbc.com/japanese/articles/c2887ldgxx7o>

In this sentence, *ōkina kādo* literally means 'big card', but in the context of the sentences, *ōkina kādo*/big card is used to refer to "the benefit in a negotiation". More specifically, it implies that Western countries can use the recognition of the state of Palestine as a strategic tool to achieve certain political goals. Some 139 countries have officially recognized the state of Palestine. In this situation, Japan showed its neutrality by agreeing to a 'two-state solution' that accounted for the rights and needs of the Palestinian people. However, Japan, as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, is still reluctant to recognize Palestine as a state.

(6) 「いまボールはイスラエル側に投げられているが、実現はしばらく難しいだろう」とみるのは東京外国語大の黒木英充教授（中東研究）。

*"Ima bo-ru wa Israel gawa ni nagerarete iru ga, jitsugen wa shibaraku muzukashii darou" to miru no wa Tokyo Gaikokugo dai no Kuroki Hidemitsu kyouju (Chuutou Kenkyuu).*

Right now, **the ball** is being directed at the Israeli side, but the realization may be difficult for a while," said Hidemitsu Kuroki, a professor of Middle Eastern studies at the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies

<https://www.tokyo-np.co.jp/article/333139?rct=gaza>

In this sentence, abstract things such as 'responsibility' are understood through concrete things, namely '*bo-ru*/ball'. Israel not only kills people in Gaza, but also destroys infrastructure such as homes, schools, hospitals, and tries to make it uninhabitable. This is the reason why the *bo-ru*/ball predominantly concentrates on the Israeli side, holding Israel accountable for its actions in Gaza. In this situation, the Japanese government followed the United States' lead and temporarily ceased funding the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East, as a result of its belief in distorted news about its employees.

## 4 Conclusion

This study reveals that the metaphor in Japanese news websites related to the Middle East conflict published in January–June 2024 is dominated by anthropomorphic metaphors. Out of the 15 data analyzed, 12 were anthropomorphic metaphors, while the remainder were abstraction metaphors. This indicates that the Japanese mass media tends to portray countries or non-human entities in conflict in a humane way. In addition, the use of metaphors in the news is not only a rhetorical tool but also a communication strategy that allows readers to imagine and more easily understand the complexity of the situation in the Middle East. This study reveals Japan's neutral stance towards the Middle East conflict, despite its inability to make firm decisions, particularly when they conflict with those of the United States. Thus, we expect this research to enhance our understanding of how Japanese mass media employs figurative language to craft narratives that shape the opinions and perspectives of the broader community.

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