

Metaphor in Political Discourse



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Political discourse is a substyle of publicistic prose which is one of the most contemporary applications of language and has its own place and role in the social, political and cultural life of the global community. Publicistic prose which represents the publicistic style of language, fulfils an important social goal promoting national and international relationships by means of different publications, mass media, and, of course, public speaking which first appeared and developed in the form of the oratorical art.¹

Political discourse as a teaching and persuasive and effective speech, makes an attempt to give solutions to the most important problems of constructing optimal speech interchange which is of utmost importance independent of its way of realization that can vary from political negotiations to orations and appeals including the ones in the mass media. It is obvious that the audience of a politician is very large and the more prominent and influential the country or the politician, the larger the audience is. For instance, the most powerful countries and their leaders, the world organizations are heroes at the international arena and whatever they say and write is listened to and read and considered by millions of people living and working in different parts of the world.

As a substyle or genre of publicistic functional style political discourse is based on the ontological juxtaposition of fact and fiction which is fundamental for the choice of linguistic units and stylistic devices, metaphors included. The persuasive aspect of political discourse also derives from the respective peculiarities of publicism which sometimes is called “persuasive writing”.

The variety of the means and ways of combination and presentation of the emotional, expressive, evaluative, subjective elements, on the one hand, and the logical, factual, objective ones on the other, serve the realization of two important functions in political discourse: the cognitive and the persuasive functions.

For at least three decades, researchers and political theorists have been interested in how metaphors are used as persuasive devices and they have discussed how this process occurs. They have focused on the necessity of communication in politics and have noted that metaphors have assisted politicians in communicating more effectively by addressing latent symbolic themes residing in segments of the public consciousness. Metaphors also fit in with the new information-processing models of political knowledge and its cognition. However, metaphors in politics appear to be only partly effective, as they are to some extent deprived of the strong emotional charge that is typical of metaphor in fiction and are completely unable to carry out their specific aesthetic function which is fully realized in fiction.

Metaphorical thought, in itself, is neither good nor bad; it is simply commonplace and inescapable. Abstractions and enormously complex situations are routinely understood via metaphor. Indeed, there is an extensive, and mostly unconscious, system of metaphor that is used automatically and unreflectively in political discourse to understand complexities and abstractions. Part of this system is devoted to understanding international relations and war. The metaphorical understanding of a situation functions in two parts. First, there is a widespread relatively fixed set of metaphors that structure how people think. This thought combines the metaphorical and the non-metaphorical, the latter being perceived as the real. For instance, a decision to go to war might be seen as a form of cost-benefit analysis, where war is justified when the costs of going to war are less than the costs of not going to war. Second, there is a set of metaphorical definitions that allow one to apply such a metaphor to a particular situation. The use of a metaphor with a set of definitions becomes pernicious when it hides realities in a harmful way. It is important to distinguish what is metaphorical from what is not. Pain, dismemberment, death, starvation, collapse of human fates and the death and injury of the loved ones are not metaphorical. They are real and in a war they could afflict tens, perhaps hundreds of thousands of real human beings.

The recent developments in the global political arena have shown that the topic of war has become one of the main themes in public writing. To make this or that political thought connected with war more expressive and persuasive the politicians have not once referred to metaphor. Some wars are thought to be morally justified, and it makes sense to think of winning such a war. In such a case it is literally vital for a politician to justify certain acts of his country and to persuade people that his policy is right. He is being especially clever in this case when he is trying to do it through a strong impact on people's feelings and emotions to lead them to cognize his actions as positive. For example, pronouncing the sentence *The US is in the gulf to protect freedom, protect our future, and protect the innocent*² the political leader understands clearly what role metaphorical thought is playing to the brink of war.

The broad acceptance of metaphor in politics answers our presumption that the metaphor in politics combines the metaphorical and the real, the literal and the non-literal. This is an exact model of a metaphor in politics and does seem so natural to foreign policy experts. It perfectly fits into the overall metaphor system for understanding foreign relations and war. And, most importantly, it hides some realities, which, though hidden, are perceived by a sensible reader or listener.

All these peculiarities of metaphor in politics form a system of metaphorical thought most commonly used by the general public in comprehending international politics. Apart from war, metaphors are widely used in other political contexts. The following remark of Disraeli is commonly used by public at large when referring to politicians:

Most politicians are a block of ice.

Though political figures won't describe themselves as *a blocks of ice*, we consider it a typical example of a political metaphor which is close in meaning to the conventional metaphor *a cool person*. *A block of ice* evokes the domain of temperature, and, since it is predicated of a person, it also evokes knowledge of what a person can do or is potentially able to do. Since a block of ice is something that is very cold and not able to become warm

quickly or easily, this knowledge is mapped onto being very unaffectionate and not being able to become affectionate quickly or easily. This metaphor carries a lot more cognitive meaning and a lot less figurative meaning. It can be said that it is more literal than metaphorical. Again the meaning of the sentence follows only from everyday knowledge and the everyday system of metaphorical mappings. We just need to perceive it. All such perceived connections come from the domain of everyday conventional metaphors and are illustrative of contemporary political metaphor.

The experiential basis of political metaphor is the fact that most of what we know comes through vision, and that in the overwhelming majority of cases, if we see something, then we know from our general life experience it is true. Achieving a purpose is understood as reaching a destination and as acquiring a desired object. To achieve most of our everyday purposes, we either have to move to some destination or acquire some object. If one wants to achieve success, he must do his best, use all his skills (either positively or negatively if it refers to politics), if a country wants to occupy more territory lawlessly, she must be involved in war. This is a natural correspondence which not always works in the metaphor of fiction but is a norm for the metaphor in politics.

The objects connected with human experience are ways in which metaphors impose a structure on real life through the creation of new correspondences in experience. And of course, once such real objects are created in one generation, those objects serve as an experiential basis for that metaphor in the next generation. There are a great many ways in which conventional metaphors can be made real. If they are not made real, they won't work in the political discourse, whereas in fiction however real they are, they will always serve appropriately their aim of realizing the aesthetical function. Besides fiction, metaphors can be realized in such a way in obvious imaginative products such as cartoons, dreams, visions, and myths. But metaphors in political discourse must be made real, at least in less obvious ways, in physical symptoms, social institutions, social practices, law, foreign policy. The experiential basis of the metaphors *He clawed his way to the top*, *He climbed the ladder of success*, *He'll rise in the world* refers to the human striving to success, promoting a career, becoming famous and influential, making money. Thus, the experiential basis is too far from being imaginative.

Law is a major area where a political metaphor is made real. For example, *Corporations are persons* is a tenet of law, which not only enables corporations to be harmed and assigned responsibility so that they can be sued when liable, but also gives corporations certain rights. Foreign policy is a primary topic of communication in political discourse. *A State is a person* is one of the major metaphors underlying foreign policy concepts. Thus, there are friendly states, hostile states, etc. Health for a state is economic health and strength is military strength. Strong states are seen as male, and weak states as female, so that an attack by a strong state on a weak state can be seen as a rape. A just war is conceptualized as a fairy tale with villain, victim, and hero, where the villain attacks the victim and the hero rescues him.

The following passage from the article by Miranda Sawyer "We're Pretty, Oh So Pretty" includes a good example of a type of political metaphor called social practice metaphor:

*Poor, poor Isabella Rossellini. She appeared at a special performance of The Vagina Monologues the other week (I know, how dreadful, but that's not why we should feel sorry for the little lamb), and told her rapt audience that her beauty has been "a curse", because society is so obsessed with looking good. **Rossellini was cursed with being the luminous face of Lancôme for 14 years**, earning millions of pounds in the process. Then, at 40, she was sacked. Ever since, she has done nothing but moan about her dismissal - how dare they drop me because I've got a few wrinkles! - which sounds a lot less like a feminist's roar and far more like the bitching of a beauty being overtaken by a younger model.*

(Miranda Sawyer, "The Observer", Sunday April 14, 2005)

The entire text is not devoted to Ms. Rossellini and her disappointment about not being eternally young. Instead, it comments on the stupidity of the beauty regime of many women, who believe that cosmetics make them look better. The background knowledge makes the figurative meanings easily comprehensible. Besides the cognitive function, the metaphor here realizes an attractive function, typical of newspaper style while the article itself can also be considered as belonging to the social sphere of political discourse.

Here is another metaphor of the same sphere about a famous woman:

*In the 45 years since manned (and yes, we mean manned) space flight began, nearly 450 people have travelled in space, but only 46 have been women. But Discovery commander Lt Col Eileen Collins⁰, who blasted off in July, **has blazed a trail for female astronauts**. As the first woman to fly the shuttle and the first to command one, we say "Come on, Eileen".*

("The Guardian", Friday December 16, 2005)

In the article partially quoted below British employment problems are discussed. The metaphor used in it is clearly critical. Their inner expressiveness is used not only to realize a cognitive, persuasive and attractive functions but also make the criticism imaginatively excessive.

*Another miserable bank holiday. Gradgrind Britain, with the fewest national holidays, is the only EU country not to make employers pay out for bank holidays. Some 3 million will not be paid if they take the day off; most of them will be low-paid women, it's a small meanness, but it signifies much. As Britain fights to retain its unique opt-out from the 48-hour Working Time Directive, the CBI campaigns hard to keep it. It is, it says, "vital to preserve workforce flexibility". These ideas take time to drip into the body politic. As ever, **New Labour is a hotbed of think tank optimism** when talking among its own kind, but afraid to whisper more visionary ideas in public. Its narrow economic focus still fears Britain's only productive advantage comes from driving a large, underpaid, under-protected workforce to work harder and for less than its EU competitors.*

(Polly Toynbee, "The Guardian", Friday April 9, 2004)

Thus, metaphor occupies a most important place in political discourse in the process of thinking and cognizing the social reality. It serves as the form of generalized reflection and cognition of the reality created on the basis of graphic mode of thinking, and it presents an organic unity of conscious-contemplative and rational-abstract forms of cognition.

Metaphor in political discourse is a logically derivative phenomenon, and, derivative in particular, from some imaginative aspect of language use. It is more pragmatic than imaginative. Although there is a sense in which the sentence used metaphorically has a metaphorical meaning, this meaning is itself a consequence of certain conceptual and conventional mechanisms.

All the metaphorical utterances have their literal illocutionary forces. Since a metaphorical utterance can have its literal illocutionary force, and its literal reference or predication, one is inclined to think that a person who speaks metaphorically is saying what would normally be said by a literal sentence. The metaphor in political discourse is based mostly on literality and carries out a cognitive function while in fiction it is built on certain imaginative fantasies and carries out an aesthetic function. The political metaphor from the passage below represents Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf as an individual and a unique personality who can save her country.

*Winning the election to become president of Liberia in November, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, a Harvard-Educated economist, simultaneously became the first female leader of an African State. But here is an unenviable position: Liberia has an unemployment rate of 85% , the capital has no electricity or running water, and a 14-year civil war ended just two years ago. **“Liberia is a country on life support.”** Kofi Annan said. **“She is the best opportunity it has had in decades”.***

(“The Guardian”, Friday December 16, 2005)

In the passage from another article the meeting and negotiations between two powerful European countries – England and France are discussed. The personified metaphors depict the policy of France and the UK clear enough.

*As Mr. Chirac held his own meeting with the German chancellor Angela Merkel, **the Elysee Palace made it clear Paris would not budge for the moment.** In a sign of tough negotiations ahead, No 10 also made it clear that Britain was willing to veto any deal which does not include a “fundamental view” of such subsidies ensuring that France also gives up hard cash before 2013. **It is London’s non-negotiable red line.***

(“The Guardian, Friday December 16, 2005)

As evident from the examples analysed in our study, today metaphor forms a necessary part in internal and international politics. It has become an indispensable part of social and political life. The role metaphorical thought plays in the sphere of politics is vital. Thanks to metaphor the

speech of a politician becomes more expressive and influential thus effectively influencing the audience which is of utmost importance in political life. Metaphors in political discourse are to some extent deprived of the strong emotional charge that is typical of metaphor in fiction and it is fully acknowledged that the primary and basic purpose of metaphor in political discourse is effectively and fully realized through cognitive and persuasive functions.

Notes:

1. The art of public speaking was born in the Ancient World. Already in Athens and Rome public speaking had a key role in the social and political relations. Oratory, the skill of public speaking, was indispensable for achieving a higher social status. A bright persuasive speech influenced masses, made the public speaker, the orator, popular and favorite with them. So, the republican form of governance and the democracy in ancient societies made the art of public speaking the most important and necessary art that opened the way to power. Nowadays the art of public speaking is most popular among politicians, state leaders and social figures. While composing any speech, speechmakers and speechwriters take into consideration a number of intertextual and extratextual factors to make the speech first of all pragmatically well-organized and audience targeted.
2. These words have been pronounced by George Bush in connection with the Gulf war more than once.

References:

1. Lakoff, George (1991) *Metaphor and War: The Metaphor System Used to Justify War in the Gulf*. California: University of California at Berkley.
2. Lakoff, George; Johnson, Mark (1980) *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
3. Searle, John (1976) *The Philosophy of Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
4. www.en.wikipedia.org

Փոխաբերությունը քաղաքական խոսույթում

Սույն հոդվածի շրջանակներում ներկայացվում է փոխաբերության՝ որպես լեզվի պատկերավորման արտահայտչամիջոցի կարևորությունը քաղաքական խոսույթում: Փոխաբերությունը, քաղաքական խոսույթը դարձնելով ավելի արտահայտիչ, դիպուկ ու ազդեցիկ, հնարավորություն է տալիս լայն լսարանին ըմբռնելու քաղաքական մտքի թաքնված ու նուրբ իմաստները: Այն ունի ոչ միայն հուզական և տպավորիչ ազդեցություն, այլև տրամաբանական ու ճշմարտացի նրբերանգներ: