

Metaphorised Politics – Politicised Metaphor

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Abstract

The paper deals with the political discourse and metaphors used in it. The political discourse, its definition, and its analysis have been the centre of interest of linguists and researchers for decades. Language used in political discourse can be sometimes very vivid and interwoven with a number of items of figurative language. This paper concentrates on metaphors and conceptual metaphors in chosen political speeches of Slovak presidents. An analysis of their annual reports on the state of the country reveals some commonly used metaphors.

Keywords: figurative language, metaphor, conceptual metaphor, political discourse.

Introduction

Political discourse and the language used in it is a bottomless source of research for linguists and researchers. As Hrivíková (2016) states, the language and a high level of communicative competence of politicians are two of the most important and influential tools for gaining support and political power.

The political speech or discourse is always intentional, targeted at a specific audience and focused on a specific topic. It highlights topics that people want to hear. The authors of these political speeches must therefore deal with the language very convincingly and prudently. As Štefančík and Dulebová (2017) state, the attitude of the authors of the text is beginning to be creative, the effort to innovate the language and the creative search for new ways of arousing the recipient's interest is visible. The expression of the author's attitude is not only immediate, but also hidden behind the various linguistic means that express it indirectly.

Political discourse

Defining political discourse has been a thoroughly discussed issue in the field of linguistics over the last two decades, though the tradition of interest in political discourse has been around as long as politics itself. Just as in the case of discourse as such, there is still no clear accepted definition for political discourse.

As van Dijk (2003) states the first observation that needs to be done about political discourse is that “it is not a genre, but a class of genres defined by a social domain, namely that of politics.” In one of his studies he claims that the vast bulk of studies of political discourse is about the text and talk of professional politicians or political institutions. He argues that although crucial in political science and political discourse analysis as actors and authors of political discourse and other political practices, politicians are not the only participants in the domain of politics. From the interactional point of view of discourse analysis, we therefore should also include the various recipients in political communicative events, such as the public, the people, citizens, the “masses”, and other groups or categories. In other words, according to van Dijk discourse becomes political when it accompanies a political act in a political institutional situation. (van Dijk 1997)

According to Dulebová (2012, also Štefančík, Dulebová 2017) political discourse can be defined as the realization of the language of politics in all its forms, as the real materialization of all means of the national language in speech that can be used in the context of political activity. Political discourse as a reflection of the socio-political life of the state carries elements of its culture, common and national specific values.

Among many others, Hashim (2015) and Beard (2000) are worth mentioning. While Hashim speaks about political discourse as one that is not only about stating public propositions, rather it is about politics, about doing things with words, and words are used to affect the political body, Beard on the other hand talks about political speeches and discourse as ideas and ideologies that need to be conveyed through language so that they are agreed upon by the receivers as well as by others who may read or hear parts of the speech afterwards in the media.

Metaphor

Specific means of literary, and nonliterary, language and expression include indirect, figurative names – tropes (figures of speech), namely metaphor and

metonymy. In this study we are going to concentrate specifically on metaphors.

If we take a closer look at the metaphor from the literary point of view, it is the transfer of meaning from phenomenon to phenomenon, on the basis of their mutual (larger - minor) similarity (although Aristotle already concluded that metaphor is the search for similarity in dissimilarity). However, the transfer of meaning is not a self-serving act. The metaphor seeks to take things out of their established and shabby, conventional relationships, to decouple and make a multifaceted reality, to discover its secret and unknown meaning. It has not only a figurative (poetic) but also a cognitive (noetic) function.

Metaphors testify to the expressive and pictorial invention of the author - about how individual authors ideologically and aesthetically see, know and evaluate reality, and whether they can only speak poetically about things, or even poetically feel and perceive, think. (Plintovič, Gombala, 1988)

According to Merriam-Webster online dictionary (2021) a metaphor is "a figure of speech in which a word or phrase literally denoting one kind of object or idea is used in place of another to suggest a likeness or analogy between them."

Paivio and Walsh (1993) talk about metaphor as "a solar eclipse. It hides the object of study and at the same time reveals some of its most salient and interesting characteristics when viewed through the right telescope" (307). They explain that the object is linguistic meaning. Metaphor highlights the capacity of language users to create and understand novel linguistic combinations that may be literal nonsense. Most metaphors are not newly created by their users, but all were once novel and new ones arise constantly even in the most commonplace of conversations.

According to Lišková (2016) there are many reasons for the use of metaphors in all areas of the society. She states, that metaphor is a typical feature of communication. By using it, both general and professional language become richer, more varied and more original. It is a cognitive phenomenon, which is reflected in communication mainly in language structures.

One of the main functions is its capability to "surprise". It is the product of a creative violation of the semantic rules of the language system and is culturally specific. Metaphors are clearly opinion-forming, whether in a positive or negative sense, and are therefore used by politicians, economists and journalists. Their argumentative compression leads very often to generalizing comparisons and subsequently to erroneous conclusions.

If we think of a metaphor in the cognitive linguistic view, it is defined as understanding one conceptual domain in terms of another conceptual domain. Kövecses (2010) mentions that this phenomenon can be seen when we talk about life in terms of a journey, theories in terms of a building or ideas in terms of food. This view of a metaphor can be illustrated as “*conceptual domain a is conceptual domain b*” and it is called a conceptual metaphor. (Kövecses 2010: 4) To fully understand this concept we have to be aware of the fact, that the two domains present in a conceptual metaphor are specified as the *source domain* and the *target domain*. Kövecses (ibid) explains that the source domain is the conceptual domain from which we draw metaphorical expressions to understand another conceptual domain, while the target domain is the one that is understood this way. He gives some examples, such as LIFE, ARGUMENT, LOVE, IDEAS, THEORY being the target domains, while JOURNEY, WAR, BUILDINGS, FOOD are considered as source domains.

To mention some examples (capital letters are used for conceptual metaphors and italics for metaphorical linguistic expressions):

LOVE IS A JOURNEY

We'll just have to *go our separate ways*.

This relationship is a *dead-end street*.

IDEAS ARE FOOD

I just ca't *swallow* that claim.

Let me *stew* over that for a while.

THEORIES ARE BUILDINGS

Is that the *foundation* of your theory?

We need to *construct a strong* argument for that. (Kövecses 2010: 6-7)

Analysis of chosen political speeches

The main aim of the study was to find similar metaphors in some chosen political speeches. The type of the speech was the same, the number of speeches by each politician, in this case president, was chosen randomly. Five presidential *Reports on the State of the Republic* were chosen, addressed by four presidents of the Slovak republic, namely:

Michal Kováč (1994)

Ivan Gašparovič (2014)

Adnrej Kiska (2017, 2018)

Zuzana Čaputová (2020)

After identifying the different metaphors in all of the speeches, we specified the source and the target metaphor, thus creating the conceptual metaphor. Following is a list of metaphors used/found in the speeches:

COUNTRY IS A BUILDING

- Skutočnosť, že **Slovensko je dielňou** svetových automobiliek (Čaputová) (*Slovakia is a manufacture*)
- Súčasne si už druhý rok **budujeme vlastný štát** (Kováč) (*we are building our own state*)
- ...za prvý rok existencie nezávislej republiky, **sa** v podstate **položili** legislatívne **základy pre existenciu** a fungovanie samostatného demokratického a právneho **štátu**. (Kováč) (*within the first year of existence of an independent republic, the legislative foundations for the existence and functioning of an independent democratic state have been laid.*)
- **Postaviť zdravšie základy** Slovenskej republiky ako tie, ktoré sme po 25 rokoch nechali zhrdzaviť (Kiska 2018) (*To build healthier foundations for the Slovak republic than those we let rust for 25 years*)

It is quite common to compare the country to a building, or at least its foundations. This metaphor can be explained on the similarity between the two phenomena, the building on one side and the country on the other. Both need stable “roots” or foundations to stand firm and serve their users – who in the case of a country are its people, citizens.

COUNTRY IS A PERSON

- Najmä keď **štát zabúda** na svojich zamestnancov (Kiska, 2017) (*Especially when the state forgets*)
- **Slovensko je hladné** po niečom, na čo môže byť hrdé (Kiska, 2018) (*Slovakia is hungry for*)
- Je neudržateľné, aby sa politická elita zhodovala, čo sú **najväčšie slabiny Slovenska** (Kiska, 2017) (*It is unsustainable for the political elite to agree on what Slovakia's biggest weaknesses are*)
- **Sociálny štát**, ktorý poznajú, im príliš často **ukazuje odmeranú, ľahostajnú, byrokratickú tvár a nie pomocnú ruku**. (Kiska, 2017)
- **Slovensko prejavilo** obdivuhodnú sociálnu **trpezlivosť** a stabilitu. (Gašparovič) (*Slovakia has shown admirable patience and stability*)

- **Slovensko sa hlási** ku všetkým významným medzinárodným záväzkom v oblasti klímy (Čaputová) (*Slovakia is committed to all major international commitments in the field of climate*)

The conceptual metaphor COUNTRY IS A PERSON is very often found in political speeches, but not only them. Finding similarities between a person and a country or state offers a huge possibility for forming metaphorical linguistic expressions. However, it is crucial to bear in mind, that these metaphors may be very easily, in some cases, mixed up with metonymy. Human feelings and states of mind are very often used in metaphors concerning the country.

POLITICS IS WAR

- Ale iba ak ľudia veria, že **štátna moc je** pri vymáhaní spravodlivosti **ich spojencom** (Kiska, 2018) (*But only if people believe that state power is their ally in enforcing justice*)
- Je čas **zliezť z barikád osobnej politickej vojny**. (Kiska, 2017) (*It's time to climb off the personal political war barricades*)
- **Zápas s extrémistami** sa nemusí skončiť – a zrejme sa neskončí – rozpustením jednej politickej strany. **Takýto politický súboj** však nie je práca ani pre políciu, ani pre generálneho prokurátora. (*The fight with extremists does not have to end – and it probably will not – with the dissolution of one political party. However, such political duel is not a task for the police or the Attorney General*)

In the case of the analysed speeches war metaphors are used to describe a certain, so to say critical, situation. However, it is important to mention at this point, that the topic of war occurs in many different ways in the political discourse. Authors must be very cautious and careful when using the metaphor of war in their writings.

CORRUPTION IS A VIRUS

- Prostredie v justícii je nateraz nastavené tak, **že sa v ňom vírusu korupcie môže dariť**. (Čaputová) (*The environment in the judiciary is currently set up so that the corruption virus can thrive in it*)

POLITICS IS SPORT

- **V prvej lige** európskej politiky. (Kiska, 2017) (*In the first league of European politics*)

A specific topic appearing in the speech of the current president Zuzana Čaputová is the situation about the COVID-19 pandemic and the accompanying crisis.

PANDEMIC IS A PERSON

- Odznievajúca **pandemická kríza však túto reflexiu spravila za mňa** (*However, the ongoing pandemic crisis did this reflection for me*)
- Sama **najlepšie odhalila**, čo je životaschopné (*She, herself, best revealed what is viable*)
- Dámy a páni, ďalšou vecou, ktorú nám **pandémia názorne predviedla** (*Ladies and gentlemen, another thing that the pandemic has shown us...*)
- **pandémia** nekompromisne a priamo **poukázala** na problémy ... (*the pandemic pointed out the problems uncompromisingly and directly*)

CRISIS IS A PERSON

- **Kríza nám ukázala** (*the crisis has shown us*)
- **Kríza nás učí** (*the crisis is teaching us*)
- No až **kríza nám názorne ukázala** našu zraniteľnosť (*only the crisis clearly showed us our vulnerability*)
- Dovoľte mi poukázať najmä na to, **čo nám kríza** o nás samých a o Slovensku **povedala** (*Let me point out in particular what the crisis has told us about ourselves and about Slovakia*)

PANDEMIC IS WAR

- **Pandemická hrozba našu spoločnosť zmobilizovala**. (*The pandemic threat has mobilized our society*)
- Všetci si **želáme vyhrať nielen prvý stret s pandémiou**, ale aj **zápas s jej dopadmi** na ekonomiku a sociálnu situáciu ľudí. Inak **naše víťazstvo v prvej zrážke s koronavírusom stratí zmysel a nazmar vyjdú aj všetky naše doterajšie obeť**. (*We all wish to win not only the first encounter with the pandemic, but also the fight with its effects on the economy and the social situation of the people. Otherwise, our victory in the first collision with the coronavirus will lose its meaning and all our previous victims will be in vain*)

The metaphors listed above are only samples of the limitless possibilities of forming and using metaphors in political discourse.

Conclusion

The language used in political speeches is specified by being thoroughly prepared, controlled, justified, and often criticised. To make the political speeches attractive and catchy a number of linguistic means is used. One of the most essential rhetorical device used for persuading and attracting attention of the listeners is the metaphor. Metaphors used in political speeches can be conceptualised based on the source and target metaphor.

To conclude, we identify with the opinion of Štefančík (2020) when he states that metaphors are not typical only for the poetic language, however, they are an integral part of our everyday lives that does not exclude politics and the political events in the country.

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