



METAPHORS IN POLITICS FROM AN EMPIRICAL, DISCOURSE-BASED PERSPECTIVE

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MUSOLFF, A. (2016). *Political Metaphor Analysis*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Andreas Musolff is an established scholar in the research of metaphors and their role in communication. In his work, he combines discourse analysis, cognitive approaches and diachronic pragmatics. Currently, he works as professor at the University of East Anglia in Norwich, UK. He has published many articles, chapters and a few books on metaphor and politics (e.g. Musolff, 2004, 2010). The last one from 2016 is the subject of this review.

0. CZECH STUDY OF METAPHORS

In the Czech and Slovak context, the study of metaphorical expressions is far from being new or unknown. Even if we start after 1990, we can assemble quite a numerous collection of publications — in the 1990s there was Jiřina Stachová (1992, 1994, 1995), Vladimír Chrz from a psychological perspective (1996a, b, c, 1999), more recently in Slovak Alena Bohunická (2010, 2013, 2014); in the linguistic community, it is the work characterised by the domestic ethnolinguistic/cultural-linguistic perspective (Nebešská, 2005; Vaňková, 2007; Záborský, 2013; Vodrážková, 2016; and others) which is probably associated with the study of metaphor the most. Nevertheless, despite the quantity of metaphor analysing papers and books in the Czech and Slovak context, qualitatively, there is still a lack of solid data-based discourse-oriented research that would approach the study of metaphors with satisfactory adequacy towards the communication reality. In this review, I shall show that Musolff's book is such a useful book, as it is peculiar in its view on metaphor and (therefore) in its findings.

1. ANDREAS MUSOLFF'S METHODOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

Put simply, Musolff's theoretical and methodological basis is two-pronged, however its originality stems also (and maybe mainly) from other fine facets. The very basis is the traditional Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT; see Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Lakoff, 1987, and many others). Yet, he, likeably enough, handles it non-dogmatically: many Lakoff's old statements are criticized and revised (for details see below). Thus, the book is a contribution to the development of CMT. But these moments are rather randomly dispersed in the book — reflection of CMT is not Musolff's primary objective.

The second foundation, in Musolff's own words, is critical discourse analysis (CDA; p. 2–3). However, this needs to be commented on. In fact, Musolff's book's approach



is not critical, at least not in the way CDA is usually understood (but see Musolff, 2012). Taking the discourse-historical approach (DHA, cf. Wodak — Reisigl, 2009) as a starting point, he places emphasis on the historical development of the metaphors under investigation rather than commitment, his own reflected ideological position etc., as is typical for CDA/DHA. For that matter, he dissociates himself from Lakoff's critical engagements (p. 27–28). Musolff's approach can neither be identified with critical metaphor analysis (CMA; e.g. Charteris-Black, 2004, 2014) because it lacks the emphasis on persuasion, ideology etc. (cf. Charteris-Black, 2004, p. 42: “[M]etaphor analysis can be employed to explore ideology.”). Another critical discourse view on metaphor is Hart (2008).

More generally, Musolff's approach to metaphor in the reviewed book can be called discourse-historical, i.e. with the indisputably needed attention to the (mainly socio-political) context of metaphorical utterances — both synchronic and diachronic. He supports the robustness of his analyses with a sound developmental dimension — before bringing his examination to the present day, he goes back to 1991 with the case of Britain conceptualized as being “in the heart of Europe” (Chapter 4), to Aesop and Shakespeare in the case of *body politic* (Chapter 5) and to Latin etymology in the case of metaphorization of parasites (Chapter 6). As a matter of fact, it can be said that *Political Metaphor Analysis* is not a general analysis of metaphors (although findings on metaphors' usage are an important side effect) — it is concerned with those discourses in which metaphors are constantly repeated, recontextualized, modified, their meaning is subject to both contests and creative treatment. As Musolff himself puts it, “metaphorical frame-building emerges in the discursive process rather than ‘underlying it’ a priori” (p. 23).

The last and perhaps key aspect of Musolff's approach is the notion of *scenario*. He uses it to originally point out the development dynamics and context dependency of metaphor usage. I shall elaborate on that and add some comments in section 3.2.

2. CONTENTS AND ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

Although each chapter deals with different metaphors and could function as separate and independent papers (after all, some of them are actually based on previously published articles — section 7.4.1 partly echoes Musolff, 2014a; chapter 6 shares some parts with Musolff, 2014b and 2014c; chapter 4 uses some of what has been published in Musolff, 2013; etc.), the whole is non-compositional. It is not a mere sum of chapters but brings a more complex understanding of how metaphors function in discourse as a value added thanks to the interconnection of single units. In fact, that could serve as a good criterion for considering any book a real monograph.

The author has clearly a good sense of composing an appealing book — the Introduction begins with a presentation of a few pieces of metaphorical discourse which are attractive through the tense relation between non-literal use of language and reality. For example, he brings up the question of how seriously rock musician T. Nugent meant his words “We need to ride into that battlefield and chop their heads off in November” (aiming at Barack Obama, then running for president) or he mentions



the problem of claiming causality between the 1967 words of Kommune 1 members about when Berlin shopping malls “would burn, to give their customers that sizzling Vietnam experience” and the firebomb attack realized a year later.

The following chapters are dedicated to a few distinct metaphorizations. Chapter 2 provides a brief overview of the conceptual and analytical apparatus of CMT, presents and examines an almost classical, textbook type of metaphor (POLITICAL) ARGUMENT AS WAR and illustrates it using data from the metaphor corpora EUROMETA (“a bilingual sample of metaphors used in the press coverage of European politics”, p. 14) and BODYPOL (“contemporary and historical data of the uses and interpretations of body-based metaphors in sociopolitical contexts [...] sourced from public media and political treatises, across eight languages”, *ibid.*). Musolff succeeds here in showing the development of narrative on the example of EU-British relations regarding beef export in 1996 as war declaration — fight/battle — outcome/aftermath. Chapter 3 analyses the productivity of the family domain for the metaphorization of EU and sovereign states, following Lakoff’s analyses of American politics via two family models — ‘Strict Father’ and ‘Nurturant Parent’; he questions it and expands it critically. Musolff builds the examination using scenarios or mininarratives (Arcimavičiene, 2017, vs Durović, 2018; for discussion of terminology see section 4.1) and shows how speakers use elements of the source domain selectively and how the elements are assembled into different scenarios. Chapter 4 aims straight into the “heart” of CMT and analyses facets of embodiment in the slogan *Britain at the heart of Europe* in different metaphor scenarios. It is a well-done example of total change of evaluative aspect of metaphor from positive to negative: British PM John Major in 1991 said that Britain would “work ‘at the very heart of Europe’ with its partners in forging an integrated European community” (p. 40), but later the metaphor was taken over by his opponents with utterances like “the heart of Europe got sick” (p. 45) or “hold the stethoscope and listen carefully, for the heart has some curious murmurs” (s. 48). The reflection of a physical point of view is further developed in Chapter 5 with rich diachronic treatment of *body politic* and metaphors like NATION AS A BODY. Here, the author highlights culture differences — “it is claimed that the members of the respective communities [British, French and German] have at least an approximate awareness of the discourse-historical status of phrases such as *body politic*, *corps politique* or *Volkskörper*, as being not only figurative but also connected to political memories, mythologies and famous (and infamous) formulations of ideologically charged concepts” (p. 70). Particularly remarkable is Chapter 6 on conceptualization of groups of people as parasites and on intentionality of metaphors. Here, Musolff presents impressively the development (re-metaphorization) of this hostile strategy using concepts of BIO-PARASITE and SOCIO-PARASITE TO IMMIGRANTS AS PARASITES. Chapter 7 deals with personalization of nations and collective identity construction through the examination of scenarios like WAR AS RAPE or *illness-therapy*. Thematically identical data are used in Chapter 8 to show the methodological potential of metaphor reception research.

3. NOVELTY AND ASSETS

3.1 USE OF EMPIRICAL DATA

One of the praiseworthy features of Musolff's book is that it is truly empirical — he founds his analyses and findings on a solid data basis. Also, he speaks about the reception of metaphorical utterances only when he has got data and methods that entitle him to do so. That shall be appreciated especially because unsubstantiated statements on metaphor effects are very seductive in general.

Firstly, he does not interpret metaphors by the seat of his pants using cherry-picked examples but builds it upon a solid amount of data. A part of Chapter 5 is based on corpora — three subcorpora of various size comprised of texts from various time spans are compared. This applies to section 6.4, too. Musolff is aware of the limits of the usability and comparability of the corpora, he points it out and does not draw inadequately strong conclusions from it.

Secondly, when he addresses the question of how people understand metaphors in Chapter 8, he analyses and interprets his own questionnaire survey. Again, he points out its limits righteously, provides just preliminary findings and is cautious with it. He is definitely not the only one who works with empirical data and who tries to be accountable, still it is refreshing in the context of older pieces of work. It helps to get the metaphor research field rid of the image of discipline which makes do with just a sharp eye, a few strong examples and persuasive rhetorics.

3.2 DISCOURSE APPROACH TO METAPHORS

I agree with many reviews of *Political Metaphor Analysis* (Ahrens, 2018; Arcimavičienė, 2017; Burgers, 2017; Mohamed, 2018; Šeškauskienė, 2018) in emphasizing the discourse- and scenario-based approach as original. The discourse basis is put well e.g. by Mohamed (2018, p. 560): “the author argues that metaphor framing is a discursive process that does not necessarily entail the existence of a priori imagery.” Arcimavičienė (2017, p. 376) highlights the scenario basis: “it can be argued that the scenario approach offers that intermediary link between metaphorical lexis and concepts (or vice versa).”

Thus, according to Musolff, for example intercultural differences as showed on metaphors connecting *state/nation* and *body* are more appropriately explicable via the difference of discourses. Otherwise, it is necessary to count upon a universal deep metaphor and its various surface realizations.

Illustrating it with the transformation of parasite metaphor, Musolff shows that metaphor semantics formation and development is not necessarily unidirectional — rather, it is often the case of repeated re-metaphorization (p. 75n.). This leads him to a less rigid (compared to classic CMT) conception of metaphor as a discursive, dynamic instrument adapting any target topic to a closer / more familiar set of notions. Anyway, it is the socio-cultural context (and discourse shaped by that context) that influences the choice of what is the topic and what is close/familiar in any particular case — rather than inherent features of a metaphor.





Although I recognize the usefulness of introducing scenarios into metaphor analysis, I have to admit that the analytical category of “metaphor scenario” defined as “discourse-based, culturally and historically mediated version of a source domain” (p. 30) sometimes has slightly blurred boundaries — in particular cases it easily competes with *script* or *narrative* (see also part 4.1).

3.3 CRITICAL REFLECTION OF CMT

Contrary to Lakoff and Johnson (1980, p. 4), Musolf claims that examples of the WAR IS ARGUMENT metaphor are to a great extent concerned with a fight in general rather than with war directly. Thus, he comes to an important problem: One can save a construction of ideas in the light of counterexamples by transforming it to a higher, more abstract level — yet, at the cost of its explicative power:

We might, of course, go to a higher level of abstraction and reformulate the supposed metaphor ARGUMENT IS WAR AS ARGUMENT IS FIGHTING. But who determines which level of abstraction is the right one? Logically, there is no reason to stop at any specific level of abstraction until we reach an extremely high level such as ADVERSARIAL ACTIVITY OF ANY KIND IS FIGHTING, but at this degree of generality the posited conceptual metaphor turns into almost tautological proposition that tells us very little about conceptual structures, let alone about culture-specific world views. (p. 13)

In fact, intercultural differences suggested by the pilot questionnaire survey of understanding metaphors (p. 120n.) support the opinion that CMT alone with its notion of automatic uniform message delivering is not enough.

4. SOME (MARGINAL) REMARKS

4.1 TERMINOLOGY

For readers who are not experienced in CMT (but also in Musolf's) terminology, it can be challenging to familiarize themselves with what exactly the author means by the terms used. Musolf does not demonstrate much what he draws from the already existing cumulative basis of CMT, what comes from his previous works and what is to be understood just on the basis of the book's text.

One example of such unclarity is the relation of two notions: on the one hand, there is *semantic field* described as “the manifestation of a conceptual domain” (p. 11) and on the other hand, there is *domain* in general, which is according to the book “‘semantic-field’-like space around the prototypical [...] concept” (p. 50).

Sometimes it is not evident what is introduced as a specific term and what is just a synonym for something already present. When Musolf says that “some variations on the *heart of EU* motif exhibit scenario combinations”, it is hard to determine what is the relation between the terms *motif* and *scenario*, in particular if *motif* is consid-

ered a term here. Also, he talks about two incongruent scenarios of the STATE AS BODY metaphor — *belly* as the most important body part vs *head-to-feet* — (p. 59), but on the next page he labels the very same *belly* as a motif. I do not claim that these two statements are contradictory, but it seems to me that it is not really reader-friendly regarding terminology. It is also somewhat uncertain to what extent *script* and *scenario* are two distinct notions.

4.2 WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR A METAPHOR?

An interesting question arises in contrast to two of Musolff's statements concerning the responsibility for the impact of a metaphor. On the one hand, the author argues in favour of the view that speakers do use metaphors deliberately and thus are responsible for their use and in consequence their meaning, interpretation and impact (p. 88). According to this view, when someone uses a Nazi metaphor like *JEWS AS A PARASITE* (RACE), their alleged unawareness of historical context should not be an excuse. On the other hand, Musolff states that when Enlightenment biologists started to use the term *parasite* for plants such as mistletoe regularly and laid the foundation for later analogical shift to the social concept of parasite, they might have not been aware of the ancient origin of the metaphor (p. 90) (Greek *parasitos* / Latin *parasitus* “was extended from designating a religious institution and its agents to a stock character of comedy a scrounger who lives at the expense of another person or group of persons”, p. 76–77). Is it a contradiction?

I think it is not. The Enlightenment scientists must have been aware of the contemporary meaning of the term *parasite*, but the historical background may have faded through the centuries. In the case of a Nazi metaphor, we cannot claim that there has been such a substantial change from the 1930s to the present day that could justify an unawareness of mid-20th century discourse sediments. An excuse for potentially hateful metaphor use may thus be based on the meaning change and time interval (let us say a few generations) that would make the original meaning unclear.

To the question of the need to condemn such stigmatization as e.g. dehumanization of individuals belonging to a particular group by declaring them parasites, Musolff provides counterarguments: a) in a free society, the concept of *SOCIOPARASITE 2** (“a class name for groups that were deemed to damage the whole of society” and needed to be “eliminated at all cost”, for it “combines deadly dangerousness with devilish cunning”, p. 77/80) is pushed out as insignificant for its inherent extremeness by other metaphors expressing contempt; b) the concept of *SOCIOPARASITE 2** is not manipulative (thus despicable) because recipients are aware of its metaphoric nature and understand it without coercion; c) linguistic analysis should be ideologically neutral (p. 81).

The argument c) is not undisputable and is based on the non-self-evident (and I think also unaccomplishable) assumption that it is possible to get rid of ideology influenced acts at all. But let us leave the question of the need to condemn up to society, rather than linguists. In public discourse, should a parasite metaphor be one of the many legitimate, acceptable conceptualizations of a person? I suspect that the contemporary (at least) Central European societies disprove the argument a). Concerning the





argument b), I am afraid that in his criticism of automatic, unconscious metaphor activation (e.g. p. 41, 68, 89 and elsewhere), Musolff may have got to the opposite extreme. Certainly, when a reasonable person gives it some thought, they should arrive at the same conclusion as Musolff (of course not in such an elaborated way), i.e. Jews or any other group of people are not really parasites, they are only likened to them. However, such an assumption is rather unfounded. There are not many cognitive or socio-psychological references in Musolff's book and therefore one can suspect him of a kind of underestimation of principles like confirmation bias, selective perception, cognitive dissonance reduction etc. (e.g. Acharya, Blackwell, & Sen, 2015; Cooper, 2007). What I mean is that if a parasite metaphor finds recipients who already have their attitudes towards the world structured normatively in a similar way, it is not justified to expect them to perform reflection, analysis or anything of that sort.

5. CONCLUSION

A potential reader should know what to expect. *Political Metaphor Analysis* is certainly not a handbook, manual or "cookbook". Its aim is not to provide step-by-step instructions for those who intend to analyse metaphors as a starter pack. Anyway, it is a demonstration of an analysis. And certainly, it is a theoretical-methodological book, since it contemplates CMT groundings and useful tools for approaching the metaphorical discourse, especially using *scenario* as Musolff's key feature.

Because *Political Metaphor Analysis* is written engagingly, makes use of attractive data and makes it easy for readers to relate to it through their experience with the world and social communication, it has a potential of being interesting not only for academics, but also for laypeople (although this utterance is almost a review cliché and it is not very likely that an ordinary — at least Central European — layperson finds out, gets and reads it). Thus, let us stay in the academic community.

For the reasons explained in this review and for the lack of such work as stated in the introduction, Czech and Slovak linguists are invited to let themselves be inspired by Musolff's approach. From a more general point of view, although all the three customary keen recommendations on the book's back cover are written by professors of linguistics, the book can surely be inspiring also for researchers in the areas of discourse analysis, media studies, political science; moreover, its reception in cognitive science might be interesting. For all such readers, the book is undoubtedly recommendable.

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