

### **METAPHOR OF WAR IN POLITICAL DISCOURSE**

**Dr. Alexander Mikhailovich Amatov**

Belgorod State National Research University, Russia

ORCID: 0000-0002-5530-3274

**Dr. Arkadiy Petrovich Sedykh**

Belgorod National Research University, Russia

ORCID: 0000-0001-6604-3722

sedykh@bsu.edu.ru

**Dr. Olga Nikolajevna Ivanishcheva**

Murmansk Arctic State University, Russia

ORCID: 0000-0001-8495-05302

oivanishcheva@gmail.com

**Lic. Elena Viktorovna Bolgova**

Murmansk Arctic State University, Russia

ORCID: 0000-0002-9845-4638

ass-elena@rambler.ru

**Lic. Natalia Sergeevna Bolgova**

Northern (Arctic) Federal University, Russia

ORCID: 0000-0003-4735-0406

natali609@yandex.ru

**Dr. Olga Ivanovna Vorobyova**

Federal State Budget Educational Institution of Higher Education

“Northern State Medical University”, Russia

ORCID: 0000-0002-9658-1721

vorobyova24@rambler.ru

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### **Abstract**

In modern political communication, one of the main tasks is the formation of a character of a politician aimed at creating a certain image. This image can be either positive and attractive to society, which is a key tool when influencing the mass consciousness or contributing to the advancement of one's goals, or negative, which is often used by a politician to discredit an opponent due to fierce competition and political struggle. The main informative function of the media in the modern information society is changing the nature of its impact, gaining a manipulative function. A metaphor acts as one of the tools of manipulative impact on the audience. The active use of metaphors in political discourse is due to its ability to influence almost every stage of solving problems in the political sphere: understanding the problem situation, searching for solutions to it, evaluating alternatives and choosing an option.

### **Keywords**

Political discourse – Military metaphor – Polarization – Communicative strategy

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## Introduction

According to the famous Prussian military theorist Carl von Clausewitz, war is a mere continuation of politics by other means. Without undertaking to evaluate the correctness of this statement from the military and political points of view, we note that from the linguistic point of view, the statement of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Prussian general is correct.

It should be emphasized that in this study we only consider military metaphors excluding cases of the direct nomination of military operations, weapons, etc. Politicians either themselves or in the words of other politicians and journalists writing on political topics attack and fend off, attack and retreat, attack and defend, dig in and go on an assault, regroup forces and conduct artillery preparations using their metaphors of politics. The arsenal of metaphorical weapons is also impressive – from venerable rusty swords, axes and daggers to artillery, aviation and the navy. V. I. Lenin, according to the current president of Russia, even managed to use nuclear weapons long before the military knew about it. During the last presidential race in the United States, Republican candidate (now President) Donald Trump called himself “America’s greatest defender and most loyal champion” and vowed to fight for its interests. In response, Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton asked God to protect America from such “faithful knights” and compared Trump with “loose cannon that tends to misfire”. In other words, politicians verbally behave exactly like the military acts in a combat situation: they fight, but only by other means – linguistic ones.

It is noteworthy that with such a variety of means of killing and destruction, as well as methods of their use, political discourse is rather stingy with metaphors with the opposite meaning – creation. Of the more than 1,500 cases of metaphorical word and phrase usage that we examined in connection with this topic in the Russian-speaking, English-speaking and French-speaking political discourse, only a few are connected with construction. Moreover, if politicians build something metaphorically, then it is usually a relationship – the one that they had destroyed before in the most brutal way previously. That is, not only the quantity itself, but also the set of metaphors of creative significance in political texts in three languages, addressed to millions of (if not billions) of audiences, is extremely scarce.

These and some other circumstances prompted us to consider the tactics of using military metaphor in political discourse, as well as the global strategy to which these tactics are subordinate.

## Methods

The last decades are characterized by the increased attention of modern linguistics that develops and supplements the theory of metaphorical modeling to the study of various aspects of political communication, the definition of its linguistic and discursive organization, the establishment of verbal tools for managing public opinion from the side of power institutions<sup>1</sup>. Among these tools, the conceptual metaphor used by the political elite of

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<sup>1</sup> A. P. Chudinov, *Metaforicheskaia mozaika v sovremennoi politicheskoi kommunikatsii: monografiia* (Yekaterinburg: Izd-vo Ural. gos. ped. un-ta, 2003); J. Zinken, “Ideological Imagination: Intertextual and Correlational Metaphors in Political Discourse”, *Discourse and Society* Vol: 14 num 4 (2003): 507-523; D. Vertessen y C. De Landsheer, *A Metaphorical Election Style? Patterns of Symbolic Language in Belgian Politics*. 2005. Retrieved from: [www.essex.ac.uk/ecpr/events/jointsessions/paperarchive/granada/ws14/Vertessen.pdf](http://www.essex.ac.uk/ecpr/events/jointsessions/paperarchive/granada/ws14/Vertessen.pdf); J. Walter y J. Helmig, *Metaphors as Agents of Signification. Towards a Discursive Analyses of metaphors*. ECPR Granada Workshop on Metaphors in Political Discourse. April 2005. Retrieved from: DR. ALEXANDER MIKHAILOVICH AMATOV / DR. ARKADIY PETROVICH SEDYKH / DR. OLGA NIKOLAJEVNA IVANISHCHEVA LIC. ELENA VIKTOROVNA BOLGOVA / LIC. NATALIA SERGEEVNA BOLGOVA / DR. OLGA IVANOVNA VOROBYOVA

different countries for manipulative purposes is one of the main and linguoculturally significant phenomena of political discourse.

The role of a metaphor in the political speech was noted as part of the traditional, rhetorical direction. Thus, analyzing the speeches of politicians addressing voters, M. Osborn concluded that archetypal metaphors certainly take place in political speech, regardless of the time, culture and geographical location of the communicants. Politicians who seek to convey any point of view to the addressee resort to images of nature, light and darkness, peace and war, disease and health, sailing and navigation<sup>2</sup>.

With the release of the work of J. Lakoff and M. Johnson understanding of a metaphor as just one of the figures of speech or figurative rhetorical means has changed significantly. The authors believe that the metaphor penetrates all spheres of everyday life and finds manifestation not only in language, but also in thought and action<sup>3</sup>.

According to the cognitive methodology, a person's reaction is manifested rather than on reality as such, but their cognitive idea of reality. Consequently, human behavior is determined not so much by objective reality as by the complex of its mental projections, and "the conclusions we reach on the basis of metaphorical reasoning can form the basis for action"<sup>4</sup>.

Many scientific studies in the field of political metaphor are carried out in line with the classical version of the theory of conceptual metaphor, but scientists improve and supplement some aspects of this theory. In particular, A. Musolff in several studies<sup>5</sup> expresses the opinion that it is necessary to rethink the approach to the analysis of conceptual metaphor where the understanding of the essence of the target sphere is rigidly determined by the structure of the source sphere. He suggests the introduction of a new term – "conceptual evolution" of metaphors. Different types of scenarios of the same metaphorical model are embodied in political communication, often completely opposite in terms of their estimated potential. They suggest the need to consider two interrelated factors: the experimental basis (tradition) and "conceptual flexibility", according to which, the functioning of a metaphor in political speech can be compared to a living organism. It is endowed with the ability to heredity and variability and in the process of interaction with the environment "evolves" and "survives" like other metaphors. Discursive factors that

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[www.essex.ac.uk/ecpr/events/jointsessions/paperarchive/granada/ws14/Helmig.pdf](http://www.essex.ac.uk/ecpr/events/jointsessions/paperarchive/granada/ws14/Helmig.pdf); E. V. Budaev, "Voennaia metaforika v diskurse SMI", *Acta Linguistica* Vol: 2 (2008): 29-36 y N. O. Prazian. Rol metafory v organizatsii teksta (na materiale angliiskogo politicheskogo diskursa)", *Vestnik Cheliabinskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta* Vol: 35 num 173 (2009). 132-127.

<sup>2</sup> M. Osborn. Archetypal Metaphor in Rhetoric: The Light-Dark Family. *Quarterly Journal of Speech* Vol: 53 (1967):115-126.

<sup>3</sup> G. Lakoff, M. Johnson. *Metaphors We Live by*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press,1980), 256.

<sup>4</sup> P. Chilton, G. Lakoff. *Foreign policy by metaphor*. Language and Peace. (Aldershot: Dartmouth, 1995), 37–59.

<sup>5</sup> A. Musolff, "Metaphor and conceptual evolution", *Metaphorik.de* num 7 (2004): 55-75; A. Musolff, *Metaphor scenarios in political discourse in Britain and Germany*. Sinnformeln. Linguistische und soziologische Analysen von Leitbildern, Metaphern und anderen kollektiven Orientierungsmustern (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 2003), 259-282; A. Musolff, *Mirror Images of Europe*. Metaphors in the public debate about Europe in Britain and Germany (Munich: Iudicium, 2000) y A. Musolff, *The Metaphorisation of European Politics: Movement on the Road to Europe*. Attitudes towards Europe. Language in the Unification Process (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001).

significantly affect the functioning of a conceptual political metaphor should be taken into account.

A revised version of the theory of conceptual metaphor was presented by D. Ritchie in the connective theory of metaphorical interpretation<sup>6</sup>. Based on the postulate of the basic limitation of thinking by empirical perception, the author emphasizes that metaphor study should be carried out in a cognitive and communicative context, which includes a detailed representation of verbal communication and the previous experience of its participants. Each metaphor is considered in a specific communicative context, and individual understanding can vary significantly. According to Ritchie, the relationships between conceptual domains are much deeper. For example, “war” is not necessarily the dominant concept for expressing a dispute. When analyzing metaphors such as “defend”, “position”, “maneuver” or “strategy”, one cannot immediately state whether they are related to war, competition of athletes or the game of chess. Such metaphors reflect cognitive responses to prototypical situations rather than imposing one concept on another.

Two key trends in the analysis of political discourse are rooted in linguistics: descriptive and critical<sup>7</sup>. The critical discourse, which is used in our study, aims to study social inequality, reflected in the discourse, and the author openly speaks out in defense of the disenfranchised and oppressed. As T. van Dijk notes, among the proponents of this approach, “there cannot be an aloof, let alone a “neutral”, position of critical scholars”<sup>8</sup>.

It was in the framework of the latter approach and the use of its methods and techniques that our study was conducted.

## Results

The military metaphor is dominant in the semantic oppositions “Us – Them”, the creation of which is resorted to by politicians as part of the strategy of attack and discredit the opponent. An important role in creating an image of a political leader is played by the so-called microroles, with which this or that politician is associated with the audience. A conceptual metaphor, including the military one, is one of the key tools of updating these microroles within the framework of a dominant communicative self-presentation strategy. Military metaphors are key to explicating the microroles of the aggressor, barbarian and villain on the one hand, and the leader, defender and fighter on the other<sup>9</sup>.

In political communication, such an opposition is the basis of the strategy of discrediting the opponent, and conceptual metaphors as a communicative filter of “ours – another’s” are aimed at achieving the following goals:

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<sup>6</sup> D. Ritchie, ARGUMENT IS WAR” – Or is it a Game of Chess? Multiple Meanings in the Analysis of Implicit Metaphors. *Metaphor and Symbol* Vol: 18 num 2 (2003): 125-146 y D. Ritchie, “Common Ground in Metaphor Theory: Continuing the Conversation”, *Metaphor and Symbol*. Vol: 19 num 3 (2004): 233-244.

<sup>7</sup> N. L. Fairclough, “Critical and Descriptive Goals in Discourse Analysis”, *Journal of Pragmatics* Vol: 9(1985): 739-763 y N. Fairclough, “Critical discourse analysis and the marketization of public discourse: the universities. N. L. Fairclough”, *Discourse and Society*. Vol: 4 num 2 (1993): 133-134.

<sup>8</sup> T. A. van. Dijk, “Principles of Critical Discourse Analysis”, *Discourse and Society* Vol: 4 num 2 (1993): 253.

<sup>9</sup> A. M. Amatov y G. V. Svishchev, Tekst kak pole boia i metafora kak oruzhie: k voprosu o politicheskom diskurse. *Tekst. lazyk. Chelovek. Sbornik nauchnykh trudov IX Mezhdunar. nauch. konf. (Mozyr: MGPU im. I.P. Shamiakina, 2017), 38-41.*

- a) separation of areas of interest;
- b) representation of “ours” in a favorable light to attract supporters;
- c) formation of negative images of the representation of “another’s” that contribute to the negative perception of their activities;
- d) formation among the population of active groups of supporters who perceive the surrounding reality in accordance with the proposed metaphorical models.

## Discussion

The process of “militarization” of political discourse is noted not only by us. In particular, according to V. Z. Demiankov, “to be effective political discourse should be constructed in accordance with certain requirements of military operations”<sup>10</sup>. What is the reason for such “metaphorical militancy” of politicians from different countries belonging to completely different parties and movements? In our opinion, the reason is one of the global communication strategies that underlie all political discourse: the binary polarization of “Us – Them”. Within the framework of this strategy, two main components are visible: a positive self-presentation (representing oneself, one’s political party, state, etc. in the best light) and a negative presentation of the opponent (another politician, party, state, etc.).

War as an extreme form of confrontation could not help but generate a large number of metaphors that fit perfectly into this polarization strategy – unlike the same “building”, for example. Thus, the accusation of aggressive actions or plans can be (and very often are) a successful tactical move as part of a negative presentation of an opponent. Applying this technique, a politician (although, not only a politician), without changing the main content of a statement (its denotation), can use a metaphor to include an entire “bouquet” of various associations, implications (depending on the degree of audience’s involvement in the communicative situation) to manipulate opinions. It is one thing to say, for example, “they criticize me” and it is quite another thing to say “they attack me” or, even better, “I was chosen as the target for an attack”. Let us consider one example from an interview with Jennifer Psaki, at that time – spokesperson for the United States Department of State:

*I am just one of many American officials – especially women, I will say – **targeted** by the Russian propaganda machine.*

Typically, the goal of such metaphorical transferences is to represent one’s opponents as aggressors and oneself, accordingly, as a victim of aggression. Such a polarization, of course, is aimed at causing the audience to sympathize with themselves (and their policies) and condemn opponents. The verb *to target* implies deliberation and purposefulness of action, which further aggravates the guilt of the attackers. Using another military metaphor in the same context, for example, “*I am attacked*” would have less effect – the attack can be spontaneous, unplanned or even provoked.

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<sup>10</sup> V. Z. Demiankov, “Politicheskii diskurs kak predmet politologicheskoi filologii. Politicheskaiia nauka. Politicheskii diskurs: Istoriia i sovremennye issledovaniia”, Moscow, Institute of Scientific Information for Social Sciences of the Russian Academy of Sciences (INION RAN) num 3 (2002): 42.

It is also important that in the same sentence, Psaki emphasizes that she is a woman: an attack, planned and calmly thought out, where a woman was the victim, almost inevitably causes the audience to have a very negative attitude towards the attacker and sympathize towards the victim. Finally, in the same statement, Psaki also demonstrates the second part of the global strategy “Us – Them,” namely, she firmly links herself with other American politicians, primarily women, asserting (it must be said, without any reason) that she is just one of many such victims. True, here she already dispenses military metaphors. That is, the “Russian propaganda machine” purposefully and systematically offends not only her, but also many other American politicians and especially women.

The second reason for the prevalence of military metaphors over “peaceful” ones, in our opinion, is the very nature of war, its dynamism and tension. Military metaphors, being conflicting, reflect the characteristic features of politics as a form of social practice and, in times of crisis, they help create the image of an external enemy and consolidate the population to fight it. Speakers usually assume that the addressee knows which camp they belong to, what role they play and what this role consists of. Just like actions on the battlefield, political discourse is aimed at destroying the “combat power” of the enemy – weapons (i. e. opinions and arguments) and personnel (discrediting the opponent’s personality). Therefore, the presence of this metaphorical model in political discourse is not unusual. The dominance of this model confirms the opinion of A. N. Baranov on the presence in the discourse of conflicting metaphors as a feature of crisis thinking<sup>11</sup>.

Here is another example of a metaphorical war on the American political front – this time from the pre-election speech of then-US presidential candidate Barack Obama in February 2007 in Springfield, Illinois:

*I was proud to help **lead the fight** in Congress that led to the most sweeping ethics reform since Watergate.*

What kind of “war” does Barack Obama proudly mention here, claiming that he took an active part in it in the Congress a few years before running for president? This “war” was relevant at that time, at least for Obama, since he considered it necessary to draw attention to it in his election speech.

This is about lobbying for the interests of certain groups in the government, which Obama calls “cynical” and with which he fought in Congress, being a senator from the state of Illinois. What is the meaning of a military metaphor in this case?

The fact is that most people perceive war as a serious, cruel and extremely dangerous thing. Therefore, a politician, calling any confrontation a “war”, automatically enhances its seriousness and significance in the eyes of the audience. Next: war requires quick and decisive action. Therefore, when Obama says that he is conducting a “war in Congress”, he thereby positions himself as a responsible and serious politician, capable of taking bold actions in a critical situation. This is already a part of the tactics of positive self-presentation, which can be summarized, as “I am a responsible politician”. At the same time, the audience is being secretly convinced that if other politicians do not “wage a war” waged by Obama, they underestimate the degree of threat and are generally irresponsible politicians or at least not as responsible as Obama. Therefore, here the second part of the

<sup>11</sup> A. N. Baranov, Kognitivnaia teoriia metafory pochti 20 let spustia: predislovie redaktora. In Lakoff G., Johnson M. *Metafory, kotorymi my zhivem* (Moscow: Editorial URSS, 2004), 7-21.

global strategy “Us – Them” is implicitly included – a negative presentation of the opponent. Implicitly is because Obama does not name anyone. However, there is an implication, namely a completely transparent allusion to Obama’s main rival in the presidential election, Arizona Senator John McCain, who voted against the 2007 anti-lobbying act.

Judging by the fact that this is the only place in the speech where Obama used the word “war” in a metaphorical sense (in other cases, he uses the noun “war” in a direct nomination, speaking about the war in Iraq, but he does not use the word “fight” at all), we can conclude about how much importance Obama attached to these parliamentary initiatives in his election campaign. Moreover, based on the fact that it was in this part of the speech that the presidential candidate picked up the stormiest applause of the audience (which began to chant his last name), we can conclude that the communicative strategy as a whole (and the skillfully applied military metaphor as one of its moves) was successfully implemented by him.

Often, a military metaphor sends an audience to some significant event. This use of it is combined with such communicative tactics as “our guy” and “advocate of traditional values”. For example, François Fillon, the presidential candidate in France at the last election, during the election campaigns considered it necessary to resort to this move: *// y a des bastilles à faire tomber...* (There are still bastilles that need to be destroyed).

Appealing to a significant event for the French – Storming of the Bastille, which marked the beginning of the French Revolution, Fillon demonstrates unity with the nation and his readiness to lead it for new achievements. Thus, the first part of the global strategy “Us – Them” is realized – positive self-presentation. It is noteworthy that when speaking of “bastilles”, the presidential candidate means, among other things, an increase in the length of the working week, which contradicts the ideas of the revolution. The ordinary French, therefore, have every reason to object to Fillon: “Not for that our ancestors stormed the Bastille, so that the descendants’ working day was increased”.

Sometimes politicians and especially journalists, carried away by a military metaphor, clearly “whip over the edge”, creating very bizarre images – if one can imagine what is said or written. Thus, the large French daily newspaper *Le Parisien* comments on the actions of the ministers Benoit Amon and Arnaud of Monteburg, who contributed to the dissolution of the government of Manuel Waltz and then accelerated it, by calling it the “gunboat shot on the government ship” (*tir à la canonnière contre le navire gouvernemental*). As a result of this “shot”, a dramatic situation arises: “and the French continue to row in the hold, without a course and a captain” (*A la soute, les Français, eux, continuent de ramer. Sans cap et sans capitaine*). No matter how hard we tried to figuratively imagine this picture, we could not understand: why and, most importantly, how the French rowed, being in the hold of a government ship fired by a gunboat. However, careless handling of metaphors, creating strange and sometimes ridiculous images, is already a topic for a separate study.

## Conclusion

Summing up the above, we can state that political discourse as a kind of institutional discourse has several systemic attributes that largely determine its nature, the strategies and tactics used in it, in particular, determining its manipulative potential. The very nature of the struggle for power (namely, the struggle for power is one of the leading goals of political discourse) accordingly structures the political text and manifests itself through the way of communication, chosen by the speaker, a set of strategies and tactics. Using the method of



critical discourse analysis we can trace the influence of the speaker's mental attitudes on the choice of language tools used by them in the political discourse to achieve well-defined communicative goals.

The metaphorical model "War" is in demand in modern political discourse and serves to conceptualize reality. The mental models included in it are updated in various rhetorical strategies and can vary under the influence of various discourse factors. The active use of the military metaphor indicates the presence of fierce competition not only among leading political figures, but also in society as a whole. The political system is permeated with the spirit of militarism and conceptualized using war terminology. In addition, since the struggle for power is the basis of the political discourse itself, it a priori has laid a rich foundation for using military metaphor. However, the potential of the model in question for modeling political reality is used to varying degrees in political discourse, depending on the scope of metaphorical expansion. Modeling the acute political, social, economic and other kinds of problems of the life of the state and society in terms of war, politics, one way or another, impose on modern society the conflicting way to solve them.

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