

Dividing the world: The dichotomous rhetoric of Ronald Reagan*

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Abstract

The language of politics often divides our world into two groups: those who share our own values, and those who supposedly oppose them. Ex-President Ronald Reagan was a master of the use of dichotomous language. His dichotomies were most clearly present in his descriptions of the U.S.–Soviet relations and the American and the Soviet military. The military build-up on the American side was ex-culpatated, while the Soviet military build-up was vilified. With the change of the Soviet leadership in 1985, Reagan's dichotomous thinking was challenged, and towards the end of Reagan's presidency a slight change in his rhetoric can be noticed: he started to acknowledge a good side to the Soviet Union; however, there was often a tendency to denigrate the observed good. New areas of dichotomies arose, and vilification flourished till the end of his presidency.

1. Introduction

Political rhetoric is often a rhetoric of prejudice. It is full of dichotomies; it tends to divide people into *us* and *them*. This is an ancient tradition – political speakers, it seems, have always felt the need to depict the world as black and white.

The purpose of this paper is to illustrate how language can be used for the goal of dividing the world in two. I will take as an example an American political figure from the 1980s, Ronald Reagan, who, I will claim, is representative of the old tradition of seeing the world divided into a virtuous *us*, and an evil *them* – in Reagan's case good Americans and bad Soviets.

In this paper, the concept *Reagan's language* refers to everything spoken by him, despite the fact that his speeches were often written by speechwriters. I understand *Reagan's language* not in the narrow sense, that is, the idiolect of one American, but rather as the language of all that he stood for:

conservative American thinking of the 1980s.

I begin by considering Reagan's speeches from the early years of his presidency (1981 and 1982), concentrating on the areas of the arms race and U.S.–Soviet relations, in which areas dichotomous language was frequently employed by the former President. My purpose is to show how Reagan used language to divide the world in two, into 'This Blessed Land' and 'The Evil Empire'. I concentrate on the structuring of his messages and his lexical choices to reveal the linguistic means he used to impose this dichotomy on his audience, and I identify three processes at work in his rhetoric: glorification, exculpation and vilification.

I then examine Reagan's speeches from his second presidential term (the year 1987) in an attempt to determine if there were any changes in his rhetoric, for example, if his speeches became less dichotomous, and more aware of complexities.

Dichotomous political rhetoric is a simple-minded way of viewing a complex world. In Reagan's case, the change in the leadership of the Soviet Union in 1985 posed a major challenge to his rhetorical style; he had either to change it or deny the changes in the world around him. From this arises the deeper question in this study: what happens to dichotomous rhetoric when it is confronted with a change in the world, a change in the reality that it is supposedly depicting?

2. The dichotomous nature of political language

It is plain ... that we can prove people to be friends or enemies; if they are not, we can make them out to be so.

Aristotle

I believe that a world exists outside language which can be made to appear different according to how it is described, just as a picture looks different depending on the angle from which you are looking at it. We are constantly creating for ourselves pictures of reality, but because everybody's reality looks different depending on the angle from which it is being looked at, we will never be able to know whose reality is the true and objective one.¹

Language is an important tool to persuade others to see 'reality' from our point of view. Language is powerful and it is often used for biased purposes. Representing matters objectively or neutrally requires a special effort, and our feelings, attitudes and intentions color our lexical choices to a greater or lesser extent. Besides, what would be neutral? Neutral from whose point of view? (Bolinger 1980: 68-69).²

To achieve their various goals, politicians throughout time have exploited the possibilities offered by language. In the world of politics there often exists the need to make oneself and one's own actions appear good, and the complementary need to make one's opponents and their deeds appear bad. Rank (1984) proposes a more subtle, four-point categorization of the purposes of political language: to make one's own good actions seem even better ('glorification'), to make one's own bad actions seem better than they in reality are ('exculpation'), to make the opponents' bad actions seem even worse ('vilification'), and finally, to make the opponents' good actions seem unimportant ('denigration') (21-27). In the following analysis it will be seen how glorification was used by Reagan in his references to the United States, exculpation in his references to the U.S. military build-up, arms and soldiers, and vilification in his references to the Soviet Union and their military buildup. It is interesting that, although three of Rank's categories fit neatly with Reagan's dichotomous rhetoric, it is hard to find examples of genuine denigration, the downplaying of the opponents' positive sides or actions, at least in the speeches of his first presidential term. This is probably because at that time Reagan avoided speaking about the Soviets' possible good sides altogether, and thus denigration was unnecessary.

Various linguistic tricks are used to glorify, exculpate, vilify, and denigrate by political speakers. As a cover term for all these processes we might use Leech's term 'associative engineering' ([1977]: 50-62). This is the phenomenon whereby careful consideration is given to the choice of words in order to create the right kinds of associations in the minds of the audience: good associations in the case of glorification (as when calling *America* 'a land of freedom'), non-negative associations in the case of exculpation ('tools' instead of *weapons*), and negative associations in the case of vilification (as when calling Soviet *weapons* 'instruments of destruction').

Dichotomous political language can also be described as euphemizing and dysphemizing the objects or deeds to which it is referring (Bolinger 1980: 119). Euphemism is 'good-naming' or giving nice-sounding names to things which usually create negative associations. Euphemism is used in reference to traditionally taboo subjects such as death, sex and bodily parts and functions, and many discussions of euphemism also include such areas as war and the military.³

Dysphemism can be defined as the opposite of euphemism. It is the process of building negative associations, 'bad-naming'. Both euphemism and dysphemism are essential parts of dichotomous rhetoric.

In glorification and exculpation euphemism is often at work because creating positive associations is the goal in both processes. In vilification dysphemism, the creation of bad associations, is present.

Good-naming and euphemism can take many different forms but all

involve bending the viewpoint so that the piece of reality in question appears as favorable as possible. In its extreme form, this mindbending may approach lying (Swift, reprinted in Muller [1985]: 426).

The forms that the building of positive associations can take are, for example, metaphors, meaningless words, words of Latin origin, or 'sheer cloudy vagueness' (Orwell [1968]: 130–136), the use of certain key words, such as *freedom* and *democracy* (Lasswell [1968]: 13), a high level of abstraction and elision of unpleasant words (Wagner 1969: 23). Especially in the area of international politics, the emotive content of words is often exploited to blur reality and make the world seem black and white. When attitudes are manipulated in this manner, there is a danger that we might actually begin to view the world not as a complex whole but as split into two halves, between which no compromise is possible.

According to yet another terminological distinction, 'purr words' and 'snarl words'⁴ divide our world in two: open, free and democratic versus closed, enslaved and communist in Western terms (Postman 1969: 18), and similar mindbending was in progress on the other side (May 1985: 129; Luckham 1984: 46). American foreign policy is supported by what Wander calls 'prophetic dualism', a doctrine according to which the world is viewed as consisting of two camps: 'One side acts in accord with all that is good, decent, and at one with God's will. The other acts in direct opposition' (Wander 1984: 342). There is no doubt that President Reagan was a devoted follower of this doctrine. His speeches followed the old American speech tradition of the 'paranoid style', described by Hofstadter. According to Hofstadter, rightwing thinking is often based on 'paranoid' assumptions: there has been a conspiracy 'to undermine free capitalism, to bring the economy under direction of the federal government, and to pave the way for socialism or communism' (Hofstadter 1965: 25). Reagan's rhetoric also has features in common with the style of Senator Goldwater: communists are seen as the ultimate enemy who must be exterminated ideologically, as well as politically (1965: 128). Reagan's speeches on foreign relations and military build-up were loaded with dichotomies of this nature. He exploited language in order to make people friends or enemies.⁵

3. It's a world that we share, but alas, it's black and white: Reagan's dichotomies

Reagan's dichotomous thinking is by no means restricted to foreign policy issues. His thinking was often divided in domestic issues as well: himself versus Speaker O'Neill, Republicans versus Democrats, and generally, himself versus those opposing him. Here, however, I will restrict myself to

Reagan's foreign policy, and focus on two large aspects of it, where his juiciest dichotomies proliferated: American-Soviet relations, and the military. I will use Rank's four part division (glorification, vilification, exculpation, and denigration) to analyze Reagan's language in these areas, which will be thematically subdivided.

*The making of the good guys and the bad guys:
The two superpowers in Reagan's eyes*

The glorification of one's own country is an integral and natural part of the speeches of politicians. One of Reagan's goals was to 'make America great again' in the eyes of both the American people and the whole world. Reagan relied on the old values which traditionally have been associated with America: freedom and religion, and used these in order to build up the pride of the American people and to make America appear righteous and virtuous in the eyes of the world.

To justify the military build-up that was going on, Reagan needed a reason, and this reason was the alleged threat posed by the Soviet Union.⁶ While Reagan glorified America on the one hand, on the other hand he vilified the Soviet Union with menacing terms, and with his words divided the world in two.

Sugar and spice and everything nice: Reagan's vision of America

Appealing to people's inherent patriotism is an old persuasive trick. Most of Reagan's public speeches were directed to an American audience. He gave a radio address to the nation every week, and in these messages he frequently exercised the positive emotions of the American people towards their own country. He did this effectively and spared no words on it, and it was worth the trouble because Reagan, to realize his plans, needed the support of the American people. His patriotism was a way of flattering Americans: America is the best; you are Americans, so you are the best.

America, America

Surprisingly, Reagan rarely refers to America as *the United States*. This is a neutral name of a country, and evidently not loaded with enough positive emotional associations. When speaking to an American audience, he tends most frequently to use the word *nation*:

- (1) a. this Nation (95/81)⁷
- b. the Nation (594/81)
- c. this great Nation (760/81)

- d. our Nation (939/81)
- e. our great Nation (147/82)
- f. this great Nation of ours (45/82)
- g. a nation under God (3/81)

Glorification is at work here. The word *nation* is a term referring to an entity, definite and separate from other countries. Unlike the neutral *United States*, it creates associations of togetherness, shared background and mutual goals. When it is connected with the proximal demonstrative pronoun *this* – as opposed to the distal *that* – (a, c, f), the possessive *our* (d, e), or a combination of both (f), the positive connotations are further reinforced. The adjective *great* explicitly states the President's strategy (c, e, f), but even with the definite article alone the word *nation* seems to carry emotional overtones (b).

Another appellation for the United States is the word *land*, which exhibits a semantic extension from 'soil' to a political unit, including territory and all people on it. An association with 'The Holy Land' may have been intended:

- (2) a. this wonderful land (1022/81)
- b. this blessed land (109/82)
- c. our blessed land (157/82)
- d. our own land (813/81)
- e. this land of ours (424/81)
- f. a caring, loving land (89/82)

This land of ours ('This land is your land, this land is my land ...') is wonderful (a), blessed (b), and our own (c, d, e). These short phrases are full of emotion, and the use of the first person plural possessive persuades the audience to strongly identify itself with the speaker. Both possess a common heritage and thus, by cunning inference, a common goal as well.

If we compare the phrases 'a foreign land' and 'a foreign country', we can notice that the former phrase has exotic and even romantic associations, while the latter is neutral, or even slightly negative, in its associations. The word *country* is also sometimes used by the ex-President. Since it is more neutral, freer of emotion, than *nation* and *land*, the word *country* seems to need some 'emotional support' around it (3), unlike the word *nation*, which itself is more emotional and can stand with only a definite article (cf. (1b) above):

- (3) a. this country (527/81)
- b. our country (822/81)
- c. our free country (560/81)

The words *this*, *our* and *free* add the needed emotional touch to this word. It is interesting that a function word, *this*, seems to be able to carry emotional meaning. The connotatively empty pair of function words *this* and *that*, in

addition to denoting deixis, is able in certain contexts to carry the emotional connotation of *this* being close to us and thus dear, and *that* being far away and less agreeable.

Despite the political vagueness of the word *America*, which officially means the whole Western Hemisphere, this word is often used to replace the more impersonal *United States*. Besides being ethnocentric, as though the United States were the only 'America' that counts, *America* is a more abstract term than the *United States*, and vague and abstract terms often have the capacity to upgrade:

- (4)a. America is such a special country. (939/81)
- b. America ... has got its eyes and its heart on you. (1045/81)
- c. a strong and prosperous America (2/81)
- d. an America that is strong and free (435/81)
- e. a healthy and a strong America (862/81)
- f. America is not a second-best society. (560/81)

Reagan personifies America: it is *special, strong, prosperous, free* and *healthy*, and it has *eyes* and a *heart*.

In one particular speech Reagan uses all the appellations which in examples (1-4) function as heads of noun phrases to refer to the United States:

- (5) ... an *America*⁸ that is strong and free ... this much-loved *country*, this once and future *land*, this bright and hopeful *nation* whose generous spirit and great ideals the world still honors. (435/81)

America – country – land – nation; while this is an example of elegant variation, a cohesive strategy to avoid repetition, the emotive content also accumulates with each new added phrase. With the highly favorable adjectives *strong, free, much-loved, bright, hopeful, generous*, and *great*, the positive emotive load of these few phrases becomes enormous.

In addition to highly favorable, emotional adjectives, Reagan also likes to use them in superlative forms:

- (6)a. ... a nation that would become *the greatest* the world has ever seen. (1074/81)
- b. ... *the freest* and *the greatest* society that man has ever known. (724/81)
- c. And once again, we felt the surge of pride that comes from knowing that we're *the first* and we're *the best* – and we are so because we're free. (441/81)

In all the above cases positive superlative qualities are attached to America.

Certain values are frequently attached to America as well, and the most commonly mentioned of these are 'freedom' and 'religion'. These values have

a long tradition in American thinking, going back to the Declaration of Independence. In his rhetoric, Reagan builds strongly on this old tradition.

Freedom

The words *free* and *freedom* are often mentioned as being among the most frequently employed abstractions in political speaking,⁹ and Reagan lives up to this generalization. The following phrases refer to America:

- (7)a. a trustee of freedom and peace (87/82)
- b. this last and greatest bastion of freedom (1/81)

These are both strong metaphors, depicting America as something trustworthy and capable of handling matters (a) or, as a stronghold defending people's freedom from attacks from outside (b). The metaphor in example (b) is of military origin, implying the defensive, non-aggressive nature of the United States' military might.

Being free is given as the cause of other good things:

- (8)a. ... we're happy and proud *because we're free* ... (593/81)
- b. And once again, we felt the surge of pride that comes from knowing that we're the first and we're the best – and we are so *because we're free*. (441/81)

Freedom – whatever Reagan understood by it (possibly capitalism and minimal government control over people's lives) – was evidently placed at the top in Reagan's hierarchy of values.

- (9)a. The most precious gift we have is our political freedom – the legacy left us by Virginians like Jefferson, Madison, and Patrick Henry. (992/81)
- b. ... the unique form of government that allows us the freedom to choose our own destiny ... (568/81)

Example (9b) contains the assumption that people can choose their destinies, and that being allowed to do so is freedom. The same assumptions are present in the following example:

- (10) ... we can leave [our children] liberty in a land where every individual has the opportunity to be whatever God intended us to be. (83/81)

If God intended some people to be, say, poor, the government can wash its hands. This leads us to the issue of religion in Reagan's speeches.

Religion

Religion is often tied with politics, and since the birth of the nation, religion has been regarded as a traditional American value. Hofstadter (1965: 79)

writes that 'ascetic Protestantism remains a significant undercurrent in contemporary America', and Reagan follows this tradition; at least that is how he chooses to market himself.

Religion and freedom are readily linked together:

(11) ... I believe God intended for us to be free. (3/81)

Associations with 'The Pledge of Allegiance' are evoked:

(12) a nation under God (3/81)

According to Reagan, God was behind the birth of America:

(13) a. There must have been a Divine plan that brought to this blessed land people from every corner of the Earth. (1024/81)

b. ... this blessed land was set apart in a very special way, a country created by men and women who came here not in search of gold, but in search of God. (109/82)

For glorification purposes, Reagan reserves God for the Americans.

The Free World

The governments whose principles Reagan agrees with also receive their share of glorification. All non-communist countries form 'the free world' (544/81, 620/81), and Reagan makes this explicit – *free* means *Western* (14a), and implies that the Western Hemisphere consists and should consist only of *freedom-loving people* (14b):

(14) a. ... in the Western World, in the free world (59/81)

b. *Freedom-loving people* in this hemisphere (446/82)

It is noteworthy that *freedom-loving people* systematically means people living in countries whose economic systems favor free enterprise. *Freedom* in that sense is the concept that ties all of those countries together with the United States:

(15) Mr. President, you're a man, and Venezuelans are a people, whose *love of life and of freedom* are something with which the people of the United States can identify. You and your country *stand for those values and those principles* that reflect *the best of mankind*. (1060/81)

In this example, glorifying abstractions ('love', 'life', 'freedom', etcetera) are frequent, and a superlative (*the best of mankind*) is also used. In other examples, Australia is 'a force of peace' (581/81), Spain 'a beacon of hope' (922/81), and West Germany stands on 'the cliff of freedom':

(16) The Federal Republic is perched on *the cliff of freedom* that overlooks *Soviet dependents* to the East. While *the dominated peoples* in these

lands cannot enjoy your liberties, they can look at your example and hope. (448/81)

Soviet dependents and the *dominated peoples* hint at the direction of the other half of dichotomous language, which I shall discuss next.

*Frogs and snails and puppydog tails; or
How we can make the evil look even worse*

It is noble to avenge oneself on one's enemies and not to come to terms with them; for requital is just, and the just is noble; and not to surrender is a sign of courage.

Aristotle

Dichotomous language does not mean only glorification, intensifying one's own good. In order for language to be dichotomous we also need the opposite process of vilification, intensifying the other's bad properties and actions. Reagan's rhetoric in reference to the Soviet Union was notoriously harsh. His 'Evil Empire' speech in 1983 received a lot of attention, but even before that the appellations he used when talking about the Soviet Union are systematically dysphemistic:

- (17) a. an evil force (464/81)
- b. hateful forces (1006/81)
- c. the forces of oppression (77/82)
- d. the forces of aggression, lawlessness, and tyranny (767/81)
- e. tyrants (409/81)
- f. aggressors (144/82)
- g. the enemies of freedom (3/81)
- h. foe of freedom (168/81)
- i. our adversaries (150/82)

All this 'snarl-talk' serves the purpose of vilifying the Soviet Union. At the time, Reagan was in the process of building up the American military; enormous sums of dollars were needed, and, without a legitimate purpose, without a threat menacing 'freedom' (g, h), the people and the Congress of the United States would perhaps not have been motivated to devote their money to the purpose of protecting themselves.

The use of the word *forceforces* (a-d) connotes the military and violence, and is also a metaphor for something that is not under human control. The word *evil* (a), since it appears frequently in the Bible, carries religious and moral connotations. To be evil is worse than to be bad.

The Soviet Union, this 'evil force', represents an ideology which Reagan

does not know whether to call socialism or communism (18a), but it is an ideology which would spread unless something was done; what need would there be to build up the military if this were not the case? Communism was a spreading disease and Reagan devoted himself to making the American people aware of it and afraid of it:

- (18) a. ... they hold their determination that their goal must be the promotion of world revolution and a one-world Socialist or Communist state, whichever word you want to use. (57/81)
- b. ... they ... have openly and publicly declared that the only morality they recognize is what will further their cause, meaning they reserve unto themselves the right to *commit any crime, to lie, to cheat*, in order to attain that, and that is moral, not immoral, and ... when you do business with them ... you keep that in mind. (57/81)

By characterizing socialism as 'committing crimes', 'lying' and 'cheating' (18b), it is no wonder that Reagan was able to create an atmosphere of cold war in just a few months after becoming President.

What else did Reagan tell us about socialism? Among other things, he reminds his listeners that the Soviets do not have a God; socialism is their 'religion' (1197/81). It is 'an ideology that smothers freedom and independence and denies the existence of God' (102/82), it is 'an illogical system, a system that has no trust, no belief or faith in people' (604/81). Sometimes Reagan only hints at this nameless terror, referring to 'certain economic theories that use the rhetoric of class struggle to justify injustice' (434/81).

If the above does not paint a dark enough picture of socialism, Reagan vividly relates what socialism and its advocates do: they 'preach the supremacy of the state' (175/81), 'suffocate' people 'under [an] oppressive whim', '[encourage] hatred and conflict' (102/82), 'opposed the idea of freedom, ... are intolerant of national independence, and hostile to the European values of democracy and the rule of law' (1162/81); they 'preach revolution against tyranny, but they intend to replace it with the tyranny of totalitarianism' (969/81), and they answer 'the stirrings of liberty with brute force, killings, mass arrests, and the setting up of concentration camps' (1186/81).

All the above descriptions of the advocates of the Soviet system create a frightening picture of them and the ideology they represent. Sometimes, however, Reagan changes his strategy from painting horror pictures of the Soviet Union, to trivializing and denigrating it. The following patronizing statements imply that we are so morally superior that we can pity them:

- (19) a. ... clichés ... a gaggle of bogus prophecies and petty superstitions (175/81)
- b. ... a sad and rather bizarre chapter in human history (175/81)

Reagan also talks about the Soviets as if they were little children:

(20) As President, I can't ... simply hope that the Soviets will behave themselves. (154/82)

In one thing Reagan is resolute and consistent: the spread of communism must be prevented:

- (21) a. ... we will stand together ... in our opposition to the *spread* to our shores of *hostile totalitarian* systems ... (1053/81)
- b. ... we must stand together for the integrity of our hemisphere, for the inviolability of its nations, for its defense against *imported terrorism*, and for the rights of all our citizens to be free from the *provocations triggered* from outside our sphere for *malevolent* purposes. (234/81)
- c. ... we will not look the other way as *aggressors usurp* the rights of independent people or watch idly while they *foment revolutions* to *impose* the rule of *tyrants*. (144/82)
- d. ... we will express our quiet determination to defend those institutions against any *threat*. (621/81)

All these examples start with either 'we will' or 'we must'. Keeping the Western Hemisphere free from communism is especially important (a, b), and the threat posed by communism is again described with vivid dysphemisms. The adjectives *hostile*, *totalitarian* (a) and *malevolent*; the nouns *terrorism*, *provocation* (b), *aggressors*, *revolutions*, *tyrants* (c) and *threat* (d); and the verbs *spread* (like a disease) (a), *trigger* (b), *usurp*, *foment*, and *impose* (c) are all rich in negative connotation. They work together to vilify the Soviet Union and its 'evil purposes'.

The battle between good and evil

... the forces of good ultimately rally and triumph over evil. (175/81)
Ronald Reagan

No official war between the United States and the Soviet Union was proclaimed, but there was a war of words going on, creating a strong impression of a battle between good and evil, which Reagan was cleverly able to fit into the ancient frame wherein morality and religious values are confronted by immorality and evil. There was a deep difference between the United States and the Soviet Union, the one representing capitalism and the other socialism; this is a political and economic opposition. However, Reagan 'elevates' this opposition to an abstract level; to a dichotomy of Right and Wrong:

(22) ... this isn't a question of East versus West, of the U.S. versus the Soviet Union. It's a question of *freedom versus compulsion*, of *what works versus what doesn't work*, of *sense versus non-sense*. (939/81)

Since the rational opposition of two different economic systems had been elevated to an opposition in spiritual spheres, a battle between good and bad spirits can be inferred, a battle not without Biblical implications:

(23) But, good men, with the help of God, cooperating with one another, can and will prevail over evil. (693/81)

In (24) it is explicitly stated that dark forces are threatening to 'put out' the light of freedom:

(24) ... *the forces of aggression, lawlessness, and tyranny* intent on exploiting weakness. They seek to undo the work of generations of our people, to put out *a light that we've been tending ...* (767/81)

One of the unwritten rules of dichotomous rhetoric is that ideas can be repeated over and over again, if they are dressed in a different form. The idea in example (24) is the same as in (25a-c), but the elements of the phrases are different. However, certain key ideas, such as *freedom*, *threaten* and *destroy* recur:

- (25) a. ... the survival of our nations and the peace of the world are *threatened* by forces which are willing to exert any pressure, test any will, and *destroy any freedom*. (168/81)
- b. We live in a precarious world *threatened* by totalitarian forces who seek to subvert and *destroy freedom*. (784/81)
- c. ... a world where *freedom* and democracy are constantly challenged (580/81)

In fairy tales the good always wins, and Reagan promises that the good will also win this particular battle:

- (26) a. The West won't contain communism, it will transcend communism. It won't bother to dismiss or denounce it, it will dismiss it as some bizarre chapter in human history whose last pages are even now being written. (434/81)
- b. ... freedom will eventually triumph over tyranny ... Time will find them beaten. The beacon of freedom shines here for all who will see, inspiring free men and captives alike, and no wall, no curtain, nor totalitarian state can shut it out. (968/81)

This side, however, cannot be emphasized too much: otherwise, if people become too convinced that good will win, there might not be enough incentive to continue the arms race.

4. The question of war and peace

*Military build-up**Defending the defense: The good arms race*

The glorification of the United States and the vilification of the Soviet Union were evidently deemed necessary to legitimize the U.S. military build-up. Because the arms race is generally considered a bad thing, Reagan made use of exculpation and euphemism when talking about it. At the same time, the opposite processes of denigration and dysphemism were employed to make the arms race on the Soviet side appear even more malevolent.

According to Reagan, the Soviet Union had weapons because their goal was to aggressively expand their system all over the world. Reagan is concerned about 'the superiority of the Soviet forces' (746/81). The Soviets are far ahead in the race, this 'decline of America's defenses' (930/81) was caused by the unwise politics of the previous President:

(27) ... a strong national defense, a vital function which had been allowed to deteriorate dangerously in previous years. (162/82)

Reagan also insinuates that if people do not support his military spending, they do not fully understand the seriousness of what is going on and they are not fully committed to liberty:

(28) ... liberty requires an understanding by ordinary people of what is at stake. The survival of the whole way of life depends on their commitment. (581/81)

Reagan also often refers to the threat posed by the Soviet Union more openly, thus adding to the vilified, dysphemistic picture of the Soviets, these 'foreign aggressors' (307/81) and 'those who would seek to pull [this Nation] down' (434/81). This is 'a precarious period of world history' (937/81), and we live in a 'dangerous world' (559/81) where freedom is being threatened:

- (29) a. ... we're confronted with *threats* to our freedom. (39/81)
 b. ... the liberty we enjoy has no guarantee (581/81)
 c. And to allow ... this imbalance to continue is a *threat* to our national security. (309/81)

Reagan needs his high military budget to defend his country 'against aggression' (67/81), and deter 'foreign attacks' (878/81), which 'jeopardize ... our hopes for peace and freedom' (878/81). The 'superiority of the Soviet forces' has opened a 'window of vulnerability' (746/81), a metaphor Reagan likes to use when referring to the assumed gap between the military arsenals of the two superpowers. Catching up with the Soviets by spending enormous sums

on weapons is referred to as an innocent act of 'closing a window':

(30) ... we're determined, that we are going to *close that window of vulnerability* that has existed for some time with regard to our defensive capability. (722/81)

Military build-up is 'increases in defense spending' (112/81), but usually it is referred to with more euphemistic, exculpatory phrases: it is protecting 'our security ... by a balanced and realistic defense program' (112/81), 'the prime responsibility of the National Government' (1077/81), 'essential to our national security' (870/81), and one of 'the necessary things we must do' (309/81). It is 'safeguarding our freedom' (226/81), 'meet[ing] our responsibility to the free world' (464/81), 'making America once again strong enough to safeguard our freedom' (800/81), and 'protection for all that we hold dear' (462/81). Reagan appeals to his and the American people's sense of duty to go on with the military build-up.

(31) It's my duty as President, and all of our responsibility as citizens, to keep this country strong enough to remain free. (309/81)

Building up the military requires not only will but also lots of taxpayers' money. However, these 'economic sacrifices' (32a), according to Reagan, are 'relatively small' (32b) and very worthwhile:

(32) a. ... we are ... making *economic sacrifices* for the sake of Western security. (750/82)

b. ... *the relatively small sacrifices* to preserve our freedom today and our children's freedom tomorrow ... (361/82)

There is no denying that the increases in the United States military build-up in the early 1980s were quite high, and Reagan had to explain it to the people:

(33) a. ... I've asked for *substantial* increases in our defense budget – *substantial, but not excessive*. (228/82)

b. But the truth is we're only spending about 6 percent – our military budget is *only* about 6 percent of the gross national product. (150/82)

c. Though *not small*, the cost of our program represents an historically *reasonable* share of our resources ... (361/82)

Increases are 'substantial but not excessive' (a), 'reasonable' (c), and the debated budget constitutes 'only 6 percent' of the gross national product (b). If, instead of the percentage, Reagan had used the dollar amount, the result would not have been as soothing. *Only 6 percent* is here a euphemism. It is also interesting to notice that Reagan changed his syntax in the middle of sentence (b). His 'false start' would inevitably have led to a collocation he

wanted to avoid: 'spending about 6 percent on the military'. In (33c) Reagan has used the litotes *not small* in order to avoid saying that his military budget is 'big'.

The verbs which Reagan uses for building up the American military might be systematically euphemistic, verbs which create positive associations:

- (34) a. ... the commitment of the Congress to *improving* America's defenses ... (957/82)
 b. ... this program will enable us to *modernize* our strategic forces ... (878/81)
 c. ... our planned program to *strengthen* the national defense. (1085/81)
 d. ... the basic program of *upgrading* and *building* weapons systems that we need in order to close the window of vulnerability ... (429/18)
 e. The search for peace must go on, but we have a better chance of finding it if we *maintain* our strength while we're searching. (462/81)

Improving (a), *modernizing* (b), *strengthening* (c), and *upgrading* (d) carry positive associations of making something qualitatively better. *Building* (d) and *maintaining* (e) are also free from negative associations, and are good, working euphemisms which exculpate the busily advancing military build-up from its possible negative connotations.

Reagan also wanted to show that there was currently something wrong with the United States military, and that his budget was aimed at repairing it. *Halt the decline* (35 a) and *rectifying imbalance* (35b) create associations of positive, constructive activities, as also the phrases *remedying* (35c) or *ending neglect* (35d):

- (35) a. ... I have repeatedly pledged to *halt the decline* in America's military strength ... (878/81)
 b. We simply must *rectify that imbalance*. (813/81)
 c. We have proposed a defense program ... which will *remedy the neglect* of the past decade ... (1064/81)
 d. ... I have directed that we *end our long neglect* of strategic defenses. (879/81)

Metaphors of *erosion* and *starvation* are evoked with reference to military weakness. Fighting against erosion and hunger is generally considered good and thus these metaphors are likely to create the right kind of response:

- (36) a. We have proposed a defense program ... which will ... restore the *eroding* balance on which our security depends. (1064/81)
 b. ... we're trying to make up for a number of years of *starvation*. (640/82)

The prefix *re-* carries the meaning of making something back into what it once was, in Reagan's terms, making 'America strong again' (1046/81). Since the issue of military build-up was discussed frequently during Reagan's first term, Reagan and his speechwriters had to come up with various ways of saying the same things over and over again. Too much lexical repetition might lead the listeners to think about what is actually meant by the words, and thus could be dangerous. It is surprising how many words with the prefix *re-* alone the speechwriters were able to find, in addition to all of the other circumlocutions used in reference to the arms race:

- (37) a. We pledge to end disrespect for America abroad and to *rebuild* our national defense so as to make America respected again among the nations. (601/81)
- b. ... the absolute necessity of *redressing* the imbalance in our defensive standpoint (839/81)
- c. ... our defense program to *refurbish* our defenses ... (1037/81)
- d. ... *restoring* our margin of safety ... (462/81)
- e. ... I am announcing today a plan to *revitalize* our strategic forces ... (878/81)

In (37a) Reagan expresses his assumption that in order to be respected, a country has to be militarily strong. If *respect* means the same as the *fear* that Reagan's rhetoric generated at least among many Europeans, he did achieve his goal.

When possible, elision is used in order to avoid mentioning a word which might create unwanted associations. In (38a) Reagan is answering a question about defense cuts, and in (38b) the context is again that of the military:

- (38) a. ... if it would be one that would not hurt the program of *building* that we are going forward with (839/81)
- b. We're going to *continue*, at the same time we are going to continue to urge them to sit down with us in a program of realistic strategic arms reduction. (746/81)

Building and continuing *what*? The objects of the verbs are elided because they would have been 'our military' and 'the arms race', or some Reaganistic circumlocution for these.

If military build-up must be mentioned, Reagan almost invariably connects it with the word *peace*. Participation in the arms race is Reagan's strategy for 'preserv[ing] the peace' (39a,d):

- (39) a. ... we're forced to try to catch up so that we can preserve the *peace*. (832/81)
- b. Our strong defense is the foundation of freedom, *peace*, and stability ... (228/81)

- c. ... so we can maintain *peace* through strength. (668/82)
- d. It's morally important that we take steps to protect America's safety and preserve the *peace*. (154/82)
- e. ... our greatest goal must be *peace*, and I also happen to believe that that will come through our maintaining enough strength that we can keep the *peace*. (522/81)
- f. We've laid the foundation for a long-range build-up of our Armed Forces, bringing us nearer the day when Americans can once again enjoy a margin of safety and *peace* will be made more secure. (602/81)
- g. In our search for an everlasting *peace*, let all of us resolve to remain so sure of our strength that the victory for mankind we won here is never threatened. (969/81)
- h. ... a plan that will meet our vital security needs and strengthen our hopes for *peace* (879/81)
- i. ... I am announcing today a plan to revitalize our strategic forces and maintain America's ability to keep the *peace* well into the next century. (878/81)

Peace is the magic word that legitimizes military build-up. These examples prove that Reagan was trying to create a collocation *military strength/peace*, so that people would automatically think about the desirable thing *peace* when they heard the phrase *American military strength*. Reagan was a follower of the old Latin proverb: *Si vis pacem, para bellum*.¹⁰

The evil arms race

While the United States was 'modernizing', 'restoring' and 'refurbishing' its 'defenses', the Soviet Union was simultaneously doing something quite different, judging from Reagan's lexicon: they were 'engaged in the most massive military build-up the world has ever seen' (832/81), 'the most massive arms build-up in history' (487/82) or 'the greatest military build-up in the history of man' (711/81). As in glorification (for example, [6] above), superlatives come in handy for vilification purposes as well. While Reagan, when talking about the United States, avoids the words *military build-up* or *arms build-up*, he readily uses these words when referring to the Soviet Union.

Example (38a) illustrates the use of elision in avoiding mention of a word with negative associations with reference to the United States' military build-up. When referring to the same activity as carried out by the Soviets, the elision of the object of *build* does not take place; on the contrary, the object is elaborately described:

(40) ... they've been building *the greatest military machine the world has ever seen*. (957/81)

While the United States' military build-up is purely defensive in nature, the Soviets are arming 'themselves at a pace far beyond the needs of defense' (164/81). The Soviet arms race

(41) ... cannot be described as necessary for their defense. It is plainly a build-up that is offensive in nature. (711/81)

The adjectives which Reagan uses with reference to the Soviet military build-up are loaded with negative emotional connotations:

- (42) a. ... the Soviet Union has undergone a *massive* military build-up, far outstripping any need for defense. (309/81)
 b. ... the *disturbing* build-up of Soviet military forces (448/81)
 c. ... this *relentless* build-up of Soviet military power ... (1064/81)
 d. ... an *unrelenting* build-up of their military forces (78/82)

Comparisons of the military strength of the United States and the Soviet Union are in a sense irrelevant; both were – and are still – capable of destroying the whole of humankind many times over. When Reagan talks about the United States' military build-up, he keeps to the abstract level of 'modernizing' (see examples 34a–e above), attempting to create an image of simply remedying a neglect (35c), whereas when it comes to the Soviet military build-up, he descends from high abstractions to the more tangible level of numbers.¹¹ By selecting the right 'facts', he is able to make the Soviet threat appear enormous:

- (43) a. Consider *the facts*. Over the past decade, the United States reduced the size of its Armed Forces and decreased its military spending. The Soviets steadily increased the number of men under arms. They now number *more than double* those of the United States. Over the same period, the Soviets *expanded their real military spending by about one-third*. The Soviet Union *increased its inventory of tanks to some 50,000, compared to our 11,000*. (1064/81)
 b. They've spent \$300 billion *more than we have* for military forces *resulting in a significant numerical advantage* in strategic nuclear delivery systems, tactical aircraft, submarines, artillery, and anti-aircraft defense. (309/81)

In both of these examples we can note the level of concreteness: Reagan speaks in tangible numbers, and even the forbidden word *nuclear* is mentioned, a collocation which Reagan avoids in connection with the U.S. military. It is surprising that the U.S.S.R. anti-aircraft system is designated by the appellation *defense*, but even a Soviet anti-aircraft system could hardly be

offensive, since these systems are defensive by definition.

Reagan expresses his irritation over the Soviets' ocean fleet, which, according to him, they should not have:

- (44) Historically a land power, they transformed their navy from a coastal defense force to an open ocean fleet, while the United States, a sea power with transoceanic alliances, cut its fleet in half. (1064/81)

Reagan is here expressing a 'go-away-from-my-sandpit' attitude. It is legitimate for the United States to have an ocean fleet because they have 'transoceanic alliances' at the border of the Soviet Union, but the Soviet Union should not have a fleet, although they also have transoceanic alliances such as Cuba. Reagan's logic is difficult to follow.

As we know, Reagan's two terms in office meant cuts in welfare programs, cuts in education, cuts everywhere else but in the military. However, Reagan accuses the Soviets in the following way:

- (45) The Soviets have not built a society; they've built an arsenal. (812/81)

Offensive, defensive, or just plain weapons?

A stone is a stone, whether it is used as a paperweight or thrown at somebody to knock him senseless. You can smooth a sleeping child's hair with your hand, and you can also use your hand to hit somebody, but your hand still remains your hand, the name does not change. However, when Reagan speaks about weapons, he has two completely different sets of vocabulary from which he chooses his words, depending on whether he is talking about American weapons or Soviet ones.

As with stones and hands, weapons can be put to different uses, and we never know what will be done with them before they are actually used. Reagan, however, wanted to divide the weapons of the world into benevolent and malevolent ones even before they were used. To one living in Europe, in the middle of the targeted missiles from both sides, it did not really matter whether they were good ones or bad ones; they were just plain weapons, destructive and scary.

Reagan's goal was a 'strong America' and weapons were naturally part of that strength, but according to Reagan, it was not likely that the weapons were actually going to be used. In the early 1980s the neutron bomb was a current issue. The United States was going to deploy the neutron warhead in Western Europe, and Reagan wanted to reduce the significance of this deployment to an act of simply 'storing' it there, since it had to be kept somewhere, after all. Besides, an American neutron warhead 'is purely, as I say, a defensive weapon' (709/81):

- (46) All we've done is *simply* say that we're going to *continue warehousing* this, but we're going to put that in the casing and *warehouse it as a unit instead of two separate parts*. (708/81)

The difference between an assembled and an unassembled neutron weapon is the same as that between a loaded and an unloaded gun. Reagan, however, manages to make it sound innocent enough with his careful phrasing and choices of vocabulary. Even a new verb, *to warehouse*, is brought into use to euphemize the deployment of the neutron weapon to Europe. Reagan also calls the neutron weapon 'a more moderate but more effective version' of other tactical nuclear weapons (710/81). Certainly a neutron bomb is 'moderate' and 'effective': it kills only people, leaving the enemy's buildings and other constructions unharmed for possible later use by, for example, the ones who dropped the bomb.

Since the word *weapons* is likely to generate unpleasant and frightening associations in the minds of listeners, Reagan, when talking about American weapons, uses highly abstract, euphemizing circumlocutions. The downplaying of one's 'own bad' is at work. In the same way as *the War Department* long ago became *the Defense Department*, and Reagan speaks of 'service academies' (462/81) rather than *military academies*, American weapons are not weapons but *systems* (951/81), *new elements* (878/81), *strategic programs* (878/81), *protective hardware* (462/81), *our technology* (952/81), *deterrent for protection* (681/82), *equipment* (952/81) or *vital security needs* (878/81). While the Soviets have concrete *missiles* (299/82), the Americans have *corresponding systems* (299/82). Nuclear weapons are *nuclear capabilities* (487/82), and the defense budget is not for weapons but for high-level abstractions such as *maintenance and readiness* (194/82).

When Reagan does descend from the level of high abstractions, and comes down to more concrete concepts, the words are still carefully chosen according to the associations they create:

- (47) a. The American people expect their *planes* to fly, their *ships* to sail, and their helicopters to stay aloft. (299/82)
- b. These two *ships* lie anchored *in peace and friendship*, yet each is vigilant and ready to defend the other if threatened ... (963/81)
- c. ... we intend that you shall find better working conditions, *tools* adequate to the tasks you're expected to perform ... (461/81)

At least to me, example (47a) brings to mind the beautiful song 'I am flying ... I am sailing'; the sentence creates an atmosphere of tranquility in the hearers' or readers' minds, and they forget that the flying planes and the sailing ships carry with them destructive weapons.

In (47b) also Reagan has chosen the neutral word *ship* to refer to American and French battleships. Generalization has here a euphemizing effect, as also

in example (47c) where Reagan, speaking to soldiers, uses the everyday word *tools*, which are useful and constructive, instead of *weapons* – useful, but destructive. It is true that weapons are soldiers' tools, but the avoidance of the direct mentioning of the word *weapons* is evident.

The 'tools' of Soviet soldiers are called by different names: they are 'machines of war' and 'instruments of destruction' (2/81). The words which Reagan avoids when referring to American arms, such as *military*, *weapon* and *nuclear*, are used, as well as other concrete words with warlike associations, for example *warheads*, *missiles* (48b) and *tanks* (48c,d):

- (48) a. The Soviet Union ... is spilling over with *military hardware*. The Soviets have ... built an *arsenal*. (812/81)
 b. ... the Soviet Union deployed *more than 750 nuclear warheads* on the new SS-20 *missiles* alone. (1064/81)
 c. ... the great superiority that the Soviet Union has on the western front against the NATO nations, a *tank* advantage of better than four to one ... (709/81)
 d. ... they outnumber us in every conventional *weapon*, thousands of *tanks*, more than the NATO defense can have. (957/81)

In (48d) Reagan makes a point of the Soviet Union having more conventional weapons. However, in this nuclear age, conventional weapons do not pose a threat comparable to that posed by nuclear weapons, no matter how many conventional tanks there are.

The noble purpose for Reagan's arming of Europe was to defend his transoceanic allies:

- (49) ... we have our allies there who don't have an ocean between them, so it doesn't take intercontinental ballistic missiles of the SS-20 type. Well, the SS-20s will have, with what they're adding, 750 warheads – one of them capable of pretty much leveling a city. (957/81)

The terms which Reagan uses are concrete, and the name of the armament game is 'you have so much and I don't have any': '... there is no equivalent deterrent to these Soviet intermediate missiles' (1065/81). 'We' should have a *deterrent*, 'they' have *missiles*. Reagan did not want to acknowledge the SS-20s as the Soviet defense of their own borders. Besides, what was Reagan himself doing on the other side of the world? Would he have forgiven the Soviets' arming their transoceanic allies on the same scale that he was arming Western Europe? There was no obvious justification for it, and so Reagan had to make the Soviet threat to the other parts of Europe seem greater in order to legitimize his actions.

- (50) ... 200 SS-20s, strategic *nuclear weapons* of medium range, that are aimed at the cities of all of Europe today ... (710/81)

The weapons are called by their own names, and at least unconsciously the point is made that these are *nuclear* weapons. If the phrase 'the cities of all of Europe' literally means all European cities, the claim is highly exaggerated. This claim is repeated elsewhere:

- (51) ... they can sit right there and that's got all of Europe, including England and all, targeted. (957/81)

Reagan goes to considerable detail in making a list of the places targeted by Soviet SS-20s:

- (52) Well, as this map demonstrates, the SS-20s, even if deployed behind the Urals, will have a range that puts almost all of Western Europe – the great cities – Rome, Athens, Paris, London, Brussels, Amsterdam, Berlin, and so many more – all of Scandinavia, all of the Middle East, all of northern Africa, all within range of these missiles which, incidentally, are mobile and can be moved on shorter notice. (1065–66/81)

It is interesting that the Soviet Union is aiming at *cities*, while the United States is depicted as aiming only at *tanks*:

- (53) At the moment, the only stalemate to them is the tactical nuclear weapon *that would be aimed at those tanks*, if they ever started to roll forward. (957/81)

In the following statement Reagan claims that the Soviets are capable of destroying more than the United States:

- (54) ... ours do not have the range to really reach the depths of Russia. Russia's too far expanded, and the rest of Europe is too concentrated, so *they can destroy where we can't*. (957/81)

Notice the elision of the word *missiles* after *ours*. This statement also reveals an attitude that 'we' would destroy more if we only could. Of course this intention is not overtly stated, and a casual listener would probably not pay conscious attention to this implicit sense.

Excupiation is evident when Reagan is called upon to explain certain foreign relations issues to a questioning audience. Arms sales is one such issue, and the phrase *arms sales* is systematically avoided; instead, Reagan speaks of 'improving our relations' (524/81), 'military co-operation ... in our search for peace and stability in the Middle East' (700/81), providing 'security assistance' (1085/81), selling 'defensive equipment' (526/81), 'making certain technology and defensive weapons available to them' (524/81), or 'our dedication to the welfare of Israel' (187/82). Euphemistic circumlocutions replace the direct *arms sales*. *Selling weapons* is euphemized to 'stand[ing] by our friends' (55):

(55) ... we are going to *stand by our friends* and allies there, both Israel and those nations like Egypt and the Sudan and so forth ... (952/81)

The subject of arms sales to the Middle East has always been controversial, due to the often conflicting interests of the Middle Eastern countries. A lot of explaining was required in the sales of AWACS planes to Saudi Arabia, because of U.S. ties to Israel:

- (56) a. ... the sale will greatly improve the chances of our working constructively with Saudi Arabia and other states of the Middle East toward *our common goal – a just and lasting peace*. It poses no threat to Israel, now or in the future. Indeed, by *contributing to the security and stability of the region, it serves Israel's long-range interests*. (867/81)
- b. ... this sale will significantly improve the capability of Saudi Arabia and the United States to defend the oil fields on which *the security of the free world* depends. (867/81)

Reagan is exploiting the principle of end-focus here: positive things are mentioned last and are thereby emphasized. Also, arms sales are associated with such noble goals as peace and 'contributing to the security and stability' of the Middle East (56a). In (56b) a more concrete motivation is revealed, but it is veiled in the glorified terms of defending not only oil, but first and foremost 'the security of the free world'. The most concrete motivation for arms sales – to make money – is never even implied.

The sale of weapons to Jordan calls for some explanation because of the conflicting interests of Israel, a United States' ally, and Jordan, to which the weapons were being sold:

(57) The greatest thing that we can do for Israel is to bring peace to the Middle East ... If we can persuade [Jordan] to acknowledge the right of Israel to exist as a nation ... that will be the greatest thing we can do. And in order to do that we have to show them that *we're willing to be a friend other than just talking about it*. (642/82)

According to this logic, a friend is one who sells you weapons. The following sequence of question and answer justifies this definition of 'friend', raising it to the level of 'a moral obligation':

- (58) Question: ... what are your plans for *arms sales* to Taiwan?
 Reagan: ... *We are not going to abandon our long-time friends and allies* on Taiwan ... It is a *moral obligation* that we'll keep. (984/82)

Reagan emphasizes that the initiative for arms sales was taken not by him but by the allies (59a) and that in El Salvador, for example, the United States

is simply acting as a helpful neighbor (b):

- (59) a. ... *our allies have asked us for cruise missiles and Pershings as a deterrent* to be stationed in those countries in Western Europe, to be deployed there. *And we have agreed to do that.* (429/82)
 b. Our economic assistance ... is more than five times the amount of our *security assistance*. The thrust of our *aid* is to *help* our neighbors realize freedom, justice and economic progress. (214-15/82)

The division of the world's weapons into good ones and bad ones, and the legitimization of the United States' arms sales by reducing them to innocent acts of friendship, serve one and the same purpose: to allow the production of arms to continue. This, in turn, supports the economic growth of the United States, an important issue on Reagan's agenda.

Peacemakers?

In the same way that Reagan glorified America, American military build-up, and American weapons, American soldiers receive their share of glorification as well:

- (60) a. *The brave men and women* who fought for our country ... (508/81)
 b. ... *American fighting men* who had obeyed their country's call ... (155/81)
 c. ... in a hostile world, a nation's future is only as certain as the devotion of its *defenders* ... (1028/81)
 d. ... while there may be some people who think that the uniform is associated with violence, you are the *peacemakers*. (722/81)

In examples (60a,b) the words *brave* and *fighting* have a glorifying effect. Note that soldiers are not called soldiers but *men and women* (a) or *men* (b), *defenders* (c), or *peacemakers* (d). *Peacemakers* is especially glorifying because of its Biblical overtone: 'Blessed are the peacemakers.'

The word *soldiers* systematically gives way to euphemizing and glorifying circumlocutions: 'those in uniform' (464/81), 'those who are called upon to do the hard and sometimes thankless job' (462/81), 'those who guarantee our safety' (464/81), or even 'these gentlemen' (174/82).

Sometimes Reagan refers to the U.S. army directly as 'our military forces' (464/17), and at other times attaches sentiment to it: 'the Long Grey Line that has never failed us' (776/81). The profession of a soldier is 'the honorable profession that you have chosen' (461/81) and in the following example, U.S. military officers are glorified by being associated with Reagan's highest values:

- (61) ... officers in the Armed Forces of the United States, *guardians of freedom, protectors of our heritage ... the keepers of peace* (461/81)

Reagan explicitly praises his forces:

(62) We may not be the biggest navy in the world; *we're the best*. (737/81)

Here he is implicitly referring to the Soviet Union, implying that their navy may be bigger, but that the U.S. navy is capable of defeating it.

The following example refers to American soldiers as an abstraction (*Armed Forces*), whereas the Soviet army is referred to in a concrete way, as consisting of actual men with weapons:

(63) Consider the facts. Over the past decade, the United States reduced the size of its *Armed Forces* and decreased its military spending. The Soviets steadily increased *the number of men under arms*. (1064/81)

Consider the following example:

(64) *Foreign forces* and *armed factions* have too long obstructed the legitimate role of the Government of Lebanon's *security forces*. (1188/82)

The soldiers of the opposite side are *foreign forces* or *armed factions*, whereas the soldiers who are on our side are *security forces*. The words *foreign* and *armed* carry some negative connotation of *foreign* belonging not to 'us' but to 'them', and *armed* having to do with weapons and violence, while *security* is a safe, positive word. Foreign soldiers may also be referred to with openly dysphemistic phrases, for example as *guerillas*:

(65) ... *the guerillas, with their terrorist tactics* in El Salvador, have failed miserably in an attempt to bring the population over on their side. (1033/81)

5. Did he ever change?

The early 1980s were frightening times because of the acceleration of the arms race on both the Soviet and the United States sides. This situation was naturally reflected in Reagan's speeches in his early years as President. Toward the end of the decade, the world political climate seemed to change, due in part to the new leadership in the Soviet Union. One might suppose that this change in external reality was reflected in Reagan's later speeches. Specifically, one might expect his rhetoric to become less aggressively dichotomous, and more compromising and diplomatic towards the Soviet Union.

I moved, then, from the speeches of the early 1980s to a consideration of Reagan's speeches in 1987. In 1987 Reagan is still repeating most of his glorifying phrases in reference to America. It is 'a great bastion of freedom'

(47/87), 'our blessed land' (79/87), 'this great land of ours' (362/87), and 'this land of freedom' (362/87). The Soviet Union and its allies are still referred to negatively, for example, as 'the enemies of freedom' (510/87), 'aggressive powers' (368/87), 'our adversaries' (3/87), and 'hostile powers' (559/87). The dichotomy between good and evil is still clearly present:

(66) *There is a power in the flame of liberty. It can melt the chains of despotism and change the world ... Today we must stand strong, because we are the keepers of that flame. (437/87)*

In short, the United States is still glorified and the Soviet Union and its allies still vilified. However, while it is difficult to find examples of denigration, that is, the downplaying of anything positive on the Soviet side – or indeed any mention of anything positive there – in Reagan's speeches in the years 1981 and 1982, hedged positive statements about the Soviet Union emerge in the 1987 speeches. This is illustrated in examples (67) below:

- (67) a. In recent months we have heard hopeful talk of change in Moscow, of a new openness. *Some political prisoners have been released ... We welcome these positive signs and hope that they're only the first steps toward a true liberalization of Soviet society. (339/87)*
- b. We think that it's encouraging – their whole attitude to arms – which has *never before been true with any of the other previous Soviet leaders. (347/87)*
- c. And this time they are actually suggesting, *as we have been*, let's do away with some of those weapons. (388/87)
- d. ... we've been encouraged by signs of Soviet *willingness to remove the roadblocks that have been holding back progress. (387/87)*
- e. In the months that followed Reykjavik, progress was slower than I hoped, but in recent weeks *the Soviets have shown new seriousness. (365/87)*
- f. ... I believe there's reason for optimism about the changes for better relations with the Soviets, *but* we also face some tough, contentious issues that require realism and strength of will on our part. (377/87)
- g. The United States remains pledged to sustaining this movement toward greater personal liberty and national self-determination and to *resisting attempts to reverse it. (367/87)*
- h. There is talk of changes in Soviet laws. There is talk of a less centralized approach to the Soviet economy, giving more scope to individual initiative. *We'll see if these talks amount to anything. (365/87)*
- i. This agenda ... [is] not based on false hopes or wishful thinking

about the Soviets; it's based on a candid assessment of Soviet actions and long-term understanding of their intentions. (365/87)

Example (67a) allows for the inference that since only 'some' prisoners have been released, the majority of them are still in prisons. Example (b) tells us that the Soviet Union has not necessarily become better: Mr. Gorbachev may be just an exception. In (c) the United States is depicted as the one who has long been suggesting reducing arms. The word *remove* in (d) presupposes that the Soviets placed (or at least maintained) the roadblock there. 'Signs ... of willingness' invites the inference that they were previously unwilling to remove the roadblocks. The words *new seriousness* in (e) presuppose that previously the Soviets had not been serious about arms reductions; moreover, Reagan had hoped for faster progress, the Soviets had not. In (f) the adversative conjunction *but* implies contrast with 'reason for optimism'; in fact Reagan goes on to say that progress is not as easy as it might seem, and a lot is still required on the side of the United States. 'Resisting attempts to reverse' the movement toward a better Soviet society (g) presupposes that there are indeed attempts being made to reverse the positive developments, and consequently implies that there are forces inside the Soviet Union which are still bad. In (h) Reagan lists several positive things about the Soviet Union, but nullifies the list by stating that it might be just 'talk', and in (i) he again implies that the Soviet Union is still bad and that their intentions are not to be trusted. The Soviet Union may be changing, but it is still the adversary of the United States:

- (68) If I had to characterize U.S.-Soviet relations in one word it would be this: proceeding. No great cause for excitement; no great cause for alarm. And perhaps this is the way relations with one's *adversaries* should be characterized. (367/87)

In short, although Reagan does find positive things to say about the Soviet Union in his 1987 speeches, the references are often somewhat denigrating.

At the same time, new areas for Reagan's dichotomies emerge. In the Western Hemisphere the battle between good and evil rages as hectically as ever:

- (69) a. And this is the choice before Congress and our people, a basic choice, really, between *democracy* and *communism* in Nicaragua, between *freedom* and *Soviet-backed tyranny*.
For myself, I'm determined to meet this Soviet challenge and to ensure that the future of this hemisphere is chosen by its people and not imposed by *Communist aggressors*. (454/87)
- b. The choice is *communism* versus *freedom* ... (305/87)
- c. ... the choice remains the same: *democracy* or *communism*, elec-

tions or dictatorship, freedom or tyranny. (454/87)

- d. Well, that's the choice we face: between *the light of liberty or the darkness of repression.* (456/87)

While the Soviet Union is no longer directly depicted as being thoroughly bad, it remains the ultimate source of evil: the tyranny in Nicaragua is 'Soviet-backed' (69a). Note that in (69b) Reagan unfairly compares a political system 'communism' with an abstraction 'freedom'. The dichotomy is clear elsewhere as well. With reference to Angola, Reagan says:

- (70) ... there were a *Communist faction* and there was a *group that wanted democracy.* (265/87)

Reagan still uses 'us' and 'them' when comparing the United States and the Soviet Union:

- (71) ... *they* have a preponderant advantage in the short-range weapons, much greater than *we* would have to offer as a deterrent on the other side. (368/87)

The Soviets are causing 'death or the severe injury of the children' in Afghanistan (565/87), they are making 'the small country of Nicaragua an aggressor nation with the largest military machine in Central America' (454/87), backing Cambodia, 'another tragic example of aggression and occupation' (367/87), and pursuing a 'policy of global expansionism' (366/87). At the same time as 'the freedom fighters' in Nicaragua – a euphemism coined by Reagan for the Contras – are fighting 'against that totalitarian Communist Government' (572–73/87), Americans are extending 'liberty to a world desperately in need' (337/87). As for the shooting down of airplanes in the Persian Gulf, the Americans are just 'protecting the United States' interest' on 'a vital mission' (540/87).

Reagan also repeats the old phrases of earlier years that we are being 'confronted with a massive Soviet build-up', and that even today, 'the annual Soviet output of nuclear missiles, tanks, and other ground equipment is still twice that of the United States and NATO combined' (487/87). He still talks about his 'steady, determined effort' to redress 'such a severe and dangerous imbalance' (487/87). However, in his 1987 speeches, Reagan is able to consider the Soviets as people, comparable to the people of the United States (72). A softer, more human side to the Soviet Union begins to emerge:

- (72) ... I've often talked about what would happen if ordinary Americans and people from the Soviet Union could get together – get together as human beings, as men and women who breathe the same air, share the same concerns about making life better for themselves and their children. (251/87)

In short, it is clear that some development towards a less dichotomous view of the U.S.–Soviet relationship took place toward the end of Reagan's second term as President, but the battle between good and evil continued elsewhere: in Nicaragua, Afghanistan, and wherever Reagan sensed a possibility of communist take-over. Dichotomous rhetoric still flourished; a change in reality did condition a change in Reagan's rhetoric, but the dichotomies survived.

6. Concluding remarks

The world political climate in the 1980s was strongly influenced by the powerful rhetoric of President Reagan. Reagan was in large part responsible for aggravating the Cold War atmosphere, and later, for glorifying himself as the initiator on the world's path to peace.

Today, in the light of the recent events in eastern Europe, many of Reagan's remarks on the Soviet Union seem like prophecies; to use Reagan's words, 'freedom' has indeed 'won tyranny', and with regard to the Soviet coup, 'attempts to reverse' the tide (67g above) have failed. A quick look at Reagan's rhetoric might lead one to think that Reagan indeed was right; however, I believe that Reagan's dichotomous language was partly tailor-made to create an image of an enemy. Had the enemy not been the Soviet Union, it would have been somebody else.

According to this hypothesis, Reagan's dichotomous view of the world served his other ends, especially, his concrete goal of reviving the United States' economy by providing employment for the military industry of the country. The maintenance of the dichotomy 'communism' versus 'freedom' was necessary for the legitimization of the United States military build-up. The explicitly stated noble goal of Reagan's dichotomous rhetoric was to safeguard the western economic system and protect the 'freedom' of the ordinary American.

However, a less noble, but more concrete, goal was simultaneously achieved: arms sales bring money to the United States; the production and maintenance of war machinery provides work for many, and perhaps more importantly, money to a select, but influential, few (see, for example, Chomsky 1982: 17). Dichotomies helped to achieve these ends. Reagan's powerful and relentless rhetoric persuaded many to subscribe to his dichotomous view without questioning what lay behind his rhetoric, or how it was used.

The question I raised in the first pages of this paper was: what happens to dichotomous rhetoric when there is a challenge to that rhetoric caused by external development, a change in the reality which this rhetoric is depicting. It is obvious that external changes in reality can and do produce changes in the

rhetorical styles of politicians, as happened in Reagan's case when his references to the Soviet Union became less vilified and he began employing denigration. If we consider the nature of the changes, however, we notice that they were essentially superficial: the Soviet Union came in for fewer vilified remarks and more denigrating ones, but the basic dichotomy between good and evil survived; it simply found expression elsewhere. This is understandable since the need to maintain the dichotomy did not disappear with the emergence of external changes.

Although this paper has concerned itself solely with dichotomies as expressed in Reagan's language, I do not wish to imply that dichotomous rhetoric is a phenomenon unique to him or to any other American politician; it was found in the Soviet Union as well, and indeed all people express themselves dichotomously at times. This is a matter which should not be taken lightly. The danger of dichotomous language is that it oversimplifies; in the case of politicians, it also pulls us apart. I feel that we would be less susceptible to dichotomous rhetoric if we consciously tried to think more for ourselves, rather than passively accepting what we are exposed to, for example, via the media. We still live among weapons which have the capacity to destroy the whole of humankind. Language is also powerful, however. Attending to and re-evaluating some existing dichotomies may eventually help us to, if not eliminate, at least lessen the threat of the possibility of mutual destruction.

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Notes

- * This study was funded by a grant from Tampere Peace Research Institute (TAPRI). I gratefully acknowledge Vilho Harle (TAPRI), Juhani Rudanko (Tampere University), Edward White, Susan Herring, Harold Hellenbrand and Elinore Partridge (California State University, San Bernardino) for their valuable comments and suggestions.
1. See Wittgenstein ([1972]: 15-17).
 2. On the power of language, see also Hart (1987) and Lasswell ([1968]).
 3. For discussions of euphemism, see, for example, Jespersen ([1962]: 227-231); Leinfellner (1971); Stern ([1965]: 330-335); Ullmann ([1967]: 205-209). For euphemisms about war and the military, see Barber ([1975]: 255), Bolinger (1980: 118), Boxmeyer (1982: 37), and Brook ([1974]: 73).
 4. These are terms used, for example, by Hayakawa ([1978]: 56) and McDonald ([1983]: 102). Philbrick (1963: 335) uses the terms 'favorable' vs. 'unfavorable' words, and Sproule (1980: 186) talks about 'god terms' (for example *America, allies*) and 'devil terms' (*fascist, communist*).
 5. For excellent analyses of Reagan's rhetoric, see, for example, Erickson (1985); Stuckey (1989); and Stuckey (1990). In her analysis of Reagan's early speeches, Stuckey argues

- that Reagan's entire world view is dictated by the basic dichotomy 'Totalitarianism vs. Freedom' (Stuckey 1989). The world is divided simplistically into 'heroes and villains' (Stuckey 1990: 4), 'the good guys and the bad guys' (1990: 92), 'us' and 'them' (1990: 53), 'devil figures' (1990: 57) and 'God figures' (1990: 73).
6. For a discussion of 'the New Cold War' and superpower propaganda, see Chomsky (1982).
 7. The references after the examples are to *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Ronald Reagan*. This particular reference 95/81 is to the 1981 volume, page 95.
 8. All underlinings in the examples from here on are mine.
 9. Weldon mentions the words *liberty* and *freedom* as words 'used mainly to arouse emotion', and he questions 'what it means to say that a person is free. ... "Free from what?"' (Weldon 1953: 69-70).
 10. If you want peace, prepare for war.
 11. The use of numbers is a persuasive tactic frequently used by political speakers. According to Chomsky, 'calculations of dollar equivalents give a highly misleading picture of relative military strength', among other reasons because the Soviet Union had more soldiers but less advanced technology than the United States (Chomsky 1982: 193).

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