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Metaphors in the Romanian Political Discourse

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RESUMEN:

Muchos mitos políticos en Rumanía son contruidos lingüísticamente a través del uso de la metáfora en los medios de comunicación. El contexto social en el que se produce un texto influye en la opinión pública a través de las especificidades en la que tiene lugar y la intencionalidad de los participantes. Este trabajo analiza el siempre presente discurso de los políticos rumanos y el significado subyacente de las metáforas seleccionadas que representan su ideario, teniendo en cuenta no sólo la identificación de patrones recurrentes, sino también otras funciones pragmáticas. El caso de estudio varía desde metáforas como "familia", "deportes", hasta la discursividad de la palabra "guerra", lo que demuestra que las áreas de interés más populares son aquellas con mayor fuerza manipuladora.

Palabras clave: metáfora, Rumanía, medios de comunicación, discurso político.

ABSTRACT:

Many political myths are linguistically shaped through the use of metaphors in Romania media. The social occasion when a text is produced influences the public opinion through the features of the situation and the purposes of the participants. The present paper examines the ever-present political discourse of Romanian politicians and the significance beyond the words chosen to render it, in view of identifying not only recurrent patterns but also pragmatic functions rising to the surface. The domains under scrutiny range from "family" to "sports" and "war", proving that the most popular areas of interest have the strongest manipulative force.

Keywords: metaphor, Romania, Media, political discourse.

Language and its functions contribute to communication in our society. Linguistic phenomena are social in the sense that whenever people speak or listen, they do so in ways which are socially determined and have social effects. Social phenomena are in part linguistic in the sense that the language activity which goes on in social contexts is not merely a reflection of social processes and practices; it is a part of those processes and practices.

Stylistically, metaphor is a figure of speech used mainly in literary texts, employed in order to refer figuratively to a topic. My intention in this paper is to take a closer look at language as a form of social practice, namely at the political discourse in Romania and at the metaphors it contains. I want to answer the following questions: Why do metaphors appear in the political discourse? How are they formed? What is the effect on the target audience?

According to Mc Nair political discourse includes "all forms of communication undertaken by politicians and other political actors for the purpose of achieving specific objectives; communication addressed to these actors by non-politicians, and communication about them and their activities, as contained in news reports and other forms of media discussion of politics" (1995:4).

It is this broad sense of the term that I take into consideration in my approach. I have chosen

fragments from interviews, speeches, comments related to politics, all having an oral form. Why do metaphors appear in the political discourse? After 1989, politics became an important field of interest for both ordinary people and intellectuals. Most of them adopted and took for granted the type of political discourse that dominated the Romanian public life at the time. It was a neo-communist, populist type of discourse, which made great use of the communist mythology. "The myth of the Golden Age, the myth of the Nation, the myth of the almighty, omniscient state, the myth of the Blame appeared frequently in the Romanian political speeches" (Tismaneanu, 1999: 15).

They were used to justify a certain state of things, the low standard of living, the poor economy and also to manipulate people and make them believe everything they saw/read in the media. If we consider the fact that the new post-communist mythology was ready to give "instant and satisfactory answers to people's dilemmas" (16), a possible explanation may be inferred of why the Romanian politicians chose it. Cliches as We won't sell our country!, We work, we do not think!, promoting false patriotism were successful. Some still use this populist discourse as it has more a manipulative purpose than an intention of offering accurate solutions to the problems of the country.

Language can be used to control and influence people's thoughts: politicians want votes. Theoretically, political speeches should be

delivered in a clear style, avoiding any kind of obscurity so that everyone should understand them. Romanian political speeches, though, are sometimes very 'original', full of expressions more or less related to the issue. Politicians try to make us 'buy' one ideology or another through the way they present themselves to the public. Many political myths are linguistically realised through the use of metaphors.

Two factors influencing the politicians' choice for using metaphors in their speeches are the social occasion and the audience. Metaphors are more frequently used in interviews, in live interventions on TV, talk-shows than in the speeches delivered on social occasions. During free conversation, people do not have time to pass value judgements and that is why the political speeches delivered on official occasions are more rigorously elaborated.

There is a permanent interaction between the producer and the consumer of political texts, in the sense that the former shapes his/her speeches so as to obtain a positive response from the latter. Mc Nair points out that the audience for a particular political communication may be broad (an election spot where the objective is to persuade an entire nation), narrow (the readers of a newspaper) or both (in the case of a terrorist attack – the people and the government) (1995: 85). The fragments and statements I chose address a broad audience.

Politicians and their image counselors are aware of the people's reaction to a certain type of discourse, so they impregnate their speeches with vivid metaphors and clichés to make sure that what they say hooks to the public. They use forms of language which share features like the wooden language, the 'beating around the bush' technique in order to avoid a clear answer or solution. The type of metaphors used involves a certain way of conceiving reality, often depending on the personality of the politician. The term metaphor will be applied to expressions like X is a pig, which frequently occur, and to original ways of conceptualising the political reality. But how are the political metaphors formed? The number of metaphors in the political discourse has increased through the transfer of terms from one semantic field to another: political earthquakes, political tide, dead/bygone agreement, political concubinage, electoral VIPs etc.

One of the fields used for enriching the figurative semantics of the political discourse is that of Physics and Chemistry. The press informs us that: the popularity of a leader starts to corrode, the present government starts to corrode, the Revolution of December 1989 has short-circuited history, events have focused the attention of the Parliament. A lot of political metaphors are created by combinations of the verb 'to demolish': spirit of demolition, demolishing structures, destructive attitude, the worst sin of all is not that of demolishing churches, but that of demolishing souls.

Technical terms have migrated to the political discourse: to launch an attack against political enemies, to manipulate the public opinion, to tune up a law to the Constitutional stipulations, to create political tension, to overturn a political situation, to monitor the elections, economic collapse. The modern process of the transfer of items from a field to another applies to items from Biology, Medicine, Law: to proliferate nuclear

weapons/drugs/criminal organisations, electoral fever, social convulsions, to inoculate ideas, political corpse, sterile discussions, shock therapy, inflamed political situation, hemorrhage of words or brains, social and economic tensions become chronic.

There are metaphors formed with the terms: virus, AIDS, cancer: there is a virus that intoxicates the public opinion, communism is a cancer of human history, a politician suffers from political AIDS. Metaphors from the field of Medicine appear in a series of political statements. The medical meaning of the terms has almost disappeared once the items became assets of the political discourse. Their frequent occurrence may be related to the state of the Romanian society, to its temporary sickness.

1. A Romanian historian is asked: 'Is the direction of our politics the right one?' His answer is: The people who run this country are sick of their politics. None of the real steps towards a real democratic system has been taken willingly. All were forced out of us with the forceps by the West.
2. The structures of the party are rotten.
3. Another politician, an ex-member of a party, declared that 'the party is only a name now.' A present member of the party answers: 'I'd say that he is only a name, but he is politically dead. May he rest in peace!'
4. We need an infusion of untainted blood.
5. The party doesn't tremble when some members are leaving. The opposing party feels shivers down its spine at the mere thought of a possible coalition between its most powerful enemies.
6. The Romanian economy is a sick person who needs a transfusion.
7. A huge internal bleeding occurred.

Most of the metaphors used by Romanian politicians have as vehicle terms from the domains of war, sports, path, family, train. My analysis starts with the most productive domain and ends with a listing of other metaphors grouped under the title unconventional metaphors.

War

1. Our party has a long tradition of fighting for freedom and democracy.
2. The collective historical memory of this nation has developed a high degree of skepticism towards the positive moments in our history. We are a nation that has been tormented and stepped on from all directions.
3. We have started the counteraction of the attacks against the image of our country.
4. Romania will be the point of the spear of a Europe extended towards the East.
5. We must start a war against this anti-Romanian Coalition.
6. The battle seems crueler than our most pessimistic expectations.
7. The members of the PD should become a 'political fighting-machine'.
8. We shall continue the fight.
9. We shall fight alone for these objectives.
10. We must fight for our industry competing with other countries, fight for our culture, our roots.
11. You'll have to accept a captain's truncheon first, and then that of a colonel's.
12. We don't have the financial resources of our opponents from one party of the other.
13. I have made an offer: the direct, open battle against those who manipulate the public opinion toward the isolation of Romania.

14. This will be the year of a life-and-death fight.
 15. The reform of the state means also the more efficient fight against corruption and organised crime.
 16. Do you want me to start a war with them at once?
 17. 2003 is a pre-electoral year and those who dig up the hatchet will hurt themselves. We expect a local War of the Roses to start this year.

A possible starting point in the interpretation of the metaphors above is people's ancestral fear of war. The use of terms like 'war', 'enemy', 'battle', 'to confront' activates a certain schema. The statements prove that the metaphors have a positive connotation, meant to arise positive feelings in the addressees. Politics is war (7), (17), governing a country is a battle (8), (9), (10), ascension in the party is a battle (11), political decisions are a battle (13). The battle is against other countries (1), (2), party members (16), the opposition (5), those who discredit us (3), international organizations / terrorism (4), corruption (15).

Metaphor 6 refers to the attempt to obtain money from the IMF (International Monetary Fund) as a battle, emphasising the idea of difficulty. If the money is not obtained the governors are not to blame, of course.

Metaphor 13 mentions a direct and open battle. The aim of the message is to convince the people of the politician's frankness and good intentions.

Metaphor 15 advances the idea of a more efficient fight for a better life or image, but it also implies that the previous attempts were not successful.

An authoritarian tone is evident in most metaphors through the use of the modals 'must', or 'have to', maybe to imply that the solution suggested is the best one. War metaphors are a reminiscence of the Romanian communist discourse in which the idea of fight was essential, and everything innovative or foreign was the enemy of Romania.

Sports

1. I underline the fact that I'm a field player.
2. I will continue to play as a member of the team.
3. I just wanted to warn the people about a risk which appears in a troubled electoral competition, when some play their last card in order not to lose the power.
4. In our times we executed compulsory figures, as they are called in skating, for those ruling now to execute free figures.
5. The differentiated access to certain pieces of information or their manipulation in order to favour some political forces can vitiate the political competition.
6. We've shown resignation lately and I think it is rooted in our history. You should never give up. It's like tennis. You play point by point, service by service. It's not over till the last service.
7. A former politician was asked: Why did you lie low when your party left the stage?
 He answered: Well, it's normal to let somebody else try to meet the expectations of the public. Like in football, if you don't score in three matches and your team is defeated, you have to obey your coach, namely the voters, and stay in the background for a while.
8. How will Romania play in the event of a war against Irak?
 At the moment, Saddam Hussein has the ball.

The sport metaphors are related to the war metaphors in the sense that they imply a division between one party and another. A (member of a party) must compete in order to get something. Politics is a competition (5) and it resembles the area of sports because there has to be a winner (3). Sport is a field that everybody is good at, at least theoretically. The clichéd metaphors from the discourse of sports are easy to decode. People like to understand what they are told and a politician who avoids obscurity and addresses the people using terms highly familiar to them is perceived as 'playing on their side' (6), (7), (8).

The schema these metaphors activate is simple: politics is a 'competition', members of parties are 'players'. The concept of the 'field player' suggests that the politician is obedient and ready to follow the rules. On the other hand he'd rather hide among other 'players' than take a strong stand. Politics is seen as a game where others should be defeated, not helped. Self interest comes first (1), (2). In 4 the ideas transmitted are that a certain party took the wrong decisions forced by the political context of that moment on the one hand, and that they sacrificed their careers for the future politicians to have a lighter burden on their shoulders.

Path is another relevant metaphor. The stages of development that Romania has to undergo are rendered through the metaphor of the path.

1. We must follow the rules and exigencies that are shown to us by the indicators on this path of European integration.
2. We have to guarantee the existence of a certain path towards achieving the standards imposed by the adhesion to the EU.
3. Romania must follow its own way and we should guarantee it.
4. I believe that, at this crucial moment, Romania has chosen the right path.

The path metaphors are rooted in the Romanian mythology, where lads must cover an initiating path in order to become real men. They must change, become mature and overcome the obstacles placed in their way or pass the tests they are subjected to. This archetypal framework is followed by the Romanian political discourse. Romania is the mythological boy and it has to face challenges as privatisation, social reforms, changes of attitudes. If it passes the reward is the adhesion to international organisations, non-refundable loans. There is no other choice: we either follow the path or we will be excluded, forgotten or punished. Politicians recite these clichés to us every day and all Romanians are or at least have been willing to 'tighten the belt' and accept drastic solutions. Politicians seem preoccupied with telling people that they should follow the right way, but they are ambiguous about what the right way is about. The result of insufficient information was revealed in a survey as Romanian people were asked to give their opinion on NATO and some assumed NATO was a country or a person. When people are told that the decisions others have taken are to bring the expected results, they tend to accept the idea more readily, although this is the worst they could do and politicians exploit this passivity.

Family

1. We have a favourable lane, the big Christian-Democratic family is ruling all over the world so we

have to stop being the poor relative of this family.

2. Europe is a family, to which we must belong.
3. We have the choice between remaining isolated and poor in some corner of the continent or being equal and thriving in a European family of respectable nations.
4. The match never ends. We've started in troubled times and today, fourteen years later, we've managed to help Romania go back to its true family.
5. Our country must be anchored in the European family of democratic nations.

The metaphorical representation of Europe as a family whose members we must be became a favourite cliché of Romanian politicians. Adhesion to the Euro-Atlantic structures has turned into their favourite excuse. The semantic connotations of the notion of 'family' are 'security', 'unity', 'cosiness', 'peace' (4). Belonging to a family gives one the feeling of being able to depend on and to trust somebody. Number 2 implies that adhesion will ensure safety and security, but the idea of obeying and playing by the rules others impose may also be inferred.

Post-communist Romania has suffered from the feeling of abandonment, a consequence of the isolation experienced during communism, and this feeling is exploited to the advantage of those interested. Politicians use modality to leave no doubt about the right direction. The terms used in 3. clearly state what the common-sensical solution is. It is the difference between being 'in' or 'out' of the family. The metaphoric representation in 1 stresses the importance of the party, placing it in a larger context.

6. Now we have the chance to fulfill the dream of out forerunners.
7. Now we are almost ready to fulfill this dream of out forerunners, Romania's place among the countries of the EU.
8. In an interview a politician is asked to give an explanation: Recent polls indicate that only 43% of the Romanians believe we'll join NATO. How can this lack of trust be explained? I think it's a deeper psychological process involved here. It's like longing for a beautiful woman for many years. And when the results of your wooing her finally appear you no longer realise what is dream and what is reality.
9. The decision of NATO to accept Romania as a member is a historical step for your country, it is something a lot of Romanians have dreamed of for more than fifty years.

Patriotism is a delicate matter with the Romanian people. Everything gains a noble aura if it is done in the name of 'our ancestors' 6. This cult of the ancestors is another communist slogan used to manipulate the masses at the time. It even seems that the American Ambassador in Bucharest is aware of the patriotic nature of Romanians (9).

European integration is conceptualised as a dream and people should appreciate the politicians who fight to make it come true. It would be better for their actions to rise to the level of their speeches; otherwise our grand-children will have the same dream.

Train

1. Let's catch the train of the UE.
2. We have to catch this train now.
3. [...] the light at the end of the tunnel.

Integration into international structures is metaphorically viewed as a journey by train.

The famous 3 image appears in a speech every time a politician wants to make people believe that something good finally happens. The journey by train has the European integration as a final destination. The tunnel refers to the transition Romania had been going through, and it is paved with failures, corruption, wrong decisions.

Discourse is described as made up of "systematically organised sets of statements which give expression to the meanings and values of an institution. Beyond that, they define, describe and delimit what it is possible to say and not possible to say with respect to the area of concern of that institution" (Kress, 1989 : 7). What is acceptable to say in politics then? Is there a line that should be drawn between registers? How informal may a politician's discourse be? Some theories (Blasko, 1999: 1678) maintain that the more original the metaphor is, the easier to remember it becomes. (1), (2), (3) recall fairytale or cartoon images, the inefficiency of the reforms is shown in (4) and (5), (14) and (15) present the political life as a stage, while (16) and (17) evoke the winter holidays spirit.

1. A politician is called Popeye the sailor man of Romanian politics.
2. Education is Romania's Cinderella.
3. A certain party will have to admit that, to them, 'the king is naked'.
4. Now they are patching the sack, but the sack is the same.
5. The government behaved like a schoolboy agape to what the foreign experts say.
6. It's clear we are at the end of the tether.
7. A reporter addresses a politician saying: You performed well as a football referee and as minister you are as snug as a bug in a rug.
8. The members of the committee appointed to unveil the former secret service agents are said to be only licking files. It's high time we closed the books!
9. If the leading party comes up with viable solutions to get the country out of shit, I'll be grateful to them.
10. Some countries are still haunted by the ghost of communism.
11. A member of the government was caught with a huge amount of money, bribe, on him. His colleagues said about him that he had been haunting the halls of the government. A politician declares: I am not like others. I don't jump from the bed of a party into that of the leading one.
12. The Romanian president is concerned about the members of his party: I'm afraid they'll lose their heads and blow their own trumpets.
13. We've managed to do what another party has been trying to do for four months with staging and lights.
14. Inside the party they'll keep arguing till only 2 are left. The second will sacrifice himself and the last one will turn off the light.
15. The leading party members have started their holiday season in January 2002 and continued till The New Year's Eve. They've used so many fireworks and crackers that the whole population was bedazzled.
16. These 2 parties can only get together emotionally, congratulating each other as if they were out at Holidays singing carols.

In conclusion, what is the effect of the use of metaphors on the target audience? The use of

metaphors enables the speaker to distance him/herself from what s/he is talking about in the sense that s/he can say something 'metaphorically' and later deny having said anything concrete about a topic. It is a useful device to use in a speech when trying to impress people with an elaborate style or to cloud the truth behind rhetoric.

Politicians use metaphors as a means of adorning their speech. It is a fact that a well-chosen metaphor, uttered at the right moment can make a politician famous and one illustrative example is the well-known. We will win the bet with agriculture. Ordinary people tend to choose one politician and believe in him because they believe his words. They represent the majority of the voters and are very sensitive when it comes to their patriotism and history. Unfortunately they will give more credit to a politician who talks about such things than to another who talks about viable solutions for the revival of the economy. They judge political speeches *emotionally* rather than critically.

The main function of the Romanian political discourse seems to be that of attacking another person, insulting, diverting the people's attention from the really important issues. Thus, we cannot talk about civilised polemics or constructive exchanges of ideas in Romanian politics. If metaphors are used the message is ambiguous and there is a risk that the receiver get the message in a totally different way than it was intended. It is precisely the ambiguity of a metaphor that makes it function for its producer, due to its effect on the consumer.

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