METAPHORICAL REPRESENTATION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION IN POLITICAL CARTOONS IN ENGLISH AND LATVIAN

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Abstract

The study is carried out in the framework of Conceptual Metaphor Theory, but since it considers political cartoons that, apart from linguistic, involve also other modes, the findings of theoreticians researching visual and multimodal metaphors are applied. The purpose of the present study is to identify and analyse the visual and multimodal metaphors encountered in cartoons focusing on the European Union matters and to find out if political events are presented in cartoons in English and Latvian on the basis of the same conceptual metaphors.

Keywords: metaphor, multimodality, political cartoon

1. Introduction

Nicholas Garland in his article *Caricature is Packed with Triple Explosives* (published in *Telegraph*; 08.06.2000) compares political cartoons to missiles which carry at least three explosive warheads, the first being the humorously, or sometimes maliciously, distorted representation of politicians; the second – an actual political comment, criticism or stance communicated in the drawing; and the third – the vehicle or image chosen to convey the political point.

Most of the definitions of political cartoons agree on such points as symbolism of meaning, satirical and critical points, and reference to some topical (current) political events or personalities. To analyse political cartoons, it is important to understand the main elements and tools used to convey the message. Political

cartoons, as cartoons in general, imply double meaning that is presented visually, linguistically, or with the use of both modes.

2. Theoretical background

According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), metaphors play a crucial role not only in language, but rather in a systematic structuring of concepts. Gibbs (2008: 3) states, "metaphor is not simply an ornamental aspect of language, but a fundamental scheme by which people conceptualize the world and their own action". According to the Cognitive Metaphor Theory (CMT) developed by Lakoff and other scholars (e.g., Lakoff 1987, 2006; Lakoff & Turner 1989; Lakoff & Johnson 1980; Gibbs 1994; Kövecses 1990, 2000, 2002, 2005, and others) metaphor is present and very common in both every day and specialized language and consider metaphor being not merely a linguistic device but rather a conceptual one.

The study of verbal metaphor was followed by several investigations into visual and multimodal metaphor (see, for instance, Forceville 2007, 2008, 2009, 2011). The present study is carried out in the framework of CMT, but since it considers political cartoons that, apart from linguistic, involve also other modes, the findings of theoreticians researching visual and multimodal metaphors are applied. The aim of the present study is to identify and analyse the visual and multimodal metaphors encountered in cartoons focusing on the European Union matters and to find out if political events are presented in cartoons in English and Latvian using the same conceptual metaphors.

3. Discussion and results

The hypothesis of the study is that in political cartoons related to the same political event or situation certain source domains would recur systematically. We examine the role of the visual and verbal modes and argue that the visual or multimodal metaphors are manifestations of underlying conceptual metaphors.

The questions put forward for the present study are:
1. How do the modes (verbal, visual, or both) employed contribute to the construal of the metaphor?
2. Which conceptual domains are used to predicate something metaphorically about the European Union?
3. If the visual and multimodal metaphors are the manifestations of conceptual metaphors, can the conceptual metaphors be unambiguously named?

The data considered in this study consist of cartoons featuring the European Union created by professional cartoonists worldwide and published in print newspapers and/or online. Published online, political cartoons sometimes lose the discursive (or situational) context they had in their original printed (newspaper)

version. This is what might influence the interpretation of the language-image relation and consequently the metaphorical representation of the EU. Visual and multimodal metaphors are highly context-dependent. Therefore, to identify and interpret them implies studying them within the domain of their context, which in case of political cartoons is the socio-political arena. Thus, Saraceni (2003: 36) holds that "cartoons are like single sentences: in order to understand them you need to have some extra-textual information". In the analogy to language, Saraceni defines two types of context: "textual context, […] the language that surrounds a portion of text," and "extra-textual context, your knowledge of the world" (Ibid). The background knowledge of the socio-political situation is a prerequisite for more accurate interpretation of the metaphors employed in the cartoons.

Political cartoon as a genre has become a rather popular research object and is studied by a number of metaphor scholars (Forceville 2005; El Refaie 2003, 2009; Schilperoord & Maes 2009; Yus 2009).

A metaphor consists of a topic, or "target," and of a vehicle, a "source" – that to which the target is metaphorically compared. A visual metaphor is a monomodal metaphor in which both target and source are exclusively or predominantly cued in the visual mode. A multimodal metaphor is a metaphor if target and source are cued in two different modes (in this case: the verbal and the visual mode).

Forceville (2011) discusses the following test as a useful strategy for distinguishing between visual and multimodal metaphors: if, all verbal elements in the cartoon are erased, and the visuals still allow for identifying a target and a source, the metaphor is construed as a visual one; but if without verbal elements it becomes impossible to identify either target or source, it is to be viewed as a multimodal metaphor.

The scholar (Forceville 2011) continues, that there might occur the cases that "the erasing of all pictorial elements still allows for construal of a target and source, for instance in the caption, the metaphor is simply a verbal (i.e., monomodal) metaphor" (for more discussion of modality in metaphor, see Forceville 2006a, 2008; Eggertsson and Forceville 2009).

Thus, taking into account that in political cartoons only two modalities can be employed, metaphors used can be either monomodal (verbal metaphors or visual metaphors) or multimodal (deploying both the verbal and the visual modes).

Within the framework of the present study, the political cartoons portraying the political events in the EU were collected from various sources (e.g., Cartoonstock, Dienas Bizness archives, and cartoonists' own homepages). The themes that appear to have received most prolific depiction in the recent years are the Greek financial crisis and Brexit.

The first group of cartoons are based on the source domain LIQUID, which is portrayed as a body of water that might serve as a pot of gold to dip into or contain the element of danger.

The political cartoon (Figure 1) depicts the EU as a body of water, thus forming the metaphor of the monomodal kind THE EU IS BODY OF WATER.

Figure 1. IMF rescue for Greece[1]

A man dressed in a T-shirt resembling the Greek flag is surrounded by sharks, their fins standing for the stars present in the EU flag, which symbolize the danger that Greece found itself in due to the financial debts. The rescue coming from the EU authorities is an ambiguous one as it is represented as an anvil instead of a life ring.

Figure 2. Referendum in Greece by Gatis Šļūka

The political cartoon (Figure 2) created by Latvian cartoonist Gatis Šļūka in relation to the referendum held in Greece during the financial crisis depicts a well and water in it resembling the EU flag, which metonymically stands for the EU, thus, enabling the construe of visual metaphor EU IS WATER. The Greek man with the water bucket chain cut off the well represents the EU concerns about the unexpectedness of decisions and further actions of the Greek government. The given cartoon also enables the construe of the metaphor EU IS CONTAINER (the well).

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[1] Retrieved from https://latuff2.deviantart.com/art/IMF-rescue-for-Greece-158950511

The problems related to the unpredictability of Greece's actions and its indecisive position are featured in the next Gatis Šļūka's cartoon (Figure 3), based on the source domain LIQUID.

Figure 3. Unpredictability of Greece by Gatis Šļūka

The EU is presented as a waterfall, which splits into smaller streams that in their turn might be interpreted as the concerns about the Eurozone financial future and its disintegration. The falling star of the EU flag and the streams forming the Greek flag are an allusion to Greece and the crisis. The visual metaphor present in the cartoon – EU IS WATERFALL.

The other most frequently employed source domain use in the construal of metaphors is CONTAINER.

The danger of losing a member state is touched upon in the more recent cartoons focusing on Brexit encountered in rather great number in both English and Latvian. Cartoonists' vision of the European community in the light of Brexit implies that the EU is CONTAINER.

Figure 4. EU – a pop-out surprise box[2]
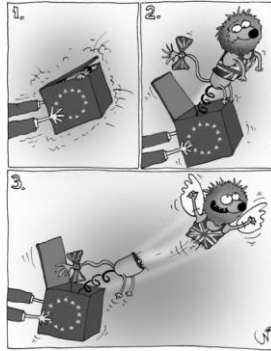
Urmas Nemvalts presents the EU as a pop-out surprise box (Figure 4), which is a container in this case, while the UK as a pop-out toy in the form of its symbol – a lion, which, notwithstanding the fact of having lost its part, is happy to regain its freedom. This also reflects the division in the opinions of the British people. The visual metaphor EU IS POP-OUT SURPRISE BOX is present in the cartoon.

Another political cartoon (Figure 5) drawing on Brexit divorce contains the visual metaphors EU IS KENNEL, and EU MEMBER STATES ARE DOGS living in the kennel (EU); after Brexit the EU states are afraid of losing one of the biggest bowls, i.e. money sources previously available from the UK.

Figure 5. EU is kennel[3]

The wealthy man (metaphorically representing the United Kingdom) divorces and abandons the lady and her household (Figure 6) – a metaphorical representation of the European Union, where both the house and the yard are crowded with different people and abounds in problems, including terrorism, refugees' issue, the EU – USA relationships, etc. Thus, the visual metaphor – EU IS HOUSEHOLD – is created.

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[2] Retrieved from https://www.irishtimes.com/news/world/europe/europe-what-s-next-28-cartoonists-on-the-state-of-the-eu-1.2788321

[3] Retrieved from https://www.politico.eu/interactive/brexit-european-union-referendum-commission-david-cameron-leave-cartoons-draw-brexit-divorce/

Figure 6. EU is household[4]

The conceptual domain CONTAINER is employed also in the construal of the visual metaphor EU IS AIRPLANE (Figure 7), while the UK is a parachutist who regrets having left the airplane. The verbal part participates in facilitating the interpretation of the message of the cartoon without participating in the development of the metaphor. The UK man's backpack – the Brexit vote and the torn off parachute ring symbolize the unexpectedness of the referendum results.

Figure 7. EU is airplane[5]

The source domain CONTAINER is present also in the cartoon (Figure 8) by Agris Liepiņš created after the referendum on BREXIT and showing Latvia's readiness and support for the idea about the increase in the member states' contribution into the EU budget. The bowl with the EU symbols and inscription budget stands for the EU, thus, enabling the construal of the visual metaphor THE EU IS CONTAINER.

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4 Retrieved from https://www.politico.eu/interactive/brexit-european-union-referendum-commission-david-cameron-leave-cartoons-draw-brexit-divorce/
5 Retrieved from https://www.politico.eu/interactive/brexit-european-union-referendum-commission-david-cameron-leave-cartoons-draw-brexit-divorce/

Figure 8. BREXIT by Agris Liepiņš

Another source domain identified while analysing the data is PLANT.

Figure 9. EU is tree[6]

The theme of cutting the ties with the European Union is considered in the cartoons (Figure 9, 10). based on the source domain PLANT (TREE). In both of them the literal scene of the idiom *don't cut the branch you are sitting on* (for the discussion of literal scene, see Langlotz 2006) is depicted. In the first cartoon (Figure 9) to be analysed it is the UK that has sawn off its own branch of the EU tree, but is still trying to hold on it and, judging from the man's facial expression is cautious about its future fall.

Figure 10. EU is tree[7]

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[6] Retrieved from https://www.politico.eu/interactive/brexit-european-union-referendum-commission-david-cameron-leave-cartoons-draw-brexit-divorce/

[7] Retrieved from https://www.cartoonmovement.com/cartoon/14240

The other cartoon (Figure 10) does not refer to any particular EU member state, but rather summarizes the wish of a number of the member states to leave the EU, but the cartoonist warns that they will not benefit from doing so. Instead, they are sure to lose much of financial support and benefits they have been receiving from the union.

One more source domain underlying the metaphors considered is CLOTHING (Figure 11).

Figure 11. Man strips down to his union jack boxers, getting out of EU jeans.

This visual metaphor is based on the source – CLOTHING in both metaphors that can be identified with the targets, namely, EU IS JEANS, THE UK IS A MAN WEARING UNION JACK BOXER SHORTS.

The EU is presented as the jeans in the colour of the EU flag and the belt with the EU stars on it – they are being taken off thus leaving the man in the Union Jack boxer shorts personifying the UK naked and defenceless. This once again supports the imposed opinion that it is not very wise to leave the EU.

The metaphors in the last two cartoons (Figure 12, 13) to be considered are based on the source domain: WATER VEHICLE

Figure 12. European (Dis)integration[8]

Alexander Dubovsky (Figure 12) makes use of the image of a raft before the UK's in/out referendum to construct a multimodal metaphor EU IS RAFT. "How will a

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[8] Retrieved from https://www.cartoonmovement.com/cartoon/21192

possible Brexit affect the not altogether sturdy European raft?" is the question asked by the cartoonist.

Rafts are known for not being the most reliable means of sailing, but the cartoon shows the raft's gradual destruction, which makes it even less sturdy and reliable. The verbal part, though being merely the names of the EU member states, is necessary in order to interpret the intended message as well as to construct the metaphor. The EU member states are logs of the EU raft.

A visual metaphor within the next domain is EU IS SHIP. In this cartoon (Figure 13) the general state of the European Union is portrayed – the ship has suffered various storms that have torn its sails but it is still afloat.

Figure 13. EU is ship[9]
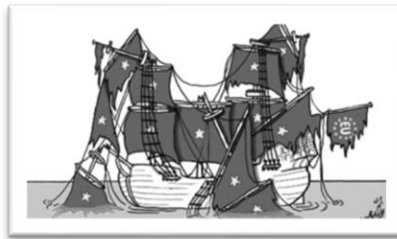
4. Closing remarks

Political cartoons usually exaggerate the negative traits of the European Union by producing satirical or humoristic effects, or both. Even though this kind of awareness constrains possible interpretations, different viewers may infer (slightly or fundamentally) different interpretations.

Cartoons, and political cartoons in particular, are critical by nature, therefore it is not surprising that they offer a rather pessimistic view on the EU.

In political cartoons created worldwide and concerning the same political events or situations in the EU certain source domains do recur systematically as hypothesized at the beginning of the study. In our study we have considered just a few source domains although we exemplified each of them by at least a couple of cartoons. The most often employed source domain in depicting the EU in the analysed political cartoons, irrespective of the language used, is LIQUID, which participates in the construal of visual metaphors: EU is THE BODY OF WATER (a sea, a waterfall, water in the well) and a CONTAINER (a pop-out surprise box, a kennel, a house, an aeroplane).

As to the mono or multimodality of metaphors in political cartoons, we have to admit that in most cases these are monomodal, in particular the visual

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[9] Retrieved from
   http://lesgrossesorchadeslesamplesthalameges.skynetblogs.be/archive/2014/04/19/blo
   g-le-debut-du-debut-de-la-fin-8166445.html

metaphors that have been encountered. This might be explained with reference to the peculiarities of the themes touched upon in the cartoons selected for the analysis, and, possibly, the other political events being considered, the results on the proportion of mono and multimodal metaphors used in political cartoons would vary.

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