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INTRODUCTION

Special issue on the political impact of metaphors

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In the wake of Lakoff and Johnson's seminal work (1980), much attention has been devoted to the study of metaphors not as rhetorical figures, but as conceptual tools to express a complex reality in more familiar terms. While conceptual metaphors occur in every area of life, the political domain remains a particularly rich source of metaphors. As Semino puts it: "It is often claimed that the use of metaphor is particularly necessary in politics, since politics is an abstract and complex domain of experience, and metaphors can provide ways of simplifying complexities and making abstractions accessible" (2008, p.90). Moreover, "if metaphor is at the heart of cognitive framing then it should be crucial to political study" (De Landtsheer, 2009, p. 60).

Accordingly, scholars in linguistics and political researchers have moved towards investigating the use and especially the identification of metaphors in various political domains (for an overview, see Bougher, 2012). For instance, Lakoff (1996, 2004, 2008) has offered various accounts of American politics in terms of conceptual metaphors; Musolff (2004) and his colleagues (Musolff, Schaeffner, & Townson, 1996) have explored how we conceive and thus speak not just about Europe, but also about the Holocaust (2010); in metaphorical terms, Beer and De Landtsheer (2004) have looked at metaphors in international relations; Charteris-Black (2004, 2011) and L'Hôte (2010, 2012) have analysed speeches by major British and American politicians and their persuasive power; Perrez and Reuchamps (2012) have captured metaphors of federalism and how citizens use them in daily language, while Goatly (2007) has demonstrated how metaphors can construct myths and shape ideologies. As suggested by this brief overview, many different topics and discourse types have been uncovered by scholars interested in political metaphors.

Nonetheless, Carver and Pikalo contend that metaphor research should move one step further (2008a, p. 3): "the analysis of political metaphors should not be

just about the interpretation of political metaphors but also and above all else about the creative-productive function that they have in politics and in political science itself". In fact, although a large body of research has been devoted to the study of (conceptual) metaphors in the political domain, it is striking that the question of the political impact of metaphors has only recently started to be addressed. While metaphors are described as devices structuring our perception of political realities and representations, and as devices frequently used by political elites to frame particular debates, their actual political impact, for example their ability to frame the citizens' understanding of given issues, has mostly been taken for granted. To illustrate this claim, consider the following passage taken from Stenvoll's (2008, p. 29) account of the 'slippery slope' metaphor in political discourse:

The slippery slope image works metaphorically in at least two ways. First, it sets up the physical world of solid objects as an analogy to political matters, implying that politics is like the physical world: if you 'move' something in the world of politics, like making or changing a particular law or policy, other things will inevitably follow — just as if you put a physical object on a sliding plate. This naturalising image of politics simplifies the complexity of cause and effect in the social world, compared to the natural world and its more mechanic [sic], more predictable patterns of causality.

Second, the slippery slope does [sic] in itself entail a particular image of movement: from a good or relatively good place to a relatively worse or bad place and from a political world of voluntarism and human action to a natural world of determinism and laws of physics. It imposes a kind of unidirectional, unstoppable movement which, when used metaphorically about politics, binds phenomena together in a specific way.

The author concludes that "the slippery slope metaphor is an expression of several conceptual metaphors that structure the way people understand, experience and practise politics" (Stenvoll, 2008, p. 35). While this account of the slippery slope metaphor offers an intuitive and interesting analysis of the metaphor's conceptual implications — by pointing among other things to the notion of irreversible movement, and thereby highlighting the political advantages of using such a metaphor in a debate about a controversial political issue — claiming that people actually understand this metaphor that way (e.g., draw similar conclusions to the ones intended by the speaker), needs further empirical investigation. On the basis of such reasoning, the focus switches from the reasons why some political actors *use* a particular metaphor — that is, the production side — to its alleged *impact on the public* — that is, the reception side. While the former has received a lot of attention in metaphor research, the latter is still largely underexplored.

Nonetheless, from the production-side perspective, there are good reasons to assume an impact might result. One reason to assume metaphors have an impact is that it has been shown that metaphor is a central component of human cognition; it is “a central cognitive process for abstract conceptualization and reasoning” (Johnson, 2010, p. 412); metaphors are thus able to be highly persuasive precisely because they can activate “both conscious and unconscious resources to influence our rational, moral and emotional response, both directly — through describing and analysing political issues — and indirectly by influencing how we feel about things” (Charteris-Black, 2011, pp. 50–51). Bowdle and Gentner have demonstrated in several instances that individuals can process metaphors as quickly as they can process literal meanings (Bowdle & Gentner, 2005; Gentner & Bowdle, 2001), yet they add that individuals need more time to comprehend novel metaphors than conventional metaphors. This suggests that the nature of the impact might be different for novel metaphors than for conventional ones. This is a point to bear in mind when turning to the analysis of metaphors in political discourse.

So far, we have been talking about the political impact of metaphors as if it was one single process. However, there are different ways in which metaphors can have a political impact. Firstly, metaphors have the ability to frame the debate. Studies in psycholinguistics have demonstrated the metaphor framing effect on individuals in their everyday life (Bosman, 1987; Read, Cesa, Jones, & Collins, 1990; Robins & Mayer, 2000). In particular, political and social scientists posit that metaphors have the potential to frame political debates (Carver & Pikalo, 2008b). One single political issue can be framed in entirely different ways depending on the metaphors at work. For instance, Walter & Helmig (2008, p. 126) suggested that the use of different metaphors about the Eastern enlargement of the EU affected the discourse orientations about this political issue at the macro level.

Using a particular metaphor can also reveal an underlying conception of a political reality. This has been shown by the proponents of Conceptual Metaphor Theory, following Lakoff and Johnson’s work (1980). Such varying conceptions may indeed lead to specific policy choices. Metaphors may thus not only frame the debate, but also orient it towards particular political decisions. Looking at the history of Europe from the latter part of the seventeenth century onwards, Ringmar (2008, p. 64) explains that “the regimes where the [machine-]metaphor was most popular — Prussia and Austria in particular — were also the states where people first were granted rights.”

Therefore, another political impact of metaphors is to achieve certain political goals such as (re-)producing legitimacy not just in the short term, but also in the longer run (Yanow, 2008). In this line of reasoning, Schneider (2008) argues that the frequency of certain metaphorical mappings in political discourse will eventually lead to constructing legitimacy, as this frequency influences how an

issue is collectively conceived of, how it should be addressed, and what solutions are brought forward. The analysis of metaphors and their political impact relates thus to the larger question of how language might structure politics, “by promoting certain ways and downplaying other possible ways of understanding phenomena, and of acting upon these understandings” (Stenvoll, 2008, p. 39). This is why Charteris-Black (2004) proposes a critical metaphor analysis that “aims to identify *which* metaphors are chosen in persuasive genres such as political speeches, political party manifestos or press reports, and attempts to explain *why* these metaphors are chosen, with reference to the interaction between an orator’s purposes and a specific set of speech circumstances” (Charteris-Black, 2013, pp. 174, authors’ emphasis).

The next step in the study of political metaphors is therefore to explore, from an interdisciplinary perspective, their political impact, not only in terms of their presence in political discourse (the production side) but also in terms of their reception by the discourse recipients. This special issue accordingly entails a twofold question about the nature of political metaphors, or to put it differently, about the nature of metaphors in political discourse, on the one hand, and the nature of their reception, on the other hand.

Are political metaphors different from any other metaphors? Are the metaphors found in political discourse typical of this type of discourse? These questions tap into the production side of metaphors. In this regard, recent research has also called into question the all-encompassing nature of conceptual metaphors and it has emphasized the need to test theoretical views against empirical data (Cameron, 2003; Steen & Wolters, 2012), and to develop reliable methods for metaphor identification (Pragglejazz Group, 2007). The question of the nature of metaphors in political discourse is also related to their deliberate nature, in the sense of Steen (2008, 2011b), who proposes a three-dimensional model of metaphor analysis, distinguishing between the linguistic, conceptual and communicative levels, in which metaphors are considered as being deliberate at the communicative level when they are “expressly meant to change the addressee’s perspective on the referent or topic that is the target of the metaphor, by making the addressee look at it from a different conceptual domain or space, which functions as a conceptual source” (Steen, 2008, p. 222). According to Steen, these deliberate metaphors tend to be processed differently than non-deliberate ones, the former being processed by cross-domain mapping, the latter being processed by categorization as conventional metaphorical extensions of a single lexical category. This view has been challenged in the literature, among others by Gibbs (2011b, p. 41) who rejects the view that conventional metaphors are not processed by cross-domain mappings and also questions the very notion of what deliberateness means by reminding us that “people have limited awareness of their habitual

behaviours”, but also by highlighting the methodological endeavour of identifying metaphors that are produced deliberately in spontaneous discourse. However, when analyzing metaphors in political discourse, it might be important to be able to make a distinction between metaphors that appear to be conventional instances of language use and metaphors which seem to be explicitly used to present one’s conceptualization of a given issue (see for instance Goatly, 2007; Charteris-Black & Musolff, 2003). In this regard Perrez and Reuchamps (2014) have also shown that making the distinction between deliberate metaphor and nondeliberate ones when analyzing citizen data can lead to meaningful political insights in reflecting the citizens’ political opinions.

In addition to the nature of political metaphors, there is the question of the nature of the discourses that convey them. As argued by Steen (2011a), scholars of discourse analysis should pay more attention to genre as a key driving force behind language use, cognition, and communication. Such an endeavour will shed light on the very nature of political discourses and their different subcategories and how they are realized in language, distinguishing between code (language, register, style, rhetoric), text (content, type, form, structure) and context (participants, settings, medium).

The questions about the nature of political metaphors and about political discourse are topics that are intrinsically interrelated and this is why the first part of this special issue tackles them. Some questions that might arise are, for instance, to what extent metaphors can be regarded as a defining feature of political discourse from the perspective of genre analysis. Or to put it another way, can the frequent use of metaphors in this kind of discourse be explained by the common expectations of the participants engaged in such an interaction/discourse? What is the nature of the metaphors identified in such political discourse? Are these realizations of conceptual metaphors that are deeply rooted in our conceptual system, or more context-specific metaphors that are used for specific communicative goals? And finally does the context of their production — be it political, social or economic — matter to understand their potential impact?

The first article directly tackles the question of the genre of political discourse and specifically addresses the nature of metaphors and their multimodality in party conference speeches. In this first contribution, linguists Camille Debras and Emilie L’Hôte argue that party conference speeches are a specific subgenre of political discourse that should be examined through a multimodal approach. Their hypothesis is that conference speeches are clearly distinguished from other types of political speech by an overuse and a greater variety of conceptual metaphors, the most important of which are made salient by a prominent multimodal frame (involving, e.g., gesture, facial expression, posture, and prosody). To this end, the authors offer a study based on a comparison between party conference speeches

and other political speeches from both the UK Labour and Conservative parties. They perform a qualitative-yet-systematic analysis of conceptual metaphors connected with the political issues raised in the speeches, looking at both the textual and multimodal levels. Their contention is that the most prominent and the most productive metaphors at the textual level are also clearly marked at a multimodal level, which is likely to yield a greater political impact.

In order to explore the impact of metaphors, the second article by communication scientist Christ' l De Landtsheer takes a very different approach. Following the tradition in political science and communication that seeks to establish a method for quantitatively evaluating the rhetorical power of metaphors, the author uses the Metaphor Power Index (MPI), a method that aims at deriving the potential rhetorical power of metaphors in a given discourse environment, to investigate the nature and the role of metaphors in the recent financial crisis. Her article more specifically examines the logic behind financial crisis metaphors in concert with the economic and political climate, in order to determine to what extent the economic and political context had an impact on the use of specific metaphors over the course of the crisis. To achieve this, the article relies on an extensive content analysis of several newspapers in The Netherlands and Flanders between 2006 and 2013.

While the first two articles tackle the production side, the second part of the special issue deals with the reception side; that is, the question of their political impact on the metaphor's recipient (in terms of representations, attitudes and behaviour). As suggested by Bougher (2012, p.217), metaphorical reasoning "offers a cognitive mechanism that explains how citizens make sense of the political world by drawing from their nonpolitical knowledge and experiences". Metaphors therefore not only reflect perceived reality, but they also function as cues by which citizens come to understand political positions, and through which they can shape their political behaviours. Recent studies have started to empirically explore such dynamics and show contrasting results. A case in point is Thibodeau and Boroditsky's studies (2011, 2013), in which different metaphors about crime were found to lead to different policy proposals by the citizens. When crime was described as a "contagious virus", measures were proposed to foster social integration; when crime was described as "ravaging beast", repression was favoured. This was explained as different images of crime resulting from the two different metaphorical frames.

Yet, a recent extended replication by Steen et al. (2014) did not come to the same conclusions. The authors show that the impact might be due to simple exposure to textual information, rather than metaphors *per se*. Simply reading about crime would increase people's overall preference for enforcement, regardless of the presence or absence of a specific metaphorical frame. Metaphors therefore do not

automatically lead to straightforward political behaviour, and above all they might have differential effects on reasoning. Between the reception and production sides of the metaphor chain, much is still to be understood about the process itself, or perhaps processes. Concerning the individual level, Gibbs and Colston (2012, p. 130) point out that “psychologists disagree [...] about the cognitive mechanisms responsible for emergent meanings during metaphor understanding.” Following this line of reasoning, it might well be the case that the context matters considerably, both in trying to understand why a given metaphorical frame is used instead of another plausible frame in a particular context and what impact this choice yields on the recipient’s representations. Moreover, the choice of a specific metaphorical frame, might have more than one single impact; there might well be multiple impacts and their temporal nature might also vary a lot between the short term, mid term and long term.

While political scientists have hitherto often neglected political metaphors (Bougher, 2012), they have long made useful distinctions for studying the impact of political decisions. First of all, they distinguish between the micro level (typically the level of individuals), the meso level (the level of organizations), and the macro level (the level of systems). In this regard, the framework of analysis of the political impact of metaphors could even be more refined. Metaphors could have an impact on *politics*, but also on *policies* and on the *polity* itself. Politics is “the activity by which decisions are arrived at and implemented in and for a community” (Blondel, 1991, p. 482), while policies consist of the output of politics, or more broadly defined, “the linkage between intentions, actions and results” (Heywood, 2007, p. 427) of government bodies. Finally, polity refers to the place is where politics occurs, i.e. “a society organized though the exercise of political authority” (Heywood, 2007, p. 5). This distinction between various levels illustrates that the potential impact of metaphors could be manifold. It would therefore be useful to determine what kind(s) of impact(s) a metaphor could lead to and under which conditions.

One could also think of a differentiated impact between stand-alone metaphors and metaphors that are part of a larger network of metaphors, which may express allegories (Gibbs, 2011a; see also Crisp 2008 on the distinction between extended metaphors and allegories), within a single discourse or across several discourses. In some cases, extended metaphors could help structure the textual information and lead to the construction of a more coherent textbase, which would eventually result in a better integration of the textual information, at least in the short-term. This in turn would suggest that the use of a metaphor might lead readers/listeners to mobilize the necessary cognitive means to make sense of a given topic at a particular point in time. Accordingly, one may pick a particular metaphor in one specific context to frame a particular issue, but pick another in a

different context to frame the same issue. This would suggest that our representations of political issues should not be regarded as static representations, but rather as being built on the fly in a given context to make sense of a political issue.

The temporal nature of the impact of metaphors has already been mentioned. It makes even more sense to take this into account in the study of political impact, since political scientists have demonstrated that political opinions should be distinguished from political attitudes and political representations. Whereas political opinions may be short-lived and change quickly, political attitudes are more entrenched in individual and group behaviours (as they are “mental predisposition[s] that need not ever be translated into observable acts or specifically formulated thoughts or beliefs” (Laponce, 1991, p. 437)) and political representations are made of political opinions, political attitudes and imagination (Moscovici, [1961] 1976). Opinions, attitudes and representations all influence political behaviours, but they do it in different ways. This is why a close study of the political impact of metaphors is necessary. Hence, the second part of this special issue is devoted to examining the nature of the political impact of metaphors on the recipient side.

Taking an interdisciplinary perspective, linguist Julien Perrez and political scientist Min Reuchamps developed an experimental procedure based round an article published in the Belgian newspaper “Le Soir” (13–14 July 2013), in which Belgian federalism is compared to a Tetris game. The procedure involved a picture and a text and four conditions: full, text, image and control. Comparing the various experimental conditions allows the authors to measure the impact of the Tetris metaphor on the citizens’ representations of Belgian federalism, to assess to what extent the different metaphorical media contribute to this impact and to measure the long-term impact of this metaphor on the citizens’ political representations. By examining these topics, the study seeks to contribute to a better understanding of the role and functions metaphors play in political discourse, and more globally in our everyday political interactions.

The impact of metaphors could also be explained by the role played by frame extendedness. In their article, linguists W. Gudrun Reijnierse, Tina Krennmayr, Gerard J. Steen and communication scientist Christian Burgers explore “How viruses and beasts affect our opinions (or not): The role of extendedness in metaphorical framing”. Following on the on-going debate between Thibodeau and Boroditsky’s studies (2011, 2013) and their own work (Steen et al., 2014) and the existence of contrasting findings, they investigate whether extending the metaphorical frame of the ‘Crime is a virus’ metaphor, on the one hand, and of the ‘Crime is a beast’ on the other, leads to a differentiated impact on the perceived effectiveness of policy measures related to crime solving. More specifically, they analysed to what extent these respective extended metaphorical frames led the subjects to choose either reform-oriented policies (hypothesised as being in line with

the former) or enforcement-oriented ones (hypothesised as being in line with the latter). Their two experiments show mixed results: the experiment testing the extension of the metaphor 'Crime is a beast' showed frame-consistent measures, but this was not the case with the experiment based on the 'Crime is a virus' metaphor. Metaphorical framing effects thus appear to be more subtle than often assumed.

Extended metaphors are also discussed in the final paper of the series. In his contribution, psycholinguist Raymond W. Gibbs contends that many conceptual metaphors should be understood as allegories, i.e., extended metaphors in which an entire narrative introduces and elaborates upon a metaphorical source domain to present a rich symbolic understanding of people and events. Such an approach could refine our understanding of the political impact of metaphors. Indeed some studies show that people can readily interpret many of these allegories via 'embodied simulations', by which they imagine themselves participating in the very actions referred to in the language. These embodied simulations are automatic and sometimes tap into enduring allegorical themes that have symbolic value. The author presents both linguistic and psycholinguistic research supporting the idea that embodied simulations are critical to creating and interpreting metaphors in political discourse, and demonstrates how these extended metaphors foster allegorical inferences which enable speakers and listeners to bond over mutually-held narrative symbols.

The questions raised in this special issue concern both the production side and the reception side of the metaphor chain, as well as the intermediary processes themselves, both at the individual and collective levels. All of these questions address the methodological challenges of measuring the political impact of metaphors. Only an interdisciplinary group of scholars is likely to be able to provide viable answers to these questions. This is the endeavour of this special issue. It brings together metaphor specialists from various disciplines — cognitive linguistics, communication, political science and psychology — to explain if and how discourse, through metaphors, actively shape the political reality.

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