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# 1

## Introduction: Metaphor and Politics

Metaphors of political discourse and political thought have had a dubious reputation for some time. More than three hundred years ago, in his treatise *Leviathan*, Thomas Hobbes described the danger of metaphors leading the human mind into intellectual and political confusion:

(1) [...] The Light of humane minds is Perspicuous Words, but by exact definitions first snuffed, and purged from ambiguity; [...] And on the contrary, Metaphors, and senselesse and ambiguous words, are like *ignes fatui*; and reasoning upon them, is wandering amongst innumerable absurdities; and their end, contention, and sedition, or contempt. (Hobbes 1996: 36)

In recent discussions in linguistics, psychology and philosophy, the relevance of metaphor for social and political conceptualization has been acknowledged in much more positive terms. In particular, the school of cognitive metaphor analysis, which George Lakoff and Mark Johnson effectively founded with the publication of their seminal work *Metaphors We Live By* in 1980, has produced ample evidence that “metaphors play a central role in the construction of social and political reality” (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 159). Cognitive theory views verbal metaphors and similes as reflecting mappings across domains of knowledge that underlie the language users’ understanding of the world in which they live, “allowing forms of reasoning and words from one domain [...] to be used in the other [...] domain” (Lakoff 1996: 63). From the cognitive viewpoint, what matters most about a metaphor is its conceptual nature, not its ‘accidental’ linguistic form. In their second collaborative book, *Philosophy in the Flesh*, Lakoff and Johnson have

reinforced this epistemological claim even further: “Metaphorical thought, in the form of cross-domain mappings is primary; metaphorical language is secondary” (Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 123).

It is obvious that this claim, if validated, has a massive bearing on the study of political discourse. If our social experiences and conceptualizations are organized in terms of metaphors, then politics, as part of the social domain, must also be perceived and constructed metaphorically. Cognitive theorists have indeed produced a number of analyses of political metaphor, often related to specific political issues.<sup>1</sup> The most systematic study has been provided by Lakoff in his 1996 book *Moral Politics: What Conservatives Know That Liberals Don't*, in which he analyses the world-views underlying political thinking in the United States of America. In his view, the conceptual metaphor of the FAMILY stands at the centre of a system of conceptualizations of society in US politics:

(2) The general metaphor looks like the following:

A Community Is a Family.

Moral Authority Is Parental Authority.

An Authority Figure is a Parent.

Moral Behaviour by Someone Subject to Authority Is Obedience.

Moral Behaviour by Someone in Authority Is Setting Standards and Enforcing Them. (Lakoff 1996: 7)

The FAMILY metaphor of Morality is by no means an isolated concept but systematically connected to other concepts such as, for instance, WELL-BEING IS WEALTH, MORAL ACTION IS GIVING SOMETHING OF POSITIVE VALUE, IMMORAL ACTION IS GIVING SOMETHING OF NEGATIVE VALUE (Lakoff 1996: 44–7). When applied to the “target” concept of the NATION STATE, this system of source concepts provides a frame of reference that “allows us to reason about the nation on the basis of what we know about a family”, based on the (metaphorical) equations “The Nation Is a Family, The Government Is a Parent; The Citizens Are the Children” (1996: 154–5).

The politically significant aspect of this metaphor of the nation state is that it has two competing versions: a STRICT FATHER model and a NURTURANT PARENT model, both of which concern parents' authority over their children and their exercise of punishment and care. The two models can be roughly equated with more or less authoritarian types of family education,<sup>2</sup> which are “rooted in long cultural experience” in Western societies and are linked to gender role models (1996: 155). The two metaphor versions “induce” two corresponding “unconscious” pat-

terns of moral belief systems, which, in turn, yield “conservative” and “liberal” world-views (1996: 37, 155). Lakoff also emphasizes the fact that people ‘in real life’ operate all kinds of combinations and sub-variants of the two basic models, which in turn may give rise to a wide range of systems of social practices and educational and moral ideologies (1996: 283–321). Nevertheless, he maintains that the two main models form the basis for all these conceptual variations (1996: 14–16, 284).

Whilst the two antagonistic basic versions of the FAMILY metaphor are, in principle, of equal status, the depth and impact of their respective application to political issues differ greatly in conservative and liberal thinking. Lakoff claims that American conservatives have developed “an elaborate language of their moral politics” from the STRICT FATHER model, which gives coherence to their views on issues such as social programmes, taxes, crime, the death penalty, the environment and abortion, whereas liberals lack a similarly powerful metaphor system, due to their uncritical commitment to an objectivist semantics that puts them “at a disadvantage in any public discourse” (1996: 386). As long as they continue to “assume that metaphors are just matters of words and rhetoric, or that they cloud the issues, or that metaphors are the stuff of Orwellian language” (1996: 387), liberals cannot even begin to redress the (im-)balance of discourse power. Lakoff’s application of cognitive analysis to political discourse and theory aims at enabling them to overcome their naïve objectivism by way of exposing the STRICT FATHER model as the “unconscious conceptual framework” of political debates on moral issues (1996: 386). Cognitive metaphor analysis thus claims to look behind explicit utterances to find conceptual structures that the users themselves may not be aware of.

We shall postpone the discussion of the political and ethical implications of this “therapeutic” stance until the concluding chapters and first focus on how its epistemological claim (about unconscious conceptual metaphors underlying actual linguistic behaviour) can be empirically corroborated.<sup>3</sup> In *Moral Politics*, the linguistic evidence of the FAMILY metaphor consists in the first place of a short list of idiomatic phrases, such as *founding fathers*, *father of his country*, *Uncle Sam*, *Big Brother*, *fatherland*, its *sons* going to war (1996: 153–4). Such a small basis of empirical data is consistent with Lakoff’s general approach to observable communication phenomena as ‘surface’ manifestations of underlying conceptual structures. However, it leaves underdetermined his main hypothesis about the FAMILY metaphor structuring the ideological divide in US society. The main sources that Lakoff cites to substantiate

his claims about family morality in US politics are in fact popular treatises on child-rearing and research literature on socialization, political theory and public administration (1996: 143–6, 182–3, 212, 227). These overtly ideological treatises indeed appear to bear out Lakoff's analysis of the ideological divide over moral issues in US society, but they can hardly count as evidence for the existence of an unconscious conceptual framework. Far from being unconscious or hidden, they are explicit and elaborate, openly arguing in favour of specific models of family morality. Moreover, as Lakoff himself emphasizes, the STRICT FATHER metaphor is by no means the only model for morality; instead he claims that it is more elaborate, systematic and more powerful than its 'competitor', the NURTURANT PARENT model. For this hypothesis to be corroborated, we would need comparative empirical data to demonstrate that metaphors based on the STRICT FATHER model are more representative of or dominant in actual political discourse in the US than those that rely on NURTURANT PARENT concepts. If the same source domain of the FAMILY can be used to argue for both conservative and liberal world-views, who is to decide which is the dominant one in a discourse community?

It is here that corpus-based analyses can help to provide a much-needed empirical complement to cognitive linguistic theory. The studies presented here aim to investigate the possibility of such analyses by providing corpus data for the British and German discourses about a mutually relevant topic – the politics of the European Union – over the last decade of the twentieth century. The relevant data have been compiled as part of a collaborative research project on linguistic manifestations of "Attitudes towards Europe" in Britain and Germany, spanning the 12 years from 1989 to 2001.<sup>4</sup> This period covers a number of fundamental changes in European politics. Following the collapse of communism and faced with the impact of German unification and the re-emergence of sovereign nation states in Eastern Europe, the "European Community" (EC) – since 1994 the "European Union" (EU) – began to move towards closer economic, administrative and political integration.<sup>5</sup> These initiatives resulted in two new treaties, which were negotiated in (and subsequently named after) the Dutch cities of Maastricht and Amsterdam in 1991 and 1997. Among the national governments and media in the EC/EU, however, opinions were divided about the pace and direction of change. Whilst the German government, especially under the Christian Democrat chancellor Helmut Kohl until 1998, promoted fast integration, British governments took a more hesitant, if not antagonistic stance. During the first half of the 1990s, the Conservative government under John Major opposed some of the integration moves and

negotiated opt-out clauses in the Maastricht Treaty, which excluded Britain from the first group of countries joining the common currency in 1999. Even after the change of government to Labour in 1997, the British media were slow to embrace integration, always fearful to lose too much sovereignty to the EU administration based in Brussels. In Germany, on the other hand, closer integration has been widely viewed as a promising economic and political prospect and as a safeguard against resurgent nationalism.

The political contrast between the two countries lends itself to comparisons of the respective national publics as discourse communities that maintain a continuous 'virtual conversation' about a particular topic. In a few cases, this conversation manifests itself in actual discussions in interviews or live debates recorded and disseminated by the public media. But such direct manifestations are not the only evidence of a continuous and coherent public debate. Rather, the whole ensemble of texts produced in public by politicians and media commentators can be assumed to form a coherent whole as long as its participants agree that they are discussing within a shared discursive context and refer to each others' statements in order to advance their arguments. The debates in Britain and Germany about EU politics can be seen as examples of such virtual conversations in the respective national public sphere. However, mutual citations, allusions and comments also often go beyond the boundaries of national discourse communities; in such cases, we are dealing with what may be regarded as the beginnings of a multinational and multilingual discourse community. It remains an open question whether, and if so when and how, the European Union will manage to establish a unified public debate across national and linguistic borders.<sup>6</sup>

The notion of public discourse as a virtual conversation within and between communities provides an auspicious perspective for comparing conceptual metaphors that underlie public debates in different national cultures. In the case of geographically and historically distant discourse communities, such an investigation will be more of a typological enterprise, whereas for two political cultures as closely related to each other as the German and British ones we can assume that their range of conceptual metaphors is largely similar. But this does not mean that their metaphoric discourse has to be similar – even common conceptual source domains can be used for different argumentative and ideological purposes. As Lakoff's example of the two versions of the NATION-AS-FAMILY metaphor in US political discourse shows, one and the same source domain can be employed to argue opposite political posi-

tions. The conservative and liberal sub-communities of the US public use one central element of the source domain FAMILY in particular – i.e. that of the PARENT–CHILD relationship – to advance, buttress and defend contrasting world-views, belief systems and attitudes. Thus, whilst the basic metaphor THE STATE IS A FAMILY is the same for both sides, the political and social conclusions drawn from this mapping are diametrically opposed to each other and are complemented by fitting sub-concepts – that is, the STRICT FATHER and the NURTURANT PARENT models.

However, the question remains open as to how much empirical evidence can be gathered for hypotheses about the relative weight of the two metaphor-based models of morality in US discourse. The same problem is evidently of great significance for a comparison for metaphor uses in different national communities as attempted here. We need to relate the abstractions of a ‘virtual conversation’ of public discourse and of its ‘domination’ by some conceptual metaphors to testable empirical evidence. Such evidence can be provided only by a corpus of documented data of metaphor use – even if a limited corpus never actually represents the whole ensemble of relevant texts produced in the discourse community but only comprises a sub-section. The evidence for the dominance of specific metaphors would then depend on the size and representativeness of the corpus.

In the following chapters, various aspects of a corpus-based approach to conceptual metaphors in public discourse will be discussed, using data from the aforementioned project on “Attitudes towards Europe” in Britain and Germany. In chapter 2, we shall concentrate on metaphors from the source domain of FAMILY concepts, as documented in a pilot corpus. They provide the basis for a preliminary discussion of general methodological issues of the corpus-based analysis of political metaphor. In chapter 3, the largest source domain of the pilot corpus – that is, that of PATH-MOVEMENT-JOURNEY metaphors – will be analysed with a view to clarifying the question of how metaphors are used in political *argument*. We aim to show that metaphorical argumentation constitutes a further cognitive dimension of metaphor that complements the level of categorization, which has so far been at the centre of cognitive research. The inclusion of the *argumentative* dimension requires a revision of the theoretical model linking cognitive and linguistic aspects of metaphor, which is the topic of the fourth chapter. In order to test the resulting hypotheses, we will then introduce data from a second, more representative corpus of EU-related discourse, specifically examples from the source domain of LIFE-BODY-HEALTH. The analysis of distribution patterns for metaphors from this domain in chapter

5 provides the main 'body of evidence' for the national comparison. The second corpus also provides the data for chapter 6, which investigates metaphors based on the source domain of BUILDING-HOUSING. They exemplify processes of 'metaphor evolution' as part of discourse history. Following on from these corpus-related discussions, we will return to the question of the socio-cognitive power of metaphor, drawing on individual examples of metaphor negotiation as well as on a reinterpretation of the notorious (mis-?)treatment of metaphor by Thomas Hobbes in the *Leviathan*. In the final chapter, we will use his exploration of *deceptive* metaphor to resume the discussion of the ethical dimension of metaphor in politics and its cognitive analysis.

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