

Non-Literal Language in Political Discourse

Elena Mihas
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

1 Introduction

The subject of my paper is the non-literal language of political discourse observed in narratives of contemporary American society. The temporal frame of my paper roughly coincides with the presidential term of George W. Bush. The reason for investigating the subject within this time slot is the drastic change the political discourse underwent in this country after 9/11, an event which became a disjunctive, transformational moment in the history of the United States. The presidential campaign discourses of 2004 naturally became the focal point of my paper.

The main portion of this paper consists of three sections. In the first part the notion of political discourse is discussed. After that, I devote one section to an analysis of euphemisms which abound in contemporary American political language. The next section deals with the metaphoric conceptual systems of the two political forces, conservative and liberal, revealed through their narratives during the presidential campaign of 2004.

I follow the textualist tradition of Foucauldian research in my analysis of the Bush administration era political language, a tradition which focuses on public modes of representation, talk and texts. Foucault's point was to study how certain discourses become authoritative, and how they infiltrate mind and character, and constitute the social world (Foucault 1994). Foucault's textualist approach means that any reality is mediated by a mode of representation, and that representations are not descriptions of a world of facticity, but are ways of making facticity. Following Foucault, a researcher must point out the value-producing practice of discourse. In other words, as the world is described it is evaluated (Chandler 2003).

Shapiro (1989) distinguishes between two kinds of investigations a discourse analyst can conduct: structural and historical. The historical focuses on the emergence of the phenomena in language, while the structural examines how a particular text is put together – the devices, strategies, tropes and rhetorics through which social reality is manufactured. I adhere to the structural approach in my investigation of the subject; namely, I explore the metaphoric and euphemistic forms profusely used in political discourse in the above specified time frame.

2 Political discourse

2.1 Political discourse in light of the deconstructive method of critique

Textualist or poststructuralist modes of analysis emphasize discourse rather than language, because the concept of discourse implies a concern with the meaning and value-producing practices in language, rather than simply the relationship between utterances and their referents. As Shapiro (1989) points out, in the more familiar approaches to political phenomena, language is treated as a transparent tool. It serves as a conduit between thoughts or concepts and things. In contrast, a discourse approach treats language as opaque, and encourages an analysis of both the linguistic practices within which various phenomena are embedded, and of the language of inquiry itself.

One of the most influential figures of the discursive revolution was Jacques Derrida, whose deconstructive method of critique became a strategy for many linguists and philosophers. Meaning cannot be owned, argues Derrida (1984). We have the illusion of control over meaning as we speak, but this is an illusion since the meaning of utterances and statements is determined by the place they hold in a discursive system. Politics is a process of contestation, involving contests over alternative understandings. The way to capture this process is to become “rhetorically impertinent” (Shapiro 1989).

2.2 Political discourse in light of critical thinking analysis

Van Dijk, a champion of critical discourse analysis, focuses on “the role of discourse in the (re)production and challenge of dominance” (2001), and views political discourse as a class of genres defined by a social domain, namely by politics. Though the domain has fuzzy boundaries, Van Dijk suggests that it can be narrowed down to the set of activities politicians engage in. The study of the structures of political discourse (topics, coherence, arguments, lexical style, disclaimers, rhetorical features), Van Dijk states, may reveal much about the unique character of the discourse. Van Dijk argues that at the more detailed,

micro-level of discourse analysis the manifestation of power is less direct and less consciously controlled, and may be observed in intonation, lexical or syntactic style, rhetorical figures, semantic structures, politeness phenomena, etc. He also investigates from a critical angle, his allegiances being professed overtly as anti-dominance. The dictum of the critical method of analysis makes clear that a researcher cannot remain neutral in his or her investigation of political discourse, that one must take a position. My approach in this paper is less specific, and less ideological. I restrict my analysis to constellations of metaphoric and euphemistic clusters in political discourses of two major political forces in the country: Republicans and Democrats. My objective is to deconstruct the meaning of familiar and less familiar political literal figures in the context of their use, and to show their loaded nature, their social force which channels people's thinking and frames their action.

2.3 Narratives in political discourse

Discourse in general is a way of organizing human experience. It establishes frames of meaning by the recounting and interpreting of events and situations. Political discourse deals with the narrative interpretation of events and ideas and establishes criteria and contexts for comparing and evaluating political systems. While the substance of political narratives varies widely, they follow certain standard trajectories, including the recounting of events in the form of retrievals and projections. According to Apter (1993), events serve as metaphors in which meanings are transmitted in terms of past and similar situations, and metonymies in which the event is a fragment or representation of some larger logical or theoretical belief system. In the process of recounting stories of events, they are systematized and formed into "master narratives" which require an "agency," a public figure, able to play the special role of "story-teller." Since the focus of my paper is the political discourse of 21st century American society, it would be natural to attribute the role of the story-teller/agency to Mr. Bush, since his narrative has dominated political discourse in the country. His presidency in a way began with some tragic benchmark, a negative pole, associated for many Americans with loss, suffering, struggle, murder, and death. His narrative established boundaries and clienteles, affiliations and loyalties, terrains and jurisdictions, defined insiders and outsiders, separated the good citizen from the pariah, us from them.

During a historical disjunctive break, which seems to be a defining moment of modern political discourse, leaders propose a fresh start (Mr. Bush's political rival Senator Kerry campaigned in 2004 with his slogan "A fresh start for America"), creating their own rationality: what they are against and what they are for. I believe the master narrative and disjunctive ideas of two participants,

respectively President Bush and Senator Kerry (and their cohorts), in the presidential race of 2004 presented an opportunity to articulate two differing systems of beliefs through a masterful use of figurative language. Each system made salvational and recuperative national claims. For one side to give way to the other was considered betrayal. In both cases the parties were divided by their discourses, their retrievals of the past determining their view of the future.

How do entrepreneurial political leaders advance their stories (which Polsky (2001) calls a “narrative exercise”) in the abstract universe of rational political action? Their narratives draw upon traditional American themes, a rich store of values that can be enlisted to justify the prescriptions that partisan entrepreneurs offer. Polsky argues that by manipulating values to achieve strategic purposes, political architects turn the cultural repertoire into a dynamic political force. From the menu of value choices, one of the presidential candidates, Mr. Bush, opted for the traditional order of faith-based family values (which was termed “a sprint for intolerance” by the opposing side), while Mr. Kerry ran on a quintessential American value of tolerance for ideas other than one’s own. Pollster John Zogby appropriately dubbed the race an “Armageddon Election” given the “closely-divided electorate with high partisan intensity on each side.” But the word Armageddon suggests another explanation as well: religious tones and undercurrents that played a major role in the election. The master narrative was clearly connected to ecclesiastical discourse, and the conceptual aspects of this linkage would be of particular interest for the analysis of political language of the presidential race.

2.4 The mediated nature of political discourse

I believe the concept of language as mediation is a key to understanding the nature of political discourse. The Vygotskian concept of the regulatory function of language throws light on how a discussion within political discourse is framed (Frawley 1987). Any participant in political discourse is other-regulated: by the media, by the opposing camp, by the electorate, etc. Consider the political debate in the closing weeks of the election. It was framed as a choice between “values and security” (Mr. Bush’s narrative), or “the economy and Iraq” (Mr. Kerry’s narrative). The GOP strategists effectively “sold” moral issues to the voters by implementing state-of-the-art organizational techniques, authored by the architect of the Bush election campaign, Karl Rove. Republicans used culturally powerful issues like gay marriage, guns, and abortions to connect to ordinary voters. While Democrats tried to peddle the “bread-and-butter” issues, Republicans “sold” values, and won. The New York Times columnist M. Dowd coined a metaphoric expression to describe the Republican election machine: *juggernaut*, which in German denotes ‘battleship.’ However, the term’s religious overtones evidently

determined Dowd's usage. Juggernaut is something which elicits a blind and destructive devotion, and also underscores its overwhelming and irresistible force. Juggernaut is the title of the Hindu deity Krishna whose idol is drawn in an annual procession on a huge car or wagon, under the wheels of which worshippers are said to have thrown themselves to be crushed (American Heritage Dictionary 1985).

By framing the terms of discourse, architects of social engineering (Dowd) frame the discourse itself. Bush officials not only framed the election in terms of the "issues;" they successfully framed it in terms of personal attitudes: a choice between what they said was a steadfast and decisive President and a flip-flopping challenger. If we look at the presidential candidates, their personalities were defined by the opposing side and by the mass media, which was affiliated with one or the other side. George Soros's diagnosis, that Mr. Kerry didn't have time to define himself because he had already been defined by the Swift Boat Veterans campaign and the conservative press as "unfit for command," proved true. Senator Kerry's profile as sketched by the press was that of a patrician, classic backbench senator who was famous because of the way he talked about issues. In the dominant, "secondary Discourses" (Gee 1992) he was typecast in the role of the liberal, elitist husband of a French-speaking millionaire, the Cicero of the presidential debates, preening in luxury and surrounded by celebrity friends, "out of touch" with the ordinary voters, "out of tune" with the nation's defining song "God Bless America" (Kathleen Parker), in short, "un-American." His rival, Mr. Bush, was presented as Barney the Dinosaur (a cartoon character extremely popular with children), an inventor of "nucular" and other "bushisms," a straight-talking guy who was not embarrassed to avow that Christ was the one who made the most impact on his life and was his Heavenly Advisor before going to war with Iraq. Mr. Bush projected an image of "one of us," easy to identify with for many mainstream voters; in short, he was positioned as "very American." In the wake of 9/11 Mr. Bush was called a "great leader" by partisan politicians and the press, and was likened to Winston Churchill and Ronald Reagan by Rudolph Giuliani at the Republican Convention of 2004.

3 Non-literal language

Non-literal language is a highly controversial notion in academic discourse. The discursive turn in academic discussion of rhetoric was marked by the works of structuralists Claude Levi-Strauss and Roman Jakobson, the formalist Hayden White, the poststructuralist Jacques Derrida, and cognitive semanticists George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, to name a few. The central proposition of this contemporary trend is that rhetorical forms are deeply and unavoidably involved in the shaping of realities, and that language is not a neutral medium.

In semiotic terms, “the conventions of figurative language constitute a rhetorical code, and understanding this code is part of what it means to be a member of the culture in which it is employed” (Chandler 2003). The culturally available stock of tropes acts as an anchor linking us to the dominant ways of thinking within society (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). Identifying figurative tropes in texts and practices can help to highlight underlying thematic frameworks; analysis sometimes involves the identification of an overarching (or root) metaphor, or a dominant trope. For instance, Derrida shows how philosophers have traditionally referred to the mind and the intellect in terms of tropes based on the presence or absence of light (Derrida 1984).

I believe two figures of speech – euphemisms and metaphors – deserve an especially close examination because of their pervasiveness and weight in political discourse. Metaphorizing and euphemizing undoubtedly serve as linguistic bridges to indirectness that tends to dominate human communication in the modern era. In semiotic terms, both metaphor and euphemisms deal with substitution of one denotation for another, creating desirable conceptual and connotative meanings. Lakoff and Johnson argue that “the essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another” (1980), while euphemisms became a salient phenomenon of language usage in modern political culture by virtue of their ability “to conceal something perjorative behind a softened or manipulated expression”(De Beaugrande).

4 Euphemisms in political discourse

In cognitive terms, euphemisms are used when one wants to name things without calling up a mental picture of them. The aim of using euphemisms is to strike at a person’s imagination. Euphemisms do not form complete pictures in the mind, nor do they completely define an event or object. Without a complete definition, the ability to understand the true meaning of a statement is obscured.

Though euphemizing is now an accepted and established practice, it has acquired a dubious connotation in light of its tendency to deliberately disguise actual meanings of words in political discourse. William Lutz, an English professor at Rutgers University, a champion of rhetorical canons and the art of clear writing across numerous discourses, focuses his work on ethical considerations in using euphemisms, what he calls “the morality of rhetoric.” Lutz defines euphemisms as inoffensive or positive words (or phrases) we use to soften a harsh, unpleasant or distasteful reality (Lutz 1989). He makes an immediate distinction between euphemisms proper and doublespeak: “When a euphemism is used to deceive, it becomes doublespeak.” The sole purpose of doublespeak is “to make the unreasonable seem reasonable, the blamed seem blameless, the powerless seem powerful.” The term doublespeak was coined as an amalgam of

two Orwellian expressions, doublethink and newspeak, both of which appeared in Orwell's dystopian novel *Nineteen Eighty Four*. "Basic to doublespeak is incongruity: the incongruity between what is said, or left unsaid, and what really is; between the essential function of language (communication) and what doublespeak does – misleads, distorts, deceives, inflates, obfuscates" (Lutz 1989). Chomsky noted that "to make sense of political discourse, it's necessary to give a running translation into English, decoding the doublespeak of the media, academic social scientists and the secular priesthood generally" (Chomsky 1993).

Opposition to the use of doublespeak has noticeably increased since the 1970s due to mounting concern of the NCTE (National Council of Teachers of English) over the manipulation of language by the government and the military in reporting and discussing the Vietnam War. Since 1974 a Committee on Public Doublespeak has made an annual award to a public utterance that is "grossly unfactual, deceptive, evasive, euphemistic, confusing, or self-contradictory," especially one that has "pernicious political and social consequences" (Lutz 1989). The recipient of the 2003 NCTE Doublespeak Award was President George W. Bush, who made unequivocal statements regarding the reasons that the United States needed to pursue the most radical actions against another nation – acts of war – reasons which remained unsubstantiated.

A popular synonym for euphemism in the media is "spin." According to the New York Times columnist William Safire, spin is "deliberate shading of news perception." Linda Wertheimer, a reporter for National Public Radio, defined spin as "not quite lying," "not quite truth." The presidential campaign of both candidates in 2004 heavily relied on designated spinners or spin-doctors, whose mission was to publicly defend or downplay errors made by their candidate. The highly staged and hyperbolic spin operations, for example, included monitoring the candidate's every word and comparing his statements with public records through a computer matrix for possible exaggerations or misstatements, sending the computer-generated list of responses via emails to reporters and partisans all over the country. The intent was to reshape public perceptions of the candidates' performances and personalities. For example, the Kerry campaign methodically highlighted the incumbent's inability to face the reality and accused him of spinning by presenting a "*rosy*" view of Iraq and the economy to the public, though the word "lie" was never used. "*He can spin till he's dizzy,*" the President lives in "*a fantasy world of spin,*" one Yale gentleman charged another. Interestingly enough, commentators on both sides also avoided using the "L-word" (lie). Instead, they chose to euphemize the instances when the political opponents "*misspoke,*" "*misstated*" or "*stretched the truth.*" For example, USA Today accused the Bush administration of putting an optimistic face on the worsening conflict in Iraq and called it "*upbeat spins.*"

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There were numerous euphemisms coined by spin-doctors of the Bush administration in the wake of 9/11. They all can be classified under the rubric of national security euphemisms. *9/11* is one of them. The euphemism is an index, a minimal deictic, which refers to the terrorist attack on America on September 11, 2001, when the country lost nearly 3,000 people. The terrorist attack was designed by Osama bin Laden and executed by 18 terrorists from different Arab countries. Being an escapist expression, it removes dreaded connotations of horror and pain that the nation experienced as the victim of the attack. Jacques Derrida, in a post-9/11 interview, attempted to explain the minimalist aim of this dating. He argues that the meaning of the event being ineffable, the language admits its powerlessness and is reduced to mechanically pronouncing a date, repeating it endlessly, as a kind of ritual incantation.

“War on terror” became a pervasive euphemism for the war on militant Islam. To use religion as the target of military engagement would be diplomatically perilous for the United States. It could have alienated Muslim countries which have been the country’s allies in the post 9/11 period, and inflamed millions of Islam believers worldwide. “Terror” does not define the enemy explicitly; it refers to enemy activity on the emotional level, singling out violence as its core sense.

The invasion of Iraq was called *“a liberation”* (though it was later defined as an occupation), *“a broad and concerted campaign,”* executed with the help of the *“Coalition of the Willing”* (among them the United Kingdom is the only ally which has contributed significantly to the occupation). The war was also defined as *“tearing down the apparatus of terror,” “confronting dictators,”* and *“regime change”* in an attempt to justify the invasion for a humanitarian reason. The outcome of the war in Iraq was portrayed euphemistically in the political narratives of the Republicans. Consider Mr. Cheney’s a *“remarkable success”* euphemism, Mr. Bush’s *“catastrophic success”* oxymoron and the metaphor *“a seedbed of democracy.”* The fact is, in spite of the historic January 2005 elections in Iraq, the country remains a hotbed of terrorist threat.

The war on terror has brought a number of euphemisms intended to blur legal boundaries to justify illegal treatment of American citizens or detainees from other nations. Among them are *“unlawful combatants,”* or *“enemy combatants”* rather than “prisoners of war” or “criminals.” The former terms offer none of the basic protections democratic nations have come to expect from their governments while the traditional titles bring with them certain rules and standards governing human treatment. When U.S. compliance with the Geneva Conventions became an issue, the former White House legal counsel Alberto Gonzales stated that the war against terrorism, being a new kind of war, gave the President the option of disregarding the Geneva Conventions – and thus of engaging in torture in clear violation of the Conventions. As a means of pre-

empting a repeat of 9/11, President Bush, along with Defense Secretary Rumsfeld and former Attorney General John Ashcroft, signed off on a secret system of detention and interrogation that opened the door to using a whole range of techniques – including sleep deprivation, the use of phobias and the deployment of “stress factors.” The appeal of the Guantanamo Bay base was that it existed in “a legal twilight zone” over which U.S. courts have no jurisdiction. Guantanamo Bay’s legally ambiguous status supported the state claim that Qaeda and Taliban “unlawful combatants” have no right to Geneva Convention protections.

The euphemism “*prison abuse*” was coined after the Abu Ghraib prison scandal broke in spring 2004 in order to avoid the word “torture,” which clearly characterized what some American soldiers and civilian contractors did in one of the most notorious prisons of Saddam’s former regime. “Abuse” is a misdemeanor or mistreatment, while “torture” denotes a violent crime which involves an infliction of severe physical pain as a means of punishment or coercion. According to military officers at Abu Ghraib, they were encouraged to create “*favorable conditions*” for interrogation, which is another euphemism for “*rough*” and “*aggressive techniques*,” approved by the government for conducting interrogation procedures. These techniques entailed a systematic “*softening up*” of prisoners through isolation, privations, insults, threats, and humiliation – methods that the Red Cross concluded were “tantamount to torture.” Originally, the above techniques were used against Qaeda enemy combatants at Guantanamo Bay, but later the Guantanamo-style interrogation methods were exported to Abu Ghraib, even though the Iraqi war was supposed to have been governed by the Geneva Conventions.

Euphemisms burgeoned in the post-election period, when Mr. Bush and Mr. Kerry delivered their first post-election speeches. For example, Mr. Bush’s second-term victory speech was replete with euphemisms. His choice of words manifested an intention to obscure the true substance of the message, to make it more palatable to public taste. “Senator Kerry’s *spirited* campaign” was a bitter, fierce challenge to unseat the President. “*To serve all Americans*,” “*to reach out to the whole nation*” was a promise to uphold bipartisanship, but Mr. Bush’s record and the first post-election press conference showed that he would continue to rule from the right. “*The restored vigor of the economy*” disguised a record budget and trade deficit and a sluggish economic growth. “The military has *brought justice to the enemy*” was a questionable claim in view of terrorist No. 1 Osama bin Laden and his lieutenants being at large. “*Our nation has defended itself*” was a gloss over the military doctrine of pre-emptive wars adopted after 9/11, which gives legitimacy to an unprovoked attack against any country, an invasion of Iraq being an example. Mr. Cheney’s introduction of Mr. Bush’s victory appearance also contained a hotly contested euphemism. He claimed “*a broad, nationwide victory*” for Mr. Bush and the Republican Party, while the

truth was that 51% of the electorate voted for Mr. Bush and 48% voted for Mr. Kerry, which means that the voters remained as divided as they were in 2000.

Mr. Kerry's concession speech was also abundant with euphemisms. In fact, Mr. Kerry's speech was entirely a euphemistic exercise. In his speech he transformed the very bitter presidential race into a poetic and nearly religious experience. For example, the election campaign was a "*gift*": a gift to him, to everybody, a gift to democracy in America. Mr. Kerry's euphemistic portrayal of volunteers, messengers of "*change*," "*knocking on doors*" of American households (which is mundane door-to-door "selling" of a political candidate) evoked apostolic images of Christian messengers of new faith and hope, knocking on doors of genteel folks thousands of years ago. "*Do not lose faith*" was another euphemistic expression which echoed the line from Matthew, 7: 8-9: "Knock and the door will be opened to you." Mr. Kerry's admonition referred to the depth of desolation of Democrats. The metaphors of "*healing*" and "*bridging a divide*," being ostensibly utopian in a country so bitterly polarized, seemed to fit into the frame of ecclesiastical discourse and secular priesthood talk. He also mentioned in his speech that "there are *no losers*" in this election, which of course contradicted the results of the election. Overall, Mr. Kerry's concession speech was an eloquent attempt to soften the harsh reality of the lost election for his party and supporters.

5 Metaphors in political discourse

Metaphors occupy a central place in the rhetoric of politicians and their minions. The trope generates imagery which invokes targeted associations, and channels our way of thinking. This mind-shaping ability of metaphor is convincingly established by Lakoff and Johnson (1980). Jakobson posited that metaphor and metonymy are the two fundamental modes of communicating meaning, and according to Derrida, highlighting them is a useful key to pinning down whose realities the tropes privilege (Derrida 1984). Lakoff (1991a) argues that "Abstractions and enormously complex situations are routinely understood via metaphor. Indeed, there is an extensive, and mostly unconscious, system of metaphor that we use automatically and unreflectively to understand complexities and abstractions." Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argued that dominant metaphors tend to both reflect and influence values in a culture: for instance, the pervasive Western metaphor that "knowledge is power" is involved in the maintenance of the ideology of objectivism.

Lakoff believes that conservatives and liberals, two competing parties in a grip for power, employ two different metaphor systems to conceptualize reality (Lakoff 1995). The metaphor with the highest priority in the conservative moral system is **MORAL STRENGTH**, which includes a subset of other metaphors

such as “doing evil is falling,” “evil is a force” (either internal or external), and “morality is strength.” President Bush’s verbal attacks on Senator Kerry exposed exactly this framework of morality. Mr. Kerry was labeled as lacking moral strength and convictions, a “flip-flopper,” who “blows with the wind” like a “weathervane,” or “wind-surfs” (both images were also used in Bush presidential campaign ads), the guy who will wage a wimpy, “sensitive” war on terrorism, “play a weak hand in the war on terror,” has a “record of weakness and inaction,” “waffles on issues.” The metaphoric attacks had a devastating effect on the evaluation of Mr. Kerry by potential voters, and ultimately resulted in his loss to Mr. Bush in the presidential race. During the presidential debates Mr. Bush often used an argument that Mr. Kerry was “liberal,” “the most liberal senator in the United States,” “out of mainstream,” which for many viewers spawned negative associations of moral weakness, indulgence, irresponsibility, indecisiveness. In the same light, Senator Kerry was portrayed by the Bush campaign as too morally weak to win the war on terror, and therefore “unfit for command.” Mr. Bush’s tough “cowboy” talk, his insistence on being “unwavering,” “steadfast” and “resolute” made a decisive impact on the voters’ minds. Curiously, Mr. Bush’s slang expression “bring them on” [them: terrorists] made diplomats cringe, but it sealed his popularity with the mainstream conservative public. *Tough guys* say “bring them on” in western movies, to show their nerve and demonstrate their readiness for a ferocious fight with an antagonistic foe.

According to Lakoff (1995), the metaphor of Moral Strength has an important set of implicatures. To mention just a few: “the world is divided into good and evil,” “to remain good in the face of evil, or to stand up to evil, one must be morally strong,” “someone who is morally weak cannot stand up to evil and will eventually commit evil.” In other words, the root metaphor of Moral Strength translates the world in terms of a *war* of good against the forces of evil, which must be fought ruthlessly. Interestingly, the presidential race itself was defined in conservative terms as the “choice between good and evil” (Tom Coburn, Republican Senator from Oklahoma), in order to draw “values voters” to the polls. Surface structures of the Moral Strength metaphor are exemplified in President Bush’s assertions that Iraq, Iran, and North Korea are an “axis of evil” (President Reagan was the first to employ the metaphor of an “evil empire,” characterizing the former Soviet Union). Saddam was dubbed a modern era “Hitler” (which created immediate connotations of genocide, massive executions and Holocaust), who had to be removed for humanitarian reasons. U.S. Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz compared the crimes of Saddam Hussein to the atrocities of the Nazi and Stalinist eras in his speech in Poland (invoking the scariest and most repulsive specters of the 20th century and generating imagery linking the Iraqi dictator to the worst of evil). Arguably, McCain’s RNC speech

eclipsed all others. His speech by far transcended the usual parameters of a propagandist exercise meant to boost the morale of the troops and the public during war time. It was a hymn to the solemn duty to fight the war, composed in the best traditions of the Romantic period Psalmists and characterized by balanced lines, melodious rhythmic stress and unrelenting repetition of meaning. Especially noteworthy was the fluency and sophistication of Mr. McCain's language which undoubtedly intensified the strength of his message and its emotional appeal. Mr. McCain eulogized "the living and the fallen" of the Armed Forces, made exhortations "to keep their generous benefaction alive" and "vanquish the hateful iniquity" caused by the "malevolent" and "unpardonable" enemy, saluted to "the unflagging resolve" of the nation and its "noble mission," shed "a tear for all that is lost when war claims its wages from us." Mr. McCain also followed the distinctively biblical tradition to metaphorically portray the war as "*a fight between right and wrong, good and evil.*"

Another dominant metaphor that defines conservative morality is that of the **STRICT FATHER** and **NATION-AS-THE-FAMILY** which turns family-based morality into political morality. This paternalistic model of the family emphasizes the father's (the government's) tough love, as he teaches his children (the citizens) to be self-disciplined and self-reliant. The paternalistic rhetoric had a tremendous success with middle-class mainstream voters who felt moved by such words as "duty," "commitment," "moral values," "faith," "strength," "courage," "deepest values of family and faith," "my family comes first," "Laura is *the love of my life*," which were recapitulated in the Bush narrative endlessly, and were forcefully highlighted in Mr. Bush's second term victory speech. Revealingly, the Strict Father and Nation-as-the-Family metaphors highlight the Father's "*solemn duty to protect*," "*to secure*," "*serve*," "*to guard*" his Family. This kind of rhetoric was consistently employed by the President in his victory speech and post-election press conference to promote his aggressive stance in post-9/11 politics.

Liberalism centers on the **NURTURANT PARENT** model of the family, which understands morality as *empathy*, according to Lakoff. Empathy is a metaphor itself, and is understood as feeling what another person feels. The bland-sounding metaphor was never put to decent work by the Democrats, while the clear, crisp Moral Strength metaphor was extensively exploited by the Republican campaign. Consider Mr. Kerry's concession speech. It was infused with allusions to liberal morality: grace, gratitude, candor, courage, compassion, honor. The values he mentioned were projected as "soft," in comparison with "strong" conservative morals. As it turned out, the issue of "strong" moral values, which the conservative side played out in the political discourse of the closing months of the 2004 election, decided the outcome of the presidential race.

Interestingly enough, Mr. Bush adopted a “*compassionate conservatism*” oxymoron during his presidential campaign of 2000 to impart warmth and humaneness to the image of the Republican Party, and to show that conservatives are compassionate towards the poor, minorities, the unemployed, and so on. It was a borrowing from the nurturant rhetoric of liberals which helped Republicans attract the votes of disadvantaged social and ethnic groups in the election of 2000. The theme of “compassionate conservatism” was used numerous times during the Republican Convention of 2004 in New York.

Another overarching metaphor that contributes to the deconstruction analysis of political discourse is **POLITICS/WAR IS A GAME**. Expressions like the following portray the opposing sides as players: “Bush can never be accused of *playing a small ball*” (meaning that Bush’s state endeavors are always large projects), “Bush has to *pick up his game* in Iraq,” “Cheney *plays politics* with his remarks,” “Kerry, if elected, will be *playing defense rather than offence*,” “we are *playing on their turf*” (about inroads into either-side-leaning regions), “Kerry would *play a weak hand*” (in the war on terrorism), “the campaign is about *the ground game*” (about attempts to energize the bases of the parties), “both sides are *playing everywhere they can* because it’s a close race,” “*late innings*” (about the time left before the election), “*the endgame* of the election” (the last stage in the game of chess when most of the playing pieces have been taken from the board), “people were *voting for what team they were on*” (about allegiance of the voters along party lines), “Democrats were *beat up in their game*” (reference to the defeat of the Democratic candidate in the presidential race). President Bush called Senator Kerry “*a Monday morning quarterback*,” mocking his numerous “retroactive” plans to improve the situation at home and in Iraq.

Both political sides resorted numerous times to the “gaming” talk. When war (or politics) is conceptualized as a game, it results in removing a moral dimension from the profile of the metaphor. The **WAR IS A GAME** metaphor profiles competitiveness of the political players and their teams, readiness, preparedness, an excitement of the spectators in the world arena, the glory of winning and the shame of defeat. It underlines the players’ drive to win the prize, whether it is presidency or any other office, or oil, or contracts in Iraq.

Lakoff (1991b) argues that Prussian general Clausewitz’s metaphor **WAR IS POLITICS PURSUED BY OTHER MEANS** is another root metaphor which lacks a moral dimension. The metaphor has been an indispensable part of the geopolitical strategy of the Bush administration. The Prussian general perceived war in terms of political cost-benefit analysis, according to which the political “*gains*” from the war should be weighed against acceptable “*costs*.” When the costs of war exceed the gains, the war should cease. Clausewitz’s metaphor judges war only on strictly business, pragmatic grounds and hides the

reality of what real war is: murder, assault, kidnapping, arson, rape, and theft. Though Senator Kerry repeatedly made charges against the Bush administration about “*underestimating costs*” of waging the war in Iraq, he chose not to run as the anti-war candidate.

Lakoff (1991a) also singles out the **JUST WAR FAIRY TALE** metaphor which shapes our understanding of the outcome of war. Within the metaphorical framework, a crime (e.g. accumulation of weapons of mass destruction with the intent to use them against an innocent victim) is committed by a villain (who is a monster, inherently evil; Saddam was likened to a “*monster*” many times in Mr. Bush’s political speeches). A hero either gathers helpers or goes alone to restore justice. The hero makes sacrifices, undergoes difficulties (President Bush’s insistence on doing “*hard work*” in Iraq during the first presidential debate) and defeats the villain. Victory is achieved, justice is restored, “*mission accomplished*.” The **FAIRY TALE** metaphor lended structure, coherence and closure to the Iraq war. The January 2005 elections in Iraq brought the fairy tale narrative to a resolution, which was acceptable to the public at large. The fairy tale end was questioned by Mr. Bush’s political opponents, who accused his administration of creating “a haven for terrorists,” a “mess,” a “*quagmire*,” as a result of having “no exit strategy” and “poor postwar planning” in Iraq. “Quagmire,” or the dreadful “Q-word,” had a direct link to a visual perception of the war as a bog where troops find their end. The Just War Fairy Tale metaphor was also framed along the lines of the western movie stereotype in the war on terror (M. Dowd). After 9/11 the rugged frontier myth, the “*hunter/Indian-fighter hero in a war of civilization against savagery*” was put to work by architects of the Bush narrative. The story-teller’s “cowboy” talk lent authenticity and credibility to the myth.

6 Conclusion

Political discourses in this country are a panorama of metaphor and euphemism. It is vital to understand what role metaphorical and euphemistic thought plays in narratives of political actors, and how it affects public mind-space. My research shows that a majority of euphemisms and metaphors circulated in the post-9/11 political discourses belong to (or have direct links to) the domain of War. Some of the literal figures are new, and some of them are old. Take “national security” euphemisms. They were coined in the last few years, in the context of the war on terror and a military conflict in Iraq. But the morality metaphors have been part of our thinking long enough to become transparent and unnoticed. Lakoff (1991a) distinguishes between deep and superficial metaphors. Deep metaphors are used unconsciously and have enormous social consequences since they shape understanding of our everyday world. Vital political reasoning is done using deep

metaphors. It is important to contrast such deep conceptual metaphors as **MORALITY IS STRENGTH** or **WAR IS A GAME** with superficial metaphors (or euphemisms) which may be of marginal linguistic interest but nevertheless have the effect of leading us astray, distorting, obfuscating our understanding of a situation. Consider Mr. Cheney's prognostication made in one of his stump speeches during the presidential campaign: "If Kerry is elected President, America will be hit in a devastating way." Mr. Cheney invokes the **STATE-AS-THE-PERSON** metaphor which is the underlying form of his surface discourse structure: America is a person that becomes vulnerable on certain premises, i.e. if Mr. Kerry is elected President. There is also a connection between the surface forms of Mr. Cheney's language and the **MORALITY IS STRENGTH** deep metaphor, which underlay his reasoning. One of the superficial forms of the **MORALITY IS STRENGTH** metaphor is "*weakness invites harm*," which was endlessly recapitulated in the Republican narrative. Following the conservative metaphorical reasoning, Mr. Kerry was too morally weak to become the ruler of the nation, and his election as President would have jeopardized national security.

My research supports an assumption that non-literal figures are "loaded weapons" (Bolinger 1980). Metaphoric and euphemistic surface discourse structures and deep conceptual metaphors function as a "manipulatory veil" (Mey 2001), as a subtle way of disguising the substance of political messages. The way they function makes possible an uncritical acceptance of a particular model of thinking and its continuous, thoughtless recycling in political discourses. But there is a way to neutralize this danger in the zeitgeist of political discourses: to continually go back to the roots of figurative figures and expose their value-making meaning.

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mihasl@charter.net