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### Metaphorical representation of “future” in British political discourse

In the contemporary world of political electioneering the media have adopted metaphors as a kind of short cut to understanding that world. A growing number of recent linguists have been trying to establish metaphor at a cognitive, conceptual level. One of the fundamental findings of cognitive science is that people think in terms of frames and metaphors. G. Lakoff places the human act of cognition in the centre of attention; his brilliantly presented result is that cognition is vitally dependent on metaphor, which he defines as a mapping of conceptual structures from one domain onto another<sup>1</sup>. He says that framing is about getting language that fits your world view. It is not just language. The ideas are primary – the language carries and evokes those ideas<sup>2</sup>. Scholars stress the crucial importance of metaphor in discourse interaction: many accounts of figurative schemas and language are concerned with: (a) what is conceptualised in terms of something else and how this process takes place; (b) exploring metaphors in various genres of political discourse; (c) cognitive rhetoric, etc.

A string of recent articles and books has stressed retrospective and prospective functions of political discourse. That’s due to the fact that any candidate in elections often reckons up the experience of his predecessors, tries to evaluate the present situation and promises his voters “extrinsic benefits that are contingent on a candidate's victory in the election”<sup>3</sup>. E. Lassan points out that the triple opposition PAST — PRESENT — FUTURE is one of the most important valuable oppositions

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<sup>1</sup> LAKOFF, G. *Women, fire, and dangerous things: What categories reveal about the mind*. Chicago; London, 1987, p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> LAKOFF, G. *Don't think of an elephant! Know your values and frame the debate*. New York, 2004, p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> ANDERSON, R. *Encouraging Democratic Participation in Russia: Pragmatic Ambiguity and Identification with Political Speakers* (<http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/polisci/faculty/anderson/modcautx.htm>), p. 2.

contemporary political discourse based on<sup>4</sup>. Insights into prospective and retrospective functions of political discourse can be drawn from D. Graber who holds that any political discourse includes prediction of the future and reflection on the past<sup>5</sup>. G. Lakoff places the future among five implicit categories that define both a progressive culture and a progressive form of government, and encompass all progressive policies. That is the moral perspective<sup>6</sup>.

A. Chudinov stresses structuring function of metaphor. He has come to an understanding that metaphors play a crucial role in framing a world model and comprehending interrelation between its elements<sup>7</sup>, which refers to the opposition PAST – PRESENT – FUTURE as well. T. Shmeleva thinks “communicative past” and “communicative future” to be an integral part of any speech genre<sup>8</sup>. E. Sheygal considers appealing to the past and proclamation of political policy for the future among the dominant characteristics of inaugural speech<sup>9</sup>. V. Dauletova exploring the genre of political autobiography also pays special attention to “communicative past” and “communicative future”<sup>10</sup>.

The present paper is concerned with exploring metaphors used to create the image of future in British political discourse devoted to the Parliamentary elections (2001). The data analysed here stem from a research project on metaphors used to conceptualise past, present and future in Russian, American and British political

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<sup>4</sup> ЛАССАН, Э. Р. *Дискурс власти и инакомыслия в СССР: когнитивно-риторический анализ*. Вильнюс, 1995, с. 42.

<sup>5</sup> GRABER, D. Political Languages. In *Handbook of Political Communication*. London, 1981, p. 198.

<sup>6</sup> LAKOFF, D. *Framing the Dems. How conservatives control political debate and how progressives can take it back*. <http://www.prospect.org/web/page.wv?section=root&name=ViewPrint&articleId=6862>, p. 4.

<sup>7</sup> ЧУДИНОВ, А. П. *Россия в метафорическом зеркале: Когнитивное исследование политической метафоры*. Екатеринбург, 2003, с. 49.

<sup>8</sup> ШМЕЛЕВА, Т. В. Модель речевого жанра. In *Жанры речи*. Саратов, 1997, с. 91-92.

<sup>9</sup> ШЕЙГАЛ, Е. И. Инаугурационное обращение как жанр политического дискурса. In *Жанры речи*. Саратов, 2002, с. 206.

<sup>10</sup> ДАУЛЕТОВА, В. А. *Вербальные средства создания автоимиджа в политическом дискурсе*: Дисс. ... канд. филол. наук. Краснодар, 2004, с. 27.

discourse. This exploration implies studying figurative phenomena in their real context of occurrence as well as taking into account the cognitive schema involved.

The analysis is done on a corpus of 454 metaphor contexts used in metaphorical representation of future drawn from British periodicals, namely, The Times, The Sunday Times, The Daily Telegraph, Tribune, The Independent, Financial Times, The Economist, The Guardian, The Observer, Daily Mail, The Sun, Mirror; and Internet resources such as BBC News, BBC World at One, Channel 4 News, conservatives.com. The research focuses on (a) number of metaphors used to create the image of future and its periods in British political discourse, (b) frequency of metaphorical models used to create the image of future and its periods in British political discourse, and (c) correlation of metaphorical representations of future and its periods. In this sense, the main objective is to draw attention to the prospective function of metaphor framing it within such a purposeful and typified activity as political discourse. This aims at understanding what interpretation of future events we can reconstruct from analysing the metaphors used in this discourse.

When analysing the British political discourse “General Election – 2001” we distinguish “near future”, i.e. what will happen directly after the election, and “distant future”, i.e. what will be Britain like in some years’ time.

The corpus under analysis yields numerous examples portraying “near future” as WAR (45,8%). Cf.: *I think there is a public revolt going on out there amongst our electors. What I can't yet tell is whether it is going to be a quiet or a noisy one. But I suspect we are going to find out soon enough.* (P. Ashdown / FT, 17.05.01)

Another domain providing metaphors is that of DISEASE (16,8%) as illustrated in the following example: *But Toryism is another matter. It has long depended for its existence on Labour front benchers who are not much good at winning elections. The last general election changed all that. Which of us, who witnessed it, can ever forget the heartbreaking 1997 cull of Tories? A similar epidemic is expected at this general election. The Tory herd could be extinguished. Central Office officials say that the outbreak is "under control". Those officials have acted promptly, and are doing a tremendous amount of work to save as many Tories as possible. But almost every day there are reports of new opinion polls indicating that the virus is spreading to more marginal seats. Vets say that some of them may recover, but Mr. Nicholls was right to express his concern.* (F. Johnson / The Daily Telegraph, 14. 03. 01)

Within metaphors used to conceptualise “near future” we find a large set specifically equating the future of British society after the coming election to family relationships (10,3%). Cf.: *I've talked of evil husbands and battered wives, but I prefer to use a happier simile when I describe to virgins what the experience of not voting New Labour is like. It's like making love. The first time is a furtive, strangely guilt-ridden experience. But the more you practice not voting New Labour, the better you get. You discover new positions - the Lib Dem embrace, the Socialist Alliance tumble, the earthy Green hug. As your self-esteem grows, you resolve never to vote New Labour until it condescends to pay you the attention you deserve.* (N. Cohen / *The Observer*, May 27. 20. 01)

Among the metaphors used in description of “near future” we find those coming from theatre (4,6%), criminality (4,6%), journey (3,8%), fauna (3,1%), physiology (2,3%), machine (1,9%) and other (8,3%) domains.

One of the richest set of metaphors used in creating the image of “distant future” draws upon the domain of JOURNEY(42,7%), as explicitly illustrated in the following example: *Britain has come to a fork in the road, and sooner or later she'll have to choose which way to go. Once she's chosen there is no turning back. You must burn one bridge in order to travel the other. It's going to be interesting to see which way you go. Very interesting indeed.* (B. Alpy / *BBC World at One*/ 4. 06. 01)

The second large set of expressions activates the metaphor FUTURE IS ARCHITECTURE (11,5%). Cf.: *Mr Blair issued a rallying cry saying: "The great issue ... for this election is opportunity for all, not just the few... "This is the time and I believe ours is the task, to set those talents free and build a land of hope and opportunity for all. Now, it is for you the people, in the coming weeks, to decide."*(*Daily Mail*,8.05.01)

The next set of metaphors regards “distant future” in terms of DISEASE (8,3%). This is illustrated in the following example: *His (Blair's) remedy is that steady Blairite improvement will be enough. Britain has suffered too much from Conservative boom and bust. What it needs now is "good steady progress" under the rules laid down by his friend, Gordon Brown.* (P. Toynbee, M. White / *The Guardian*, 29.05.01)

Finally, the expressions presenting “distant future” as living organisms (6,3%), family relationships (6,2%), games (6,2%), criminality (4,2%), trade (3,1%) and expressions of other types (11,5%) are also used in British political discourse.

Correlation between the periods of future and the types of metaphors used are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. *Correlation between the periods of future*

Period of future	Number of metaphors encountered	Percentage	Number of metaphorical models	Metaphorical models most frequently used
“near future”	262	57,7%	15	FUTURE IS WAR (45,8%) FUTURE IS A DISEASE (16,8%) FUTURE IS FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS (10,3%)
“distant future”	192	42,3%	14	FUTURE IS A JOURNEY (42,7%) FUTURE IS ARCHITECTURE (11,5%) FUTURE IS A DISEASE (8,3%)

The table shows that in quantitative terms, the following things are noticeable about the metaphors found in the British political discourse “General Election – 2001”: overall, 454 metaphors are encountered, 262 entries are used to characterise “near future” (57,7%), 192 entries refer to “distant future” (42,3%), thus metaphorical representation of “near future” and that of “distant future” are nearly equally frequent. Table 1 illustrates as well that the quantitative gap between the number of metaphorical models used in conceptualising the two periods of future is relatively small: 15 metaphorical models are used to portray “near future”, 14 metaphorical models are used to describe “distant future”.

The most frequent metaphor models of the British Parliamentary discourse used in portraying “near future” are WAR, DISEASE and FAMILY

RELATIONSHIPS. FUTURE IS WAR (45,8%) is the most frequent model of them, it views future from the perspective of "war" between political, social or economic subjects with "casualties," "enemies," "military action," "war powers," etc.; so "near future" is conceptualised metaphorically as a physical fight in which the stronger wins. The next metaphorical model, which is saliently less frequent than WAR, is that of DISEASE (16,8%). Its frequent use might be due to the following facts: the plague of foot-and-mouth disease that descended on Britain's farms at the time of the election campaign, a desperate effort of the government to keep a May 3 General Election alive despite the raging foot-and-mouth crisis and its postponing to June 7 because of it. The next most frequent model after DISEASE depicts "near future" as FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS (10,3%). This metaphor for characterising future comes "with moral systems, which in turn provide the deep framing of all political issues"<sup>11</sup>, moral systems that candidates try to appeal to when they go to the polls.

Let us turn to the system of metaphorical thought most commonly used by the general public in conceptualising "distant future". The most frequent metaphorical model is FUTURE IS A JOURNEY (42,7%) where Britain is a traveller, purposes are destinations, means are routes, difficulties are obstacles, counsellors are guides, achievements are landmarks, choices are crossroads. Each politician tries to become a guide who is able to choose the only right route and (in spite of any obstacles and other guides) bring the country to the only right destination that will be called a landmark in the history of the country. "Distant future" of British society is also seen as akin to ARCHITECTURE (11,5%). This metaphor portrays future as building or rebuilding process. The next most frequent metaphorical model is that of DISEASE (8,3%). The results of the investigation show that it is one of the most frequent metaphorical models used to conceptualise both periods of future. As "Well-being is wealth. The general well-being of a state is understood in economic terms: its economic health. A serious threat to economic health can thus be seen as a death

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<sup>11</sup> LAKOFF. Сноска 6, p. 2.

<sup>12</sup> LAKOFF, G. *Metaphor in Politics: An open letter to the Internet*, <http://zakros.ucsd.edu/~trohrer/metaphor/lakoff-1.htm>, 1991, p. 2.

threat<sup>12</sup>”, politicians try to diagnose and find remedies to cure the country from all fatal illnesses.

The results obtained show that, to a large extent, the choice of metaphors used in conceptualising the image of future responds to the persuasive power that each of them was observed to display in problematic situations, as well as to their usefulness for elaborating “the linguistic picture of the world”<sup>13</sup> and understanding the correlation between its elements.

As a final remark, it must be noted that depicting future either in the most favourable light or portraying it in dark colours (depending on the speaker’s intentions) is frequent and efficient means used by mass media and politicians in British political discourse. The reason for it is one of the main driving forces of all human actions – their hope that one day things will change for the better.

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<sup>13</sup> ZINKEN, J. Metaphors, stereotypes, and the linguistic picture of the world: Impulses from the Ethnolinguistic School of Lublin. In *Metaphoric de*, № 7, 2004, <http://www.metaphorik.de/07/zinken.htm>.