

Straipsniai

BRITISH POLITICS TODAY: MORAL GROUNDS AS REFLECTED IN CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR

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The present study aims at examining the moral grounds of today's British political life as reflected in conceptual metaphors of political discourse. The method applied to analyze the moral grounds is that of hypothetical deduction combined with the theoretical framework of cognitive linguistics (qualitative analysis). The research findings reveal that the underlying conceptual metaphor of British critical political discourse is that of POLITICS AS JOURNEY. The use of this metaphor shows the moral unacceptability of today's British political life due to the failed moral obligations of British politicians.

1. Introduction

The challenging claim by Johnson about existential and metaphoric nature of morality has given ground to far-reaching implications in linguistic studies (1997, 1–25). Within the anthropocentric orientation the philosopher defines morality as an abstract radial category that ‘reaches into every aspect of human lives’ (1993, 253–258), meaning that morality also reaches into politics, whose participants perform certain actions, and follow certain procedures and techniques. Thus in order to perform these prescribed political actions, the political ethics should be held to.

According to Schön, political ethics is generally regarded as a matter of problem solving – there are typical ethical problems, and a politician is supposed to solve them (in Ortony 1993, 143). To learn more about these problems, the morality metaphor has to be analyzed. This kind of linguistic analysis will result in the implications of prevailing attitudes, judgments, values, beliefs and conceptual models that govern political life. As morality is an abstract category, it is conceptualized in more concrete basic level categories, which is a clear-cut case of conceptual metaphor, e.g. *these events have stained the government's reputation* is an illustration of conceptual metaphor IMMORALITY IS DIRT wherein the abstract concept of immorality is perceived via the concept of dirt.

The conceptual metaphor has been in the focus of attention of many contemporary linguists around the world (Fauconnier, Gibbs, Kövesces, Lakoff, Sweetser, Turner etc.). The theory of conceptual metaphor was developed in the framework of cognitive linguistics, whose underlying principles are as follows:

- (1) Conceptual structure arises from human sensorimotor experience; the conceptual structure is characterized by image schemas and motor schemas.
- (2) The structure of concepts includes prototypes of various sorts, e.g. typical cases, ideal cases, stereotypical cases, etc. each type of prototype uses a distinct form of reasoning.
- (3) Reason is imaginative in that bodily inference forms are mapped onto abstract modes of inference by metaphor.
- (4) Conceptual systems are pluralistic, not monolithic. Typically, abstract concepts are defined by multiple conceptual metaphors, which are often inconsistent with each other.

Accordingly, Lakoff claims that metaphor is one of the principal mechanisms of imaginative cognition that has a linguistic representation (2006, 6). Hence, conceptual metaphor is realized by linguistic expressions, which are asymmetrical in their correspondence to the conceptual metaphor. In other words, one and the same metaphor is represented by a number of linguistic expressions, e.g. the conceptual metaphor MORALITY IS CLEANLINESS is realized by such linguistic expressions as a *clean past*, her *spotless* record, he doesn't want to get his hands *dirty*.

However, to analyse the political moral grounds via metaphor it is necessary to distinguish between traditional and contemporary MORALITY views. Johnson argues that there are two traditional MORALITY views – **moral absolutism** and **moral relativism** (1993, 3–35). The former asserts the existence of universal moral laws that can tell which human acts are right and which are wrong. As a result, human imagination is totally subjective, and it has no place in a morality of laws. The latter, by comparison, is the opposite position that claims that there are no universally valid moral laws, and that all standards of human evaluation are culture-specific. Thus, the moral relativism theory emphasizes the concept of imagination as central and opposed to human reason by that undermining the possibility of moral universal laws.

Differently from these views, Johnson proposes a contemporary view of MORALITY – **moral imagination theory**. Its underlying principles arise from the thesis that 'humans are fundamentally imaginative creatures whose understanding of experience is built up with the imaginative materials of cognition' (1993, 3–35). Accordingly, metaphors as imaginative structures make up the moral understanding shared by members of a certain community or even culture. This moral imagination theory governs my research, wherein I perceive morality as the social and cultural construction organized by conceptual metaphors.

Hence, if moral understanding is of metaphorical character, it is due to metaphors that people make appropriate moral judgments. These moral judgments are not clear-cut universal rules, but rather multiple possible framings of any given situation. Accordingly, Johnson defines morality as 'an essentially contestable radial category, where certain kinds of cases are recognized as moral, where non-central or peripheral cases are the subject of the continuous debate' (1993, 254). To illustrate, the capital punishment or death penalty is a strongly contentious moral issue that has been discussed and still under discussion around the world. The supporters of the death penalty consider it to be morally right to appropriately punish such capital offenders as murderers, spies or

treason offenders; whereas the opponents argue that the capital punishment violates human rights, and is therefore morally wrong.

This dichotomy of moral rightness and wrongness in language is expressed via the conceptual metaphor of MORALITY IS WELL-BEING (Lakoff & Johnson 1999, 292). In other words, the abstract concept of morality is represented by such conceptual mappings as MORALITY IS HEALTH, MORALITY IS CLEANLINESS, MORALITY IS LIGHT, and MORALITY IS STRENGTH. For example, the conceptual metaphor of MORALITY IS STRENGTH in language is realized by the following linguistic expressions: *strong will, weakness of will, a slave to one's passions*, etc. Thus, it is generally accepted that it is morally right to be strong, healthy, upright; whereas weakness, ugliness, low positions, diseases are conceived as moral wrongness. Thus Lakoff claims that moral views are of an experiential basis and strongly affect political worldviews (1999, 41).

Prof. E. Lissan, as the founder and instigator of cognitive linguistics in Lithuania, today stimulates research interests in this discipline by investigating the cultural meanings of various concepts (2007). Recently, J. Cibulskienė carried out a doctoral research on the use of conceptual metaphor in Lithuanian and British election discourse, wherein the following conceptual metaphors were analysed: POLITICS IS WAR, POLITICS IS A JOURNEY, STATE IS A BUILDING (2005). In my article, I aim at analysing MORALITY metaphor that underlies any social discourse, political in particular. Though this article is entirely devoted to the analysis of British political discourse, in the future I intend to accomplish cross-linguistic analysis, i.e. English (British political discourse) and Lithuanian (Lithuanian political discourse).

2. Data and Methodology

To find out more about political worldviews, the moral views, underlying the language of political discourse, have to be analyzed. This article is based on the research of critical political discourse in *The Economist* on the topic of British politics. There are several reasons why I have chosen *The Economist* as the source of my research data. First, *The Economist* is an internationally recognized weekly political magazine. Second, all *The Economist* articles are anonymous, as what is written is more important than who writes it. According to its chief editor, this tendency has a name of collective voice: 'many hands write it but it speaks with a collective voice' (Edwards 1995, 15). Finally, this international magazine covers the main political and business events as well as offers an opinion and critical analysis of current political issues.

This article aims at analyzing the critical articles in terms of moral grounds or judgment underlying British political life via conceptual metaphor. The research data consists of thirty *Bagehot* (i.e. a weekly column on British politics) articles retrieved from the website *The Economist*. The articles were extracted from the online archive, where they were automatically sorted by date. For the analysis I used the latest thirty articles dating from March 30, 2006 to January 04, 2007.

The articles were analyzed in the framework of cognitive linguistics theory, which is exclusively qualitative in nature. This method refers to the analysis of linguistic corpus in the following direction: metaphorical linguistic expressions → MORALITY conceptual metaphor, i.e. in order to analyse

what moral values underlie British politics, metaphorical linguistic expressions have to be primarily identified, analysed and classified in accordance with the source domain they represent.

Thus, the linguistic expressions are only illustrations of one or another source domain, i.e. STRENGTH, which structures the target conceptual domain, i.e. MORALITY. Consequently, the conceptual metaphor has the following conceptual representation: A IS B, e.g. MORALITY IS STRENGTH, and the following linguistic representation B: a, b, c, or STRENGTH: strong will, weakness of will, etc. Consequently, to analyse the moral grounds of British politics I formulated two principal research hypotheses. First, moral judgement that underlies British politics is represented by conceptual metaphors. Second, the analysis of metaphors will reveal about the nature and culture of mainstream British political life.

3. Discussion

The entire MORAL system is centred round the conceptual metaphor POLITICAL LIFE IS A JOURNEY. This metaphor derives from the universal metaphor of LIFE IS A JOURNEY. Johnson claims that people in many cultures conceive life as an ongoing journey with its various destinations, paths to destinations, impediments to motion, etc (1987, 37–88). Appropriately, politics as one of the life spheres is also conceptualized as a journey. The conceptual metaphor of POLITICAL LIFE IS A JOURNEY is represented by the following mappings:

Table 1: Conceptual Representation of POLITICS AS JOURNEY Metaphor

TARGET DOMAIN - POLITICS	SOURCE DOMAIN - JOURNEY
Political Activity	As a Long-term Journey
Politicians	As Travellers
Political Decisions	As Movements
Political Purposes	As Destinations
Political Problems	As Difficulties

Hence, in the analysed political articles political activity is presented as an ongoing and long-term journey, where politicians are travellers, whose movements stand for their decisions and their destinations for their purposes, and finally the obstacles they encounter stand for political problems. As a result, the main questions that arise while analysing the conceptual metaphor of POLITICS AS JOURNEY are as follows: what is the moral judgement of the political journey undertaken by today’s British politicians? Is their political journey morally acceptable or denied? What aspects make it morally acceptable or not to the mainstream readership as well as journalism?

3.1. Moral Grounds of the Conceptual Metaphor POLITICAL LIFE AS A JOURNEY

In the underlying conceptual metaphor POLITICS AS JOURNEY, politicians are conceptualised as travellers on course to reach their political goals. According to the conceptual scheme of this metaphor, politicians are expected to choose a route that will eventually lead to the social and

economic prosperity of the whole country. To achieve that, they are expected to avoid obstacles that may result in *'sticking in a mess'*. Hence, choosing an appropriate route is one of the most important steps in the political journey. Consider the following examples below:

- (1) The sub-text is that, although Mr Brown welcomes the opportunities of a globalised *economy*, *he uniquely understands its threats and **the steps Britain must take** to respond to them.* (October 5 2006, *A hard road ahead for Mr Nice Guy*)
- (2) *Ms Kelly has made a stab at defining "non-negotiable" British values—respect for the law, freedom of speech, equality of opportunity, respect for others and responsibility towards others—that every citizen must sign up to. **Steps are also under way** to introduce an inclusive, narrative account of British history to be taught in schools as part of compulsory citizenship classes.* (December 13, 2006 *Treacherous Territory*)
- (3) *When Mr Blair announced he was setting up six cabinet working groups that would "step back" from the daily grind of governing **to plot a course for the next decade.*** (September 28 2006, *They'll miss him*)

However, the analysis of the research data revealed that British politicians are incapable of guiding today's political life, as they constantly lose the direction of travel or choose the wrong path, c.f.:

- (4) *According to Mr Bubb, however, the Tories' romantic attachment to an earlier era of charitable activism, often fired by moral and evangelical ardour, may **lead them in the wrong direction.*** (June 20 2006, *The Fight over a Big Idea*)
- (5) *The real problem with Mr Blair is not that he in any way lacks purpose or vision. The sense of drift identified by Mr Clarke has a different source: Mr Blair's authority is ebbing, and within the party there is growing truculence about just **where he wants to take it in the time left to him.*** (September 7 2006, *The sands run out*)

Another characteristic feature of the conceptual metaphor POLITICS AS JOURNEY in today's British politics is that politicians are either unwilling to take appropriate steps or are incapable of moving in the same direction with their electorate, as in the examples below:

- (6) *During that time the members of the Northern Ireland assembly have drawn their generous wages and expenses, while being **unwilling to make the moves necessary** for them to carry out their jobs properly as elected representatives of the people.* (October 12 2006, *An old man who's not in a hurry*)
- (7) *Mr Blair's great fear is that, if this were to happen, the party and the voters would find themselves **moving rapidly in opposite directions.*** (September 7 2006, *The sands run out*)

Besides politicians' unwillingness to take necessary political actions or their inability to move in the same direction with their electorate, politicians regularly encounter various difficulties that characterize their whole political journey as purposeless, c.f.:

- (8) *After exhausting every conceivable way of extracting money from British taxpayers without reneging on his promise to leave the upper rate of income tax unchanged, the chancellor*

knows only too well that he is stuck with a reputation for taxing by stealth. (June 22 2006, *The Right side of the argument*)

- (9) *This has traditionally been difficult territory for many on the left.* (January 25 2006, *Safe in their hands?*)
- (10) That is not to minimise the sheer awfulness of **the mess** Charles Clarke, the home secretary, *has got himself and the government into.* (November 16 2006, *A sad, bad business*)

It is obvious that many of the obstacles encountered by politicians in their political journey are of moral kind. They all have to do with their damaged reputation which is conceptualized as an obstacle in their political career.

Furthermore, politicians are also conceived not only as travellers without a prescribed route or course but also as *idle vagabonds purposelessly wandering around*, c.f.:

- (11) *Without any clear idea of what they were doing, ministers succumbed to the bathos of the highway “cones hotline” and the “back to basics” agenda.* (November 9 2006, *Let’s play nicely*)

However, besides being those lazy wanderers, there is still another dichotomy of being political travellers present – cautious vs. daring – as in the examples below:

- (12) *With responsibility for funding the next election campaign falling to him, Gordon Brown may want to tread carefully.* (June 20 2006, *The Fight over a Big Idea*)
- (13) *Nothing is off-limits as far as Mr Blair is concerned. He wants to see the third sector deliver training for the hard-to-employ, rehabilitation for offenders, education, community care, even specialised health services.* (June 20 2006, *The Fight over a Big Idea*)

Accordingly, Gordon Brown is a cautious ‘walker’ who does not take risks to lose weight of his position before the upcoming elections in Great Britain; whereas, Tony Blair has nothing to lose, his political term has come to an end, thus he tries out all possible reforms to gain some moral credit in the eyes of his electorate.

Thus, the political figures are conceptualized and linguistically realised as individual travellers; parties, however, travel by vehicles as in the example below:

- (14) *A year from now, “triple-whammy Wednesday” may be only a distant memory—or it may be seen as the moment when the wheels finally came off New Labour.* (May 4 2006, *The wheels on the bus*)

Accordingly, the fact that Labourites’ vehicle lost its wheels during its political journey symbolizes the increasing unpopularity of this political power.

Another representation of good government originally derives from the metaphor of MORAL WHOLENESS, i.e. where morality is conceptualised as wholeness or unity. Thus, in case of government, the morally right government is unified and consistent, whereas the morally wrong government is falling apart and losing its unity or wholeness, as in the example below:

(15) *ALL long-lived governments have a natural lifespan before **the bits start falling off**. (May 4 2006, The wheels on the bus)*

Besides, in terms of the research data, the erroneous government is presented as undisciplined and purposeless lot prone to accidents in their political journey, c.f.:

(16) *At some point, they **lose the discipline and sense of purpose to carry on**. Sheer physical and intellectual exhaustion gets them. They become **accident-prone, relationships fracture** and a **death-wish** often settles on their supporters in Parliament. (May 4 2006, The wheels on the bus)*

As a result, the underlying conceptual metaphor of critical political discourse is POLITICAL LIFE AS A JOURNEY. The moral judgement of the British political journey consists of the following conceptual elements:

- political activity is expected to be a long-term and purposeful journey
- politicians are expected to choose the right direction to reach favourable destinations for the development of social and economic life of the country
- politicians are expected to move in the same direction with the people they represent
- the political journey has boundaries that cannot be crossed
- in order to reach their destinations politicians are expected to avoid obstacles, otherwise they can ‘stick’ or ‘get into mess’
- political parties are expected to travel as a unity, otherwise the vehicle that carries the party may fall apart

However, the present British government fails to fit the afore-enumerated moral expectations. Today’s British government is presented as political travellers on meaningless course, moving in opposite directions with their electorate, crossing the boundaries, coming across obstacles, getting into mess and falling apart. Hence, the political journey undertaken by today’s British politicians is not morally acceptable; therefore, it is criticised and strongly ironised in the analysed articles.

3.2. MORAL CHARACTER SKETCHES OF BRITISH POLITICIANS

Morality metaphor is also pervasive in the description of individual characterization of British politicians. The conceptual metaphor that dominates in featuring political agents is STRENGTH AS SUBSTANCE, which in its turn originally derives from the conceptual mapping of MORALITY AS STRENGTH. Accordingly, the abstract concept of power or moral strength of a political character is conceptualised via the more specific concept of substance as in the illustrations below:

(17) *One of the claims made for Gordon Brown by his followers is that, by contrast with Tony Blair, their man thinks and plans for the long term. Mr Blair, they suggest, is instinctive, restless, **intellectually of no fixed abode**.*

(18) *As he demonstrated again this week, in his first big speech since his ousting, Mr Kennedy is good at mood but **hopeless at substance**.*

Accordingly, the moral judgment of politicians is based on the classical metaphor MORALITY IS STRENGTH. Lakoff asserts that one consequence of this metaphor is that ‘people are not

simply born strong” (Lakoff & Johnson 1999, 3). Just as in ‘*building physical strength*’, moral strength is also built through ‘*self-denial and self-discipline*’. Moreover, Lakoff discerns the following entailments of MORAL STRENGTH conceptual metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson 1999, 71):

Table 2: *Conceptual Domains of MORAL STRENGTH Metaphor*

MORAL Conceptual Domain	PHYSICAL Conceptual Domain
Being Good As Being Upright vs. Being Bad As Being Low	
Doing Evil As Falling	
Evil As Force (external vs. internal)	
Morality As Strength	

Consequently, in the framework of this conceptual scheme, Lakoff claims that a morally strong person is unlikely to fall, to give in to evil, and to commit immoral acts (1999, 72–95).

Most of the British politicians are referred to as lacking substance which is needed to build up their moral strength, c.f.:

- (19) *Sir “Ming”, as he likes to be known, lacks **zing**.* (September 21 2006, *Still in the Game*)
- (20) *No wonder Mr Blair’s “legacy” is **less substantial** than he would wish after a decade of power.* (September 21 2006, *Still in the Game*)
- (21) *Mr Clarke’s estimation of his own ministerial record is slightly at odds with reality. Despite his **thuggish appearance**, Mr Clarke is a bit of a **softy** whose grip leaves something to be desired.* (June 29 2006 *Friendly Fire*)

Hence, the British politicians are perceived and presented to the readership as morally weak personalities, except for several cases like in the examples below:

- (22) *An exception is John Reid. The home secretary is unquestionably **of leadership timber**. He is a confident performer, clever, more than arrogant enough to see himself in the top job and he plays the game of politics every bit as **brutally** as Mr Brown. But, unfortunately for him, Mr Reid is very Scottish, and an important element in the case against Mr Brown is that his Scottishness makes him less appealing to the voters of middle England.* (September 14 2006, *The Charming Mr Johnson*)

This character sketch of John Reid clearly illustrates that he is a personality of moral strength and substance; however, despite the British home secretary’s positive moral evaluation, his popularity rating is lower because of his ‘Scottishness’.

Another important MORALITY metaphor is that of CLEANLINESS, whereby moral political actions are conceptualized as *clean* and *pure*, whereas immoral ones as *dirty* and *polluted*, c.f.:

- (23) *For most of his party, the damage done to Mr Blair’s popularity by the war in Iraq and his closeness to a widely loathed American president are **the indelible stain on his otherwise successful premiership**.* (September 28 2006, *They’ll miss him*)

(24) *In his predicament, some sympathy is due Mr Blair. Thanks to stringent rules governing ministerial behaviour and a terrifying press, British public life is pretty **unsleazy** by international standards. It was **to clean things up** further that the Lords appointments commission was set up—by Mr Blair himself.* (September 28 2006, *They'll miss him*)

As the examples above illustrate, the Prime Minister Tony Blair has completely lost his reputation due to his immoral acts, which are linguistically realized through the metaphor of *dirt*.

4. Conclusions

Political discourse is grounded in morality metaphor, the analysis of which helps to learn more about values, beliefs, attitudes, and conceptual models that govern today's political life. In the framework of this research, it has been estimated that the British political values are morally unacceptable, thus heavily criticized as well as ironised in the critical articles, due to the findings as follows:

1. The underlying conceptual metaphor of British analytical political discourse is POLITICAL LIFE AS A JOURNEY.
2. POLITICAL LIFE AS A JOURNEY is a set of the following conceptual projections: POLITICIANS AS TRAVELLERS, POLITICAL DECISIONS AS MOVEMENTS, POLITICAL PURPOSES AS DESTINATIONS, POLITICAL PROBLEMS AS OBSTACLES.
3. Today's political British life is morally denied, as it fails to fulfil the following moral expectations: travelling on a due and meaningful political course, avoiding obstacles, limiting territory, etc.
4. The moral evaluation of the British political life is the following: political agents are generally idle wanderers, travelling without purpose, sticking into obstacles, crossing boundaries, sticking into mess.
5. Another conceptual metaphor underlying British analytical political discourse is MORAL STRENGTH AS SUBSTANCE.
6. British politicians are morally denied because of lacking substance in their character and actions.
7. Finally, MORALITY IS CLEANLINESS is the conceptual metaphor that also dominates the analytical political discourse; it is released through the metaphor IMMORAL POLITICAL ACTION IS DIRT.
8. British politicians' performance is morally unacceptable due to their dirty actions that leave permanent stains on their reputation.

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BRITŲ POLITIKOS VERTINIMAS:

KONCEPTUALIOSIOS MORALĖS METAFOROS ANALIZĖ

Liudmila Arcimavičienė

Santrauka

Šio straipsnio tikslas – atskleisti, kokia pagrindinė konceptualioji metafora vyrauja šiuolaikiniame britų politiniame diskurse ir kokie jos struktūriniai elementai sudaro bendro moralinio vertinimo pagrindą. Tyrimui buvo pasirinkta trisdešimt analitinių politinių straipsnių iš *The Economist* elektroninio archyvo. Straipsniai analizuojami remiantis kognityvinės lingvistikos principais bei kokybiniu analizės metodu, kurie leidžia atskleisti kalbiniuose pasakymuose (linguistic expressions) glūdinčias konceptualiąsias metaforas. Nustatyta, kad Britų politikos moralinis vertinimas yra grindžiamas konceptualiąja metafora POLITINIS GYVENIMAS KAIP KELIONĖ. Išanalizavus šios metaforos kalbinę raišką, paaiškėjo, kad straipsniuose vyrauja neigiamas britų politikos vertinimas, atspindintis konceptualiosios metaforos POLITINIS GYVENIMAS YRA KELIONĖ elementų kalbinėje raiškoje, kai politikos veikėjai (1) vaizduojami kaip „dėmėtos reputacijos“ klajūnai, (2) keliaujantys be tikslo, (3) peržengiantys nustatytas ribas, (4) nesugebantys apeiti/įveikti kelyje pasitaikančių kliūčių ir t.t.

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