

SPORTS METAPHORS IN POLISH WRITTEN COMMENTARIES ON POLITICS

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ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to investigate what sports metaphors are used in Polish written commentaries on politics and what special purpose they serve. In particular, the paper examines structural metaphors that come from the lexicon of popular sports, such as boxing, racing, track and field athletics, sailing, etc. The language data, derived from English Internet websites, has been grouped and discussed according to source domains. Applying George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's approach to metaphor, the paper attempts to determine both the kind of source domains from which common metaphors are drawn and to what degree structural metaphors are used. The data suggests that many structural metaphors can be found in the language of politics. They are drawn from a wide variety of sports source domains, although the domains of boxing, racing, sailing, and soccer are of particular prominence. It seems that the primary function of structural metaphors in written commentaries is to facilitate the interpretation of facts in a way that is enormously appealing to the reader.

Keywords: structural metaphors, source domains, politics, sport

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been an increasing interest among researchers in the investigation of metaphors in the language of politics. Some scholars have dealt with the use of metaphors in American politics. George Lakoff (1996), for example, analyzed the conceptual metaphors that are central to the understanding of political views of American conservatives and liberals, while Paul Chilton (1996) showed that the choice of particular metaphors influences the dominant ideas of international politics in the USA and its allied countries during the Cold War. Other researchers have been concerned with the use of metaphor in political discourse and its significance for the production and reception of political texts. Andreas Musolff (2004), for his part, focused on the use and function of metaphors in the German and English political discourses, while Maria-Ionela Neagu (2013) carried out a detailed analysis of the cognitive and argumentative nature of political discourse with a focus on the role of conceptual metaphors in practical argumentation. Adopting a cognitive viewpoint, P. Chilton (2004, p. 50) considered

political discourse “as necessarily a product of individual and collective mental processes”, and metaphor as an essential part of these processes.

So far, however, there has been little discussion on the use of sports metaphors in political written commentaries, let alone their function in this specific context. Besides, there have been a small number of studies investigating structural metaphors and common source domains from which such metaphors are drawn. The research to date has focused on the investigation of sports metaphors used by politicians in spoken commentaries, rather than on the study of metaphors in written commentaries. For example, Nicholas Howe (1988) provided an analysis of sports metaphors used in the contemporary American political discourse, while Elena Semino and Michela Masci (1996) investigated the use of a set of football metaphors in the discourse of Silvio Berlusconi. Lech Zieliński (2002), in turn, examined the influence of sports vocabulary upon the language of politics in Poland. Due to these limitations in previous research, in this paper an attempt will be made to determine what kinds of structural metaphors are used in Polish written commentaries and what functions they tend to serve in the political context.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The paper rests on the theoretical framework offered by G. Lakoff and M. Johnson’s *Conceptual Theory of Metaphor* (1980), which was further developed by Zoltán Kövecses (2002). From this viewpoint, structural metaphor is defined as understanding the target domain in terms of the structure of the source domain (Kövecses, 2002, p. 7). For instance, the conceptual domain “politics” (the target domain) is conventionally structured and thus comprehended in terms of the conceptual domain “boxing” (the source domain). The connection between these two domains is systematic in the sense that we can observe systematic correspondences, or cross-mappings between the concept of “politics” and that of “boxing”. Here are some of these correspondences: politicians are like boxers, the purpose of the political campaign can be equated with the main goal of a boxing fight, the events and actions during the political campaign are the events and actions during the boxing fight, and many others. Such a view of metaphor is captured in the following shorthand way: “Conceptual target domain (a) is Conceptual source domain (b)”. The target, which is a more abstract kind of domain, can be understood through the use of the source domain. The source domain, in turn, is a more physical kind of domain from which we choose linguistic expressions to comprehend another (target) conceptual domain.

The term “domain” is generally used to refer to our conceptual representation or coherently organized knowledge about a particular situation type. A domain is basically identical to what other cognitive linguists have called a frame, namely, a schematic knowledge structure of a particular situation type (e.g. boxing, participating in a race, playing football, sailing etc. – activities and situations which make up our everyday life) together with a list of the semantic roles or “frame elements” (the typical participants, props, and roles) that can be found in such a

situation (cf. Atkins, & Rundell, 2008, p. 145). In this discussion, these two terms will be used interchangeably because they both designate a coherent organization of human experience.

By contrast, metaphorical linguistic expressions are lexical units or other linguistic expressions that come from the source domain, that is, “the language or terminology of the more concrete conceptual domain” (Kövecses, 2002, p. 4). Thus, all the expressions that have something in common with politics (e.g. “knockout”, “throw in the towel”, “decisive blow”) and that are drawn from the domain of boxing are linguistic metaphorical expressions, while the conceptual metaphor that they evoke is “politics is boxing”.

It is worth noting that several researchers have challenged the main assumption of G. Lakoff and M. Johnson’s Conceptual Theory of Metaphor (1980) that language is a matter of cognition and conceptual structure rather than of language and then have gone on to argue that metaphor should be best investigated from a semiotic, psychological and socio-cultural perspective (cf. González-García, Peña-Cervel, & Pérez-Hernández, 2013). Thus, what is actually suggested is that metaphor needs to be examined by taking a more dynamic, interdisciplinary approach and a functional-cognitive stance in contrast to a purely cognitive one.

DATA AND METHOD

The language material to be analyzed has been extracted from the corpus of the language of politics compiled for the purpose of this paper. Corpora contain various kinds of texts obtained from two online resources: *google.com* and *onet.pl*. All of the texts derived from the websites were published no later than five years ago, which means that the compiled vocabulary is up-to-date. The data was retrieved from the corpus by means of a software program, *MonoConc Pro*.

Two methods were employed for the retrieval of the data and the identification of metaphors: a corpus-based approach to source domain vocabulary and the introspective method. The first approach was used to search for a lexical item from the source domain and extract a sample of its occurrences in corpora. The choice of items was based on *a priori* knowledge and existing online glossaries of sporting terminology. For each sample, metaphorical patterns in which a particular lexical unit occurs were identified. The second method of investigation involved reading the texts in the corpus and manually extracting metaphors used in them. It is important to note that this method has certain disadvantages: it limits the size of the material for interpretation and depends on intuitive judgments about what metaphor is.

SOURCE DOMAINS

The language material extracted from the corpus contained 321 metaphorical linguistic expressions coming from 10 sports domains. An overwhelming majority of these expressions might be classified as referring to the source “domains of boxing”, race (track events, a horse race, and motor racing), sailing, soccer, a

card game, the game of chess, wrestling, field events in athletics, rowing, and ski-jumping. The data has indicated that the domain of politics is extensively conceptualized in terms of concepts relating to the afore-mentioned domains. By way of illustration, some examples from the most numerous sources are provided below.

“Boxing”

Tusk „zadał straszliwy cios” polskiej gospodarce [Tusk “gave a terrible blow” to the Polish economy] (*Kaczyński: czy...*, 2013).

W ostatnim czasie scena polityczna w Polsce zamieniła się w wielki „ring” [Recently the Polish political scene has turned into a great “ring”] (Ostrowski, 2007).

“Race”

Armenia jest na „ostatniej prostej” przed wyborami parlamentarnymi [Armenia “enters its finishing straight” before the parliamentary elections] (Charkiewicz, 2012).

Rozpoczyna się „maraton” wyborczy, „zawodnicy” już są w formie [The electoral “marathon” has started. The “runners” are already in fine form] (Wysocki, 2014).

“Sailing”

Wyborcza “łódź” Bronisława Komorowskiego “złapała wiatr w żagle” [Bronisław Komorowski’s electoral “boat caught the wind in its sails”] (Kubrak, 2010).

Palikot „obrał ster” mocno na lewo [Palikot “took the helm” firmly to the far left] (*Być albo nie być...*, 2010).

“Soccer”

Poczuł, że jest „faulowany” we własnej partii, więc postanowił „zagrać sam” [He felt that he was being “fouled” in his own party, so he decided to “play” on his own] (Miziołek, 2013).

Jarosław Kaczyński „pokazał” rządowi „czerwoną kartkę” [Jarosław Kaczyński “showed” the government “the red card”] (Jarosław Kaczyński..., 2012).

“A card game”

Wydaje się, że prezydent „trzyma w rękawie lepsze karty” [It seems that the president “holds better cards up his sleeve”] (Mańka, 2013).

Szef CBA to chyba najlepsza „karta” w nowej „talii” Tuska [I think that the head of CBA is the best “card” in Tusk’s “pack”] (Rzeczkowski, 2009).

“The game of chess”

Wanda Nowicka jest „pionkiem w grze” Palikota [Wanda Nowicka is “a pawn” in Palikot’s “game”] (Gąsior, 2013).

Kaczyński baczenie obserwuje „ruchy” na „szachownicy” Premiera [Kaczyński carefully observes “moves” on Prime Minister’s “chessboard”] (Ziemkiewicz, 2010).

The figurative expressions that come from the above-mentioned source domains constitute a substantial part of the total collection of metaphors, altogether approximately 95%. In particular, the domain of boxing provides about 26 % of the metaphors (85 metaphorical expressions), while racing contributes roughly 20 % (63 metaphors). Sailing contributes 19 % of the metaphors (61 metaphors). The metaphorical expressions derived from the domain of soccer account for 18 per cent of the total collection (57 occurrences). Those referring to a card game and chess occur 40 times, 23 out of which refer to a card game (7 %) and 17 to chess (5%).

Clearly, the list of domains that participate in conceptual metaphors as sources is far from being exhaustive. Metaphorical expressions are in fact derived from a number of other domains: wrestling, athletics, rowing, ski-jumping, and many others. However, none of these source domains appears to have made such an enormous contribution to this research as those mentioned above.

STRUCTURAL METAPHORS

The above examples of the source domains seem to point to the existence of several types of structural metaphors that are fundamental to understanding the domain of politics. In these kinds of metaphors, the source domain provides a relatively rich knowledge structure for the target concept of politics: namely, the cognitive function of structural metaphors is to allow readers to understand politics by means of the structure of boxing, racing, sailing, soccer, etc. There are many different kinds of structural metaphors in the domain of politics. By way of exemplification, the most prominent instances will be discussed below.

The data extracted from the corpus indicate that the conceptual metaphor "Political debate is a boxing bout" occurs most frequently. As mentioned above, metaphorical expressions coming from the source domain of boxing constitute 26 % of all sports metaphors in the domain of politics. Politicians who take part in televised political debates are analogous to boxers in their corners before the beginning of a boxing bout. Politicians are also compared to boxers of various weight classes. Upper weight classes denote prominent politicians (*waga ciężka* [heavyweight], *kategoria półśrednia* [welterweight]), while lighter weights tend to be used disapprovingly (*waga lekka* [lightweight], *waga kogucia* [bantam weight]). It is important to note that one of the most frequent metaphorical terms is the word *cios* [blow], which is often preceded by adjectives (*podwójny* [double], *decydujący* [decisive], *silny* [hard/heavy]). This noun (occasionally, *uderzenie* [punch] appears in similar contexts) is used metaphorically to refer to various turning points in debate. An outstanding or overwhelming victory is analogous to *nokaut* [a knock-out] or *nokdaun* [knockdown]. A negative comment made by a politician to gain advantage over their political opponent is *ciosem poniżej pasa* [a low blow] or [a blow below the belt]. A politician on the losing side resembles a boxer who received a hard blow, leaned on the ropes, and finally was counted and sent to the floor. Given such a rich variety of analogies, it is apparent that in many ways

politics is conceptualized in terms of boxing. The following examples in (1) are provided to illustrate this phenomenon.

“Political debate is a boxing match”

Kaczyński i Komorowski „stańli twarzą w twarz” [Kaczyński and Komorowski “stood face to face”] (*Kaczyński i Komorowski...*, 2010).

Kaczyński pokazał, że jest „zawodnikiem wagi ciężkiej” [Kaczyński showed that he “is a heavyweight boxer”] (Wybranowski, 2010).

To był „nokaut”, kompletna klęska Kaczyńskiego [It was a “knockout”, Kaczyński’s complete defeat] (Niesiołowski, 2007).

Pierwsza telewizyjna debata Bronisława Komorowskiego i Jarosława Kaczyńskiego, dwóch „pretendentów” do Pałacu Prezydenckiego, mocno rozczarowała [The first televised political debate between Bronisław Komorowski and Jarosław Kaczyński, two “challengers” to the Presidential Palace, was a great disappointment] (*Politycy nas oszukali...*, 2010).

As the illustrative examples in (2) show, a political campaign may be understood in terms of the domain of “Race” (a track event, a horse race, or motor racing). Politicians or parties are construed as runners or race horses participating in a race, which can be either a long-distance running event (*marathon*) or a short sprint. The term *przeszkoda* [hurdle] is used to refer to difficulties encountered by a politician or a political party. Like runners, politicians start in a race, commit a false start (i.e. lose the first political debate), increase the pace, outdistance their opponents, or win by breaking the tape. Some politicians may compete fiercely like horses running neck and neck; others could be in a dead heat, particularly in the polls: namely, two candidates may gain the same number of votes. Other sides may attempt to catch or find a second wind, particularly after suffering a few defeats. Finally, exhausted though candidates might be after a long race, teams enter the home stretch and reach the finish line. In addition to the metaphors discussed above, the examples in (2c) and (2d) demonstrate that a political campaign can be also conceptualized as motor racing. An election campaign may approach to the halfway point or come close to the finish. Both politicians and parties are compared to cars or drivers competing in a motor race. Parties or parliamentary candidates may move into pole position, keep their foot on the gas, shift into second gear, as well as chase and overtake opposition parties or candidates.

“A political campaign is a race”

Barack Obama i Mitt Romney „idą” nadal „łeb w łeb” w sondażach przed wyborami [Barack Obama and Mitt Romney “go neck and neck” in the polls before the elections] (*Barack Obama...*, 2012).

Zieloni (PSL) postawili na właściwego „konia” w tych wyścigach i ten koń wygrał [The Green “bet on the right horse at the races” and that “horse” won] (Socha, 2009).

Tak jak dwa lata temu, PiS w wyborczym wyścigu zajął „pole position” [Just like two years ago, PiS “moved into pole position” in an election “race”] (*Premier Kaczyński...*, 2007).

Platforma nie skręca. Raczej „przyspiesza, wrzuca drugi” lub trzeci „bieg” [The Civic Platform does not turn. Rather, it “speeds up” and “shifts into second or third gear”] (Schetyna: *PO...*, 2007).

A number of examples found in the corpus suggest the existence of the conceptual metaphor “A political party is a sailing ship”. The examples in (3) below illustrate that political parties can be compared to sailing boats, ships or yachts participating in a regatta or embarking on a long-distance voyage. A party, like a ship, may catch the wind in its sails, sail to its destination, set course for a new destination, come into port, or sail downstream. An influential politician is analogous to a “skipper” who is “on board” with his crew and “steers the ship”, or resembles a helmsman who „takes the helm” in a party. The helmsman or the skipper “keeps” his party „on course” for its destination and ensures that the ship „sails” safely, namely, a party leader wants his party to defeat all political opponents and to secure victory in the elections. Clearly, the voyage may also end in failure if a party experiences considerable difficulties on the way to its final destination: the party may be defeated in an election, or it may not enter parliament. In those circumstances, the party (like the ship) drifts, capsizes or „runs aground”, whereas the helmsman (that is, the politician) „leaves the sinking ship”.

A political party is a sailing ship

Gorzowska Platforma Obywatelska „utknęła na mieliźnie” [The Civic Platform in Gorzów “ran aground”] (Brykner, 2009).

Platforma „rusza w niebezpieczny rejs - może zatonać” [The Civic Platform “goes on a dangerous cruise” - it may “sink”] (Dębski, 2011).

Partia Donalda Tuska była wcześniej „transatlantykiem” mknącym przez oceany; teraz jest już tylko małą przeciekającą „łajbą”, z której powoli zaczyna uciekać „załoga”, opuszczając swojego „kapitana” [Donald Tusk’s party used to be a “transatlantic ship sailing across the oceans”; now it is just a small “leaky boat”, out of which his „crew” begins to get slowly, leaving his “skipper”] (Czarnecki: *PO...*, 2013).

PiS przypomina „żaglowiec”, który po wielkich trudach opuścił port, „wyszedł na pełne morze i złapał wiatr w żagle”. Tyle tylko, że teraz „kapitan” wraz z załogą nie bardzo wiedzą, jaką trasę obrać, by szybko i bezpiecznie dopłynąć do celu. Za chwilę może przestać “wiać” i zacznie się “dryfowanie”. [PiS resembles a “sailing boat” which “left port” after great difficulties, “put out to open sea” and “caught the wind in its sails”. However, now a “captain” and his “crew” do not know which way to follow, in order to reach the destination fast and safely. In a moment the wind may stop blowing and “the ship” will “drift”] (Siekielski, 2010).

As demonstrated below in (4), politics can be also understood in terms of a soccer game. We can observe systematic correspondences between the target domain of politics and the source domain of soccer: the events and actions in politics are the events and actions during a soccer game; the political aim is the purpose of the football match; the politicians are the players, the political party is the team, the political plans and strategies are the football tactics and strategies,

the political campaign is the game, etc. These analogies become more obvious if we consider some of the examples in (4). They show that all politicians may be perceived as soccer players, while a leading politician is compared to a captain, a tactician, or a coach. Influential politicians are compared to top players who play in the Champions League. Yet another two examples, the lexical items *drużyna* [a team] and *taktyka* [tactics], are used figuratively to refer to a party and a political programme, respectively. If politicians do not fulfil their pre-election promises, they receive “a red or yellow card”. A political party may also “score an own goal”: in other words, such a party takes political action that results in a disadvantage to all members of this party.

“Politics is a soccer game”

Ufam Jarosławowi Kaczyńskiemu, który jest świetnym „taktykiem”. On jest „trenerem”, ja – „zawodnikiem tej drużyny” [I trust Jarosławowi Kaczyńskiemu, who is a great “tactician”. He is “a coach”, I’m “a player of this team”] (*Legenda polskiej piłki...*, 2011).

Wszystko zależy od „kapitana” Tuska, który musi wymienić „drużynę” i zmienić „taktykę” (program polityczny) [It all depends on the “team captain” Tusk, who must “substitute players in the team” and modify his “tactics” (a political programme)] (*Gowin – symulant...*, 2013).

Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej przyznał „czerwone i żółte kartki” rządowi Donalda Tuska [Democratic Left Alliance “gave red and yellow cards” to Donald Tusk’s government] (*Rok bez happy endu...*, 2010).

Bolesny upadek Schetyny. Był głównym „rozgrywającym”, jest zwykłym posłem [Schetyna’s painful fall. He was a major “playmaker”, now he is an ordinary MP] (*Bolesny upadek Schetyny...*, 2013).

As may be inferred from the data presented in (5), politics can be conceptualized in terms of a card game. The term *as* ‘an ace’ is used to denote an influential politician, while the word *dżoker* [a joker] usually refers to a prominent politician who may change the course of events in politics in a positive manner. A prime minister or president that changes some of the members in his cabinet is viewed as a card player who reshuffles a pack of cards. A politician who is in control of a situation in politics holds all the trump cards or holds all the aces. A political leader who reveals his plan of action and declares his intentions resembles a player who puts his cards on the table, plays his ace, or plays his trump card. By contrast, a politician who keeps his intended actions secret is compared to a card player who plays with his cards close to his chest or has an ace up his sleeve.

“Politics is a card game”

Miller: Lewica ma dużo „waletów”, ale to Jerzy Szmajdziński jest „asem” [Miller: The Left has many “jacks”, but it is Jerzy Szmajdziński who is “an ace”] (*Grzeźółka*, 2010).

Polityka przypomina „grę w karty”. Każdy usiłuje rozpoznać, jakie „karty” mają przeciwnicy, (...) [Politics resembles a “card game”. Everybody attempts to recog-

nize the cards which the opponents have, (...)] (Passent, 2008).

Zdrojewski: „Walet”, który stał się „*asem w talii*” Tuska [Zdrojewski: A “*jack*” who became “*an ace in Tusk’s pack*”] (Zdrojewski: *Walet...*, 2011).

Tusk „*odkrywa wszystkie karty*” [Tusk “*shows all cards*”] (*Premier czyści rząd*, 2009).

It is also important to mention that politics is frequently perceived as the chess game. The data in (6) below serve as an illustration of this phenomenon. Politics resembles a game of chess in which various strategies and tactics are employed. Top politicians, in particular a prime minister or a president, are compared to outstanding chess players who are skilful at shifting or reshuffling their chess pieces (e.g. their cabinet ministers) on the chessboard, and who checkmate their political opponents. The term „gambit” (i.e., a move or moves made at the beginning of a game of chess in order to gain an advantage later) is used to refer to the first political action performed by a prominent politician at the beginning of a political campaign or his/ her rules in order to gain some advantage. A situation in politics where neither politician nor party can ensure victory is analogous to a “stalemate”, while a situation in which a politician or a party is defeated is called “checkmate”.

“Politics is the game of chess”

„*Pat polityczny*” w USA szkodzi biznesowi [A political “*stalemate*” in the USA harms business] (*Pat polityczny...*, 2013).

„*Roszady*” Tuska nie przekonują opozycji [Tusk’s “*castlings*” don’t convince the opposition] (Ferfecki, 2013).

Ryzykowny „gambit” Tuska [Tusk’s risky „gambit”] (*Ryzykowany gambit...*, 2012).

Tusk „gra” dobrze w polityczne „szachy” [Tusk “plays political chess” well] (*Tusk gra...*, 2010).

FUNCTION OF METAPHOR

Metaphors found in written commentaries on politics seem to serve several different functions. In the first place they aim at describing the events and actions taking place in politics. The actions of individual politicians and parties as well as the events during a political campaign are most frequently captured by structural metaphors. It appears highly unlikely, therefore, that metaphors are simply used to convey factual information. Considering the widespread use of metaphor in this context, it is not difficult to assume that metaphors must serve a particular purpose, a function that cannot be easily performed by literal language. The aim of written commentaries is not only to depict what has occurred in politics, but also to do so in a way that attracts the reader’s attention. Even if the journalist was able to provide us with a factual account of the events during a political campaign, it would probably not appeal to the reader. It is possible that metaphors are employed to translate the facts of what has taken place into writing that is

appealing to the reader, by highlighting or focusing on some of the events and forming a more coherent account of the events in this way. Clearly, by doing this the journalists also have the opportunity to present their own viewpoint and opinion on the events described. For instance, the situation that is contrued by one journalist as Jarosław Kaczyński knocking out Donald Tusk in a political debate can be described by another as J. Kaczyński defeating D. Tusk in a political debate, which evidences how in each of these accounts the situations are interpreted in a slightly different way.

It is likely that this different interpretation enables the writer to convey factual information in a way that is easily comprehensible to the average reader. Since politics as an activity is a highly abstract concept in itself and its rules have nothing in common with a concrete experience, it is possible that one function of metaphor is to make these abstractions more comprehensible. If politics is depicted in terms of a physical fight or racing, it allows the reader to understand political actions in terms of physical activities.

CONCLUSION

The most obvious finding to emerge from this study is that the metaphors that come from the source domains of BOXING, RACING, SAILING, and SOCCER comprise an overwhelming majority of metaphors in Polish written commentaries on politics. The results reveal that the following conceptual metaphors: "A political debate is a boxing bout"; "A political campaign is a race"; "A political party is a sailing ship"; "A politics is a soccer game", which are the most common in the language material extracted from the corpus, are used to describe many significant events and actions in politics. It seems unlikely, therefore, that the function of metaphors is just simple communication of factual information. Rather, it is quite likely that metaphors are employed to translate what has occurred in politics into writing that is appealing to the reader, by conceiving politics in terms of the activities, entities and events that are natural to human beings.

The current findings add substantially to our understanding of structural metaphors in media commentary on politics, and they also support the idea that the events and actions in politics are conceptualized in terms of more concrete entities which we understand more readily, namely boxing, racing, sailing, and several others. However, the present study is limited to structural metaphors found in Polish written commentaries. However, it does not address any cross-cultural variation in the range of conceptual metaphors and in their particular elaborations. Future research should therefore concentrate on the comparison and contrast of metaphors found in Polish and their counterparts in English and German. In addition, since the current investigation was limited to written commentaries, it is recommended that a comparative study of spoken and written commentaries be undertaken, in view of the possible existence of linguistic variation in these discourses.

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