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AMERICAN AND RUSSIAN “VICTORY” DISCOURSE: A CONFLICT OF CULTURES

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AMERICAN AND RUSSIAN “VICTORY” DISCOURSE: A CONFLICT OF CULTURES²

This article focuses on the presidential rhetoric of Russian and American leaders at the end of their latest campaigns, taking their victory speeches given immediately after winning their respective elections as examples. The comparative cross-cultural research presented in this study includes cognitive, corpus, and rhetorical approaches and is carried out within the framework of critical discourse analysis. The interconnection between language, culture and politics is evident through metaphors used by national leaders. The metaphor THE RUSSIAN NATION IS AT WAR reconstructed in President Putin’s victory speech is quite different from the metaphor THE AMERICAN NATION IS ONE FAMILY found in President Obama’s victory speech. Archetypal metaphors found in both speeches reflect public values that turn out to be highly contrastive and explain some cultural and political differences between the great powers.

Key words: rhetorical strategies, archetypal metaphor, metaphorical concept, corpus data, public values.

JEL classification: Z19

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Theoretical background

This paper seeks to show the contrast between Russian and American public values through political metaphors as reflected in national presidential discourses. The role of metaphor as not only a rhetorical flourish but also an effective tool of cognition having an impact on people's understanding and actions has been discussed in many works. My research is based on a rhetorical and cognitive approach to metaphor. The name of Michael Osborn is particularly important for the rhetorical method [Osborn 1967]. Osborn focuses on the universal, cross-cultural character of archetypal metaphors and on their popularity in rhetoric. As Osborn puts it, when speakers want to 'place figurative value judgments upon subjects' they will most probably prefer archetypal metaphors that are deeply grounded in human experience and mentality [Osborn 1967:116]. Analyzing the case of Winston Churchill, Osborn demonstrates the role of archetypal metaphors in political discourse, as such metaphors in the speeches of political leaders appeal to basic myths, feelings, and experience of the nation and help consolidate it in the hardest times: 'Churchill in his war speeches shows a remarkably consistent preference for archetypal images in general. This favoritism may be a symptom of a more general truth, that in moments of great crisis, when society is in upheaval and fashionable contemporary forms of symbolic cultural identity are swept away, the speaker must turn to the bedrock of symbolism, the archetype, which represents the unchanging essence of human identity' [ibid., 120-121].

Another important approach is the theory of conceptual metaphor. In their famous book *Metaphors We Live By*, G. Lakoff and M. Johnson show that our conceptual system is 'fundamentally metaphorical in nature' and metaphor is not just a rhetorical device, but also a means of cognition and understanding. Conceptual metaphors, such as ARGUMENT IS WAR, lay deeply in our culture. They give us a whole system of metaphors conceptualizing argument as war – *win, lose, kill, shoot*, etc. Therefore, our behavior is structured in terms of war [Lakoff 1980]. In his later works, Lakoff demonstrated the key role of conceptual metaphors not only in everyday life or scholarly discourse, but also in politics [Lakoff 1991]. Analyzing the system of values in Democratic and Republican political discourse, Lakoff observed that both Democrats and Republicans have a metaphor for the nation as a family. Lakoff looked into the discourse and showed that two different understandings of America correspond to two different understandings of family. According to Lakoff, politicians 'program' the worldview of their electorate and form their values through conceptual metaphors that create necessary frames for perceiving reality [Lakoff 2004].

The present paper focuses on the victory speeches of two leaders – the American president Barack Obama and the Russian president Vladimir Putin. Each president appeals to his people and tries to unite the electorate on a base of common values. The ‘after-victory’ speeches finalize each presidential campaign, show these common values to the public, and produce an agenda for a new term in a short and figurative form.

The reason these particular campaigns are researched is that both countries are large powers that used to be the main players on the Cold War stage and claim to be either at a ‘reset’ stage or in a ‘New Cold War’ right now. The countries and their leaders are extremely different with regard to tradition, history, mentality, and other aspects. However, both countries are large, influential, and multinational, and both can be understood as ‘civil nations’, which is why their leaders need to find some points for national self-identification in the modern world. There are deeply rooted myths in both countries about the special and great role of the nation, such as Manifest Destiny in America and Special Way of Russia (*Osoby Put’ Rossii*). This is why comparing the messages of winning leaders to their nations seems to be an ambitious and crucially important task.

In my work I endeavor to expose basic national values that are hidden in the conceptual metaphors used by the leaders. I believe it logical enough to analyze only two certain speeches as a victory speech is a specific genre referring to epideictic rhetoric, but different from an inaugural address as the latter is more formal and ceremonial: ‘A form of rhetoric that praises or blames during ceremonial occasions, invites the audience to evaluate the speaker’s performance, recalls the past and speculates about the future while focusing on the present, employs a noble, dignified literary style, and amplifies or rehearses admitted facts’ [Campbell 29]. In contrast with more traditional and ceremonial inaugural addresses, victory speeches seem more spontaneous, emotional, and sincere. It is also tailored to unite the audience and form its identity, but the politician speaks here just after his or her victory, which can have an impact on the style and content of the speech.

Victory speeches represent interesting material for research, which helps to understand the common and different points in the mentalities of the two great nations, as well as the means of interaction between the two countries.

Conceptual metaphors

President Obama's Victory Speech, November 7, 2012

Victory speeches and inauguration speeches are genres that are traditionally much better developed in American rhetoric. The victory speech is a relatively new genre for Russian leaders, while American presidents have always presented such an address. President Obama always uses a lot of metaphors, repetitions, allusions, and other devices in these speeches. He personally thanks his team as well as his family. He is very polite and friendly to his opponents and his audience. He tends to emphasize freedom and the equality of diverse people as the main values of all Americans. In his speeches, Obama uses such rhetorical devices as the rule of three, alliteration, metonymy, metaphor, paraphrase, and allusions to his great predecessors Martin Luther King, the Founding Fathers, and previous American presidents. All these devices form a narrative of Obama referring to the religious discourse of telling tales and parables. The method of telling well-known stories to an audience familiar with religious discourse gives people a feeling of participation, a joy of knowing common history, and a basic national myth uniting everyone.

Here are examples of metaphors in President Obama's victory speech (bold font):

- *It moves forward because of you. It moves forward because you reaffirmed the spirit that has triumphed over war and depression, the spirit that has lifted this country from the depths of despair to the great heights of hope, the belief that while each of us will pursue our own individual dreams, we are an American family, and we rise or fall together as one nation and as one people*
- *And together, with your help and God's grace, we will continue our journey forward and remind the world just why it is that we live in the greatest nation on earth.*
- *Tonight, in this election, you, the American people, reminded us that while our road has been hard, while our journey has been long, we have picked ourselves up, we have fought our way back, and we know in our hearts that for the United States of America, the best is yet to come.*
- *Thank you for believing all the way, through every hill, through every valley*
- *We want our children to live in an America that isn't burdened by debt, that isn't weakened by inequality, that isn't threatened by the destructive power of a warming planet.*

- *What makes America exceptional are the bonds that hold together the most diverse nation on earth.*
- *America's never been about what can be done for us. It's about what can be done by us together through the hard and frustrating, but necessary work of self-government. That's the principle we were founded on.*

As we can see from these examples, President Obama's victory speech demonstrates a plethora of metaphors:

- POLITICS IS A BRIDGE
- THE HISTORY OF OUR NATION IS A JOURNEY UP
- AMERICAN HISTORY IS A RELIGIOUS MISSION
- AMERICAN UNITY IS BOUND WITH LOVE
- AMERICAN HISTORY IS A FIGHT
- AMERICA IS A BUILDING
- AMERICA IS A FAMILY
- AMERICA IS AN ORGANISM
- ELECTIONS ARE A FIGHT
- POLITICS IS A RELIGIOUS SERVICE
- THE PROBLEMS OF THE COUNTRY ARE A BURDEN
- THE PROBLEMS OF THE COUNTRY ARE A WEAKNESS
- THE HISTORY OF AMERICA IS A RENAISSANCE
- THE HISTORY OF AMERICA IS SAILING
- DEVELOPMENT IS LIGHT
- AMERICAN HISTORY IS A LESSON

President Putin's Victory Speech, March 4, 2012

This short speech was emotional, spontaneous, and quite different from his inaugural address, as well as from traditional, ‘safe’ victory speeches that convey only positive intentions to the people (that the fight is over).

Here are basic metaphors in his text³.

³ Here and further translation is mine, A.P.

- *Special thanks to those who have gathered now here, in Moscow. All those who support us in every corner of our huge, borderless Russia. Thanks to all who said ‘Yes!’ to a great Russia.*
- *This was a test for political maturity, for self-sufficiency, for independence.*
- *We have shown that our people are really able to easily differ the will for the new from political provocations that have only one aim – to destruct the Russian state system and usurp power.*
- *The Russian people have shown today that such plans, scenarios won’t pass on our land. Will they? (Chanting).*
 - *It’s a clean sweep.*
 - *This is a landslide victory of an overwhelming majority.*
 - *Did I promise you that we would win? We have won! Glory to Russia!*

As we can see, metaphors of building, medicine, sport, performance, and war are met in the speech. Here is the list of the basic archetypal metaphors in Putin’s victory speech; the speech itself and the list of metaphors are much shorter than in that of Obama:

- RUSSIA IS A HOME
- RUSSIA IS A BUILDING
- RUSSIA IS A LAND
- ELECTIONS ARE A FIGHT
- ELECTIONS ARE A WAR
- ELECTIONS ARE SPORT
- ELECTIONS ARE A TEST
- POLITICS IS PERFORMANCE

Analysis

As we can see, President Obama describes America as a great and exceptional country that is developing and changing in accordance with the basic principles of freedom and equality inherited from the Founding Fathers. Obama emphasizes that America is the unity of diverse people, reminding of his own victory speech in 2008 when he listed different categories of Americans:

It's the answer spoken by young and old, rich and poor, Democrat and Republican, black, white, Hispanic, Asian, Native American, gay, straight, disabled and not disabled – Americans who sent a message to the world that we have never been just a collection of individuals or a collection of Red States and Blue States: we are, and always will be, the United States of America (2008).

I believe we can keep the promise of our founding, the idea that if you're willing to work hard, it doesn't matter who you are or where you come from or what you look like or where you love. It doesn't matter whether you're black or white or Hispanic or Asian or Native American or young or old or rich or poor, abled, disabled, gay or straight. (Cheers, applause.) You can make it here in America if you're willing to try. (2012)

We are greater than the sum of our individual ambitions and we remain more than a collection of red states and blue states. We are, and forever will be, the United States of America. (2012)

Such self-quoting, together with constant mentioning about hard labor and personal responsibility, refers to the basic myth of American success and realization of the American dream. The Protestant ethics of labor and the Puritan idea of Manifest Destiny are also reflected in the Obama discourse; he underlines the unique place of America and its religious mission. The basic metaphor reconstructed in this speech is that AMERICA IS ONE FAMILY.

As for President Putin's victory speech on Manezhnaya Square in Moscow, here we can see quite different archetypal metaphors. In terms of the Lakoff theory, elections as a subspecies of politics are conceptualized through several metaphors, presuming a CHALLENGE for the Russian electorate. Metaphorical conceptualization, as we have seen, presumes structuring one kind of thing in terms of another, including different categories of the conceptualized subject. In our example, it is not only elections but also the people who

participated in them. In Putin's victory discourse, the people who voted for him are opposed to those who did not. Putin's electorate consists of warrior-winners, sportsmen-winners, students, or patients who passed the test. They are not called citizens, but the Russian people (*russky narod*). Those who did not vote for Putin are conceptualized as provokers and enemies of the great country. Putin emphasized that these elections were legitimate and that he received the majority of votes. There are three important metaphorical concepts of Russia in the speech: A LAND, A BUILDING, and A WAR. While metaphors of building and war are traditional in international political discourse (cf. *The Founding Fathers, a battle for a new law*, etc.), the metaphor of LAND poses great interest within the context of Russian myths and archetypes expressed in the construction 'ON OUR LAND'. To look up the semantics of this expression, we checked this phrase in the National Corpus of Russian Language (www.ruscorpora.ru). We found approximately 200 examples from contemporary Russian fiction, non-fiction, and mass media and found out that almost one third of them contains a war context (another popular context is religious). The following example demonstrates that the expression 'ON OUR LAND' goes back to World War II:

Dear Timofey Pavlovich! Moscow veterans from the 59 GMP congratulate you warmly on the 40th anniversary of the Soviet Guard... We are going to organize a meeting with our brother soldiers devoted to the 40th anniversary of our regiment. We heartily wish you a peaceful sky on our land, guarded by our brave missile officers... ('Vostochno-Sibirskaya Pravda', Irkutsk, 2003).⁴

Another important idiom in Putin's victory speech is 'THEY WON'T PASS', which refers to the famous Spanish revolutionary motto 'NO PASARAN'. The search in the National Corpus of Russian language shows that this idiom is also associated with the war discourse:

— The tanks won't pass. — he murmured. — The infantry has seized the position...
(Vasiliy Aksenov. '*The mysterious passion*', 2007)

The final phrase of the speech, *Glory to Russia*, seems to be far from the war context, but in reality it is the motto of Russian Nazis. This strange verbal coincidence also helps form the rhetorical strategy of dividing society via a Soviet-style creation of 'an image of an enemy'.

Putin appeals to the basic values of his electorate, evoking the memories about great victories (the war of 1812 was mentioned during Putin's electoral campaign, and World War II is presumed in his victory speech). Russian society is divided into the State and Opposition,

⁴ Here and further translation is mine, A.P.

suggesting that there are some internal and external enemies that do not want to see a strong Russia. There are not so many things uniting people in modern society, which is torn by social discrepancy, and Russia's military victories seems to be one of them.

On the next level of analysis, the conceptual metaphors discussed above can be united into basic national values presented by the leaders to their respective audiences. It looks as follows:

Putin

SUPPORT

MAJORITY

CONFRONTATION

STRENGTH

DEFENDING OUR LAND

MATURITY

STATUS QUO

VICTORY OVER ENEMY

Obama

BELIEF

DIVERSITY

UNITY

RESPONSIBILITY

PERFECTING OUR UNION

DEVELOPMENT

CHANGE

HOPE

As we can see from the examples, these basic national values have ‘umbrella’ conceptual metaphors reflecting the presidential vision of the country and its development. For President Obama it is the metaphor of FAMILY, whereas for President Putin it is the metaphor of WAR.

Conclusions

If we compare the basic concepts representing fundamental values in the two speeches, we find **AMERICA IS GREAT** and **THE AMERICAN NATION IS ONE FAMILY** in the American discourse, and **RUSSIA IS GREAT** and **THE RUSSIAN NATION IS AT WAR** in the Russian discourse. Obama unites the nation, whereas Putin divides the nation. Obama mentions minorities, while Putin speaks about the majority. Putin conceptualizes Russia as a great superpower that is at war with its enemies now and that has won or is going to win in this war. Putin also sees politics as sport, performance, school or medicine, or a building, while Russia is seen as a HOME, a BUILDING, and OUR LAND. Obama always speaks about changes; Putin sees changes as provocations against a strong Russia. The Opposition poses a threat to Russia because they want changes, and the value of change is not included in Russian presidential discourse: Russia is so great that it should be saved as it is, because changes could spoil and destruct the uniqueness of this land (cross reference the old Russian notion of *Sviataya Rus'*, *Holy Rus'*). As for the Russian people, they are positioned as autonomous mature warrior-winners or sportsmen-winners. The American people are also survivors and winners, but at the same time Obama poses them as travelers on their hard and long way to fulfilling the American dream. While Putin looks into the past, reminding of victories in wars, Obama looks into the future as a realization of basic American principles. Even religious discourse is realized in both speeches in a different way: Obama sees it through the prism of the Protestant work ethic, whereas Putin, speaking about *our great motherland and our land*, evokes the Orthodox image of Saint Mother Rus', which must not be changed. From a linguistic point of view, it is important to note that Putin often uses negative constructions, such as *nobody and nothing* and *won't pass*. A strategy of hostility and negating change as dangerous has proved to be viable and has partly framed modern official Russian politics, which corresponds to the Lakoff theory about the interconnection between language and power.

Such different communicative strategies should be explained, first and foremost, by absolutely different historical, cultural, and political traditions of the two nations. A deep

analysis of archetypal structures shows interconnection between language, cognition, society, politics, and national behavior and helps to better understand not only national stereotypes, but also different political practices that ultimately should contribute to dialogue and mutual understanding.

It is important to mention that for more detailed results, further research based on solid data is needed. I consider it a future task.

The main important outcome so far is that analyzing national archetypes behind contrasting conceptual metaphors is crucial for successful communication between the countries, which would help to overcome existing and potential cross-cultural conflicts.

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Supplement to the article

Речь Владимира Путина на Манежной площади в Москве 4.03.2012

Дорогие друзья, я прежде всего хочу поблагодарить всех граждан России, которые принимали сегодня участие в выборах президента Российской Федерации.

Особая благодарность, конечно тем, кто собрался сегодня здесь, в Москве. Всем, кто поддерживает нас в каждом уголке нашей огромной, необъятной Родины. Спасибо тем, кто сказал «Да!» великой России.

Владимир Путин на Манежной площади в Москве 4 марта 2012

Я вас спросил однажды — «Мы победим»? Мы — победили.

Мы победили в открытой и честной борьбе. Но это были выборы не только президента России. Это был очень важный тест для всех нас, для всего нашего народа. Это был тест на политическую зрелость, на самостоятельность, на независимость.

Мы показали, что нам действительно никто ничего не может навязать. Никто и ничего! Мы показали, что наши люди действительно в состоянии легко отличить желание к новизне, к обновлению от политических провокаций, которые ставят только одну цель — развалить российскую государственность и узурпировать власть.

Российский народ сегодня показал, что такие варианты, сценарии, на нашей земле не пройдут. Они не пройдут?

Мы победили сегодня и благодаря подавляющей поддержке подавляющего большинства наших избирателей одержали чистую победу.

Мы будем работать честно и напряжённо. Мы добьёмся успехов и мы призываем всех объединиться вокруг интересов нашего народа и нашей Родины.

Я обещал вам, что мы победим? Мы победили! Слава России!

Anna Plisetskaya,

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