# METAPHORS IN THE AMERICAN AND RUSSIAN POLITICAL DISCOURSE

by
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This paper presents research on metaphor from the perspective of the pragmatic modeling and cognitive variability of political discourse. For this purpose, we analyze a range of issues related to discourse as a social phenomenon, where we focus on factors determining the variable, pragmatic, and cognitive features of the American and Russian political discourses. The reason for carrying out a comparative analysis of the American and Russian political discourses is obvious, since these discourses represent complex and different systems of values and traditions as reflected in the respective languages. The role of metaphor in political discourse is crucial as it helps to identify the hidden meanings of the various subsystems functioning within these systems (formation of mind, means of formation of the culture and the ideology of society, preservation of the cultural-historical experience). Keeping this in mind is essential to the understanding of the multi-channeled processing of human speech in a complex communication environment. As such, it involves a number of factors to be taken into consideration.

## *Theoretical background*

Socio-cultural perspectives have been productively used in all linguistic studies of the communicative nature of language; such studies, by focusing on language's pragmatic and cognitive functions, will ultimately enable us to see its inseparable relationship with social meaning. A number of functional and critical studies have shown the dynamics of language use in the close interaction of its users (Fairclough and Wodak 1997, Canagarajah 1999, Eco 1999, van Dijk 2001, etc). In so doing, these studies have demonstrated how dialectical relationships are maintained and how they translate into the socio-cultural structures and social practice often called discourse

(van Dijk 1998). In this context, we refer to Enkvist's classical definition (1989:372): discourse means text plus context, where the context contains a situational component. Text and context are the two main factors here because there is no discourse without them.

Traditionally, text is considered in two ways: propositionally and communicatively. The first approach is based on the view that any (written) text minimally consists of two sentences, linked through different, explicit devices. The second approach defines text in accordance with a functional criterion and asks whether the sender (the author) produces a communicative unit of some specific and definable type in an authentic, communicative situation. In this regard, Enkvist (1989:369) writes that to have meaning, a text must relate to a certain authentic situation. As to the context, on the other hand, this is said to include the participants and their roles, goals, settings and shared knowledge (van Dijk 1998:23).

Modern functionalism studies the text from the point of view of the participants' communication processes, in particular the choices they make, the constraints that they encounter using text in social interaction, and the mutual effects the participants undergo during communication. The theory of text focuses attention on the complex processes by which text is produced, understood, inferred and interpreted. Any interpretation of text produces a new text. Such an approach can be applied not only to philosophy and the humanities, but to all spheres of knowledge, and even to social phenomena. If we can build a real or metaphoric world over any text, then the result of this interpretive process is a new discourse (for example, globalization is considered to be a type of metaphoric discourse).

The receiver's involvement in the creation of meaning offers a strong incentive towards the belief that the development of general principles of the theory of text (with due regard being paid to the background knowledge shared by the sender and the receiver, their world-views, cultural traditions, and the mechanism of linguistic thinking, etc) can be observed in what has been relatively recently described as cognitive linguistics (Kibrik 1994, Fauconnier 1999,

etc). Thus, the functional-cognitive approach to text is based on the inseparable relations among language, cross-cultural, and academic knowledge. Text is viewed as the dialogue of cultures in the general context of intercultural communication; here, not only the choice of language as a means of constructing text plays an important role, but also the knowledge of how language functions in a social context which develops the cognitive skills needed to understand the real world referents of the discourse.

In general terms, discourse deals with the interrelationships between language and society as well as between language and mind. It has strong links to anthropology through the investigation of language and culture, to psychology through the close interaction between language and mind, and to sociology through the crucial role that language plays in social life.

Further research has brought to our understanding that not only social practices or discourses are ideological, but that ideologies are produced by them (van Dijk 1998:33). Zaychikova (2003:55) indicates three basic characteristics of discourse: 1) it is fixed in text, 2) it has a cognitive foundation, 3) it is ideologically marked; these characteristics are fundamental to the analysis of any type of discourse. The results of the investigation of a large number of discourse types (Mann & Thompson 1992; Zadorin, Burova & Syutkina 1999; Wodak 2009, etc.) show that some of them (among which the literary, political, and media discourses are of special interest) are strongly pragmatically, cognitively, ideologically and culturally motivated.

We will focus on political discourse. D. Johnson and R. Johnson (Johnson & Johnson 2000:1) suggest that political discourse is the formal exchange of reasoned views as to which of several alternative courses of action should be taken to solve a societal problem. It should also be noted that political discourse takes place in real-world communication, where the felicity conditions are governed by the principle of cooperation and depend upon the maxims of quality, quantity, relevance and manner (Grice 1975). But these

rules are often consciously violated to create pragmatic, stylistic, and cognitive effects. The pragmatics of political discourse is marked by its function, with aesthetic, cognitive and actual information (Galperin 1981) successfully integrated in it. This is why various rhetorical strategies of explicit grammatical, lexical, and stylistic devices (conjunctions, pronouns, articles, word order, repetitions, metonymy, metaphor, the names of person, place, literature, brand names, etc.) are creatively and widely used within political discourse to arouse more attention in the receiver, by using cognitive, poetic and other literary effects to perform diverse communicative functions. Metaphor is one of the most important among these devices, as it encourages the receivers to spell out a variety of implications, subtly persuades them to recognize the prominent values and preferences, and ultimately helps construct their political identity.

*The pragmatic and cognitive effects of the uses of metaphors*

When we study discourse, we have to inquire into the perspectives of both sides of the communication. Of course, the sender is to be regarded first of all. Any politician, as a sender of a political message, thinks about his/her receivers, in particular their ideological and cultural backgrounds, in order to get as positive reactions as possible. Psychologically, the purpose of political discourse is to create consensus among citizens as to which course of action will best solve a problem (such as poverty, crime, drug abuse, racism, a country's economic health, and so on) (Johnson & Johnson 2000:4). Traditionally, it is believed that politicians know their potential audience and that they construct their speech and use relevant rhetoric according to that knowledge. But the situation changes rapidly under current circumstances. The modern receiver of a political text differs from that of 20 or 30 years ago due to the ongoing processes of globalization and migration. As far as the American political discourse is concerned, the situation is even more complicated because of the

global public's interest in US politics. The presence of this diverse audience has a great impact on the senders of the political texts in the US. The Russian political discourse is not constructed under similar circumstances, but the receiver of the political messages in Russia has also changed, especially with regard to his/her cultural background. Physical context is also important, as politicians try to be more aggressive and to use stronger rhetoric in rallies than in official ceremonies or in the mass media. So, politicians have to weigh their words and to build political discourse in order to meet expectations of both direct and potential receivers. Words have always been important instruments in any political discourse since the classical age of Greece. The senders of political texts usually use words in order to persuade their audiences, and sometimes to manipulate them. People, of course, listen to the politicians, but they are more interested in concrete actions than in so-called empty words. It is likely that the well-known saying ('We need deeds, not words') appeared as a response to that desire. But the word becomes even more persuasive when it acquires figurative meaning, and politicians have traditionally used this characteristic of the word to create a large number of metaphors.

One of the most productive ways to understand metaphors is the theory of metaphor introduced by G. Lakoff, who makes a distinction between conceptual metaphor and metaphoric expressions (Lakoff 1993). The conceptual metaphor is perceived as the original image of the relevant culture, while metaphoric expressions are simply a verbal-linguistic reflection of that image. Most recently, an interesting attempt has been made towards a better theoretical understanding of metaphor; we are referring to Tendahl's 'Hybrid Theory of Metaphor' (Tendahl 2009) which combines a cognitive approach to metaphor with Relevance Theory.

The study of metaphor has become central to the analysis of the political discourse (see, i.a., Ahrens 2009). Some of this research tends to refine the cognitive theory of metaphor (Musolff 2004) in order to show its relevance in the construction and understanding

of political discourse. Political discourse is constructed, first of all, by using concepts which reflect different world views. The crucial issues here are how to the verbalize these concepts in different political discourses belonging to different cultures, and how to resolve the conflict between cultural identity and universal values, as the understanding, inference and interpretation of the same concept may differ, both within the same culture and (a fortiori) between different cultures. The relationship of political discourse to cultural identity is a very complicated issue, which for a long time has been associated with language and culture and has triggered hot debates for the last two centuries or more.

In any case, despite the universal nature of many concepts in the modern world, their reflections in a particular culture and language vary. At the same time, the cultural identity and the behaviorist psychology of a society form specific conceptual metaphors, which are characteristic of different political cultures and which are used in the relevant political discourses. The metaphoric expressions formed by such conceptual metaphors become the reference points for that culture's discourse.
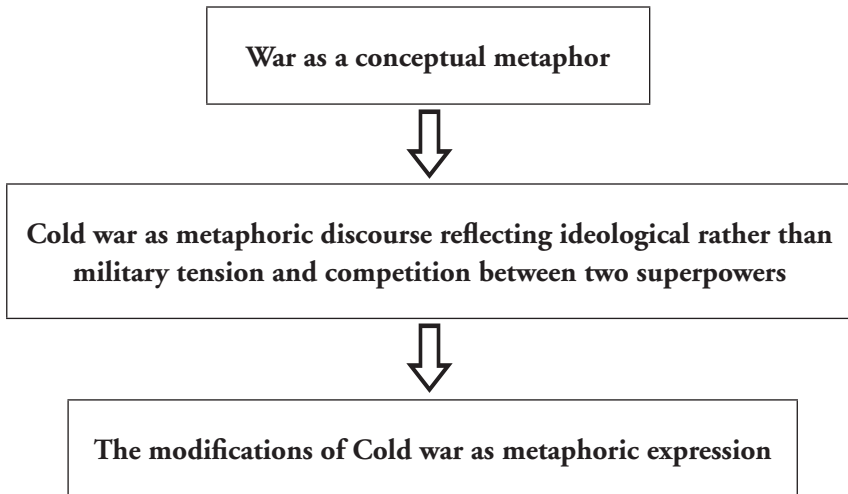
In addition to cultural identity, other factors – among these physical context, charisma of the sender, social status of the receiver as well as the current political and economic situation – influence the verbalization of the conceptual metaphors in political discourse. In political discourse, metaphors are useful elements that help to associate the explicit information with the implicit background, by becoming signs of certain situations and thus making an original image irrelevant. The conceptual metaphor sees figurative meaning as essential to the political discourse, as an original image usually gets forgotten or becomes unimportant.

The following concepts loom large in political discourse: ideology, power, patriotism, social differentiation, and gender. The dominance of these concepts is natural and obvious as they reflect various processes in society; in addition, they are closely interrelated. For example, the ideology is basic to the concept of social differentiation;

also, it has a strong connection with patriotism. As a result, some of the metaphoric expressions related to these conceptual metaphors, tend to overlap.

For any political discourse, ideology is the pillar, both in terms of domestic and foreign policy. But the priorities obviously change, depending on the context in which the ideology exists. We have already mentioned van Dijk's views on the formation of ideology in political discourse; according to him, each ideology, despite its universal nature, depends for its existence on the concrete political culture, as will be seen in the following.

Ideological differences between the West, led by the US, and the former Soviet Block, gave rise to the formation of the metaphor of the Cold War. The function of this metaphor can be traced in the following table:

| **War as a conceptual metaphor** |
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| **Cold war as metaphoric discourse reflecting ideological rather than military tension and competition between two superpowers** |
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| **The modifications of Cold war as metaphoric expression** |
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The Cold War metaphor embraces diverse implications, stretching from the direct indication of the real conflict of two superpowers to any kind of nonviolent friction, even within family life. Any sign of new tension between the major world powers revitalizes the image of this extremely productive metaphor, first of all in the American

political discourse. Apparently, the reason is that the American political culture is the source of its origin. The metaphor is perceived not as the war against a concrete enemy, but as the everlasting war, defending fundamental American values. So, despite the actual Cold War having come to an end, the metaphor is still being widely used in the American political discourse. Thus, President Barack Obama recently used the following metaphoric expression with regard to Russian foreign policy: '[Russia] has one foot in the old ways' (International Herald Tribune, July 4-5, 2009, p. 3). Such remarks are more or less direct references to the period of the Cold War.

The Russian expression Холодная война ('Cold War') is not equally popular in the Russian political discourse because of the unpleasant memories related to the outcome of that war. Russian political discourse tends to focus on the existence of the Cold War as a historical fact of the military, political, economic and social rivalry between two equal parties. Such an assumption gives rise to expressions like великое противостояние ('the great contestation'), военный паритет ('military parity') or период конфронтации ('the period of confrontation'):

> …Мы все надеемся, что период конфронтации ушел в прошлое… (Дмитрий Медведев, Выступление на церемонии по случаю 20-й годовщины падения Берлинской стены, 9 ноября 2009)
> …We all hope that the period of confrontation is a thing of the past… (Dmitriy Medvedev, Speech at the Ceremony of the 20th Anniversary of the Fall of the Berlin Wall, November 9, 2009)

Political discourse is also interesting as the crossing point of metaphoric expressions that reflect different conceptual metaphors. We would like here to bring to mind our remark about the cultural motivation of political discourse. The idea of traveling as a conceptual metaphor is significant for the American culture, and its relations with

other spheres of life such as love or career have been studied extensively (see, e.g., Johnson 1993, Lakoff 1993). While the importance of ideology in the political discourse is obvious, a connection of the concept of traveling with political discourse seems a bit far-fetched; even so, this idea also permeates political discourse. When we look at US election campaigns, we usually encounter such expressions as 'run', 'race', 'ticket', '100 days', 'journey', and so on:

> I just want to say that whatever happens tomorrow, I have been deeply humbled by this journey (Barack Obama, Manassas, Prince William County, Virginia, November 3, 2008).

The conceptual metaphor 'travel-election campaign' represents a combination of time and space, as it reflects the following cognitive scheme:

| you participate | you win | you serve | you leave |
|---|---|---|---|

In the US, the election campaign itself captures the popular interest as it stands for an exciting process with a beginning and an end, a process which, of course, reflects a liberal ideology. In the Russian political discourse, election campaigns have never been associated with traveling as they tend to be less participatory and massive while being more result-oriented. But the conceptual metaphor 'competition' is obviously present in both political discourses – with some differences, first and foremost due to the two-party system in the US vis-à-vis the multiparty system in Russia. Such differences between the American and Russian political systems are reflected in expressions like 'bipartisanship' or metaphors like 'blue [Democratic] America vs. red [Republican] America' in the American political discourse, as compared to битва за места в Госдуме ('the battle for seats in the National Duma [Assembly]'), главные политические игроки

('the main political players'), or оппозиционные силы ('the forces of the opposition') in the Russian political discourse. Compare:

> I have a clear record of bipartisanship. The situation today cries out for bipartisanship. Senator Obama has never taken on his leaders of his party on a single issue. And we need to reform (John McCain, Presidential Candidates debate, Belmont University, Nashville, Tennessee, October 7, 2008)

> The men and women who serve on our battlefields come from many walks of life, different political parties, but they fought together and they bled together. Some die together under the same proud flag. They have not served red America or blue America, they have served the United States of America. And that is what this campaign has been about, we're calling us to serve the United States of America (Barack Obama, Election Night Victory Speech, Grant Park, Chicago, Illinois, November 4, 2008)

> Разумеется, у нашей партии и у оппозиционных сил, а также между различными оппозиционными партиями есть разногласия, и достаточно острые, но в вопросах, касающихся защиты основополагающих национальных интересов, мы были и будем едины (Борис Грызлов, Известия, 14 сентября 2009) (It is obvious that there are differences, even quite sharp ones, between our party and the forces of the opposition, as well as between the different opposition parties, but we have been and will be united in the issues concerning the safeguarding of the fundamental national interests) (Boris Gryzlov, Izvestiya, September 14, 2009)

Obviously, given that the conceptual metaphor 'power' is central to any political culture, the crucial issue in political discourse is power, considered as a specific type of social relation between groups (van

Dijk 1998:162). But approaches to power are, of course, different and these differences are reflected in the relevant metaphoric expressions. In the Russian political discourse, the word власть (power) creates a metaphoric discourse covering the whole ruling elite, including all branches of power. Therefore, such oppositions as власть-народ (power-people) or власть-бизнес (power-business) are common in the Russian political discourse. But such an assumption is not always productive for the central authorities, as clearly illustrated by President Dmitriy Medvedev's use of the metaphor власть in the following text, where a clear distinction is made between the central and the regional authorities:

> … И, я надеюсь, подали абсолютно доходчивый и правильный пример для властей. Обращайте внимание власти на то, что происходит на местах (Дмитрий Медведев, Аргументы и факты, 14-20 октября 2009, стр. 17) (And I hope that we have provided a completely compelling and right example for the regional authorities. Pay attention, central and regional authorities, to what's going on in the provinces) (Dmitriy Medvedev, Arguments and facts, 14-20 October 2009, p. 17)

The conceptual metaphor 'power' is more complex in the American political culture, and its verbalization in the American political discourse is diverse. It expresses itself in such common metaphoric expressions as 'political stronghold', 'business elite' and 'media tycoon'. 'Power' as a conceptual metaphor is traditionally associated in the US with pragmatism, as its main characteristic is to be pragmatic. We can easily prove this argument by remembering the famous words of late President Ronald Reagan: 'Trust but verify', used in the context of the Cold War. Since then it has become a popular metaphor – the symbol of pragmatism.

In both political discourses, power is associated with leadership, again with a certain degree of difference. The Russian political dis-

course contains the metaphoric expressions стоять у руля страны ('to stand at the country's steering wheel'), вождь ('the Leader'), отец народов (the nations' father), which reflect the conceptual metaphor сильная рука ('strong hand') in the Russian political culture. Of course, some of these metaphors are not used in current Russian political discourse, but they are still popular expressions among a portion of the Russian population. The American political discourse tends to use the word 'leadership' more frequently than is the case in British or French political discourse. The American way of dealing with this notion is more general, as it reflects not only the leadership of certain politicians, but also the leadership of certain countries or organizations.

When we speak about 'power' and 'leadership', the notions 'criticism' and 'dismissal from power' should also be mentioned. The metaphoric expressions reflecting this notion are usually formed in the American political discourse from the word 'fire', and they are commonly used in the American political discourse. The Russian political discourse contains the metaphoric expression находиться под огнем критики ('to be under critical fire'), which is probably derived from the expression 'to be under fire'.

The conceptual metaphor 'patriotism' is also interesting as an object of study in both political discourses, as this notion is an essential element of both the American and the Russian political culture. There are, of course, different interpretations of patriotism even within those political cultures, depending on political ideology. Thus, US Republicans and Democrats each have their own, long enduring attitudes towards patriotism, especially in times of war. Former Vice-President Al Gore described patriotism from a liberal standpoint by using a very interesting opposition: 'Here in America patriotism does not mean keeping quiet. It means speaking up' (International Herald Tribune April 15, 2002, p. 5).

The issue of personalization is one of main factors here worthy of investigation. In this regard, I. Koptyolova (2005:88-89) carried out an interesting analysis of the rhetoric used by President George

W. Bush in his address to the US Congress after the September 11 attacks, by comparing it with late President John F. Kennedy's famous words characterizing the relationship between citizen and country ('Do not ask what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country'). In contrast, the Russian political discourse is full of metaphoric expressions reflecting a much tougher line on these issues, regardless of political and ideological preferences: дать решительный отпор возможному врагу ('to deal a decisive blow to a potential aggressor'), державные амбиции ('state ambitions'). We must also take note of the strong Cold War stereotypes that still are reflected in the Russian political discourse; compare expressions like НАТО-руки прочь… ('NATO: Hands off…'), where NATO is still being associated in certain circles of the Russian political elite with a negative image of the US. Such a stereotype also still exists in the English-speaking political discourse in a broader sense, as can be seen from the metaphoric use of certain expressions like 'politburo' – which, in contrast to the Russian expression, is used in a mostly humorous fashion.

Another important issue in the American and Russian political discourse is how to verbalize social and class differences. In Russia, where the distinction between the political 'right' and 'left' is more or less obvious, any positive mention of the upper class or rich people is not a politically effective line. Therefore, expressions such as олигархи ('tycoons'), used to negatively identify the rich, are very popular, even among right-wing politicians. The American political discourse is more complicated in this regard, as it reflects fundamental differences between the existing major political forces, and not only in terms of right vs. left or conservatives vs. liberals. The recent financial crisis has added new images to these differences, as reflected in the discourses of both presidential candidates in the 2008 elections. As the financial leadership, metonymically referred to as 'Wall Street', attracted much criticism for the financial crisis, oppositions such as Wall Street – Main Street became very common in the American political discourse:

…because as you just described it, bailout, when I believe that it's rescue, because – because of the greed and excess in Washington and Wall Street, Main Street was paying a very heavy price, and we know that (John McCain, Presidential candidates debate, Belmont University, Nashville, Tennessee, October 7, 2008)

And:

So let us summon a new spirit of patriotism; of service and responsibility where each of us resolves to pitch in and work harder and look after not only ourselves, but each other. Let us remember that if this financial crisis taught us anything, it's that we cannot have a thriving Wall Street while Main Street suffers – in this country, we rise or fall as one nation, as one people (Barack Obama, Election Night Victory Speech, Grant Park, Chicago, Illinois, November 4, 2008).

In some cases, the metaphoric expressions related to social inequality and ideological differences are used together in order to verbalize the real political picture even better:

It's the answer spoken by young and old, rich and poor, Democrat and Republican, black, white, Latino, Asian, Native American, gay, straight, disabled and not disabled – Americans who sent a message to the world that we have never been a collection of Red States and Blue States: we are, and always will be, the United States of America (Barack Obama, Election Night Victory Speech, Grant Park, Chicago, Illinois, November 4, 2008)

Despite (or perhaps because of?) the obvious under-representation of female politicians in both countries. gender has become an actual area of interest in studies of both the American and the Russian

political discourse. As more and more female politicians appear in the political spotlight of both major parties, this issue is gaining momentum in the American political life. Compare how figurative and metaphorical discourse entered the 2008 election campaign over a vice-presidential candidate's use of the word 'lipstick'. And, though some female politicians (like Sarah Palin) try to distance themselves from focusing on gender, the issue is still clearly reflected in their discourse in that they sometimes use unusual, male-oriented metaphors like 'the good old boys' club':

> But the age issue I think was more significant in my career than the gender issue. Your resumé not being as fat as your opponent's in a race, perhaps [but] being able to capitalize on that… being able to use that in campaigns – I don't have 30 years of political experience under my belt … that's a good thing, that's a healthy thing. That means my perspective is fresher, more in touch with the people I will be serving. I would use that as an advantage. I've certainly never been part of a good old boys' club. That I would use in a campaign. And that's been good. (From an interview with Sarah Palin, *Time*, August 2008)

Elvin Lim (2009) recently discussed the use of gendered metaphors by Hillary Clinton in an untraditional manner, by comparing it with Madonna's use in her discourse. Analyzing the Clinton speeches, we might infer that gender is an important part of her agenda, even if she tends to use fewer metaphoric expressions related to gender than do the media covering her political activity (See: 'Sen. Clinton busts out at Museum of Sex'. MSNBC. August, 2007).

The role of gender in the Russian political discourse has been investigated by E. Gritsenko 2005, who focused on metaphoric expressions such as женщина-кандидат-бомж (the woman-candidate-homeless), бабушка российского комсомола (the grandma of the Russian komsomol) or кандидат-мужик (the candidate-guy), used to identify certain politicians who especially emphasize gender

differences. These metaphoric expressions appeal to the receiver's background and help her or him identify political realities with regard to certain Russian politicians and to determine their stance towards gendered identity. They reflect a trend in the Russian political culture to pay more attention to a politician's appearance or personal biography than to his or her policy. As the recent US elections have shown, such an emphasis is impossible to avoid in most political cultures. But such findings are tentative and more detailed studies are necessary.

*Conclusion*

The success of a metaphor lies in the successful functioning of its socio-cultural format or frames of reference, both for the sender and the receiver of the message. Successful metaphor is a tool that allows the receiver to understand more thoroughly what frames of reference are involved. The original image of the metaphor is capable of coming back to life and being reconstructed. But the new and complex text of the discourse dissolves the familiar picture and creates a new, mostly non-verbal picture. Thus, an explicit prototype becomes implicit, the accumulated human experience becomes relevant and the metaphoric message becomes formally discrete. The cognitive approach to metaphor allows us to see metaphor as a source of data informing us about the deep processes within the human mind, as well as being a productive way of building a linguistic picture of the world. This important observation should be kept in mind when studying different world views; neither should it be ignored when different languages and different discourses are being explored.

Metaphors in both discourses, American and Russian, appear to reflect, for the most part, different ways of describing relevant world-views, as they are part of ready-made systems of categorizing what people perceive as being relevant. While some metaphors are associated with categories common to both cultures, the opposi-

tions contained in the categories reflect themselves in the differing metaphoric expressions. We conclude that most of the political discourses belonging to different political cultures are built on such oppositions, just as it is the case for discourses comprised within one particular political culture.

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