A Metaphorical Election Style?

Patterns of symbolic language use in Belgian politics.


Dieter Vertessen
Christ’l De Landtsheer

Dieter Vertessen
PhD Candidate
University of Antwerp
dieter.vertessen@ua.ac.be
Tel:+32(0)32204128

Christ’l De Landtsheer
Prof Communication Sciences
University of Antwerp
christl.deLandtsheer@ua.ac.be
Tel: +32(0)32204968
Fax: +32(0)32204420
A Metaphorical Election Style?

Patterns of symbolic language use in Belgian politics.

Abstract.
This paper examines whether and how the metaphorical language of Belgian politicians at election time differs from their language use during periods in between elections. We expect politicians at election time to be eager to win the votes and to intensify their persuasive effort. Politicians, therefore, may attempt to establish a direct link between their worldview and the world of the citizens. Political metaphor being a gateway to the public's thinking facilitates this linkage. The theory and method section of the paper argues how we define and identify metaphor. The section summarizes what recent research concludes on the topic of metaphor change in politics. It details the method used to assess metaphor power in political language. Samples consist of speech by Belgian politicians on television news and in newspapers. The empirical section presents the results of the calculation for these samples of a "metaphor power index" and two test variables - language complexity and a particular use of modals- (e.g. De Landtsheer, 1998; De Landtsheer and De Vrij, 2004). The results reveal the importance of emotive language as it is exemplified by metaphor at election time.

Keywords: Political language, language style, rhetoric, metaphors, campaign coverage, Belgium.

Introduction

Most research on political language and political communication has been conducted to reveal the essence of the messages politicians want to convey. Political scientists and scholars in communication have attempted to unravel politician’s words in order to determine what these politicians are really saying by way of policy or various types of content analysis. The political vocabulary, historical semantics and political lexicology movements are illustrative examples of the semiotic approach as it is performed by linguists, philosophers and historians. Although these movements made and still make important contributions to the development of the research field of political communication, they mostly ignore one major dimension of language, namely the language use which provides for the meaning of the uttered words in a general sense. How we say things and how we verbally express our thoughts both affect which meaning the words acquire, independent of their mere content significance. It can be learned from detailed accounts of political language studies (De Landtsheer, 1998) and political metaphor (Beer and De Landtsheer, 2004) that both style and form matter in politics. The understanding that style affects meaning and that it contributes to certain desired or sometimes unintended effects is not new, and it is recognized in a wide
array of scientific work. Especially scholars in political psychology, political communications and in the domain of sociolinguistics have drawn extensively upon these insights.

This paper starts from the general point of view that style is important in politics, and it furthermore argues that the style that politicians use when addressing their audience is subject to change. These changes in political style may occur at the subconscious level of discourse. This may be particularly true when changes are due to factors at the general level of society that include political, economic, or psychological changes that affect the audience. For example, when international diplomatic relations worsen, when violence breaks out or when the economy crashes, content and style analyses of political language show significant short-term and even long term differences before and after the turning-point. During a time of crisis, politicians use a more terse, condensed, persuasive and therefore emotive language, in order to create a closer contact with the citizens (e.g. De Landsheer 1994; De Landsheer and De Vrij, 2004; Ivie, 2004; Rosati and Campbell, 2004; Shimko, 2004).

The actual style used by politicians, however, is also affected by factors that play at the organisational or media level (globalization, commercialization, technological innovations). In a mass media age, media have substantial power to decide which messages pervade the public sphere and which do not. Critics of modern day consumer culture like Habermas (1989) highlight this media dependency of contemporary politicians and consider it to be destructive for democracy. Media and journalists no longer perform their initial watchdog function, guarding public interest and democracy, but they open and close the gates to the public sphere according to other evaluative criteria, namely saleability and commercial range of the news. Politicians have to adapt their style in order to meet the mass media demands. When sound bites, under ten seconds in length, replace integral speeches on television news, one may be convinced that media format changes also have important implications for the politician’s language style (Zaller, 1999). The same shift from content to form can be observed in print media as part of the tabloidization tendency (Esser, 1999). In order to be mutual beneficial for media and politicians, media format and language style have to be complementary. At different stages of the communication process, politicians and the mass media are struggling for the most beneficial audience. Furthermore, political language style by politicians changes according to the situation they face (e.g. elections). Due to this kind of factors, there can be observed the dynamic and most often deliberate application of style.

This paper aims at providing evidence for the dynamic application of political style by testing hypotheses at both the media and the situational level. Does the political language use
differ on commercial and on public television as well as in tabloids and in quality newspapers? Does there exist a distinct election style?

Thinking about language style and form, and its changes, metaphors necessarily come into view. Metaphors are typical examples of language use instead of being structural language elements. Aristotle defines these as applications of alien names, and in his definition the act of applying is emphasized. In other words, metaphors are not units of discourse but they are forms of use of discourse. Words can only become metaphorical in a context. This characteristic in combination with the substantial amount of theorizing on metaphors in general, justifies focusing on metaphors when language style is the subject of research (Beer and De Landtsheer 2004; De Landtsheer en De Vrij, 2004).

Therefore, this study of language style changes at election time in a diverse range of media, concentrates on metaphorical differences. The paper firstly presents an overview of different perspectives on the role of metaphor in politics, and it then clarifies their importance. In the empirical part, the metaphor analysis by De Landtsheer (e.g. 1992) is applied to various samples of metaphor language by Belgian politicians. “Metaphor indices” are calculated as quantitative representations of different metaphorical language styles. The focus is on metaphor, but two other style variables, integrative complexity and the empathetic use of modals, are included in the analysis as test variables.

Different perspectives on metaphor

The current study combines the principles of the classical metaphor approach with its reasonably new application in the political domain. By highlighting some critical perspectives on metaphors and by explaining how they relate to each other, we offer a cognitive frame in which our research has to be interpreted (Beer and De Landtsheer, 2004).

Prior to understanding the rhetorical power of metaphor in politics, we have to fall back to the common sense unproblematic meaning of the word “metaphor”. Although its further characterization soon seems to result in apparently irreconcilable differences (however unjustly, as we will state later on), there exists an original meaning which most researchers seem to be able to subscribe without much difficulty. Not surprisingly, this is the etymological meaning of the word “metaphor”. Etymologically, “metaphor” comes from “meta” and “pherein” and it means “to transfer” or “to carry beyond” (Hellsten, 2002; Luke, 2004). There is much less consensus however on what exactly is being “transported” or on
what effects this “transportation” has. This is also reflected in the lack of agreement on the terms defining metaphorical processes, although we suppose they more or less refer to the same. Even though a diverse terminology is being used, emphasis is on the surprisingness metaphor provides for, on the strangeness of metaphor content to the context, or even on the conflict between metaphor content and context (e.g. Koeller, 1975; Mooy, 1976). Metaphor content is seen as the alien word or word group that is introduced into another context. Vehicle (Richards, 1936), focus (Kittay, 1987), ground (Cacciari, 2001) or subsidiary subject (Black, 1979) are terms being used to denominate the metaphor content. Metaphor context, being the subject that is discussed, is entitled the tenor (Richards, 1936), the frame (Kittay, 1987), the topic (Cacciari, 2001) or the principal subject (Black, 1979). Recently source and target came into use to denote this two interacting key elements (Beer and De Landtsheer, 2004) that create the metaphor and its power.

Turning back to metaphor models, we can discriminate between three main approaches. Firstly, the oldest metaphor model is the substitution model. This semantic-oriented model is based on Aristotle’s basic principles. In this view, words have proper fixed meanings in a given context. This stringency incorporates the possibility of error. When alien words are introduced in a specific context, the original link between word and meaning, or between “signifier” and “signified”, is disrupted. Metaphorical substitution transforms the meaning from a literal to a figural one. The substitution model does not assume that inserting alien meaning in a different context results into further interaction or resonance between source and target. Metaphors rather transport meaning than that they create meaning, and they are mainly rhetorical. In this view, metaphors are deliberately constructed tropes, aimed at causing desired and direct effects. They are indispensable devices for orators, who aim at being persuasive by hiding particular perspectives while stressing others, and who obtain the audience’s attention and involvement by simplifying complex problems (Beer and De Landtsheer, 2004; Hellsten, 2002).

In contrast to Aristotle, scholars like Thomas Hobbes or publicists like George Orwell emphasized the undesirability of metaphor use. Faithful to an empiricist or a critical tradition, they consider the use of metaphor as a cardinal abuse of language that could obfuscate thinking. This fear brings us to a second, more modern metaphor model. Language that has the power to corrupt thinking extends the scope of the substitution model (Grey, 2000). This new “interaction” or “combination” model assumes that metaphor effects are more indirect and unconscious, and therefore less easily recognizable. The main principle of the combination model is that in the blended space between metaphorical target and source new
meaning is created, based on mostly primal conceptual schemata present in our minds. This new meaning is based on the original meaning of source and tenor, but cannot be considered their mere application. (Beer and De Landtsheer, 2004).

At this point, the influential writings of Lakoff and Johnson (1980) should be mentioned. In their cognitive theory of metaphor they demonstrate with an endless list of examples that thinking itself is metaphorical. According to Woodman (1997) metaphor is the literal language of the soul. This linkage between thought and language suggests that metaphors play an important role in framing the outside world. Choosing a particular metaphor means taking a stand. Hitler’s “medical” language is a clear example of how thought can be invaded by the deliberate use of language. By defining and describing supposed enemies and all kind of threats to the Nazi state as dangerous diseases and deadly plagues, Hitler tried to prepare, with the help of metaphor, the Germans’ minds for murder, and the mass killings of the Jewish people. The images of disease evoked by the medical metaphors suggest the necessary acceptance of the “therapy proposals” of biased treatment prescribed by the Nazis (De Landtsheer, 1987; Edelman 1977). In short, in the interaction or combination model, metaphorical language produces meaning which has powerful cognitive effects.

A third syntactical approach presents us with a model that moves from concentrating on the substitution of meaning (cfr. the substitution model) or the cognitive creation of meaning (cfr. the interaction model) to a more structural understanding of metaphor. In line with Ricoeur (1977), this approach considers the copula of the verb “to be” a crucial element in metaphorical language. “To be” connects the constitutive parts of metaphor and places them next to each other. Contrary to the substitution model, the syntactical model does not stress replacement of words or meaning, but it emphasizes the structural modalities of the occurrence of metaphor. In “The Rule of Metaphor: the Creation of Meaning in Language”, Ricoeur states that this connection at the same time denotes what is and what is not.

Though we discriminated between three different approaches, we should note that integration between the three models is both possible and recommended. For example, referring to the third syntactical model, a closer reading of Ricoeur (1977) reveals that he perceives cognitive effects in the dynamic relation between semantic (or literal) and symbolic (or metaphorical) readings of texts. Besides this, the scrutinizing of language structure and syntax resembles Lakoff and Johnson’s (1980) interpretation of metaphor. These cognitive linguists argue that conceptual metaphors like “discussion is war” are at the centre of our thinking. Those conceptual metaphors show a structure that is similar to the one that is
intended by the syntactical model (Hellsten, 2002). Since we find traces of the combination model in the syntactical model, we may conclude that the application of one model does not necessarily exclude the others. Therefore, in our opinion, all three models offer different perspectives on the same and they consequently have different strong and weak points. As they originate from different scientific disciplines including philosophy, rhetoric, literacy criticism, linguistics and cognitive psychology, they are complementary rather than contradictory (Beer and De Landtsheer, 2004). The current study follows an integrative approach, that searches for rhetorical effects in which metaphors are able to influence thought and behaviour.

Metaphors in political language

Here we will further clarify the significance of metaphors in political language, whereas in the previous section we directed attention to metaphor theories more in general. Why do politicians use metaphors? Which advantages result from well thought out metaphor use? Why do metaphors have the effects they have?

Firstly, an important advantage of metaphor use is that it enables politicians to make close contact to the audience. This way, speaker and public are drawn closer to one and another, constituting a community. Politicians do so in order to facilitate their persuasive efforts (Cohen, 1979; Weinberger, 1995; De Landtsheer and De Vrij, 2004). The language use is “impressive”, when it is mainly audience-oriented, or aimed at making contact with the public. Demagogues do so to the highest possible degree, in contrast to doctrinaires, who are neglecting their audience, and who use “expressive” language (Windt, 1987).

Secondly, emotions play a major role in provoking metaphorical effects. When politicians feel the need to be emotive, they turn to metaphors. Furthermore, metaphors have their effects, in part because emotions are all but trivial, especially in politics. Aristotle already conceived of the power of emotions as the cornerstone of advantageous political language. According to Aristotle in his Rhetorica, pathos is only one of the three forms of persuasion in rhetoric. The other two, namely logos and ethos, are closely related to pathos. Rhetoric has to appeal to reason by offering a reasonably amount of integrated arguments (=logos) and the virtue of the orator has to raise credibility (=ethos). Rhetorical efforts, however, are in vain if they don’t move the audience. Rhetoric has to appeal to emotions in order to persuade people and motivate them for cognitive or behavioral change. (Beer and De Landtsheer, 2004; De Landtsheer and De Vrij, 2004).
Their attempts to trigger emotions urge politicians to turn to an emotive language. Consequently, metaphors as pre-eminient type of emotive language are popular rhetorical devices. Metaphors smooth the way for successfully influencing the public’s thought and behaviour. “The powerful suggestion mechanism activated by metaphors triggers underlying emotions and connects them with political individualities and policies.” (Beer and De Landtsheer, 2004). The aims of metaphor usage by political leaders are divergent: for example, metaphors can mobilize the public by highlighting only one side of a developing story or they can reassure them by offering ready-to-use solutions for ongoing problematic situations. Metaphors also enable politicians to introduce ambiguity if clarity is disadvantageous or they can serve as excellent campaigning instruments at election time, which is one subject of this study. These examples are some of the diverse forms that persuasive political language can take.

When stressing emotions, we first have to make clear that we do not intend to marginalize the importance of reason. In order to persuade, the argument made should be more or less coherent and acceptable. Even further leaving the particular domain of rhetoric, style isn’t everything; content still matters. An honestly well informed public is necessary in a democracy. (see e.g. Delli Carpini 1999; Marcus, 2002; Palmer, 2004). The point we want to make is that the political domain isn’t restricted to the reign of reason. Political scientists have mostly ignored this insight. Aristotle was far ahead of his time in recognizing the power of emotion in rhetoric and in politics in general. Most of his successors minimized the effects of emotion in politics or feared democracy threatening effects. Viewing reason and emotion dualistically as opposing forces became a common practice (Grabe, Zhou and Barnett, 2001). The notion of a “deliberative democracy”, for example, where policy results from a structured public debate, is often based on a conception of deliberation as the one by Elster that contrasts reason and arguing to emotion and bargaining (Hoggett and Thompson, 2002). Political language, as a result, needs to be freed from the excessive use of emotional style elements (Beer and De Landtsheer, 2004; Marcus 2002; Richards 2004).

Recent advances in neurosciences and cognitive sciences shed new light on the importance and desirability of emotion. By attaching importance to the not necessary negative influence of emotion, this research reconnects to the above stated theory of rhetoric by Aristotle. According to neuroscientists, rational thinking only becomes possible because emotional experience precedes cognitive processes. Emotions direct attention towards what is perceived as the most important. Since people in our society are confronted with lots of signals and competing stimuli, the need for selection becomes obvious (Marcus 2002). Media
nowadays inundate their public with information, some of which is useful but mostly hidden in a larger pool of rather useless information. Mass media make selection even more urgent and apparent. Therefore, metaphors are not just ornamental idioms. By controlling emotions, metaphors can produce both more rhetorical and more cognitive effects. Metaphors, accordingly, direct attention to what seems to be worth the mental effort. Because emotions play such an important role, metaphors sometimes surpass mere persuasive effects. Metaphors, then, become “the gateway to reason”.

**Changing metaphorical needs**

Politicians use different language styles when the situation they face differs. Being emotive and persuasive is not a condition that has to be fulfilled to the same degree at all times. Political crisis for example demand more persuasive language. (De Landtsheer and De Vrij, 2004). Besides situational differences, language style differences exist between individual politicians or between political factions. Previous research by one of the authors (De Landtsheer, 1998) has shown for example that speeches by members of distinguished political factions in the European Parliament differ from speeches by political opponents in their metaphorical power. Extremist speeches, whether they are left-wing or right-wing, are found to be more metaphorical than the language of centre political groups. Similarly, metaphor power of female politicians is slightly lower than the metaphor power of their male colleagues. We argue that the same division between situational (external) and ontological (internal) factors can be observed at the media level. On the one hand, what makes it into the news is strongly dependent of situational factors. If a news event itself is persuasive thru metaphorical language, chances are great the coverage of the event will show comparable elevated levels of emotive language. In this view, television news for example functions like a window on the world. However, media and the news do more than just reflecting the world; they are all but neutral “information transmitters”. Sometimes, this kind of distorted news coverage brought in a specific active style “culminates in a point of view”, articulating some aspects and minimizing others (Gregg, 2004). According to Bennett (2001), in an age of mediated politics, news “is not just a record of events, it’s an even in and of itself”. The modalities of this dynamic process depend from the goals the medium wants or needs to meet. Does television news want to attract the biggest number of viewers or are journalists more concerned with public interest, guarding honesty and fairness? In our opinion, these ontological differences correspond with style differences, which include language styles. As
our research focuses mainly on situational aspects at the politicians’ level and on ontological aspects at the media level, mainly emphasizing metaphorical differences on television news, we will turn to those two in more detail.

A metaphorical election style

How the language style politicians apply is affected at what we call the society level by political or societal change or by events like for example crisis (= situational influence at the politician’s level) has been the subject of various studies. We pick out some research and explain its importance before turning to the subject of our own research. Lasswell highlighted the existence of a political crisis style. Obviously, Lasswell expects this style to come forward in crisis times (Lasswell, 1949). He further describes this style as “ornamental, effect-contrasted, emotive, repetitious and accessory”. He contrasts this style to an “effect-modeled, varied, and cognitive noncrisis style, with pure signs”. Lasswell argues that when emotions gain importance during crisis, politicians turn to a distinctive emotive figurative language, of which metaphors are seen as the most important feature. The topic of language style differences and rhetoric was further elaborated on by one of his followers, De Sola Pool. In his early work he concentrated on the nature and influence of political discourse. A detailed content analysis in newspapers during WOII for example reveals that during peace time language is more varied than during war. Another finding is that totalitarian regimes also show lower levels of variation in discourse (De Sola Pool, 1956).

Recent research confirms those early conclusions: Anderson observed how discourse style in Russia evolved when the government changed from authoritarian to democratic. He established significant style changes between 1964 and 1993 (Anderson, 1998). In the democratic period, “utterances by speakers are more likely to draw attention to the reasonableness of the speaker than are utterances by their authoritarian communist predecessors” (Anderson, 1998). Turning back to metaphors, Rosati and Campbell show how the metaphors and images of President Carter and two of his most influential staff members change, partly due to changes in the foreign political situation (Rosati and Campbell, 2004). One of the authors of the current study (De Landtsheer 1987) concluded that during economic crisis, when unemployment rates rise and purchasing power drops, politicians use a more metaphorical and stronger language. They attempt to reassure their public, and they help it to cope with ‘social stress’, a mental state which occurs when anxiety levels in society are elevated (Fritzsche, 1994). The same metaphorical shift can be retrieved when other reasons compell politicians to be more persuasive, for example, when political crisis strikes, as a
result from failure of soldiers abroad, unable to achieve their goals (see e.g. The Srebrenica crisis study; De Landtsheer and De Vrij, 2004) or when riots break out, after the racist murder of an immigrant (see e.g. Abou Jahjah’s rhetoric and the CCC-Theory; De Landtsheer, 2004).

The current paper firstly focuses on situational metaphorical differences at the politician’s level. By examining the influence of approaching elections on metaphor use, our research contributes to the further development of knowledge about this situational factor. The existence of a “metaphorical election style”, that is similar to Lasswell’s crisis style (1949) is investigated. Both styles may have in common the need for extremely persuasive and therefore emotive language. We will return to this in section “Research questions and hypotheses”.

Metaphorical differences between media types

Ontological differences at the media level constitute our second focus of research. Different media types require different metaphor use. We call these differences “ontological” because they refer to the internal structure and characteristics of distinctive media types. Metaphor use is not always the same, this time not due to societal or situational change, but because of ontological inclinations towards one form of dealing with metaphorical language. In our research, we discriminate between four media types or formats: public television, commercial television, quality papers and tabloids. We justify focusing mainly on the predicted bias in metaphor language on public and commercial television by referring to two reasons. Firstly, in our research quality papers and tabloids are considered test variables to enhance the validity of our conclusions, and, secondly, we believe some parallels can be drawn between processes determining metaphor use on television and in papers.

Public and commercial broadcasting differ. For example, public broadcasting traditionally executes a different function than private or commercial broadcasting. “The common aim of public television in the Reithian tradition was to serve the broader public good, combining popular mass entertainment with serious informational programs about public affairs” (Holtz-Bacha and Norris, 2001). In a democratic society, public broadcasting has to ensure a sufficient amount of public participation. In order to increase participation, public broadcasters are mainly financed through licence fees or the state (Peter, Lauf and Semetko, 2004). On the contrary, commercial broadcasters have no other superior function to fulfil but to survive and to make profit in a highly competitive media world. In order to achieve this goal, commercial broadcasters have to appeal to largest possible number of viewers or “customers”. Advertisers only show interest in buying advertising time from
The different nature of public and private television has important implications for the content of the broadcasts. Studies have examined whether television news on commercial stations shows more aspects of “tabloidization” than television news on public stations. Esser (1999) defines “tabloidization” by its focus on soft news and by an “overall decrease in journalistic standards”. Although little empirical evidence has been found until today, most researchers believe that “tabloidization” (a term that originally refers to print media) is more important in commercial news broadcasts (Holtz-Bacha and Norris, 2001). As a result, more infotainment and sensationalism arises in commercial media.

What is the linkage between metaphors and the above stated? In our view, there exists a common ground between metaphor use and sensational news. Both trigger emotive functions and provoke “emotional and sensory stimulation” (Grabe, Zhou and Barnett, 2001). Since viewing figures are critical to the commercial media world, we argue that their importance causes an increased attention for sensationalism, which seems to comprise metaphors. We therefore expect the “metaphor power indices”, a concept that we will clarify in the “Data and Method” section, to be higher in television news on commercial stations then on public broadcasting.

This way, our study certainly contributes to the study of sensationalism because formal aspects as source for differences have been mostly ignored until today, what is in contrast to the weight that is attributed to content in traditional research (Grabe, Zhou and Barnett, 2001). It is not a surprising finding that if science has neglected the importance of emotion, formal dimensions in general have been ignored, and that analyses have been reduced to content analyses. Our research aims at filling this gap and adds some data from newspapers. Although it is recognized that the dynamic determining public television is not the same as the one determining quality or prestige print press, it is argued that journalists from both media are less worried about the size of their audience than their colleagues from commercial media. Summarizing the above, since different media types have different requirements, we expect some of the journalists to be virtually obligated to turn to metaphors, whereas others may find metaphor use rather optional.

**Research questions and hypotheses**
Given the multi-faceted character of the research, we bring together our assumptions and hypotheses and integrate them into one single general research question: what is the impact of approaching elections on metaphor use or on language use in general by politicians in popular media as well as in prestige or quality-guarding media? This is a complex question with multiple dimensions, so we have to discriminate between several aspects determining the dynamic application of style.

Firstly, based on the review of literature, we expect politicians to make an extra rhetorical effort at election time to persuade their public. We assume this effort results in a metaphorical stronger language: politicians use more metaphors that are more intense and that evoke other, more striking images. Triggering emotions in order to persuade, which is a main effect of metaphor use, really becomes necessary when voters are about to execute their crucial democratic task.

Secondly, previous research shows the usefulness of distinguishing between language style in popular media and in non-popular or quality-guarding media. We argue that politicians’ speech in popular media is more sensational and therefore emotive and metaphorical than in quality-guarding media. We suppose this is due to the different selection criteria used by journalists, but we admit that the possibility exists of politicians adapting their speech in order to meet the media demands. The difference between these two is interesting, though irrelevant, since our research focuses on the amount of persuasive language that has the potential to reach the public.

Thirdly, we assume this metaphorical language is part of a broader persuasive language pattern. Metaphors aren’t the only devices at hands of politicians and media owners, eager to win the votes and to make the biggest earnings.

**Method and samples**

*The CCC-theory*

As a methodology, we use the metaphor power model by De Landtsheer (1994) that draws on various linguistic and social-scientific theories. The model aims at assessing metaphor power of political texts, by way of a “metaphor power index”. This model became part of an umbrella theory, the Crisis Communication Combination Theory or CCC-theory, encompassing two more style elements, namely language complexity and the use of modals (De Landtsheer and De Vrij, 2004). Combined with metaphors into the framework of the CCC-theory, these three different theories or models offer a balanced view on politicians’
language styles. The CCC-theory assumes that politicians’ persuasive efforts result, firstly, in a stronger, figurative, metaphorical language (variable: metaphor power). Secondly, persuasive language requires simple arguments (variable: language complexity) and thirdly, in order to persuade successfully, politicians have to establish strong ties with their public during the communication process (variable: use of modals). These basic principles are compatible with Lasswell’s (1949) “ornamental, effect-contrasted, emotive, repetitious and accessory” persuasive crisis style, we have dealt with before. Each of them focuses on one aspect of the definition of “crisis-style”. On the media level, we argue that politicians’ persuasive style resembles the sensational commercial media style. Applying the CCC-theory to study the different language styles of different media, is thus expected to produce important and interesting results. The following paragraphs clarify the three variables of the CCC-theory and explain how scores are assessed. As we focus on metaphors, we devote more attention to the metaphor power index than to complexity scores or to the modal variables.

**Metaphor power**

The “metaphor power index” conceptualizes a quantitative metaphor content analysis. Although it was developed to gauge the level of anxiety in society during crises by looking at metaphor language, this paper uses it to research a persuasive and emotive language style, apart from language style during crises. The index is calculated based on three variables, namely metaphor frequency, intensity and content.

How frequently metaphors are used (F) provides us with important clues about the metaphor power of discourse. In our opinion, applying language with a higher metaphor frequency enables politicians to be more persuasive, as more emotion triggering elements pervade the public sphere. Therefore, just counting metaphors is a useful technique. The metaphor frequency should be calculated relative to the total amount of language or speech of the sample. When examining spoken language, for example the appearances of politicians on television news, we divide the total number of metaphors (f) by the total number of minutes politicians speak (st). Metaphor frequency then denotes the average number of metaphors per minute. When considering written language, for example interviews in newspapers, we calculate the metaphor frequency per sample of 200 words in length (total number of words = tw). According to Schreuder and Gilbers (2004), the normal speech rate in Dutch is approximately 180 words per minute. A small test we conducted revealed that average speech rates of politicians on Belgian television news are slightly higher. It was decided to normalize the frequency by using 200 words per minute instead of 180 words. As a consequence, we can
compare metaphor frequency of written and spoken language, since 1 minute of spoken speech corresponds to 200 words.

Spoken language: \( F = \frac{f}{st} \), written language: \( F = \frac{f}{tw/200} \).

The second variable is the intensity (I) or the originality score of the metaphors. Metaphor theory states that innovative, creative and original metaphors are more intense than dormant or dead metaphors (Tsoukas, 1991). If the reference strength to the first-order meaning of the metaphor - this is the literal meaning of the metaphorical source - is still strong, then we call it a strong metaphor. In contrast, if the literal meaning does not come to mind, metaphors are weak (Black, 1962; Mooy, 1976). The distinction between the two is important, because the intensity of metaphors has an impact on their potential effects. (Tsoukas, 1991). In 1946, George Orwell already recognized this difference when he promoted reserving metaphor use to strong metaphors in order to clean out political language: “Never use a metaphor, simile or other figure of speech which you are used to seeing in print” (Orwell, 1946). In the metaphor power model, metaphors were given intensity scores with values ranging from (1) for “weak” (w) metaphors, over (2) for “normal” (n), to (3) for “original, strong” (s) metaphors. “I” stands for the sum of the weighted values of metaphor intensity divided by the total number of metaphors (T). This gives the following formula:

\[
I = \frac{(1w + 2n + 3s)}{T}
\]

The third variable introduces the content (D) of the metaphor. Different semantic fields, according to Kittay (1987) identified by different lexical fields, have different metaphor power. Different semantic fields are awarded scores on a scale ranging from 1 till 6, based on insights from psycholinguistic and social-psychological theories. As the metaphor model was primarily constructed in order to analyze language during crisis times, the classification into categories and the determination of scores are focused on the ability of language to raise support during difficult times. We suppose crisis language and campaigning language in popular media have in common their orientation towards persuasion and emotion. Therefore, we assume that those semantic fields that have proven to be efficient stress reliefs during crises, equally contribute to persuasion at election time. Whether these assumptions are correct, should appear from our data.
The first content category consists of metaphors that use images from the semantic field “everyday life material reality”. This category includes images of things in material reality, family metaphors and popular sayings (p). Because the connection between them and the real material world itself is still strong, there is little chance of them making escape from reality possible. Therefore, we consider their metaphor power to be lower and give them the lowest score (1).

Nature metaphors (n) belong to the second category. We give them the score (2) as we associate them with conformation and natural order, though they always contain the possibility of change.

Thirdly, political, intellectual and technological metaphors (po) are often sophisticated constructs that are suited for simplifying complex political processes. On the one hand, they enable politicians to provide a perspective for framing multi-dimensional processes. On the other hand, they don’t produce the same amount of emotive power as our higher categories. This ambiguity justifies the intermediate score (3).

Disaster and violence metaphors (d) are much less neutral than the metaphor categories we have mentioned before. They have in common the expression of despair, depression or aggression. Their ominous character implies a stronger emotional involvement (4).

Sports, games and drama metaphors (sp) receive the value (5). They appeal to many people and they are manipulative. As elections either can be “won” or “lost”, we argue this category plays an important role in election or campaigning language.

The category we attribute the highest metaphor power (6) to, is the category of body, disease, medical and death (m) metaphors. According to Gregg (2004) metaphors have more emotive power if they are closely related to the body, as “embodied meaning” plays a central role in our cognitive processes. Hitler’s “medical” language we mentioned above, only was effective thru it’s extensive use of emotional, medical and body images. (De Landtsheer, and De Vrij, 2004). The following formula brings together all the content categories and their values, which results in the content score:

\[ D = \frac{(1p + 2n + 3po + 4d + 5sp + 6m)}{T} \]

Multiplying the scores on each of the three variables (frequency, intensity and content) gives the metaphor power index (C).

\[ C = F \times I \times D \]
Language complexity

Besides metaphors, the CCC-theory makes use of Suedfeld’s theory of integrative or cognitive complexity (Baker-Brown et al., 1983; Suedfeld, Tetlock and Streufert, 1992). According to Suedfeld’s theory, low levels of complexity in public speech represent black-and-white thinking, intermediate levels represent increasing differentiation between point of views, and high levels point to integrative thinking, or the ability to synthesize and to react flexibly. As De Sola Pool (1956) concluded that political discourse grows more simple or standardized during crises, we expect the same to happen at election time, when persuasion is needed. The less complex argumentation is, the greater the chance that it will sound reasonable to the audience. Integrative complexity is measured on an ordinary 7-point scale and is symbolized by “CC”. A CC-score of 1 indicates there is no differentiation in perspectives or arguments, whereas 7 denotes the presence of explicit differentiation and integration of arguments. We follow the detailed coding instructions provided by Suedfeld et al.

Modals

Modals are verbs that express possibility, obligation or necessity (e.g. “can”, “may”, “ought”, “need”, and “must”). (Sweetser, 1995). Politicians use modal verbs to remind the audience of certain values that should be respected. According to Anderson’s (1998) theory on “pragmatically ambiguous modals”, on which our theorizing is partly based, the “epistemic” use of modals directs the audience’s attention to the communicator’s state of mind, and the “speech act” use of modals aims at interaction with the audience. The “content” use of modals differs greatly from the other two categories, because this particular use refers to the social or physical outside world experienced by the communicator. In our research, modals are relevant because they show differences in expressive and impressive audience oriented language use. (Windt, 1987). We argue that at election time, when language is more expressive, politicians will apply more audience oriented language. We call the use of modals “empathetic” (E+) if the speaker either explicitly introduces himself in the communication process or if (s)he explicitly addresses the audience. “Content” use of modals (E-) or the reference to an outside source of possibility, obligation or necessity, is expected to be more frequent if no greater persuasive effort is required.

The crisis pattern
The crisis communication combination is symbolized by CCC and can be calculated for a text by multiplying the metaphor index C by the number of empathetic modals E+. Then we divide the result of this multiplication by the integrative complexity level CC, multiplied by the number of non-empathetic or content modals E-. Higher CCC-scores indicate language is condensed, simple and emotive. Lower CCC-scores denote language is more expressive, complex and therefore less persuasive. Summarizing, we present the formula for calculating the CCC-score that reveals when an emotive crisis pattern emerges:

\[
CCC = \frac{(C \times E^+)}{(CC \times E^-)}
\]

Samples

In order to answer our research questions, we use samples of different origins in our analysis. A first sample consists of news broadcast from three different periods. Period I (T1: January 2003) and III (T3: December 2003) are two-week periods in between elections, whereas period II (T2: May 2003) is at election time. The latter consists of the two weeks preceding the Belgian Federal Elections of May 18th, 2003. Research shows that this two-week period just before elections is the main campaigning period (Leroy and Siune, 1994; Peter, Lauf and Semetko, 2004). Every day, we analyze the main evening news broadcasts on two different television stations: VRT is a public Flemish broadcaster, whereas VTM is the largest commercial station in Flanders. Due to technical malfunctioning, two news broadcasts were no longer available (one on VTM and another one on VRT), and our final sample consists of a total of 82 news broadcasts. We are only interested in the politicians’ speech, and we neglect for example journalist’s commentary, and only analyse the speech when politicians actually say something. This selection method yields 255 minutes of politicians’ speech, more or less equally divided between VRT (128 minutes) and VTM (127 minutes).

When we assess metaphor power, we use the entire sample. However, when analyzing language complexity and modals, the two test variables, we reduce the total sample. The sound bites we analyze are often very short (on average less than 15 seconds), and they are not suited for assessing language complexity. We therefore only analyze for each non-election period and television station the 10 longest sound bites. Then we add at election time from every station ten sound bites that are comparable in length to the ones selected for periods in between elections. This results in a sample that consists of sixty sound bites and of forty and a half minutes of speech time.
In newspapers, we only analyze the front page, as this is where the most important and influential news can be found. The front page has more persuasive potential than the other pages, though we expect to find less politicians’ words by coding the front page than if we would code for example interviews. We only selected politicians’ quotes between quotations marks, in order to be sure that we only deal with politicians’ literal words. In this way, we keep the samples reasonably “clean”. The research periods are the same as the one in the television news research. Because the study aims at establishing differences between quality-guarding papers and tabloids, we use six different newspapers. Three of them are regarded as representing the Belgian quality papers: De Standaard, De Morgen and De Tijd. The other three papers are tabloids: Het Laatste Nieuws, Het Nieuwsblad and Gazet Van Antwerpen. The total sample consists of 210 newspapers (two newspapers are missing) and 8554 words. Unlike in the television news study, we analyse all three CCC-variables, including metaphors, using the same sample.

Results

As this paper focuses on metaphors, we start with the results of the metaphor language study. The data seem to confirm that politicians make an extra effort to use metaphorical language at election time. We also find differences between quality-guarding media and mere commercial media, although the data and results should be interpreted cautiously as we were not able to detect significant differences. Table 1 presents an overview of the metaphor power indices and their three constitutive parts. It is clear that there are important differences between metaphor use at election time and in between elections. For example, at election time the lowest C-score is 8.678 (VTM), whereas in between elections the highest C-score is 6.910 (VTM). An ordinary regression analysis indicates that metaphor power is significantly higher at election time than between elections.

Table 1: Metaphor frequency (F), intensity (I), content (D) and metaphor power (C) on 2003 Belgian public (VRT) and commercial (VTM) broadcasting television news at election time (T2) and between elections (T1 and T3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>T1</th>
<th>T2</th>
<th>T3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>VRT</td>
<td>VTM</td>
<td>VRT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency (F)</td>
<td>1,034</td>
<td>1,435</td>
<td>1,594</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intensity (I)</td>
<td>1,75</td>
<td>1,659</td>
<td>1,982</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content (D)</td>
<td>3,075</td>
<td>2,795</td>
<td>3,055</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metaphor index (C)</td>
<td><strong>5,567</strong></td>
<td><strong>6,654</strong></td>
<td><strong>9,648</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1 also reveals that the elevated metaphor indices at election time are mainly caused by the larger number of metaphors applied and by their intensification. At election time, politicians use on average slightly more than three metaphors per two minutes, whereas between elections the rate drops to two-and-a-half. Metaphor intensity rises on average from 1.634 between elections to 1.920 at election time. However, metaphor content scores seem to exhibit a different pattern as they are not elevated at election time. This may suggest that the hierarchical ordering of categories is affected by crisis but not by election time.

What can be said about the differences between commercial and public television? In general, television news on VRT, the public broadcaster, is - if we neglect the influence of elections - significantly less metaphorical than on VTM, the main commercial station. However, the increase of metaphor power at election time is much larger on the public station than on the commercial station. The same can be seen even more clearly in Figure 1 on the next page.

Table 2 presents an overview of the metaphor power in newspapers. Although we have to keep in mind that the sample is rather small, we are able to establish differences between metaphor use on television news and in papers. The most striking difference is that metaphor indices are much higher in papers than on television news, which is mostly caused by much higher frequency rates (see also Figure 1). Part of this bias, however, can be due to our analyzing method as we only searched for quotations on front pages. A front page has other metaphorical needs than a full-length news broadcast as they serve as “eye and attention catchers”.

Table 2: Metaphor frequency (F), intensity (I), content (D) and metaphor power (C) in 2003 Belgian quality papers and in tabloids at election time (T2) and between elections (T1 and T3)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>T1</th>
<th>T2</th>
<th>T3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quality</td>
<td>Tabloid</td>
<td>Quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency (F)</td>
<td>5,788</td>
<td>3,936</td>
<td>5,501</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intensity (I)</td>
<td>1,721</td>
<td>1,682</td>
<td>1,906</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content (D)</td>
<td>2,934</td>
<td>2,955</td>
<td>3,25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metaphor index (C)</td>
<td>29,233</td>
<td>19,556</td>
<td>34,078</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Frequency scores in Table 2 provide us with more evidence of the specific metaphor needs of the front page: as there is no clear pattern, we conclude front pages have to feature metaphorical “sound bites” at all times. However, metaphor intensity scores and metaphor content scores follow a similar pattern as on television news: political language intensifies at election time, but the content variable still does not provide us with an unambiguous result.
Figure 1: Metaphor power (C) in different 2003 Belgian media types at election time (T2) and between elections (T1 and T3)

Table 2 and Figure 1 further denote that metaphor power indices of quality papers confirm the hypothesis about the metaphorical election style. Tabloids are the only media type that has no elevated metaphor power index at election time. As they only constitute a minor part of the total sample that we analyzed, we claim, on the one hand, that a metaphorical election style exists, certainly on television news, but, on the other hand, we argue that further research is necessary to clearly understand the role of the variable “media type”.

This study includes two other style elements besides metaphors, the empathetic use of modals and language complexity, which we consider two important language style elements. Combined they strengthen language when persuasion is needed most, as they form a persuasive pattern. Table 3 presents the CCC-scores obtained by the analysis of television news.
Table 3: Metaphor power (C), empathetic use of modals (E+/E-), integrative complexity (CC) and the crisis communication combination (CCC) on 2003 Belgian public (VRT) and commercial (VTM) broadcasting television news at election time (T2) and between elections (T1 and T3)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Broadcaster type</th>
<th>T1</th>
<th>T2</th>
<th>T3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>5.567</td>
<td>9.648</td>
<td>5.462</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Commercial</td>
<td>6.654</td>
<td>8.678</td>
<td>6.910</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6.040</td>
<td>9.150</td>
<td>6.276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>2.125 (17/8)</td>
<td>4.667 (14/3)</td>
<td>0.667 (6/9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E+/E-</td>
<td>Commercial</td>
<td>0.571 (4/7)</td>
<td>1.286 (9/7)</td>
<td>0.7 (7/10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1.4 (21/15)</td>
<td>2.3 (23/10)</td>
<td>0.684 (13/19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>2.222</td>
<td>1.909</td>
<td>2.636</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CC</td>
<td>Commercial</td>
<td>1.625</td>
<td>2.182</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1.941</td>
<td>2.045</td>
<td>2.318</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>5.323</td>
<td>23.583</td>
<td>1.381</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCC</td>
<td>Commercial</td>
<td>2.340</td>
<td>5.114</td>
<td>2.418</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>4.356</td>
<td>10.289</td>
<td>1.852</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pearson correlations between (on public &amp; commercial television) :</th>
<th>C &amp; E+/E-</th>
<th>C &amp; CC</th>
<th>E+/E- &amp; CC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C &amp; E+/E-</td>
<td>0.648</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C &amp; CC</td>
<td>-0.414</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E+/E- &amp; CC</td>
<td>-0.173</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In general, CCC-scores provide us with striking evidence for the presence of a persuasive and emotive language pattern that emerges clearly at election time. Due to the nature of the CCC-index, the combined effect of C, E+/E- and CC magnifies the language styles differences. Looking at the values, at election time, the CCC-score is much higher than between elections. This is caused partly by increased metaphor power, which we discussed before, but the results indicate that the use of modals follows the same persuasive or empathetic shift. The self defined empathetic use of modals gains popularity at election time resulting in a more impressive language use. Language complexity however does not produce the expected results: although language complexity on public stations is lower at election time, commercial television shows a slightly higher complexity level at election time than between elections. In other words, at election time the simple language on commercial stations becomes more complex, whereas the more complex language on public stations simplifies. Once more we have to conclude that public television illustrates more clearly that election time is a turning point for language use. Although significance could not be established, the signs of the correlations between C, E+/E- and CC are as expected.

Table 4 indicates that even greater CCC-differences between campaigning and non-campaigning periods exist in newspapers. The CCC-value at election time (56.27) is almost six times as high as the average value between elections (10.155, not showed in table 4).
Table 4: Metaphor power (C), empathetic use of modals (E+/E-), integrative complexity (CC) and the crisis communication combination (CCC) in 2003 Belgian quality newspapers and tabloids at election time (T2) and between elections (T1 and T3)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Paper type</th>
<th>T1</th>
<th>T2</th>
<th>T3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Quality paper</td>
<td>29.23</td>
<td>34.08</td>
<td>26.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tabloid</td>
<td>19.56</td>
<td>21.85</td>
<td>27.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>25.88</td>
<td>30.06</td>
<td>22.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E+/E-</td>
<td>Quality paper</td>
<td>0.56 (9/16)</td>
<td>1.91 (21/11)</td>
<td>0.88 (7/8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tabloid</td>
<td>1.1 (11/10)</td>
<td>1.14 (8/7)</td>
<td>0.27 (3/11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>0.77 (20/26)</td>
<td>1.61 (29/18)</td>
<td>0.53 (10/19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CC</td>
<td>Quality paper</td>
<td>1.62</td>
<td>1.38</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tabloid</td>
<td>1.38</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>1.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1.55</td>
<td>1.34</td>
<td>1.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCC</td>
<td>Quality paper</td>
<td>10.15</td>
<td>47.08</td>
<td>16.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tabloid</td>
<td>15.58</td>
<td>19.85</td>
<td>4.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>12.85</td>
<td>59.27</td>
<td>7.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson correlations between (in quality papers &amp; tabloids):</td>
<td>C &amp; E+/E-</td>
<td>0.264</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson correlations between CCC-scores on television and in papers</td>
<td>CCC TV &amp; CCC Papers</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In general, complexity scores in newspapers are lower than complexity scores on television news, probably again due to the specific demands of the front page. In newspapers, the persuasive pattern for complexity scores and empathetic use of modals is more pronounced than on television news: without exception, election time shows the lowest complexity scores and the highest relative use of empathetic modals. However, the correlation between metaphor power scores and complexity scores reminds us that our data have to be handled with caution. Although we expect metaphor power to be negatively correlated with complexity scores, the measured correlation is positive. To explain this anomaly, we suggest a larger sample is required as we were only able to collect 8554 politicians’ words on front pages of 210 newspapers. However, a final prove of the validity of the CCC-theory is the high correlation (0.98) between CCC-scores on television and in newspapers, though not significant.

Conclusion

If politicians’ discourse on television news contains one metaphor every minute, and if their frequency further increases at election time, it is clear that metaphors are more than just ornaments. By using a metaphor power index we demonstrate that metaphors become more...
important at election time. This way, metaphors are part of a broader persuasive language pattern in which “being emotive” plays a central role. By using more and other metaphors, by simplifying language and by connecting with the public thru the use of empathetic modals, politicians prepare their audience for persuasion and action. This pattern, including metaphors, emerges more clearly in both quality papers and on public television news. A possible explanation for this is that the public broadcasters or prestige papers consider it their public duty to stimulate participation at election time more than ever. The persuasive shift at election time is part of a larger effort to increase the involvement of the people in politics. Commercial broadcasters and tabloids show less interest in being more persuasive at election time. Our findings illustrate well that language style is important for both politicians and media. Politicians, eager to win the votes, adhere to a specific style to persuade voters, whereas media apply a style to attract the largest possible public and, in case of quality media, to perform a public function.

Further research should reconsider media differences, as our sample was rather small. Comparing television interviews with newspaper interviews is expected to produce valuable results. Furthermore, comparing “campaigning messages”, instead of “all messages at election time” with “non-campaigning messages”, instead of “all messages between elections”, will focus on one aspect of our research more sharply. This kind of new research and our own, both highlight different features of the relation between style and situational style. The presented studies examine the total amount of political speech that has the potential to reach the public, including campaigning messages but also for example politicians’ verbal reactions on disasters. The newly suggested approach however, examines the less distorted campaigning communication on its own. Mostly neglected persuasive devices as metaphors have to be approached in myriad ways in order to recognize their importance.
References


