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The Evolution of the Journey Metaphor in Albanian Political Discourses on European Integration

ABSTRACT: Political discourse heavily relies on metaphor usage to frame how the public views or understands political issues by eliminating alternative points of view. One of the most common usages of metaphors is to positively represent future scenarios that are constructed as solutions to existing problems thus conceptualizing an ideal Utopia or the good projected in some remote space in time. Through the activation of unconscious emotional associations metaphors contribute to the 'creation' of a desired story and politicians have to tell the right story in order to persuade the public opinion and serve their ideological purposes. Since the fall of communism, Albanian politicians have mainly relied on the *journey* metaphor to conceptualize Albania's EU accession process. This particular metaphor frame is very frequent in public debates as well as in everyday language use. It is part of a system of *journey / transport* metaphors that pervades our conceptualization of processes extending over a period of time.

Through a corpus of speeches collected during the last five years this paper aims at analyzing how Albanian politicians use the *journey* metaphors to shape their political and ideological objectives. Even though different usages of the metaphor are noticed, it mostly implies an imperative for the country to learn, mature and transform during the EU integration process.

Keywords: conceptual metaphor, framing, persuasion, political discourse, Albania

Razvoj metafore potovanja v albanskih političnih diskurzih o evropski integraciji

POVZETEK: Politični diskurz se v veliki meri zanaša na uporabo metafor, da uokviri, kako javnost vidi ali razume politična vprašanja z odpravljanjem alternativnih stališč. Ena najpogostejših uporab metafor je pozitivno predstavljanje prihodnjih scenarijev, ki so zgrajeni kot rešitve za obstoječe probleme, s čimer se konceptualizira idealna utopija ali dobro, projicirano v nekem oddaljenem prostoru v času. Z aktivacijo nezavednih čustvenih asociacij metafore prispevajo k »kreaciji« želeno zgodbo in politiki morajo povedati pravo zgodbo, da bi prepričali javno mnenje in služili svojim ideološkim namenom.

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Od padca komunizma so se albanski politiki pri konceptualizaciji pristopnega procesa Albanije k EU zanašali predvsem na metaforo *potovanja*. Ta poseben metaforični okvir je zelo pogost tako v javnih razpravah kot tudi v vsakdanji jezikovni rabi. Je del sistema metafor *potovanja/transporta*, ki prežema našo konceptualizacijo procesov, ki potekajo skozi neko časovno obdobje.

S pomočjo korpusa govorov, zbranih v zadnjih petih letih, želi ta članek analizirati, kako albanski politiki uporabljajo metafore *potovanja* za oblikovanje svojih političnih in ideoloških ciljev. Čeprav je opaziti različne rabe metafore, večinoma implicira imperativ, da se država uči, dozoreva in preoblikuje v procesu integracije v EU.

Ključne besede: konceptualna metafora, uokvirjanje, prepričevanje, politični diskurz, Albanija

Introduction

In recent discussions in linguistics, psychology and philosophy, the relevance of metaphor for social and political conceptualization has been acknowledged in much more positive terms. In particular, the school of cognitive metaphor analysis, part of the larger fields of Cognitive Linguistics and Critical Discourse Analysis, which George Lakoff and Mark Johnson effectively founded with the publication of their work ‘Metaphors We Live By’ in 1980, has produced significant evidence that ‘metaphors play a central role in the construction of social and political reality’ (Johnson 1980, 159).

The field of Critical discourse analysis has garnered significant interest among researchers in linguistics, language studies and other social sciences in the past two decades (Chouliariaki and Fairclough 1999). Extensive studies on the field have displayed how closely related language, power and ideology are and especially that language is far from being neutral.

The present paper endeavours to investigate selected metaphorical expressions used to denote the relationship between Albania and the European Union from the perspective of contemporary Albanian political discourse and it is anchored on the critical discourse analytical theory. It will specifically focus on the investigation of the *European integration is a journey* conceptual metaphor.

Political context of Albania and EU relations

The Republic of Albania has been an official candidate for EU accession since June 2014 following its application for EU membership on 28 April 2009. Accession talks started in March 2020. EU accession has been a long-term ambition of the Albanian political class since the fall of Communism as the process is considered as the strongest incentive to move forward in

the process of democratization (Vurmo 2008) as well as the embodiment of liberal values (Brisku 2012).

In order to facilitate the process, the Albanian Government established a separate Ministry for EU integration matters, an action which was succeeded by the opening of the negotiations with the European Commission on a Stabilization and Association Agreement. At the dawn of its second mandate, in 2017, Prime Minister Edi Rama decided to merge the Ministry for EU integration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs causing controversies and questioning the government's commitment to lead the country towards a European path.

The same time period is characterized by a change in the discourse regarding EU accession negotiations. The Prime Minister's statements in the last five years imply notes of pessimism and surrender and suggest that Albania has done it all and the responsibility is now solely on the EU institutions. For this particular reason PM Rama has been considering other alliances such as the Open Balkans initiative together with Serbia and The Republic of North Macedonia. His discourse regarding the Open Balkans remains contradictory as he states that this initiative does not interfere with Albania's EU integration perspective.

Theoretical framework

Critical discourse analysis

The School of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) emerged in the early 1990s. It is an interdisciplinary approach to problem-oriented analysis. Despite its linguistic focus, CDA delves into social phenomena rather than studying linguistic units in isolation. Given the inherent complexity of these phenomena, a multidisciplinary approach is essential. Its primary objective is to uncover the structured mechanisms perpetuating power imbalances.

It is important to note that the term 'critical' in CDA doesn't carry a negative connotation, to be critical, in this context, entails exploring the hidden connections between language usage and underlying causes, as expressed by Fairclough (1995). Thus, critical reading in CDA surpasses hermeneutics, aiming to demystify texts ideologically shaped by power relations. It centers on the interplay between discourse and societal structures, employing open interpretations and explanations.

CDA has been widely used to analyse political discourse and is mainly focused on the manipulative potential found in lexical choices (Wodak 1989; Dijk 1993) and morpho-syntactic decisions, including activation/passivation (Leeuwen 1989) nominalization (Fowler et al. 1979) and the use of pronouns (Bramley 2001). Simultaneously, there's a growing interest in CDA towards pragmalinguistic and socio-pragmatic aspects, such as face management (Armasu 2013), the realisation of specific speech acts (Hill 1999) as well as conversational strategies and topical organization (Becker, 2007). Political metaphors are also explored using a corpus-based approach.

Conceptual metaphor

Scholars like A. Musolff, P. Chilton and G. Lakoff under the effect of Lakoff's 'Metaphors we live by' have incorporated the mechanism of conceptual metaphor into the field of discourse studies. Conceptual metaphors go beyond the borders of rhetorical metaphor. Its importance lies in the fact that it manages to project a concrete domain of knowledge into another abstract domain. In political discourse, metaphors conceptualize political behaviour and processes through an ideological point of view of reality. The analysis of metaphors in political discourse is very important since they can change the perception of reality (Chilton 1996).

Linguistically speaking, metaphor is considered as a reflection of the domain of knowledge that underlies the language users' view of the world that surrounds them. Thus, metaphor is not a random linguistic form, nor a simple rhetorical tool, but it is an embodied conceptual entity.

The exploration of metaphors proves to be highly beneficial in examining political discourse. Within the context of metaphor usage in the discourse of the European Union, scholars like Musolff, Wodak, Judge and Durovic distinguish themselves. Their collective findings affirm that the abstract process of EU integration is realized through an interplay between language, cognition and reality. Metaphors emerge as a crucial element of cognition, serving as the most pervasive cognitive and linguistic tool for shaping conceptualizations of a given reality. Consequently, metaphors play a central role in constructing social and political realities (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). This perspective aligns with Critical Metaphor Analysis, asserting that if language is a primary means of controlling people, meta-

phor becomes a key tool for individuals to regain control of language and shape discourse (Charteris-Black 2004).

The *journey* metaphor

The conceptual metaphor of a *journey* remains one of the most prevailing metaphors underlying our thinking. If we examine the metaphor taxonomy through a vertical cut based on hierarchical relations, it becomes clear that the conceptual metaphor ‘politics is a journey’ is quite intricate. This metaphor entails aspects of events such as states, causes, changes, actions, and purposes which are comprehended through physical concepts like location, force and movement. If political actions are considered as purposeful activities, we naturally reach the target conceptual metaphor ‘politics is a journey’.

This particular metaphor results to be very commonly used in political discourses who focus, especially, on conceptualizations on the European Union and European Union Integration. For instance, Musolff (2004) has made an extensive investigation into British and German perspective on the EU, Charteris-Black (2005) has analysed the journey metaphor usage in British and American discourses and Cibulskiene (2012) has studied the same metaphor in Lithuanian political discourse. The *journey* metaphor proves to be effective in political communication since the concept of the journey itself is inherently purposeful. It is the directionality that matters to political leaders who are conscious of the need to appear to have planned intentions (Charteris-Black 2005).

Methodology and data collection

The criterion followed for metaphor identification in the actual article is adopted from Charteris Black, who defines conceptual metaphors in terms of semantic tension, role in persuasion and cross domain mapping in the conceptual system. The selected corpus consists of selected speeches, press releases and media reports centering the topic of Albania’s EU accession, during the last five years. Regarding the sources, the paper relies on information published on selected online media immediately after the events. The metaphor identification process is divided in two steps. The first step involves close reading of selected speeches to identify metaphors and metaphor key words. This process is carried out using the Pragglejaz method for

metaphor identification. The second step involves the evaluation of the semantic value of literacy of the key words based on the context of the selected speeches (Charteris-Black 2011). As noted by Kövecses (2005), metaphorical linguistic expressions not only make conceptual metaphors apparent but can also be employed to deduce metaphors in thought. Establishing the conceptual mappings between the more abstract target domain and the abstract target domain (*EU integration*) and the more concrete source domain (*journey*) is crucial for constructing the scenario of a political journey.

Findings

Close analysis of selected metaphors results in the conceptualization of the EU integration process in terms of linguistic devices of movement such as start, move forward, push forward, pursue and more concretely as a path and destination. The highlighted verbs and their combinations indicate a high speed and persistence, an illustration of the governments aims and future plans. During the first term of the Rama government, especially, EU integration was a key issue raised during parliamentary speeches, electoral campaigns and various media interviews. The following is a reoccurring and repeated statement, not only by PM Rama but also by other Albanian politicians. ‘By no doubt the European path is definitely not one of the choices for us, but it is the only and the ultimate choice.’ (PM Rama)

Also, different modes of travelling are highlighted. On several occasions PM Rama has discussed the European Union as a bus and the candidate countries as potential passengers who are on board of the bus, however, do not have a seat. ‘The slow EU bus is becoming an interesting place to stay even without a free seat – no doubt the passengers of the Western Balkans can endure better the length of the trip as they follow a loud conversation between the seated guys. Let’s hear what’s next.’ (PM Rama)

The ‘seated guys’ here refers to the EU member countries from whom the passengers (Western Balkan countries/ candidate countries) expect to hear news of whether they will be secured a seat in the bus or not. The trip is also considered long, implying that the integration is not anywhere nearby but it will still take more time to be fulfilled. PM Rama has used the same metaphor in another occasion where he compares the EU bus with a Russian plane, alluding to the Wagner’s head plane crash. ‘In the

current state of affairs staying on the EU bus even without a seat is safer than sitting on a Russian plane, because the journey may be too slow and our destination too far, but one thing is as certain as death: This bus will never crash in the EU.' (PM Rama)

He reinstates here again the slowness and the distance of the process, which is not a new statement in the discourse of PM Rama. In the following passage, extracted from a speech delivered by PM Rama at the Kreisky Forum for International Dialogue in 2014, we can clearly infer Rama's view on the process of EU integration conceptualized as a journey. He states that the path towards EU was conceptualized as a *train* journey which he dislikes as this typology of a journey does not match the Albanian perspective on EU integration. Conventionally speaking train journeys are considered as slow, long distance journeys which, in PM Rama's view do not resonate with the reality of the Albanian political context. He attributes the length and slowness of the journey to the bureaucratic processes carried out in Brussels.

The viewpoint that considers the EU as long and further destination has been uttered by PM Rama in other circumstances too, by using a different metaphor: *European integration is the future*. 'There is no possible influence that can change our European belonging. Europe is a religion for us and beyond all constrains and disappointments we want to be fully part of it as a choice of our vocation.' (PM Rama)

This metaphor is similar to the *journey* metaphor as it refers to a future aim too. But instead of a spatial conceptualization (more inherent in the *journey* metaphor), this metaphor reflects a temporal conceptualization. Time is divided into the past and the future in relation to the present. The linear image of time flowing from the past towards the future, supported by accompanying metaphorical processes, reconstructs the concept of progress: whatever belongs to the past is reactionary and undeveloped, while the future is associated with notions of development and progress. Such a perception made possible statements within political discourses in which Albania's accession to the EU is portrayed as its opting for the future. However, Prime Minister Rama's statements regarding Albania's path towards EU integration seem contradictory. On the one hand, he articulates a sense of pessimism by characterizing the country's integration as

illusory and akin to a dream. However, in a contrasting vein, he reaffirms the notion that this very dream remains a worthwhile pursuit and the singular viable alternative for Albania. This duality in his discourse reflects the complexity and ambivalence inherent in country's EU aspirations.

I am not optimistic and either pessimistic, I am just realistic, which means I know, we all know that it is not about us but it is about them, the EU I mean. We have done everything to deserve the formal start of negotiations since more than two years now. But they have not delivered yet because of their own problems and lately because Bulgaria is blocking North Macedonia.

[...]

Nevertheless, I think this struggle help us realize that we must push and push forward as much as we can, without illuding ourselves while never giving up on pursuing the dream of many generations to be integrated part of Europe, whatever it will take. (PM Rama)

The *European integration is a journey* metaphor has been supplemented by another conceptual metaphor the *Europe is a building / edifice / home / fortress*. This metaphor is not confined to Albanian political discourse only. It became very popular in the mid-1980s, after Mikhail Gorbachev used the phrase common European home to emphasize the 'political vision of a collaborative way of living together for the European nations' (Musolff 2004, 127). The source concept of the building has mostly been used to denote the entity 'Europe' in its geo-political sense. It builds upon the traditions of metonymic identification between a political entity and the dynastic household or other ruling institutions.

However, in actual European political discourses, the European house almost exclusively denotes the European Union. When referring to the integration of Albania and other Western Balkans countries in the EU, the Union is depicted as a building or even fortress in some cases, which does not include the WB countries despite their undisputed geographical status as part of the European continent. This conceptualization of the EU as a building, is linguistically related to the famous phrase building Europe, uttered by French president, Nicolas Sarkozy in July 2008 during France's EU presidency, when he states that: 'We must [...] profoundly change our way of building Europe, which worries the citizens of Europe' (Samuel 2008).

Non-EU nations that belong geographically to Europe are perceived as outsiders, who may have a future chance of being allowed into the European house, by way of an extension of the already existing European house.

During the Skopje Economic Forum in June 2021, immediately after failing to establish a date for the opening of accession negotiations, PM Edi Rama stated: 'We did not fail, they failed, they have their own reasons. It's their house, not ours. We want to enter, but the house is not ours.' And further: 'We are in Europe, surrounded by European borders. They tell us that they want us to be inside, but you have to respect some rules which we have not established yet.'

In his statement Rama reinforces the concept of the EU as a fortress. He distinguishes between the European Union as an institution and Europe as a geographical entity, part of which Albania is. He plays with the paradox of being part of the European landscape, but still outside of the fortress. Also, he applies here an Us vs. Them narrative which is a rhetorical strategy that aims at oversimplifying complex issues by polarizing the involved actors and manipulating the audience into positioning themselves with one of the sides. He extensively uses the first-person plural pronoun We, also known as the Royal We, which here embodies a deictic function of expressing inclusivity. This kind of deictic expression is generally used by monarchs representing as one person the whole nation. In pragmatic theories this kind of reference is categorized as an 'exclusive we' as it solely refers to the ruler or a close group of people close to him. However, in political discourses, the royal We reflects a deceptive 'inclusive we' (Yule 1996, 11). By speaking as the representative of the country the PM includes a broader audience in the discourse space which in this case are the common people of the Republic of Albania. By doing so he is spreading the responsibility of the failure beyond the government and governmental institutions.

What can be witnessed in the last decade is that the building / edifice / house / fortress metaphor is not used by European officials and politicians coming from the member states but rather by those who are 'outside the building'. Nevertheless, the mental image of the EU as a building/ edifice/ house/ fortress is reinforced by metaphors referring only to a part of a building, or better what divides the building from the other territory. They are door and doorstep.

In an interview for AFP in February 2020, PM Rama states that: ‘Albania will not stay at Europe’s door and cry for it to open.’ This statement is reminiscent of a controversial interview that Rama gave to Politico in 2017 where he stated that: ‘The only way to keep the Balkans in this peaceful and cooperative mode ... is to keep the path to the EU open, to keep the perspective clear, to keep emotions about the EU positive. No one would like to turn [in] on themselves and look for smaller unions, everyone would like to unite in the big union. But if there’s no hope, no perspective, no space, then, of course, little unions may happen.’ And also: ‘A union with Kosovo is not my wish but a possible alternative to the closed door of the European Union.’

The above cited statements serve to underscore the Prime Minister’s assumption that Albania has satisfactorily met all the requirements set forth by the EU, thereby absolving itself from further obligations pertaining to the integration process. Notably, Prime Minister Rama implies a somewhat threatening tone when he states that the country will need to seek other alliances and look for other ‘smaller unions’. Apparently, this was not just a rhetorical device as evidenced by the events of July 2021, when Albania, in conjunction with Serbia and the Republic of Macedonia entered into an agreement to establish the ‘Open Balkan Initiative’. This initiative, notably, establishes a shared economic area encompassing all three participating countries.

Conclusions

Following a Critical Discourse Analysis and a Critical Metaphor Analysis perspective the findings identify the conceptualization of the EU integration process in terms of linguistic devices of movement such as start, move forward, push forward, pursue and more concretely as a path and destination, which belong to the semantic frame of a *journey*, thus generating the *European integration is a journey* conceptual metaphor. The journey element is reinforced by the conceptualizations of the process in terms of vehicles which on the other hand establish the perception and ideological stance of the political discourse in Albania.

The *journey* metaphor as opposed to the other static metaphors, implies an immediate imperative for Albania to learn, mature and transform during this process. From the Albanian point of view, however, there are con-

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