
COMMUNICATION MEDIATORS: THE COGNITIVE AND PRAGMA-STYLISTIC ASPECT OF TROPES IN MODERN MASS MEDIA DISCOURSE

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The paper focuses on the communicative aspect, stylistics and pragmatics of lexical tropes in mass media discourse, primarily in the press. The cognitive aspect of tropes in modern non-literary discourse is discussed to show that they are not merely expressive means of the language but complex cognitive structures which can either affirm our schematic knowledge or bring substantial changes to it. By having an insight into some aspects of cognitive metaphor theory we look upon the cases when new or alternative knowledge structures function as source domains and discuss the way in which individual authors, using both conventional and unconventional conceptual metaphors can change the role that mass media audience take in interpreting texts thus giving mass media tropes a chance to influence and mold social practice.

Key words: metaphor, cognitive metaphor, tropes, communication, mass media discourse, mass communication, stylistics, pragmatics.

It is a deep-rooted, widespread belief that nowadays mass media can no longer be treated as merely a tool providing communities with news coverage, forecasts and random analysts' opinions but as a powerful means of communication since the primal aim and motto of modern mass media discourse is to get across to tremendously large and quickly growing groups of addressees across the globe bringing them all kind of knowledge, norms and values. It will not be an exaggeration to claim that nowadays it is the informative media that monopolized the right to mold public opinion and is often held responsible for setting a tyranny of "objective coverage" of the news and "fairness" of journalistic opinion.

Given that, we agree with Jacob L. May that as to content, the newscasters are supposed to strive to represent all opinions in an equitable manner, and to use language that could be prejudicial against any group. On paper it is taken for granted that the official news and other programs should maintain a neutral stance toward all opinions found in a democratic society and the majority should not be allowed to impose its views against the minority's wishes [11. P. 298]. But in fact the "objectivity" criterion of mass media discourse has been repeatedly given a series of severe blows, thus quite frequently the media coverage of all events from G20 summits to showbiz gossip alike are often served up as neutral, objective while reflecting the interest of certain segments of communities as well as subjective interests of the individuals including journalists and reporters as the latter may have their own pragmatic aims they want to achieve getting across to their distant interlocutors.

Traditionally, presenting and interpreting the objective reality in mass media discourse is carried out along two lines: explicitly, through facts presentation, discussion and argument as well as through direct evaluation, and implicitly, through such language means as tropes which are often evasive, indirect and manifold but easily re-

cognizable and decodable by the target audience. The fact that mass media discourse is more and more viewed as a mediator in communication between the state and the public only proves the claim that it is steadily acquiring the features that rate it as more phatic, more aggressive, more incentive, urging to action. The dual nature of mass media discourse (as being at the same time opposing and supporting the ruling power) brings about other issues such as the growing awareness of the fact that by exercising its influence on the addressee the addresser eventually gets them both involved in communication conflicts imposing patterns of stereotyped reasoning and behavior [1. P. 114]. So as mass media discourse is shifting towards the emotional, the phatic, attempting to win over larger audiences, it finds itself in constant need of effective language means which could also be two-faceted, enticing, evaluative, but easily decodable and what is equally important — serving the aim of being both a means of communication and achieving social and political goals. Such language means as lexical tropes skillfully employed by mass media seem to be a valuable asset in achieving at least two pragmatic goals: firstly, to make a certain media discourse more effective, eye-catching, and consequently more competitive as compared to other types of communication; secondly, to impose (explicitly or implicitly) an ideology that can be often aimed at changing the schemata of the reader. Thus we tend to agree with Jeffries who points out that in non-literary texts (to which we can definitely allocate mass media texts in their written, electronic or oral form) the imposed propaganda can alter the schemas of the addressees (that is the portion of background knowledge that contains generic information about different types of extralinguistic facts and phenomena) in the key that these texts reinforce those ideologies, rather than challenge them [7. P. 11].

In regard to such general truth such as that of ideology being an unavoidable fact of all types of discourse it is worth studying how mass media texts can bring it home to the target audience. Besides it is of interest what language means are more favoured by the media which in its turn allows one to have an insight into how and why individual authors may choose from the regular resources of the language in representing a view of the world [7. P. 17]. In this paper we focus on stylistic means of the language, namely tropes, which are believed to be among the best language tools raising the effectiveness of communication between media and public.

A question may arise though why so much attention is given to tropes when it comes to their role in reinforcing public world view when used in mass media texts and whether we exaggerate their contribution to the communicative strategies of individual authors. But there are apparently some grounds we will try to analyze, yet briefly, further in the paper, which allow one to assume that it is the tropes we should examine carefully when trying to answer such questions as, for instance: “Why is media discourse has that competitive edge in controlling and molding the minds of the public and to what extent?”

Mass media discourse is traditionally believed to be in the possession of three main functions that is to inform, to instruct/influence and to entertain the addressee. But numerous studies of the last decades seem to suggest that the first, the most essential function of the three tends to be somewhat outshadowed by its once less prominent ones. Nowadays mass media happens to be involved in a tough competition of getting it all when it comes to the general public attention and loyalty. Thus tropes which

are characterized by a great degree of expressiveness are known to catch the reader/listener's eye and if they help the bulk of information that we, addressees, pay attention to, to stand out conspicuously in the text, it cannot be completely erased from our memory. The fact is the addressee is very selective when it comes to choosing facts and arguments he receives in communication, most assuredly focusing on those which concern him personally or match his own life experience or — in terms of linguistics — his schematic knowledge. Thus we see that presenting news and comments is based on some skillfully designed communicative patterns or strategies on which certain ideologies are superimposed.

Besides it should be also pointed out that emotive tropes, when used skillfully, can also play a pivotal role in fostering what is widely known as “mass mind” or “mass opinion” as the target addressee does not go in for a deep analysis of the received information, reacting impulsively, becoming more and more receptive to subconscious, encoded signals. We agree with John Zaller who, talking about the phenomenon of mass political behavior, supports that mass media (and definitely its communicative strategies) is very instrumental in forming or changing the public opinion as media coverage may consist of ostensibly objective news reports, partisan argumentation, televised news conferences, or even paid advertisements, but what matters for the formation of mass opinion is the relative balance and overall amount of media attention to a certain issue [16. P. 1]. And it is up to the media discourse to make the right choice out of the scope of metaphors, metonymies, periphrases and other tropes — emotively charged, evaluative means — while trying to preserve the above mentioned balance.

Mass media metaphors have always been and still are an ample source of scientific research and debate, but what should be stressed that other tropes and their role in non-literary texts was apparently underrated, as seems to be always all about metaphors only when it comes to stylistic aspect of non-literary discourse. We support the idea that much of what was said about metaphor functioning in mass media texts and its cognitive nature can be fairly attributed to other tropes whose communicative and evaluative potential should be studied alongside that of the stylistic device of metaphor.

In regard to the fact that metaphor is no longer (particularly in non-literary texts) is understood merely as a rhetorical device, but more frequently as a means of exerting a certain degree of influence on the interlocutor, much attention is paid to its cognitive structure. As Lesley Jeffries and Dan McIntyre claim a traditional rhetorical approach to metaphor is limited to providing descriptive categories for different types of metaphor. Thus the rhetorical approach offers no insight into the cognitive basis of metaphors (and into the cognitive basis of other figures or tropes, as we may assume), nor into the means by which people process and make sense of them [8. P. 139]. Consequently the necessity to study tropes or figures of speech from the cognitive (metaphor) theory is perhaps the only possible way of trying to find a clue to how make the communication between the public and mass media more cooperative.

It has been some time already since Lakoff and Johnson, and later Faiclough, Semino and many more worked out the cognitive metaphor theory with Fauconnier and Turner contributing to it with their theory of blending mental spaces, and quite a few conceptual metaphors from both literary and non-literary discourses have been brought to light and analyzed, yet there is still an unflagging interest in the cognitive potential

of the trope in question that allows it to shape ideology or to lead to what is called “schema affirmation”. At present a number of researchers argue whether it is possible to speak about objectivity referring to metaphors, metonymies and the like and whether it is possible to say that conceptual metaphors are as subjective as they are objective. Goatly, citing Lakoff’s words concerning philosophic issues of objectivity and subjectivity in conceptual metaphors points that there cannot be apparent objectivity as we have no immediate access to reality and our entire mental process is mediated by metaphoric structures, but at the same time there is no sign of subjectivity prevailing as we make our metaphors on the basis of our bodily experience which is universal in character and thus we all speak a somewhat common metaphoric language [4. P. 276].

It is worth mentioning that conceptual metaphors, based on the mapping of the source domain x on to the target domain y, such as in much discussed one ARGUMENT/POLITICS IS WAR, are quite typical of mass media discourse. Thus according to Lesley Jeffries and Dan McIntyre this cognitive structure implying aggressive behavior in all that concerns politics and adjacent spheres is deeply entrenched in Western and possibly in other societies and implications of using that type of conceptual metaphor are significant. What they further assume is that the conventional metaphorical ways of talking about particular activities suggest that people tend to think about them in particular ways [8. P. 140]. In other words by using some conceptual metaphors repeatedly describing certain segments of things and phenomena mass media discourse does not only mirrors the way we conceptualize the reality, but may deliberately or not broaden our schematic knowledge, thus turning to what is currently called “novel conceptual metaphors” which can reveal the way an individual author conceptualizes things.

Despite the fact that the language of mass media sticks to the standardized forms of expression which in the case of tropes is a marked slant towards the use of traditional, language tropes, which are based on conventional concepts and reactions, the world around us demand from the users to broaden the already established borders with new source domains being mapped on to the regular target ones. Such is the case of the target domain WAR on to which such conventional source domains as politics and sports are mapped as in the examples below:

- 1) Away from *the battlefield of a hugely divided Congress*, President Obama probably thought he was on safe ground praising his political allies at a fundraising event in California [12].
- 2) At the end of the last month’s league final *a corner of both dressing rooms resembled a battlefield dressing station*. Tommy Walsh had a cut beneath his eye. Paul Murphy had a bad gash across his finger. Down the corridor, Lar Corbett wheezed with the pain of a broken rib [13].

The given examples are both easily decodable by the majority of the addressees irrespectively of their identity, besides to blend such referents as political struggle as well as a boxing fight on the ring will not require much mental work on the individual reader’s part. Nor will it be too demanding of the reader to decode the following one, such as:

- 3) The weather has been very strange in some parts of the world recently. Freak snowstorms have swept much of the Midwest US, although this cold snap has had at least one benefit — very few tornados have been recorded so far this year. *Springtime is normally a battlefield of colliding warm and cold air masses* that can erupt into violent super-

cell thunderstorms, which unleash powerful tornados over Tornado Alley on the plains of the US [15].

By referring a fierce political debate, the physical state of the boxers, bruised and bleeding after the fight, and the unstable springtime weather to one and the same concept only supports the arguments that we verbalize reality as we see it. But media discourse does not seem to be fully contented with these traditional models. We have observed that the target domain WAR is stretched towards some new sources. Let us have a look at the following example in which the journalist presents such matter as children restaurant menus in terms of war:

4) *'Unhealthy' menus for children turning restaurants into battlefields* for parents.

There is no shortage of culprits when it comes to the nation's alarming childhood obesity problem with everything from packed lunches to computer games held responsible.

Now health campaigners have accused family restaurants of serving unimaginative, high-calorie and largely unwholesome fare on their children's menus, *turning eating out into "a battlefield" for parents*. Burger King was judged to be the worst offender, "devoid" of any healthy option with not as much as a lettuce leaf on top of its chicken and beef burgers [14].

If we try to analyze the metaphor 'menus for children are battlefields' in terms of domains we may come to a difficulty as it evidently requires a mental effort on the addressee's part to bring together the concepts behind unhealthy restaurant's fare and worried parents' behavior. Even if we try to apply the theory of blended spaces to the case we are sure to see that it might not give us enough clues to understand the pragmatic aim of the author in likening high-caloried food to parent's worries. Yet if we take into consideration the grounds of the blending theory and that is a belief that meaning construction in tropes such as metaphor is not always dependent on the so-called pre-existing knowledge domains but more likely on temporary knowledge structures created during online processing we can try to pick out elements from two in-input spaces RESTAURANT FOOD and PARENTS, such as "unhealthy", "harmful", "destructive", "alarming", "fattening" on the one hand and "requiring urgent action", "a need to combat side-effects", "belligerence", "immediate reaction /attack" on the other. This may allow one to see the restaurant fare as a menace to growing children and consequently parents' behavior in this case can be likened to that of the soldiers who are instantly ready to confront an enemy.

But what also may attract our attention is the fact that the metaphor in Example 4 is different from the previous ones, mainly due to the fact that, strictly speaking, it is not a conventional, conceptual one. We tend to agree with Goatly and call such metaphor "alternative", as they markedly represent conventional things in a little bit unconventional way. In other words the metaphor "restaurant food is a battlefield to parents" in Goatly's terms should be classified as "live", or "active", as opposed to the conventional, "inactive" ones. We also support his view of alternative metaphors as of means that within a language allow multiple perspectives or constructions of social practices. All metaphors seem to be cognitive filters, but alternative ones are more likely to filter "differ-

ent particles of truth”. And if we want to assess the communicative value of alternative metaphors we should bear in mind that by applying language in new and alternative ways or structuring the concepts differently, alternative or novel conceptual metaphors (as well as other tropes constructed in a similar way) “have the potential for challenging the commonsense categories of knowledge” [4. P. 25].

However there can be one more question to give an answer to, and that is why the individual authors are so eager to resort to alternative metaphors as they run the risk forcing their readers into more mental effort by creating puzzling or disturbing metaphors that are not ingrained into their conception of particular segments of reality. To be honest, we cannot but notice that the author of this “food metaphor” wants to be safeguarded from a possible misunderstanding, thus the metaphor in the headline is further reinforced in the lead by contributory lexical means, explaining the nature of the problem and being used for the second time the figuratively used noun ‘battlefield’ appears in inverted commas as to stress that the author is metaphorically speaking.

In regard to the above said we believe it is necessary to highlight that by creating novel conceptual metaphors, attributing conventional target domains on to the rather unusual source domains, the media discourse forces us to look at things around us in a new key. As far as we can judge “aggressive” metaphors are beginning to win over the journalists’ minds, influence their creativity, as they try to promote and impose their own, often subjective, view of the world. Goatly calls such metaphors ‘mechanisms of regimes of truth, as they *create* the reality rather than describe it’ [4. P. 80].

The reasons for such a marked slant towards metaphoric creativity in media discourse can be both of linguistic and extralinguistic nature. As for the latter, we can often witness how sometimes harsh reality forces us to see things in a new light. Researches assume that Western cultures are very responsive to political, economic and social changes. News about unceasing military conflicts, credit crunches and austerity measures inevitably forces one to see the reality as being entirely hostile and menacing, and the language as a social barometer immediately reacts to these worries by creating speech metaphors such as based on the patterns SPRING WEATHER IS WAR or EATING OUT IS WAR which as we see take a little time to rub well into the language system and eventually get integrated into our schematic knowledge. With the time “military” conceptual metaphors tend to persuade us that fighting or attacking is a normal activity no matter what subject we take. Thus we agree with Kovecses who points out that metaphoric concept can be realized not only linguistically but also in social practice [9. P. 20]. Let us have a look at one more example illustrating that thought:

5) So I telephone Gilles, who heroically comes and ploughs, which enables me to devote the entire summer to having nightmares about weeds and Colorado beetle. And then everything ripens on the same day, so that by September, ***the whole vegetable patch is like the Somme: an eerie battlefield of blackened tomatoes, exploded cucumbers, ruined melons and burnt-out courgettes*** [2].

As the example shows the central conceptual metaphor GARDENING IS WAR is very eye catching and not very conventional. One should also pay attention to the supporting elements that reinforce its expressiveness and the resulting humorous effect,

such as the stylistic simile ‘the whole vegetable patch is like the Somme’, and the contributory epithets of the same semantic field like ‘blackened’, ‘exploded’, ‘ruined’, ‘burnt-out’ that help the reader to visualize the garden catastrophe which is, in author’s view, similar to what we can see at the theater of war. Another object of interest can be the stylistic simile “like the Somme” which introduces the idea of war with the author likening one of the bloodiest battles of the First World War to growing vegetables. It is as if the author suggested, let us say, politics (which is traditionally perceived as a ruthless and aggressive business) and gardening may function along similar lines. A direct reference to yet notable, but possibly unfamiliar for some, fact of world history may also suggest that such novel metaphors may be devised in a hope of it being appreciated by a more sophisticated public. The humorous effect that the whole utterance is supposed to produce only proves that media discourse should also entertain.

To sum it up, as the above analyzed examples show conceptual tropes, namely metaphors can no longer be limited to the conventionally accepted structures and patterns as they are effective tools of enriching our perception and interpretation of objective reality. Both conventional and alternative language structures when used in mass media discourse allow one to see the way mass opinion can be manipulated both explicitly and implicitly. Thus tropes can be viewed as cognitive containers which control and guide communication as well as influencing a relevant behaviour of all participants sometimes without them realizing that. They are perfect mediators in communication as they are often used due to the power of persuasion that they acquire in non-literary discourse. Media tropes can easily unite the reality, individual experience and symbols as they are those mechanisms that construct our outlook of the world.

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ПОСРЕДНИКИ КОММУНИКАЦИИ: КОГНИТИВНЫЙ И ПРАГМА-СТИЛИСТИЧЕСКИЙ АСПЕКТ ТРОПОВ В СОВРЕМЕННОМ МАССМЕДИАЛЬНОМ ДИСКУРСЕ

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Статья посвящена изучению коммуникативного, стилистического и прагматического аспекта тропов, реализуемого массмедиальным дискурсом, в частности, прессой. Рассмотрение когнитивного аспекта тропов, актуализируемых в нехудожественном дискурсе, имеет целью показать, что лексические стилистические приемы не следует рассматривать лишь как преимущественно экспрессивно-образные средства, а как комплексные когнитивные структуры, способные апеллировать к существующим фоновым знаниям адресата, а также существенно расширять их объем и границы. Интерес к некоторым аспектам когнитивной теории метафоры обусловил рассмотрение случаев реализации и функционирования структур, содержащих новую, альтернативную концептуализацию знаний о мире, выступающую в роли области источника, а также позволил затронуть вопрос о том, как, оперируя конвенциональными и неконвенциональными концептуальными метафорами, авторы могут регулировать ту роль, которая отводится получателю масс медиального продукта, позволяя тропам в массмедиальных текстах воздействовать на социальную практику.

Ключевые слова: метафора, когнитивная метафора, тропы, коммуникация, язык СМИ, массовая коммуникация, стилистика, прагматика.