Metaphor Negotiation
as a resource for macro- and micro-level positioning in the Guardian *Comment is free* section

Stefanie Vogelbacher
Anglistisches Seminar
Universität Heidelberg
RaAM 2014, University of Cagliari

General background

- Metaphor in political discourse (Charteris-Black 2009, 2005), public discourse about the European Union (Musolff 2008, 2006, 2004; Schäffner 2005; Chilton & Ilyin 1993)

- Metaphor negotiation in online debates as part of the public debate among non-experts

  → metaphorical framings in public discourse as a starting point

  → qualitative, discourse-analytical research into metaphor in language use, focus on micro-level of discursive interaction

General background

Metaphor negotiation

a contextually-situated, metaphor-related discourse activity with genre-specific micro-level functions

Research questions

- ✓ What semantic, pragmatic, and contextual aspects of metaphor are relevant when users negotiate metaphor in online debates?

- ✓ What are the micro-level socio-communicative functions of metaphor commenting and negotiation?

Outline

1) Metaphor in public discourse about the EU

2) Contextual dimensions

   ✓ Socio-cultural/global context

   ✓ Genre-specific/local context

3) Metaphor negotiation and positioning in *Comment is free*

4) Discussion of examples

5) Conclusion

1 Metaphor in public discourse about the EU

- – Political discourse: a productive environment for metaphor (Charteris-Black 2009, 2005)

- – Meta-debate on language, cf. "eurospeak" (Musolff 2004: 30)

- – Politico-historical background: Britain as the "awkward partner" in the community of nations (George 1998)

  → public relevance

  → prominent role of metaphor in argumentative traditions

  → potential for controversial and heated debate

2 Contextual dimensions

- Principle of pressure of coherence (Kövecses 2009, 2005)

  ✓ Socio-cultural context/global context

  ✓ Genre-specific context/local context

2.1 Socio-cultural context: EU discourse

- History of and contemporary public debate about Britain's role in the European Union

- EU-specific metaphors as framing devices
  - ✓ Discourse metaphors (Zinken et al. 2008): EUROPEAN FAMILY, COMMON EUROPEAN HOUSE (< NATION AS A PERSON)
  - ✓ Metaphorical scenarios (Musolff 2006): Franco-German couple, family nurturing the euro

- Metaphors as reference points in the debate (Musolff 2004: 61) in and across several genres

2.2 Genre as context: Online debates

- Features of online debating (cf. Herring 2007)

   ✓ contributions in reply to expert commentary, cf. letters to the editor (Landert & Jucker 2011)

   ✓ relative ease of going public, voicing one's opinion (Gruber 2011), cf. also "electronic agora" (Largier 2002: 287)

   ✓ polylogue, conversational character, interaction among users

   ✓ purpose: (exchange of) information and social functions

   ✓ prototypical user? non-expert, male, 30+ years

2 Genre as context: Online debates

Our aim is to ensure this platform is inclusive and safe, and that the Guardian website is the place on the net where you will always find lively, entertaining and, above all, intelligent discussions.

(…)

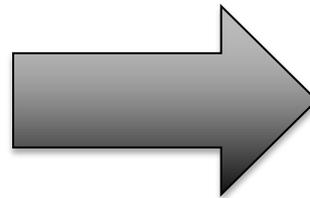*Demonstrate and share the intelligence, wisdom and humour we know you possess.*

http://www.theguardian.com/
community-standards (04.06.2014)

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– Communicative situation

Commentary		**Online debate**
✓ newspaper websites ✓ professional commentators, invited contributions by experts	→	✓ comment and debate section ✓ comment on trigger text and conversation-like interaction among non-experts

Methodology

– Computer-mediated DA (Herring 2004): "linguistic behavior online"

– Metaphor negotiation in user comments

    → Negotiation patterns (cf. Musolff 2004: 156ff)

    → Interaction patterns/metaphor-shifting (cf. Cameron 2010: 89ff)

– Micro-level functions of commenting and negotiation

    → Bucholtz & Hall's concept of macro- and micro-level positioning (2010, 2005)

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– *My Europe* series

✓ twelve essays by European

writers their views on Europe/EU

Dec 2010 –Jan 2011

✓ *Europe is a troubled adolescent*

that just needs to grow up, by

Philippe Perchoc

✓ 280 user comments

http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2010/dec/29/europe-troubled-adolescent-grow-up
(04.06.2014)

– Metaphorical patterns at the textual level (Semino 2008: 22ff)

  ✓ extended metaphor: evoking scenario based on ADOLESCENCE source domain, elaborated for argumentative purposes

  ✓ based on relatively conventional NATION AS PERSON, but novel correspondences

  ✓ intertextual relations

    • discourse tradition NATION AS PERSON

    • *Europa* as a character in Greek mythology

3 Metaphor negotiation in *Comment is free*

– Mappings in the ADOLESCENCE scenario

  ✓ TERRITORIAL EXPANSION < PHYSICAL GROWTH

  ✓ DEVELOPMENT OF THE UNION < MENTAL DEVELOPMENT, BECOMING MATURE

  ✓ RELATIONSHIPS TO OTHER NATIONS < HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS

– Perchoc: Europe/European Union

  ✓ has a "*problem of self-perception*"

  ✓ believing itself to be "*too big and awkward*"

  ✓ is shocked by "*the immense physical change that transformed it*"

  ✓ "*has trouble liking itself*"

  ✓ is "*paralysed by fear*", "*has awkward relationships to others*"

– Functions of metaphor negotiation in user comments

✓ Macro- and micro-level positioning

→ in terms of stable categories (Bucholtz & Hall 2005: 594): pro-EU vs. anti-EU (cf. Musolff 2004: 61)

→ in terms of local orientations displayed in discursive interaction, indexed in conversational acts (Bucholtz & Hall 2005: 591)

Discussion of examples

Data: 44 coded segments in 280 comments

    1)   Meta-discursive comment (16)

    2)   Metaphor challenging (6)

    3)   Scenario modification (6)

    4)   Alternative conceptualisation (11)

    5)   Other (5)

Meta-discursive comments

> (…) I don't know. The **fluffy language** used in this piece is indicative of a mentality that says alot but does nothing, and as such it's a little hard to take seriously. Lots of "should"s and "if"s (…) (9)

> Philippe Perchoc, fine words, and you're absolutely right underneath it all. Where by "underneath it all" I mean the **impression of rarified airs** coming from this. (…) (63)

→ meta-linguistic comments as indirect comment on metaphor (?), via evaluative categorisations of language and rhetorical style

→ positioning as „expert" reader

Meta-discursive comments

(…) The European Union **can not be reduced somehow to a sentimental person-like picture** , as this article somehow attempts to draw. (24)

→ meta-pragmatic comment on appropriateness of metaphor-based argument, with explicit reference to ontological function of the personification

→ positioning as „expert" reader, aware of the manipulative powers of metaphor

Metaphor challenging

> How adolescent is an entity that's **risk-averse, unambitious and conformist**? (58)

$\rightarrow$ questioning the appropriateness of the source scenario, e.g. via conceptual elements that form part of it, but do not fit the target

$\rightarrow$ positioning as ?

Metaphor challenging

I rather suspect it is mr perchoc **who needs to grow up**. (18)

→ creative strategy: appropriation of source scenario to frame a different target, i.e. author of the article

→ positioning as „ironic", „witty ", „clever" ?

The EU **certainly spends money like a teenager**, reign that in and I may have more time for it. (5)

→ source scenario element used to turn the argument by analogy to a
   different, negative conclusion

→ creative strategy, positioning as „eloquent", „witty"

Scenario modification

> (…) sometimes, **squabbling nations**, which are numerous in Europe, historically speaking, sometimes need the **playground-attendant's firm hand** to break up such altercations. But you wouldn't expect that **attendant** to follow those who **bicker throughout their adult lives**, issuing edicts on their every move. (73)

→ takes over the basic source domain PERSON

→ stays with the GROWING UP scenario, but modified: CHILD, PLAYGROUND ATTENDANT

→ function: argument by analogy

→ positioning? > non-expert using the same rhetorical strategy as the professional writer!

Alternative conceptualisation

The EU is a **canker at the heart of European democracy** and the sooner the people of Europe realise it the sooner we can dispense with this grossy undemocratic project. (124)

The uncomfortable truth is that the EU is a **hideous, dictatorial monster**, that **tramples** on anything that stands in its way. (39)

→ relatively conventional source domains with strongly negative associations: MONSTER, DISEASE

→ emphasising anti-EU position (= macro-positioning)

Alternative conceptualisation

I see it as a **pig-ugly over-consuming monster –** a bit like one of those **fat kids you see at McDonalds** stuffing chips in its face! (25)

Speaking from a British perspective, the EU is an **annoying relative** you'd love to pack off to **Dignitas** (62)

→ conventional source MONSTER, but „filled in" with cultural knowledge

→ alternative scenario based on NATION AS A PERSON + cultural knowledge

→ positioning as „creative", using the same strategies as professional writer

Conclusion

– Trigger text provides metaphorical basis for the negotiation of

the target concept EUROPE/EU

→ conceptual elements from source domain (PERSON) or scenario
(TROUBLED ADOLESCENT) are taken over

→ alternative source domains/concepts/scenarios are proposed

– Context-induced metaphor use with genre-specific functions

✓ positioning as pro- or anti-EU

✓ positioning as expert/marking of expert status

✓ positioning as creative, witty, eloquent

Conclusion

– Commenting patterns in terms of the focus/target: user make

 relevant

  ✓ Semantic-conceptual elements

  ✓ Communicative elements

  ✓ Contextual elements

  → the semantic-conceptual, contextual, and micro-level communicative

   dimensions need to be taken into account!

Further research

– Balanced corpus of contemporary public discourse about the European Union, annotated for metaphor

– Balanced corpus of spoken political discourse, e.g. debates, interviews, statements and speeches

   ✓ establishing degree of conventionality of metaphors

   ✓ measuring the metaphoricity of public EU-discourse

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