Variation in political metaphor: A diachronic study of metaphor use in TV debates about Belgian federalism

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Structure of the talk

1. Context of the research project
2. Theoretical background
3. A short introduction to Belgian politics
4. Objective of the paper
5. Corpus and method
6. Results
7. Conclusion
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Research project – ADAROF – Metaphors in the context of Belgian federalism

**A focus on Production:** Variation in metaphor use in various kinds of Belgian political discourses: *Who uses a metaphor, when and why?*


**A focus on Reception:** *How can a metaphor influence citizens’ representation of Belgian federalism: the ‘Tetris’ Metaphor* (cf. Reuchamps et al. 2018)
Research project – ADAPOF – Metaphors in the context of Belgian federalism

A focus on Production: Variation in metaphor use in various kinds of Belgian political discourses: *Who uses a metaphor, when and why?*

Television debates (cf. Randour et al.)
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Metaphors in political discourse

• Metaphors play a central role in our understanding of political concepts and processes
  • Lakoff (1996) *Moral Politics*
    • Strict-father and nurturant parent models
    • Metaphors in debates about of the European (de)construction
    • Metaphorical scenarios
  • Charteris-Black (2004, 2011)
    • Persuasive power of metaphors in the speeches of major UK and US politicians
  • Goatly (2007)
    • Ability of metaphors to carry ideologies
  • Semino (2008)
    • “It is often claimed that the use of metaphor is particularly necessary in politics, since politics is an *abstract* and *complex* domain of experience, and metaphors can provide ways of simplifying complexities and making abstractions accessible”
  • Federalism
Citizens do use metaphors when talking about federalism

**Belgian federalism is a machine**
« On a coupé le citoyen du fonctionnement d’une espèce de mécanisme, de machine folle lancée sur elle-même. » (PBF, B8, 839-840)

“The citizen has been cut from a sort of mechanism, of cranky machine spinning around”

**Belgian federalism is a construction**
Mais, ce que je voudrais, si on doit encore aménager cette fois ci le fédéralisme tel qu’il a été construit progressivement, c’est qu’à un moment donné, on se dise que ça s’arrête, c’est fini (PBF, D8, 3897-3898)

« if we have to rearrange federalism as it has progressively been built up,... »

**Belgian federalism is a company**
« hoe werkt een staat, een beetje zoals een bedrijfsleider over zijn bedrijf ». (PBN, K4, 1232-1233)

how does a state work, a bit like a ceo...

**Belgian federalism is a love relationship**
“Si l’on compare avec un ménage, certains ménages se marient avec contrat de mariage, d’autres pas,» (PBF, B1, 188-190)

If we compare this to a couple, some couples get married under a wedding contract, others don’t…

Perrez & Reuchamps 2014, 2015
Deliberate metaphor theory (DMT)
Steen 2008, 2015

• Metaphors in **language**
• Metaphors in **thought**
• Metaphors in **communication**
  • Metaphors that are used as *metaphors* to achieve a *communicative goal* in a given discourse (deliberate metaphors) (Reijnierse et al. 2017, Steen 2015)
  • “A metaphor is potentially deliberate when the source domain of the metaphor is part of the referential meaning of the utterance in which it is used.” (operational definition, Reijnierse, 2017)

• Identification issues
  • Reconstructing the speakers’ intentions a posteriori
  • Assuming the comprehension processes going on in the receivers’ mind
  • *Potentially* deliberate metaphors
Deliberate metaphors in political discourse?

**Organization is Physical Structure**

**Political systems are buildings**

FR. Je crois que c'est un problème qui représente toute la difficulté de la construction d'un État fédéral où il faut à la fois trouver des frontières et respecter les gens et il faut réussir à trouver, entre ces deux éléments, un équilibre. *(Philippe Moreaux, PS, 18/02/90)*

EN. I believe it’s a problem which is typical of the difficulty of constructing a federal state, where we both need to find borders and to respect the people and we need to find a balance between these two elements. *(Philippe Moreaux, PS, 18/02/90)*

FR. Je pense que Melchior Wathelet a raison sur ce point-là, un stop institutionnel est nécessaire, je pense qu'on ne peut pas construire une maison si l'architecte change les plans toutes les semaines. *(Jean-Charles Luperto, PS, 20/02/2005)*

EN. I think Melchior Wathelet is right about this, an institutional stop is necessary, I think one cannot build a house if the architect is changing the plans every week *(Jean-Charles Luperto, PS, 20/02/2005)*

=> Political metaphors “serve primarily as a means to change meanings, and hence, to change social and political attitudes” *(Musolff 2016: 136)*
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Belgian politics in 3 slides

Federal Structure of Belgium

Federal Authorities
- King
- Federal Government (Prime Minister, Ministers, Secretaries of State)
- Federal Parliament (Senate, Chamber of Representatives)

The Communities
- Flemish Community
- French Community
- German-speaking Community

The Regions
- Flanders Region
- Brussels-Capital Region
- Walloon Region
Belgian politics in 3 slides

• A never ending and ongoing **political transformation**
  • From a **unitary country to a federal country**
    • Art 1 of the Constitution: ‘Belgium is a federal state composed of communities and regions’ (3 regions and 3 communities)
    • 2007-2011: unprecedented political crisis
    • 06/2010 – 12/2011: 541 days to form a federal government

• **Main cleavages** : diverging views on the future of the state
  • In simple words, when Flemish political parties have homogeneous positions on the necessity to reform the Belgian state, this is less the case for French speaking parties (cultural vs. economical divides)
  • The question of **financial transfer** from Flanders to Wallonia and more economical autonomy for Flanders
  • The question of Brussels: which territory with what financial mechanisms
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Objective of this paper

- Analysing the progressive – albeit not without political tensions – transformation of Belgium’s political system by analysing the use of metaphors in Belgian political discourse
- Undertakes a systematic analysis of the use of metaphors by Belgian politicians during television debates from the 1980’s until now.
- A contribution to two main research fields:
  - From a linguistic perspective: a better understanding on the use of metaphors in political discourse
  - From a political science perspective: a better understanding on the framing by political actors of the evolution of the Belgian State
Objective of this paper

• **From a linguistic perspective: a better understanding on the use of metaphors in political discourse**
  - Which *frames* are used to describe Belgian federalism?
  - To what extent does metaphor use **evolve over time**?
  - Is there variation among the *political actors* producing these metaphors?
    - Gender (see for instance Ahrens & Lee 2009, Semino & Koller 2009)
    - Political affiliation
  - To what extent does metaphor use vary according to the specific *political context* in which the are produced (state’s reforms, elections,...)?
  - To what extent is the distinction between *deliberate* and *non-deliberate metaphors* relevant for political discourse analysis?
  - (Cultural variation?)
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Corpus

• TV debates | RTBF – Mise au Point (VRT - De Zevende Dag)
  • Weekly political programs broadcasted by the public TV channels
  • Sample selection: Only television debates that deals specifically with questions on the development and evolution of Belgian federalism
  • 80 debates in total (RTBF: 80 | VRT: 47) > 15 hours (RTBF: 9 | VRT: 6)
  • Period: from 1967 until 2016 (mainly 1980 to 2016)
  • RTBF-corpus: 906,237 words

• Political actors
  • Belgian politicians from both communities (MPs, Ministers and officials from political parties)
  • Journalists
  • Members of the civil society (Professors, artists,...)

• Audience
  • Primary audience: other political actors during the debates
  • Secondary audience: citizens

• Oral (but retranscribed) and formal form of political discourse
Method

- **Semi-automatic** method for metaphor identification
  - Makes it possible to deal with large corpora

Potential metaphorical contexts

- **POS-tagging**
- **Lemmatization**

Onomasiological profiles (cf. Geeraerts, Grondelaers & Speelman 1999) of potential source domains
Method

- **Semi-automatic** method for *metaphor identification*
  - Makes it possible to deal with large corpora

Onomasiological profiles (cf. Geeraerts, Grondelaers & Speelman 1999) of potential *frames*

- Battle
- Disease
- Construction
- Relationships
- Body
- Machine
- Sport
- Nature
- Container
- Movement/destination

60% of the dataset
Method

- **Potential metaphorical contexts**
  - Check the metaphorical status
  - Check the relevance of the target domain

- **Metaphor analysis**
  - **MIPVU** (Steen 2008, Steen *et al.* 2010)
    - Linguistic level (direct vs. Indirect)
    - Conceptuel level (novel vs. Conventional)
    - Communication level (deliberate vs. Non-deliberate)
  - **External parameters**
    - (Political) actor
    - Gender
    - Date/Time
    - ...

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## Results | General tendencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SOURCE DOMAINS</th>
<th>POTENTIAL METAPHORICAL CONTEXTS</th>
<th>CONFIRMED METAPHORICAL CONTEXTS</th>
<th>TARGET DOMAIN: BELGIAN FEDERALISM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BATTLE</td>
<td>838</td>
<td>758</td>
<td>690</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DISEASE</td>
<td>489</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONSTRUCTION</td>
<td>1506</td>
<td>1432</td>
<td>1035</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RELATIONSHIPS</td>
<td>1102</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>4855</td>
<td>2350</td>
<td>1871</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results | Deliberate vs. Non-deliberate
Results | Deliberate vs. Non-deliberate per frame

- All metaphors
- Building
- Battle
- Relationships
- Disease

[Graph showing the comparison of deliberate and non-deliberate metaphors across different domains.]
Belgian federalism is a love relationship/family

**Non-deliberate**

FR. Que deviendrons Bruxelles et la Wallonie en cas de divorce belge (*Journaliste, RTBF, 13/12/2006*)

EN. What will Brussels and Wallonia become in case of a Belgian divorce? (*Journalist, RTBF, 13/12/2006*)

**Deliberate**

FR. Si on a dans sa propre sa famille, si on a deux enfants et que les deux enfants ont une autre maladie, on ne donne pas le même médicament. Ça c'est la plus importante question. (*Geert Lambert, *Spirit*, 13/12/2006*)

EN. If you have in your own family, if you have two children and the two children have a different disease, you don’t give the same medicine. That’s the most important question. (*Geert Lambert, *Spirit*, 13/12/2006*)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Belgian Federalism is a Disease</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Non-deliberate</th>
<th>Deliberate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FR. FR. Mais pour l'instant, on a un peu l'impression d'être dans une situation de coma, de blocage, je le vois au parlement fédéral. <em>(Zoé Genot, Ecolo, 20/02/05)</em></td>
<td>FR. A1 : Abrégeons les souffrances ? PHG : Alors. Il y a deux pratiques : il y a la pratique flamande qui consiste à euthanasier la Belgique et il y a la pratique francophone qui consiste à pratiquer contre toutes évidences un acharnement thérapeutique. <em>(Paul-Henri Gendebien, RWF, 12/09/2014)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EN But for the time being, we have the impression of being in a situation of coma, of deadlock, I can see that at the federal government <em>(Zoé Genot, Ecolo, 20/02/05)</em></td>
<td>EN. A1: Should we put an end to Belgium’s sufferings? PHG: So, there are two practices: the Flemish one consisting in practising euthanasia on Belgium and the francophone one obviously consisting in practising a heroic treatment. <em>(Paul-Henri Gendebien, RWF, 12/09/2014)</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Metaphor use through time

- **Federal elections**
- **Regional elections**

**2nd state reform**
- **BHV crisis**
- **541 without government**

**3rd state reform**

**4th state reform**

**5th state reform**

**6th state reform**

**Graph Elements**
- Metaphor use
- Federal elections
- Regional elections
- BHV crisis
- 541 without government

**Time Periods**
- 1981 to 2016

**Legend**
- Federal elections
- Regional elections

**Note**
- The graph illustrates the metaphor use through time with specific events and reforms marked.

**Data Points**
- Various years from 1981 to 2016 are indicated on the x-axis.
- The y-axis represents the metaphor use scale.

**Key Events**
- 2nd state reform
- 3rd state reform
- 4th state reform
- 5th state reform
- 6th state reform
- BHV crisis
- 541 without government
Metaphor use through time: which frame?

Federal elections
Regional elections

2nd state reform
3rd state reform
4th state reform
5th state reform
6th state reform

BHV crisis
541 without gouvernment

Battle
Building
Disease
Relationship
Metaphor use through time: deliberate vs. non deliberate

Federal elections
Regional elections

2nd state reform
3rd state reform
4th state reform
5th state reform
6th state reform

BHV crisis
541 without government
Non deliberate

Metaphor use per political actor

- Frequency of metaphor use - all actors: 2.38
- Politicians: 3.37
- Journalists: 2.44
- Civil society: 1.33

Categories:
- All metaphors
- Non-Deliberate
- Deliberate
FR. Je voudrais poser une question à monsieur Voorhamme. Vous dites et vous venez de dire et vous pensez la même chose tous les trois je crois "les francophones ont peur". C'est ce que vous dites, c'est l'analyse que vous avez, c'est un refus par la peur. Alors est-ce qu'il est anormal d'avoir peur quand dans un couple un des deux sent qu'il va se faire larguer par l'autre? Est-ce que c'est, ou alors la question que je vous pose c'est, est-ce que vous tenez encore au couple ou bien est-ce que vous estimez effectivement que les visions sont tellement différentes qu'il faut dépasser ce stade-là? (Journaliste, RTBF, 14/03/1999)

EN. I’d like to ask a question to mr Voorhamme. You claim and the three of you just said the same thing, I think « the francophones are afraid ». It’s what you’re claiming. It’s your analysis, a refusal out of fear. So, is it unusual to be afraid when in a couple one of the two (partners) is feeling s/he will get dumped by the other? So the question I’m asking is: do you still care about the couple or do you think the visions are so different that we should go beyond that? (Journalist, RTBF, 14/03/1999)
Metaphor use per actor: frames
Zoom on politicians: variation in the use of frames?
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Main tendencies

• Variation
  • Variation over time
    • Political context?
      • Period of political crisis > greater variety fo frames
  • Variation per political actor

• Relevance of deliberate metaphors
  • Higher frequency in periods of crisis
  • Greater use by the journalists
  • // Communicative functions in such context
Further work

• Complete the analysis > other frames (body, machine, sports, container, nature, movement)
• Quantitative analyses > regressions
• Qualitative > tracing individual metaphors
• Expand these analyses to the VRT-corpus
Thank you for your attention 😊