

Analysis of Georgian Political Discourse According to George Lakoff's Framing Theory

Givi AMAGLOBELI*

Abstract

In the paper we will try to analyze the Georgian Political Discourse based on the Framing Theory proposed by American linguist George Lakoff. According to this theory two main U.S. ideological platforms (Republican/Democrat) can be identified based on moral-ethical values which reflect their worldviews in general. The emphasis is placed on the ideological difference between conservatives and democrats which reveals itself in the discourses produced by each of the two where (political) metaphors, perceived as cognitive frames, constitute a good example of how the discourse works in general.

Keywords: Framing, metaphor, political discourse

Introduction

We start with the general definitions of metaphors and the concept of frame. According to George Lakoff metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing (or idea) in terms of another. Metaphors are used by us not only in our everyday interaction and language but in our conscious processes and actions as well. Our whole conceptual system is by its nature fundamentally metaphorical (Lakoff, 1980).

A frame is a mental structure by means of which we perceive and give meaning to objective reality. By means of frames we construct what is defined as reality. Frames structure ideas and concepts, determine our style of thinking. For the most part frames operate automatically and unconsciously.

Metaphorical thinking (thinking in terms/by means of metaphors) is crucial for forming political-ideological preferences and therefore, for political discourse in general. Political metaphors are formed and actualized in specific mental frames which can be regarded as ideological platforms. Each ideological platform has its own conceptual frames and relevant metaphors used in order to communicate their basic arguments. In addition to these, each ideological-political platform has its own moral principles by which they justify their statements. Accordingly, ideological differences at the same time reflect differences in moral-ethical foundations.

In the given paper we examine general features of the two main political-ideological platforms in the US (Republicans and Democrats) and their discourses involving analysis of conceptual metaphors actualized by each of the parties using George Lakoff's discourse analysis method. We will also try to compare contemporary Georgian po-

litical discourse with that in America one according to the above-mentioned parameters.

In this context, it is important to define the following fundamental points while dealing with any specific type of political discourse:

- What are the worldview differences between discourses?
- What moral grounds do political-ideological platforms have?
- How is framing realized within political discourses?

Worldview Differences between Discourses

We start with differences in between worldviews. George Lakoff identifies two major ideological frames within an American political discourse. These are discourses produced and actualized by two main political parties – Republicans and Democrats. Accordingly, it is possible to speak about Republican (or Conservative) and Democratic (or Progressive) conceptual frames, with each frame having its own moral ground by which they justify their arguments. Lakoff applies his framing theory to two main understandings of parenting style within the context of family/upbringing then applying the same notion to politics. According to him moral-ideological platform of each party is based on specific parenting style that reveals itself in formation of distinct political views. These are the Strict Father and Nurturant Parent family models. "American culture consists of two competing worldviews that broadly correspond to the "strict" versus "nurturing" role of the parent. The first stipulates that human nature is weak, thus necessitating a "strict father"

* Assistant Professor, International Black Sea University, Tbilisi, Georgia.
E-mail: gamaglobeli@ibsu.edu.ge

who resorts to discipline and punishment to set the child securely on the path of human development. The “strict parent” outlook is associated with a limited view of the appropriate scope of government - while governance is necessary to maintain law and order and protect society from external threats, most domestic problems are and should be matters of individual responsibility. If people are poor, it is because they lack initiative; people who are unemployed could find work if they tried harder; By this logic, social welfare programs are counterproductive because they breed dependence instead of self-reliance. The Democrats and other progressive groups stand for policies that emanate from the “nurturing parent” point of view. This view of human nature as essentially robust implies a more expansive set of governmental responsibilities (Iyengar, 2005).

All these aspects make major American political ideologies predictable based on their moral arguments and statements. It is clear which party stands for right or left wing political ideas with some centrist inclinations in between for each.

When studying major Georgian political parties, it is difficult to determine which ideology they stand for in general. While most of political experts define main Georgian political parties as center-right, parties basically do not hesitate in adopting left wing decisions for specific political purposes.

There is certain kind of vagueness and incoherence in ideological stances of Georgian political parties. It is commonly accepted that party identities are shaped and determined by their leaders. Individuals, as a rule join or vote for a specific political party not because that particular party reflects certain political principles or interests of a social group to which individuals identify with, but because they trust a party leader. Therefore, it is not necessary for parties and alliances to follow political principles and logic, or ideology.

“There may be a considerable discord between formally declared principles and stances taken regarding concrete issues by political parties. For example, it is often the case when a center right party supports principles typical for left wing parties. This contrasts with the two major American political parties, which generally they do not deviate from their ideological or moral principles” (Scholtbach & Nodia, 2006).

- ***What moral principles do political-ideological platforms have?***

Turning to Georgia, what mental frames do Georgian political parties operate within? Is it even possible to apply the same theory described above to the Georgian political realm?

Georgia’s totalitarian past of living 70 years within the Soviet rule has had a huge impact on the consciousness of the country’s people. Many individuals still operate with old concepts that were indoctrinated upon them during the Communist Regime. An example of this would be the cult of Stalin which still exists in Georgia (predominantly within the older generation). If we are to find a theoretical explanation of this cult of personality within the above given theory of mental frames proposed by George Lakoff, it would fit the Strict Father model, with Stalin as a figure who controls and dominates every sphere of life, decides what’s best for

each and every individual, and requires every individual to conform to his will. Disobedience necessarily results in punishment. As within this system of values a state is all powerful and dominating, its main function is to take care of every aspect of individuals’ lives. That is why individuals of the Communist mentality are dependent on the state as they project the model of the Strict Father (Stalin’s Cult of Personality) onto the functions of the state in general.

Another interesting feature of the totalitarian discourse of the Stalin’s cult of Personality is its symbiosis with the religious categories that has emerged after the collapse of the Soviet Union. This phenomenon can be clearly observed in Russian Federation; however, it has its adepts in Georgia as well. Within this specific discourse, which appears as some kind of mix of totalitarian and religious thinking, a leader (Stalin) is portrayed as a deeply spiritual (religious) person who did not commit any acts of evil and he had no part in all the evil that was done during the Communist regime. It is a good example how totalitarian discourse incorporates religious categories within itself (or the contrary).

Another example of the Father’s discourse is Ilia Chavchavadze as the founding “Father” of the Georgian Nation. An interesting point here is that Ilia Chavchavadze and his deeds, as a secular person, whose main goal was to create a modern type democratic Georgian state was also incorporated by the religious discourse as he was proclaimed a Saint by the Georgian Orthodox Church.

There goes a debate between secular and religious segments of (an American) society whether the “Fathers of a Nation” were religious or secular in their worldview, with each party projecting their own ideology to their (“Fathers of the Nation”) inheritance.

As for metaphors used by parties in their discourses: American politicians and political leaders use specific type of metaphors which represent their mental-political frames. According to George Lakoff, Democratic politician use progressive-creative metaphors which reflect a progressive moral framework, which is - nurturing parent model - empathy - caring about others. For example, Barack Obama’s discourse can be regarded as the one of a “caring father” discourse. He uses the “Nation as a Family” metaphor to reach all segments of society. Georgian politicians and political leaders, they do not use “Nation as a Family” metaphor in their discourses. The terms “family” is not used in its metaphorical meaning. The term only became heavily used in its direct meaning during debates over same sex marriage.

Another characteristic of Democratic/progressive discourse is that leader(s) emphasize values and identity more rather than real politics. The main focus is made on individuals, not on policies in general. The same feature can be observed in Georgian politics as well. Main emphasis of Georgian voters is basically made on individuals/leaders and not on ideological principles declared by them (politicians). In parallel with an emphasis made on personalities, abstract notions like “bringing back dignity”, “restoring justice”, “preserving national originality” gain importance.

There is one metaphor which has become quite heavily used in the Georgian political discourse within last years

that is completely identical with an American version in terms of its form (and presumably, in terms of content/meaning, as well): “ქართული ოცნება” (“Georgian Dream” – “American Dream”). However, there is an obvious difference between the two: the American version represents a long-standing metaphor while the Georgian version is a name of a concrete political party/movement. While the American version of metaphor does not lose its relevance, the Georgian version of a metaphor may presumably become a dead metaphor (however, there are some indications that it is becoming a conventional metaphor) shortly after the party which has produced and introduced it into the Georgian political discourse loses its power, for “metaphors change and especially the frequency of its usage changes as well. As for politics, at a first glance, empirical correlation between metaphorical and political changes do not indicate which of these two are casual, however, according to some scientists (R. D. Anderson) metaphorical change precedes political changes (Berekashvili, 2007).

The case of the Georgian metaphor (“Georgian Dream”) confirms the hypothesis regarding metaphorical changes preceding political changes.

Another interesting feature of Georgian political discourse is the use of specific narratives which can be generally labeled as “hate speech”. This type of discourse is quite widespread within the considerable part of the Georgian public. Within this discourse, phrases like “სისხლი მსმელი/სადისტური რეჟიმი, მფატრავები, “სისხლიანი გეგმა” – “bloody/sadistic regime”, “butchers”, “bloody plan” and expressions of that sort are heavily used. They have become a normal part of ordinary speech. As it seems, these kinds of metaphorical expressions have considerable impact on individuals’ thinking and construct corresponding frames (of negative connotations). Consequently, this type of specific discourse may become a dominant discourse.

If there exist different ideological-moral platforms, we can therefore speak about different frames, as well. In American political discourse, there are two fundamental frames with corresponding ideological-moral differences: Conservative (Republican) and Progressive (Democratic) frames.

What about Georgia?! It would be very useful here to present some sharp analysis of Georgia rather than 35-year old stereotypes about the U.S!

Conclusion

In the case of Georgian political discourse, if we accept that Georgian political parties do not have clearly outlined and defined ideological stances, it is difficult to perceive what types of frames Georgian political parties use or have for their discourses, stating problems and finding ways of solution to those problems, for discourses produced by Georgian politicians are directed towards their opponents on a personal level but not towards ideological issues generally.

References

- Berekashvili, T. (2007). *On some Contemporary Political Metaphors*. Semiotics, №1.
- Lakoff, G., Johnson, M. (1980). *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Scholtbach, A. P., Nodia, G. (2006). *The Political Landscape of Georgia: political parties: achievements, challenges and prospects*. USA: Eburon Academic Publishers.
- Shanto, I. (2005). Speaking of Values: The Framing of American Politics. Retrieved February 12, 2017 from <http://pcl.stanford.edu/common/docs/research/iyengar/2005/speaking.pdf>