

Physiological Metaphor as a Means of the Metaphorical Modeling of Brexit in Russian Media Texts

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ABSTRACT

This article deals with the analysis of the physiological metaphor as a means of the metaphorical modeling of the discourse event Brexit in the Russian media discourse and political discourse. A special emphasis is put on its potential conflictogenic effects and the intentions of its use. The analysis is carried out at the interface of cognitive linguistics, media linguistics, political linguistics, and linguistics and cultural studies. The interdisciplinary nature of the analysis contributes to a deeper understanding of the contemporary Russian linguistic picture of the world. The material for the research was Russian electronic media, published from 2016 to the present. In the process of the analysis, the method of frames and slots is applied.

Keywords: *Brexit, Cognitive linguistics, Frame, Linguistic picture of the world, Media discourse, Political discourse, Physiological metaphor, Slot.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Metaphor has been the focus of scholarly interest for more than two millennia, but approaches to its study have not been homogeneous. Some have regarded it as a trope belonging exclusively to poetic language; others have seen it as a tool that can be used to name the world around us. A turning point in the study of metaphor was the cognitive revolution, which brought to the fore its cognitive properties and its role in the formation of the linguistic picture of the world. This communicative-pragmatic turn spurred the emergence of new scientific disciplines, and at the same time, the importance of interdisciplinary metaphor research began to be increasingly accentuated [1].

The relevance and necessity of interdisciplinary research on metaphors in the media is especially relevant in today's digitalized era when we are exposed to a vast amount of information. The primary role of the media is to report on current events, however, media texts also have the possibility to sophisticatedly influence the views and values of consumers through the use of emotional language [2]. The informational and

psychological influence that is implemented on one's interests is a kind of psychological "weapon". Manipulation is carried out implicitly or explicitly by means of various speech devices, which include metaphor. In this article, therefore, we also take into consideration the conflictogenic potential of metaphor, which is one of the most frequent means of eliciting a wide range of emotions. An important part of our analysis is to understand the key principles of the process of media metaphorization concerning the discourse event Brexit.

2. DISCOURSE-ANALYTICAL RESEARCH ON METAPHORS

The concept of metaphor is extremely broad. From the semiotic point of view, for instance, every sign can have a metaphorical nature. A sign becomes a certain symbol in a particular linguocultural community: it can be a well-known statue, monument, memorial, photograph, poster, etc. Thus, a metaphor can be not only verbal but also visual [3]. In the process of researching metaphor, we must constantly bear in mind that the perception of the recipient of the metaphor is also diachronic (in space and time) in which the act of metaphorical looking at a certain phenomenon

takes place. Therefore, language has a "chronotopic nature" and "images" are mediated in the temporal-spatial flow of the act of speech. Hence, it follows that seemingly the same metaphor (e.g., of a rose, a ship, a castle, a star, etc.) in a different space-time can take on various connotations and cultural associations [4].

Discourse-analytical research on mass media is becoming an increasingly productive research area for semioticians, linguists, and discourse analysts. This may be explained by the fact that the media is nowadays the main source of information, which, moreover, has a strongly intertextual nature [5]. It is a transdisciplinary research field that began to develop in the mid-1960s and 1970s in anthropology, ethnography, micro-sociology, cognitive and social psychology, poetics, rhetoric, stylistics, linguistics, semiotics, and other humanities disciplines and social sciences that deal with the systematic study of the structures, functions, and processing of text and speech [6].

Discourse theory contributes to the understanding of social realities that are constructed in politics, economics, science, law, and other areas of everyday life [7]. Its focus is on discourse, which may be defined as "purposeful social activity and speech immersed in life. It is a complex whole of linguistic practice and extralinguistic factors; it is essentially every text in all its depth and multiple meanings, and its content includes, in addition to the immediate communication, the whole complex of knowledge about the world, society, communicants, communication codes and their interaction" [8].

In this article, we analyze the functions of metaphors in media discourse, which we characterize as the totality of processes and products of speech activity in the media. The analysis of media discourse is primarily dealt with in the field of media linguistics, within which the research of linguists, experts in the field of journalism and media communication, discourse analysts, etc. intersect. As Brexit is predominantly a political topic, we can also talk about research on political discourse, which often overlaps with media discourse as it is mainly conducted through the media [9]. In Russia, there is also a term for this type of discourse – *политический медиадискурс*, i.e. media discourse with political topics.

It is undeniable that metaphors have strong rhetorical effects in media and political discourse, and thanks to their imagery and unexpectedness are able to penetrate the mind of the recipient [10]. It is

well-known that what is expressed metaphorically is always more powerful than dry interpretation. The metaphorical artistic experience can become a way to understand the mysterious and the untouchable, lying beyond the rational [11]. Metaphors create new meanings that can potentially change thinking. In political discourse, politicians are fond of using metaphor and metonymy to construct a persuasive version of reality to which they adapt style and content and through which they try to appeal to emotions. The use of emotional and metaphorical images is an important tool for different political groups in democratic political struggles [12]. Persuasion is a basic and key function of the language of politics, but politicians also use language to communicate their intentions and goals. The persuasive function is also called informative (influencing attitudes). In addition to this function, the language of politics also has an integrative (expressing common values and attitudes), regulative (guiding top-down relations between politicians and citizens), instrumental (people's demands, wishes; bottom-up), and (self-representation of politicians) image-building function [13].

We agree with eminent Russian linguist A. P. Chudinov, who argues that "metaphorical models are to be studied in discourse, in close connection with the conditions of their emergence and functioning, taking into account the author's intentions and pragmatic characteristics against a broad socio-political background and taking into account a number of extralinguistic factors. The system of metaphorical models is an important part of the national linguistic picture of the world, and the national mentality, closely related to the history of the nation and the current socio-political situation" [14].

3. ANALYSIS OF THE PHYSIOLOGICAL METAPHOR IN THE PROCESS OF METAPHORIZATION OF BREXIT IN RUSSIAN MEDIA

In the process of the analysis, we use the method of frames and slots, which is also relied on by Chudinov in his research [15]. The material for our research was Russian electronic media, published from 2016 up to the present. We consider the exploration of Brexit (and now its aftermath) and the nature of its key events and actors to be still relevant and fruitful, despite its apparent "end". Its implications for British, European, and global

politics will resonate in the Russian media for a long time to come.

The physiological metaphor is considered one of the most traditional metaphorical models, as it is closely connected with our experience and naive ideas about our bodies, organs, and their functions. After all, every language has a distinctly anthropocentric nature and presents a picture of the world as it appears to us and the form in which it exists for us as humans.

3.1 *Body Parts and Organs*

3.1.1 *Sensory Organs*

The prototypical function of the sensory organs is the acquisition of information about the world around us. In this slot, the concepts *глаза* (*eyes*), *нос* (*nose*), and *зубы* (*teeth*) had the highest frequency of use: *Призыв «Покончим с Брекситом» побудил многих избирателей к голосованию за консерваторов. При этом они закрыли глаза на отсутствие ясности в ответах Джонсона на вопрос, каким же образом будут выстраиваться в будущем отношения с ЕС* [ipg-jurnal.io, 16.12.2019] / *Борис Джонсон утверждает, что европейцам достаточно будет «заглянуть в глаза» британцев, чтобы оценить серьезность их намерений* [novayagazeta.ru, 23.07.2019]. The eyes are metaphorically regarded as the window or mirror of the soul, through which truth or lie, as well as the mood of a person, can be detected. The metaphor *закрывать глаза* (*to close one's eyes*) symbolizes Johnson's vague and evasive answers about post-Brexit relations with the EU, which may be explained by the general fatigue of British society about Brexit. These metaphors are not intended as an attempt at speech aggression. However, the expression *заглянуть в глаза* (*to look into someone's eyes*) is manipulative because Johnson is using it to appeal to the emotions of the Britons and convince them that his decisions reflect their true interests.

Within the concept *нос* (*nose*), the most productive metaphors were *водить за нос* (*lead someone by the nose*) and *на носу* (*around the corner*; literally *on the nose*): *Своей риторикой Джонсон водит за нос общественное мнение Великобритании* [russian.rt, 13.06.2019] / *Полгода парламент водил его за нос* [russian.rt, 16.12.2019] / *Внезпно на носу! Великобритания и ЕС ускоряют переговоры* [rossaprimavera.ru, 30.08.2019] / *На носу досрочные выборы, нет*

никакой определенности «Брекситом» [kommersant.uk, 06.09.2019] / *Пять недель вынужденного простоя до середины октября – не успеешь оглянуться, на носу Брексит!* [vesti.ru, 29.08.2019] / *Но вот «час икс» уже на носу, всё время потрачено на бесплодные споры и малопонятные «дорожные карты»* [kr.ru, 16.01.2019]. The metaphor *водить за нос* (*lead someone by the nose*) is very productive in media texts because it is related to the false behavior of politicians, who are known for failing to keep their promises and misleading society. In the abovementioned examples, this metaphor is used in connection with Boris Johnson. In the first example, he is the demagogue, in the second, it is him who is deceived by the Parliament. The metaphor *на носу* (*around the corner*; literally *on the nose*) is used when reporting on close events and "tight deadlines", in our excerpts, it is mainly associated with the date of Brexit. On the basis of the analyzed examples, it may be concluded that the abovementioned concepts have an ironic and, in the case of the metaphor *водить за нос*, negative pragmatic potential.

When analyzing the concept *зубы* (*teeth*), the metaphor *сломать зубы* (*to suffer a crushing defeat*; literally *to break teeth*) emerged as the most frequently used: *Обо что сломала свои крепкие зубы Тереза Мэй?* [russian.rt, 21.08.2019] / *Вполне логично, что основной лейтмотив — это реализация Brexit, о которой успели «сломать зубы» два предыдущих лидера партии и премьера* [russiancouncil.ru, 01.07.2019]. The *teeth* are a symbol of health and life energy; *крепкие зубы* (*strong teeth*) are an indicator of power in media discourse with political topics. The metaphor *сломать зубы* is used to denote failure or futile effort, and in the examples mentioned above, it articulates the political decisions of Theresa May and David Cameron, whose political careers came to an end because of Brexit. The metaphor has therefore a negative, even satirical, connotation in relation to the two former Prime Ministers.

3.1.2 *Face and Its Parts*

The human face is a fundamental part of our appearance as it is usually the first thing we notice about a person. This concept is therefore linked to a person's prestige, authority, status, honor, and dignity: *Третий вариант практически исключен – Джонсон потеряет лицо, а потом и должность* [vz.ru, 24.06.2019] / *Влиятельные*

силы в Великобритании и ЕС готовы потерять лицо, но не мытьем, так катаньем отменить результаты референдума [aif.ru, 28.03.2019]. In the first example, the metaphor *потерять лицо* (to lose face) was used in relation to Boris Johnson, who was in danger of losing his authority and position as Prime Minister as a result of his political actions. Boris Johnson is portrayed negatively because this metaphor has a traditionally negative pragmatic potential. An equally frequent metaphor in Russian media discourse is *сохранять серьезное лицо* (to keep a straight face): *Джонсон, конечно, замечательно умеет сохранять серьезное лицо, когда он на самом деле совершенно неискренен* [ng.ru, 05.09.2019]. The aforesaid metaphor points to Johnson's insincerity and his ability as an experienced politician to double-cross and engage in intrigue against his rivals.

Щеки (cheeks) and *брови* (eyebrows) are also prominent parts of the face. Within these concepts, we have observed the following examples in Russian media discourse: *Как и нынешней Англии — ходить в роли ближних задворок Штатов. Потому как быть собой не получается [причём очень давно], но щёки имперского величия раздувать всё ещё хочется и строго хмурить брови тоже* [russian.rt, 18.01.2019].

Based on the above, it may be concluded that the metaphorical use of the analyzed concepts has a particularly ironic and negative shade. This can be especially seen in the phrase *раздувать щеки имперского величия* (to inflate the cheeks of imperial grandeur), since the currently popular colloquial (reduced) metaphor *раздувать щеки* (to inflate cheeks) in the Russian linguistic picture of the world points to feigned importance to the point of empty bragging. Great Britain is depicted by means of facial grimaces as a country that strives to appear important, despite its loss of status and frequent subservience to the interests of the USA.

3.1.3 Heart

In the direct sense, *сердце* (heart) is the central organ of the circulatory system; in the figurative sense, it acts as a symbol for the soul and emotions: *У сторонников «Брексита» хватило аргументов, чтобы убедить большинство британцев «голосовать сердцем»* [novayagazeta.ru, 24.06.2016]. In the given excerpt, the author points to the manner in which British politicians tried to persuade the public to vote for Brexit by appealing to them to decide not with their

minds, but with their hearts. This type of metaphor may be seen as manipulative.

The metaphorical expressions *скрепя сердце* (with a heavy heart, reluctantly) and *с тяжёлым сердцем* (with a heavy heart), used to describe situations when something is done with reluctance, may be observed in the following excerpts: *Скрепя сердце британский премьер договорился с Брюсселем о переносе «развода» до 31 января 2020 года* [iz.ru, 20.12.2019] / *В отличие от энтузиаста Brexit Джонсона, его противник Джереми Хант, как и Мэй голосовавший за членство страны в ЕС в 2016 году, будет заниматься Brexit с «тяжёлым сердцем»* [russiancouncil.ru, 01.07.2019].

In the first excerpt, Boris Johnson was forced to make a deal with Brussels to postpone the UK's exit from the EU; in the second, politicians Jeremy Hunt and Theresa May had to deal with the implementation of Brexit, despite initially voting against it. This type of metaphor naturally evokes in the recipient a sense of the negative attitude of British politicians towards Brexit, who have often had to act in contradiction to their own views.

Another interesting example where *the heart* has been used is the following fragment: *Ведь именно он довел Британию до выхода из ЕС, а затем вдруг бросил эту затею и ушел в тень. Это было, как если бы герой известного произведения Данко не «разорвал руками себе грудь», не «вырвал из нее свое сердце» и не «поднял его высоко над головой», а просто спрятался бы в кусты. Борис Джонсон жертвовать собой не захотел. Сегодня Британия вот уже три года топчется в потемках Brexit. Зато Джонсон теперь «на коне» и в твердой уверенности, что ему дозволено все. И «вырывать для этого сердце», как Данко, уже не надо* [russiancouncil.ru, 01.07.2019]. Johnson is metaphorized through an analogy with *Danko*, a character in Maxim Gorky's short story *Old Izergil* (1895), who sacrificed himself to save his people by ripping a flaming heart out of his chest. Danko wanted to lead his people out of the dark forest, in what the author sees as an analogy to Johnson, whose goal was to "lead" Britain out of the EU. Danko is viewed as a symbol of courage, while Johnson is conceptualized as a coward. The given allusion to a well-known national precedent name undoubtedly has a strong emotional and evaluative effect for the Russian reader.

3.1.4 Hands

The most productive slot within the analyzed frame was clearly the slot *руки* (*hands*), which is supported by the number and variety of the excerpted metaphors. In the fragment «Брексит» *будет реализован руками консерваторов, которые будут нести полную политическую ответственность за все проблемы, после чего лейбористы смогут собрать протестные голоса избирателей* [kommersant.ru, 02.08.2019], the author's goal was not to ridicule or criticize British politicians but to highlight the idea of *action*. The ironic pragmatic potential of the metaphor *hand* is absent, since the metaphors *made by hands / created by hands* are conventional (lexicalized). In the positive sense, *hands* are used as a symbol of friendly cooperation: *Великобритания станет для Евросоюза «дружелюбным соседом», всегда готовым работать рука об руку с Брюсселем при условии совпадения их интересов* [iz.ru, 20.01.2021].

In Russian media texts, we have also observed the metaphorical expression *развязать руки* (*untie someone's hands*), which denotes absolute freedom in action: *А "брексит", напротив, развяжет руки британским спецслужбам, скованным европейскими правилами и судебными решениями* [rg.ru, 15.06.2016]. As can be seen, the metaphor *развязать руки* is neither ironic nor negative. *Hands* have a high frequency of metaphorical use in political discourse in the form of the phrase *играть на руку* (*to play into someone's hands*), which aims to evoke an image of political help or advantage: *Амбиции потенциальных кандидатов на пост главы правительства Альбиона играют на руку премьеру, которая убеждена: альтернативы ее плану по выходу Британии из Евросоюза просто не существует.* [rg.ru, 20.09.2018] / *После референдума он стабильно и жестко поддерживал выход, и это, судя по всему, сыграло ему на руку на выборах* [inosmi.ru, 17.12.2019]. In the examples above, this metaphor is used in the context of Theresa May's political advantage and in reporting on Boris Johnson's victory in the snap general election. The authors do not aim to model Johnson and May negatively.

Another interesting metaphorical example is *И теперь у него в руках карт-бланш на реализацию Brexit* [ria.ru, 13.12.2019], where *карт-бланш* (*carte blanche*) symbolizes the unlimited political power of B. Johnson in the implementation of Brexit. This metaphor does not

have an explicitly negative pragmatic potential in the given example, but the image of absolute political power can evoke negative emotions in the recipient, as political leaders often pursue their goals at the expense of the population. In the example *Недоброжелатели, желающие Евросоюзу скорейшего распада (а таковых сегодня немало и в России), довольно потирая руки, уже составляют списки будущих "брекситов"* [kommersant.ru, 30.12.2016], the metaphor *потирать руки* (*to rub hands*) is commonly used as a symbol of gloating and contentment. Compared to the other analyzed metaphors, it has a stronger ironic pragmatic potential as it articulates joy at the instability of the European Union. Through the metaphor *рука Москвы* (*Moscow's hand*), members of the *Labour Party* accuse Russia of interfering in British politics, which may be interpreted by the Russian recipient as an expression of aggression and unfair accusations towards Russia: *Лейбористы открыто заявили, что "рука Москвы" играла на стороне консерваторов* [ria.ru, 13.12.2019].

In the following example, we may observe the concept of *the hand* in the metaphorical sense of hidden activity (*незримые руки*; in English *invisible hands*): *Впрочем, Мэй, которая всю свою политическую жизнь практически всегда пребывала на вторых ролях, делать это привычно. Поэтому и раскачивается, создаёт интригу, а в это время незримые руки со всех сторон пытаются её поддержать* [russian.rt, 18.01.2019]. It is no longer Russia, but May's aides, without whom, according to the author, she would not have been able to carry out the post of Prime Minister. This creates a negative image of her in the recipient who perceives her as a politician with an opaque political background.

3.1.5 Legs

A traditional metaphor that is popular with Russian journalists is the international phraseme *Achilles' heel*, which symbolizes the weak and vulnerable point of a person or an organization: *Лондон нацупал ахиллесову пяту Евросоюза* [russian.rt, 22.10.2020] / *Борис Джонсон не сумеет добиться от Евросоюза уступок по ирландскому вопросу – он абсолютно принципиален для Брюсселя. Зачем идти на уступки, если все козыри на руках у Евросоюза? Он не хочет, чтобы Британия уходила, вот и держит ее за ахиллесову пяту, понимая, что никто в английской элите не может*

согласиться на фактическое отделение Северной Ирландии от королевства [vz.ru, 24.07.2019]. In the first example, the author reports on the UK's advantage in having the City of London's financial institutions play a key role in mitigating the risks associated with the huge debts of EU member states to Brussels and the world. The second example demonstrates that Boris Johnson is exploiting the UK's weak point – the issue of the separation of Northern Ireland, which is extremely important for the European Union as well as Britain – to buy time to complete Brexit. Concepts associated with weakness generally have a negative impact on the reader, as the examples above demonstrate.

The phrase *наступать на пятки* (*tread on somebody's heels*), which is used in the context of fierce competition with the meaning *to catch up and overtake*, is very popular in the Russian media: *После голосования за “брексит” Лондон уже не так интересен предпринимателям... Британской столице наступают на пятки другие европейские инкубаторы стартапов – Дублин, Париж и Лиссабон. И, конечно, Берлин. После “брексита” именно Берлин первым вышел на связь с британскими стартапами и крупными корпорациями* [ru.euronews, 15.07.2018]. The author uses this metaphor to show how London's decision to leave the EU has weakened its position in the world of contemporary economics and innovative technological perspectives and has put it at a competitive disadvantage.

3.1.6 Spine, back

The *spine / back* is traditionally a symbol of a sensitive and vulnerable place: *Нынешняя ситуация чем-то напоминает обстановку 2016 года, когда Гоув «воткнул нож в спину» Джонсону* [russian.rt.com, 27.05.2019]. The expression *воткнуть нож в спину* (*a knife in the back*) has a negative connotation because it is associated with the betrayal of a loved one. We observe the same situation with the example of Johnson and his close associate Michael Gove. In the given metaphor, we may see its conflictogenic nature, which evokes strong negative emotions and a feeling of aggression. The following fragment has the same effect on the recipient: *Позиции Терезы Мэй теперь ослаблены как на переговорах о “Брексите”, так и внутри страны, вплоть до упорных разговоров о ее скорой отставке и новых выборах. Те, кто точит ножи у нее за*

спиной, дают ей еще максимум полтора года [kommersant.ru, 19.06.2017]. The author points to Theresa May's weakened position in Britain and in the world. The enemies of the British politician are metaphorized as traitors waiting in the wings for her downfall. This fragment also has a particularly negative effect on the reader as it is closely linked to the cowardly, dishonest, and aggressive behavior of political rivals.

3.1.7 The Nervous System and Nerves

Russian journalists are fond of using the concept *нервы* (*nerves*): *Он обещал «великую многомерную игру в «шахматы» нескольких переговоров одновременно», используя «нервы, мышцы и инстинкты, которыми этой стране не приходилось пользоваться уже полвека»* [novayagazeta.ru, 22.09.2020] / *Без четкого плана в этом направлении Брексит окажется просто пратой времени и нервов* [inosmi.ru, 18.10.2019] / *Королевство на грани нервного срыва* [novayagazeta.ru, 23.07.2019]. Mental problems or emotional strain have negative connotations in the creation of the metaphorical image. The authors use them to point to the instability of political subjects. In the above examples, *nerves* symbolize the tension and effort that politicians have to make in order to implement Brexit. In the first fragment, this effort is reinforced by the concepts *мышцы* (*muscles*) and *инстинкты* (*instincts*). The use of *nerves* in the following excerpt is particularly ironic. *Что до Англии, то, видимо, у неё тоже произойдёт какая-то ротация курса, который ей напишут. Например, предложат медитировать над альбомом с фотографиями былого величия и триумфов. Это, говорят, нервы успокаивает* [russian.rt, 18.01.2019]. The author makes satirical comments about Great Britain and its former glory; the recipient is able to perceive this negative attitude, which is demonstrated by the metaphorical image of how *Britain calms its nerves by looking through a photo album of past achievements and triumphs*. In this way, the author tries to influence the emotions of the recipient and create the image of an unstable and tense political environment in England.

3.2 Physiological Activities

This frame proved to be less productive compared to the frame *Body parts and organs*: *Выстроив более тесные отношения с США, стране придётся проглотить всё то, что предложит ей Трамп* [regnum.ru, 31.08.2019].

The concept *проглотить* (*to swallow*) often has a figuratively negative connotation, as it is associated with the forced acceptance of the rules of another politician or political entity. In the aforesaid example, the US and the UK are in this position. The UK by virtue of its close relations and cooperation with America, has to accept what Trump has to offer.

4. CONCLUSION

The most productive slot in our analysis is the slot *hand*, which has positive connotations, especially when it acts as a symbol of cooperation and action. In the sense of interfering in foreign activities or gloating about the instability of the EU, it takes on an ironic pragmatic potential. We consider the most conflictogenic metaphors to be the concepts related to the *spine / back* (the phrase *воткнуть нож в спину – a knife in the back*) and *nerves* (*на грани нервного срыва – on the verge of a nervous breakdown*). Our analysis has shown that Russian authors of media texts conceptualize Great Britain as a country that cannot forget its lost glory and tries to act as a great power (*раздувать щеки – to inflate cheeks*; and *хмурить брови – to frown one's brow*). Theresa May is metaphorized as a defeated Prime Minister who, despite her efforts to implement Brexit, failed (*сломать зубы – to suffer a crushing defeat*). Boris Johnson is portrayed as a politician who, like *Danko*, wanted to help his people, but who, unlike him, proved to be a coward. The analyzed examples show that Russian journalists turn to given metaphorical models in order to appeal to the feelings and will of the recipients and to negatively influence their perception of British and European politics.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Linda Krajcovicova – formulation of scientific hypotheses, excerption, analysis and interpretation of data, synthesis of the findings

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