Metaphor in the Anti-Immigration Rhetoric of the Slovak Far Right

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Abstract

The political discourse on international migration does not have a long tradition in Slovakia. Its beginnings can be dated back to 2015. However, the Slovak far right has articulated this topic much earlier. In the article, we offer an answer to the question of what categories of metaphors the representatives of the far right in Slovakia use when they articulate the topic of international migration. The text is based on the assumption that due to the extremely negative approach of the Slovak far-right to migrants, politicians will use means of expression with a negative connotation. Based on the analysis, it can be stated that the representatives of the Slovak far-right populism often use metaphors such as water, enemy, nouns denoting animals, and metaphors expressing burden. On the contrary, Slovak politicians use much less the metaphor of the guest and the metaphor of the commodity.

Keywords: migration, discourse, metaphor, Slovakia, far-right populism.

Introduction

In 2015, after the intensification of migration processes from North African countries and the Arab region, the topic of international migration also came to the centre of the Slovak political discourse. Until this period, migration was mainly a topic of experts from the ranks of scientists, academics or non-governmental organisations, which were primarily devoted to assisting migrants. Until then, migration was articulated only by some political parties, which can be classified at the right edge of the ideological spectrum.

Since the summer of 2015, discussing migration has also become popular in Slovakia, despite the fact that Slovakia was not on one of the migration routes used by refugees travelling towards West-ern European countries, so Slovak citizens were not directly exposed to the actors of migration pro-cesses.

There may be more reasons for the discovery and subsequent articulation of this topic by Slovak politicians. The first is the strong intensity of migration processes. Between 2015 and 2016, hundreds of thousands of migrants arrived in Europe, which was not typical when compared to the previous period. The second reason is directly related to the first. Given the scale and intensity of migration, migration has become a central topic of media news coverage. The media covered migration in detail, with images of drowned refugees (including children) in the Mediterranean Sea, of border controls, or of the unflattering situation of refugees at the train station in Budapest. The regular media coverage of the migration processes was naturally reflected in the increased interest of the domestic public. We consider the campaign before the parliamentary elections, which took place in March 2016, as the third and decisive reason for moving this topic from a marginal position to the centre of Slovak public discourse. The growing fears of the population about the unknown have been used by the politicians to mobilise voters and gain electoral support. Political discourse was thus conducted within the boundaries of a single line, the content of which was the presentation of migration as a threat (Androvičová 2015).

Despite the fact that representatives of all relevant parties have expressed their views on migration, in this text we will focus on only one ideological trend, namely the far-right one. The language of the far-right ideology, or even the language of right-wing populism, is specific, and is often studied as a special phenomenon in the world (Smolík 2013; Demčišák 2020). Although the mode of expression of the current or former representatives of the People's Party-Our Slovakia (ĽSNS) has evolved in recent years, from the extreme to the standard, we can still identify specific means of expression in it. Thus, in the article presented we will focus my attention on the question of what categories of conceptual metaphors are used by representatives of the far-right ideology in Slovakia when articulating the topic of international migration, since metaphors have a decisive influence on the content and conception of the text and, ultimately, on the discourse (Böke, Jung, Niehr, Wengeler: 2000; Pavlíková 2020).

Our reasoning is based on the assumption that, given the extremely negative attitude of the Slovak far right towards migrants, politicians will use expressive means with negative connotations. The corpus of the texts under study consists of public statements made by the representatives of the political parties Kotleba's People's Party-Our Slovakia (ĽSNS), Republika and Sme rodina. We included the Sme rodina party in the research because it maintains good relations with the far-right parties from other European Union states and articulates the topic of international migration in a similar way to the representatives of right-wing extremism.

Metaphors in political discourse

Metaphors are usually seen from two perspectives. In the traditional or Aristotelian view, metaphor is understood as a decorative addition to language, especially in poetry and rhetoric. In this conception, metaphor is meant to represent stylistic beauty and linguistic creativity. On the contrary, in the modern conception, the roles of metaphors are further expanded by additional perspectives. One of them is represented by the theory of cognitive metaphor, authored by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson and their joint work Metaphors We Live By (1980).

According to Lakoff and Johnson, metaphors are not only a linguistic phenomenon that most people can manage without. Metaphor is a part of every individual's life, thought and action. Through metaphorical thinking, we can create and understand linguistic expressions that can be interpreted metaphorically. These conceptual metaphors are culture-bound, so we can only comprehend them through an understanding of a particular culture. Metaphors are expressions of the abstraction of memories and experiences that people acquire in the process of linguistic socialization. Conventional metaphorical concepts generate conventional expressions in language. Conventional thinking enables the generation of linguistic conventions (Kalliokoski 1996). In other words, metaphors have a close relationship between the use of language and thought processes, attitudes to-wards the world or everyday life, which are related to a certain perspective of the individual's perception of the world and personal experiences (Liebert 2008).

According to Lakoff and Johnson, metaphors become most powerful when they are self-evident and therefore escape the attention of readers (Petersson, Kainz 2017). Lakoff and Johnson view metaphors as a means to understand one experience through the experience of another. For them, a metaphor is a conceptual metaphor or a metaphorical concept. They view metaphor as a cognitive phenomenon. However, conceptual metaphor is not only encountered in everyday language, but is also present in science, where it performs "the function of linking one idea to another in order to understand something better through that idea" (Micsinai 2015: 47).

Metaphors are also a fixed part of political discourse, thus arousing scholarly interest in their re-search. Nikoleta Mertova (2018) points out that at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, political metaphorology established itself within linguistics as an independent discipline. In political communication, they fulfil several roles that depend on the situation and context in which politicians use them. In addition to the presentation of facts, these include their interpretation and evaluation. Metaphors have the ability to influence the receiver of the message and can direct him/her to-

wards political thinking and action (Dulebova 2010), which is ultimately to be reflected in his/her voting behaviour. The ability of metaphors to influence recipients in their political views is also highlighted by the German author Linda Giesel (2019). In her view, persuasion is precisely one of the key communicative functions of metaphors.

In addition to persuasion, metaphors are used to explain some abstract content that can be better understood if explained to voters in a figurative sense (Giesel 2019). Thus, one of the functions of metaphors in politics is to simplify and explain the political issue raised (Mio 1997, Spišiaková 2017). The question remains, of course, whether political actors are interested in explaining their ideas or, conversely, in influencing or directly manipulating them. After all, the aim of politicians is mainly to convince the electorate in order to gain the voters' favour. This is also why politicians use different categories of metaphors when communicating with voters. A metaphor has the disposition to carry not only particular information but also an evaluative judgement based on emotion. Thus, in addition to persuasion, another communicative function of metaphor is evaluation. The evaluation, or the emotion evoked by the evaluation, can be either positive or negative. Through metaphors, politicians high-light their own merits and, conversely, attack the policy outcomes of their opponents (Štefančík 2020).

Metaphor and migration discourse

Although international migration has only been present in political discourse in Slovakia since 2015, migration has been discussed in the typical immigration countries of Western Europe for many decades. For this reason, there are a number of different linguistic expressions that are used in connection with migration. Charlotte Taylor (2021) focused on research on conceptual metaphors of migration in the English press since 1785 and concluded that the most common metaphors in the context of migration can be summarised into six groups:
- The first conceptual metaphor is water, or liquid. These terms evoke a negative connotation be-cause they are associated with chaos, instability, or danger that cannot be fully controlled (a migratory wave, migratory flows, a boat is full, a tide or a flood of asylum seekers).
- The second metaphor, quite often used in the past, is that migrants are objects or commodities. Given that Taylor (2021) analysed newspapers from as early as the late 18th century, these metaphors occurred in the context of the human or slave trade. Later we identify them in the context of a discussion of cheap labour from abroad.

- Another group of metaphors associated with migration comes from the animal kingdom, and usually with the animals that do harm. Quite often, expressions such as parasites or pests, snakes, or horde appeared in connection with migration. The evaluation that accompanies these metaphors is extremely negative. Nowadays, it appears in the language of right-wing extremists frequently (Štefančík, Stradiotová 2021).

- Currently, a fairly common metaphor in relation to migration is that of the enemy or the invader. Again, this is a negative perception of the actors of migration processes. According to Taylor (2021), the use of this group of metaphors, although it does not dehumanize migrants, it does induce a sense of threat.

- The second to last group of metaphors is the metaphor of the migrant as guest. Although this metaphor does not appear negative at first glance, Taylor identifies in it an unequal relationship between the local population on the one hand and someone who comes to the local community on the other. The metaphor of the guest has been conventionalized as a visiting (invited) worker, particularly in the German postwar context (Taylor 2021), when Germans addressed a shortfall in the labor market by inviting foreign workers during a period of economic growth.

- Finally, the last group of metaphors identified in the context of migration is the metaphor of heavy load or burden. This metaphor is mainly used for negative evaluations in which migrants are perceived as an economic burden.

Metaphor in the language of the Slovak far right

As mentioned in the introduction of this article, until 2015, the actors in the migration debate were primarily researchers, academics, or representatives of some NGOs focused on assisting particular groups of migrants, primarily asylum seekers. While the first group had a largely neutral view of migration, a positive attitude towards migrants prevailed among representatives of the third sector. Until 2015, only some political representatives, usually on the right edge of the ideological spectrum (SNS and ĽSNS), were involved in the debate on migration (Stradiotová 2017). Since 2015, representatives of the political elite have become the dominant media outcomes in Slovakia, while the positions of experts have remained marginal. This fact has also influenced the nature of migration discourse in Slovakia. Until 2015, an academic style of discussion prevailed, while after 2015, simple, populist constructions, charged with mostly negative emotions, prevailed, as evidenced by the metaphors used by politicians when presenting their positions

on this topic. Negative attitudes of politicians towards migration also affect-ed the attitudes of voters. In discussions on social networks, many voters presented extremely negative, even xenophobic, views about migrants (Or-goňová, Bohunická 2016).

In the following section, we want to find an answer to the question of which metaphors were used by the representatives of the far right. We will rely specifically on Charlotte Taylor's categorization and focus my attention on the metaphors: water, commodity, concepts from the animal kingdom, enemy or invader, guest and burden.

a) the metaphor of water

The first conceptual metaphor in the Slovak case is also water. Water usual-ly symbolizes something chaotic, dangerous (Mocková 2019). The arrival of migrants in 2015 is referred to as a migratory wave or migration flows, which in itself does not necessarily evoke a negative emotion. What will be important is the context in which the motive of the wave is presented. Milan Uhrík, a former member of the ĽSNS and today's MEP, presented the mi-gration wave in 2018 as follows:

- "*To show you the true face of this **catastrophe**, we have visited some of the European coun-tries most affected by the immigration **wave***" (Milan Uhrík, ĽSNS 2018).

Thus, in the quoted passage, the migratory wave is associated with a "catastrophe" and countries are "affected" by international migration. In this context, the metaphor of water has a strong negative connotation.

In addition to waves or flows, the terms flood and tide or influx also ap-pear in the case of migration:

- "*Politicians in the European Parliament have betrayed us and are **flood-ing** Europe with millions of migrants*" (ĽSNS 2019).
- "*It is more than obvious that if the massive **influx** of immigrants is not stopped immediately by tough measures, such attacks will not only be re-peated continuously*" (ĽSNS 2016).
- "*What he (Andrej Kiska) did yesterday can be called treason, because accepting Merkel, we would still understand, but giving the highest state honours [...] to Merkel, who has **flooded** Europe with immigrants, Muslims, Africans and all sorts of things...* (Marian Kotleba, ĽSNS 2019).
- "*If they are against the unbridled **influx** of migrants, they can comment on this page ... they would **flood** Europe with migrants, they would uncontrol-*

*lably release these **flows** from third countries*" (Boris Kollár, youtube, 2021).

b) the metaphor of animals

This metaphorical category was used by the right-wing extremists to describe migrants in their early stages before entering parliament in 2016. Apparently, also under the influence of a number of trials held against individual representatives of the ĽSNS, the leaders of this party have softened their vocabulary and nowadays they do not use some of the pejorative terms as intensively as they did in the previous period. One such expression, for example, was the word parasite. The right-wing extremists used this term mainly in connection with criticism of the members of the Roma minority, but it also appeared in their anti-immigration rhetoric.

- "*As if it wasn't bad enough that we have a gypsy problem here, we're already being swarmed by **hordes** of Muslim immigrants*" (ĽS NS 2016).
- "*But they won't learn their lesson and they will still be looking around for such **half apes** ... I'm sure if I did that in an Islamic country, we'd have the death penalty in no time! This is cultural enrichment ... Filthy **parasites**"* (M. Mazurek, quoted by Benčík 2016-2020).

In this context, it is pertinent to note that the word parasite (or in the plural parasites) was also used by Adolf Hitler, who used it to refer to Jews (Bein 1965). In the Nazi leader's logic, the term parasites referred to a group of people who, as in the biological sense, were supposed to have a malignant effect on the organism, in Hitler's logic on the German nation (Schmitz-Berning 1988). Ötsch and Horaczek (2017) note that when a political actor wants to verbally express hatred to-wards other persons or a group of persons, he or she will often use a term from the animal kingdom.

c) migrants as enemies, invaders

The mindset of the representatives of the far right is dichotomous, in the sense of US vs. THEM, or the others, or friend vs. enemy. The category US is made up of the nation, although not everyone belongs to the nation. Mostly it is only those who do not openly support the other side. To strength-en the identity of US, it is important to create a category of THEM, against which discourse actors define themselves (Cingerová, Dulebová 2019). The category THEM (enemy) is much broader, and can be divided into two groups: the in-home enemy and the external enemy. The first group usually

includes the ruling elite, independent journalists or representatives of minorities (Roma, homosexuals). The second group consists of international organisations (EU, NATO), banks, pharmaceutical companies, but above all migrants, especially black and Muslim ones. It is in the anti-immigration rhetoric of the representatives of the Slovak far right that we can identify dichotomous thinking in the sense of US vs. THEM.

- "*At a time when the whole of Europe is threatened by invaders from Africa or Asia, when it is threatened by Islamification and the subversion of our faith, our states, our culture and our traditions ...*" (ĽSNS 2015).
- "*We will not allow immigrants to take over Slovakia. We will not give them our women or our land. We will defend our homeland ...*" (ĽSNS 2016).
- "*Let all Islamists see that they are not welcome here, that we will defend our Slavic women and families and that our Slavic land does not belong to them*" (M. Mazurek, Warsaw 2017, quoted by Bencik 2017).
- "*The invasion of illegal immigrants, many of whom do not come from genuine need, but come here only to enjoy themselves for free, to steal, rape and murder*" (ĽSNS 2018).
- "*Immigrants are taking over Europe*" (Stratená Európa 2019).

The term migrant, or the derivative immigrant, is generally understood by the representatives of the far right as a person who comes from a culturally and religiously different background. In anti-immigration rhetoric, the migrant is perceived as an enemy of the local nation, posing a security, social, political, economic and cultural threat to its members. Since representatives of the far right like to style themselves as defenders of the nation, they often use military vocabulary (*occupy*, *protect*, *defend*, *defend the borders*, *invade*, etc.) on this topic.

d) migrants as a burden

Another metaphor that can be identified in the anti-immigration rhetoric of the far right is migration as a burden. This burden can be of different nature, usually referring to the economic burden. In the language of the far right, migrants are presented as those who compete with native workers in the labour market, but also, for example, as those for whom the state has economic costs that could be used for other activities if the borders were closed, such as support for schools, nurseries, health care, etc. However, the burden does not have to be exclusively economic in nature, but can be understood in terms of cultural, social or security burdens.

e) migrants as guests

- "*Muslim immigrants cannot and will not adapt to our laws and social norms. They commit many crimes and are a huge burden on the indigenous population*" (ĽSNS 2018, from the text of the Petition for a Referendum on the Slovak Republic's Withdrawal from the European Union).

The migrants-as-guests metaphor has emerged in migration discourse in typically immigrant countries in connection with inviting cheap labour from abroad to promote economic growth. The recruitment of a cheap and primarily young workforce was not only supposed to have a positive impact on economic growth, but immigration was also supposed to address the demographic deficit. In the language of the representatives of the Slovak far right, compared to the others, a positive attitude towards migration is not often found and is not expressed.

- "*Yet the EU is inviting more immigrants here*" (ĽSNS 2016).

f) migrants as objects or commodities

As indicated above, this metaphor was intended to refer to migrants as goods, as commodities, in a period when there was a market of human beings or slaves. Nowadays, it appears as a term to refer to migrants as cheap workforce. In a number of European countries, liberal immigration policies have been used to solve the shortages in the labour market, but the Slovak representatives of the far right refuse to solve not only the economic but also the demographic problems of Slovak society with liberal immigration policies.

Conclusion

The conducted analysis shows that the use of metaphors is a frequent means of communication of the representatives of the Slovak far right. In the text we focused on the search for an answer to the question of what categories of metaphors the representatives of this ideological spectrum use in their anti-immigration rhetoric. Given that the far-right generally has a negative perception of international migration, the use of metaphors in the context of immigration discourse evokes negative emotions.

In the analysis we did not aim to quantify the use of each metaphor, so we cannot express the frequency of their use in an exact way. However, the

available texts show that among the most frequent metaphors in the anti-immigration rhetoric of the far right are the metaphor of water, the metaphor of the enemy or invader, and the metaphor of animals. All three have a negative emotional colouring that is accentuated in the context of what is being said. In fact, the water metaphor is also used in everyday communication, and is often found in neutral scientific texts, with no ambition to express a particular emotion. However, when the metaphor of water is combined with other means of expression that are typical of the language of the far right, the negative emotional colouring comes to the fore.

A frequent metaphor of the far right in anti-immigration rhetoric is that of the enemy. However, this is not only typical in the context of negative statements on international migration. In fact, the communication strategies of the far right are based on the dichotomous division of society into two categories of people expressed by the terms US and THEM (Fraštíková 2020). The category US is supposed to represent the nation that the representatives of the far right are interested in protecting and defending. However, it is not the whole nation, but only a certain group of people, usually voters and sympathizers of the extreme right. On the contrary, the category of THEM is supposed to represent people (but also organisations), as a rule, with an opposite view, mentality, worldview. Dichotomous thinking in the sense of US vs. THEM is thus present in expressions on various topics, but it is particularly intense in the migration discourse.

The presented analysis proves that metaphor in anti-immigration discourse does not really represent a rhetorical ornament, but acts as a semantic means through which extremists, radicals and populists express attitudes, ways of thinking, values, but also mentality. This attitude is expressed in an emotionally negative way, resulting in a sense of threat and fear among the electorate, as migrants are presented as a (dangerous and uncontrollable) force destroying the national and cultural identity of the receiving nation. Indeed, fear is considered an important motivating factor for social action, or one of the means to motivate people to participate in elections and to support this type of political party.

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