

## METAPHORS OF HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY – WOMEN'S UNDERSTANDING OF SPORT METAPHORS IN POLITICAL DISCOURSE

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**Abstract:** Within the framework of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff and Johnson 1980) and Critical Discourse Analysis (van Dijk 1993, Wodak 2006) we analyse in this paper the results of a survey conducted among 100 women and 20 men in order to establish the level of their understanding of sport metaphors in political discourse. The results indicate that sport metaphors may pose a serious barrier to women's understanding of political life and may discourage women's political participation.

**Key words:** Conceptual Metaphor Theory, Critical Metaphor Analysis, politics, sport metaphors, women

### **1. Introduction**

Due to the fact that metaphors, being a basic and indispensable feature of human understanding, have attracted much scholarly attention in the last three decades, it has now been widely recognised that political discourse in many countries of the world abounds in sport metaphors (see e.g. Orwell 1946; Lipsky 1979; Howe 1988; Semino and Masci 1996; Thompson 1996; Herbeck 2000; Russo 2001; Silaški et al. 2009; Silaški and Radić-Bojanić 2009; Radić Bojanić and Silaški 2010, etc.) and that they are frequently used to socially construct a sometimes hard-to-understand concept of politics. These

often deliberately generated metaphors may facilitate the understanding of political developments by men, since sport is a part of male cultural background and everyday experience in many countries.

However, women and sport seem not to be that related. “Woman. Sport. These two words rest curiously next to each other like unrelated, detached strangers” (Boutilier and San Giovanni 1983:93). Since football is practically an entirely masculine activity, it comes as no surprise that football metaphors are so ubiquitous in politics, which is, at least in Serbia, also perceived as a predominantly masculine activity.

Female citizens, however, may find sport metaphors an obstacle to the understanding of politics rather than a means which may help them in understanding the meanings conveyed by them, as they mainly reflect male experience. This is at the same time the main hypothesis of our analysis – that women have difficulties in understanding sport metaphors as used in politics, which, in turn, may discourage women’s participation in political life. In other words, as we have argued elsewhere (Radić-Bojanić and Silaški 2010:31):

[w]e also believe that most women voters do not understand SPORT metaphors in political discourse. Although metaphors are a rhetorical device which is supposed to facilitate and simplify the act of message comprehension, we maintain that most women need to put a significant processing effort in order to understand the true nature of SPORT (FOOTBALL) [...], often without positive results.

In order to either refute or confirm our hypothesis, we conducted a survey among 100 women and 20 men in Serbia in order to establish the level of their understanding of sport metaphors in political discourse. Before giving the details of our survey results, we should first outline the basic tenets of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff and Jonson 1980) and of Critical Metaphor Analysis (Charteris-Black 2004), the two theoretical frameworks upon which our paper rests.

## **2. Theoretical framework**

According to the main tenet of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (as originated by Lakoff and Johnson 1980), metaphor use involves such cross-mapping from a source

domain to a target domain that the source conceptual domain (in our case, sport) is almost always more structured, more experientially founded and easier to comprehend, whereas the target conceptual domain (politics) is less structured, intangible and more difficult to understand. In metaphor understood as such a cross-domain mapping, constituent conceptual elements of the source domain correspond to constituent elements of the target domain. Thus, in the POLITICS IS SPORT metaphor, constituent conceptual elements of sport (predetermined rules, teams, players, sport field, referees, etc.) correspond to constituent elements of politics (election rules, political parties, politicians, etc.).

Metaphors, however, highlight only certain aspects of the target domain, while necessarily concealing its other aspects (Lakoff and Johnson 1980), which makes them suitable for use as one of the most pervasive instruments of persuasion and propaganda in the language of political rhetoric. Simultaneously, however, metaphors may serve as a powerful ideological tool. Deignan (2005:23) claims that “[t]he case for metaphor as ideological is developed from the observation that the interpretation of situations and events presented by any metaphor is only partial, and therefore flawed”, which stems from the principle of *metaphorical* hiding and *highlighting* (Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Kövecses 2002), according to which the metaphorical source domain focuses on a single aspect of the concept, while at the same time hiding some other aspects of the concept. This allows metaphors to present “a particular interpretation of situations and events” (Deignan 2005:23), desired by their creators and users alike.

According to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Critical Metaphor Analysis (Charteris-Black 2004), a version of CDA which draws heavily on the main insights of the cognitive theory of metaphor, rarely are metaphors void of some evaluative stance. They are charged with an ideological component, “which reflects a bias on the part of a speech community towards other groups of peoples, mores, situations and events” (López Rodríguez 2007:18). This is why metaphors are regarded in this paper as, among other things, carriers of ideology, when they serve as powerful tools of either presenting reality in the desired manner, or of distorting the picture of the reality we live in.

### **3. The survey**

In order to establish the extent to which women understand the meaning of sport metaphors used in Serbian political discourse (by which we mean not only *internal* political communication, referring to “all forms of discourse that concern first of all the functioning of politics within political institutions, i.e. governmental bodies, parties or other organisations” [Schäffner 1996:202], but also *external* political communication, aimed at the general public, as well as the language used by reporters and political commentators as the main mediators between the political parties and the voters), we conducted a survey among 120 participants (100 female and 20 male, the latter serving as a control group). The respondents were asked to answer several sets of questions, of which the first set contained demographic questions (sex, age, education) as well as some questions pertaining to respondents’ political behaviour patterns and their interest in sport.

The majority of the *respondents, from three different cities in Serbia (Belgrade, Novi Sad and Čačak)* were in the 31-40 age range (31%), while 26% of *respondents* were 20-30 and a further 26% 41-50 years of age, followed by 16% in the 51-60 bracket and 3% over 61. Respondents’ highest educational level was divided into primary (1%), secondary (46%), university (42%), MA (9%) and PhD (2%). 52% of respondents claimed they voted regularly, whereas 42% voted occasionally. Only 6% said they never voted in elections. The vast majority (96%) of respondents claimed not to be members of any political party. The question “Do you follow sport events?” was answered with “regularly” by 20% of respondents, whereas 69% of them claimed that they followed sport events “occasionally”, with only 11% saying that they “never” did so. The next question in the first set was “How well do you know the rules of football?”, which was answered by 12% of respondents with “very well”, while “moderately well” was the answer given by 62% of respondents. 26% of respondents chose the answer “not at all”.

The second and third sets of questions related directly to our analysis of sport metaphors and the extent to which they are understood by women in political discourse. In the second task, therefore, respondents were asked to explain the meaning of the following ten key football terms, completely decontextualised and given in isolation: 1. *off-side position* [ofsajd], 2. *penalty area* [kazneni prostor], 3. *yellow card* [žuti karton],

4. *midfielder* [vezni igrač], 5. *dribbling* [driblanje], 6. *additional time* [zaustavno vreme], 7. *red card* [crveni karton], 8. *own goal* [autogol], 9. *extra time* [produžeci], and 10. *penalty shot* [jedanaesterac]. The main aim of this part of the survey was to establish the extent to which women recognise either the literal or metaphorical meaning of the ten football terms.

Due to space constraints, we shall deal in detail in this paper only with the five most typical football terms: *offside position*, *penalty area*, *yellow card*, *own goal*, and *additional time*. Table 1 shows the results obtained in this part of the survey.

<b>Football term in isolation</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Men</b>
<i>Offside</i>	correct 20% vague 40% incorrect 40%	correct 45% vague 30% incorrect 25%
<i>Penalty area</i>	correct 9% vague 40% incorrect 51%	correct 25% vague 65% incorrect 10%
<i>Yellow card</i>	correct 32% vague 57% incorrect 11%	correct 35% vague 65%
<i>Own goal</i>	correct 78% vague 12% incorrect 10%	correct 80% incorrect 20%
<i>Additional time</i>	correct 12% vague 10% incorrect 78%	correct 45% vague 35% incorrect 20%

**Table 1. Respondents' answers concerning the meanings of football terms in isolation**

The first football term from the survey, *offside*, despite its high frequency both in football and politics, was not understood as well as we expected it to be since only 20% of women and 45% of men defined it correctly. The results indicate that a large number

of respondents have only a vague understanding, which certainly reflects on their understanding of political discourse as well.

The terms with an extremely low number of correct answers among female respondents, *penalty area* and *additional time*, did not achieve high results with men either, because in both cases men scored below 50%. Where these two terms are concerned, the number of women's incorrect answers is greater than 50% and with *additional time* it is a surprisingly high 78%, the highest negative score in the corpus.

The terms where women achieved better scores were *yellow card* and *own goal*, since only around 10% of women were not able to define them correctly. Interestingly enough, with both terms the proportions of correct answers given by women and men are almost the same (for *yellow card* ~35% and for *own goal* ~80%).

In the last part of the survey, respondents were given 10 sentences, excerpted from the *print and electronic editions of the leading Serbian political dailies and weeklies* (*Blic*, *Politika*, *Večernje novosti*, *Press*, *Kurir*, *Vreme*, *NIN*) in the period between 2008 and 2010, during which Serbia had conducted both presidential and parliamentary elections. Our hypothesis was the following: if women are not ardent football fans, it will be quite difficult for them to guess the (literal) meaning of the majority of the expressions mentioned, let alone contextualise them in the field of politics and understand their extended, metaphorical meanings.

Here are the sentences which we used in our survey:

1. Meni je to pokazatelj da je vlada potpuno *otišla u ofsjajd*.

[In my opinion, it shows that the Government has completely *gone offside*.]

2. Tadićevci, priča se, već spremaju Aleksandra Vlahovića za premijera i u tom slučaju „svadba slonova” sa DSS bila bi logična za njih. A, i „gužva u šesnaestercu” tada bi bila manja.

[Tadić's (Serbian President) supporters are said to be grooming Aleksandar Vlahović for prime minister, in which case an “elephant wedding” would be logical for the DSS (Democratic Party of Serbia). And the *penalty area* would be much less crowded.]

3. Možda je ovoga puta od sagovornika u demokratskom bloku dobio samo *žuti karton*.

[Perhaps this time he only got a *yellow card* from his fellows in the democratic

block.]

4. The Serbian Renewal Movement has enough MPs to become an important *midfielder* in the team about to form a new government. [Srpski pokret obnove dobio je dovoljno mandata i tako postao važan *vezni igrač* u timu koji namerava da sastavi novu vladu.]

5. Još jedno političko *driblanje* u *kaznenom prostoru*.

[Another case of political *dribbling* in the *penalty area*.]

6. The Government, as is already known, has been formed during *additional time*.

[Vlada je, kao što se zna, ipak formirana, i to u *zaustavnom vremenu*.]

7. The second *division* of Serbian politics imagines that they can do better, having forgotten along the way the spectre of their political past.

[Druga liga srpske politike je umislila da može nešto više, uzgred, zaboravljujući koliki im je politički dijapazon.]

8. A big *red card* for G17+, LDP, SPS [Serbian political parties] for not supporting this meeting.

[Veliki *crveni karton* za G17+, LDP, SPS što nisu podržale ovaj skup.]

9. I look forward to the second election round with optimism, *extra time* will be played, we are starting from zero.

[Sa optimizmom gledam u drugi krug, igraju se *produžeci*, počinje se od nule.]

10. Political analyst Vladimir Cvetković points out that in the latest clashes the DSS *scored an own goal*, as they set off for a political fight without any allies in the DS.

[Politički analitičar Vladimir Cvetković ističe da je DSS poslednjim sukobima “*postigao politički autogol*, jer je krenuo u politički obračun bez ijednog saveznika u DS-u”.]

Football metaphors in sentence context	Women	Men
For me that's an indicator that the government is totally <u>in the offside position</u> .	correct 14% vague 35% incorrect 51%	correct 35% vague 15% incorrect 50%

That would make the crowd in the <u>penalty area</u> smaller.	correct 18% vague 14% incorrect 68%	correct 30% vague 25% incorrect 45%
He was given a <u>yellow card</u> by his interlocutors in the democratic block.	correct 9% vague 40% incorrect 51%	correct 25% vague 65% incorrect 10%
With the latest conflicts, the DSS <u>scored</u> a political <u>own goal</u> because they had no allies in the DS.	correct 48% vague 26% incorrect 26%	correct 85% vague 10% incorrect 20%
The government was formed during <u>additional time</u> .	correct 32% vague 11% incorrect 57%	correct 45% vague 10% incorrect 45%

**Table 2. Respondents' answers concerning the meanings of football terms in context**

Again, due to space constraints, we shall deal in greater detail with only five of them. Table 2 above shows the results obtained from the last question of the survey.

Just a glance at Table 2 reveals that women achieved under 20% of correct answers with three contextualized football terms, *offside*, *penalty area* and *yellow card*. Men's scores for these three terms range between 25 and 35%, which is not a particularly high score either. For both men and women, the contextualised terms *own goal* and *additional time* were more understandable, as evidenced in the scores.

If the results of isolated and contextualised terms are compared, it cannot be said that the context helped respondents in defining metaphorical meanings of football terms. With some of these terms the tendency was quite the opposite, as can be seen with *offside*, *yellow card* and *own goal*, where the majority of respondents scored less than in the part of the questionnaire with uncontextualized terms. This illustrates the fact that the not-so-well understood language of football becomes even less transparent when used in

the domain of politics, which does not help the electorate relate to the issues politicians and journalists talk about.

As for the metaphorical meanings of the terms *penalty area* and *additional time*, the score is higher when the terms are placed in a context, which shows a tendency opposite to that exhibited for the other terms, which achieved higher scores in isolation. One possible explanation for this finding is that the respondents used their own world knowledge and personal experience from the political life of Serbia and were able to interpret what it meant, for example, for the government to be formed *during additional time*, as the fact that political parties were not able to form a government was featured in all the news reports at the time.

#### **4. Discussion**

We have argued elsewhere (Radić-Bojanović and Silaški 2008; 2010) that the conceptually superior POLITICS IS FOOTBALL metaphor as used in Serbian political discourse may be divided into three submetaphors (POLITICAL PARTIES ARE FOOTBALL TEAMS, ELECTIONS ARE A FOOTBALL MATCH, and DEMOCRATIC ELECTION RULES ARE FOOTBALL RULES), of which the last, DEMOCRATIC ELECTION RULES ARE FOOTBALL RULES, is of crucial importance for our research. Thus, politicians get a *yellow card* ('žuti karton') or a *red card* ('crveni karton') as a caution from the electorate for inappropriate behaviour, a political mistake or a bad political move. If a politician makes a rash decision, a wrong move or a damaging statement which backfires, he/she is said to have *scored an own goal* ('autogol'), whereas an *offside* ('ofsajd'), an illegal position in the game of football, is an attitude or a decision of a politician that puts the government and people in a difficult situation and should somehow be punished, etc.

The results of our survey, in which we tried to check whether these and similar football terms are understood by men and women when used in Serbian political discourse, indicate several things. Firstly, as far as the football terms used in isolation are concerned, it is surprising that many men were not able to define them correctly, which means that they were not familiar with their exact literal meaning. This is contrary to our expectations as we assumed that it would be mostly women who would have problems understanding the rules of football and its key terms. In addition, women exhibited a very

high level of misunderstanding of certain key football terms, with the exception of *own goal* and *yellow card*. This clearly indicates that conventionalised or even lexicalised metaphors – “those that are taken up and used by an ever-increasing number of other speakers, so that they gradually lose their uniqueness and peculiarity, becoming part of the established semantic stock of the language and being recorded as such in the dictionary” (Dagut 1976:23), are much more easily understood by women, compared to some other terms which still remain rather confined to their literal use. These are the terms that are “generally accepted as being no longer recognizable as [metaphors]” (Leech 1981:228). We therefore think that women correctly defined the terms in isolation (*own goal* and *yellow card*) not because they are familiar with football rules, but because these two terms have already entered the lexicon of the Serbian language and as such are very frequently used metaphorically, in political discourse as well as in many other types of discourse. With other terms women are only vaguely familiar.

However, the results are much more contrasting when it comes to the understanding of football terms used metaphorically in the sentence context within political discourse. Namely, despite the fact that men scored fairly highly with the terms in isolation, they scored below 50% for all the contextualised terms except, again, *own goal*. As far as women’s understanding of contextualised metaphorical football terms is concerned, the results indicate that, with the exception of *own goal*, all sentences remain either vaguely or incorrectly understood.

Therefore, our starting hypothesis – that most women voters do not understand SPORT metaphors used in political discourse – has definitely been proven. In light of the results obtained from our survey, we argue the following: if metaphors are a mechanism by which we are supposed to understand one abstract entity in terms of another, concrete, entity, deeply embedded in our experience, and if, on the other hand, football is not part of women’s entire corpus of experience, then FOOTBALL metaphors, as used in political discourse, are an obstacle to women’s understanding of political reality rather than a means which helps them comprehend political developments. Moreover, although widely thought to be more than familiar with football rules, men have difficulties in finding their way in sport-related and football-loaded political discourse. It seems as though their presumed acquaintance with football does not help men in discerning the messages

hidden in political discourse when it is covered with a finely embroidered metaphorical veil, which only increases the number of voters in Serbia who actually do not know what the politicians are talking about in the first place!

Such mystification of political discourse has a twofold mechanism: as for women, the majority of them are automatically repelled by their lack of knowledge and experience in football and choose not to delve into the subject at all, thus abstaining from the political process completely, whereas men's understanding of metaphorical political discourse does not go beyond a very superficial level.

## **5. Conclusion**

In this paper an attempt has been made to show the extent to which SPORT metaphors are understood by women in Serbian discourse. The results of the survey have proven our hypothesis that women need to expend a significant processing effort in order to understand the true nature of football metaphors, often without positive results. In the light of the fact that women account for 52% of the total population in Serbia and that they make up 53% of the electorate, their participation in institutional political life being at the moment disproportionately small, this may indicate that such gendered and masculinised political discourse in Serbia, manifested through the frequent use of SPORT metaphors, is one of the reasons for voting abstinence among the female part of the electorate. This, in turn, may potentially exclude them from political participation, both passive (via voting) and active (via membership in political parties and holding political positions). Sport metaphors seem to clash with the female cognitive framework, which is not saturated with the concepts of sport. This results in an incongruence between political rhetoric and women's experience, reflected in a potential abstinence from political life on the part of women.

It is, therefore, of the utmost importance to remove any metaphors from political discourse which may prevent both male and female voters from understanding the true meaning of political messages. Only in this way will Serbian political discourse become gender neutral and hopefully free of metaphors which indicate hegemonic masculinity, by which it has so far been characterised.

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