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SPEECH EFFECTS FROM COGNITIVE PERSPECTIVE: A CASE OF PRESIDENT ZELENSKYY'S 2022 ADDRESS TO THE POLISH PARLIAMENT

Abstract

The paper examines the formation of speech effects from the cognitive perspective drawing on the impressions that Polish politicians voiced in reaction to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's 2022 address to the Parliament. The comparison of the speech, treated as part of the Ukrainian war discourse, with the ideas expressed by the politicians reveals three types of impressions: cited, i.e., borrowed from President Zelenskyy's speech; prompted, or made up by the listeners from different concepts named in the speech; and situational, rendering the listeners' personal assessment of the address. The methodology of the paper rests on the dynamic cognitive model relating discourse activity to the successive verbal enaction of the human faculties of perception, based on figure versus ground opposition; categorization, which rests on image schemas; memory, coded in concepts; reasoning, associated with conceptual metaphors. It is found that the most effective and well-remembered ideas of the speech are expressed by the BROTHERHOOD and TEMPERATURE metaphors. They catch the listener's ear because they occur in the introductory and concluding parts of the speech, being repeated a number of times though sometimes in a modified form. Constructing the TEMPERATURE metaphor the Ukrainian President moves from the cool to the warm while the member of the audience cites it in a reverse order, emphasizing that the distance associated with the cold is in the past. The prompted impressions derive from the concepts of history and unity evoked towards the end of the speech and serving as the ground for the speech represented as the figure. The things the Ukrainian President says about the history of the two countries are prominent enough to draw the listeners' attention. The situational effect of the standing ovation in response to the address of the Ukrainian president results from a cumulative impression of the speech as the figure against the audience as the ground being reconstructed with the help of a number of image schemas.

Keywords: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Polish Parliament, discourse, speech effect, image schema, concept, conceptual metaphor.

Анотація

У статті розглянуто в когнітивному ракурсі принципи формування мовленнєвих ефектів сприйняття промов, які ґрунтовані на враженнях, висловлених польськими політиками після виступу Президента України Володимира Зеленського в парламенті країни у 2022 році. Зіставлення промови як складника українського воєнного дискурсу з ідеями, висловленими польськими політиками, дозволяє диференціювати три різновиди вражень: цитовані, тобто запозичені з промови; підказані, або утворені з різних концептів, позначених у виступі; ситуативні, які передають особисті враження слухачів. Застосована методика аналізу спирається на динамічну лінгвокогнітивну модель, що пов'язує дискурсивну діяльність комунікантів з активацією низки їхніх здібностей, які містять сприйняття в розрізі протиставлення фігури й фону; категоризацію, що базується на образ-схеми; пам'ять, закодовану в поняттях; мислення, утілене в концептуальній метафорі. Установлено, що найефективніші й найкраще запам'ятовувані ідеї промови виражені метафорами БРАТЕРСТВО й ТЕМПЕРАТУРА. Вони привертають увагу слухача, оскільки трапляються у вступній і завершальній частинах промови, повторюючись кілька разів, хоч іноді у видозміненій формі. Застосовуючи метафору ТЕМПЕРАТУРА, Президент України рухається від відчуття холоду до теплоти, а слухач вибудовує свої враження у зворотній послідовності, наголошуючи, що відстань

між країнами, яка асоціюється з холодом, залишилися в минулому. Підказані враження зумовлені зверненням Президента до концептів історії та єдності, задіяних всередині тексту. Висловлення Президента про історію двох країн є достатньо помітними для привернення уваги слухачів. Ситуативний ефект, що виявляється в бурі овацій, яка завершила звернення В. Зеленського, зумовлений кумулятивним враженням від промови як фігури на тлі аудиторії як фону.

Ключові слова: Президент України Володимир Зеленський, парламент Республіки Польщі, дискурс, мовленнєвий ефект, образ-схема, концепт, концептуальна метафора.

Introduction. A notable feature of the Ukrainian war discourse (Ізотова & Потапенко, 2024, с. 4; Głaz, 2025, p. 377) are President Zelenskyy's domestic and international speeches. According to some estimates, during the first year of the war the President delivered 563 domestic and international addresses (Давиденко & Надельнюк, 2023). The former are daily briefings about the state of the country that contribute to the unification and mobilisation of Ukrainian citizens against the enemy. The international speeches, meant for parliaments of foreign countries and for international organisations, aim to create an in-group of global supporters against the aggressor. The addresses are considered to be effective and skillfully crafted (Fallows, 2022): those effects result from expressing unification (Guliashvili, 2023), sarcasm (Джиджора, Мельник, 2022, с. 489), heroic (Zachara-Szymanska, 2023) or charismatic leadership (Petlyuchenko, 2024, p. 85), or persuasiveness in the addresses to various parliaments (Talavira & Potapenko, 2023). The studies testify to **the relevance** of this paper to the current state of discourse analysis. However, being in line with the present-day development of non-fiction text interpretation (Мороховский, 2011, с. 386), the studies outlined above mainly rely on the researchers' introspection overlooking the listeners' judgements. Consequently, **the aim** of this paper is to identify the impressions of the members of the audience which they voice after comprehending President Zelenskyy's speech in the Parliament of the Republic of Poland on 11 March 2022 (Zelenskyy, 2022). The aim of the article involves the following **objectives**: first, to collect Polish politicians' comments on the speech; second, to trace them back to President Zelenskyy's original address; third, to analyze them in cognitive linguistic terms; and finally, to link them with the sociopolitical allegiance of the politicians. It is important to note that the speech came in the very first days of Russian full-scale invasion, when both the general population and political elites were still in shock, and when support for Ukraine in Poland was basically unanimous (regardless of politicians' affiliations) and unconditional – at least this is what transpired through the media.

As for the data, the analysis carried out in the paper faces the choice between the Ukrainian and English variants of the address available on the President's site. We opt for the English version, which is more comprehensible for the international audience. Moreover, the language used does not seem very important since the President delivered the speech in Ukrainian, while it was interpreted into Polish online and translated into English on the site. What is significant for identifying the impressions the speech produced is the expounded ideas which transform into effects and can be reconstructed by relating them to cognitive structures and processes.

Methodology. The paper interprets the listeners' comments on the impressions of Zelenskyy's speech drawing on the dynamic cognitive model relating discourse activity to the successive verbal enaction of the human faculties of perception, categorization, memory, and thinking / imagination based on particular cognitive structures.

Perception mainly rests on the figure – ground alignment: the figure is regarded as the most salient entity in a given configuration, while the ground has secondary prominence (Schmid, 2007, p. 128). In this study, the figure are the linguistic elements cited by the listeners, and the rest of the initial text is treated as the ground.

Explaining categorization positioned in the perception / cognition continuum (Moist & Głaz, 2013, p. 22) this paper draws on image schemas which model the simplest interactions between an organism and the environment (Johnson, 2005, p. 19), constituting the basis of the human conceptual systems (Evans & Green, 2011, p. 180).

M. Johnson's original 27 image schemas (1987, p. 126) can be grouped into five types: bodily, perceptual, spatial, kinetic, and force. The bodily schemas split into FAR – NEAR, LEFT – RIGHT, FRONT – BACK, UP – DOWN. Perceptual schemas fall into MASS – COLLECTION – COUNT – OBJECT, representing an image transformation as a result of a changing distance between the viewer and the perceived. Spatial schemas are divided into OBJECT – SURFACE – CONTAINER – CONTENT, reflecting an individual's perception of an object in the course of manipulation. The kinetic schemas comprise PATH, CIRCLE, VERTICALITY, differing in the location of the initial and final points of motion. The schemas for force include COUNTERFORCE, defined as two equally strong centers colliding face-to-face with the result that neither can go anywhere (Johnson, 1987, p. 46); ENABLEMENT, defined as a sense of power; ATTRACTION, rendering a sense of being pulled; COMPULSION, encoding an act of being moved by external forces, such as wind, water, physical objects, or other people (Johnson, 1987, p. 47); BLOCKAGE, defined as a force vector encountering a barrier and then taking any number of possible directions (Johnson, 1987, p. 45); DIVERSION, when a force vector is diverted as a result of causal interaction of two or more vectors (Johnson, 1987, p. 46); DISABLEMENT, implying a source devoid of any energy and as a result incapable of any motion; RESTRAINT REMOVAL, signaling an open way or path which renders the exertion of force possible (Johnson, 1987, p. 46).

Image schemas structure concepts as memory entities defined as abstract rules specifying the characteristics a thing must have to "fall under that concept" (Johnson, 1987, p. 155) or as mental representations deriving from percepts (Evans & Green 2011, p. 7). The basic concepts employed in President Zelenskyy's speech to the Polish Parliament are UNITY, e.g., *We united to constantly gain and create freedom, as a great Pole, a close friend of Ukraine John Paul II said* (Zelenskyy, 2022), and WAR, e.g., *No one ever has the right to war, to invasion* (Zelenskyy, 2022). The latter concept rests on the COUNTERFORCE image schema (Johnson, 1987, p. 46), which at the preconceptual level underlies the concepts of ARGUMENT, MILITARY CONFLICT, DISPUTE, DEBATE, COMBAT, etc. (Dancygier & Sweetser, 2014, p.13).

At the level of human thinking / imagination (Johnson, 1987, p. 139), image schemas underlie the formation of multiple conceptual metaphors. Thanks to them speakers associate some aspects of experience with others usually resorting to concrete concepts so as to interpret abstract ones (Gibbs, 2019, p. 195). Metaphors, in turn, attract the listeners' attention and exert an influence inviting people to conceptualize one thing in terms of another (El Refaie, 2017, p. 153). For example, the statement *we had a long way to go* (Zelenskyy, 2022) is based on the RELATIONS ARE PATH metaphor.

Results and discussion. The suggested methodology is applied to the analysis of President Zelenskyy's speech effects voiced in the Polish politicians' comments. We have identified impressions of three types: cited, i.e., borrowed from President Zelenskyy's speech, e.g., *dear brothers and sisters*; prompted, or made up by the listeners from the concepts named in the speech, e.g., *a historic event*; and situational, rendering the listeners' personal assessment, e.g., *a moving address*.

The cited verbal effects are represented by two metaphoric borrowings from the speech: the FAMILY, or rather BROTHERHOOD, metaphor, and the TEMPERATURE metaphor. They catch the listener's ear because, first, they occur in the introductory and concluding parts of the speech; and second, they are repeated a number of times though sometimes in a modified form.

The BROTHERHOOD metaphor, *polskich braci i sióstr* [Polish brothers and sisters], is cited in a tweet by Wojciech Saługa (2022), a liberal politician and MP, at the time in opposition

to the then ruling conservative government. The ʙʀᴏᴛʜᴇʀʜᴏᴏᴅ metaphor *Polish brothers and sisters* opens up the speech (1) followed by the ᴛᴇᴍᴘᴇʀᴀᴛᴜʀᴇ metaphor. It is quoted by Andrzej Rafał Potocki (2022), a conservative, right-wing journalist, in his interview for the Polish public radio: *te stosunki między narodami polskim i ukraińskim nie były takie ciepłe, były momenty chłodu* [the Polish-Ukrainian relations were not always warm, there were moments of cold]:

(1)   Polish brothers and sisters!
When I became President in 2019, it felt like we had <u>a long way to go with Poland</u>.
Because our relationship was <u>pretty cold, our attitude towards each other wasn't too warm</u>.
This was the situation. But I wanted <u>to go this way fast</u>. <u>The path to warmth</u>.
Because we are such nations. I knew that we were akin by nature – Ukrainians, Poles.
I remember my first meetings with Andrzej Duda. From meeting to meeting everything changed. The <u>coolness disappeared</u>. (Zelenskyy, 2022)

In the introduction to the speech (1), the ᴛᴇᴍᴘᴇʀᴀᴛᴜʀᴇ metaphor is evoked by four phrases: *pretty cold*; *our attitude towards each other wasn't too warm*; *the path to warmth*; *coolness disappeared*. Those phrases depict the rapprochement between the two countries and nations indicated by the expressions that precede them: *we had a long way to go* and *to go this way fast*.

The initial greater distance between the two nations is signaled by the adjective *cold*, while an improvement of the relations (and a reduction of the distance) are indicated by the noun *warmth*. So, coldness is correlated with greater distance, warmth with smaller distance. Importantly, the Ukrainian President refers to coolness and warmth twice in this specific order: moving from the cool to the warm. However, Andrzej Rafał Potocki (2022), the journalist already mentioned, cites this metaphor in the reverse order: from warmth to cold, that is, he emphasizes that the distance associated with the cold was in the past, and against this background we can now enjoy the warmth as the figure: *te stosunki między narodami polskim i ukraińskim nie były takie ciepłe, były momenty chłodu* [the Polish-Ukrainian relations were not always warm, there were moments of cold].

The ʙʀᴏᴛʜᴇʀʜᴏᴏᴅ and ᴛᴇᴍᴘᴇʀᴀᴛᴜʀᴇ metaphors are differently distributed in Zelenskyy's speech. The ʙʀᴏᴛʜᴇʀʜᴏᴏᴅ metaphor re-occurs throughout the address, while the ᴛᴇᴍᴘᴇʀᴀᴛᴜʀᴇ metaphor is mainly found in the introduction, and then pops up in the concluding part. This particular distribution seems to be caused by the permanence of family, or of brotherly and sisterly, relations, as opposed to the transience of sensations and temperatures.

The ʙʀᴏᴛʜᴇʀʜᴏᴏᴅ metaphor seems more prominent in the speech since the Ukrainian President returns to it several times in two forms: full and shortened.

The full form *Polish brothers and sisters!* occurs as an address three times, dividing the speech into compositional parts and making the phrase stand out.

Its shortened form *brother(s)* occurs twice. It characterises the conversation between the Polish and Ukrainian Presidents on the first day of the full-scale invasion, with the full form *Polish brothers and sisters* (2) used shortly after that, implying that similar relations exist between the two nations:

(2) *On the morning of February 24, I had no doubt who it would be. Who will say to me: "<u>Brother</u>, your people will not be left alone with the enemy."*
And so it happened. And I'm grateful for that. <u>Polish brothers and sisters</u> are with us. And this is natural. [...] (Zelenskyy, 2022)

The shortened form *brother* alongside the noun *relatives* (3) is also used in the context of peace between Poles and Ukrainians as well as hopes for similar relations with Belarusian neighbours:

(3) *During the 16 days of this war, Ukrainian pride and Polish honor, Ukrainian courage in battles and Polish sincerity in helping us allow me to say very important words now. Words that there is real peace between our nations. <u>Peace between relatives</u>. <u>Peace between brothers</u>. And now I really want these words to be heard by our common Belarusian neighbors.*

<u>Peace between relatives</u>, <u>peace between neighbors</u>, <u>peace between brothers</u>. We have to come to this with them as well! We will definitely come! (Zelenskyy, 2022)

In the concluding part of the speech, the BROTHERHOOD and TEMPERATURE metaphors again come to the fore and characterise the Polish-Ukrainian alliance. In this case, the TEMPERATURE metaphor denoted by the noun *warmth* (4) reflects the unity of the two nations, correlating with the noun *alliance* (4), used twice:

(4) *I feel that we have already formed an extremely strong <u>alliance</u>. Even though it is informal. But this is <u>an alliance</u> that grew out of reality, not words on paper. <u>Of the warmth in our hearts</u>, not of the speeches of politicians at summits.*

If God allows and we win this war, we will share the victory <u>with our brothers and sisters</u>. [...] (Zelenskyy, 2022)

The BROTHERHOOD metaphor in its full form *our brothers and sisters* (4) is employed to refer to the future win considered as a shared feat of the two nations in the utterance *If God allows and we win this war, we will share the victory with our brothers and sisters* (4).

The pre-concluding utterance of the Ukrainian President's speech is in (5):

(5) *This is the <u>common history of great nations</u>!*
May God help us win! (Zelenskyy, 2022)

The expression *common history of great nations*, correlating with previous reference to the peoples' unity, was borrowed by the far right-wing politician Krzysztof Bosak (2022) in his tweet *Jest to wspólna historia wielkich narodów* [It's common history of great nations]. This is interesting inasmuch as Bosak's political views on Ukraine range from sceptical to anti-Ukrainian, but at that key moment in history he also expressed pro-Ukrainian sentiment. A separate question is whether this was a sincere view or a tactical move of a politician under the circumstances at that time, since in the early stages of the full-scale invasion any sign of emotional distance to Ukraine would not have been received well by the majority of Poles.

Prompted verbal effects result from someone using the speaker's words but in new combinations. This occurs when President Zelenskyy's address is viewed as *a historic event* and when it is judged as *an alliance of hearts*.

The impression relating the event to history runs like this: *czuć było, że jesteśmy uczestnikami historycznych wydarzeń* [it could be felt we're part of historic events] (Bosak, 2022). It is a tweet by Krzysztof Bosak, a right-wing nationalist with often anti-Ukrainian views, but those views are not vociferated in this tweet.

Though the Ukrainian President does not use this particular phrase, he employs the noun *history* (8) and the adjective *historical* repeating it three times at one point (7). The noun *history* is defined as "a chronological record of significant events (such as those affecting a nation or institution)" (https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/history) referring to the corresponding concept. It can be construed in terms of the PATH schema representing motion (Johnson, 1987, p. 114) with the significant events treated as figures against the flow of history as ground.

The things the Ukrainian President says about the history of the two countries are prominent enough to draw the listeners' attention.

First, Zelenskyy refers to the absence of borders between the two nations, which underscores their unity (6) evoking the corresponding concept:

(6) *There are <u>no more borders</u> between us, between <u>our nations</u>. No physical ones. No historical ones. No personal ones.* (Zelenskyy, 2022)

Second, the President refers to the community of 90 million representing the two nations as a single unit again with a *historical mission* (7), an expression repeated three times*:*

(7) *Remember, there are <u>90 million of us together</u>! We can do everything together. And this is the <u>historical mission</u>, the <u>historical mission</u> of Poland, the <u>historical mission</u> of Ukraine to be leaders who together will pull Europe out of this abyss […].* (Zelenskyy, 2022)

Third, reference to the common history (8) of the peoples concludes the speech:

(8) *This is the <u>common history</u> of great nations.*

One of the final passages of the speech (9) also seems to prompt the made-up metaphor *sojusz wypływający z naszych serc* [an alliance of hearts] in the tweet by Wojciech Saługa (2022), a liberal politician representing pro-European and pro-Ukrainian political views. It probably derives from the noun *alliance* (9), used twice in a context close to the noun *heart:*

(9) *I feel that we have already formed an extremely strong <u>alliance</u>. Even though it is informal. But this is <u>an alliance</u> that grew out of reality, not words on paper. <u>Of the warmth in our hearts</u>, not of the speeches of politicians at summits.* (Zelenskyy, 2022)

Situational verbal effects, or situational impressions, are made up by the listeners without using any phrases or words from the speech. They derive from the impressions produced by the address as a whole. One such effect is expressed by the phrase *Owacja na stojąco dla prezydenta Ukrainy* [Standing ovation for the President of Ukraine] (Dworczyk, 2022). It is a tweet by Michał Dworczyk, the then head of the Prime Minister's cabinet. In cognitive terms, the meaning of *standing ovation* can be related to the VERTICALITY image schema, with an upward posture signalling a positive attitude, and the COMPULSION schema encoding the act of being moved by external forces (Johnson, 1987, p. 47). Accordingly, the main question here is what made Polish MPs stand up and applaud the speaker. We surmise that the motion of standing up is brought about by the cumulative effect of all the other impressions discussed so far. They include the BROTHERHOOD, TEMPERATURE, and the ALLIANCE OF HEARTS metaphors, references to the historic event, which make the speech salient against the historical background and prompt a standing ovation. Certainly, the reaction can also be attributed to the general military-political context prevailing at the time and the very fact that President Zelenskyy, a heroic figure for the majority of the public, addressed the Polish Parliament.

Conclusions and prospects for further research. The comparison of the impressions of Polish politicians in reaction to President Zelenskyy's 2022 speech in the Parliament with the actual address reveals that the most effective and well-remembered parts of it are expressed by the BROTHERHOOD and TEMPERATURE metaphors repeated several times in the introductory and concluding sections. The impressions that have been prompted derive from the concepts of history and unity evoked several times in the middle of the speech and in its concluding part. The situational verbal effects result from a cumulative impression of the speech as the figure – this is the case with the standing ovation in response to the address of the Ukrainian president. The perspectives of further research may concern the study of the impressions obtained by the audiences of political speeches on different occasions.

Conflict of Interest
The authors declare no conflicts of interests.

Use of Artificial Intelligence
No artificial intelligence tools or materials were used in the manuscript.

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