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The portrayal of Europe’s migrant crisis in Serbian media discourse – the case of the WALL metaphor

Abstract:

In order to prevent further illegal entries of migrants into its territory, in September 2015 Hungary constructed a 175km-long barrier in the form of a razor-wire fence on its border with Serbia, leaving hundreds of refugees stuck in camps in “no man’s land” between Hungary and Serbia and making the latter a new migrant hotspot. The Hungarian construction of the fence inevitably had a major impact on Serbia’s migrant policy as well as on the perception of Europe’s migrant crisis by Serbian citizens, closely modelled around the concept of the WALL that was literally constructed by the Hungarian authorities.

From a cognitive linguistic point of view, the topic of migrant crisis seems to be a fertile ground for research “due to its rich potential for polemical and emotional language as well as its socio-political and historical significance” (Musolff, 2011: 7). Therefore, within the theoretical framework of Critical Metaphor Analysis (Charteris-Black, 2004, 2006, 2011, 2014; Goatly, 2007; Musolff, 2004, 2011, etc.), in the paper we deal with the WALL metaphor in an attempt to identify the most frequent metaphor scenarios modelled around this concept and pertaining to a critical period of the European migrant crisis. As metaphor scenarios “constitute an essential feature of metaphor use in public discourse registers” (Musolff, 2006: 28) and “help to shape the course of public debates and conceptualizations of political target topics by framing the attitudinal and evaluative preferences in the respective discourse communities” (Musolff, 2006: 28), our aim is to establish the extent to which the literal construction of the Hungarian border wall influenced the metaphorical portrayal of the migrant crisis in Serbian media discourse.

The data collection for the analysis has been extracted from several political dailies and weeklies (Politika, Večernje novosti, Blic, Novi magazin, Kurir, NIN, Vreme) as well as from relevant news portals (B92, N1, RTS, Beta, Vesti onlajn) published in Serbian during the second half of 2015. In order to clearly establish the presence of metaphoricity in our data we applied the procedure for metaphor identification proposed by the Pragglejaz Group (2007).

Two major metaphor scenarios (Musolff, 2006), triggered by the WALL metaphor, arise from our data collection: firstly, “the Fortress Europe” scenario, in which the EU seems to have cemented its borders by means of the constructed wall on the Hungarian border, and secondly, “the Berlin Wall” scenario, which clearly establishes strict borders between the EU
and non-EU space. The scenarios respectively conceptualise the united EU space surrounded by the fence which cannot be broken into, as well as the strict separation of the EU from the rest of Europe, reminiscent of the wall that now does not divide the once divided city but the whole of the European continent into the countries belonging to the EU and those out of it. The latter scenario also triggers a host of ideological, religious and social dichotomies and polarisations such as Us vs. Them, Civilisation vs. Barbarism, West vs. East, Christians vs. Others, etc.

References:


