

LANGUAGE EVIDENCE OF A WAR WAGED IN EUROPE: MAD COW DISEASE

Victoria Martín de la Rosa
Universidad Complutense de Madrid

Abstract

This article applies some of the insights from social policy and metaphor analysis to an understanding of politics using the 1996 outbreak of mad cow disease in Great Britain as a case study. The article shows how metaphors of war and business (POLITICS IS WAR and POLITICS IS BUSINESS) were used to frame this complex situation by both the media and policy makers in an attempt to drum up support for the war scenario recreated, and how this, in turn, guided citizens' perceptions and shaped their behaviour when dealing with the situation. The data source used are the British newspapers The Times and The Guardian through the months of March and May of that year.

Keywords: Mad Cow Disease, Metaphor, Policy

Resumen

Este artículo aplica el conocimiento procedente de campos tales como la política social y el análisis metafórico a un mejor entendimiento de asuntos políticos tomando como ejemplo el brote de la enfermedad de las vacas locas que sufrió Gran Bretaña en 1996. Se dará evidencia de cómo la compleja situación se enmarcó en términos de metáforas de guerra y de negocios, tanto por la prensa como por los políticos, en un intento de ganarse el apoyo de los ciudadanos guiando así su percepción de la situación y, en consecuencia, su conducta a la hora de hacer frente a este problema. La fuente de información procede de los periódicos The Times y The Guardian a lo largo de los meses de marzo y de mayo de ese año.

Palabras clave: Enfermedad de las Vacas Locas, Metáfora, Política

1. INTRODUCTION

An outbreak of Mad Cow Disease (Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy) swept the UK in 1996. The government's response to deal with the situation was to adopt a policy of wholesale slaughter -the same policy was later implemented with foot and mouth disease (Nerlich 2004)-, which implied killing not only infected animals but very often healthy animals which were in neighbouring farms. Other alternatives, as the vaccination policy, were ruled out as not appropriate. This culling policy, which exterminated millions of animals, was then considered the only way to bring the country "back to its feet" again and restore its economic vitality. This situation shocked the whole country, especially rural communities, where the impact was felt more bitterly.

In this paper I look, primarily, at the social impact of BSE, through the use of metaphors. It is true that the study of metaphor has long been associated with education, both as a subject of enquiry and as a vehicle in the transmission of knowledge, but in over the last two decades it has become evident the fundamental role metaphors play as a cognitive not just

linguistic device necessary to make sense of what goes on around us (Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 185). Besides, I argue that the framing of the disease and of the complex reality the illness gave rise to interacted with the framing of the BSE policy the government adopted. Already back in 1979, Schön discussed on a paper on metaphor and social policy “the essential difficulties in social policy have more to do with problem setting than with problem solving”; or in other words how underlying metaphors not only frame social policy problems but influence the range of solutions we consider possible. This takes us into the bottom line of this paper, which is that the language chosen to represent a certain issue will shape and affect people’s behaviour by establishing ideologies of our culture as common sense (Fairclough 1989). Political discourse, the focus of this paper, is a prototypical example of how people’s perceptions of certain issues can be heavily influenced by language. Therefore, in this paper I intend to unearth the metaphors which were used to report this political -also social and economical- controversy, exposing those unconscious patterns of thought which people are often unaware of, since this is the only way in which those background assumptions can, if necessary, be challenged and not just accepted as natural, when in fact they are the product of social constructions anchored in human experience (Batstone 2000).

The data in this article comes from stories about BSE from two leading newspapers: *The Times* and *The Guardian* throughout the months of March and May 1996.

To make sense of this new situation journalists and policy makers resorted to two well-known metaphors and scenarios, *war* and *business*, plus A STATE IS A PERSON to give coherence to the ensuing discourse. POLITICS IS WAR, as this is one of the metaphors most heavily used in political discourse (Howe 1988); POLITICS IS BUSINESS, a powerful metaphor when reporting political issues as it provides a well-known scenario that ties in well with people’s own experience of life (Lakoff 1991); Finally, the metaphor A STATE IS A PERSON, constitutive of our basic understanding of the previous two metaphors since countries are considered as people that relate to other countries for war or for business reasons. The three metaphors mentioned help politicians and journalists to represent a complex reality in simpler terms. Another advantage is that by offering a readily-made scenario which makes sense of this complex reality it will be easier to influence their perceptions and behaviour.

2. THE METAPHOR “POLITICS IS WAR”

As early as the XVIII century, a Prussian general, Karl Von Clausewitz, articulated for the first time this war metaphor saying WAR IS POLITICS PURSUED BY OTHER MEANS where war is seen as a form of cost benefit analysis (in Lakoff 1991:2)

Since war is not an act of blind passion, but is dominated by political aims, the value of these aims determine the measure of the sacrifices which have to be made to reach those objectives. This refers not only to the extent of those sacrifices but also to their duration. As a consequence, as soon as the strength expended is so great that the political aim pursued is no longer equivalent, this aim will have to be abandoned and the result will be peace. (My translation from the Spanish translation “De la Guerra”; Clausewitz (1972: 65). Editorial Mateu. Translation from R.W. Setaro).

Interestingly enough, Clausewitz’s idea is reflected in the words of an English journalist in the following statement: “With quiet words in chancelleries having achieved so little, the Prime Minister was under pressure from his party to take Clausewitz’s advice and continue diplomacy by other means” (*The Times*, 22/May/96).

Later on, Lakoff (1992) provided us with the prototypical war scenario, which he called THE JUST WAR AS FAIRY TALE, in his article about the Persian Gulf war. We all know that in fairy tales there is a cast of characters: a villain, a victim and a hero; there is a scenario where a crime is committed by the villain against an innocent victim. The villain is not just a decent person who happens to do something wrong but is inherently evil and impossible to reason with. The hero sees the offence that has been committed against the victim and he is left with no other choice but to engage the villain in battle. Once that decision has been made, the hero must undergo some difficulties to meet the villain in battle. The hero then defeats the villain and either rescues or recompenses the victim. Victory is then achieved and moral balance restored.

In our BSE scenario, when BSE broke out in 1996, the government and the media started using a number of metaphors such as HANDLING THE BSE CRISIS IS A WAR where the BSE was seen as the enemy to be destroyed. Later on, as there was a clear opposition from Europe to the way Great Britain was handling the crisis (banning British beef by-products and British beef itself), the government and the media saw an advantage in keeping the war scenario but changing the role of one of the characters involved: the hero, which would still be played by the government; the victims, farmers and rural communities, and the enemy, which would not be played by the BSE any longer but by Europe, or Germany at times.

Anyhow, this war metaphor was not just a rhetorical device to talk about the actions taken by the government to face the situation but it was, rather, more of an attempt to use a

type of persuasive language which would arouse patriotism, manufacturing consent (Fairclough 1989), and would create a very strong bond among all citizens to pull together against a common enemy: Europe. In such a way that talking about the creation of a war cabinet, the alignment of countries on one or the other side of the fight, and the existence of victims and hostages sounded all natural to citizens; a ready-made social and cultural construct prepared to be digested. Anyhow, with time the metaphor was literalised (Nerlich 2004) as hatred and anger as well as expressions of a war-like climate, mainly from Great Britain towards Europe, emerged as a reality. Therefore, we can easily find in some of the papers like *The Sun* insults towards Europeans, mainly Germans -prototypical members of the European Union-.

Let us list the various correspondences set up between the two domains, source (war) and target (politics), and then we shall analyse and support each of them with evidence from the newspapers *The Times* and/or *The Guardian*.

CORRESPONDENCES:

<u>Source domain (WAR)</u>	<u>Target domain (POLITICS)</u>
Enemy -----	European Union/Germany
Declaration of war -----	Beginning of hostilities
Allies -----	Countries that help: a) Germany b) Great Britain
Weapon -----	A policy of non-cooperation, blocking all decisions that need to be approved by unanimity carried out through the mechanism of veto
War cabinet -----	Group of people in charge of Britain’s response to the beef crisis.
Victims and hostages -----	All the dossiers that are being blocked due to the course of action taken by Great Britain: 1) A statement on human right abuses in Burma 2) The agreement on negotiating mandate for EU-Mexican trade relations 3) Brussels’ efforts to eliminate unnecessary bureaucracy 4) Initiatives designed to limit the spread of Aids in the Third World 5) Steps taken to protect the environment

- 6) Programmes to assist refugees in Asia and Latin America
- 7) Measures aimed at streamlining the single market
- 8) A convention on insolvency procedures

Name of the operation ----- Operation Moo

Enemy

After a short period of time in which the BSE was portrayed as the enemy, it was the European Union, Germany at times, that started shaping up as the real enemy. Such confusion over the identity of the real enemy is reflected in a quote by a German expert on foreign policy.

- (1) Politicians [from Germany] lined up to express their regret over the British campaign. Karl Lamers, the Christian Democrat foreign affairs expert, told Focus magazine: "The British are making a big mistake; *they are confusing Germany with Europe.*" (The Times, 29/May)

A) The EU is the enemy:

- (2) Mr Rifkind said that Britain's refusal to co-operate in decisions requiring unanimous support was already biting. He signalled a lengthy *campaign against the EU* unless Britain's European partners lifted the ban on beef products such as tallow, gelatine and semen. (The Times, 24/May)

B) Germany is the enemy:

- (3) How we can use beef *to beat Kohl.* (The Times, 24/May)

Declaration of war

A war usually starts with a declaration of war. This was clearly reflected in the BSE controversy, as can be seen in the following example.

- (4) Major's *declaration of war* is emerging as a flop - he was wrong to think that moderate Conservative MPs would remain loyal-. (The Times, 29/May)

Allies

This correspondence refers to the interaction between different parties in this war, each of which has their own supporters. In our case, the confusion pointed out above between the EU and Germany as the enemy can still be traced. Thus, it is Germany's allies that are mentioned in this correspondence, as opposed to Britain's allies.

A) German allies:

(5) Clearly the Germans will be reluctant to let in our beef derivatives until consumption of their own picks up. *Their allies* in this matter are the Low Countries. (The Times, 22/May)

B) British allies:

(6) Even *Britain's allies* were reluctant to support Mr Major's non-cooperation policy. (The Guardian, 22/May)

Weapon

The chosen weapon by the British government to materialise its attack against the enemy was its campaign of non-cooperation through the use of the veto.

(7) Britain escalated its beef war with Europe yesterday, *wielding the national veto* 12 times to scupper measures that would normally have sailed through. (Times, 29/May)

Creation of a war cabinet

This cabinet was made up of a number of members of government and civil servants that John Major appointed, so that the beef crisis could be closely monitored and, accordingly, a direction could be taken. The core team was John Major, Malcom Rifkind (Foreign Secretary) and James Hogg (Agriculture Minister).

(8) It could be revived later, Mr Rifkind conceded, as he announced that any minister wanting to avoid vetoing a cherished policy will have to plead with the *beef war cabinet* for an exemption. (The Guardian, 24/May)

Victims and hostages

In every war there are victims, the numbers of which will vary depending on the amount of people involved, the intensity of the war and the length of the conflict. In addition, a number of hostages -those held prisoners conditional on demands being met- are always an integral part of wars. In the war being waged against Europe, we also find victims and hostages.

A) Victims:

(9) The first engagement of the great beef war left *a number of corpses on the battlefield*. There will now be no further moves on Aids in the Third World, no help to Asian refugees and no steps to cut red tape for small firms. (The Times, 29/May)

B) Hostages:

(10) He [Jacques Santer] said: "The Commission deplores the effect that, in council, dossiers which are not at all linked to BSE have been *taken hostage*. (The Guardian, 30/May)

Name of the operation

The operation to be developed in a war is the execution of a well-constructed plan which has been deeply thought out in advance.

(11) The war plan is a secret, but Downing Street confirms that there is a war cabinet and a secretariat in place. Hostilities have been brought forward from next month's Florence summit. *Operation Moo* is under way. (The Times, 29/May)

3. THE METAPHOR "POLITICS IS BUSINESS"

This metaphor is succinctly expressed in the words of the above mentioned Prussian general Karl Von Clausewitz when he says: "war is seen as a form of cost-benefit analysis", as a second step to the metaphor POLITICS IS WAR PURSUED BY OTHER MEANS, where good political management is conceptualised, through the use of this metaphor, as a well-run business (Lakoff 1991: 2)

In this metaphor the political gains of a situation are seen as "benefits", whereas the political failures are considered as "costs". The gains have to be weighed against the costs to see if the benefits are worth the costs. Thus, politics is understood as a business where it is necessary to enter in the books all that counts as a "cost" or as a "benefit" and work out the balance to decide if it is positive or negative. In this framework, if war is the path that has been chosen at a particular point, the war should continue provided that the gains exceed the costs. As Lakoff (1991: 2) says: "a decision to go to war might be seen as a form of cost-benefit analysis where war is justified when the costs of going to war are less than the costs of not going to war". This metaphor is, in its turn, deeply entrenched in the metaphor RATIONALITY IS THE MAXIMIZATION OF SELF-INTEREST (Lakoff 1991), where nations, considered as human beings, are engaged in the process of seeking to maximise their own benefit. If going to war with another nation, or nations in this case, may be a good way to maximise your self-interest, then, the feasibility of such project will be considered and if the credit is on the side of going to war that direction will be pursued.

Let us analyse the various correspondences set up between the two domains, source (business) and target (politics).

CORRESPONDENCES:

Source domain (BUSINESS)

Target domain (POLITICS)

Costs	-----	whatever diminishes the well-being of a country
Benefits	-----	whatever increases the well-being of a country

Each nation has political objectives and, at times, those political objectives may only be met or met more quickly if war is used as one of the diplomatic avenues which are available to governments. At this stage, it is, then, important to decide what counts as “benefits” and what counts as “costs” in the resolution to go to war.

3.1. Tally of costs and benefits before the resolution to go to war has been implemented (up to 23 May)

Analysis of the costs

a) Pursuing the tactic of non-cooperation is a risky business because it is not completely sure whether or not it will bring about the expected benefits and, at least at first, it will leave Britain in a very exposed position.

(12) But the decision to go for broke yesterday was the Prime Minister’s. He told colleagues: “enough is enough”. (The Times, 22/May)

b) Vetoing all important EU decisions will hinder progress on issues in which British interests are stake.

(13) It [the policy of non-cooperation] could prevent progress on expediting business where Britain has something to gain. (The Times, 22/May)

c) A policy of non-cooperation will very likely alienate those countries which are on Britain’s side.

(14) It will create a resentment that will take some time to heal. (Times, 22/May)

d) This action may weaken Britain’s position when facing the constitutional issues within the framework of the European Union.

(15) John Major has chosen to use his most dramatic weapon, non-cooperation in the European process, to buttress Britain’s case on this particular issue. That could weaken his position on the constitutional issues, which, historically, are much more important. (The Times 22/May)

Analysis of the benefits

a) The resolution will show the other member states that Britain has a big say in Europe. Making use of the beef dispute can help articulate another vision of Europe, different from that put forward by Germany.

(16) Britain is a big player and not to be pushed around. (The Times, 22/May)

b) The British government will be fighting in the name of science (=reason), as, from their point of view, the best scientific advice has been ignored.

(17) There is a need to restore confidence in the market because of ill-conceived comments and ignorance of science. (The Guardian, 27/March)

c) Recalling the impact of the Falklands war on Lady's Thatcher's 1983 election victory, this war can be seen by Tories as the background against which their party could recover to win an election.

(18) MPs see beef as *Major's Falklands*. (The Guardian, 23/May)

d) British citizens will have the chance to see how their representatives are fighting to safeguard the national interest, showing citizens they have determination when it becomes necessary.

(19) He [John Major] told another friend: "Britain is being pushed around and I am not having the country treated like this." If carried through with determination, a policy of non-cooperation will demonstrate that Britain is determined to fight to safeguard its national interest. (The Times, 22/May)

Once the balance of costs and benefits has been worked out, the choice of whether to go to war or not will depend on which course of action is perceived as most beneficial. In the case I am dealing with, John Major thought that going to war with Europe was worthwhile and this is what he did; that is to say, even though there is always a risk involved in a situation such as the present one, John Major considered that the benefits expected from the war outweighed the costs.

The first indication of a belligerent mood was when John Major on May 22, (1996) declared that he would go to war with Europe vetoing all important EU decisions until the ban on beef by-products was lifted and there was a clear framework for raising the beef ban itself.

(20) The barricades have risen. John Major's decision to obstruct any progress in the European Union until the removal of the ban on British beef matches the growing exasperation of his party both in and out of Parliament. (The Times, 22/May)

3.2. Tally of costs and benefits a few days after the policy of non-cooperation has been implemented (from 23 to 30 May)

As time goes by and one particular tactic has been pursued, the costs of that tactic, in this case going to war, have to be reanalysed to see if, in the new context, the benefits which were expected from this choice are still worth the costs. Thus, Clausewitz states: "[...]the original political intentions change a lot in the course of war and at the end they can be totally

different, precisely because they are determined in part by the successes and probable results.” (My translation from “De la Guerra”, (1972: 66)).

Reanalysis of the costs

a) There are members of the government who are starting to complain about the behaviour of the British government in this crisis.

(21) John Major’s confrontation with Europe started to backfire on him last night when a former minister [George Walden] threatened to resign the party whip over the Prime Minister’s silly and cynical approach. (The Times, 27/May)

b) The European Union annoyed with the way the British government has been handling the crisis decides to attack rather than accept the conditions Great Britain has been trying to impose, which forces Britain to invest a lot of energy to face all that irritation and anger coming from Europeans.

(22) Europe launched a fierce counter-strike against Britain’s blocking tactics in the beef war yesterday. (The Times, 30/May)

Reanalysis of the benefits

a) Government’s determination to keep defending the national interest, not giving up so easily something which has taken so much of their time and energy.

(23) Britain escalated its beef war with Europe yesterday wielding the national veto 12 times to scupper measures that would normally have sailed through. (Times, 27/May)

After that week filled with argument and struggle, still John Major continued his campaign of non-cooperation, showing his view that the main benefit that he was expecting, “to have the ban on beef by-products lifted and, eventually, the beef ban itself” was worth the cost of risking Britain’s position in the EU.

4. THE METAPHOR “A STATE IS A PERSON”

As said above, for a better understanding of the two previous metaphors POLITICS IS WAR and POLITICS IS BUSINESS, we need to have a look at another metaphor that fleshes them out: A STATE IS A PERSON.

In the metaphor POLITICS IS WAR, the notion of a person as somebody who engages in social relations, which involves having friends and enemies, corresponds to the concept of state. Thus, due to the conceptualisation of a state in terms of a person, having a country waging a war against another country makes perfect sense to us.

Likewise, the metaphor POLITICS IS BUSINESS also takes us back again to the metaphor A STATE IS A PERSON, as “gains” were defined as what increases the well-being of a country, whereas “costs” as what diminishes the well-being of a country. The idea of the well-being of a country, which sounds completely reasonable, is again determined by the metaphor A STATE IS A PERSON. Besides, another metaphor, WELL-BEING IS WEALTH, is implicit in the projection of a country as somebody whose well-being can be improved. This means that when we think about a person, the better off a person is, the better their inherent qualities are supposed to be. If this is projected onto the concept of state, the result is that the wealthier a country is, the more enjoyable the lives of its inhabitants are expected to be.

This metaphor is pervasive throughout the whole debate over the Mad Cow Disease, as can be shown by a quick look at the data, which shows how important it is to human beings to grasp non-human entities in terms of human characteristics. The psychological motivation for such a process of projecting human features over non-human entities can be found in the fact that it is difficult to consider all the feelings and behaviour of a whole country. To make this easier, we see the country as a person, and thus the process becomes much more familiar. The danger that it involves is that differences felt by the different sectors of the population are played down and hidden in the conceptualization of this.

5. CONCLUSION

The main two metaphors, in terms of their frequency, through which the issue was reported in the media are those of POLITICS IS WAR, and POLITICS IS BUSINESS; although both of them rely on the metaphor A STATE IS A PERSON. The repeated use of those metaphors, mainly that of POLITICS IS WAR, help to highlight certain characteristics of the situation, which call for a win or lose approach, and play down other features which would allow an approach on the issue as a joint-problem solving.

The issue was, then, depicted as a war being fought against the rest of Europe because the national interest was at stake. Thus, the strength and persuasiveness of this metaphor resides in the fact that, as a self-defence scenario imposed upon the situation, it moves readers to action, leaving them with no other option but to contribute their energies in the defence of their country as good and patriotic citizens. If you are being attacked, which is the way the situation is being presented, two options stem from our dual folk morality: either to settle accounts or to turn the other cheek (Lakoff 1996) John Major has opted for the first option: “to settle his country’s accounts instead of turning the other cheek.” In other words, this war

frame was designed to drum up public support and ensure that people would rally around a policy: fighting a common enemy. Besides, waging a war against Europe had the added benefit of channelling citizens' pride by showing continental Europeans that British people do not need to be told how to act in a situation of crisis and, therefore, are able to make their own decisions and control their future.

In a war the confrontation is usually between two parties, each of them wishing to impose their will on the other. In this case, though the enemy is the whole of the EU, most of the attacks are aimed at the country which is felt to be the strongest and most powerful of the continental members: Germany. The battle, then, is conceptualised as a contest of strength between basically two contenders: Britain and Germany.

This war, though, produced a highly visible social damage which went unnoticed due to the manipulative power of language: on the one hand, many of the casualties, the dossiers which were hijacked in this policy of non-cooperation, concerned regions outside the EU: Burma, Mexico, Asia and Latin America; on the other hand, what should be the real focus in this crisis, social and animal welfare concerns, together with the damage to the livelihoods of farming communities and rural business owners, was displaced by a political issue (POLITICS IS WAR) in which the two main contenders, Great Britain and Europe/Germany, took positions, attacked each other and defended themselves.

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