

In 2009, French President Nicolas Sarkozy announced his plan for “a grand debate on national identity” that he viewed as “necessary.” The “grand debate” was then placed under the aegis of Prime Minister François Fillon and the Minister of Immigration, Integration, National Identity and Solidarity Development, Eric Besson. According to Besson, the project would be “a grand debate on the values of national identity.”¹ The official launch of the debate took place on November 2, 2009 and was centered on the question: “What is it to be French?”² This question was posted online via a government-sponsored website and the French populace was encouraged to participate in the debate during a period of roughly three months until its closure in February. Then, on February 8, 2010 a governmental seminar chaired by Prime Minister François Fillon was held in Paris. Following this summit, a series of measures were taken in order to “reinforce [our] national pact.”³ These measures included the reinforcement of civic education, the presence of the French flag and the declaration of the rights of man in every classroom, the signatory requirement of a “contract of rights and duties”⁴ in order to obtain French nationality and the increase of the French language level required for French citizenship. However, despite the adoption of such measures, the French press largely evaluated the “grand debate” as a failure.

This “debate” organized by President Sarkozy and Prime Minister Fillon sparked much controversy, further exacerbating the divide between the French *Parti Socialiste* and the right-wing *Union pour un Mouvement Populaire* (UMP). According to the socialist opposition, the debate merely served to promote racist sentiments surrounding increased immigration to France, particularly that of Muslim populations. Certainly, in recent times questions surrounding the

¹ « un grand débat sur les valeurs de l’identité nationale »

² « Qu’est-ce qu’être Français? »

³ « renforcer notre pacte nationale »

⁴ « charte des droits et des devoirs »

place of Muslims and other immigrants in French society have usually been suppressed from public discourse, save for the vitriolic speech of extreme right-wing parties, like the *Front National*. In this particular instance, however, Nicolas Sarkozy and the governing UMP employed “national identity” as a means by which to address the various questions surrounding immigration, religion, and multiculturalism in France—a discursive strategy whose effects were still manifest in the 2012 French presidential election.

President Sarkozy’s emphasis upon national identity and the importance of its definition was a significant characteristic of his presidency and should have continued to play an important role during the following presidential campaign and election of 2012. However, after the “failure” of the “grand debate,” the question of national identity definition largely disappeared from the French press and was never overtly referenced by either of the two principal candidates during the presidential campaign of 2012.

Why was such a previously important issue noticeably absent from presidential campaign discourse in 2012? It is my hypothesis and the subject of this thesis that the definition of national identity was indeed present during the presidential campaign, albeit in the form of metaphorical utterances present throughout campaign discourse that varied according to the respective ideologies of each presidential candidate.

Research Question

The definition of national identity as both an abstract concept and with respect to specific nations is remarkably varied and usually ambiguous. Nevertheless, the evocation of national identity by politicians remains a powerful discursive tool because of its capacity to link the largest possible number of voters amongst an electorate into a previously unimaginable community. Because of the intrinsic complexity of a concept such as national identity, politicians

often attempt to describe it metaphorically. Furthermore, politicians of differing political ideologies use metaphor differently in order to redefine and construct their own interpretation of national identity.

In this study, I will examine the phenomenon of national identity creation by addressing the following question: How does each principal candidate (François Hollande, Nicolas Sarkozy) in the French presidential election of 2012 use metaphor in order to construct their own vision of national identity?

Theoretical Framework

In order to examine the means by which French presidential candidates employ metaphor in order to define national identity, this thesis will utilize a multidisciplinary approach that incorporates several theoretical frameworks. First, “national identity” will be treated as a multidimensional concept as detailed by Stefan Spießberger and Marliese Ungersböck, encompassing various definitions from the fields of sociology, philosophy, and political science. More specifically, Ruth Wodak’s research on *The Discursive Construction of National Identities* will be directly applied to the analysis of the corpus of campaign discourse. Wodak’s research relies upon five foundational assumptions, all of which will also be considered in my research. Firstly, nations are conceived as mental constructs, or *imagined political communities*. Secondly, national identities are produced, reproduced, transformed and destructed *discursively*. Thirdly, national identity is a sort of *habitus*, as described by Pierre Bourdieu. Thus, national identity can be described as “a complex of common ideas, concepts or perception schemes, (a) of related emotional attitudes intersubjectively shared within a specific group of persons; (b) as well as of similar behavioral dispositions; (c) all of which are internalized through ‘national’

socialization”.⁵ Fourth, Wodak states that the construction of national identity runs parallel with the “construction of difference/distinctiveness and uniqueness”. Finally, Wodak emphasizes the role of discursive context by assuming that “different identities are discursively constructed according to context, that is according to the social field, the situational setting of the discursive act and the topic being discussed”.

This research will also incorporate theoretical frameworks expressed in French academic literature. More precisely, the work of Anne-Marie Thiesse entitled *Des fictions créatrices: les identités nationales* will be referenced in relation to the discursive employ of references to a “collective conscious” composed of a common language, history, landscape, historical monuments and folklore. Thiesse’s research on representations of national identity will be complemented by Jean Jaques Courtine’s paper *Le tissu de la mémoire: quelques perspectives de travail historique dans les sciences du langage*. Courtine’s research examines the relationship between history and identity as observed through language, specifically with regards to “social and collective memory, in its relationship to language and history”.⁶ In his paper, Courtine effectively combines discourse analysis with a linguistically historical approach to examine the role of memory in discourse. Given the salient link between memory and the construction of national identity, Courtine’s research will be indispensable to my thesis research.

Concerning a theoretical approach to metaphor analysis, this study will rely upon the basic premises set out in the field of cognitive linguistics. According to cognitive linguists George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, metaphor is more than a rhetorical construct; rather, people think metaphorically and construct their perceptions of the world around fundamental

⁵ Wodak 1999

⁶ Courtine 1994

metaphorical concepts. In addition to Lakoff and Johnson, researchers Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson also recognize the role of metaphor in their Theory of Relevance.

Relevance Theory states that metaphor is an utterance of ostensive-inferential communication by which a speaker uses metaphor as an effective ostension in order to signal to an audience the relevance of the information that he is attempting to communicate. Sperber and Wilson's work is further elaborated by Marinela Vramulet, whose work examines the function of metaphorical utterances in the context of a Mutual Cognitive Environment (MCE). Vramulet argues that a larger MCE facilitates communication by enlarging the set of assumptions that are mutually manifest to both the speaker and the audience. After detailing the conditions by which a metaphorical utterance may succeed if the speaker and the audience share the same MCE, Vramulet asserts that metaphor, as an ostensive stimuli, has the highest capacity to attract the audience's attention. Furthermore, the utilisation of metaphorical utterances enlarges the MCE, thereby augmenting its own efficacy in what is effectively a positive feedback loop.

It follows that metaphor is used ostensively in political discourse in order to increase the size of and reinforce the MCE shared between the speaker and his audience. Moreover, politicians should be most interested in employing metaphorical utterances that relate to the largest possible MCE : the nation as a whole, through the definition of national identity.

Case Selection

The unique format of the French presidential election necessitates a strict corpus from which to analyse political discourse. Unlike the American model of the presidential campaign, in which privately funded campaign advertisement would be conveyed through a variety of media, such as television, radio and print, the lack of privately funded political promotion requires an

alternative approach.⁷ Thus, this study will only consider official statements issued directly from the presidential candidates themselves. More precisely, this thesis will analyse a corpus of the most salient written and spoken enunciations by each of the major candidates in the French presidential election of 2012, including political discourses, campaign posters, and official video clips.

Hypothesis

For the purposes of this study, I will assume that the underlying principles of cognitive linguistics apply to the usage of metaphor in political discourse. I hypothesize that each candidate will use ideologically influenced metaphorical utterances in order to redefine national identity, thereby creating the largest possible MCE within the French nation and thus attracting the largest potential electorate. I will also attempt to illustrate how each candidate constructs their metaphorical utterances by examining the discursive patterns that are present throughout the official discourse of each candidate.

Methodology

This thesis will utilize a multidisciplinary approach that incorporates methodology from the fields of Cognitive Metaphor Theory, Critical Discourse Analysis, Metaphor Identification Procedure, and qualitative corpus-based study.

⁷ Individuals are only allowed private contributions to political parties limited in scope.