

Making a cardinal point: The conceptualization of EAST and WEST in Hungarian politics

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Keywords: conceptual metonymy, political discourse, political-cultural context of metonymy

In political discourse, cardinal points are not mere reference points on a compass: based on the map ICM, they represent different political-cultural regions via the part for whole metonymy (Brdar-Szabó & Brdar 2011). For example, *the East* refers to countries which had communist governments prior to the 1990s within Europe. Moreover, pairs such as *the East* and *the West* hold “metonymic implications,” i.e., they carry values based on cultural and political oppositions (Brdar-Szabó & Brdar 2011: 234). Thus, the question arises what implications concepts based on cardinal points can have in political communication.

To explore the values behind two cardinal points, the EAST and the WEST, this research presents a case study of these concepts in Hungarian political discourse. Hungarian politics frequently associates the WEST with “progress” and “democracy,” and the EAST with “backwardness” and “oppression” (Rac 2014). However, the attitude to the EAST-WEST dichotomy was challenged by the current Hungarian government as it implemented its foreign strategy called “keleti nyitás” [eastern opening] in 2012. Thus, the tension between the two concepts in the country’s political discourse makes it possible to shed light on opposing values associated with the EAST and WEST.

The concepts are analyzed in online news articles published by the most widely read Hungarian progovernment and non-progovernment websites, *origo.hu* and *24.hu* in 2022. Relying on a discourse-based approach to metonymy (Brdar 2015), I search for the keywords “kelet” [east] and “nyugat” [west] in the corpus and identify the target concepts they stand for based on the context and co-text in which they occur (Brdar-Szabó & Brdar 2011). By way of illustration, the WEST FOR THE EUROPEAN UNION metonymy can be found in an article discussing the EU measures against Russia: “hazudik a Nyugat a szankciókról” [the West is lying about the sanctions]. Subsequently, the hits are qualitatively interpreted, determining the way the observed concepts are depicted (Brdar 2015).

In sum, the study explores the way metonymy functions in specific cultural-political contexts via the conceptualization of the EAST and the WEST in Hungarian political communication.

References

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