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## ON DELIBERATE USE OF *THE TSUNAMI OF ISLAMIZATION* METAPHOR IN PUBLIC DISCOURSE

### ***Abstract***

*Applying the Method for Identifying Potentially Deliberate Metaphor (DMIP), the expression the tsunami of Islamization is analyzed in order to describe its communicative function and consequences of its use in public discourse. The paper aims to show that figurative language may be used to support ideological claims and be rhetorically effective.*

**Keywords:** *the tsunami of Islamization, deliberate metaphor, metaphor analysis, cognitive linguistics*

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<sup>1</sup> Statement of authorship. The first author investigated the theoretical background of the metaphor and determined that it is poorly described from the cognitive-linguistic point of view, but that it dominates European media and public discourse in general (e.g. in the form of quotes, interpretations, posts and comments on social networks). About 635.000 results for "the tsunami of islamization" were reviewed on the Google search engine, discarding references that have no significance for a linguistic study. The review of the relevant cognitive-linguistic literature revealed that the metaphor is insufficiently described. Furthermore, it has been established that its use indeed originated from the Dutch Prime Minister's statement, and the original quote was forwarded to the second authoress. Subsequently, the first author began the methodological part by describing DMT and the levels of analysis within that theory.

## 1. Introduction

The sole focus of this paper is the expression *the tsunami of Islamization*, which gained public interest after the Dutch Prime Minister Geert Wilders used it in his public statement on the development of Islam in the Netherlands. Given its metaphorical nature, we aim to explore its wider capacity and communicative function in the naturally occurring language use. In this light, the article is structured as follows. In section 2, the findings from previous research on the use of *the tsunami of Islamization* are outlined. The theoretical background of the expression reveals that it does originate from the Dutch Prime Minister's statement, it dominates European media and public discourse in general (e.g. in the form of quotes, interpretations, posts and comments on social networks), and it is poorly described from the cognitive-linguistic point of view. In studies related to Deliberate Metaphor Theory (e.g. Steen 2010), *the tsunami of Islamization* is mentioned casually, as an example in a research focusing primarily on some other issue. Indeed, in these accounts of the role of the expression in discourse, its communicative function of changing recipients' perspective has been mentioned but not thoroughly discussed, let alone studied. Nevertheless, the main points of these findings are taken into account, as they also point in the direction of *the tsunami of Islamization* being used deliberately. Our intention, however, is to apply a reliable and objective methodological framework to establish whether the expression is indeed metaphorical and deliberate. There are several advantages to such an approach: any subjectivity is avoided by strictly following the steps of the Deliberate Metaphor Identification Procedure (henceforth DMIP); the findings are based on an independently

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The second author supplemented the section on methodology with a descriptive and schematic representation of the DMIP protocol. Multiple dictionary entries for the metaphorical linguistic term *tsunami* were reviewed to determine and compare its basic and contextual meanings. Afterwards, the cognitive-linguistic analysis conducted according to the DMIP protocol was described. References are written as required by the Guidelines for publication in the Proceedings. Both authors are of the opinion that the contribution to the paper is joint as they agreed on the conclusions and assertions stated in the paper. We would like to thank Ilhana Nowak, PhD for proofreading the paper and the anonymous reviewers for their constructive comments on an earlier version of this paper. The authors are of course sole responsible for any remaining errors.

produced description of language (relevant dictionaries are consulted); the findings can be checked and the research replicated. In section 3, we present and discuss our choice of methodological framework in more detail. Section 4 contains a thorough analysis (i.e. the annotation) of the expression according to the DMIP protocol. On the basis of this analysis, the effects of the deliberate use of *the tsunami of Islamization* specifically in political and public discourses are discussed. Concluding remarks are offered in section 5.

## 2. Previous findings on *the tsunami of Islamization* use

The expression *the tsunami of Islamization* is first identified in the statement by Geert Wilders, the Dutch Member of Parliament who discussed the large numbers of migrants arriving to the Netherlands from Islamic countries:

“We have to stop *the tsunami of Islamization*,” says Mr. Wilders.  
“It is affecting our heart, our identity, our culture.”<sup>2</sup>

Consequently, Wilders has gone on trial in the Netherlands for “incitement to hatred and discrimination” and “offending a group of people, which relates to his comparison of Islam to Nazism.”<sup>3</sup> The statement has since gone viral in mass media and on social platforms.<sup>4</sup> Wilders’ language style is labelled as “an extreme right-wing discourse” containing “many strong metaphors that provoke unrest and that must convince people of the need for change” (Landtsheer et al., 2011, p. 1). It is well known that politicians tend to construct their own “persuasive version of reality” (*ibid.*, p. 5) relying on metaphors, which represent the core of emotion in political language, and exemplify compact persuasive ideology (*ibid.*, p. 5). Wilders practices a metaphorical style in order to achieve desired rhetorical goals and

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2010/oct/5/acquit-geert-wilders/> (Retrieved on June 27, 2022)

<sup>3</sup> <http://edition.cnn.com/2010/WORLD/europe/10/04/netherlands.incitement.trial/index.html> (Retrieved on June 27, 2022)

<sup>4</sup> About 635.000 results for "the tsunami of Islamization" were reviewed on the Google search engine, discarding references that have no significance for a linguistic study. The review of the relevant cognitive-linguistic literature revealed that the metaphor is insufficiently described.

resorts to the use of deliberate metaphor such as *the tsunami of Islamization*.

The metaphorical linguistic expression *the tsunami of Islamization* is based on a conventional conceptual metaphor MIGRATION IS DANGEROUS WATERS, where migrants are presented as a (natural, dangerous, uncontrollable) force destroying the country in which they come. The linguistic expression *tsunami* from the domain of WATER was “conventionalized as a hyperbolic version of metaphorical *streams* or *floods*” (Steen, 2009, p. 182), i.e. “the metaphoric wave is hyperbolically extended into the largest wave possible” (Burgers et al., 2016, p. 10) so that an abstract concept like migration is made concrete through metaphor, while, at the same time, it exaggerates the impact through hyperbole (Burgers et al., 2016, p. 10). The combination of power of the individual figures (in our case, metaphor and hyperbole) has a combined effect otherwise not achieved in isolation, which ultimately strengthens their impact on reasoning and possibly makes them more difficult to disprove (Burgers et al., 2016, p. 11).

The novel perspective in cognitive-linguistic studies (cf. Burgers et al. 2016, p. 3) is that figurative language serves as both a linguistic device (“referring to *how* something is said”) and a reasoning device (“by containing important conceptual content”). Thus, a metaphor is seen as a reasoning device activated by one specific linguistic metaphor – in this particular case *the tsunami of Islamization* – which contains an important conceptual content that shapes public perception of migration and the development of Islam in the Netherlands.

Steen (2009, p. 182) claims that Wilders was, quite possibly, fully aware in his deliberation to invoke the image of the natural catastrophe in Indonesia and its surrounding countries as the source domain, in order to influence the perception of the development of Islam in the Netherlands, and adds that “his goal was to appeal maximally to fear and have maximal persuasive effect on the right wing of Dutch politics.” Steen (2010, p. 96) believes that metaphor in communication is a specific linguistic means between discourse participants, so – when it comes to the deliberate metaphor *a tsunami of Islamization*, where the rise of Islam in the Netherlands is compared to a catastrophic flood that will harm a country – it is quite certain that none of the language users will think that the *tsunami* is not metaphorical in this context.

The deliberate metaphor *the tsunami of Islamization* may be regarded as an overtly anti-immigrant metaphor in public discourse due to openly ignoring real facts and motives of migration, and even obscuring the complex nature of the phenomena. Machielsen (2017, p. 68) points out that the natural phenomenon of water displacement has no actual or highly uncontrollable ‘source’, and that the comparison between a figurative migration and a tidal wave highlights the supposed agentive and belligerent character of the metaphor, where the shift in focus targets symptom treatment instead of the origin with far more opaque and startling results. The persistent use of certain rhetoric, especially if it contains negatively connoted metaphorical expressions, influences our reasoning about an issue and in a way justifies our policies and actions towards certain social groups. Thus, if we resort to obscurement of the metaphor due to our “social conceptual bias, reflected in habits of speech and reasoning concerning certain situations”, we continue to conform and “live by a conventional and sociocultural norm or standard, a more or less automatic and unconscious chain of defining, interpreting, evaluating, and treating particular problematic situations” (Machielsen, 2017, p. 68). Obviously, the conceptual framework that builds around the MIGRATION IS DANGEROUS WATERS metaphor, which includes the metaphorical linguistic expression *the tsunami of Islamization*, provides linguistic means and cognitive structures for us to ‘define, interpret, evaluate, and treat’ social groups in a desired way.

Furthermore, when Wilders spoke of *the tsunami of Islamization* instead of the actual figures of Muslims migrating into the Netherlands, he resorted to the ‘simplification’ of complex politics (Sopory and Dillard, 2002), i.e. the simple, plain formulation of a complex phenomenon by means of the metaphor, which creates “different and enhanced image of Muslims (immigration) in the Netherlands” (Machielsen, 2017), reminding people “of the power of a tsunami, which can engulf a whole country, in this case with (Muslim) violence” (*ibid.*) Having in mind this theoretical background of the expression, we set to investigate the deliberateness of its use in the aforementioned statement.

### 3. Research Methodology

The paper relies on the Deliberate Metaphor Theory (DMT) founded by Steen (2017, 2015, 2008). This theory about the properties of metaphor in language use gives us more insight into “moments when language users attempt to take voluntary control over the way they use metaphor for highlighting and hiding in expression, conceptualization, and communication” (Steen, 2017, p. 2). Steen (2008, p. 230) distinguishes three different representations of metaphor (metaphor in language, metaphor in thought, and metaphor in communication) and argues that metaphors in discourse perform the following functions: linguistic, conceptual, and communicative. Potentially metaphorical linguistic expressions, i.e. linguistic metaphors are determined by consulting dictionaries and establishing basic and contextual meanings of the expressions, and ultimately comparing and contrasting the basic and contextual meanings (cf. Krennmayr, pp. 67-75). The dictionaries of English used to retrieve the basic and contextual meanings of *the tsunami of Islamization* are *Collins*, *Macmillan*, *Cambridge*, and *Oxford Online* dictionaries. At the linguistic level, the potentially metaphorical linguistic expressions are identified using Metaphor Identification Procedure Vrije Universiteit (MIPVU; cf. Steen et al. 2010) and the distinction is made between indirect, direct, and implicit metaphors (see the protocols described by Krennmayr, 2011). This linguistic level analysis serves as a basis for the analysis at the conceptual level, where the distinction is made between conventional and novel metaphorical linguistic expressions, as well as conventional and novel conceptual metaphors. The analysis of metaphor at the communicative level identifies the deliberate change of “the addressee’s perspective on the referent or topic that is the target of the metaphor, by making the addressee look at it from a different conceptual domain or space” (Steen, 2008, p. 222). Therefore, the three-dimensional analysis of metaphor implies that “a distinction is consequently made between thoughts, the words that are used to express those thoughts, and the persons, things, actions, or events in the (text) world that the words refer to (referents)” (Reijnierse et al., 2018, p. 132).

The central point of metaphor analysis within DMT is the communicative level, where metaphor is explored in communication.

Therefore, DMT focuses on the deliberate use of a metaphor *as* a metaphor, and the distinction between deliberate and non-deliberate metaphors is made. The deliberate use of metaphor “provides an alien or alternative perspective on the topic of an utterance” (Reijnierse et al., 2018, p. 133), which implies that recipients have to “move away their attention momentarily from the target domain of the utterance or even phrase to the source domain that is evoked by the metaphor related expression” (Steen, 2015, p. 68). On the other hand, non-deliberate metaphors “stay ‘on topic’” (Steen, 2011, p. 37) without the recipient having to attend to “the structure of an alien source domain” (*ibid.*) of the metaphorical utterance. In order to determine “whether the source domain functions as a distinct referent in the meaning of a metaphorical utterance” (Reijnierse et al., 2018, p. 129), DMIP is developed as a reliable tool for deliberate metaphor identification.

DMIP instructs analysts to read the entire text to get a general idea of what the text is about, apply MIPVU to find all metaphorical linguistic expressions, and determine whether the source domain of the identified metaphorical linguistic expression is part of the referential meaning of the utterance in which it is used. If ‘yes’, the expression is marked as potentially deliberate. If ‘no’, the metaphorical expression is marked non-deliberate. The protocol instructs analysts that, in case of doubt, they mark the metaphorical expression as potentially deliberate, and add the code WIDLII (When In Doubt Leave It In, as explained in Steen et al., 2010). For the metaphorical expression that is marked as potentially deliberate, analysts need to describe how the source domain of the metaphorical expression is part of the referential meaning of the utterance. A schematic overview of steps within DMIP is presented below:

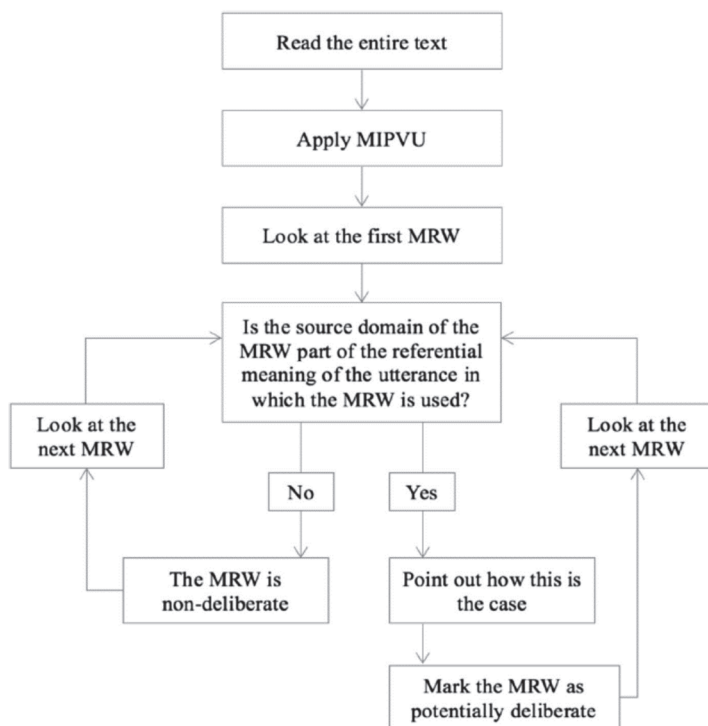


Figure 1: DMIP coding scheme retrieved from Reijnierse et al. (2018, p. 136)

In previous research and descriptions of the expression *the tsunami of Islamization*, this protocol was not explicitly mentioned or applied. We have opted for this particular coding scheme because it yields objective conclusions – analysts do not decide subjectively on the metaphoricity or deliberateness of an expression. Determining the type of metaphor at all three levels of metaphor analysis, and especially at the communicative level, is completely prescribed by the protocol (MIPVU and DMIP). After that process of annotation, the analysts are in a position to describe rhetorical effects of the metaphor in discourse. Their statements, however, are based on the previously conducted annotation where they determined metaphor type (indirect vs direct metaphor; conventional vs novel metaphor; deliberate vs non-deliberate metaphor) and are aware of discourse properties of each metaphor type.



In the section that follows, the analysis of *the tsunami of Islamization* is conducted using DMIP in order to determine if it is indeed used as a deliberate metaphor. Consequently, the rhetorical effects of its use in public discourse are discussed.

#### 4. The three-dimensional analysis of *the tsunami of Islamization*

The three-dimensional analysis of a potentially metaphorical linguistic expression starts by searching for its entry in dictionaries to determine its basic and contextual meanings. The annotation of the expression *the tsunami of Islamization* implies establishing its basic and contextual meanings by resorting to dictionaries. The basic meaning of *tsunami* is “a very large wave, often caused by an earthquake, that flows onto the land and destroys things” (*Collins*), while its contextual meaning is “a very large amount or quantity of something that is available or that arrives somewhere, and may be difficult to deal with” (*Cambridge*). Following MIPVU instructions (cf. Steen et al. 2010), it is determined that there are enough differences and similarities (cf. Krennmayr, 2011, p. 56-57, 75) between the basic and contextual meanings of *the tsunami of Islamization* to mark it as metaphorical. At the linguistic level, *the tsunami of Islamization* is marked as indirect metaphor, whose impact on recipients is covert because the cross-domain mapping is not expressed explicitly. At the conceptual level, the vivid expression *the tsunami of Islamization* revitalized the conventional conceptual metaphor MIGRATION AS DANGEROUS WATERS.

When it comes to the communicative level of metaphor analysis, the distinction is made between deliberate and non-deliberate metaphors. In order to determine whether *the tsunami of Islamization* is used deliberately, it is necessary to consider if this particular linguistic metaphor functions as metaphor in communication, i.e. if it explicitly introduces a different perspective on the target domain of migration (specifically, mass migration of Muslims into the Netherlands). The function of deliberate metaphor is “to change the addressee’s perspective on some referent in the discourse: a matter of what is attended to, and conceptually represented, during processing” (Steen, 2009, p. 182). In this particular example, referents from the source domain are used in the context of the target domain and recipients cannot avoid attending both to 'tsunami' and 'migration'. As Steen

(2009, p. 182) puts it, Wilders “invoked the image of recent natural catastrophe in Indonesia and its neighbouring countries as the source domain to look at the development of Islam in the Netherlands.”

DMIP protocol instructs us to consider if the source domain of metaphorical linguistic expression is part of the referential meaning of the utterance in which that expression is used. Reijnierse et al. (2018, p. 136) point out to a potentially deliberate nature of a metaphor in cases where the source domain plays a role in the representation of the referential meaning of an utterance. The expression *tsunami* is related to metaphor at the linguistic level of utterance meaning. Its contextual meaning is related to migration, while its basic meaning is related to the domain of WATER. The expression is metaphorical at the conceptual level because the associated concept TSUNAMI comes from a different conceptual domain than the target domain of the development of Islam in the Netherlands. To determine whether *the tsunami of Islamization* counts as a case of potentially deliberate metaphor, we consider whether the source domain of water is part of the referential meaning of the utterance. The sense descriptions in consulted dictionaries (*Collins, Macmillan, Cambridge, and Oxford* online dictionaries) do not capture the target domain of migration and the development of Islam specifically (the entries describe ‘large quantities of something difficult to handle’, though). Furthermore, the source domain meaning of *the tsunami of Islamization* metaphor does not match the overall topic of Wilders’ statement, which implies that *tsunami* introduces a new perspective on the target domain of ‘Islamization’, i.e. the development of Islam in the Netherlands due to (mass) migration of Muslims.

As Steen (2009, p. 182) points out, the expression *tsunami* “meant what it meant before it was conventionalized as a hyperbolic version of metaphorical *streams* or *floods*”, and then became “conventional enough” (Steen, 2007, p. 6) for Wilders to use it to cause a scandal in the political debate. Hence, *the tsunami of Islamization* is a deliberate metaphor which does not merely stand out from non-deliberate metaphors, but it is in fact a powerful cognitive mechanism which affects our perception and reasoning. Wilders resorted to this particular metaphor to frame the political debate about the complex political issue to suit his rhetorical goal, presumably to reinforce a particular, ideological way of thinking about the issue. His choice of metaphor is

not a mere linguistic ornamentation – it goes beyond simply expressing his opinion effectively. As aforementioned, *the tsunami of Islamization* metaphor has a persuasive and perspective-changing function in the segments of real discourse. The figurative construal of the spread of Islam *as* a tsunami is aimed to influence the way recipients (the public) understand and frame this particular issue.

## 5. Concluding remarks

The conducted analysis reveals that *the tsunami of Islamization* is a deliberately used metaphor functioning to change recipients' perspective on the spread of Islam in the Netherlands. It is a negatively connoted metaphorical expression used in an extreme right-wing discourse and in support of anti-immigrant ideology. Given that deliberate metaphors “supposedly force the addressee to consider the current topic from the point of view of the metaphor's source domain, thereby effecting a conceptual change” (Beger, 2016, p. 86), it means that the persistent use of *the tsunami of Islamization* may affect recipients' reasoning and ultimately public perception of the spread of Islam. In result, this may negatively affect public attitudes and actions towards a particular group of people over the course of time.

Bearing in mind that this paper focused on a single expression (*the tsunami of Islamization* metaphor, its own deliberateness and communicative function), we suggest future research to focus on its (inevitable) expansion in all types of discourse (public, political, and media discourse) across different languages. Furthermore, its use in discourse in connection with other metaphors may be examined, as well as in achieving discourse coherence at the intertextual level if it is produced by discourse operation on metaphor in the future (extension, elaboration, modification, and reinterpretation). Further research may focus on the possibilities of reconceptualization or alternative metaphor use. The lack of neutral and/or alternative way of conceptualizing the issue in question (that would ‘oppose’ to the existing *the tsunami of Islamization* metaphor) may add a further ideological dimension emerging in public discourse on this topic. Steering the public towards a certain viewpoint (underlying *the tsunami of Islamization* metaphor) influences the recipients' perception and leads them to draw on the same ideologies in making sense of the topic at hand.

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## **O NAMJERNOJ UPOTREBI METAFORE TSUNAMI ISLAMIZACIJE U JAVNOM DISKURSU**

### **Sažetak**

*Primjenom metode za identifikaciju potencijalno namjerne metafore (DMIP), analizira se izraz tsunami islamizacije kako bi se opisala njegova komunikativna funkcija i posljedice upotrebe u javnom diskursu. Cilj rada je pokazati da se figurativni jezik može koristiti za podupiranje ideoloških tvrdnji i da je pritom retorički efikasan.*

**Ključne riječi:** *cunami islamizacije, namjerna metafora, analiza metafora, kognitivna lingvistika*

## الاستخدام المتعمد للفظ الاستعارة تسونامي الإسلامية في الخطاب العام

### الملخص

بتطبيق طريقة تحديد الاستعارات المتعمدة المحتملة يتم تحليل مصطلح تسونامي الإسلامية لوصف وظيفته التواصلية وعواقب استخدامه في الخطاب العام. الهدف من البحث هو إظهار أن اللغة التصويرية يمكن استخدامها لدعم الادعاءات العقائدية ومدى فعاليتها من الناحية الخطابية كذلك.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تسونامي الإسلامية، الاستعارة المتعمدة، دراسة الاستعارات، اللغويات المعرفية