

Metaphors for Terrorism in German Media Discourse

Monika Schwarz-Friesel & Helge Skirl

Synopsis

Abstract concepts such as **TERRORISM** are often expressed and conceptualized via metaphors, especially in the mass media discourse. In cognitive linguistics, the role of metaphors in describing emotional states is widely recognized, but the emotional content of metaphors not referring to emotions, but to abstract concepts, remains an important subject deserving research. In our paper, we want to show how terrorism is metaphorically characterized in German media discourse in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks September 2001. Based on extensive data from German newspapers, our aim is to reveal the complex conceptualization involved, focusing on the persuasive aspect of information dealing with emotions.

Biography

Monika Schwarz-Friesel is head of the Department of Language and Communication at the Technical University of Berlin, Germany, where she has the chair in General Linguistics. Her research focuses on the interaction of language, cognition and emotion in discourse, especially in the mass media. She is the author and editor of several books, e. g. on language and emotion (2007), and on contemporary anti-semitism (2010).

Helge Skirl is assistant professor for linguistics at the Technical University of Berlin. He is, together with Monika Schwarz-Friesel, author of a linguistic book on metaphor (2007).

Essay

1 Introduction

The attacks of September 11 in 2001 mark a turning point in modern history. In terrorism studies it is sometimes argued that this new kind of terrorism came into being years before, but that the Western public became aware of it only on that day: "On September 11, bin Laden wiped the slate clean of the conventional wisdom on terrorists and terrorism and, by doing so, ushered in a new era of conflict" (Hoffman 306). With the gruesome attacks, the number of casualties and

the symbolic significance of the targets, the concept of terrorism has drastically changed in the mass media discourse: By now the religious motivated mass murder by Islamists has attracted major attention. How exactly, however, is this new form of terrorism characterized in the media discourse? So far, linguistic studies rather focused on the “war on terrorism,” the official rhetoric of the Bush administration concerning the campaigns in Afghanistan and in Iraq. Only a few studies have dealt with the characterization of Islamic terrorism itself.¹

In our paper, we want to show how terrorism is metaphorically characterized in German media discourse in the aftermath of 9/11. Based on data from German newspapers, our aim is to describe the conceptualization involved, focusing on the persuasive aspect of information activating emotions.

Global Islamist terrorism is a highly relevant topic, which is the subject of intense discussion in public discourse. In this context, terrorism is very often characterized through metaphors; like *terror octopus Al Qaida* in (1) and *many-headed hydra* in (2):

- (1) Are the terrorist octopus Al-Qaida and its leader Osama Bin Laden once again responsible for the worst terror attack since 9/11? [Ist es wieder der Terror-Krake al-Qaida und sein Führer Osama Bin Laden, die hinter dem schlimmsten Terror-Anschlag seit dem 11. September stecken?] (Matthias Gebauer, *Spiegel Online*, 14.10.2002)
- (2) Unfortunately the possibility cannot be ruled out that the global political situation will get significantly worse. For Islamic terrorism is a many-headed hydra. [Die Möglichkeit ist leider nicht völlig auszuschließen, dass sich das weltpolitische Szenario noch erheblich verschlechtert. Denn der islamische Terrorismus ist eine Hydra mit vielen Köpfen.] (Helmut Schmidt, *Die Zeit*, 45/2001)

Metaphors express analogical thinking: they force us to establish a similarity relation between two conceptual domains. In such an analogy, a specific evaluation is given, and consequently, also a certain emotional impact. Metaphors may, for example, contain the potential for feelings of anxiety/threat—as in (1) and (2)—or reassurance/security.

Metaphors are used with the intention to persuade. They are thus always part of the persuasive strategies contained in a text. They are an important part of the persuasive communication, because they combine the cognitive function with an emotional one.

In this paper a range of examples are presented to illustrate the role that metaphors (can) play in the conceptualization of TERRORISM. Our corpus consists of thousands of articles taken from German print media, particularly weekly newspapers. What will be presented are the first results of a research project on terrorism metaphors. This project, “Terrorismus-Metaphern,” funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, SCHW 509/8-1), has been running

since December 2010, at the Department of General Linguistics of the Technical University of Berlin.

The analyses carried out so far have shown that through the use of metaphors in the mass media, the meaning of terrorism is on the one hand intensified and emotionally loaded, with the emotion of anxiety playing a decisive role. On the other hand, there is also evidence for metaphors that relativize and trivialize, and through which a feeling of relative safety is transmitted.

In many cases, the sole purpose of certain metaphors such as *network* and *cell* is to indicate how difficult it is to grasp the phenomenon described. Such metaphors often convey no detailed conceptualization, which is sometimes pointed out explicitly in the discourse, see (3).

- (3) According to the known to the secret services, the terrorists are organized in networks, but unfortunately we do not get information about how these networks function. [Die Terroristen sind, so das Geheimdienstwissen, netzwerkartig organisiert, aber darüber, wie dieses Netz funktioniert, erhalten wir leider keine Auskünfte.] (*taz*, 13.07.2007, 11)

Furthermore, there are also texts on the subject of terrorism in which metaphors play no part or at least no significant role, see (4).

- (4) The terrorist attacks of 9/11 have provided proof of the dramatic threat to all civilized societies from terrorism and its global dimension. Terrorism has revealed itself as a complex phenomenon, the legal classification of which is infinitely difficult. (Rupert Scholz, *Die Welt*, 08.03.2002)

Metaphors are used in texts where the persuasive strategies combine argumentative and emotional aspects.

2 Terrorism and Mass Media—an Interaction

The relationship between the phenomenon of terrorism and the language use of mass media represents a linguistic interaction. Terrorism, in its destructive activity and reach, depends on the dissemination of news through the media. The media, however, also considers terrorist attacks and threats as events of high news-value. This creates the danger that mass media reporting allows itself to be manipulated for terrorist ends. In (5) this is made clear through the metaphor of *ideal information viruses*.

- (5) Due to their mode of operation, the mass media were always the instruments of the self-induced irritation and hysteria of over-informed societies, and terrorist news fit into the system of daily news and special programs as ideal information viruses. [Weil

Massenmedien ihrer primären Funktionsweise nach immer schon Instrumente der Selbstirritation und der Selbsthysterisierung von übermediatisierten Gesellschaften sind, hängen sich Terrornachrichten als ideale informative Viren in das System der Tagesnachrichten und Sondersendungen ein.] (Peter Sloterdijk, *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 17.11.2001)

Note, that *virus* is also often used metaphorically for the danger of terrorism.²

3 Metaphor and Conceptualization: Evaluation and Emotional Potential as Part of Persuasive Strategies

In cognitive linguistics, metaphors are seen as the most important means for making abstract and/or difficult-to-grasp phenomena understandable and therefore accessible. Metaphors are the linguistic expression of analogical thinking: one concept is characterized with the help of another. The recipient is asked to draw the analogy.

- (6) Terrorism is the cancerous ulcer of humanity. [Terrorismus ist das Krebsgeschwür der Menschheit.] (*netzzeitung.de*, 07.10.2001)

In (6), *terrorism* points to the conceptual target domain of the metaphorical characterization; the metaphor *cancerous ulcer* points to the source domain. The communicated conceptualization TERRORISM AS CANCEROUS SORE reveals that TERRORISM is presented in analogy to CANCER CASE, which establishes a specific view. Through the reference to a serious, life-threatening illness, a strongly negative evaluation is established, which contains a considerable emotional potential (→ REPULSIVE, FRIGHTENING). The conceptualization can be understood as an indirect persuasive demand for action (→ MUST BE INVESTIGATED/COMBATED).

Persuasion is at least the writer's intentional influence on the conceptualization of the recipient: that is confirming or challenging existing ones and even creating new ones (see Schwarz-Friesel, *Sprache und Emotion*). Concerning the political discourse, Charteris-Black argues, that "messages become persuasive when they evoke things that are already known or at least familiar" and that "could be done both through considering fundamental human experiences such as life and death and an argument that appealed to the feelings" (10). With regard to terrorism, it becomes quite clear why sickness-metaphors like the cancer cases are used for the persuasive strategy of intensifying the danger: nothing is as frightening as an incurable cancer. But also the contrary of Charteris-Black's argument is true: The frequent metaphors of invisibility or darkness show, that the unknown is also very persuasive, because what is more frightening than a deadly danger which is completely unexplained, e. g. *Grey War* in (7):

- (7) The liberal Washington Post, for instance, like nearly nine out of ten US citizens, considers the country to be at war. But a war that is not

clearly understood: After the Second World War and the Cold War, the “Grey War” has now started, against post-modern terrorism. [Die liberale Washington Post etwa wähnt das Land zwar wie fast neun von zehn US-Bürgern ebenfalls im Krieg. Allerdings einem wenig übersichtlichen: Nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg und dem Kalten Krieg hat demnach nun also der „Graue Krieg“ begonnen, der gegen den postmodernen Terrorismus.] (*Frankfurter Rundschau*, 13.09.2001)

Metaphors express everyday forms of conceptualization. The conceptualization is anchored in basic human experiences, concerning the human body and the physical environment. The primary thing are not the linguistic manifestations, but the underlying conceptual constellation. According to Lakoff and Johnson, different verbalizations e.g. *cancer, tumour, metastases (of terrorism)* can be allocated to a higher-order conceptual combination (here, *TERRORISM AS A CANCER CASE*), which they describe as a conceptual metaphor. A metaphor is therefore a linguistic token, which points to a conceptual model.³

By “conceptual metaphor,” Lakoff and Johnson mean generally a conceptual structure of the type *CONCEPT 1 AS CONCEPT 2*. We are using here the term ‘metaphor’ only for the forms of linguistic manifestation, while ‘conceptualizations’ is employed for the underlying conceptual structures. This means that the difference between the linguistic and the conceptual levels remains terminologically transparent.⁴ We will show that for the conceptualization of *TERRORISM*, new metaphors are decisive, which may form larger metaphor complexes.

4 Degrees of Conventionality: Lexicalized, Creative and Innovative Metaphors

With reference to the degree of conventionality, it may distinguish between different metaphors, some of them quite innovative.

Conventionalized (lexicalized) metaphors such as *network* in (8) and *cells* in (9) are hardly noticed in linguistic use. In the 2006 edition of Duden Rechtschreibung (the standard German spelling dictionary), the composites *Terrornetzwerk*, *Terrorwelle* and *Terrorzelle* [*terror network, wave of terror and terror cell*] can already be found as individual entries.

- (8) And do we really want trials now, while the terrorist networks are still active? [Und wollen wir denn wirklich Prozesse, jetzt, während die terroristischen Netzwerke noch aktiv sind?] (Michael Walzer, *Die Welt*, 02.03.2002)
- (9) The leading terrorist (= Osama Bin Laden) rarely gets his own hands dirty; he allows his cells in individual countries plenty of room for manoeuvre. [Der Chefterrorist (= Osama Bin Laden) macht sich

selten die Hände selbst schmutzig, seinen Zellen in den einzelnen Ländern lässt er viel Spielraum.] (Erich Follath, *Der Spiegel*, 24.09.2001)

Creative metaphors such as *Terror plc* are based on well-known conceptual patterns (CRIMINAL GROUPS AS BUSINESSES), for which metaphorical manifestations already exist in the language.

- (10) He (= Osama Bin Laden) is the driving force in the background—important is that the general direction of his Terror plc is right. [Er (= Osama Bin Laden) ist der Spiritus Rector im Hintergrund – Hauptsache, die Richtung seiner Terror-GmbH stimmt.] (Erich Follath, *Der Spiegel*, 24.09.2001)

Innovative metaphors cannot be traced back to already known conceptualizations, but they activate new conceptual connections. They are of particular interest, because they are only used in order to give expression to specific novel views.

- (11) For the supporters of the liberal idyll, by contrast, Islamist terror remains an unwelcome guest—a lunatic graffiti artist who defaces the facades of an innocent society with obscene messages. [Für die Anhänger der liberalen Idylle hingegen bleibt der islamistische Terror ein unwillkommener Gast – gewissermaßen ein verrückter Sprayer, der die Fassaden der feindlosen Gesellschaft mit obszönen Botschaften verunstaltet.] (Peter Sloterdijk, *Zorn und Zeit*, 339)

In (11), Islamist terror is conceptualized in a personified way as CRAZY (GRAFFITI) SPRAYERS. That, doubtlessly, is a relativizing metaphor which conceals the danger.

5 Metaphor Complexes

A further essential analytical category is that of the textual integration of metaphors. Different phenomena play a role here; the most relevant is the establishment of larger metaphor complexes, which can be allocated to one source domain, as in (12) and (13).

- (12) In Fischer's view, in spite all efforts the world after 2001 has not become secure again. "We are dealing with a hydra. It doesn't help to chop off all its heads, because they will grow back. One has to strike at the heart, that is, to resolve the conflicts behind this terror." [Die Welt ist nach Auffassung Fischers seit 2001 trotz aller Anstrengungen nicht wieder sicherer geworden. „Wir haben es mit einer Hydra zu tun. Da hilft es nichts, allein die Köpfe

- abzuschlagen, die wachsen nach. Man muss sie ins Herz treffen, also die Konflikte hinter diesem Terror schlichten.“] (*Der Tagesspiegel*, 11.09.2003)
- (13) Global terrorism is like a cancer with many invisible centers. It is not enough to cut out just one carcinoma, because whatever remains spreads out again. Above all, the patient must not be killed. The patient? That's oppressed and downtrodden of Afghanistan, that's us—our liberal political and economic order. [Der globale Terrorismus gleicht einem Krebs mit vielen unsichtbaren Herden. Es reicht nicht, nur ein Karzinom herauszuschneiden, denn was bleibt, streut. Vor allem darf der Patient nicht getötet werden. Der Patient? Das sind die Geschundenen und Unterdrückten von Afghanistan, das sind wir – unsere liberale Staats- und Wirtschaftsordnung.] (Josef Joffe, *Die Zeit*, 41/2001)

A further form of textual integration consists of the explanation of metaphors in the co-text. For example in the last sentence of (13) it is explained which target domains the metaphor *the patient* is meant to characterize. It is also important to note whether metaphors are inserted as a quotation and hence marked intertextually as in (12). Statements, e.g. by leading politicians or terrorism experts, often contain metaphorical characterizations of the phenomenon and are gladly used as quotations in print media reporting.

6 The Emotional Power of Metaphors

The main point of qualitative analysis is the reconstruction of a specific conceptualization which is communicated through metaphors, and their emotional potential.

A critical factor here is the extent to which the utilization of metaphors makes the phenomenon of terrorism concrete and clear, or whether they are used as an equivalent for uncertainty, lack of clarity and abstraction. For in the case of many metaphors, not the novel, insightful conceptualization of TERRORISM is dominating; rather, they emphasize through their vagueness the opacity, unexplained nature or exaggerated significance of the phenomenon.

- (14) Many commentators therefore inflate the fog cloud that is Al-Qaida, this conglomerate of hatred, unemployment and quotations from the Koran, into a form of totalitarianism that has its own style. [So blähen zahlreiche Kommentatoren die Nebelwolke Al Quaida, dieses Konglomerat aus Haß, Arbeitslosigkeit und Koranzitaten, zu einem Totalitarismus eigenen Stils auf.] (Peter Sloterdijk, *Im Weltinnenraum des Kapitals*, 290)

Such metaphors, as *fog cloud* in (14), often serve to relativize the danger of terrorism.⁵ However, rather unspecific metaphors such as *network*, when

combined with intensivizing characterizations, can also emphasize the diffuse and therefore frightening aspects of the security issues, see (15).

- (15) Osama Bin Laden leaves to the world one of the most resistant and effective terror networks in history. [Osama Bin Laden hinterlässt der Welt eines der widerstandsfähigsten und schlagkräftigsten Terrornetzwerke der Geschichte.] (*spiegel.de*, 02.05.2011)

Metaphors of invisibility can also be used to intensify the impression of danger, because something that we cannot see, but know that it represents a threat is frightening. See (16):

- (16) The diabolical invisibility of the wire-pullers makes even the American superpower look helpless—the first results of the manhunts could not conceal this fact. (...) Now the enemy comes out of nowhere, with no head of government, no territorial homeland, no identifiable troops—indeed, his battalions may already be operating in Western Europe and America. Conventional geostrategic thinking is ineffective against this enemy. [Die diabolische Unsichtbarkeit der Drahtzieher lässt selbst die Supermacht USA hilflos aussehen – erste Fahndungsergebnisse können das nicht kaschieren. (...) Nun kommt der Feind aus dem Nichts, er hat keinen Regierungschef, kein Staatsgebiet, keine identifizierbaren Truppen, ja möglicherweise agieren seine Bataillone längst auf westeuropäischem und amerikanischem Staatsgebiet. Das konventionelle geostrategische Denken ist gegen diesen Gegner wirkungslos.] (*Focus*, 15.09.2001)

On the other hand, concretizing metaphors sometimes point in the direction of attenuation, and present terrorism as something that can be mastered or controlled. For example, there are plant metaphors where terrorism is characterized as an organic being (like a plant), from which one merely has to *remove the fertile soil* or whose *many offshoots* are known. Such reassuring metaphors, which communicate a feeling of safety, are used, say, by politicians and advisors in declarations and interviews intended to allay the fears of the population.

- (17) It is “very important” to remove the nutrients that feed terrorism, said Clinton in London, during her Europe trip. [Es sei „sehr wichtig“, dem Terrorismus den Nährboden zu entziehen, sagte Clinton am Rande ihrer Europa-Reise in London.] (*Der Spiegel*, 11.10.2009)
- (18) Many experts say that Al-Qaida has passed its peak. Islamist terrorists have not succeeded in any assault on Europe since the attacks in Madrid and London of 2004 and 2005. To a great extent, their many offshoots in Germany seem as well known. [Nicht wenige Experten sagen, al-Qaida habe ihren Zenit überschritten. Islamistischen Terroristen ist seit den Anschlägen von Madrid und

London 2004 und 2005 kein Attentat in Europa mehr gelungen. Ihre Netzwerke in Deutschland gelten bis in viele Verästelungen als bekannt.] (*Die Zeit*, 01.10.2009)

As a rule, however, conceptualizations are found in the mass media that intensify, concretize and exemplify, which are communicated through innovative metaphors such as TERROR AS MOSQUITO BITES in (19), or elaborated conceptualizations that are established through metaphor complexes such as TERRORISM AS CANCER CASE in (20).

- (19) “What is seen today as terrorism is still little more—with due respects—than a few mosquito bites.” Walter Laqueur, historian and expert on terrorism [„Was heute als Terrorismus gilt, das sind doch – verzeihen Sie – erst nur Mückenstiche.“ Walter Laqueur, Historiker und Terrorismusexperte] (*Die Zeit*, 25.08.2005)
- (20) SPIEGEL: To what extent are terror cells still dependent on Bin Laden's al-Qaida? // Schily: We observe how al-Qaida keeps creating further metastases. Autonomous cells are appearing that identify ideologically with al-Qaida but develop their own strategic and operational planning. This is extremely alarming, since it is almost impossible to monitor them. (*Der Spiegel*, 18.07.2005)

The CANCER conceptualization in (20) is linked to the emotional potential ALARMING.⁶ The euphemistic talk of *mosquito bites* in (19) carries a similar emotional potential, namely in relation to future terrorism.

7 Summary

Summing up, it can be said that metaphors appear to play a significant role in the conceptualization of TERRORISM in the mass media discourse of German-language print media. Some of the metaphors employed such as *Netzwerk [network]* are rather unspecific and abstract and can be used either for relativization or for intensification of emotions. Intensifying metaphors play a much more important role in this process, since they communicate strongly negative conceptual patterns such as TERRORISM AS SICKNESS etc. Remarkable in this regard is the conceptualization TERRORISM AS CANCER which dominates whole passages of text. Through systematic reference to a severe and dangerous disease, a life-threatening scenario is established. On the other hand, however, this kind of metaphorical reference also implies the demand for investigating and combating terrorism effectively. Thus, the reader gets the impression that there is some hope in the future struggle against terrorism.

Works Consulted

- Baldauf, Christa. *Metapher und Kognition. Grundlagen einer neuen Theorie der Alltagsmetapher*. Frankfurt a. M.: Lang, 1997. Print.
- Bhatia, Aditi. "The discourses of terrorism." *Journal of Pragmatics* 41 (2009): 279–289. Print.
- Charteris-Black, Jonathan. *Politicians and Rhetoric. The Persuasive Power of Metaphor*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. Print.
- Ferrari, Federica. "Metaphor at work in the analysis of political discourse: investigating a 'preventive war' persuasion strategy." *Discourse & Society* 18.5 (2007): 603–625. Print.
- Hoffman, Bruce. *Inside Terrorism*. New York: Columbia UP, 2006. Print.
- Hülse, Rainer, and Alexander Spencer. "The Metaphor of Terror: Terrorism Studies and the Constructivist Turn." *Security Dialogue* 39.6 (2008): 571–592.
- Kirchhoff, Susanne. *Krieg mit Metaphern. Mediendiskurse über 9/11 und den „War on Terror“*. Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2010. Print.
- Kövecses, Zoltán. *Metaphor and Emotion. Language, Culture and Body in Human Feeling*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999. Print.
- Lakoff, George. *The Political Mind: Why You Can't Understand 21st-Century American Politics with an 18th-Century Brain*. Chicago: Chicago UP, 2008. Print.
- Lakoff, George, and Mark Johnson. 1980. *Metaphors we live by*. Chicago: Chicago UP, 2003. Print.
- . *Philosophy in the Flesh. The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought*. New York: Basic Books, 1999. Print.
- Lakoff, George, and Elisabeth Wehling. *Auf leisen Sohlen ins Gehirn. Politische Sprache und ihre heimliche Macht*. Heidelberg: Auer, 2008. Print.
- Liebert, Wolf-Andreas. *Metaphernbereiche der deutschen Alltagssprache. Kognitive Linguistik und Perspektiven einer Kognitiven Lexikographie*. Frankfurt a. M.: Lang, 1992. Print.
- . „Bildfelder in synchroner Perspektive.“ *Lexikologie / Lexicology*. Eds. D. Allan Cruse et al. Berlin, New York: de Gruyter, 2002. 771–783. Print.
- Musolff, Andreas. *Mirror-Images of Europe. Metaphors in the public debate about Europe in Britain and Germany*. München: Iudicium, 2000. Print.
- . *Metaphor and Political Discourse: Analogical Reasoning in Debates about Europe*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004. Print.
- Sageman, Marc. *Leaderless Jihad. Terror networks in the twenty-first century*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008. Print.
- Schwarz, Monika. *Indirekte Anaphern in Texten. Studien zur domänen gebundenen Referenz und Kohärenz im Deutschen*. Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2000. Print.
- . *Einführung in die Kognitive Linguistik*. Tübingen: Francke, 2008. Print.
- Schwarz-Friesel, Monika. „Kognitive Linguistik heute – Metaphernverstehen als Beispiel.“ *Deutsch als Fremdsprache* 41.2 (2004): 83–89.
- . 2007. *Sprache und Emotion*. Tübingen: Francke. Print.

- Skirl, Helge. *Emergenz als Phänomen der Semantik am Beispiel des Metaphernverstehens*. Tübingen: Narr, 2009. Print.
- Skirl, Helge, and Monika Schwarz-Friesel. *Metapher*. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2007. Print.
- Spencer, Alexander. *The Tabloid Terrorist. The Predicative Construction of New Terrorism in the Media*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. Print.
- Stenvall, Maija 2003. "An actor or an undefined threat? The role of 'Terrorist' in the discourse of international news agencies." *Journal of Language and Politics* 2.2 (2003): 361–404. Print.
- . 2007. "Fear of terror attack persists – Constructing fear in reports on terrorism by international news agencies." *Discourse, War and Terrorism*. Eds. Adam Hodges and Chad Nilep. Amsterdam: Benjamins, 2007. 205–222. Print.
- Van Dijk, Teun A. "Discourse and manipulation." *Discourse & Society* 17.3 (2006): 359–383. Print.

¹ Linguistic studies focusing on the Bush rhetoric are e.g. Charteris-Black, Van Dijk, Ferrari, Lakoff and Wehling, Kirchhoff. Regarding the characterization of Islamic terrorism, see e.g. Stenvall and, from a media research perspective, Hülse and Spencer, Spencer.

² See for example: "And one increasingly gets used to this murderous virus called terror, just as one has got used to the existence of Aids. [Und man gewöhnt sich zunehmend an dieses Mördervirus Terror, wie man sich an Aids gewöhnt hat.]" (*Der Spiegel*, 11.07.2005)

³ In recent publications, Lakoff has also commented on the conceptualization of "terrorism" and "terrorists," specifically with reference to the "war on terror" declared by the Bush administration (see Lakoff 125–132, Lakoff and Wehling 114–142). In the analysis, the critical interpretation of metaphor use plays an essential role. Metaphor examples are interpreted in terms of the communicated conceptualizations, as well as implicit demands for, or justification of, action. The interpretation of individual metaphorical examples often goes very far. The metaphorical use of *plague* with reference to terrorism in (a) is interpreted in (b) as a conceptualization of TERRORISTS AS RATS.

- (a) President Vladimir Putin condemned the attack as an act of international terrorism. "Only by combining our forces can we take on this plague of the 21st century," said Putin, his words directed towards the international community. [Präsident Wladimir Putin verurteilte den Anschlag als ein Werk des internationalen Terrorismus. „Nur mit vereinten Kräften können wir es mit dieser Pest des 21. Jahrhunderts aufnehmen“, sagte Putin an die Adresse der internationalen Staatengemeinschaft gerichtet.] (*stern.de*, 06.02.2004)
- (b) Let's take a closer look: the plague was an epidemic. What do we know about it? Well, it was passed on by rats. When we speak of terrorism as a plague, then in our minds the terrorists become rats, metaphorical carriers of the plague of "terrorism." [Schauen wir genauer hin: Die Pest war eine Seuche. Was wissen wir von ihr? Nun, sie wurde von Ratten übertragen. Wenn wir also von Terrorismus als Pest sprechen, dann werden damit die Terroristen in unseren Köpfen zu Ratten, metaphorisch zu Trägern der Seuche „Terrorismus“.] (Lakoff and Wehling 115)

Plague, however, is often utilized in the conventional metaphorical meaning of 'maximally bad'; this is true both in English and in German. The interpretation therefore is most likely an over-interpretation (cf. Skirl). The very wide-ranging interpretation corresponds to the holistic cognitive

linguistics approach, which does not differentiate between linguistic knowledge and conceptual world knowledge. By contrast we adopt a (moderate) modularistic approach, which differentiates between the semantic and the conceptual levels (s. Schwarz, *Indirekte Anaphern* and *Einführung in die Kognitive Linguistik*). Such a differentiation is essential especially for metaphors, since conventionalized metaphors do not provide elaborated conceptualizations. The interpretation is problematic to the extent that Putin's statement is not investigated in its communicative context. Such an examination would clarify whether (a) is an adequate interpretation or not. If, say, terrorists were described as *carriers of infection* or directly as *rats*, the interpretation in (a) could be empirically demonstrated.

⁴ The research in lexicalized metaphors, which point to conventionally established conceptualizations, has taken center stage in cognitive linguistics since 1980 (see for example Lakoff and Johnson, Lakoff, Kövecses, Liebert, Baldauf, Musolff).

⁵ Sometimes, as in (14), false views are given in combination with metaphors. For instance, that unemployment is a crucial factor for Islamist terrorism (cf. Sageman). In the public discourse, the academic state-of-the-art research on terrorism is often ignored.

⁶ The cancer metaphor was used early on, e.g. "Fundamentalist terrorism is a cancerous ulcer in Islam. [Fundamentalistischer Terrorismus ist ein Krebsgeschwür im Islam.]" (*FAZ*, 17.09.2001). It is still in use today, e.g. "Metastases of Islamic terrorism also in the body of Western societies. [Metastasen des islamistischen Terrorismus auch im Gewebe der westlichen Gesellschaften.]" (*faz.net*, 03.05.2011). Note that even the cancer conceptualization can be found together with relativizing arguments.

- (c) 9/11 was a terrible example of a very destructive tumor. In order to remove this cancer, however, it is not enough to cut the terrorists off and kill Bin Laden, as you would eliminate a tumor. (...) The defects in the world's immune system are of a cultural, social and economic nature. [Der 11. September war ein furchtbares Beispiel für einen höchst destruktiven Tumor. Um aber diesen Krebs zu beseitigen, reicht es nicht, die Terroristen auszuschalten und Bin Laden zu töten, wie man einen Tumor eliminiert. (...) Die Fehler im Immunsystem der Welt sind kultureller, sozialer und wirtschaftlicher Natur.] (Benjamin Barber, *taz*, 19.02.2002)

In (c) it is implicated, that once the cultural and socio-economic problems are solved, terrorism will disappear, which is, after all, wishful thinking (see Sageman), cf. also (d):

- (d) Frequently one could now read that we should fight terrorism by removing its causes, namely, poverty and oppression. I know of no single example of terrorism that arises from material need, but plenty of examples where terrorists were created due to offended self-esteem. Offended self-esteem is, however, not always justified. (...) Anyone who declares the western world to be Satan, sunk in depravity or like an infectious cancer does not know the West. [Man konnte nun öfter lesen, wir sollten den Terrorismus bekämpfen, indem wir seine Ursachen beseitigen, nämlich Armut und Unterdrückung. Ich kenne kein einziges Beispiel für Terrorismus aus materieller Not, wohl aber Beispiele dafür, dass gekränktes Selbstwertgefühl Terroristen gemacht hat. Das gekränkte Selbstwertgefühl hat jedoch nicht immer Recht. (...) Wer die westliche Welt zum Satan erklärt, in Sittenlosigkeit versunken, einem ansteckenden Krebsgeschwür gleich, kennt den Westen nicht.] (*Der Tagesspiegel*, 30.09.2001)