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# ATTACK METAPHORS OF THE WELFARE STATE AND AUSTERITY ACROSS THE BRITISH PRESS, 2008–2015

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## Abstract

This paper analyses a group of metaphors conceptualising the welfare state as a participant in the ATTACK scenario, as well as several related metaphors involving the use of force, in a corpus of British newspaper articles published between 2008 and April 2015. The analysis draws on a point of convergence between Discourse-Historical Approach and Conceptual Metaphor Theory, focusing on the argumentative functions of these metaphors. The paper finds that these particular metaphors are attested predominantly in the left-leaning newspapers. As a predication strategy with a coercive effect, they typically work to axiologically and emotionally undermine the austerity policies of the Coalition government.

## Key words

*Welfare state; British press; critical discourse studies; conceptual metaphor; scenario*

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## 1. Overview of context and research material

The British welfare state is not an easy concept to pinpoint. It has been part of the British political system for about seven decades, although it is difficult to locate its exact beginning. This is usually placed in 1940s, often on the so-called Appointed Day, 5 July 1948. On that day, the National Health Service became operational and legislation such as the National Insurance Act and the National Assistance Act took effect, forming the basis of an insurance-based system of social services proposed in the 1942 Beveridge Report (see Jones and Lowe 2008). The Report itself, however, is often viewed as an alternative symbolic beginning of the welfare state. Elements of some services had been introduced earlier, whether in the 1940s (such as the Butler Education Act) or before World War II altogether (such as the beginnings of a pension scheme), further confounding the point of origin.

The difficulty locating the beginning of the welfare state is largely due to what might be termed its ‘boundary problem’, as the concept has comprised a number of changing services, policies, and institutions not always explicitly described as parts of the welfare state. Even specialist discourse is not consistent with respect to the literal sense of the term ‘welfare state’: at its broadest, it is interpretable as a government’s management of economy (Garland 2015: 8) where different degrees of commodification of services are possible within different models of the welfare

state (see Esping-Andersen 1990 for the most frequently used typology). Garland (2015) also lists two other, narrower senses of the term. In one of these, the welfare state is synonymous to the public social services, typically those that are insurance-based and (in the UK) free at the point of use, such as the National Health Service or education. The other, even more narrow, definition restricts the welfare state to the system of social security benefits. In popular political discourse as reflected in the sample of the British press analysed here, the first of those three variants (economic governance) is present only marginally. The welfare state – inasmuch as the referent of the term can be established – is usually interpretable as social security ('welfare') or, less frequently, the system of public services.

This shifting referent of the term has a substantial bearing on the evaluation of the concept (see Paprota 2018). But even when the referent is not a matter of disagreement, the evaluation of the welfare state often is, particularly so in times of crisis. This is because the welfare state – whether defined broadly or narrowly – is a focal point for debates, both axiological and economic, about the relations between the individual and society. Figurative language is part of such debates. Therefore, consistent with Hart's (2010) view of metaphors as strategic and ideological, this paper seeks to outline the argumentative function of selected metaphors of the welfare state and to trace how these metaphors lead to specific evaluations of the welfare state.

The analysed material was published between the beginning of 2008 and April 2015, a period which covers the recent financial crisis and the ensuing austerity policies in the UK. The decision by the Labour government of Gordon Brown to bail out failing financial institutions in 2008 (starting with the nationalisation of Northern Rock in February that year) had a significant budgetary impact. Brown's Labour, like Blair's Labour before, sought to reform the welfare state, though the motivation behind the reforms (the restrictions on benefits for those too ill to work and the introduction of greater conditionality in some benefits) was communicated as primarily moral (see Brewer 2007). After the 2010 election, the Coalition government of Conservatives and Liberal Democrats prioritised the reduction of the deficit and introduced austerity measures resulting in cuts to the system of social security benefits. These reforms have been described as a continuation rather than a break with those of Labour (see Daguerre and Etherington 2014, Williams and Scott 2015), with a financial rationale added to the moral argument. The Coalition reforms included the restriction of legal aid; the introduction of a 'bedroom tax' tantamount to a reduction in housing benefit; the 'welfare cap', placing an upper limit on the amount a household could receive in benefits; and a reappraisal of benefits paid to persons with disabilities (see Williams and Scott 2016, Wintour 2013, Hood and Phillips 2015 for a detailed overview). Overall, the reforms resulted in a welfare system that can be described as harsher. The debates over these reforms, and more generally about the welfare state, continued over the parliamentary election and the 2015 election campaign. With the unexpected Conservative victory in the 2015 polls, the Brexit referendum gradually came to occupy the spotlight, resulting in a substantial shift in the British political discourse. The timeframe therefore ends after the 2015 election campaign, the last (at least to date) to be defined by the debate on austerity.

This debate is well-reflected in the British press, which often takes more radical positions than political parties and offers access to both hegemonic and opposition discourses. Another rationale for the choice to examine press material is the fact that the UK specifically retains substantial press readership: the publishers of the four newspapers analysed in this paper reached around 65% of the market share in print and online in 2015, according to a report by Media Reform Coalition based on National Readership Survey data (Media Reform Coalition 2015). Though its impact is often overstated, not least by itself, the press has been shown to have some bearing on election results (see Curtice 1999; Reeves et al 2015). At the same time, in a free market environment, it cannot afford not to reflect the public opinion to some extent.

To allow comparisons across the political spectrum, the newspapers selected for the analysis comprise two conservative dailies: the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Daily Mail*, and two described here as left-leaning: the (liberal) *Guardian* and the (more traditionally left-wing) *Daily Mirror*, along with their Sunday sister papers. In each pair, the former is a quality newspaper and the latter a tabloid.

The corpus has been obtained from the LexisNexis database and comprises texts where the search term ‘welfare state’ occurs twice. The assumption was that a text where the search term occurs more than once is more likely to be thematically related to the welfare state rather than mention it in passing. The resulting topical corpus is therefore of a size that allows qualitative analysis and is broadly representative of the discourse of the dailies during the timeframe. Texts from the four dailies have been saved in four subcorpora, with 161 texts from the *Telegraph*, 126 from the *Mail*, 402 from the *Guardian*, and 61 from the *Mirror*.

## 2. Theoretical background

### 2.1. The discourse-historical approach (DHA)

This paper exploits a point of convergence between the discourse-historical approach to discourse analysis – locating this study within the broad area of Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) – and Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT). Critical Discourse Studies is a diverse discipline with a focus on the relation between language and social reality. DHA is a perspective within that discipline which attaches particular significance to context, understood as co-text, intertextual connections, and the situational and historical context. Discourse is viewed as “a cluster of context-dependent semiotic practices that are situated within specific fields of social action” (Reisigl and Wodak 2016: 27); the approach also notes the link between discourse and argumentation about validity claims. In this paper, ‘discourse’ as a mass noun means language in use, whereas Reisigl and Wodak’s definition applies to *a* discourse/discourses.

The research programme proposed by DHA is broad in scope, but textual analysis with an emphasis on context remains at the heart of the approach. In textual analysis, DHA has typically analysed strategies of self- and other-presentation in group construction, particularly where national identity is concerned

(see Wodak and Reisigl 2001, KhosraviNik 2014, or more recently Chovanec and Molek-Kozakowska 2017 for examples). This motivates the choice of discursive strategies normally scrutinised in DHA. They comprise: nomination or referential strategies (the labels used to reference groups or individuals); predication (assigning actions or characteristics to social actors); argumentation (particularly typical warrants which connect claims with conclusions); perspectivation (the varying salience of the text producer's point of view, and the attitude to inserted discourse); and intensification/mitigation (intensifying/mitigating the deontic or epistemic status of a statement), as outlined in Reisigl and Wodak (2016). The strategies are not restricted to discursive constructions of identity, however.

In this paper, the standard DHA repository of discursive strategies is not debated. Nomination or referential strategies, however, are not analysed here, since the key social actor is invariably referenced as “the welfare state” (see Paprota 2018 on an alternative strategy, delineation, to consider in analyses of concepts). Predication is interpreted as labelling or evaluating social actors (see Reisigl and Wodak 2016, Hart 2010). Perspectivation is treated as the indication of a text producer's attitude to inserted discourse, while intensification or mitigation is understood as sketched above.

Of particular interest to the framework are argumentation strategies. At its simplest, an analysis of these strategies amounts to establishing a basic positive or negative evaluation of an action or actor in relation to a list of *topoi*. The *topos* is defined as “the content-related warrants or ‘conclusion rules’ which connect the argument or arguments with the conclusion, the claim” (Wodak 2001: 74). One example is the recurrent implicit warrant referred to as the *topos* of burdening/weighing (see e.g. Wodak 2001): representations of immigrants as burdensome to the host country will result in negative evaluation of this group and may serve as a justification for actions that limit immigration and in this way reduce the burden.

This content-related understanding of a *topos* departs from its classical rhetorical treatment, where it functioned – as noted by Žagar (2010) – as a general rule in argumentation with no connection to specific contents such as burden. Žagar proposes that DHA analyse arguments in terms devised by Stephen Toulmin (1985/1995, discussed in Žagar 2010). In Toulmin's terms, the move from the evidence (referred to as grounds or data) to the conclusion in an argument is justified by a warrant, which may be qualified, further supported, or restricted to specific conditions, and which broadly corresponds to the *topos* in DHA. Reisigl (2014), too, notes that the *topos* is analogous to the warrant in Toulmin's simplified model. The *topos* appears particularly useful when viewed as follows:

[*topoi* are] specific “structures of arguments” which are linguistically “realized” through argumentative strategies leading – quasi as “short-cut” (frequently without providing data and warrants) – to a particular (logical and intentional) conclusion (...). Krzyżanowski et al. (2009: 9)

A *topos* can thus be regarded precisely as a mental short-cut<sup>2</sup>: in Toulmin's terms, a warrant that is frequently not articulated because it is viewed as self-evidently correct or is well-rehearsed. While a full reconstruction of the argument, as proposed

by Žagar (2010), is not always practical or necessary, locating these mental shortcuts can help identify naturalised assumptions which appear commonsensical. Further, this understanding of the topos shows an interesting proximity – outlined at the end of the subsequent section – to the figurative scenario with an argumentative function as described by Musolff (2004, 2016), and so motivates the recourse of this paper to Conceptual Metaphor Theory, briefly profiled below.

## **2.2. Conceptual Metaphor Theory and its use in CDS**

As outlined by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) views not just language, but thought and experience as metaphorical: concepts which are concrete and based on the embodied experience provide a basis for understanding those which are more abstract. Conceptual metaphors are sets of systematic correspondences, or mappings, between two distinct conceptual domains: the (more concrete/embodied) source and the (more abstract) target domain. These mappings are reflected in linguistic expressions: for instance, the ‘shaky foundations’ of a theory and the potential to ‘bring down’ a theory point to the (complex) conceptual metaphor THEORIES ARE BUILDINGS.

The primacy of the conceptual and the somewhat dismissive treatment of linguistic metaphors, which prevailed in CMT in its original formulation, has since been somewhat redressed. Linguistic metaphors are no longer treated as secondary in more recent works that draw on real language data rather than invented examples (see for instance Fabiszak 2007 or Semino 2008). Studies (such as Semino et al 2018) referencing the scenario, which is a “discourse-based conceptual construct” less schematic than the domain (Musolff 2016: 30), are a case in point. Another example of the importance of real discourse is the positing of discourse metaphors (see for instance Evans 2013). The importance of social and cultural factors to metaphors is also being addressed (see Charteris-Black 2004 or Lu and Ahrens 2008).

The importance of metaphor, though without reference to a specific theory of metaphor, was noted by early exponents of what was then referred to as Critical Linguistics or Critical Discourse Analysis. In his early work *Language and Power*, Fairclough points out that “any aspect of experience can be represented in terms of any number of metaphors” (1989: 119). This claim is rejected by Koller (2004: 30) as “radically constructivist”, but its less radical interpretation would imply that alternatives, where they exist, may have distinct ideological implications. This is especially clear in light of Fairclough’s further comments: he notes that “it is the relationship between alternative metaphors that is of particular interest here, for different metaphors have different ideological attachments” and “different metaphors imply different ways of dealing with things” (1989: 119–120). This he illustrates with the example of cancer as a metaphor for a protest or riot, which does not encourage negotiation as a solution. Wodak (2001: 73) includes metaphors, especially personifications or depersonifications, among nomination and predication strategies that need to be examined by DHA.

A number of features of metaphor in CMT account for its appeal to CDS. Hart (2010) gives an extensive overview, pointing out its fundamental importance to

making sense of experience; its motivated rather than arbitrary or deterministic character; its creative and dynamic potential (which he accounts for with recourse to Conceptual Blending Theory, however); and their capacity to naturalise certain construals, concluding that metaphor has the potential to be “both strategic and ideological” (Hart 2010: 127).

This potential largely lies in the capacity – assumed in CMT – of metaphor to highlight and suppress aspects of reality and of experience. These aspects may be present in or absent from the entailments, or the logical implications, of metaphor. Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 140–141) give the example of LOVE IS A COOPERATIVE WORK OF ART, which would highlight cooperation in a relationship, a factor less noticeable when a relationship is construed as a vehicle in the LOVE IS A JOURNEY conceptual metaphor. Semino (2008) describes this aspect of metaphor in Hallidayan terms as its ideational function. She notes the role of metaphor in ideology, not only in that “many (...) shared mental representations are structured, at least in part, via conceptual metaphor” (2008: 33), but also, after Cameron (2003), in the systematic use of metaphorical expressions within a discourse community.

A related if stronger claim in Lakoff and Johnson (1980) is that metaphor may precipitate a course of action. They speculate that the POLITICS IS WAR metaphor present in the rhetoric of the Carter administration may have hardened US foreign policy at the time, stating that “a metaphor may (...) be a guide for future action [that will] fit the metaphor” (1980: 156) when the metaphor is one that creates social reality. This would indicate a very strong relationship between language and power; it is important to note, however, that this claim is easy to overstate: metaphors may guide action, but they can be (and indeed are) resisted, and a given discourse community may or may not be receptive towards specific metaphors (see Musolff 2016).

The specific impact of metaphors on a discourse community is in fact difficult to isolate: research specifically focused on metaphor impact (Thibodeau and Boroditsky 2011, 2013; see also Sopory and Price Dillard 2002 for a meta-analysis) does indicate that metaphors, even when not recognised by language users as figurative, may have an opinion-forming function. Another empirical study (Steen, Reijnerse, and Burgers 2014), however, throws some doubt on the results of Thibodeau and Boroditsky (2011, 2013), finding that the opinion-forming function may be contingent on other factors.

Some studies explicitly positioned within CDS which draw on CMT explore the ideological potential of metaphor and other cognitive linguistic constructs. These include Chilton’s (1996) analysis of security metaphors during the Cold War, or Hart’s (2010) cognitive linguistic analysis of immigration discourse with insights from evolutionary psychology. Other analyses scrutinise a variety of contexts and discourses to examine the motivations and effects of the use of metaphors. Examples include Koller (2004), which focuses on metaphors from a specific source domain, that of WAR, in business media discourse. She combines metaphor (and conceptual blend) analysis with recourse to Hallidayan categories in the critical linguistic tradition, and finds that WAR metaphors in her sample of discourse have a gendering, specifically masculinising, function that also impacts social practices:

the use of WAR as source domain obscures cooperative approaches to the advantage of competition in the discourse analysed. Importantly, Koller also notes the importance of “the effects and purposes of metaphor usage” (2004: 27), which are outside of the scope of CMT. A similar observation is made in Charteris-Black (2004), a corpus-based study of metaphors in discourses ranging from political to religious. Charteris-Black emphasises that though many source domains are related to embodied experience, this experience does not exclusively determine metaphor use. Another important point is that social resources (which he lists as the impact of culture, history, or ideology) are also of significance, calling for a theory of metaphor that would “incorporate a pragmatic perspective that interprets metaphor choice with reference to the purposes of use within specific discourse contexts” (2004: 246-247).

Musolff’s metaphor analyses (e.g. 2004, 2016), often diachronic, have focused on political discourse, examining the role of metaphor in argumentation. In his 2016 study, he points out that DHA in particular is well-positioned to analyse what he calls the “added communicative value” (2016: 137) of metaphor: its capacity to evaluate, persuade, or to integrate a concept into familiar structures (2016: 4). His earlier works share similar concerns and methodological approaches regardless of references or lack thereof to CDS, exploring metaphor as “a fundamental means of concept- and argument-building” (Musolff 2012: 301). To that end, he utilises the construct of the scenario.

### **2.3. Scenarios and topoi: a point of convergence between CMT and DHA**

Described as a cinematographic metaphor (Musolff 2004: 17) and corresponding to a frame (see Sullivan 2017), a scenario is a mental representation more specific than the domain: A TRAIN JOURNEY, for instance, is a scenario within the broader JOURNEY source domain. A scenario includes the knowledge of “competent members of a discourse community” about more specific situations, participants and their roles, the typical developments and outcomes, and their evaluations and implications (Musolff 2016: 30).

It is the implications of a scenario that account for what Musolff (2016: 11) calls the “argumentative effect” or “argumentative function” of a metaphor. In Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 139), the entailments of a conceptual metaphor “arise from our beliefs about, and experiences of” the source concept. Elsewhere, entailments have also been interpreted as the strictly logical implications of a metaphor resulting from the transfer of reasoning from source to target: Sullivan (2017: 395) gives the example of books being construed as sources of light as an entailment of the UNDERSTANDING IS SEEING conceptual metaphor. To avoid this less flexible interpretation, Musolff prefers the term ‘inferences’ to describe the implications of a metaphor based on cultural and social knowledge shared by the members of a discourse community. The inferences of a scenario, much more specific and so argumentatively useful than those of the source domain, include what Musolff terms “normative presuppositions” (2004: 37) about desirable outcomes, roles, or preferred courses of action within that scenario. The argumentative effect of a metaphor scenario can thus be described as its ability – via its presuppositions



– to naturalise, or present as self-evidently obvious, an outcome of a narrative, a conclusion of an argument, or a course of action. This is particularly the case where the issue being debated is one which is (already) a matter of disagreement in discourse, with presuppositions functioning in a metaphor scenario working to validate a course of action (Musolff 2004).

Thus understood, a metaphor scenario has a clear affinity to the *topos*, as defined above. Like the *topos*, a scenario that has an argumentative function – or more precisely, the presuppositions within that scenario – can be described in terms borrowed from Toulmin’s argument scheme as a warrant that connects the grounds to the conclusion. Indeed, Musolff’s (2004) discussion of analogical reasoning refers to metaphorical scenarios as “warrants in an analogical argument” (2004: 37). Musolff (2004) analyses several metaphor scenarios (such as TRAIN JOURNEY or ILLNESS) that function in British and German political discourse as “argumentative warrants” in debates about European integration, where the presuppositions and inferences in the source concept (such as punctuality being of essence when travelling by train) are expected to obtain in the target domain (where punctuality corresponds to timely participation in European integration).

It should be reiterated that a metaphor scenario (with its presuppositions and inferences) does not in itself determine the course of action, especially against the will of the given discourse community, which can contest or modify the scenario. A metaphor scenario can nonetheless be interpreted as reflecting the position of the discourse community when used systematically.

#### **2.4. VIOLENCE metaphors in political discourse**

In this paper, the focus is on the metaphorical expressions pointing to a scenario identifiable as ATTACK, though these expressions often co-occur with ones indicating BATTLE or WAR. These are common in political discourse, and a number of studies examine expressions from the broader semantic field of violence.

Much attention has been directed to metaphors where WAR is the source or target domain. The latter have been analysed as neutralising the drastic or immoral aspects of military conflicts, thus reducing resistance to war (Lakoff 1991, see Fabiszak 2007 for a discussion of this study); the role of these metaphors in US foreign policy in particular has been the subject of much debate (see Fabiszak 2007 for an overview or Twardzisz 2013 for criticism). Underhill (2003) notes what he terms a ‘switch’ whereby actual war is construed as something more innocuous (such as a game), while at the same time other issues (e.g. eradicating an infectious disease) are construed as war, which affects the perception of the target concepts in each of these cases. Goatly’s analysis of ideology in metaphors (2007) points out that what he calls FIGHTING metaphors construe their target domains as adversarial systems. Fabiszak’s extensive study (2007), grounded in philosophical and cultural context, analyses among others the role of conceptual metaphor in press reports of war. She notes the importance of WAR metaphors in constructing oppositions which impart a strong evaluation to the sides of conflict. Semino (2008) lists WAR as a common domain in political discourse, deployed to underscore differences between political opponents and the gravity of selected problems.

Of some relevance to political discourse is also the use of violence-related metaphors with COMMUNICATION as the target domain. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) open their discussion with expressions supporting the existence of the conceptual metaphor ARGUMENT IS WAR, a formulation which has since been questioned (Haser 2005 uses this example to point out problems in delineating source domains, and suggests VIOLENCE as one of the possible alternatives) or reinterpreted (Semino 2008 proposes a more general formulation based on corpus data: HOSTILE COMMUNICATION IS PHYSICAL AGGRESSION).

Beyond the domain of WAR, Charteris-Black (2004) describes what he refers to as the CONFLICT source domain as particularly productive. He finds that ATTACK metaphors account for a plurality of metaphorical expressions in a corpus of inaugural speeches by US presidents (2004: 91), and that the presence of these metaphors substantially increases in British political party manifestos over the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He describes these metaphors as contributing to the construction of political identities by identifying difficulties, adversaries, and objectives, and notes that the ATTACK source domain brings out the extent of effort involved in obtaining an objective (2004: 91). Charteris-Black identifies these metaphorical expressions as manifestations of the underlying conceptual metaphor POLITICS IS ATTACK, a complex metaphor motivated by two more basic ones: SOCIETY IS A PERSON and LIFE IS A STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL. Many of the figurative expressions he analyses follow a ‘shared script’ (2004: 92) that appears akin to the BATTLE scenario (though he does not describe it as such); social problems, for instance, can be construed as enemies within this script. This is in contrast with the analysis in Fabiszak (2007), where POLITICS IS WAR is viewed as non-metaphorical when interpreted as an extension of the famous statement by Clausewitz describing war as a continuation of politics. Fabiszak allows, however, for its figurative reading through the intermediate metaphor ARGUMENT IS WAR, where politics is understood as comprising speech acts.

Regardless of how they are broken down, VIOLENCE metaphors in political discourse are typically interpretable as instances of personification, in that it is typically a person who is a perpetrator or victim of violent acts. The degree of personification is very general, however, as it appears that little else beyond mere personhood is required. They thus function as a means of simplifying or dramatising agency, intentionality, or adversity; Semino (2008: 100) makes a similar point specifically about WAR metaphors.

### **3. ATTACK metaphors in the corpus**

#### **3.1. Methodology**

The metaphorical expressions analysed in this paper are those consistent with the ATTACK scenario where the welfare state is a participant, and have been selected from a larger set of metaphors of the welfare state. Collocation candidates of the search term ‘welfare state’ within an eight-token window in SketchEngine (Kilgarrif et al 2014) were first listed. This list was then examined for expressions

denoting qualities of the welfare state and actions or processes with the welfare state as a participant. To include less frequent or statistically significant candidate expressions, each subcorpus was also queried for adjectives and verbs within a four-token window on either side of ‘welfare state’, and for the prepositions ‘of’, ‘for’, ‘on’, and ‘at’ within a four-token window to the left of the same search term. The resulting concordance lines were then examined manually to ensure that the qualities and actions or processes were indeed relevant to the term ‘welfare state’, and then analysed for metaphoricality using MIPVU criteria, a modified version of the Pragglejaz metaphor identification procedure (see Steen et al 2010). The literal meanings of the term ‘welfare state’ are those outlined in the first section of this paper.

The subsequent sections of this paper examine expressions where the welfare state is a participant in a violent process which can be understood as a physical attack, and corresponds to the Actor or Goal in the process (roles which are identifiable though processes are often expressed as nouns). Assigning the role of a perpetrator in an attack or a victim of one to the welfare state is a predication strategy with a clearly an argumentative effect – discursive strategies, it should be emphasised, are not discrete (for instance, Hart 2010 notes that referential strategies can work as premises in *topoi*). The argumentative functions of the *ATTACK* scenario with the welfare state as participant, as well as intensification and perspectivation strategies, in the four subcorpora are analysed below.

### 3.1.1. Actor, offensive process

The metaphorical expressions where the welfare state is the Actor in a violent process are very few in the corpus, with none attested in the *Mirror*. The Vehicles (metaphorical expressions indicating the source concept) are verbs denoting killing or a method of killing (*kill, suffocate, slay*). As such, they are not verbs prototypically associated with the *ATTACK* scenario, but they do fall into possible outcomes of a physical attack, and as such are analysed in this category. The meaning focus (see Kövecses 2017) of these metaphors is on the social impact of the welfare state, which is expressed as a violent action. The Vehicles are: *has suffocated* and *slaying* in the *Telegraph*; *kills* in the *Mail*; and *slay* in the *Guardian*.

The Vehicles in the conservative subcorpora are very similar, both in that their basic sense is ‘to cause death’ (by violent means in the *Telegraph*), and in that their metaphorical sense recoverable from the co-text – to stifle a desirable trait – affects almost the same characteristic:

- (1) And for all their bragging about “taking children out of poverty”, Labour’s welfare state has suffocated aspiration for many poor people. It does not ease them out of poverty; it traps them in it.

Heffer, *Telegraph* 2009<sup>1</sup>

- (2) Perverted welfare state kills ambition

Gillon (letter), *Mail* 2009

The *Telegraph* passage comes from a text by Simon Heffer, a renowned columnist, bemoaning Labour's attempts to reduce inequalities. The *Mail* excerpt is the headline of a letter criticising state aid to single mothers. Both use the metaphorical expressions to convey the sentiment, recurrent in the corpus, that the support offered by the welfare state prevents the development of motivation and thus achievement. As such, it does not foster self-reliance, a preferred component of a neoliberal subjectivity.

The metaphorical use of *kill* and *suffocate*, with their strongly negative literal meanings, is pivotal to underscoring the harm done by the welfare state in both passages. It therefore indicates what might be called the topos of harm, where an activity that causes harm is self-evidently wrong and should be avoided or counteracted. It also constitutes an appeal to emotion, or pathos in the Aristotelian sense. As such, it is identifiable as what Chilton (2004) terms coercion, specifically emotive coercion: if coercion is a broad macrostrategy that seeks to impact or ensure certain responses in a discourse community, emotive coercion is "strategic simulation of affect" (Chilton 2004: 46), where an emotional response is sought to further the ends of the text producer. Here, this emotional response validates the condemnation of the welfare state.

The verb *slay*, with a similar basic sense of causing a violent death, is a reference to the 1942 Beveridge report, broadly considered the founding document of the British welfare state. Its perhaps famous phrase is the figurative description of social problems, or 'evils', of modern Britain (Want, Ignorance, Squalor, Disease, Idleness) as the five giants on the road to reconstruction who need to be slain. There are recurrent references to slaying the five giants across the corpus, but the Actor is rarely identified, and there are only two instances where the welfare state performs that role. One is in a letter responding to a column by a minister, and takes issue with what the minister represents as the original intention for the welfare state:

- (3) As minister for disabled people, Esther McVey ('At last a fair welfare state', 3 April) should have read the Beveridge Report and known that the welfare state was never intended as a "safety net". It was designed to slay the five "dragons" of want, disease, ignorance, idleness and squalor.

Brown, *Guardian* 2013

The passage rejects a positively evaluated, albeit restrictive, metaphor of the welfare state (the safety net, which is a passive rescue device) in favour of one that ascribes a much more active role to it. The figurative use of *slay* highlights the agency of the welfare state in eliminating social problems. The use of a verb that is literary and perhaps archaic (in the BNC, dragons, Minotaur, and monsters are among the most significant collocates), as well as the reference to "dragons" rather than the original giants, calls up what appears to be a specific ATTACK scenario in its own right, KNIGHTLY QUEST: the welfare state is assigned the role of a knight or a warrior, and its actions are evaluated as virtuous. This is in contrast to (1) and (2), where the Actor performs acts classifiable as criminal in the literal sense.

In the *Telegraph* text which contains the verb *slay*, the ‘knight function’ of the welfare state is represented as not actualised. The excerpt comes from a column about a documentary critical of the welfare state:

- (4) The first four of Beveridge’s evils [Want, Ignorance, Squalor, Disease] have largely disappeared from British society through advances in agriculture, education, housing and medicine. But idleness, far from being slain by the welfare state, has become entrenched in large parts of the population.

Johnston, *Telegraph* 2011

This passage refers to the social problems as *evils* (a term which also occurs in the Beveridge Report). Four of the original evils are declared all but eliminated by progress in four areas corresponding to the problems, while the welfare state is stated to have failed to solve the last. Interestingly, the advances referenced in the passage could easily be attributed to the welfare state: the NHS, education, and public housing, corresponding to three of the four listed areas, are part of public services, and so of the welfare state. Nonetheless, they are not described as such. There is no Actor to whom the changes are attributed, with the *advances* being merely a medium via which they have occurred. Instead, the emphasis is on the non-actualised agency of the welfare state, which failed to have solved idleness.

The use of the verb *slay* and the references to Beveridge’s giant evils again indicate the KNIGHTLY QUEST scenario. Within that scenario, dispatching enemies is a commendable pursuit. In the target domain, it figuratively validates an active approach to solving social problems, also within the topos of harm. In the corpus examples, the scenario works to somewhat mythologise and impart a positive evaluation to the welfare state in (3), but underscores its failure in (4), denying it a positive assessment.

These few instances of metaphors related to an ATTACK scenario are consistent with the political divide in the corpus. The sole *Guardian* example is the only one that has the welfare state in a positively evaluated role, while those in the conservative subcorpora are strongly critical of its impact, as evident from the figuratively used verbs. The Goals of the attack are also in line with the political position of the papers, consistent with Charteris-Black’s observation that social problems are more likely to be the Goal of attack in Labour manifestos (2004: 66). Further, it is perhaps notable that the strong phrasings in the conservative subcorpora are in the part of the corpus which precedes the 2010 general election, when a Conservative-led coalition took over power. Criticism of the welfare state was at the time tantamount with criticism of the Labour government, perhaps facilitating radical judgments. With so few tokens, however, it is difficult to state definitive conclusions.

### 3.1.2. Actor, defensive process

There is a single instance of the verb *defend* with the welfare state as Actor in the corpus in the *Guardian* subcorpus, and several of *protect* in the *Guardian* and

*Mirror* subcorpora. The basic meanings of *defend* and *protect* are respectively ‘protect from attack’ and ‘keep safe from harm, injury, damage, or loss’. Charteris-Black analyses both as figurative. Here, however, their contextual meanings with the welfare state as Actor can be expressed as ‘keep individuals from becoming poor’. Poverty is interpretable as harm; therefore, only *defend* is considered metaphorical here, and clearly fits the ATTACK scenario.

*Defend* with the welfare state as Actor occurs in a 2013 *Guardian* column criticising the condition of public services and the benefits system, affecting women and the vulnerable. Headlined *From welfare to wages, women fight back against the uncaring market*, the column opens with the lead and the paragraph excerpted below:

- (5) The welfare state is the latest victim of the market’s corruption of all it touches. Fighting like hell is the only option  
It’s almost unbearable to wake up to a world in which the welfare state that has defended us from the worst excesses of the market is being destroyed. The only way to hold on to the last vestiges of entitlement, and even reverse defeats, is to fight like hell.

James, *Guardian* 2013

The passage draws on metaphorical expressions from the semantic field of violence. The ATTACK scenario is indicated by the verbs *has defended* and *fight back*, as well as the designation of the welfare state as *the latest victim* of the market. Other related metaphors – [to] *reverse defeats*, *fighting like hell* – are perhaps closer to the WAR source domain. The antagonist in the passage is the market: the broader co-text indicates that it is responsible for low wages and unfavourable working conditions, preventing women from prioritising (child)care. The negative evaluation of the market within the column is explicitly expressed (*uncaring*). This evaluation is co-textual as well as inter-textual, as support for the social control of the market is a defining feature of left-leaning worldviews (unlike, it should be noted, the idea that childcare should be a priority for women). The ATTACK metaphorical expressions work to create a sense of threat to ‘us’, where the ‘we’ appears to be inclusive of the reader, as indicated by the exhortation to resist. This sense of threat posed by an antagonist to the deictic centre, interpretable as proximation (see Cap 2006 or overview in Hart 2010), intensifies the negative evaluation of the antagonist, and has a clearly coercive effect. It also entails a positive assessment of the welfare state as a bulwark against the market.

### 3.2. Goal

The largest group of aggression metaphors relevant to the welfare state contains metaphorical expressions which construe the welfare state as the object of a physical attack. The offensive action, typically on the part of the government, is usually interpretable as a policy such as cuts to benefits system or public services. The action can also be verbal criticism of the welfare state, especially where

entities other than government are positioned as Actors; these instances are not numerous, however. The Vehicles in this group are *assault* and *attack*, which recur in the corpus (the former in all dailies, the latter only in the left-leaning ones); *strangle* and *defend*, attested in texts where *assault* is also noted, and *killer blow*, attested only in the *Mirror*. The analysis also accounts for metaphorical expressions from related scenarios (in particular BATTLE) noted in the co-text.

### 3.2.1. Assault on the welfare state

#### Assault: Guardian

In all eleven of *Guardian*'s instances of *assault* relevant to the welfare state, an assault on the welfare state consists in policies impeding its operation rather than verbal criticism, perhaps because the agency lies with entities capable of political action. All instances are attested in the post-2010 election part of the corpus, and so coincide with the austerity policies of the Coalition government. In all but two texts, it is this government that has the role of the Actor to whom the assault is attributed (the remaining two texts have a supranational actor and previous UK governments inspired by Margaret Thatcher in this role).

*Assault* normally carries strongly negative connotations: in a random sample of 250 concordance lines in the BNC, 213 were cases where an assault was clearly reprehensible, and only six instances which had a positive figurative meaning – an attempt at a daunting task. In the *Guardian* texts where the welfare state is the object of the assault, it always has a negative evaluation, most typically effected by a co-textual positive evaluation of the welfare state. One example is the passage below, excerpted from a 2010 column criticising cuts to arts funding:

- (6) I think what we are seeing is the end of a golden age – not simply for the theatre, but for much of what we've accepted as normal and civilised for 60 years. The assault on the welfare state isn't a neutral act of fiscal prudence. It is deeply unfair.

Hall, *Guardian* 2010

The welfare state instantiates the *normal and civilised* state of things referred to in the first excerpted sentence, as corroborated by the timeframe (60 years is approximately the distance between the establishment of the welfare state by the reforms of the Attlee government in late 1940s and the year 2010). As such, the welfare state is given a positive evaluation, intensified by the description of the period as a *golden age*, and by the explicitly negative description of the assault on the welfare state as *deeply unfair*, which in turn intensifies the negative evaluation of the act. Several other texts in the *Guardian* pre-modify the term to similar effect, referring to a *reactionary assault* (Miliband, *Guardian* 2010), an *exclusively ideological assault* (*Observer* 2010), or an *unprecedented assault* (McCluskey, *Guardian* 2010) on the welfare state.

The last of these examples occurs in a text – a column by a trades union leader – which uses another intensification strategy, a related extended metaphor. This is evident in the headline – *Unions, get set for battle: We must join students in a broad*

*strike movement to combat attempts to strangle the welfare state* – and in the passage excerpted below:

- (7) While it is easy to dismiss “general strike now” rhetoric from the usual quarters, we have to be preparing for battle. It is our responsibility not just to our members but to the wider society that we defend our welfare state and our industrial future against this unprecedented assault.

McCluskey, *Guardian* 2010

Like in (6) above, the austerity policies instituted by the government are construed as an assault against the welfare state and what is perhaps best interpreted as the future of workers. Further in the column, the impact of the policies is referred to as *strangling the welfare state*, the verb also appearing in the headline. *Assault* and ‘strangle’ are both consistent with a physical attack, but WAR metaphors are also deployed: the motivation behind the reforms is described as *class-war austerity*, and the impact of cuts on communities as *an onslaught*. Self-defence can therefore be inferred to be a reasonable course of action; indeed, the verb *defend* is also present in the passage. The self-defence, in turn, is construed in terms indicating the BATTLE scenario, as indicated by the expressions *get set for battle* and *combat* in the headline, as well as *preparing for battle* in the excerpted paragraph.

It is clear that the ATTACK scenario has a strongly evident argumentative function: because the attack is an act of harm directed against the deictic centre, or ‘us’, and against positively evaluated entities, it is evaluated negatively. A defensive response is thus presumed to be self-evidently correct, and the scenario provides a figurative warrant – consistent with the topos of harm – validating this reaction. In contrast, the BATTLE metaphors do not appear to have such an emotively coercive effect: instead, they underscore the strength of a collective response.

Notably, these expressions can be accounted for by different conceptual metaphors. Those construing the cuts as a military or physical attack are traceable to a variation on a metaphor noted in Lakoff et al (1991) as ECONOMIC HARM IS INJURY, perhaps better expressed more generally as DETRIMENT IS INJURY, where causing detriment to something or someone is conceptualised as physically attacking a person. The expressions describing defence against cuts are, at least in this passage, interpretable as motivated by the classical POLITICS IS WAR conceptual metaphor. The co-text indicates that the *battle* is going to be industrial action, or withholding labour as an act of protest, perhaps accompanied by a demonstration or a picket. As such, it is not limited to speech acts: therefore, in this instance at least, POLITICS IS WAR is figurative without the mediation of ARGUMENT IS WAR, unlike in Fabiszak’s (2007) analysis.

Another *Guardian* passage, from a column on cuts to arts funding, disconnects policies and communications more explicitly:

- (8) What is really horrible about this coalition is the unhealthy blend of hardcore Tory instincts to cut and slash with the woolly Liberal heritage of middle class do-gooders. So assaults on the very concept of the welfare state are



dressed up in talk of making people less passive, involving us in our society. Cameron's "big society" idea is the woolliest of all.

Jones, *Guardian* 2010

The policies of the Coalition government are summed up as *assaults*, and the term *assault* is used twice earlier in the text to refer to specific cuts. The motivation behind the reforms is referred to as *Tory instincts to cut and slash*, and the two verbs, denoting violent actions in the literal sense, are compatible with the ATTACK scenario. The violence conveyed by the verbs corresponds to the drastic extent of cuts, and the reference to *instincts* implies the action is not rationally motivated. The passage also – separately – identifies the official communication of the Coalition government as *the talk* which the policies are *dressed up in*. The policies, exemplified by the Big Society (the idea of outsourcing public services to among others civic society organisations), are described as a woolly idea. These textile metaphors construe the government messages as manipulative and non-specific, also imparting a negative evaluation to what they construe. A stark contrast can be noted between *woolliest*, the metaphorical expression to describe the civic empowerment discourse of the Big Society, and the violence conveyed by *assault* and *cut and slash*. This contrast perhaps indicates the interpretation that the messaging is reprehensible but merely misleading, while the policies are downright dangerous. In this way, *assault*, as part of an extended metaphor, again has the argumentative effect of rendering opposition to austerity reforms self-evidently right.

As many as seven of the eleven occurrences of *assault* with reference to the welfare state (as well as the non-recurring *strangle* and *defend*) are attested in texts from 2010, the year when the austerity policies of the new Coalition government were announced and began to be implemented. Later occurrences come from 2011 (two texts), 2013, and 2015; the 2015 text refers to before the Coalition years. It is clear from this timeframe that these Vehicles function in the *Guardian* as a means of rendering opposition to Coalition (and similar) reforms a natural and self-evidently correct course of action, indicating an intention to affect the emotions of text consumers.

#### Assault: *Mirror*

The figurative use of *assault* with the welfare state as target in the other left-leaning subcorpus, the *Mirror*, echoes that in the *Guardian*. There are four occurrences of *assault* with the welfare state as the object of attack (and one where the *pillars* of the welfare state are assaulted) in four texts, in a subcorpus about 10% the size of the *Guardian*. In all, the ATTACK scenario is traceable to the posited DETRIMENT IS INJURY conceptual metaphor: policies rather than political messages are construed as an assault, and the welfare state is always evaluated positively.

Though one of the texts occurs in the pre-election part of the corpus, the *assault* it mentions are the policies of the Conservative party that would come to form government after the election. The remaining texts (one from 2010, the other two from 2013) unambiguously point to the austerity policies introduced

by the Coalition government, generally in one case and specifically in two – the introduction of means testing for child benefit and the withholding of some benefits from 16-24-year-olds. The universal provision of child benefit was traditionally treated as a key principle of the British welfare state, which easily accounts for the use of a metaphorical expression as highly marked as *assault* to undermine the reform it describes. It is perhaps less easy, however, to see the rationale for designating the restriction of entitlements to the young in particular as an *assault* on the welfare state, as other reforms restricting the provision of benefits are not substantially different in terms of their impact on individuals in need of help.

Further, unlike in the Guardian, extended metaphors are not noted with *assault*, although its negative characterisation is in two cases intensified by the premodification of the act as *outrageous* (Mirror 2013, 3 April) and *unprecedented* (Mirror 2010, 5 October). The latter is, however, somewhat undermined by the immediate co-text:

- (9) With the targeting and scapegoating of low income and jobless claimants, the end of universal child benefit is an unprecedented assault on the welfare state.

Mirror 2010, 5 October

The treatment of low-income and unemployed benefit recipients, also traceable to Coalition reforms, is likely to contribute to a lower quality of their lives, but is not construed as an assault. Instead, it is a circumstance for the restriction of child benefit; while – as noted above – this restriction is of high symbolic importance, it will not directly affect these vulnerable group(s), perhaps rendering the term *assault* excessive. It thus appears that if the figurative use of *assault* in the Mirror is an argumentation strategy providing a figurative warrant that justifies resistance to the reforms, it can also be a hyperbolic one: its coercive effect can therefore be viewed as manipulative.

#### Assault: Telegraph

In the conservative subcorpora, there are very few instances of *assault* with the welfare state as object, and its function is in stark contrast with that in the left-leaning subcorpora. The figurative use of *assault* does not work, or is rejected as, a warrant that denies validity to Coalition reforms. In the Telegraph, the context is a satirical text where a verbal assault on the welfare state is perpetrated by Philip Blond, a Red Tory (left-leaning conservative) thinker. He is introduced as *the pet philosopher* of Conservative leader David Cameron, and his writings are summarised as follows:

- (10) He whisked us back to the 19th century, (...), after which Mr Blond assaulted the welfare state for destroying the independent life of the working class. By the time he started to assault monopoly capitalism, fostered and extended by over-mighty government, we began to think he might be on to something. But we could also see why Mr Cameron treats him with a certain caution.

For Mr Blond is like a bouncy dog who charges about all over the place for the sheer pleasure of startling various birds, or even catching them in his jaws.

Gimson, *Telegraph* 2009

In both instances, the assault is plainly interpretable as a critical comment, the contents of which are indicated in the excerpted passage. The ATTACK scenario is indicated also in the last excerpted sentence by the direct, as defined by Steen et al. (2010), metaphor which construes the philosopher as a pouncing but harmless dog. The scenario is traceable to the conceptual metaphor phrased in Semino (2008) as HOSTILE COMMUNICATION IS PHYSICAL AGGRESSION. But it is the dehumanising construal of the philosopher as a dog in the figurative comparison – rather than the use of the ATTACK scenario – that is responsible for the argumentative effect, which is to facilitate the dismissal of Blond’s comments primarily for their random manner rather than on merit.

#### Assault: *Mail*

There is only one text in the *Mail* which refers to an assault on the welfare state. The text is a news report (Chapman and Barrow, *Mail* 2010) commenting on, and speculating on the government’s response to, the *Guardian* column by Len McCluskey calling for strikes against austerity reforms (see 7 above). A separate section appended to the report quotes extensive passages from the column. The section heading and its opening paragraph are excerpted below:

#### (11) THE CLASS WAR RHETORIC OF ‘RED LEN’ MCCLUSKEY

UNITE leader ‘Red Len’ McCluskey, a 60-year-old militant ex-Liverpool docker who now earns £97,000 a year, led the call yesterday for ‘a broad strike movement’ against the Coalition. Here we present a flavour of his incendiary rhetoric:

(Chapman and Barrow, *Mail* 2010)

The quotations include almost all of the figurative expressions analysed above in (7), apart from *combat* and *onslaught*, and add a few more related expressions, such as the trade unions having *to prove [them]selves*. This discourse is summarised by the *Mail* writers as *incendiary rhetoric*, echoing the reference to *the class war rhetoric* in the section heading quoted in (11).

To reiterate, the original *Guardian* column uses ATTACK metaphors to position austerity as an act of violence by the government and so make a case for a defensive response of the trades unions expressed in terms consistent with BATTLE. In the *Mail* text, the ATTACK metaphors are perspectivised, that is attributed to a speaker whose legitimacy is negated. The distinction between these two scenarios and their function is obliterated. Instead, the figurative language in the original column provides evidence of unreasonable – class-based rather than rational – hostility. This sense of hostility is intensified by the *Mail*’s descriptions of trades unions activists as *militants* and of their call to action as *plotting a campaign of resistance*, both clearly within the broader WAR source domain. The hostility also

contrasts with the conciliatory actions of the government, exemplified by a meeting hosted by the Prime Minister, who spoke to trades unions activists *over mince pies and coffee*.

It therefore appears that WAR metaphors are exploited not for the concerted action they profile in the original *Guardian* column, but to highlight the violence and brutality connoted by war: the construal of strikes as acts of war has the argumentative function of undermining them as overly hostile and so unjustified. There are speculations in the *Mail* text that the government might consider introducing legislation limiting the right to strike, and these figurative expressions are utilised to give legitimacy to this demand. Neither the *Mail* nor the *Telegraph* text indicates that an assault on the welfare state is cause for concern.

### 3.2.2. Attack on the welfare state

#### Attack: Guardian

*Attack* as a Vehicle shows some similarities to *assault*, although it is overall less emphatic, and slightly less likely to impart a negative evaluation on the Actor: as noted above, *attack* can be used figuratively without such evaluation to identify and underscore a problem.

Nonetheless, in the *Guardian* subcorpus, out of the nine texts where specifically the British welfare state is under attack, there are eight texts in which the welfare state is not represented as problematic, facilitating the assessment of the attack as reprehensible. This evaluation correlates with the identity of the Actor or the party responsible for the attack, which in these eight cases is the Coalition government. One example is the excerpt below, from a letter responding to the *Guardian* column by Len McCluskey calling for trade unions to join student protests against austerity (see 7 and 11 above):

(12) As Len McCluskey noted, the Conservative attack on the welfare state and public services is driven by ideology (Unions, get set for battle, 20 December). They would, if they could, cut services back to the bone and then outsource everything to private sector vultures.

It's also personal. This millionaire cabinet wasn't educated at the state schools that 93% of pupils attend, but at elite fee-paying private schools. Social housing? Not likely. And the NHS queues are bypassed courtesy of Bupa.

Knights, *Guardian* 2010

In the passage, the attack consists in cuts to spending on the welfare state and public services. The responsibility for the attack is assigned to Conservatives (obscuring the impact of the other Coalition party, Liberal Democrats). The broader conceptual metaphor is again DETRIMENT IS INJURY.

The negative evaluation of *attack* as Vehicle is intensified by adding another phrase, *cut services back to the bone*. The phrase is consistent with the physical aspect of the ATTACK scenario, since it can be interpreted as specifying the form and impact of the attack. The sentence frame-shifts (see Coulson 2001) from

a heavily conventional metaphor for funding restrictions (*cut*) to another conventional metaphor for harm as a deep wound, implying severe damage and a decidedly animate victim. This may trigger an empathetic response, and so strengthen the coercive effect. Further, the beneficiaries of the attack are depersonified as vultures, a conventional metaphor for unethical behaviour, intensifying the negative assessment of the process and those responsible.

At the same time, the welfare state acquires a positive evaluation in two ways: less obviously within evaluative harmony (see Partington 2017) by association with public services in the first excerpted sentence, and more clearly co-textually, as the second excerpted paragraph lists state-run services used by, and useful to, ordinary non-millionaire Britons. The ATTACK scenario thus functions – strongly so in the excerpted passage – to enhance the positive evaluation of the welfare state, as well as negatively evaluate those responsible for the attack.

When the Coalition is the attacker, it is referred to either directly or metonymically, via a reference to the Chancellor of the Exchequer or one of the Coalition parties. The Liberal Democrats only have their agency highlighted once, in a letter stating they *have connived in the most ferocious attack on the welfare state since its inception* (Davies, *Guardian* 2011), an act contrasted with their progressive heritage. If only one party is mentioned, it is normally the Conservatives as the more powerful party. In two instances, earlier governments are identifiable as the attacker, but continuity is stressed between their actions and those of the Coalition.

The positioning of the (typically Coalition) government as attacking the British welfare state perhaps accounts for the low prominence of the COMMUNICATION target domain with *attack* as a Vehicle in the subcorpus. There is a single example where such an attack is immediately identifiable as verbal. This is an account of the philosopher Philip Blond's progressive Conservatism, a major influence on David Cameron pre-2010 and on his Big Society project (the Telegraph excerpt in 10 above satirises the same philosopher). The passage below summarises Blond's main points, and his criticism of the welfare state is figuratively phrased as a verbal attack:

- (13) The second is an attack on the managerial technocratic welfare state which has destroyed the mutualism of the working class – and here, he owes much to Ferdinand Mount's thoughtful *Mind the Gap*.

Bunting, *Guardian* 2009

The premodification of the welfare state as *managerial technocratic* indicates a preoccupation with systems and procedures. Negative in itself, this description also precludes the typically positive view of the welfare state as an expression of human solidarity in the *Guardian* subcorpus. Further, the relative clause articulates a well-rehearsed criticism of the welfare state – its negative impact on a valued aspect of working class culture and so civic society (see King and Ross 2010). This is positioned in an embedded relative clause, which indicates that its factuality is here not disputed. The entity under attack – the British welfare state – is thus expressly described as problematic. This is the clearest such evaluation in the subcorpus. Accordingly, the ATTACK metaphor does not fulfil its frequent argumenta-

tive function of rendering the action it describes as problematic – if anything, that function is noticeable with the verb *destroy*, which construes the adverse impact of the welfare state in a way similar to those described above in (1) and (2). Because this verb does not require Goals that are animate, any emotive coercion is weaker than with a verb that requires animate or human Goals.

Another passage, the closing paragraphs of a news report on the competition between two centre-left parties (the SNP and Labour) in Scotland, is interesting in that it has instances of ATTACK metaphors traceable to distinct target domains:

- (14) Signalling an all-out battle with Labour for centre-left voters, [SNP's Nicola Sturgeon] insisted that only independence would allow Scotland to defend the welfare state and use the state's resources to tackle poverty and inequality.

Sturgeon chose similar ground to Brown, attacking the UK coalition government's obsession with austerity and its attacks on the welfare state.

Casell, *Guardian* 2013

The passage has a number of metaphorical expressions traceable from the semantic field of violence. Two – *all-out battle* and *chose similar ground* – are consistent with the BATTLE scenario. They construe political messages as stages in a battle, consistent with Fabiszak's (2007) analysis of POLITICS IS WAR as mediated via communications. This is also the case with *attacking* in the second excerpted sentence, though this Vehicle is more straightforwardly related to ATTACK. In contrast, *defend*, *tackle*, and *attacks* indicate – very clearly with *tackle* – a physical attack, and the posited DETRIMENT IS INJURY conceptual metaphor. These expressions point to policies rather than criticism: independence and state resources are essential for policies, such as tackling poverty, but not for communication. Further, distinct figurative senses of *attack* make the last clause less stylistically jarring, as the doubling of *attack* is obscured by the different target domains.

Interestingly, although both groups of expressions are consistent with the stock repertoire of descriptions of political activity, it is the latter group which has a noticeable argumentative function: the defence of the welfare state and the tackling of poverty are considered self-evidently right as goals in politics (by the left-wing SNP at least). This is because poverty is self-evidently problematic, just as the welfare state is self-evidently valuable, and the metaphorical expressions are in concert with these evaluations. As such, these goals impart legitimacy to the independence campaign within the reported discourse of the SNP (ie, independence is worth achieving because the welfare state will be successfully defended). Similarly, the Coalition's policies on the welfare state are considered self-evidently reprehensible, with the figurative use of *attacks* indicating this negative evaluation.

If the text refers to a welfare state that is not British, the figurative use of *attack* coincides with a negative evaluation of the act where the term conveys policies, but not so where verbal criticism is concerned. The former is the case in two instances, and the Actor is also identifiable with a government: a fictitious president of the US allegedly considering a *crypto-Reaganite attack on the welfare state* in a review of a TV series (Jeffries, *Guardian* 2015), and European leaders who

*attack the welfare states, employment protections and public services that the best of the European centre-left fought for after 1945* (Cohen, *Observer* 2012) in a column about the treatment of Greece by the EU. The negative evaluation of the attack is much clearer in the latter excerpt, as the welfare state is explicitly named a positive achievement. In the former text, the attack is described as pandering to *ordinary God-fearing, tax-terrified Americans* (Jeffries, *Guardian* 2015): the sarcastic description of the group which the policy is intended to please discourages a favourable assessment of either the group or the policy.

With verbal criticism, however, no such pattern is evident: one text on Swedish crime novels (Emery, *Guardian* 2008) coordinates the Swedish welfare state with *capitalist society as a whole* as the Goals of the attack, perhaps highlighting a negatively evaluated institutional and transactional dimension to both. Another text references a strongly partisan US documentary criticising the welfare state (Harris, *Guardian* 2012), and *attack* is premodified as *vitriolic*. Though the evaluation of the welfare state is difficult to recover from the text, the premodification indicates the attack is problematic. Finally, an extended US-centred essay on big data in governance explicitly comments on the evaluation of the welfare state in discourse: *just because Silicon Valley is attacking the welfare state doesn't mean that progressives should defend it to the very last bullet (or tweet)* (Morozov, *Guardian* 2014), with both the Actor and the Goal of the attack criticised in the broader context.

In the *Guardian* subcorpus, verbal criticism of the welfare state is not frequently construed as an attack, although when it is, the effect is not necessarily to undermine the criticism. In contrast, when it construes policies that affect the British welfare state, *attack* as a Vehicle always denies validity to the action it describes, with those responsible exposed to criticism. This coercive effect is often intensified by extended metaphors. Diachronically, this use is not as restricted in terms of distribution as that of *assault*, but four of its eight occurrences (denoting policies affecting the British welfare state) are noted in 2013, coinciding with a package of austerity reforms. None occur in the pre-election part of the corpus, confirming its interpretation as a discursive strategy resisting the reforms.

#### Attack: *Mirror*

The *Mirror* subcorpus has six instances of figurative use of *attack* relevant to the welfare state. Though somewhat simpler, as the texts focus on the UK, the pattern largely resembles that in the *Guardian* subcorpus. An attack on the welfare state is identifiable as political action in four texts, in all cases by the Coalition government. One example is the passage below, where metaphorical expressions consistent with the ATTACK scenario result in an extended metaphor:

- (15) WORKING people will be the victims of Tory villain George Osborne's latest callous attack on the welfare state.

Slashing £21billion from social security spending is a cut far deeper than the Conservative Chancellor likes to talk about and it will hit pay packets hard.

*Mirror* 2015, 29 January

The ATTACK scenario is called up by the figurative use of the noun *attack*, but it can also account for ‘cut’, a description – not just conventional, but default – of reducing funding, which is intensified with an adjective (*deeper*) consistent with the source scenario and perhaps revives the metaphor to some degree. *Slashing*, a more violent synonym to *cutting*, and the verb *hit* describing the impact, are also interpretable as consistent with the ATTACK scenario. The attack is thus construed as rather violent, and as such the scenario works to condemn the action rather than identify a problem to be tackled. This is also indicated by the premodification of the attack as *callous* in the first excerpted sentence. Elsewhere in the subcorpus, the attacks are pre-modified as *savage* and *all-out*, suggesting a similar evaluation and strengthening the coercive effect.

Though the first excerpted sentence names the welfare state as the object of the attack, the designation of *victim* (again consistent with the scenario) is explicitly ascribed to the beneficiaries of the welfare state, who are not direct targets of the attack. This underscores its negative impact, predicted to affect people as well as the institution. The result is that this extended metaphor articulates the impact of funding reductions in terms likely to evoke negative feelings about the action within the topos of harm, where an action should not be performed if its results are harmful. A negative characterisation of those responsible is also achieved in this way. In particular, Chancellor of the Exchequer George Osborne, to whom the attack is attributed, is directly described as a villain – a term not metaphorical under MIPVU but consistent with the evaluative harmony in the passage, reinforcing the evaluation.

The (two) texts where an attack on the welfare state can be inferred as verbal criticism comment on cases where a claimant is considered to have wrongly benefited from the welfare state, thus providing grounds for its criticism. The criticism is rejected as not entirely justified, as in the example below:

- (16) But ‘Orrible Osborne lumped deserving cases like Laura in with the likes of child-murderer Mick Philpott when he made his notorious attack on the welfare state.

That’s how the disgusting Tories think. We don’t have to think like that.

Routledge, *Mirror* 2013

The passage references the criticism of the welfare state as aiding immoral lifestyles made by George Osborne, Chancellor of the Exchequer, following the case of Mick Philpott (a benefit claimant who set his house on fire, resulting in the deaths of several of his children). The text gives the example of Laura, a *deserving case* helped by the welfare state, to show that Osborne’s criticism of the welfare state was also (unwittingly but no less unjustly) targeted at cases like Laura’s. Osborne’s comments are therefore deemed unfair, allowing the rejection of the moral thrust of his criticism. The premodification of the attack as *notorious*, along with the negative characterisation of the Chancellor (*‘Orrible*) and his party (*the disgusting Tories*) undermine those issuing the judgment, further intensifying its rejection. The figurative use of *attack* to convey criticism of the welfare state is thus also evaluated negatively, although not purely due



to the argumentative function of the metaphor, and in weaker terms than with political action.

All instances occur in the post-election part of the subcorpus (with the *Mirror*, the pre-election part is admittedly very small, with no texts at all from 2009). With no neutral or ambiguous cases, the use of *attack* appears more consistent than in the *Guardian*. The argumentative function of *attack* as a Vehicle in the *Mirror* subcorpus is to deny validity to the act thus described, with premodifications and extended metaphors underscoring its negative evaluation regardless of whether policies or communications are construed as attacks.

#### Killer blow: *Mirror*

In the *Mirror* subcorpus, the welfare state is not the only target of an attack in a column criticising a series of benefit cuts to be introduced in April 2013:

- (17) SPITEFUL David Cameron today steps up his WAR ON THE POOR, the sick, the disabled and the weak with a killer blow to the welfare state set up to protect them.

Beattie and Buckland, *Mirror* 2013

The opening sentence reiterates the intended function of the welfare state as protecting those who need support, establishing positive evaluation of the welfare state. The use of the metaphorical expression *killer blow* to describe the reforms, where lethal force corresponds to the perceived impact of the reforms on the welfare state, clearly works to coerce their negative evaluation. This is intensified by a related metaphorical expression capitalised for emphasis, and by the list of vulnerable groups as its direct targets, which perhaps evoking a more empathetic response than were the welfare state a target. The attack, whether physical or military, is thus unequivocally reprehensible. David Cameron, the person indicated as responsible, is at the same time indicted in moral terms. Interestingly, while there are references in the *Mirror* to *a war on women* (Beattie, *Mirror* 2010), *a war against our teachers and schools* (Roberts, *Mirror* 2010), or *a war on the poor* (Maguire, *Mirror* 2010, Beattie and Buckland, *Mirror* 2013), there is only a single instance of *a war on the welfare state* (Maguire, *Mirror* 2010), in a column which dismisses as absurd the plans to limit child benefit. A possible explanation is that *war* is more likely to with groups rather than institutions – it is perhaps even more emphatic than *assault*, and might perhaps be perceived as hyperbolic when an institution is the target.

#### 4. Concluding remarks

In the discourse analysed, the metaphorical expressions traceable to the ATTACK scenario can be accounted for by different conceptual metaphors. Some, present mostly in the *Guardian* subcorpus but attested in all, are traceable to the metaphor HOSTILE COMMUNICATION IS PHYSICAL AGGRESSION. The Actor is typically a politician or a political entity, and the attack consists in a speech act, normally criticism.

The ATTACK scenario can also be connected to the conceptual metaphor expressed as DETRIMENT IS INJURY, where, in an entailed mapping, seeking to cause detriment corresponds to an attempt to inflict an injury, in other words an attack. This reading would account for those metaphors where introducing a policy is conceptualised as an attack, or where the perceived destructive impact of the welfare state corresponds to an act of violence. The Actor, construed as the perpetrator, is the entity responsible for the policy, or the welfare state itself. The detriment is typically financial (or moral) harm, construed as the impact of the attack: a wound or death.

Finally, ATTACK metaphorical expressions often co-occur with those consistent with the BATTLE scenario or more generally to WAR; here, collective political action – whether direct action or speech acts – is construed as a military activity, and those carrying out the action are militants or armies.

The argumentative function of the ATTACK scenario in the analysed sample of discourse is best evident with the second of these, DETRIMENT IS INJURY. While ATTACK metaphors need not impart a negative evaluation to the action they conceptualise, they often do so in this corpus and within this conceptual metaphor. This is typically done by the construal of the deictic centre, or an entity represented as valuable, as under attack. The violence of the attack is often intensified, either by extended metaphors or by premodification. This results in a strong axiological (as well as emotional) marking of the act as reprehensible, with a notable coercive effect. The scenario thus presumes that the condemnation of or resistance to the attack are legitimate responses, and in this way provides a metaphorical warrant to reject the action, and the Actor, as self-evidently morally wrong. This structure can be described as the topos of harm, where a course of action that leads to harm is self-evidently wrong.

It is also this subgroup of ATTACK metaphors that accounts for the plurality of metaphorical expressions consistent with the scenario in the corpus. There is a stark difference in their presence in left-leaning and conservative subcorpora. Their function is also consistent with the political leanings of the newspapers: the few ATTACK metaphors with the welfare state as participant in the conservative subcorpora highlight its perceived negative impact, construing it as a perpetrator. In contrast, the ATTACK metaphors with the welfare state as Goal have a stronger presence in the left-leaning corpora. Here, these metaphors draw on and preserve the existing positive evaluation of the welfare state, and convey opposition to the austerity policies of the Coalition government, which motivates their use. It appears that a fairly stable mapping – AUSTERITY IS A PHYSICAL ATTACK – can be noted in the discourse analysed. This mapping is entirely restricted to the left-leaning subcorpora, however – its absence from the conservative dailies analysed indicates that this emotional defence of the welfare state has not filtered through the political divide. Further, the relatively low token count associated with this mapping even within the left-leaning corpora would suggest that, as an argumentative strategy – it is not the dominant mode of resisting the austerity policies within the period analysed.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Examples from the corpus are retrievable and so not listed in the References. The name of the author, the year of publication, and the subcorpus are provided to facilitate retrieval.
- <sup>2</sup> See also Paprota (2018) for a similar formulation.

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