

# Discourses of War and Peace\*

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## **Abstract**

This paper examines the uses and abuses of language for purposes of political and war propaganda and its potentials for establishing and maintaining peace. It is based on the experience of the former Yugoslavia and, after its disintegration, of Serbia.

The paper is in six parts. A brief and largely terminological introduction (1) is followed by sections on hate speech (2), euphemistic speech (3), the two in contrast (4), and peace discourse (5); at the end are some tentative concluding remarks (6).

Between them, these sections cover the various verbal devices and strategies employed in changing circumstances over the past decade. This includes the breakdown of the Yugoslav federation, waves of conflicts between the ruling parties and the democratic opposition in Serbia, focussing on periods of elections and demonstrations, a comparison between Western and Serbian propagandas during the NATO attack on the present Yugoslavia, and current developments as a new round of elections approaches.

A possible profile of a more peaceful type of discourse is outlined against this background, suggesting that professional linguists are well equipped to make a contribution to the gradual transformation of public language from a weapon to an instrument of peace-building.

## **Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen!**

If you only heard my title announced orally, you might imagine that the phrase *War and Peace* was italicised in writing and that I was about to examine the various discourses in Tolstoy's great novel. I would actually be much happier if I could do that, or choose another, more conventional linguistic topic. However, tragic developments in the part of the world where I live have over the past several years directed my attention away from my usual preoccupations and towards the role of language in those developments. While I have no special liking for such a study, I believe that recent experience has shown it to be worth undertaking. Furthermore, this role is not easy to pin down or write about in one's own environment without getting emotionally or politically involved. Still, I will try to concentrate on a macrolinguistic analysis and keep both emotions and politics at bay as far as possible.

I propose, then, to consider, rather informally, language in the service of political and war propaganda and, more summarily, language as a potential vehicle of peace. The case study to be presented is Yugoslavia in the process of its disintegration and, subsequently, Serbia. The examples to be cited come from a corpus I collected throughout most of the past decade, almost invariably from Serbian regime-controlled media, many of them originating from leading politicians.<sup>1</sup>

## 1. Introduction

In thinking about the verbal underpinnings of warlike activities, three potential conceptual and terminological headings come readily to mind: the *language* of war, the *rhetoric* of war, and the *discourse* of war. At an informal level all three may be used at will, even interchangeably, but more discriminating usage is called for in serious discussion. Strictly speaking, there are of course no languages of war (or, for that matter, of peace), since any language can in principle express the full gamut of ideologies, beliefs, political programmes, etc. — it can “talk war” as well as “talk peace”. Hence “the language of war” is no more than a metaphor. “The rhetoric of war” is more precise in that it points to a specific mode of using language, rather than a special kind of language, but it may be construed as relatively shallow (as in the disparaging phrase “empty rhetoric”). “The discourse of war” overcomes this weakness, especially if the concept of discourse is understood, ambitiously, as much more than a mere concatenation of utterances — as an agent shaping thought and action and making language an active political force. Such an application of the notion of discourse is to be found in what has come to be known as critical discourse analysis, where it is firmly embedded in situational, social, ideological and institutional contexts, revealing relations of power, dominance, inequality, etc. as construed by language.<sup>2</sup> There is obviously nothing shallow about discourse in this sense, as shown by the apparent oddity of the phrase “empty discourse”: discourse means business! It seems best, therefore, to talk about the *discourse* of war (and, correspondingly, of peace), as signalled in my title, though the other two phrases may also occur from time to time, depending on context.

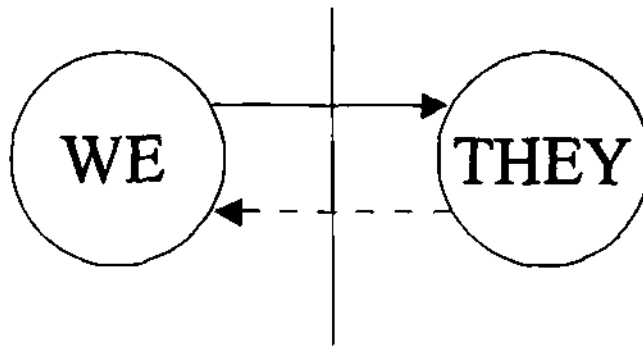
According to my analysis, the two most salient general features of war discourse are its aggressiveness and its evasiveness. Their apparent incongruity disappears as soon as we become aware of the difference in their distribution: the aggression is directed at a perceived enemy, whereas the evasion refers to activities of one’s own side. Thus the conflict between other-presentation and self-presentation is resolved in mutual reinforcement as the two segments fall into place — naturally, always at the expense of the other and to the benefit of the self. Taking up the aggressive side of the coin first, we may identify *hate speech* as probably the best known component of war discourse.

## 2. Hate speech

Hate speech may be loosely defined as a comprehensive term for the verbal expression of hatred, chauvinism, xenophobia, racism and other negative collective feelings. It is a particularly violent form of invective designed to identify, demonize and possibly destroy an ethnic, racial, confessional, social or political group, which under conditions of war may even announce physical annihilation. Interpreted in this way, hate speech is a powerful mobilizing device, a means of silencing or removing opponents — often in preparations for a war or in the course of one, when hate speech assumes the leading role in orchestrating the rhetoric of war.

By no means a recent phenomenon, hate speech has been a palpable feature of major conflicts — recall the racist propaganda of the Third Reich, the Korean and Vietnam wars, the bitter verbal exchanges of the Cold War, or more recently the Gulf war. The full effects of hate speech gradually came to be felt with the spread of mass media — press, radio and especially television. As regards the former Yugoslavia, interethnic hatred, skilfully engineered by political and national elites in its republics, was literally mediated in this way, preparing the ground for warfare, accompanying it all along and contributing its fair share to the federation's downfall.

The forms of hate speech may vary somewhat, but the bare essentials of the mechanism on which it rests and without which it loses its power are extremely simple. Namely, there are always two well-defined and sharply delimited groups. One of them accommodates US, who are good, progressive, peace-loving, endangered, the object of envy and conspiracy, etc., while the other is reserved for THEM, who are evil, backward, aggressive, menacing, forever plotting, etc. Between these two categories there are no transitional forms or possibilities of a peaceful settlement: nuances and compromise are completely alien to the nature of hate speech. The group which WE define has a legitimate right to power, riches, territories and all the rest, which is why THEY, with their incomprehensible and illegal claims to some of that, must be discredited, satanized and if possible destroyed. The corresponding verbal activity, or rather barrage, may be essentially unidirectional, bidirectional or even multidirectional when several parties are involved, without affecting the nature of the mechanism itself. The latter can be schematically represented as in Figure 1, where the vertical line indicates the wall between the two categories, the full horizontal line verbal fire in one direction, and the broken line possible return activity:

Figure 1<sup>3</sup>

This simple model has been in effect all the time since the outbreak of armed conflicts and the breaking up of Yugoslavia; what has been subject to change is, of course, the membership of the two groups. Seen from the Serbian side (and not forgetting that the same pattern acted reciprocally towards it from the other participating sides), we were first presented with the following picture, transmitted through the state media. Category WE was understandably filled by Serbs, pictured as *patriots, barehanded defenders of age-long hearths, innocent victims, a celestial people*, and the like. In sharp contrast, but in harmony with the polycentric character of the conflict, category THEY was quite heterogeneous, accommodating other Yugoslav peoples, subsequently to be more or less selected and somewhat specified as *Ustashi cutthroats, Jihad fanatics, Shqiptar terrorists*, etc., but also *traitors and hirelings* among the Serbs themselves. (We may note in passing that the use of labels like *Chetniks, Ustashi, Mujahadeens* on the different warring sides, some of them evoking the horrors of World War II, in this application antedated the appearance on the battlefields of people whom they might fit, which means that verbal ghosts only later turned into men of flesh and blood. This shows how language, usually thought of as reflecting existing reality, may under extraordinary circumstances anticipate future events. For more on this see Bugarski 1993).

In Serbia, the next phase of hate speech set in after the cessation of military and paramilitary activities on formerly Yugoslav territory, and has been in evidence to this day, though with variations in subject matter and intensity. Speaking quite generally, this has to do with the conflict between the regime and the democratic opposition. The scene is once again dominated by our two categories, but their profiles are fundamentally different. Category WE is no longer constituted by the Serbian people but by the ruling parties in Serbia and the reduced Yugoslavia, while the target category THEY, emptied of the now mostly irrelevant other Yugoslav peoples, is available for the *internal enemy* supported by the *foreign factor*. This enemy must be annihilated so that WE might go on ruling without being disturbed by unreasonable attempts which THEY make to usurp our natural rights. In this psychological model, then, political opponents are experienced as enemies and treated accordingly by the power-holders and

media under their control. So the enemy is still there, only this time primarily internal rather than external.

Two focal points may be singled out as typical of this ongoing process of verbal disparagement, both of them connected with elections in Serbia. The first emerged as a consequence of the attempt by the regime to steal local elections in November 1996, which triggered off massive demonstrations of students and citizens all over the country, lasting well into 1997 and ending, after considerable outside pressure as well, with official recognition of the actual results and the opposition coming into power in most of Serbia's cities, including Belgrade. In an attempt to retain power at all costs, the thoroughly shaken regime had relied on ideological constructions with little basis in reality, evoking the eternal battle between the good and the evil, "Partisans" and "Chetniks", "progressive left" and "regressive right", with nothing in between, no political centre and apparently no possibility of refusing to join either of the two largely fictitious camps: as the notorious slogan has it, he who is not with us is against us.

In a very short time two Serbias were profiled politically and through the media, both falsely pictured but still two, or rather two ideological constructs between which there could be no compromise even at the risk of civil war (which, as a competent insider was later to acknowledge, in fact nearly broke out). A huge amount of hate speech was generated, most of it directed at Coalition "Together", which had won the local elections. Offensive labelling of political opponents, the most important single rhetorical device of hate speech, reached previously unrecorded proportions. All protesters were indiscriminately dismissed as *hooligans*, *traitors*, *foreign agents*, *pro-fascist elements*, *quislings*, *fifth columnists* and so on — labels which, one might naively have thought, belonged to an earlier era and a different political philosophy. These were accompanied by "hate pictures" — highly selective and utterly false coverage of the demonstrations by state TV, focusing on untypical participants and incidents. In this way the dignified peaceful protest which impressed the world and at least for a while changed the image of Serbia was falsified to the point of caricature and presented as mere ravages of street mobs.<sup>4</sup>

The second focal point in the ascendance of hate speech set in with the aftermath of NATO bombing in Spring 1999. (The period of the bombing itself will be discussed in Section 4 below). At this point there is a substantial change: while category WE is naturally still occupied by the regime (though pretending to speak for practically the whole population), category THEY is now split up equally into internal and external halves — *domestic traitors* and their *foreign masters*. The former label covers the democratic opposition, this time as represented by the Alliance for Change, a coalition perceived by the ruling parties as their major rival in the forthcoming elections, while the latter subsumes principally NATO and the U.S. administration. The close link between the two is underlined by the endless repetition of a single tune to the effect that NATO, having failed to destroy Serbia and its people in military action, is now trying to

achieve the same ends through a handful of its hirelings in the country itself (referred to as the *Alliance for NATO*, *NATO infantry*, etc.). A kind of bridge between internal and external agents is provided by current leaders of Montenegro and the Republika Srpska, who, denounced by the xenophobic Serbian regime as unscrupulous servants of the West, come in for their share of vicious treatment (not only as *traitors* but also as *smugglers* and *criminals*).

Again there are only two preordained options: a person can only be “for Serbia” or “for NATO”, where the first alternative really means ‘supporting the ruling oligarchy’ and the second ‘condoning NATO bombing’; so there is simply no place for those against both — easily the majority of the population. A related neat dichotomy is between *builders* and *strollers* — respectively, applauders of the controversial reconstruction of the destroyed economy and resources, and idle protesters standing in its way. Even students demanding the revocation of the scandalous University and Information acts are branded with the silly rhyming slogan “Whoever is for Plato is for NATO” (reference is to the plateau in front of the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade, a traditional rallying point of protesting young academics).

In particular, leaders of the Alliance for Change are ruthlessly identified as the real culprits for all the evils that have lately befallen the innocent and peaceful Serbian people: NATO bombing, the tragedy of Kosovo, even the international sanctions imposed on Serbia years before the Alliance was even formed. Ridiculous charges, no doubt, but it would be unwise to underestimate the power of official propaganda when rammed down the throats of brain-washed subjects: in Serbia there are people who will believe literally anything they hear on state TV. Alliance leaders are also personally abused by being pictured as eternal losers, frustrated have-beens and people with no morals, allusions being frequently made even to their physical features, alleged mental problems or deviant sexual preferences, and the like. Meanwhile local government officials in towns run by the opposition are repeatedly ridiculed as a bunch of *filthy thieves*, and members of a fast-growing student organisation called Resistance, which the regime apparently fears most and persecutes accordingly, are branded the *new Hitlerjugend*, *fascists* and *terrorists* (!). Anything goes as long as it can help discredit your political challenger...

Yet what is exploited to the full with the approaching new elections is the overarching image of NATO, a veritable godsend to the regime’s propaganda. Capitalising on the tragic experience of ordinary citizens, the loudspeakers never cease bellowing about *NATO parties*, the *NATO menagerie*, *NATO’s mannequins* and *political poodles* rushing to kiss the hands of the murderers of our kids, etc. Calls for free democratic elections are construed as inviting civil war, bloodshed and chaos amidst which NATO might storm in, occupy and dismember Serbia and install a puppet government whose principal task would be absolving NATO from criminal charges. Representatives of the opposition,

along with the NGOs and the *so-called* independent media journalists, are collectively dismissed as *American spies on CIA's payrolls*, prepared to sell their country for a handful of dollars. In short, yesterday's indiscriminate *traitors* have been pointedly specified as *NATO's servants* and *fifth columnists*, which has apparently made it easier for the regime, faced with the newly united political opposition and the developing civic resistance, to proclaim with feigned self-assurance that there is in fact no opposition in Serbia — merely a *gang of NATO promoters, NATO-fascist scum*. Fortunately, however, these pitiful *degenerates* and *freaks* don't stand half a chance against the patriotic ruling coalition, determined to save the Serbian people and their homeland at all costs ...

This shameful language, directed from the very top of the state against its own citizens, needs no further comment. It must be said in fairness that there has throughout been some hate speech fired off in return by the targeted opposition (recall the broken line in our diagram): e.g. *liars, mafiosi, thieves, red bandits, murderers*. However, this inevitable reaction of wildly satanized groups cannot be compared in either volume or intensity with the incredible torrent of verbal abuse which caused it. After all, it is well known that true control over public language goes with political and economic power, so the ruling circles must take first responsibility for the language used, misused and abused.<sup>5</sup>

### 3. Euphemistic speech

Political rhetoric and war propaganda are among the major areas of public life often saturated with evasive and euphemistic speech. As noted in our introductory remarks, this kind of language is heavily drawn upon in justification of one's own policies or actions, usually with the aim of putting a pretty mask on an ugly face. To this extent euphemistic speech may be construed as a kind of inverse hate speech and will accordingly be treated more briefly here.

Generally speaking, euphemistic speech in the present context frequently has the effect of Orwellian doublespeak, characterized by the incongruity of what is said and what is done, one which replaces true communication with intentional confusion. War propaganda being at least as old as modern warfare, it is not difficult to find telling examples of this variety of verbal manipulation. Some of the more recent wars, particularly that in Vietnam, have been well studied from this point of view (cf. e.g. Olson 1988 and Reinberg 1991). Well-known English examples include *pacification, defensive victory, active air defence, preventive initiative, friendly fire, collateral damage, defoliation* and *depopulation* of villages, and phrases like "defence of U.S. troops in Vietnam from internal aggression".

Turning to the Yugoslav scene, the desire to cloud sensitive issues and cover up responsibility for criminal activities has produced some interesting examples of such discourse. Thus conquest was typically presented as *liberation*, destruc-

tion as *protection*, attack as *defence* (even the phrase *defensive offensive* was used — compare U.S. *defensive victory* above!), and the protracted shelling of Sarajevo was in retrospect grudgingly described as a *mistake*. The phrase *ethnic cleansing*, itself a curious piece of doublespeak, was replaced in some negotiations between Serbian and Croatian leaders with the improbable expression *humane transfer of populations*. Perhaps more amusingly, away from the battlefields, the knocking out of an opposition MP by a Radical one in the Federal Parliament in Belgrade was referred to by an official spokesman as an occurrence of *physical misunderstanding*.

In post-war Serbia, once again in the context of elections, some quite bizarre euphemisms have likewise been exploited. For example, the stealing of votes by the regime was called a dispute between politically opposed sides, and the savage beating up of peaceful demonstrators by special police units equipped with water cannons and armoured cars was repeatedly explained away as clearing the streets for undisturbed motor traffic. And, of course, the ultimate in evasion being silence, many a statement or event not to the taste of political rulers simply went unrecorded in the state media, in accordance with the adage that what was not in the newspapers never happened. Alternatively, if it was impossible to pass over in complete silence, an embarrassing state of affairs tended to be watered down beyond recognition.

A peculiar instance of such a “non-event”, extending over a considerable period, was what was going on in Kosovo. Official political discourse on “the southern province of Serbia” (as it continues to be pointedly referred to) differed from that which preceded it on Croatia and Bosnia. In these earlier cases, when the national goal to be promoted through the media was that of creating a Greater Serbia, one was exposed to deafening war cries, an unbearably aggressive language in a veritable flood of open hate speech. But in the case of Kosovo the goals were different, and this was reflected in an at least superficially defensive language, focussing on the glorious past (“We will not give up a single square foot of the holy Serb soil”, Kosovo is “the cradle of Serbdom”, the “Serb Jerusalem”, “the most expensive Serbian word”). There was no mention of war here, no guerilla movement or anything of the kind; there were only “Shqiptar terrorists and separatist bands”. Hate speech was somewhat subdued, and insistence on the exclusive and obligatory use of these labels created the impression that all Kosovo Albanians (except for the few “honest” ones among them) were really terrorists; in this way it was also easier to justify the large number of Albanian civilian casualties.

Furthermore, the Kosovo problem (whose very existence had in fact long been denied by the regime’s senior officials) could be solved “only in a peaceful manner”, “by political means”, “through negotiations”. Here the prescribed rhetoric actually contradicted itself, since “there are no negotiations with terrorists”. But never mind, “we” have a solution for everything. Thus, for example,

the Serb Radical Party proclaimed in August 1998 that “Serbia wishes to solve the problems in Kosmet in a peaceful and democratic manner”, and with that goal in mind Serbian police force is “supported in its efforts to finish off the Albanian bands”.

The endless repetition of worn-out stereotypes was designed to blunt the attention of the public and at the same time to serve as a cover for applying brute force instead of developing a sound policy for dealing with the problems. Just as all we had in Kosovo after 1981 was *irredentism*, we now only had *terrorism*. On the Albanian side the rhetoric was equally limited and stereotyped (“Kosova Republic”, “independent Kosova”, “Greater Albania”). Both sides remained deeply entrenched in their positions, having inherited a common political mentality for which willingness to talk and make compromises is merely a sign of weakness. Therefore there could be no real negotiations between them unless they were imposed from outside — which is what was actually attempted. although Kosovo was an “internal affair of Serbia” with which “nobody from outside could interfere” because of the historic “no” to foreign mediation at the referendum in Serbia ...

And so, whereas with the ancient Greeks rhetoric was primarily the art of persuasion, in this instance it was rather the art of stupefaction — a negative sort of rhetoric. That awakening from the stupor can be painful soon became evident. The subsequent attack by NATO, resulting in the virtual loss of Kosovo, must have come as an inexplicable shock to all who had been lulled by the Serbian regime’s carefully controlled discourse into believing that nothing out of the ordinary had been happening there. The sudden encounter with reality was duly followed by an explosion of anger and frustration, embodied in a new wave of familiar hate speech predictably directed at NATO countries (especially the U.S., led by the *world’s leading Fascist dictator* — the *White House monster*) and their *occupying forces* in Kosovo, bent on destroying the Serbian people hand in hand with *gangs of Shqiptar murderers and narcotics dealers*. All this was happening under the watchful eyes of commanding generals and civil administrators representing the insatiable Western powers and the discredited, helpless United Nations, every one of these opportunists a *confirmed Serb-hater* — and so on, and so forth ...

#### 4. Euphemistic speech vs. hate speech

Having contrasted hate speech and euphemistic speech, each taken individually and assigned to the same source group but aimed at different recipients, we may now ask whether it is possible to have two groups engaged in armed conflict, one of them emitting mostly euphemistic speech and the other returning fierce hate speech. At first blush it would seem that this typologically interesting possibility was plainly excluded in real-life situations — or at any rate that it would

take a new and very special kind of conflict to admit it. Yet something approaching this unlikely scenario actually happened in the case of NATO's attack on Yugoslavia — a situation so new and a fight so special that even an appropriate general word to describe it is lacking. "War" will hardly do for such a one-sided assault, leaving the other side with almost no means of effective retaliation. As we know, conventional war implies two armies engaged in fighting, more or less face to face, with propaganda of both parties manipulating language in comparable ways, painting a black-and-white picture which extols the good boys on our side while demonizing the bad boys in the opposed camp. Such parallelism was also true of recent warfare in former Yugoslavia. However, the NATO attack on the present Yugoslavia was a completely different affair, apparently ushering in a new pattern of aggression for the twenty-first century. This is destroying a country and killing its citizens from a safe distance high above in the skies, with one side engaged in wholesale destruction and the other suffering it, any possibility of eye contact being excluded.

From the viewpoint of the invisible killer pilots, guided to their targets from many miles away and at little risk to themselves, who do not even see the disastrous effects of their bombs and rockets, this is rather like a computer video game of manipulating joysticks in a kind of virtual reality suitable for CNN-type TV spectacles. But on the wrong side of these missiles there is actual reality, composed of dismembered and burnt bodies of civilians, flattened out towns and villages, demolished electricity plants and water supplies, endless columns of refugees of all ethnic backgrounds, amounting to a huge humanitarian and ecological catastrophe.

This sharp contrast was duly reflected in verbal dress, in the terminologies employed by the two sides. Probably the only categorial similarity was producing wild propaganda in place of factual information, with both parties relying on large-scale manipulation and lies, each for its own audiences and purposes; all the rest was strikingly different. Mindful of the fact that the war was really being fought in the media as well as on the ground, and apparently worried by the possibility of losing the media battle and with it the support of public opinion, NATO propagandists carefully avoided the word *war*, preferring to call their effort an *operation*, a *humanitarian intervention* by means of *limited air strikes*, a *campaign* under the insufferably cynical label of *Merciful angel*.

These euphemisms went hand in hand with the supposedly "hygienic" and "surgical" nature of the action as advertised by NATO, as if saying "We really love you, and if we bomb you it's for your own good". And, of course, the hundreds of innocent men, women and children who got killed as a result of this peculiar delivery of *humanitarian aid* simply did not count, their lives being automatically written off amidst the extensive ruins as *collateral damage* — that famous jewel of Pentagon Newspeak, legacy of the Vietnam era which was readily drawn upon once again.<sup>6</sup> Another, though less widely employed, way of

referring to the cold-blooded murder of civilians was talking of regrettable but inevitable *anomalies*, suggesting something like “These people simply shouldn’t have been there /i.e. in their homes, hospitals, market places, passenger trains, etc./ when we attacked”!

In view of the more embarrassing consequences of NATO’s *prevention of a humanitarian catastrophe*, further semantic smoke-screens were put up in order to blur the distinction between military and civilian targets. Thus, when in one of the numerous *incidents* a keen aviator, apparently mistaking a column of Albanian refugees for an outfit of Yugoslav tanks, killed several dozen old men, women and children, this was explained away with the statement that the pilot, coming as he did from a democratic country, had naturally acted *in good faith*. One may be excused for wondering what might have happened had he perchance come from an *undemocratic* country and acted in *bad faith*! All this was carefully packed into the moralising rhetoric about the “historic battle between good and evil” and the “attempts to defend moral values on which the Europe of the twenty-first century will rest” — notwithstanding the fairly evident fact that the whole undertaking was inspired by rather more mundane needs of certain powerful countries, coalitions and individuals.<sup>7</sup>

Such, then, was the aerial perspective. But a view from the ground dictated an entirely different choice of words. From this angle the whole thing was unmistakably an act of *criminal aggression*, planned by *Hitler’s disciples* and *war criminals* among U.S. and NATO leaders and ruthlessly carried out by their *murderous hordes of airborne barbarians, gangsters of the night, degenerate bastards* in their role of *savage pirates, gay drug addicts* turned *Nazi-style sadists* and *professional killers* posing as messengers of *tomahawk democracy*... This emotionally charged language in turn corresponded to the terrible experience of victims in the extended experiments with brand-new high-tech weapons for mass destruction.

In sum, two entirely different realities, one virtual and the other actual, naturally relied on correspondingly divergent terminologies — one ridiculously euphemistic and the other unashamedly emotional in the best tradition of hate speech. Whatever one may think of one or the other side in conflict, of one or the other kind of verbal device generally, in this instance language seems to have performed its functions successfully. On the one side, previous verbal and especially concurrent pictorial satanization of the Serbs for their repressive activities in Kosovo (by insistent showing of Albanian refugee camps on TV) prepared the ground for a deluge of euphemistic speech once bombing started, NATO’s verbal trickery making it easier to conceal from the general public the real nature and horrible consequences of its operations. And on the other side, the explosive language generated in Yugoslavia played an important part in mobilizing the defence mechanisms of this small country under annihilating attack by the most powerful military force the world has ever seen. In both cases,

though in opposed ways, language was utilized as a major aid in achieving the objectives — respectively, playing things down and stepping them up. That this is indeed so can be shown by trying to imagine a reversal of the two verbal strategies, assigning linguistic intensifiers to NATO and downtoners to Yugoslavia — surely an absurd proposition. So the conclusion seems warranted that language ultimately fitted reality — virtual in the one instance and actual in the other.

## 5. Peace discourse

Having been concerned at some length with hate speech and the discourse of war, including euphemistic speech as an additional aspect of the latter, we may now pause to consider possible alternatives to these phenomena. One of them is merely an analogical term with no discernible content to it and can be dismissed out of hand: “love speech”. It would indeed be idle to pretend that all of us should now start singing love songs or fall round each other’s necks, whispering words of love in diverse tongues. *Peace discourse*, on the other hand, seems a viable alternative to *war discourse*, though even here we encounter serious difficulties, for it is far from clear what kind of sense the notion of peace discourse really makes. It would appear that the phenomenological status of the concepts ‘war discourse’ and ‘peace discourse’ is not the same. The former strikes us as empirically and experientially more substantial, whereas the latter is still somehow in the air. In other words, we tend to know what war discourse is, but only to imagine what peace discourse might be. (Incidentally, this asymmetry is physically reflected in my lecture, in that the present section will be rather shorter than the preceding block!)

Still, at least a few general observations may be offered, accompanied by some specific proposals. Broadly speaking, we may conceptualize peace discourse as the systematic employment of an at least overwhelmingly normal, unburdened, unideologized kind of language, less given to manipulation and more resistant to falsification. It should have the feel of “politically correct” language, without the exaggerations imposed on the notion by its more enthusiastic but less serious advocates.

In essence, peace discourse can be construed as an inverse of war discourse, so that some of its principal properties can perhaps best be outlined in negative terms — that is, as scrupulous avoidance of the worst features of war discourse. Put differently, while what will in fact be said in peace discourse is obviously important, it may be even more vital for its overall profile what will *not* be said in it, or what will at any rate be eschewed as much as possible. To avoid misunderstanding, however, a caveat must be entered here. Namely, it is one thing to advocate the gradual replacement of authoritarian rhetoric with more sensitive and diversified patterns of democratic discourse. But it would be quite another

thing to call for any kind of administrative intervention — for example, by banning certain linguistic devices from public use, or imposing new ones. Even if this were possible, which it luckily is not, it would be tantamount to substituting new straitjackets for old ones. The last thing we want is another Newspeak. What is needed in replacement of “Warspeak” is not an equally crude and militant “Peacespeak”, but judicious use of normal language, allowing for fine-grained selection and discrimination, for urbanity and finesse. The existing linguistic tools all have their *raison d'être* and must be preserved rather than dismembered; what is open to debate is how best to use them to common advantage.

But if straightforward bans are out of the question, avoiding some of the available verbal devices is certainly not. A provisional and highly selective avoidance list, then, might include the following items: hate speech generally, abusive labels, ethnic stereotyping, war-mongering, lies, doublespeak, etc. The transition from a heavily loaded language, employed as a weapon, towards a more balanced use of language as an instrument of sympathetic peaceful communication may then be symbolically represented as a serial passage from a “minus” to a “plus” — that is to say, from a much abused term, concept or strategy to one which might usefully take its place in focussed public use of language.

Let me give a few illustrative examples. Abstract nouns like *freedom*, *homeland*, *patriotism*, *glory*, *enemy*, etc., have their rightful place in the lexicon, but should not be abused in the service of crass political or war propaganda, as when *people* is used to mean ‘regime’, or *traitor* to mean ‘political challenger’. Personal pronouns may become troublesome when manipulated by, say, using *we* rhetorically to mean ‘nation’, ‘party’, ‘the ruling class’ and the like, without clear indication of the pronoun’s intended scope, and similarly *they* to refer vaguely to some unidentified opposed group. In some contexts, more frequent reliance on the word *I* instead of *we* would certainly remove any unwelcome ambiguity. More discriminating use of the opposition *ours* vs. *theirs* might also be recommended, as well as care in the choice of adjectives and adverbs, modals and full verbs, connectors and discourse markers, and so on. For example, one would like to see words such as *must*, *all*, *never*, *can't*, *won't* drop in frequency in favour of those like *may*, *some*, *sometimes*, *perhaps*, *try*. Even a tentative *yes* is often preferable to a decisive *no*, and the menacing link *either...or* should make more room for its friendlier alternative *both...and*. All-purpose syntactic structures are there to be fleshed out lexically, but some of them have been exploited in aggressive ways. Thus the structure *N has no N* has been filled to form the slogan *Freedom has no price*, all of a sudden replaced with *Peace has no alternative*; and the commanding pattern *First N then N* keeps dictating — *First state then democracy*, *First constitution then elections*, *First sanctions then recognition*, *First reparations then relations...* Political and quasi-

historical talk couched in past and perfect tenses should shrink in favour of the future tense, the use of which would increase statistically as the general obsession with the past turned into a serious concern for the future. Frequent recourse to direct questions addressed to responsible individuals would make it more difficult to hide behind rhetorical questions and safe impersonalities. And so on. While these suggestions are based on the Yugoslav experience, one may assume that similar strategies could be useful in comparable instances of verbal wars elsewhere.

## 6. Concluding remarks

As suggested above, if the discourse of war is to be effectively counterbalanced by that of peace, what is needed is the genuine thing, not the same old stuff masquerading under new garments. To cite just one diagnostic example, with regard to the Bosnian crisis official Yugoslav policy at one stage took a dramatic turn from inspiring and supporting the war to advocating a peaceful settlement. As a result, numerous hawks suddenly became doves, war-mongers turned into peace-lovers. But old habits die hard, and language cannot easily accommodate to such overnight switches. Consequently, what we got — and in fact still have, in different forms and with some oscillations — is, essentially, talking about peace in the language of war. The proclaimed goals change from time to time, and with them the phraseology, but the same militant rhetoric and verbal arrogance remain very much in evidence. The underlying message is that the shapers of our destinies may now want something different, but they still want all of it and immediately, or else... The drums may at one time say *peace peace peace* rather than *war war war*, but the drumming goes on much as before. An occasional hero may become a villain, some patriots may turn into traitors and the other way round, there may even be some redistribution of friends and enemies. However, the world continues to divide up neatly into heroes and villains, patriots and traitors, friends and foes — briefly, US vs. THEM. Deeply ingrained over the generations in the mental substance of brainwashed brainwashers, manipulated manipulators, these pristinely clear-cut oppositions are mere echoes of “left” vs. “right”, Partisan vs. Chetnik, etc. It is this totalitarian way of thinking and type of rhetoric, this endless ritual repetition of simple formulas, that a true discourse of peace must strive to overcome first and foremost — not the shifting contents of linguistic expression.

In a word, no false substitutes will do. If the lexical, grammatical and rhetorical resources of language are to be directed towards the goal of mutual understanding, tolerance and compromise, peace discourse must be made as genuine and as efficient as the war discourse which it is designed to counteract. That is to say, the potentials of language must be exploited for purposes of establishing and maintaining peace at least as much, and as vigorously, as they

were abused in the service of war. Language can hardly bring about peace by itself, but it can certainly make a notable contribution to collective peace-seeking efforts.

My argument is beginning to sound like a sermon, so let me end with a few remarks about the more difficult part of the task: conceivable ways of implementing such a theoretical programme in actual practice. There can be no ready recipes in matters like these, but I should at least make it clear that I do not envisage anything like a one-time all-out campaign of spreading the new gospel. I rather have in mind a long and laborious process of gradual training of the general public in any given conflict-ridden country or region in certain new ways of speaking, and indeed of listening, along the lines suggested. This implies a setting in which democratic modes of thought and behaviour can develop, in the spirit of tolerance for differences and respect for linguistic and human rights. Gricean principles and maxims, which hate speech and war discourse have effectively stood on their heads, could then reclaim their rightful place in meaningful communication.

Such attitudes and practices should permeate public debate on topics of political discourse, starting with the most powerful and influential moulders of linguistic habits — leading statesmen and politicians, speech writers, editors, journalists and other public figures — and percolating down to the populace through the media. Needless to say, a major role in this belongs to educational institutions at all levels, which should be sensitised to the issue at their own pace and develop adequate long-term strategies to fight off the menace of hate speech in particular. All this includes linguists, especially applied linguists, who are professionally equipped and motivated to scrutinise the flow of language and make appropriate recommendations.<sup>8</sup>

An essential prerequisite for such activities is advancing the level of public awareness of the deadly effects of war discourse, a cause best served by a thorough analysis of its nature and legacy — as it were, under the motto “Know thy enemy!”. Against this background it should be easier to secure a wider hearing for the authentic voice of peace, within a general framework of peace education — specifically, critical language education as developed through the combined efforts of peace researchers, sociolinguists and language teachers. In this way one may work towards achieving “negative peace” (absence of war) and then move on to the challenge of “positive peace” (absence of structural violence in a society as a cause of economic and political inequality, discrimination and unrest).<sup>9</sup>

It may well be objected that all this is merely an idealistic vision with no chances of coming to life in the present-day world. Perhaps so; yet it still seems to me worth thinking about, and anyone with better ideas is welcome to step forward and offer them for discussion. And I can think of no more competent forum for a critical examination of the role that verbal manipulation can play in

our lives than a learned society such as ours, dedicated to the study of language. This is my justification for bringing the subject to your attention today. Thank you.

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### Notes

- \* Presidential address delivered to the 33<sup>rd</sup> Annual Meeting of the Societas Linguistica Europaea in Poznań on 1 September 2000 and submitted for publication shortly afterwards. — Parts of the text, written in the spring and summer of the same year, may appear in a somewhat different light after the October downfall of the Serbian regime, a major generator of hate speech and war discourse. However, this in no way invalidates or renders irrelevant the analysis presented; indeed, there is already encouraging evidence of a return to normal language, as advocated in this contribution.
- 1 Some of this material has been published in different forms and languages (cf. my articles and books in the References). A small portion of it formed the substance of a paper I gave at the 1998 meeting of our Society in St Andrews, Scotland.
- 2 See e.g. the use of the term in a similar context in Wertsch & Mehan (1988:8-9) and, more generally, Fairclough (1995).
- 3 The WE/THEY (or US/THEM) dichotomy is well known from studies in anthropology, ethnicity and nationalism, social psychology, etc. That linguists too are becoming increasingly aware of its functioning and effects can now be surmised from several contributions in Schäffner & Wenden (1999) and especially from an anthology in preparation wholly devoted to it: Duszak (forthcoming). This opposition, which frequently underlies the constitution of identities, is in the Yugoslav case merely a device of political manipulation.
- 4 Other devices of hate speech and political manipulation of language have been identified, classified and illustrated in the papers reprinted in Bugarski (1997c,d) and, in English, in Bugarski (forthcoming).
- 5 For more on hate speech in former Yugoslavia and in the Balkans generally see e.g. Marić (1995), Valić Nedeljković (1997), Lenkova (1998), Thompson (1999), Skopljanac Brunner et al. (2000).
- 6 Incidentally, it is hardly surprising that this phrase, in its German form as *Kollateralschaden*, was later to be awarded the title of “ugliest word of the year” for 1999 by a jury in Germany.
- 7 An analysis of moralising as a modern strategy for enlisting public support in waging wars, illustrated from the Gulf and Vietnam, is now to be found in Schallenberger (1999).
- 8 It is therefore fitting that the 10th world congress of AILA, held in Amsterdam in 1993, should have included a special symposium on “Language and peace”, which formed the core of the important anthology of Schäffner & Wenden (1999).
- 9 Modern political theory owes this distinction to Galtung (1964), reference to which is made several times in the anthology just cited.

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