IMPLICIT PERSUASION IN EU-RELATED MEDIA-POLITICAL DISCOURSE

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Abstract: *This article analyses implicit persuasion in EU-related media-political discourse as a cognitive-pragmatic process based on background knowledge. The study examines how idioms, mythologically based references and historical allusions guide the addressee's interpretation of political events without direct evaluative pressure. The analysis focuses on the mythologically based expression Achilles' heel, the historical allusion Marshall Plan, and the idiom kicking the can down the road. These units connect current political issues with cultural and historical associations and direct interpretation toward vulnerability, legitimacy or avoidance of responsibility. The article argues that implicit persuasion in EU-related media discourse often operates not through open argumentation, but through meanings already available to the audience.*

Keywords: *implicit persuasion, background knowledge, media-political discourse, cognitive pragmatics, historical allusion, idiom.*

Introduction. Media-political discourse does not simply report political events. It also shapes the way these events are interpreted by the addressee. In texts about the European Union, the audience relies not only on the information presented in the article, but also on cultural, historical and institutional knowledge already available in the communicative context. Such background knowledge affects how political events are understood, evaluated and connected with wider public meanings.

In contemporary media texts, persuasion is not always expressed through direct evaluation or explicit argumentation. It often works indirectly, through references that are familiar to the audience and therefore do not require detailed explanation. Historical allusions, mythological references and idiomatic expressions allow media texts to guide interpretation while preserving the appearance of informative and neutral reporting. Research on media persuasion usually focuses on explicit evaluation, framing or argumentation, while the persuasive role of background knowledge is less often placed at the centre of analysis. The issue is especially relevant for EU-related media-political discourse, where political meanings are often constructed through culturally familiar expressions rather than through open evaluative statements.

This article examines implicit persuasion in EU-related media-political discourse from a cognitive-pragmatic perspective. The empirical material consists of three English-language media texts published in *Reuters* and *The Guardian*. The analysis focuses on how idioms, mythologically based references and historical allusions connect political issues with background knowledge and create implicit evaluative meanings.

Materials and Methods. The study uses qualitative cognitive-pragmatic analysis. The empirical material consists of three English-language media texts published in *Reuters* and *The Guardian* between 2019 and 2023. The selected units are the mythologically based expression *Achilles' heel*, the historical allusion *Marshall Plan*, and the idiom *kicking the can down the road*. They were chosen because each of them links a political issue with mythological, historical or idiomatic background knowledge.

The theoretical framework combines sociocognitive discourse analysis, pragmatics of implicit meaning, relevance theory and cognitive metaphor theory. T. A. van Dijk's approach is used to explain the connection between discourse, cognition and control over public interpretation. In *Discourse and Power*, social power is treated as a form of control, while access to public

discourse is connected with influence over the audience's understanding of social and political reality (van Dijk, 2008, pp. 8–9, 13). The same line of argument allows discourse to be analysed in relation to both cognitive and social structures (van Dijk, 2008, p. 28). For the present article, this is the basis for examining media language as a means of directing interpretation rather than only transmitting information.

The pragmatic side of the analysis relies on H. P. Grice's theory of conversational implicature and on relevance theory developed by D. Sperber and D. Wilson. Grice's cooperative principle and conversational maxims explain how the addressee moves from what is said to what is implied (Grice, 1975, pp. 45–47). His notion of implicature is used to account for meanings that are not explicitly stated but are inferred from context and shared assumptions (Grice, 1975, pp. 49–50). Sperber and Wilson make this explanation more precise by relating relevance to contextual effects and processing effort. An assumption is more relevant when it produces stronger contextual effects and requires less effort to process (Sperber & Wilson, 1995, pp. 123–132). In the analysed media texts, idioms and allusions work in this way because they activate cultural or historical associations already available to the addressee.

G. Lakoff and M. Johnson's theory of conceptual metaphor is used more narrowly. It supports the analysis of cases where an abstract political issue is understood through a familiar image or source domain. Their work shows that metaphor is not merely an expressive device, but a way of understanding one area of experience through another (Lakoff & Johnson, 2004, pp. 25–29, 31–34). This helps explain why expressions such as *Achilles' heel* can organise evaluation without explicit commentary.

The selected examples represent three different sources of background knowledge. *Achilles' heel* relies on mythological knowledge, *Marshall Plan* on historical memory, and *kicking the can down the road* on idiomatic meaning.

This selection makes it possible to compare how different types of familiar knowledge produce implicit evaluation in media-political discourse.

The analysis is qualitative and proceeds from the expression to its pragmatic effect. First, the media context of each expression is identified. Then the background knowledge activated by the expression is described. Finally, the implicit persuasive effect is examined. The aim is to show how culturally shared expressions guide the addressee toward a particular interpretation while preserving the appearance of neutral or informative reporting.

Results. The analysis shows that implicit persuasion in EU-related media-political discourse is produced through the interaction of a current political issue with background knowledge already available to the addressee. The selected examples do not persuade by means of long explanations or direct evaluative statements. They compress evaluation into culturally familiar linguistic forms, so that the addressee reconstructs the intended meaning through mythological, historical or idiomatic associations.

In the Reuters commentary on Europe's dependence on imported oil and gas, the evaluative meaning is built around the image of vulnerability. The EU's dependence on external energy supplies is described as "the EU's Achilles' heel" (Davis, 2023). The expression comes from Greek mythology, where Achilles is represented as a powerful warrior whose only vulnerable point leads to his downfall. The pragmatic effect depends on this mythological background. In the media context, energy dependence is no longer perceived as one technical problem among others. It becomes the weak point that can undermine the credibility of the EU's green ambitions. The article does not have to state explicitly that the EU is vulnerable. The mythological reference already directs the addressee toward this interpretation.

A different type of background knowledge is activated through the reference to the "Marshall Plan". In the Reuters article on the EU response to the COVID-19 crisis, Ursula von der Leyen argued that the EU budget should

become the "Marshall Plan" for Europe (Reuters, 2020). The historical allusion refers to the American programme of post-war assistance that supported the economic reconstruction of Western Europe after the Second World War. When this historical memory is transferred to the EU budget, the proposal is moved beyond routine financial planning. It appears as a response equal to the scale of the crisis and as a collective act of recovery. The persuasive effect is therefore legitimising. The current political decision receives historical weight through association with reconstruction, solidarity and large-scale support.

The Guardian example shifts the analysis to a different register. Gina Miller's description of Theresa May as "an expert at kicking the can down the road" does not rely on solemn historical memory or mythological symbolism (Miller, 2019). Its persuasive effect comes from everyday idiomatic imagery. A complex Brexit situation is reduced to a simple and familiar pattern of postponement. This reduction is pragmatically significant because it narrows the possible interpretation of May's actions. They are not framed as caution, tactical patience or difficult negotiation, but as repeated avoidance of responsibility. The idiom therefore performs a critical function without the need for extensive argumentation.

Taken together, the examples show that background knowledge does not function in one uniform way. The mythological reference presents vulnerability as the central evaluative meaning, the historical allusion gives recovery policy a legitimising historical context, and the idiom recasts political delay as avoidance of responsibility. Despite these differences, all three examples rely on the same inferential logic. The expression does not explain the evaluation directly, but makes one reading of the political event more accessible than others. The evaluation is not imposed as an explicit judgement. It is inferred through the cultural or linguistic associations activated by the expression.

Discussion. Implicit persuasion in the analysed media texts emerges when a political issue is connected with background knowledge that the

addressee can activate without additional explanation. A familiar expression does not simply add expressiveness to the text. It gives the political situation a preferred evaluative direction.

The comparison of the three units shows that background knowledge performs different pragmatic tasks. In one case, it presents energy dependence as vulnerability. In another, it gives recovery policy a legitimising historical context. In the third, it turns political delay into avoidance of responsibility. These differences show that implicit persuasion is not tied to one fixed linguistic device. It depends on how a familiar expression is inserted into a political context.

The evaluative meaning remains indirect. Part of the argument is carried by cultural memory or idiomatic association, so the text does not need to develop a full explicit judgement. This is important for media-political discourse, where evaluation often enters the text through a form that still looks like information, explanation or commentary.

At the cognitive-pragmatic level, this process can be described as guided inference. The addressee recognises the expression, retrieves the relevant association and applies it to the political event. The result is not simple emotional colouring, but a narrowing of interpretive alternatives. The event becomes easier to understand in one direction rather than another.

Conclusion. The analysis demonstrates that implicit persuasion in EU-related media-political discourse is produced through the interaction between linguistic choice and background knowledge. The selected expressions connect current political issues with familiar mythological, historical and idiomatic associations, allowing evaluation to be inferred rather than openly stated.

The examples show three different evaluative directions. *Achilles' heel* presents energy dependence as structural vulnerability, *Marshall Plan* gives recovery policy a legitimising historical context, and *kicking the can down the*

road turns political delay into avoidance of responsibility. These meanings are activated by the associations carried by the expressions themselves.

Cognitively and pragmatically, these units narrow the range of possible interpretations while the text still appears informative or analytical. Background knowledge therefore becomes part of the persuasive process, since the addressee completes the evaluative meaning through associations that are already familiar in the relevant cultural or linguistic context.

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