

# “War on Terror” – An Intentional Choice of Words? A Corpus Analysis of *war on* and *war against*

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On 11 September 2001, President George W Bush declared a ‘war against terrorism’ but the official response to the attacks on America soon became known as the ‘war on terror’. The main aim of this paper is to report the findings of a corpus study designed to assess whether *war on* and *war against* are genuinely interchangeable. The findings show that *war on* is predominantly used for metaphorical wars, which begs the question as to why the White House should choose a metaphor for a campaign that was clearly going to involve military action. The answer is somewhat disquieting. The second aim is to examine how the German-speaking press renders *war on terror* and the reasons determining that lexical choice.

## 1. Introduction

Before the dust had settled at ground zero, the wordsmiths were already debating whether the expression “global war on terror” represented metaphorical warfare or whether it was a deliberate choice of words to foreshadow military action. The President promised ‘to find those responsible and to bring them to justice’ (Bush, 2001a) implying that the attacks of 11 September 2001<sup>2</sup> were a crime and then declaring the next day that they were ‘acts of war’ (Bush, 2001b). The boundaries between the literal and the metaphorical wars became even more blurred as the US launched Operation Enduring Freedom in October 2001 and Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003. Although many, who shall remain nameless to spare their blushes, were prepared to pontificate on the subject, what was lacking in this debate was empirical evidence as to whether there is any difference in the way metaphorical and literal wars are represented by the constructions *war on* and *war against*. The debate was an example *par excellence* of Hunston’s (2002: 20) observation that: ‘Intuition is a poor guide to at least four aspects of language: ‘collocation, frequency, prosody and phraseology.’ Providing the empirical evidence is one of the aims of this paper and it will be shown that the choice of words was very deliberate, but not as a harbinger of war. The second aim is to show how the *war on terror* is rendered by the German-speaking press and that the lexical choice is likewise ideologically determined.

The expression *war on terrorism* was first used with reference to an attack on Sir John Anderson, the governor of Bengal, in 1934 (1) and was introduced to the White House by Ronald Reagan in 1986 after Libyan terrorists attacked a Berlin nightclub frequented by US Servicemen (2).

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<sup>2</sup> ‘11 September 2001’ is used for the date and ‘September 11<sup>th</sup>’ is used as a metonym for the events of that day.

- 1 Mr. W.W.K. Page, president of the European Association, says that the recent bomb outrage at Sibpur police station and the attack on the Governor make clear that only continuous and ruthless war on terrorism can achieve its extermination. (*The Times*, 1934).
- 2 To that end, the United States believes that the understandings reached by the seven industrial democracies at the Tokyo summit last May made a good start toward international accord in the war on terrorism. (Reagan, 1986)

On 11 September 2001, President George W. Bush reassured the nation that ‘we stand together to win the war against terrorism.’ (Bush, 2001a). A week later he referred to a ‘war *on* terrorism’ (Bush, 2001f) and two days later, the expression changed from a ‘war *on terrorism*’ to a ‘war *on terror*’ (Bush, 2001g). And despite him using these expressions (as well as *war against terror*) almost interchangeably, *war on terror* became the official appellation.<sup>3</sup>

## 2. Methodology

	US		UK		German	
Database	Major US Newspapers		UK National Newspapers		Bespoke list	
Time period	Before 11.9.01		11.9.99 to 10.9.01		11.9.99 to 10.9.01	
Corpus	USWA	USWO	UKWA	UKWO	KGG	KFG
Search term	war against	war on	war against	war on	Krieg gegen	Kampf gegen
Running words (m)	51.5	36.5	4.2	5.3	2.8	3.5
Tokens (search term)	57,403	43,802	5,005	7,624	5,786	7,367

**Table 1:** Corpora information

Six corpora were compiled from *LexisNexis News and Business*, as detailed in Table 1. The quantitative analysis was carried out using *Wordsmith 4.0* and involves a keyword analysis between the two corpora for each country and then a collocate collection process to determine the node verbs (e.g. *wage*, *declare*) and the node targets (e.g. *drugs*, *drug traffickers*, *Japan*). Table 2 shows an excerpt from the *war on* collocates, from which the node targets *drugs* and *Japan* can be identified but a further search for *war on drug* is required to find the full node target.

N	Word	Total	R1
1	DRUGS	12,612	12,008
15	DRUG	815	212
19	JAPAN	227	170

**Table 2:** Collocates for *war on* (US corpora)

The next stage comprises classification of the node targets according to three different criteria. First, whether they represent real war (e.g. *Germany*) or a

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, <http://www.pentagon.mil/>

metaphorical war (e.g. *political correctness*). Secondly, the degree of agency, whereby the target *drug traffickers* has explicit agency, *drugs* has implicit agency and *cancer* has none. The third classification is by the ideology that determines the use of a *war* expression, which is reflected in speaker attitudes towards the node target. For the US analysis, node targets relating to terrorism are considered separately.

On the face of it, the task of classification seems relatively straightforward, but the reality is somewhat different. For example, *the government* poses a problem since it is used both metaphorically, for railing against government policies, and literally, against military governments. Elsewhere, evidence of speaker attitudes is essential for the classification of node targets, such as *abortion* where it can be viewed as a societal problem or a right. Corpora ‘are invaluable for doing what they do, and what they do not do must be done another way.’ (Hunston, 2002: 20). Accordingly, in order to classify the node targets accurately, some qualitative input is required.

### 3. US Findings

#### 3.1 Keyword Analysis

Examples of the results of the US keyword analysis (following Scott and Tribble, 2006: 55-59) are shown in Table 3, from which it can be seen that the positive keywords (i.e. those pertaining to *war on*) are more likely to occur in news reports about metaphorical warfare, such as *education* and *crime*, whereas the negative keywords (i.e. those pertaining to *war against*) would ordinarily be found in the reporting of conflict situations. This suggests a preference for using *war on* for metaphorical warfare and *war against* for armed combat.

Positive Keywords – <i>war on</i>	Negative Keywords – <i>war against</i>
Kids, Children, Parents.	Peace, Human, Aid.
Federal, Enforcement, Police, Criminal.	Israel, Kosovo, Bosnia, US, Middle East, Russia, Washington.
Education, University.	Military, Forces, Army, Troops, Defense, Air, Fighting, Soldiers.
Poverty, Poor, Abuse.	United Nations, NATO,
Health, Medical, Cancer.	
Drugs, Marijuana, Cocaine.	

**Table 3:** Examples of keyword findings (US corpora)

#### 3.2 Collocates

From Table 4, it can be seen that when *war on* is used, ninety-two percent of the node target tokens relate to metaphorical war, and when talking about real war, ninety percent of the tokens co-occur with *war against*. Although twenty-two percent cannot be accounted for in this way (most notably, the metaphorical uses of *war against*), the findings clearly indicate how *war on* is ordinarily used.

	War on (f)	War against (f)	Total (f)
Metaphorical	22,519	12, 115	34,634
Real War	2,065	18,542	20,607
Total	24,584	30,657	55,241

**Table 4:** Types of node target (US corpora)

Classification of the top fifty metaphorical node targets by agency is shown in Table 5. Although both *war on* and *war against* show the same proportion of agentless targets, there is a tendency to use *war against* when the agent is explicit (e.g. *Christians, drug traffickers*) and *war on* when it is implicit (e.g. *organized crime, prostitution*). This suggests that the *war on* campaign is usually directed at a number of agents and fought on different fronts. For example, in the *war on prostitution*, the war extends beyond prostitutes to their pimps and clients.

Tokens	Agent Implicit		Agent Explicit		No Agent		Total	
	(f)	(%)	(f)	(%)	(f)	(%)	(f)	(%)
War on	14,989	74	617	3	4,640	23	20,426	100
War against	5,296	64	1,093	13	1,876	23	8,265	100
Total	20,285		1,710		6,516		28,511	

**Table 5:** Node targets classified by agency (US corpora)

Metaphorical war is declared on node targets which are seen to be damaging to society, such as *drugs* and *crime*. An initial glance at the collocates for *war on crime* indicates that the war is being won, since the lemma *win* occurs 130 times and the lemma *lose* only twenty-seven. However, the concordance lines and the clusters paint a somewhat different picture, as can be seen in Table 6, which shows that when *win* is used in conjunction with the *war on crime*, it is rarely used with the conviction of victory. This is substantiated by the clusters which show, for example, twenty-one occurrences of *we have not won* and by collocates such as *costly, blows* and *cautioned*. A qualitative analysis of a sample of texts supports this and shows an attendant air of resignation. Therefore, when declaring war on a society problem, the idea of winning is somewhat elusive.

<p>credit for winning the city's war on crime, has no formal links  are serious about winning the war on crime." Kelly last month  DO WE THINK WE'RE WINNING "THE WAR ON CRIME" WHEN 600,000  Fight for a serious, winnable war on crime and drugs." AGE: 52.  . don't believe we can win the war on crime," he added. "They  wary. "We have not won the war on crime," cautioned Attorney  to turn to. "We are winning the war on crime because we're there  EDITION EDITORIAL; Winning the war on crime SECTION: EDITORIAL;  Page Only united can we win war on crime Chicago Sun-Times  it needs to keep winning the war on crime. Those needs are  that Atlanta was winning its war on crime. Harvard contends  won the war on drugs, nor the war on crime. We will never win</p>
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**Table 6:** Examples of *war on crime* with the verb lemma *win* (US corpora)

In contrast to the way in which *war on* is used with an air of resignation, there is evidence to indicate that it is also used optimistically. A good example of this is *breast cancer*. Examination of the concordance lines shows that both USWA and USWO extend the war metaphor with lexical items such as *new arsenal*, *sword*, *courageous combatant* and *casualties*. USWO is relatively optimistic as demonstrated by the collocates *optimism*, *winning*, *can be won* and *survivor*, whereas USWA is more neutral. From this it can be concluded that the decision to declare war on breast cancer is predicated on a positive belief that the new weapons (new drugs, wider screening *etc.*) will contribute to victory.

The third pattern is that the node target is highly desirable and a third party has unjustly waged war on it, but these do not occur as frequently as the “problem” node targets. For example, both corpora show *values*, *traditional values* and *traditional American values*. Other modifiers, although not frequent enough to make the collocate lists are *enlightened*, *conservative* and *moral* and the discourse prosodies (as defined by Stubbs, 2002: 65) show that frequently the speaker is demanding an end to these wars.

Finally, there are controversial node targets such as *smoking* and *abortion* where the speaker sees them either as a society problem or something that people have the right to as in (3). There is no discernible difference between the choice of *war on* and *war against*, and both corpora show *right* as a collocate of such node targets.

- (3) It is unreasonable that society continues to wage war on tobacco ...  
the war on abortion is becoming a war on the rights of poor women  
... has been waging war on abortion rights since ... the latest sign  
that the war against smoking has gotten out of hand ...

There are a number of node verbs, including *back*, *conduct*, *wage*, *declare*, *win* and *lose*, which are collocates in both corpora, but within this there are certain preferences. Eighty percent of *declare* tokens co-occur with *war on*, which accounts for fifty-six percent of the *war on* node verbs, whereas seventy percent of *wage* tokens co-occur with *war against*, accounting for fifty-two percent of the *war against* node verbs

### 3.3 Terror

Terror and terrorism are difficult to define because any definition is necessarily judgemental and in the absence of universal definitions, trying to distinguish between the two is not easy. Therefore it is useful to examine the corpora to identify any differences in usage. Prior to 11 September 2001, the combined corpora show 5,430 tokens of *terror* and 11,964 of *terrorism* and the collocates, with which they have a mutual information statistic (as defined by Scott and Tribble, 2006: 37) of more than three and high frequency (more than fifty for *terror* and 100 for *terrorism*), are shown in Table 7.

	<b>Terrorism</b>		<b>Terror</b>	
Acts	Domestic	Israel	Reign	Israel
Threat	Sponsor	Trial	With	Islamic
Expert/s	Urban	Law	Attacks	During
Combat	End	Islamic	International	bin Laden
Charges	Global	bin Laden	Trial	Target
Violence				

**Table 7:** Collocates with high MIS and frequency (US corpora)

Table 8 lists the main semantic preferences (as defined by Stubbs, 2002: 65), based on the collocates of the items in Table 7 that only appear on one list. It can be seen that they are broadly similar with the exception of *terrorism* having a domestic preference and *terror* having a totalitarian preference, connoted by the allusion to Stalin. Interestingly, one would expect to find a semantic trace of state sponsorship with *terror* and yet this is not the case with *state* and *sponsor* being collocates of *terrorism*. This gives rise to the view that they are almost used interchangeably, regardless of any difference in meaning, as is seen, for example, in the concordance lines in Table 9, which all relate to the training camps established by bin Laden in Afghanistan.

<b>Semantic preference</b>	<b>Examples of <i>terror</i> collocates</b>	<b>Examples of <i>terrorism</i> collocates</b>
Counter-terrorism	confront, preventing.	deter, counter, breakthrough, combat, blow, assurance, fight.
Crime	criminals, defendants.	writ, charges, conspiracy, defendants, racketeering, law.
International	international, Israel, Peru.	Yasser, foreigners, Palestinian, France's, global, Iran, Middle East, Israeli, state, sponsor.
Terrorists and actions	began, target, wage, attacks, Koresh, Hamas.	Active, acts, bombing, activity, aggression, commit, bloodiest, convicted, fanaticism, cowardly, followers, deadly, violence, destructive, torture, connections, planned, threat, poses.
Domestic		domestic, urban, Americans.
Totalitarianism	reign, Stalin's.	

**Table 8:** Semantic preferences for *terror* and *terrorism* (US corpora)

The lemma *terror* appears more frequently in USWA both as a node target (Table 10) and in general (Table 11). In other words, generally terrorist activities are perceived as being closer to real war than metaphorical war, but the argument is weakened by the number of tokens in USWO.

and bin Laden's terror training camps. (ZS-5) TYPE:  
operates as many as 11 terror training camps. "We do know that  
ere is no evidence of terror training camps in his country  
humanitarian aid into terror-training camps and pulled out.  
and, in 1996, set up terror training camps in that country  
officials say are terrorist training camps about 90 miles  
missile attack on terrorist training camps was a scenario out  
of six suspected terrorist training camps in a remote region  
rsian Gulf and the terrorist training camps of Afghanistan.  
tacks on suspected terrorist training camps in Afghanistan.  
ssile attacks on a terrorist training camp in Afghanistan and  
iming to be from a terrorist training camp in Afghanistan that  
e than 200 people; terrorist training camps in Afghanistan and  
with an account of terrorist training camps in Afghanistan  
keep track of terrorist training camps in Afghanistan and  
of life in the terrorist training camps in Afghanistan  
attacks against terrorist training camps in Afghanistan  
' It linked him to terrorist training camps in Afghanistan and  
as being linked to terrorist training camps in Afghanistan. No  
11 in Teheran or a terrorist training camp in Afghanistan

**Table 9:** Excerpt from concord *training camp*\*(US corpora)

Lexical item	USWA	USWO	Total
Terrorism	579	245	824
Terror	103	79	182
Total	682	324	1006

**Table 10:** *Terror* node targets (US corpora)

Lexical item	USWA	USWO	Total
Terror	3,816	1,614	5,430
Terrorist	8,019	2,443	10,462
Terrorists	5,252	1,748	7,000
Terrorism	8,802	3,162	11,964
Terroristic	44	13	57
Terrorist's	28	25	53
Terrorism's	28	12	40
Total	25,989	9,017	35,006

**Table 11:** The lemma *terror* (US corpora)

#### 4. UK Findings

The UK findings broadly support those of the US corpora, indicating that the White House *war on terror* will be understood in the same way in the UK, namely as a metaphorical war. This is shown by examples from the keyword analysis (Table 12), and the node targets (Table 13). There are no real differences between the choice of construction when the node targets are classified by ideology and *war on* is usually *declared*, whilst *war against* is most frequently *waged*.

<b>Positive Keywords - war on</b>	<b>Negative Keywords – war against</b>
Byers, Ken, Parker, Frank.	Kosovo, Iraq, Israel, Serbia, Belgrade.
Drivers, Transport, Traffic.	IRA, Guerrillas, Fighter, Rebels.
Supermarket, Boots, Asda, Trading, Standards.	Peace, Civilians.
Mortgage, Rates, Fraud.	NATO, UN.

**Table 12:** Examples of keyword findings (UK corpora)

	<b>War on</b>	<b>War against</b>	<b>Total</b>
Metaphorical	1,376	764	2,140
Real	152	1,199	1,351
Terrorism	19	27	46
Total	1,547	1,990	3,537

**Table 13:** Node targets (UK corpora)

There are, however, some interesting differences between usage in the US and UK. *Drugs* is the most frequently occurring node target in both of the UK corpora and although *drugs* features strongly in USWA, it is in second place to *Iraq*. Many of the UK node targets are not problems that seriously affect society, but rather are issues that offend the speaker, who demands a war on *cliché*, *bad writing*, *frumpiness*, *etc.* There is a higher frequency of node targets where the speaker is calling for war (*benefit cheats*, *fraudsters*, *the Euro*) rather than commenting on wars instigated by the authorities. The UK corpora contain “indignation” node targets, which either do not exist in the US corpora or are too infrequent to show up in the analysis. These are where the targets are victims of the war and the most notable is *the motorist*. There is also a tendency amongst the UK press to use war constructions whimsically.



## 5. German Findings

The second part of the investigation is to examine how the *war on terror* is rendered by the German-speaking press and in order to put this into context it is necessary to examine how the possible renderings *Kampf gegen* for *war on* and *Krieg gegen* for *war against* are used before 11 September 2001. As with the US and UK, the keyword analysis (Table 14) shows a clear distinction between *Kampf* and *Krieg*, with the former being used for metaphorical and the latter for real warfare.

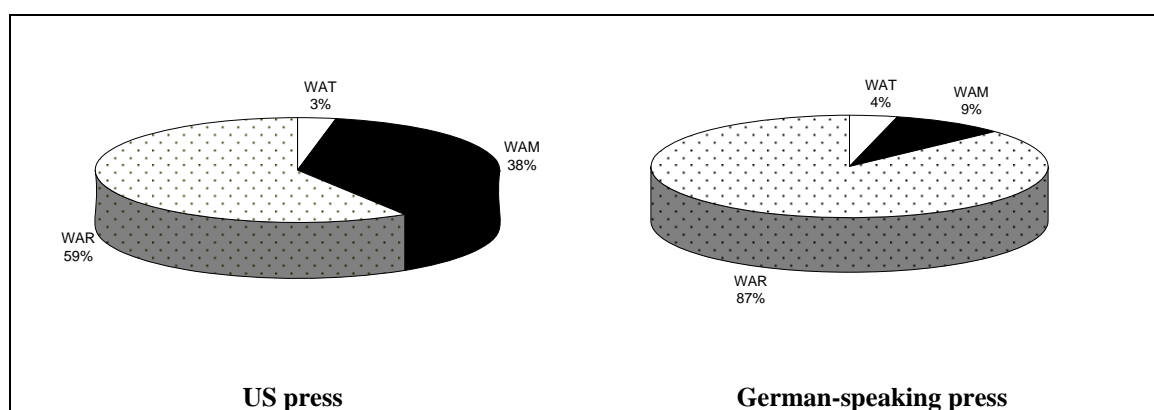
Positive Keywords – <i>Kampf gegen</i>	Negative Keywords – <i>Krieg gegen</i>
AIDS, Krankheit, BSE, Rinderseuche.	Jugoslawien, Tschetschenien, Irak, Kosovo.
EU, OECD.	Soldaten, Blutigen, Konflikt, Panzer.
Arbeit, Arbeitslosigkeit, Globalisierung.	NATO, Politik.
Fremdenfeindlichkeit, Rassismus, Apartheid.	Frieden, Volk, Bevölkerung.
Rechtsextremismus.	Putin, Hitler, Milosevic, Clinton, Hussein,
Organisierte, Korruption.	
Illegal, Geldwäsche, Kriminalität.	

**Table 14:** Examples of keyword findings (German corpora)

Table 15 demonstrates that *Kampf* is ordinarily used for metaphorical war, and again this is not dissimilar to the findings for the US and UK. However, there is a significant difference between the English-speaking and German-speaking press with regard to the use of *war against/Krieg*. Whereas the former uses *war against* for metaphorical war (twenty-one percent of total tokens for the US and twenty-two percent for the UK), only five percent of the *Krieg gegen* tokens are metaphorical and most of these are *drugs* (Figure 1).

	<i>Kampf gegen</i>	<i>Krieg gegen</i>	Total
Metaphorical	1,867	293	2,160
Real	174	2,786	2,960
Terrorism	144	123	267
Total	2,185	3,202	5,387

**Table 15:** Node targets (German corpora)



KEY: WAT = War against terror/ism, WAM = War against as metaphor, WAR = War against real war

**Figure 1:** Node targets for *war against* for US and Germany.

A further difference between the US and German press can be seen in the type of metaphorical node target. In terms of agency, fifty-five percent of the *Kampf* and only one percent of the metaphorical *Krieg* node targets are agentless, which compares with the US findings of twenty-three percent for both *on* and *against* and the agent is implicit in the remaining node targets, with no evidence in the corpus of explicit agency. Furthermore, although there are metaphorical targets in the corpus that represent something desirable (e.g. *rights*) or controversial (e.g. *abortion*) these are so infrequent, that they do not occur on the collocate lists, even when the ‘minimum frequency’ is reduced to three.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the way in which the German language uses the *Kampf* and *Krieg* constructions is much more specific than in English.

## 5.1 The War on Terror

The German renderings for *war on terror* are shown in Table 16, from which it can be seen that *Kampf gegen den Terrorismus* is the preferred rendering. The *Kampf gegen* items account for seventy-eight percent of the tokens which follow the *war* + PREP construction. Comparing this with usage prior to 11 September 2001 tells us that the German-speaking press views the war on terror as a metaphorical war targeted against something that is undesirable for society.

German Rendering	(f)
Anti-Terror-Krieg	425
Anti-Terror-Kampf	1,044
Kampf gegen Terror	1,399
Kampf gegen den Terror	3,335
Kampf gegen den Terrorismus	3,918
Kampf gegen Terrorismus	455
Krieg gegen Terror	166
Krieg gegen den Terror	1,411
Krieg gegen Terrorismus	77
Krieg gegen den Terrorismus	891
TOTAL	13,121

**Table 16:** German renderings for *war on terror*

It is suggested, however, that there is another reason, outside the war on terror, accounting for this clear preference and that is a desire to avoid the word *Krieg*, which has particularly negative connotations in German, resulting in a reluctance to use it for metaphorical war. In 1945, the word took on a new meaning entailing total destruction (Gauger, 1987: 130). This fatalistic connotation and its associations of the Third Reich therefore indicate that whilst the press still uses *Krieg* to describe conventional warfare, there is a reluctance to use it in a metaphorical sense. ‘Vor allem in Deutschland bilden die NS-Ära und der Zweite Weltkrieg einen riesigen dunklen Fleck in der nationalen Erinnerung, mit dem sich [...] nicht Positives verbinden lässt. (Frey, 2005: 25). Moreover, not only does the word connote the

Nazi regime, but it also serves to remind that Germany and the US were opponents in WWII. By avoiding *Krieg*, the solidarity with the US (declared by both Schröder and Schüssel and generally supported by the press) is strengthened

This view that *Krieg* is the preserve of real and quasi-warfare is substantiated by analysis of a sample of texts containing *Krieg gegen* tokens, which shows that where the expression is used, the publication sees features of real war in the war on terror. First, Schröder described the attacks of 11 September 2001 as a declaration of war, which did not go unobserved by commentators (see, for example, Geier & Schuppener, 2002: 16ff). Secondly, associations of WWII are evoked through the analogy between the attacks on America and those on Pearl Harbor (see, for example, Brickner, 2001 and Unterberger, 2001). Thirdly, the *Krieg/Kampf* issue blurs after 20 September 2001, when Bush explicitly links the perpetrators of the attacks with fascism, Nazism and totalitarianism (4). Although this is not an analogy widely invoked by the German-speaking press, there are enough examples to account for the use of *Krieg gegen*. For example, Kremp (2001) likens the *coalition of the willing* to the ‘Bündnis [...] gegen Hitler und den japanischen Imperialismus’, whilst Rau (2001) compares Bush’s crusade with the WWII ‘Crusade in Europe’.

- (4) We have seen their kind before. They are the heirs of all the murderous ideologies of the 20th century. By sacrificing human life to serve their radical visions -- by abandoning every value except the will to power -- they follow in the path of fascism, and Nazism, and totalitarianism. And they will follow that path all the way, to where it ends: in history’s unmarked grave of discarded lies. (Bush, 2001g).

Although the node target *Terror* is preferred for both constructions, this preference is more marked for *Krieg* than for *Kampf*. In German, *Terror* has associations of totalitarianism (Waldmann, 2005:17, Frey 2005:12), whereas *Terrorismus* corresponds to the sort of attacks that are carried out *against* a state (Waldmann, 2005: 17). The expression *Kampf gegen (den) Terrorismus* therefore indicates a response to September 11<sup>th</sup>, whilst the *Kampf gegen (den) Terror* indicates a much wider campaign, in line with White House usage.

## 6. Discussion

The corpus findings show that node targets with the lemma *terror* typically occur with *war against*, that in the discourse of domestic incidents, *terrorism* is preferred over *terror* and the choice *against* heralds a military action but allows for a metaphorical reading. This indicates that the obvious lexical choice for the White House was *war against terrorism*. And indeed this is the very expression that Bush uses to refer to the US response (Bush, 2001a) and one that occurs frequently in his public discourse thereafter (see Table 17). Why then did the White House declare a war on *terror*, particularly as Bush himself preferred *terrorism* (Figure 2)? And why did it choose the overt metaphorical construction *war on* when the more ambiguous *war against* would have done?

important contributions in the war against terrorism across the course of this conduct of this war against terrorism, I'll be peaceful people. Resolve The war against terrorism is a No government should use our war against terrorism as an with you that this is a war against terrorism, not Islam? about how they can help in the war against terrorism. We take that on September 11th, our war against terrorism began. And we are engaged in a two-front war against terrorism. Our new found? THE PRESIDENT: Ours is a war against terrorism in general. not alone in this struggle. The war against terrorism is an The military phase of the War Against Terrorism began

Table 17: Examples of *war against terrorism* in Bush's speeches.

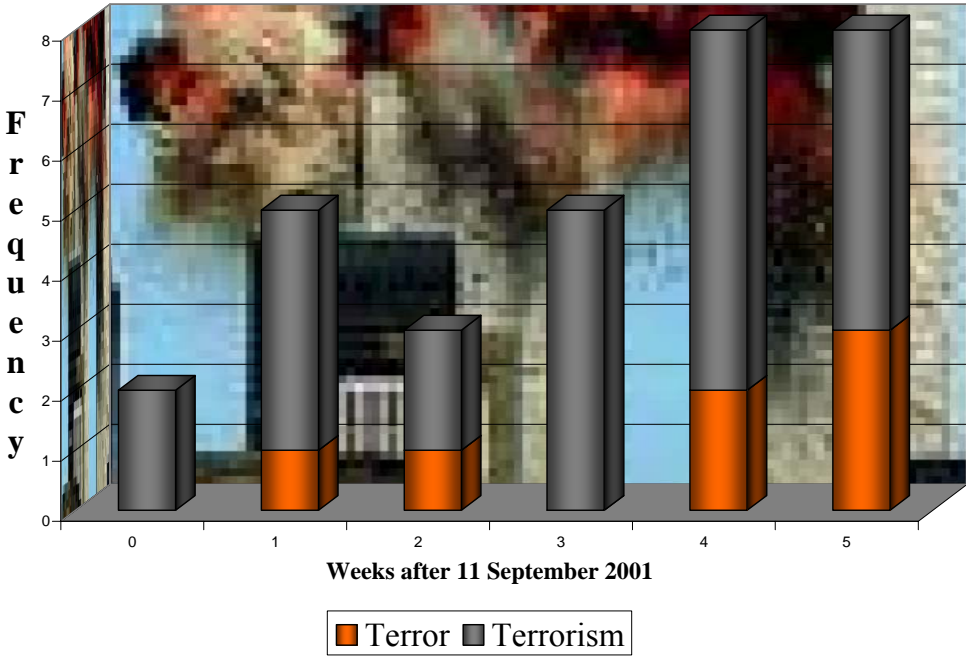


Figure 2: Use of *terror* and *terrorism* in Bush's speeches.

‘Who knows, these days, what terror is?’ (Harpham, 2002: 573). *Terror* is often discussed in relation to *fear*, but as Altheide, (2006: 415-439) shows, *terrorism* now plays a key role in the discourse of fear. Therefore, the lexical choice of the White House had to be determined by something other than scare-mongering. Within the context of September 11<sup>th</sup>, terror creates ‘an emotion that the person in the audience is supposed to feel. And that is not a good thing.’ (Lakoff, in Schreiber, 2001). According to Eubanks and Schaeffer, (2004: 59), *terror* as a metonym ‘treats a complex chain of events as immediate and automatic’ and this chain includes the threat of terrorism. This interpretation is corroborated by the corpus analysis, which demonstrates that many of the *war on* node targets are likewise metonymic. It is therefore suggested, that the answer to the first question is that the node target *terror* creates a larger metaphorical theatre for the White House to fight its metaphorical war.

The ingenuous answer to the second question is that the White House chose *war on* because it quite simply refers to something that is not a real war. First of all, *terror* is not a tangible enemy and in the words of Lapham, (2002): ‘We might as well be sending the 101st Airborne Division to conquer lust, annihilate greed, capture the sin of pride.’ Moreover, the referent is ‘a hunt for a specific terrorist group’, rather than a war (Brown, 2002: 263). The metaphorical aspect is further underlined by the inability to qualify victory. Victory in the conventional sense cannot be achieved, which leads to the assumption that it will be a war without victory, and therefore a ‘war without end’ (Light, 2002: 278). This was implied by Donald Rumsfeld’s attempt at defining victory, which can be interpreted as “‘persuading the American people” that real victory will never happen, and that the war itself may continue indefinitely.’ (Rampton and Stauber, 2003: 130). This then likens *terror* to other undesirable node targets with the fatalistic overtone of infinite struggle.

Previous terrorist attacks elsewhere, such as those of the IRA in London, ETA in Spain and the RAF in Germany, were treated as crimes (Frey, 2005: 92), which begs the question as to why the attacks on America should be considered as war. Although this is a valid observation, it must be remembered that there was no shortage of war rhetoric in the discourse surrounding the activities of the RAF (see Musolff, 1991 for details).

A number of commentators (for example, Edwards, 2004: 166 and Bellamy, 2005: 277) call attention to the treatment of the “prisoners of war” in Guantanamo Bay. Since this contravenes international convention, the *war on terror* cannot be recognised as a genuine war. Conversely, however, this cannot be an argument for suggesting that it is a metaphorical war, since the treatment of perpetrators in the metaphorical drug and crime wars, is governed by certain rules.

## 6.1 Hindsight is Twenty-Twenty

There is a body of scholarship showing how September 11<sup>th</sup> and the subsequent war rhetoric facilitated the introduction of policies, which ordinarily might have faltered (for examples, see Aretxaga, 2002: 148, de Beaugrande, 2004: 122-139 and Ahmad, 2003: 21-23 *inter alia*). Although the war on terror is often mentioned as part of this rhetoric, its metaphorical qualities are generally not emphasised, the exception being Glover, (2002: 213) who argues that the *war on* provides the President with an excuse to ‘wreak havoc across the planet.’

With the benefit of hindsight, almost six years after the event, we can substantiate Glover’s foresight with a number of examples that demonstrate the reasons determining the lexical choice of *war on terror*. It is now clear that the White House did not need to use *war against* to covertly communicate a military response, since this message reverberates loud and clear from Bush’s discourse, as in (6) to (11), or in the President’s own words ‘There is no doubt in anybody’s mind with whom I’ve had a conversation about the intent of the United States’ (Bush, 2001d).

- (5) Our military is powerful, and it’s prepared. (Bush, 2001a)
- (6) They were acts of war. [...] This battle will take time and resolve. But make no mistake about it: we will win. (Bush, 2001b)
- (7) Those who make war against the United States have chosen their own destruction. Victory against terrorism will not take place in a single battle, but in a series of decisive actions against terrorist organizations

and those who harbor and support them. We are planning a broad and sustained campaign to secure our country and eradicate the evil of terrorism. [...]. I will not settle for a token act. Our response must be sweeping, sustained and effective. (Bush, 2001c)

- (8) It is time for us to win the first war of the 21st century decisively, [...]The American people are used to a conflict where there was a beachhead or a desert to cross or known military targets. That may occur. But right now we're facing people who hit and run. They hide in caves. We'll get them out. (Bush, 2001d).
- (9) And I'm proud to report our military, led by the Secretary of Defense, understands that; understands it's a new type of war, it's going to take a long time to win this war. [...]I think that this is a long-term battle, war. There will be battles. But this is long-term. (Bush, 2001e).
- (10) This war will not be like the war against Iraq a decade ago, with a decisive liberation of territory and a swift conclusion. It will not look like the air war above Kosovo two years ago, where no ground troops were used and not a single American was lost in combat. (Bush, 2001g)

Thus a *war against terrorism* would have primarily flagged up the widely anticipated offensive in Afghanistan and played a secondary role of signposting some sort of ongoing strategy (the metaphorical war) against those responsible for September 11<sup>th</sup>. Whichever reading is chosen, however, the parameters are too narrow to fulfil the aims of the administration. The *terror* target expands the war arena beyond "those responsible" and the agent becomes less obvious. Similarly, the choice of *war against* is too narrow whereas a range of military and non-military initiatives can prolong the *war on* indefinitely.

Let us now consider some of the things that have been done in the name of the war on terror, which perhaps would not have been so easily done in the name of the war against terrorism.

The Patriot Act, which, amongst other measures, allows unprecedented phone tapping, access to financial information and to medical records without the need for a court order, was passed with remarkable speed in October 2001. And if its content is disconcerting, then its deconstructed discourse as shown by de Beaugrande, (2004: 122ff ) is even more so. In 2002, the Department of Homeland Security was established to respond to national disasters such as terrorist attacks. The department now has responsibility for immigration and, following the Secure Fence Act of 2006, has access to greater resources enabling stricter controls. Particularly controversial has been 'racial profiling' and as Herbst, (2003: 14) points out, the crime "Flying while Arab" has become the new "Driving while black". 'And, you know, we've now got a reason to do what it takes to not only provide security at home, to do what it takes to win the war on terrorism' (Bush, 2001i), suggesting that these were policies-in-waiting rather than a direct reaction to September 11<sup>th</sup>.

Likewise, it is alleged that plans for the invasion of Iraq were in place before September 11<sup>th</sup> (Henshall and Morgan, 2005: xi). Although a *war against* would have allowed for this, the *war on* permitted its justification to change from retaliation for "those who harbor" terrorists to pre-emptive action against the launch of weapons of mass destruction to the desire for regime change, but regime change in its relexicalised form, not the regime change that entails promoting change from within.

The *war on* has endorsed the treatment of detainees, which has changed markedly since Edwards' (2004: 166) remarks that they were not being treated as prisoners of war. And we are no longer talking about those in Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib, but all those transported under the extraordinary rendition programme

and held in “black sites” overseas, where they are subject to “enhanced interrogation techniques” and “sensitive collection activities”, such as “torture lite” and “waterboarding”. These practices were ratified in October 2006 with the passing of the Military Commissions Act, which allows the CIA ‘to continue its program for questioning key terrorist leaders’ (Bush, 2006).

These and other measures have been introduced under the metaphorical war on terror, which now extends far beyond a response to the attacks on the twin towers. What is even more disquieting is how the war will progress, particularly given the aspirations of the members of the *Project for the New American Century* and their desire for *pax Americana* as detailed in *Rebuilding America’s Defenses* (RAD).

## 7. Conclusion

It was seen above that in American English, although there is a preference for *war on* for metaphorical war and *war against* for real war the expressions are used almost interchangeably. Analysis of the UK press shows a similar pattern and additionally highlights how metaphorical wars are launched at and by individuals and corporations, as well as official bodies. The German-speaking press shows a clearer distinction between the corresponding lexical items and whilst the *Kampf gegen den Terrorismus* is not a faithful lexemic rendering, pragmatically, it represents the idea of a metaphorical war. However, It is suggested that the lexical choice is primarily governed by dissociation with the past, which resonates awkwardly through both *war* and *terror*.

Since the White House response to September 11<sup>th</sup> was a military retaliation, it would have been appropriate to have christened it the *war against terrorism*, rather than the *war on terror*. The military intention is quite clear in Bush’s discourse, but the *war on* metaphor is not part of this narrative.

It is, therefore, the contention of this paper that the words *war on terror* were chosen very deliberately to enable the administration to introduce policies which sound far more palatable when implemented in the name of a metaphor rather than in the name of preserving ‘American Military Preeminance’ (RAD, undated: 50).

In the light of the above analysis, it is somewhat unfortunate that Bush chose to use the metaphor with a desirable node target in the same sentence as another war metaphor: ‘All we ask is that you use the same amount of effort the United States will to win this war against freedom, to win this battle against global terrorism.’ (Bush, 2001h). Perhaps he is just being honest.

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