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The President and the viper: Political satire and conceptual blending theory

Applying conceptual blending theory, the paper analyses the construction of the meaning of a satirical text ridiculing the language employed by politicians to frame the debate on current political and social issues. In particular, it focuses on the language used by Donald Trump in explaining his anti-immigration stances through a poem based on the fable about the farmer and the viper, and a satirical text providing a new version of the poem, which criticizes Trump's immigration policy. The paper examines the creation of the humorous meaning of the text in conceptual blending. The humorous meaning is created in the blended space due to the unusual combination of related structures, which results in incongruity (Coulson 2002; Marín-Arrese 2003). Furthermore, as blending can be used as a rhetorical tool influencing the audience to change the reality and even act upon it (Coulson 2006; Coulson & Oakley 2006; Coulson & Pascual 2006; Oakley & Coulson 2008), the analysis of the construction of the meaning of the satirical text as a product of conceptual blending can reveal rhetorical and argumentative goals in political discourse.

Key words: conceptual blending theory; political humor and satire; political discourse; rhetorical goals; incongruity.

1. Introduction

In January 2016, while campaigning in the primaries, Donald Trump, the 45th president of the United States of America, decided to read to a cheering crowd at a rally a poem about a personified snake which kills a woman after she saves it from the cold. Trump has used this poem ever since to draw attention to the dangers of immigration. As a part of his routine in his speeches, Trump would first list the possible threats of taking care of refugees and immigrants, and then he would take out a



piece of paper and read the poem in which the snake asks the woman to be saved and then it repays her charity with a fatal bite. Trump also used the poem in a speech at the Conservative Political Action Conference in February 2018 and it produced a series of comments, positive and negative alike, in the media, among them a satirical text written by Maureen Dowd of the New York Times.

In highly developed democracies, the criticism of democratic processes through political humor and satire in public discourse, ranging from jokes and political cartoons to late-night comedy shows, has proven to be very powerful. Political humor and satire very often focus on the language used by those in power to frame issues of common political concern. This paper attempts to uncover the extent to which political humor and satire can criticize current political affairs and the state of society in general.

Within the framework of conceptual blending theory, the paper analyses the above mentioned texts. It focuses on Donald Trump's attempt to frame the debate on immigration through the poem based on the fable about the farmer and the viper, on the one hand, and on the other, Maureen Dowd's satirical text entitled *This Snake Can't Shed His Skin*, which provides a textual reinterpretation of the poem. The aim of the paper is twofold: to examine the creation of the humorous meaning of the satirical text in conceptual blending as a result of incongruity produced in the blended space and the role of the novel inferences and conceptualizations produced in the blended space in achieving rhetorical goals.¹

The paper is organized as follows. In the first part, the paper provides a brief overview of conceptual blending theory and the rhetorical potential of conceptual blending. The second part presents the analysis of the two texts mentioned above, that is, it discusses the creation of (humorous) meaning in conceptual blending, and

¹ The present paper does not discuss the distinction between satire and humor in detail, nor does it attempt to define the two terms, considering that these issues lie beyond the scope of this study. It is, nevertheless, important to mention that in contemporary humor studies, following Ruch (1998), humor is used as an umbrella term for the laughter-related forms such as (political) satire, parody, irony, jokes, standup comedy, and others (Simpson 2003; Martin 2008; Popa 2011; 2013; Tsakona & Popa 2011). The present study uses the term "humor" in the same sense. Furthermore, what all of these phenomena have in common is incongruity, which gives rise to humorous meaning (cf. Tsakona & Popa 2011; Popa 2013), which is of greater importance for the present study than the differences between the above mentioned phenomena. The text analyzed belongs to political satire, which is a special type of political humor (Popa 2013; Young 2014; 2016). Regardless of the academic vantage points, generally speaking, political satire disparages politicians and highlights inconsistencies in their policies and decisions, incompetence, and corruption (Baym 2005; Popa 2013; Young 2016). Thus, the paper discusses the creation of the humorous meaning of this satirical text.



the role of conceptual blends in achieving rhetorical goals. Finally, the paper presents the main conclusions drawn from the analysis.

2. Conceptual blending theory

Conceptual blending, or conceptual integration theory, is a theoretical framework of meaning construction, proposed by Fauconnier & Turner in 1993. Conceptual blending is an extension Fauconnier's (1985) mental space theory. The basic ideas behind conceptual blending theory have since been elaborated in the works of Fauconnier & Turner (2000; 2002; 2006 [1998]), Turner & Fauconnier (1995; 1999; 2003), Turner (2007; 2014), Coulson & Oakley (2000), Grady et al. (1999). Conceptual blending is a basic cognitive operation, "a common, everyday process indispensable to the most routine workings of the modern human mind" (Turner 2014: 18).

In conceptual blending meaning is created by establishing and maintaining relations between mental spaces in a conceptual integration network. Mental spaces, as defined by Fauconnier (2007: 351), are "very partial assemblies constructed as we think and talk for purposes of local understanding and action". Mental spaces contain elements which represent discourse entities, and relations between them are represented by frames. A conceptual integration network is composed of at least two input spaces, a generic space, and a blended space, although a single network can be composed of multiple input and blended spaces. Input spaces are connected by counterpart connections established in the process of partial matching. The connections are based on different kinds of relations such as identity, analogy, metonymy, transformation, metaphoric connections, and vital relations mappings. Structure from the inputs is projected to the blend, a new mental space. However, not all elements from the inputs get projected to the blend, which means that projections from the input spaces to the blend are partial. The generic space captures the shared elements of both inputs and these elements from the generic space are in turn mapped onto the counterpart elements in the input spaces. It should be noted that the generic space has been disputed (Brandt & Brandt 2005; Oakley 2011; Oakley & Pascual 2017) with claims that it is "a superfluous artifact of analysis" (Oakley 2011: 6) and no agreement on the need for a generic space has been reached yet. The emergent structure created in the blended space is not copied from either input. Rather, the new structure in the blend is generated in three ways, namely through the processes of composition, completion, and elaboration, which operate unconsciously. Composition refers to the projection of elements from the input spaces into the blended space and the creation of relations that do not exist in the inputs.



Completion is bringing additional structure to the blend to fill out a pattern created in the blend by the projections from the inputs. In the completion process, the background knowledge and structure are brought into the blend unconsciously. Elaboration is a mental simulation of the event in the blend, which can be performed indefinitely. It enables the blend to run in many different directions.

It is important to note that blending is an online, dynamic process. Mental spaces in an integration network can be modified at any point of the construction of the network. In addition, input spaces can be modified by backward projections (Fauconnier & Turner 2002) or retrospective projections (Coulson 2001) from the blended space. Integration networks are built by setting up mental space, establishing cross-space mappings, finding shared structures, projecting from the blend to the inputs, recruiting additional structure to the inputs or the blend, and running other operations in the blend. The results of these dynamic processes, which are unfolding during discourse production, are novel conceptualizations, inferences, conceptual structure, and logic arising in the emergent structure in the blended space.

Fauconnier & Turner (2002: 15) claim that blending can be detected “in language, art, action, planning, reason, choice, judgment, decision, humor, mathematics, science, magic and ritual, and the simplest events in everyday life”. Conceptual blending theory has developed into a research program currently used in disciplines ranging from linguistics and cognitive psychology to art, music, and politics. Within cognitive linguistics, conceptual blending has been used in studies of a wide variety of linguistic phenomena, from studies of meaning construction to the studies of grammatical patterns. Considering the ubiquity of blending, it is not surprising that conceptual blending theory has found its application in the study of humor (Coulson 1996; 2002; 2003; 2005; Kyratzis 2003; Lundmark 2003; Marín-Arrese 2003; Bergen 2004; Fujii 2008; Delibegović Džanić & Berberović 2010; Dynel 2011; 2018; Dore 2015; Libura 2017). Coulson (2002) claims that “[t]hough not all blends are humorous, blending does seem to be an inherent feature of humor”.

In conceptual blending, humor is created in the blended space by the unusual combination of elements resulting in incongruity. The cognitive clash produced in the blend by a combination of inconsistent and contrasting but related structures from different inputs encourages the reader to retrieve the inputs, look for the cross-space mappings connecting the inputs and identify the incongruity from which the humor arises. In order to resolve the incongruity, the reader has to unpack the blend, that is, to reconstruct the whole integration network. As Marín-



Arrese (2003) claims, the resolution of incongruity is done by backward projections from the blend to the input(s).

In addition, Coulson (2002) finds that the emergent structure in the blend can promote the construals in the input spaces, which provide humorous discourse with a serious rhetorical agenda. Coulson (1996; 2002; 2003; 2005; 2006) discusses jokes and political cartoons providing evidence that humorous blends, with bizarre concepts arising in the blended space, can highlight certain aspects of reality. Similarly, the studies discussing the rhetorical force of blending emphasize the importance of the emergent structure in yielding new conceptualizations that cast new light on real-world domains. Coulson and associates (Coulson 2006; Coulson & Oakley 2006; Coulson & Pascual 2006; Oakley & Coulson 2008) and Semino (2010) discuss blending and its rhetorical potential in argumentative and persuasive discourse. These blends, although containing absurd scenarios, are not constructed to be entertaining, creative, and humorous.² Rather, such blends are created to convince readers to change the current state of affairs or to persuade them to change their convictions. As with humorous blends, the rhetorical persuasiveness of such blends lies in the incongruity produced in the blend and the new conceptualization of the input(s).

Thus, the inferences, emotional responses, and rhetorical force created in the blend seem to be more important than the structure of the blend itself. As Oakley (2011: 6) explains, “the blended space is rarely the principal rhetorical focus of the network, as it is far more often the case (as with satire) that it exists to help us think about the topic of one of the input spaces”. Thus, blends are produced with specific argumentative goals, however, the principal focus of the speaker is not to draw attention to the structure created in the blended space but to the inferences and conceptualizations it produces (Coulson & Pascual 2006). Reasoning differently about the inputs or promoting construals in input spaces is achieved by backward projections from the blended space to the input spaces. Thus, backward projections from the blend to one or both inputs highlight certain aspects of the input(s) in light of the inferences created in the emergent structure. In a nutshell, blends have a rhetorical power and can help the readers gain new perspectives on reality, sometimes

² Dynel (2011) claims that the linguists examining blending in humor do not discuss the difference between humorous and non-humorous blends, which cannot be solely based on incongruity. Thus, the question that remains unanswered is what makes incongruous concepts humorously incongruous. However, although Dynel (2011: 67–69) proposes several reasons why some blends are humorous and others are not, in this paper these issues are of no concern as the paper, although it discusses the creation of humorous meaning in conceptual blending, is more interested in the rhetorical power of blends with incongruity.



provoke their emotional reaction, and possibly even make them act to change the reality.

3. This snake can't shed his skin

In the speech delivered at the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) on 23 February 2018, Donald Trump particularly focused on immigration, emphasizing his anti-immigration stances. Throughout his speech, Trump depicted immigrants as bad people, killers, terrorists, and threats to the safety of the nation. In the middle of the speech he decided to recite a poem called *The Snake* introducing it as a rock 'n' roll song and repeatedly warning the crowd to think of *The Snake* in terms of immigration.

In the poem, a tender-hearted woman finds a snake on her way to work. The woman wraps the snake in silk, admires its beauty, and gives it milk and honey. When the woman returns from work, she pets the snake and admires its beauty but the snake, due to its true nature, inflicts a fatal bite on the woman. In the conversation between the snake and the woman, the woman asks for the reasons for such betrayal and the snake tells her that she should have known better considering the true nature of snakes.

- (1) *So this is called — this is called the snake.
And think of it in terms of immigration and you may love it or you may say
isn't that terrible? Okay. If you say isn't that terrible, who cares. Because
the way they treat me, that's peanuts compared to the way they treat me.
Okay. Immigration.*

The Snake

*On her way to work one morning
Down the path alongside the lake
A tender-hearted woman saw a poor half-frozen snake
His pretty colored skin had been all frosted with the dew
"Oh well," she cried, "I'll take you in and I'll take care of you"
"Take me in oh tender woman
Take me in, for heaven's sake
Take me in oh tender woman," sighed the snake
She wrapped him up all cozy in a curvature of silk
And then laid him by the fireside with some honey and some milk
Now she hurried home from work that night as soon as she arrived
She found that pretty snake she'd taken in had been revived
"Take me in, oh tender woman*



Take me in, for heaven's sake
Take me in oh tender woman," sighed the snake
Now she clutched him to her bosom, "You're so beautiful," she cried
"But if I hadn't brought you in by now you might have died"
Now she stroked his pretty skin and then she kissed and held him tight
But instead of saying thanks, that snake gave her a vicious bite
"Take me in, oh tender woman
Take me in, for heaven's sake
Take me in oh tender woman," sighed the snake
"I saved you," cried that woman
"And you've bit me even, why?
You know your bite is poisonous and now I'm going to die"
"Oh shut up, silly woman," said the reptile with a grin
"You knew damn well I was a snake before you took me in
"Take me in, oh tender woman
Take me in, for heaven's sake
Take me in oh tender woman," sighed the snake
And that's what we're doing with our country, folks. We're letting
people in. And it is going to be a lot of trouble. It is only getting worse.³

The meaning of Trump's anti-immigration poem is created in a conceptual integration network composed of two input spaces. Input space one contains the Trump administration immigration policies. Input space two contains *The Snake*, a poem based on the fable about the farmer and the snake. Although the poem itself does not contain anything that would trigger a connection with immigration, the readers are able to set up analogical cross-space mappings between the above mentioned input spaces because Trump explicitly tells the audience to have immigration in their minds and thus activates input space one.

The poem itself is a modified version of Aesop's fable entitled *The Farmer and the Viper* in which a farmer takes a snake to save it from freezing and places it in his bosom. The revived snake, led by its true nature, bites the naïve farmer inflicting on him a fatal wound. The moral of the fable is: *The greatest kindness will not bind the ungrateful*. The fable, in this or slightly modified forms, has been widespread in different cultures and religions, serving as a source for proverbial expressions such as *to nourish a snake (or viper) in one's bosom*, or as inspiration for its reinterpretation in literary works. Considering its prominence and its universal

³ Retrieved from: <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/DCPD-201800112/pdf/DCPD-201800112.pdf>. Accessed: 14 September 2018



moral, it is not surprising that it also served as an inspiration to Oscar Brown Jr., civil-rights activist, the writer of the poem recited by Trump, and Al Wilson, who subsequently recorded it as a rock song.

As far as the meaning of the original fable is concerned, it is created in a conceptual integration network composed of two input spaces. Input space one contains snakes, which usually live in the wilderness and behave instinctively. Snakes are stereotypically conceived of as dangerous animals, which can inflict fatal wounds on other animals and humans using their poison. Input space two includes humans, who usually act intentionally. The blend receives selective projections from both inputs. From input space one, projected to the blend are snakes as dangerous animals, while from input space two the blend receives projections that involve humans, their intentional and rational behavior, and their ability to communicate using language. As one of the common traits of fables is that its characters have anthropomorphic characteristics, the viper in the blend is humanized and kindly asks the farmer to take it to his home. However, in the blend, the humanized snake still acts instinctively and bites the farmer, who concludes that he should have expected that for pitying such an evil creature.

The fable blend is modified in the poem, which is in turn, as mentioned above, input space two for Trump's anti-immigration poem. Thus, the scenario in the fable blend is modified and enriched by adjusting the fable about the viper and the farmer to the contemporary urban life and translated into verses. Therefore, the poem, that is, input space two in Trump's anti-immigration poem, contains a scenario created in the fable blend, which is modified and enriched. In this input space, the farmer is replaced by a tender-hearted woman who finds a snake on her way to work. In the poem the woman is a contemporary working woman, and the snake is probably an urban snake. The woman wraps the snake in silk, admires its beauty, and gives it milk and honey. Notice that milk and honey is a reference to the religious *land flowing with milk and honey*, i.e. the land of plenty. When the woman returns from work, she pets the snake and admires its beauty but the snake, due to its true nature, inflicts a fatal bite on the woman. When the woman asks for the reasons for such betrayal, the snake tells her that she should have known better considering the nature of snakes. Throughout the poem, the snake begs the woman to save it, but in the end, instead of thanking her, it kills the woman.

Going back to Trump's immigration poem blend, there are projections from both input spaces. From input space one, the Trump immigration policy input, the blend receives projections that include the United States of America as a promised land, welcoming the tired, the poor, and the ones yearning for freedom. From input



space two, the poem input, which is in turn the modified fable blend, projected to the blend are the urban woman, her naivety, and the vicious snake acting on instinct. Analogical cross-space mappings connect the elements from input space one with the elements from input space two, that is, immigrants with the snake, the United States of America with the woman, and the behavior of immigrants to the instinctive behavior of the snake. In the emergent structure in the blend, the woman takes care of the snake, giving him home and milk and honey; but the snake, instead of thanking her, acts true to his nature and bites her fatally. The inferences produced in the blended space are projected back to input space one. These backward projections guide the reader to reason differently about immigration in the United States, that is, about the dangers of immigration and its possibly highly damaging consequences to the United States as a country.

As a response to Trump's use of *The Snake* to vividly represent his anti-immigration stances, Maureen Dowd, a well-known columnist of the New York Times, published the satirical text entitled *This Snake Can't Shed His Skin*, ridiculing Trump's rhetoric.⁴ Unlike Trump's poem with its immigration fear-mongering message, Dowd's satirical text manipulates and creatively stretches the same conceptual blend, criticizing Trump's immigration policies and his presidency in general. The title of the text also reiterates the true nature of snakes, that is, no matter how many times a snake sheds his skin, he is still a snake. However, as will become obvious, the snake that stays true to his vicious nature is Donald Trump himself.

Presented in this way, this satirical text, together with Trump's original statement, is an integral part of a network intertextually linking the texts dealing with the same issue.⁵ By creatively stretching the original statements but also providing

⁴ Retrieved from: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/24/opinion/sunday/donald-trump-snake-dowd.html>. Accessed: 12 March 2018

⁵ In this paper, the role that figurative language has in structuring or organizing discourse is referred to as intratextual and intertextual coherence. These terms, which originate in literary studies (Kristeva 1980: 66), have found its application in the cognitive linguistic studies in a sense defined by Chilton and Schäffner (2002: 29). Intertextual coherence refers to the coherence across texts, while intratextual coherence refers to the coherence within texts. Numerous cognitive linguistic studies dealing with figurative language, mostly metaphor, and sporadically blending, in real discourse (Musolff 2000; 2004; 2006; 2016; Cameron 2003; Charteris-Black 2004; Koller 2004; Deignan 2005; Semino 2008; 2010; Kövecses 2009; 2015; 2016; 2018; Dancygier 2012; Berberović 2013; Semino et al. 2013; Berberović & Mujagić 2017; Dorst 2017; Ritchie 2017a; 2017b,) find that one of the main functions of metaphor (and blends) is to provide discourse coherence, either at the intertextual or intratextual level.



a different perspective by employing a different but a compatible scenario, the author of the satirical text successfully maintains the intertextual links with the original statements. At the same time, the text provides a fresh perspective on the political and social reality.

Dowd structures the first paragraphs of her text by the poem, which is modified only slightly by choice of words, but being of crucial importance for the modification of the Snake blend. The modified parts of the original poem are marked in boldface in the text below.

- (2) a. *This Snake Can't Shed His Skin* by Maureen Dowd, *the New York Times*, 24 February 2018

*On her way to work one morning, down the path along the lake, a tenderhearted woman saw **a rich, coldhearted, frozen** snake.*

His tangerine skin was all caked with makeup and his bald spot was frosted with the dew.

“Poor thing,” she cried, “I’ll take you in, and I’ll take care of you.”

*“Take me in, oh tender woman. Take me in, for Heaven’s sake. Take me in, oh tender woman,” sighed **the vicious** snake.*

*She wrapped him up all cozy, **tucking in his absurdly long tie of silk, and laid him by her fireside with two Big Macs, two Filet-O-Fish, and a chocolate shake of milk.***

*She hurried home that night **from holding up a torch on Liberty Island, and soon as she arrived, she found that **the freaky snake, transfixed by his own image on TV, had been revived.*****

“Take me in, oh tender woman. Take me in, for Heaven’s sake. Take me in, oh tender woman,” pleaded the cunning snake.

*She clutched him to her bosom, which he really seemed to like. “**You think you’re pretty,**” she cried. “But if I hadn’t brought you in, by now surely you would have died.”*

She stroked his puffy Velveeta scales again, and kissed and held him tight. But instead of saying thank you, **that grabby snake wrapped around her you-know-what** and gave her a vicious bite.

*“Take me in, oh tender woman. Take me in for Heaven’s sake. Take me in, oh tender woman,” **sighed the sneaky snake as he changed to “Fox & Friends” for news that was fake.***

“I saved you,” cried the woman. “And you’ve bitten me. Heavens, why? You know your bite is poisonous, and now I’m going to die.”



“Oh, shut up, silly woman,” said the serpent with a grin. “You knew damn well I was a snake before you took me in.”

By citing the original poem, Dowd makes the reader invoke the scenario created in the Snake poem blend. However, by modifying the parts/verses of the poem, the author also prompts the reader to modify the blend by establishing new connections between the spaces and cancelling the previous ones. She also calls for establishing new projections to the blend from input space one, the Trump immigration policy input, and cancelling the ones in the original blend, that is, restructuring the integration network.

In the text, the *half-frozen snake with pretty colored skin frosted with the dew* becomes a *rich, coldhearted, frozen snake with tangerine skin all caked with makeup and his bald spot frosted with the dew*. These are the first cues for the reader to establish the analogical mapping between the snake and Donald Trump. This connection is further reiterated by the mention of a long silk tie Trump is known for, and his love for public appearances and his narcissistic nature, sex scandals, and fake news issues. Considering that the woman’s job is to hold the torch of liberty, the reader is also prompted to confirm that the connection between the United States of America from input space one and the woman from input space two is still valid in this modified blend. In addition, the blend is enriched by an additional projection from input space one because, in the blend, the United States assumes the metonymic shape and role of the Statue of Liberty, known as a symbol of the US welcoming immigrants coming by sea. Another modification is that the woman feeds the snake junk food from McDonald’s, instead of milk and honey. Thus, the author exploits a cultural model, and in the blend turns the promised land of milk and honey into a land of junk food with all its negative connotations. This is yet another reference to Donald Trump, known for his love of junk food. The blend contains a bizarre scenario in which the Statue of Liberty saves the snake, who exhibits the characteristic behavior of Donald Trump. This scenario in the blend contains incongruity, producing humorous effects and prompting the reader to solve it by reconstructing the network. In addition, the inferences produced in the blended space are projected back to input space one, which reconstructs this input in which Trump, not immigration as in the original blend, is perceived as a danger to America.

However, this is not the end of the story about the president and the viper. The author further extends the story by a humorous conversation between the tangerine-skinned snake and the dying Statue of Liberty, formulated in playful language, with occasional rhymes, raising serious issues about Trump’s presidency. Thus, the hu-



morous meaning of the rest of the text arises in the blended space modified by additional projections from input space one. The blend, modified, enriched, and developed throughout the text also has a text organizing force, that is, it provides intratextual coherence of the whole text. The blend contains the absurd scenario in which the Statue of Liberty, although slowly dying, has enough strength to mock the snake using witty comments about his presidency.

- (2) b. *He gave a snakey shrug and said: “I’ve had the greatest first year with the biggest crowds and the best people of any president. I’ve certainly put to shame that disastrous previous resident.”*

“Shame?” she repeated with exasperation to the titular head of the nation. “You have none, and for that you have my sympathy. Even with a horrific mass shooting, you need Hope Hicks to script your empathy.

“You say you want to end the human sacrifices and protect our kids at school. But arming overworked and undersupplied teachers is the act of a fool. You simply refuse to recognize the problem is the guns. Is that because you’re afraid of the monstrous N.R.A. and disarming your big game-hunting sons?”

With beady blue eyes, the snake watched his victim gasp for air. He ignored the note from Hope to “Pretend you care.”

“Oh, dying woman, you really don’t get it,” he said. “The N.R.A. poured millions behind me early — earlier than any other candidate in history — and I never will forget it.”

In this part of the text the snake provides his view on the first year of his presidency, mentioning his success and the crowds he attracts, while the Statue mocks him for not being a true leader but rather *the titular head of the nation* without appropriate reactions to serious events such as mass shootings. In addition, the dying woman criticizes Trump’s relationship with the NRA and his solution to the problem of mass shootings such as arming teachers to protect schools instead of introducing some sort of gun control.

Thus, as the story progresses, the blend is modified by additional projections from input space one, which include the first year of Trump’s presidency and the problem with mass shootings and gun control in the United States. The absurd scenario in the blend is further modified by additional projections from input space one, which include specific events from the political life of the US, creating a richer image in the blend and producing a more vivid representation of the Trump snake character. The analogical links between the inputs are further reiterated and maintained as the story progresses. Backward projections highlight a special rela-



tionship between the NRA and Trump, and his lack of compassion. His not being in touch with reality recasts him as a self-centered greedy person not worthy of the presidential title.

The interpretation and understanding of this satirical story fully depend on the general knowledge about the current political situation in the US, as well as specific details about certain important events, Trump's specific policies, as well as his response to these events. Therefore, throughout the story, the reader has to establish conceptual associations between the inputs and different aspects of Trump's presidency and his policies and statements have to be recalled.

In the next part of the text, the conversation between the dying Statue of Liberty and the snake continues with the woman criticizing Trump for being a different person from the one he promised he would be before the election, mentioning his sex scandals.

- (2) c. *The woman was aghast. "You promised you could be classy enough in the Oval Office to impress socialites from Palm Beach. But instead, you are surrounded by porn stars and Playboy bunnies — just a tacky leech."*

"Oh, shut up, gullible woman," said the reptile with a smile. "I can't believe I fooled you all with my huckster's guile."

As she felt his venom coursing through her body, she moaned in despair, "We kept praying there would be pivots, but instead there were only divots."

The blend receives additional projections from input space one in this part of the text as well. The projections include knowledge about the sex scandal Trump was involved in. In addition, the author also plays with phonological similarities between the words *pivot* and *divot* to create humorous effects. The woman points out that the United States expected a highly competent president i.e. a *pivot*, but in reality instead of the desired scenario all they got is a *divot*, i.e. a toupee worn to cover partial baldness or for theatrical purposes. This is a clear allusion to Trump's peculiar hairstyle. In the unrealistic scenario in the blend, the Trump snake, involved in sex scandals, managed to persuade the public he would be a competent president, but instead they got divots. Inferences produced in the blended space are projected to input space one once again highlighting that president Trump's behavior is unpresidential and that he managed to fool the American public into voting for him.



As the woman is dying, she continues listing Trump's failed promises, mockingly criticizing him for changing immigration policies because of the alt-right movement, and using the policies he changed to help his wife's family get citizenship.

- (2) d. *Her muscles clenching, her organs failing, the woman found herself wailing. "It is just like when you promised a 'bill of love' to save the Dreamers. But you let that collapse in Congress because of Stephen Miller and the other alt-right schemers."*

The woman winced at the metallic taste in her mouth and rasped: "You could have gotten your crazy wall but insisted on ending chain migration, even when you took advantage of it to bring in Melania's Slovenian parents. What an abomination!

"Speaking of family, you want your son-in-law to run the world, but he can't even get a security clearance. Unfortunately, to the law and his disclosure forms, Jared never gave adherence. Oh, what a dork. Given your interest in trade, you might want to export him back to New York and in him stick a fork."

The blend receives additional projections from input space one, which include the immigration policies of the Trump administration. In addition, the woman mentions the issue concerning Jared Kushner's security clearance, suggesting to Trump to export him back to New York as the only possibility due to the lack of trade agreements with other countries. Thus, the scenario in the blend is further developed and enriched by the projections of the issue with Kushner's security clearance, and the Trump administration strategy to get more favorable trade agreements by waging trade wars and damaging relationships with other countries. In the bizarre scenario in the blend, the snake's character is further developed. The Trump snake makes wrong diplomatic moves and is involved in nepotistic acts. Inferences projected from the blend to input space one highlight the many scandals that have left a mark on Trump's presidency.

With her last breaths the woman continues to criticize the snake mockingly for the ongoing scandal with Russian interference into the election process, as well as Trump's relationship with Vladimir Putin. On the woman's accusations, the snake hisses his famous words used in connection with the scandal, *There was no collusion*.

- (2) e. *The woman mocked the snake even as the toxins won, reminding him that his coldblooded dad would not tolerate a loser as a son. "The Mueller net is growing tight with more convictions within reach, and now it probably won't be long until you hear the word 'impeach.'*



“Papadopoulos, Flynn and now Gates have all flipped. How long can Manafort keep his lips zipped? Those Russian indictments show that Mueller is digging like mad, so the special counsel’s path could ultimately lead to Vlad. Sad!”

“Oh, daffy woman,” the snake hissed disdainfully. “You know that’s an illusion. As I like to say, THERE WAS NO COLLUSION.”

As in the previous parts, the scenario in the blend is further enriched by projections from input space one, which include the whole scandal with the election and the Russian interference with it, as well as the investigation of this scandal. Thus, in the absurd scenario in the blend, the conversation between the Statue of Liberty and the Trump snake continues with the mention of yet another scandal surrounding his presidency. The inferences projected from the blend to the Trump input highlight the investigation of Trump’s involvement in the scandal with Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election.

- (2) f. *Even as she gasped her last, the woman gave him a triumphant blast. “You really are an asp. Oh, vain and ignorant snake, you may extinguish me. But never my torch. Oh, Liberty.”*

In the last paragraph of the text, the woman finally succumbs to the wounds, but not before she says her final words to the snake warning him that liberty cannot be extinguished and exclaiming *Oh, Liberty*. The blend is once again modified, but this time it receives projections from another input space, that is, the *Reign of Terror in the French Revolution* input. Between 5 September 1793 and 27 July 1794, the Revolutionary government in France decided to take harsh measures against those suspected of being enemies of the Revolution. Thousands of people were executed during this period, including Madame Roland, who uttered “Oh, Liberty, what crimes are committed in thy name!” moments before her execution bowing before the clay statue of Liberty. This input space projects the concept of terror, that is, harsh measures against enemies, economic and religious issues to the blend, as well as Madame Roland’s famous last words. This input space is linked by analogical mappings with input space one, connecting Trump’s policies attempted to protect America and the Revolutionaries protecting the Revolution by destroying their enemies. In the blend, the Statue of Liberty accuses the Trump snake of committing crimes under the guise of protecting liberty in the United States. Inferences produced in the blend are projected back to input space one, highlighting the harmful actions undertaken by the president, which destroy, rather than protect, core American values. It has to be noted that it is possible that the reference to the French Revolution will not be understood by the readers considering the fact that



this historical event is not tied to American history and culture. Therefore, it is questionable whether this blend and its inferences are successful in achieving their primary goal, that is, criticizing Donald Trump. However, this blend highlights the importance of shared background knowledge and cultural models for understanding scenarios created in the blend.

The absurd scenario in the blend gradually develops in different parts of the text. As the story progresses, the blend is gradually enriched by projections of conceptual material from input space one, while the existing projections and cross-space mappings are maintained. In addition, the blend is also enriched by exploiting a cultural model. Thus, as the texts analyzed show, conceptual blends can provide discourse coherence at the intratextual level.

Overall, Dowd's story is the satirical representation of current political affairs in the US related to Donald Trump's presidency. The humorous meaning is created in the blend due to the unusual combination of related structures, which results in incongruity. The absurd world created in the blended space, in which the snake kills the Statue of Liberty by inflicting on her a poisonous bite and in which the Trump snake and the dying Statue discuss current political affairs in the US, produces humorous effects. The incongruity created in the blended space is the key element for the creation of the humorous meaning of this story. As the analysis shows, the blend is gradually developed, enriched, and modified by receiving projections from input space one, creating a conceptually rich and absurd scenario in the blend. The incongruity in the blend prompts the reader to unpack the blend by looking for the inputs. The resolution of the incongruity is realized by backward projections from the blend into inputs.

As already mentioned, unpacking the blend and resolving incongruity successfully promotes certain construals in input spaces. Thus, unpacking the blend and projecting back to input space one give the reader a different perspective on immigration issues, as well as Trump's entire presidency. This satirical story singles out Trump as the main American problem, not the immigration, as in the original Snake blend. It also provides criticism of Trump's entire presidency, which is burdened by scandals and controversies. Thus, this satirical text, that is, the creative figurative language produced in conceptual blending, is used as a means of achieving rhetorical goals.



4. Conclusion

Applying conceptual blending theory, the paper discusses the creation of (humorous) meaning of two different texts in conceptual blending. The paper also discusses the role of conceptual blends in achieving rhetorical goals.

The (humorous) meaning of the texts discussed is created in conceptual blending as a basic cognitive operation. In order to be rhetorically effective, Donald Trump uses the poem based on the fable about the farmer and the viper to present his anti-immigration stances. In her text, Maureen Dowd criticizes the language employed by Donald Trump and his anti-immigration policy by satirically representing the conversation between the Trump snake and the Statue of Liberty. The humorous meaning is created in the blended space due to the unusual combination of related structures, which results in incongruity. The resolution of incongruity, and thus the understanding of humorous meaning, is done by recognizing the incongruity based on which the blend is unpacked into its input spaces.

It is important to emphasize that the understanding of the meaning of both texts depends on the reader's knowledge about the political situation, or more precisely, the immigration policy of the Trump administration, as well as arguments against such policy. The background knowledge is even more important for the interpretation and understanding of the satirical story because it fully depends on familiarity with specific events of Trump's presidency, his responses to certain controversies, and his political stances.

Apart from explaining the creation of (humorous) meaning, conceptual blending theory can reveal why blends have rhetorical power. Backward projections from the blend into inputs highlight certain aspects of the input spaces and thus cast a new light onto these scenarios now viewed in accordance with the new scenario created in the blend. Thus, *The Snake* highlights the dangers of accepting immigrants because they can easily become a danger to the American way of life. In contrast, Trump's immigration policies are viewed in light of the comic effect created in the blend in Dowd's satirical story. The absurd scenario created in the blend of the satirical text actually has a very serious message and effectively criticizes not only Trump's immigration stances, but his entire presidency. Unlike in the original poem, in the satirical text, the real danger to freedom and democracy is Trump himself. Therefore, as the analysis shows, humorous conceptual blends can produce rhetorically powerful language with a very serious political message.

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PREDSJEDNIK I ZMIJA:**POLITIČKA SATIRA I TEORIJA KONCEPTUALNE INTEGRACIJE**

Primjenjujući teoriju konceptualne integracije, u ovom se radu analizira nastajanje značenja satiričkog teksta koji ismijava jezik kojim se koriste političari kako bi uobličili rasprave o trenutačnim političkim i društvenim problemima. Rad se bavi jezikom kojim se koristi Donald Trump kako bi predstavio svoje antiimigracijske stavove pjesmom temeljenom na basni o farmeru i zmiji i satiričnim tekstom koji daje novu verziju pjesme, te kritizira Trumppovu politiku vezanu za imigraciju. Rad istražuje nastajanje humorističnog značenja ovog teksta u konceptualnoj integraciji. Ovo značenje nastaje u integriranom prostoru zbog neobične kombinacije povezanih struktura što rezultira nastajanjem nekongruentnosti u integriranom prostoru (Coulson 2002; Marín-Arrese 2003). Nadalje, kako se *blending* može koristiti kao retoričko sredstvo koje može utjecati na javnost da promijeni stvarnost, čak i da djeluje (Coulson 2006; Coulson i Oakley 2006; Coulson i Pascual 2006; Oakley i Coulson 2008), analiza nastajanja značenja ovog satiričnog teksta kao proizvoda konceptualne integracije može otkriti retoričke ciljeve u političkom diskursu.

Ključne riječi: teorija konceptualne integracije; politički humor i satira; politički diskurs; retorički ciljevi; nekongruentnost.