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Magic tricks with race cards: Conceptual integration theory and political discourse

The paper examines the use of creative figurative language in American political discourse. In particular, the paper focuses on the use of the expression *to play the race card* and the creative figurative language motivated by the use of this expression in the contemporary American political discourse. The aim of this paper is to show that conventional metaphors can be creatively stretched through conceptual blending, producing instances of creative figurative language which contributes to achieving different discourse goals and discourse coherence. Specifically, applying conceptual integration theory, the paper analyzes innovative conceptual blends, motivated by the conventional CARD GAME metaphor, which are used to achieve different discourse goals. In addition, such creative metaphorical blends also provide discourse coherence at the intertextual level.

Key words: conceptual metaphor; conceptual blending; political discourse; discourse goals; intertextual coherence.

1. Introduction

Last several decades have seen an explosion of studies examining figurative language in different types of discourse within the frameworks of conceptual metaphor theory and blending theory. Some of the studies applying these two theories aim to uncover how metaphor and conceptual integration, as basic cognitive mechanisms, are used in order to promote certain viewpoints and express rhetorical goals in discourse. Some of the linguists who have shown the rhetorical potential of

metaphor in discourse are Lakoff (1992, 2003), Semino and Masci (1996), Semino (2008), and Musolff (2000, 2004). In addition, in a series of papers Coulson and associates study persuasive force of blending (cf. Coulson and Oakley 2006; Coulson 2006; Oakley and Coulson 2008). Furthermore, investigating metaphor in discourse, many cognitive linguists (Charteris-Black 2004; Eubanks 2000; Koller 2003, 2004a; Kövecses 2009c, 2010; Musolff 2000, 2004; Semino 2008) have uncovered that an important function of metaphor is providing intratextual and intertextual coherence. Nevertheless, surprisingly, in an enormous body of valuable literature on figurative language in discourse, only several studies address the issue of figurative creativity and the rhetorical potential it may have, as well as the ways in which figurative creativity can contribute to discourse coherence (cf. Semino 2002, 2008; Koller 2004a, 2004b; Musolff 2000, 2004; Kövecses 2005, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c, 2010). The phenomenon of figurative creativity is defined by Kövecses (2005) as creativity arising through the cognitive mechanisms of metonymy, metaphor, and blending.

This paper examines the use of creative figurative language in American political discourse. In particular, the paper focuses on the use of the expression *to play the race card* and the creative figurative language motivated by the use of this expression in the contemporary American political discourse. The aim of this paper is to show that conventional metaphors can be creatively stretched through conceptual blending, producing instances of creative figurative language which contributes to achieving different discourse goals and discourse coherence. Specifically, applying conceptual integration theory, the paper analyzes innovative conceptual blends, motivated by the conventional CARD GAME metaphor, which are used to achieve different discourse goals. In addition, such creative metaphorical blends also provide discourse coherence at the intertextual level.

2. Conceptual integration theory and cognitive metaphor theory

Cognitive metaphor theory (henceforth CMT) and conceptual integration theory, or blending theory (henceforth BT), are cognitive linguistic theories that have acquired prominent status within the cognitive linguistic framework over the course of the past several decades. Their primary goal is to uncover meaning construction and thus account for complexities of the human mind. CMT, first discussed at length in Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) *Metaphors We Live By*, has been successfully used in the study of language for the past several decades, producing evidence that metaphor and metonymy are cognitive mechanisms of the utmost importance

in the human conceptualization of the world. In 1993, Fauconnier and Turner built BT on the foundations of Fauconnier's mental space theory. This theory has been successfully used to account for a wide range of phenomena of human thought and action, from counterfactuals to metaphors, proving blending to be present in the simplest kinds of human thinking.

CMT and BT share some common features; both are basic cognitive operations, which are pervasive in human thought and action, involve mappings, and are guided by certain constraints. However, differences, which can be regarded as their defining properties, between the two theories exist. The basic and most obvious difference between CMT and BT is that the former operates over two conceptual domains, while the latter deals with four mental spaces.

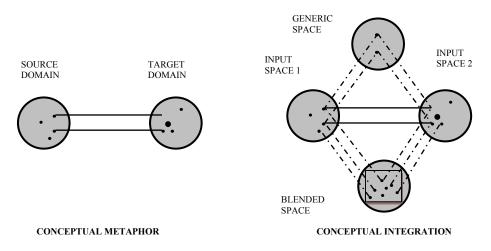**CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR**   **CONCEPTUAL INTEGRATION**

Figure 1. Comparison between conceptual metaphor and conceptual integration.

Furthermore, compared to domains employed in CMT, defined as "any coherent organization of experience" (Kövecses 2002: 4), mental spaces are smaller conceptual packets, which are usually more specific and comprise knowledge from many different domains. Fauconnier and Turner (2002: 40) define mental spaces as "small conceptual packets constructed as we think and talk, for purposes of local understanding and action". Direction of mappings is another difference between these two theories. Mappings in CMT proceed from a concrete source domain onto an abstract target domain. In BT, mappings are established between mental spaces, generic space, and blended space. In metaphorical blends, conceptual material is projected from both input spaces into the blended space. In addition, the re-conceptualization of the target input space by projections of inferences from the

blended space is possible in BT.

The proponents of BT point out that the theory was designed to account for a wider range of phenomena of human thought and action than CMT, such as counterfactuals, analogy, concept combination, including metaphor and metonymy (Coulson and Oakley 2000; Turner and Fauconnier 2003). In numerous papers, the proponents of BT claim that, apart from metaphoric projections from source to target domains, complex integration processes construct blended spaces, which have often gone unnoticed in the two-domain model (cf. Fauconnier and Turner 2008; Turner and Fauconnier 1995, 2003; Coulson 1996). "The many-space model explains a range of phenomena invisible or untreatable under the two-domain model and reveals previously unrecognized aspects of even the most familiar basic metaphors" (Turner and Fauconnier 1995: 184). To support this claim, Turner and Fauconnier offer a wealth of examples of metaphorical blends in which inferences in the blended space cannot be explained by simple source to target mappings. Therefore, they propose BT as an alternative and comprehensive approach, which can account for the complex cognitive processes taking place in the construction of meaning, prompting cognitive linguists to "rethink metaphor", as the title of one of Fauconnier and Turner's (2008) papers states.

However, metaphor does play an important role in conceptual integration. As pointed out, metaphor as a cognitive mechanism is presupposed in BT. As Grady et al. (1999: 111) argue, conventional metaphors serve as triggers for launching the blends by providing counterpart mappings between input spaces (cf. Grady et al. 1999; Turner and Fauconnier 2003; Fauconnier and Turner [1998] 2006, [1998] 2001).

> If conceptual metaphor theory is primarily concerned with well-established metaphoric associations between concepts, and blending theory focuses on the ability to combine elements from familiar conceptualizations into new and meaningful ones, then conceptual metaphors are among the stable structures available for exploitation by the blending process. (Grady et al. 1999: 110)

From this view, "conventional metaphors feed the blending process by establishing links between elements in distinct domains and spaces" (Grady et al. 1999: 110). They further point out that metaphorical associations of this sort are part of human conceptual repertoires. BT can benefit from the findings of CMT, as counterpart mappings between concepts have been the focus of CMT investigations for a long time.

Fauconnier and Turner ([1998] 2001) point out that blending is always available once a conventional metaphor is activated. Therefore, as previously mentioned,

conventional metaphors are available for the elaboration in the blending process. However, it must be kept in mind that conceptual integration does not have to be based on metaphors, but it can involve other types of relations. Nevertheless, conventional metaphors do have a significant role in conceptual integration. As Fauconnier and Turner ([1998] 2006: 360) summarize it,

> … a counterpart mapping is needed to launch on-line blending, and that counterpart structure is often supplied by activating a conventional metaphor, and the counterpart structure may have been created by the basic metaphor projection rather than merely picked out as a template for the projection.

Considering the above-mentioned claims, CMT and BT are closely related and can interact with each other in various ways. Combining the findings of these two theories can explain complex cognitive processes involved in the construction of meaning, especially figurative creativity in discourse.

3. Playing card games in political discourse

The standard vocabulary in American politics includes expressions such as *ace in the hole, a fast shuffle, dealing from the bottom of the deck, up his sleeve, call a bluff* and many other expressions derived from the domain of card games (Safire 2008: 102). One such expression is *to play the race card*, which has extensively been used in American political discourse recently. The meaning of the expression *to play the race card* can be defined as exaggerating a racial issue and injecting it into a debate or discussion that is nonracial. The case study presented in this paper concentrates on the use of this expression and the creative figurative language motivated by this expression during the 2008 presidential election.

As Langlotz (2006: 149) points out, card game idiomatic expressions are motivated by the PURPOSEFUL ACTIVITIES ARE CARD GAMES metaphor. Therefore, the phrase *to play the race card* can be viewed as a metaphorical linguistic expression of the RACE CARD metaphor. In this conceptual metaphor, politicians correspond to card players; political issues to cards, racial issues to the trump card, and political debates, or political action in general, correspond to a card game. In this paper, the expression as well as figurative creativity produced by the use of this expression is viewed as a product of the interaction of conceptual metaphor and conceptual blending.

During the 2008 presidential campaign, *the race card* was the main topic in American political discourse on two different occasions. Both times, the politicians

involved in the campaign used the actual expression, *to play the race card*, which initiated the discussion of racial issues in figurative terms. The first time it was used by Bill Clinton, who, defending his stances, accused the Obama camp of playing the race card.

(1) a. *"No, I think that they **played the race card** on me," said Clinton, "and we now know from memos from the campaign and very thing that they planned to do it all along."*

Later on, McCain campaign manager accused Obama of playing the race card.

b. *"**Barack Obama has played the race card, and he played it from the bottom of the deck**. It's divisive, negative, shameful and wrong," proclaimed McCain campaign manager Rick Davis.*

These statements and events initiated the discussion on racial issues in figurative terms. Such course of events during the campaign indicates that a particular metaphor can become very prominent within a discourse community, allowing further creative exploitation, reinterpretation, and modification. Alluding to the RACE CARD metaphor or using this metaphor as motivation for imaginative conceptual blends, different texts on the same topic, namely racial issues, are intertextually connected, providing discourse coherence. The prominence of the RACE CARD metaphor formed a micro-tradition of discussing racial issues within American political discourse community in terms of card games.

Therefore, once it became prominent within American political discourse community, the RACE CARD metaphor was creatively developed into more or less creative conceptual blends by members of the discourse community, providing intertextual coherence of discourse on racial issues.

(2) a. *From the start of his career, Obama wanted, and needed, **to remove the race card from the political deck**. While it isn't clear from **whose sleeve the card was pulled**, it is likely it wasn't from the person with the most to lose.* [huffingtonpost.com, January 17, 2008]

b. *This time, **the race card is also the wild card**, and some worry **it could trump everything**.* [Daily News, October 20, 2008]

c. ***The race card is on the table**, and it doesn't matter **who dealt it** first. All that matters now is **who plays it best**.* [The Globe and Mail, August 1, 2008]

d. *Hillary **Pulls** **Race Card** and Obama **May Fold*** [Margaret Carlson, huffingtonpost.com, January 17, 2008]

These examples of figurative creativity can be treated as conceptual blends, motivated by the RACE CARD metaphor. They are asymmetric, inheriting the organizing frame from the source input, the card game input. Apart from the most powerful cards and players, other various portions of conceptual material are activated and projected to the blend. The source concept initiates the construction of a richer image in the blend. Different aspects of card games, ranging from the value of the actual cards to different types of cheating in card games, are projected from the source domain to the blend, producing more or less creative conceptual blends.

This sort of creativity is possible because the input space of card games is very general and contains the complete encyclopedic knowledge of card games. In addition, the existence of the overarching CARD GAME metaphor also implies the existence of conceptual associations between card games and politics residing in human minds, which feed the conceptual integration processes and contribute to further creative exploitation of the metaphor. As Fauconnier claims (1997: 182), "entrenched mappings provide strong background support for on-line innovations." However, because of the exploitation of conventional aspects of the source input these blends can be perceived as less striking examples of creativity.

In addition, some innovative conceptual blends exploit the rich background knowledge of the source input by activating the aspects of the source that are not conventionally used metaphorically, creating novel and even more elaborate blends. In that sense, in the blend in (3), Barack Obama is not an ordinary card player but a croupier, a trained and skilled card dealer, in the political card game. Therefore, additional conceptual material is projected from the source input into the blend.

(3) *And when you **play the race card** against, quote unquote, Republicans and John McCain, before John McCain - indeed John McCain contorting himself to not go anywhere near that. And **you still drop the card on him**, well, I think your new nickname should be **the croupier**. This is getting a little tedious to me. This is one-third whiney. This is one-third creepy, and this is one-third boring. Until **the race card is played**. And I'm sure Axelrod or somebody said, "It looks like **they're not going to play it. You better play it for them**."* [Fox News, June 25, 2008]
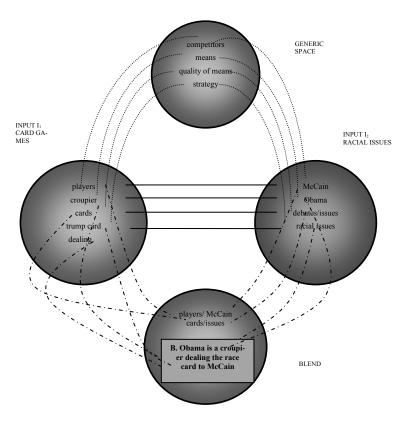
Figure 2. Conceptual integration network for *B. Obama is a croupier.*

In this conceptual integration network, input space one, the card game input, apart from the trump card and card players, contains other concepts related to card games such as a croupier, a trained and skilled card dealer, and the action of dealing the cards. Input space two, the target space, contains the 2008 presidential election with the Democratic presidential nominee Barack Obama and his opponent the Republican presidential nominee John McCain. In addition, the target input contains Barack Obama's comments on the McCain campaign tactics. Cross-space mappings connect players to McCain and his team, the trump card to racial issues, and the croupier to Barack Obama. Projected to the blend from input space one are the trump card, players, croupier, as well as the concept of dealing cards. From input space two, projected to the blend are Barack Obama, his statements, John McCain, and racial issues. In the blend, Barack Obama deals the race card to John McCain unexpectedly and with great ease, characteristic of skilled and trained participants in the card game, such as a croupier. Retrospective projections to the target input highlight certain aspects of the political issues in light of the new struc-

ture created in the blend. Therefore, backward projections from the blended space, in which Barack Obama is a croupier, reinforce the importance of racial issues in the campaign and highlight Obama's involvement in the manipulation of racial issues and their presence in the campaign.

The concept of croupier is not as salient as concepts of dealing and other concepts made use of in the previous examples. This concept is a rather marginal facet of the card game domain and it does not belong to conventional associations between the domains, which are part of the human conceptual repertoires. Therefore, the blend exploits the aspects of the source domain that are not conventionally used metaphorically, producing a more radical example of figurative creativity. Recruiting marginal aspects of the card game domain, which are not part of conventional associations between the domains, produces more striking examples of figurative creativity, both linguistically and conceptually.

In addition, the rich conceptual knowledge about the source concept and the richness, conventionality, and flexibility of the overarching CARD GAME metaphor, shared by the members of the discourse community, are modified online in dynamic discourse situations. The product of complex cognitive operations in conceptual blending is creative figurative language which can be used to achieve different discourse goals and promote a certain rhetorical agenda. In that sense, during the 2008 presidential election members of American discourse community, creatively stretching the RACE CARD metaphor through blending, produced creative figurative language in order to agree or disagree with the politicians' statements, to provide their insights into racial issues, to promote a certain rhetorical agenda, to criticize the prominence and question the validity of the RACE CARD metaphor, to ridicule its use and prominence by means of political humor and political cartoons.

In (3) figurative creativity through blending was used to accuse Obama of playing the race card. In (4), it is used to accuse John McCain of doing the same thing.

(4) *Given that mathematical fact, it would be supreme stupidity for Sen. Obama to **"play the race card"**. Whatever else his opponents may throw at him, none of them accuses him of being stupid. **"The race card"** is something that is only **played** by someone who can hope to use it **to produce a winning hand**. **In this game**, it is obvious that that **player is John McCain. The cards he holds otherwise don't include so much as a pair of deuces**, so his campaign has decided **to use a joker as a wild card for a black jack**.* [huffingtonpost.com, August 1, 2008]

Therefore, in examples (3) and (4), creative conceptual blends, extending the RACE

CARD metaphor used in the politicians' statements, are used to argue a certain point of view.

Using highly creative figurative language, the participants in the political debate on racial issues provide their insights into this complex issue by discussing the impact that raising racial issues could have on the election.

(5) a. *Let us hear no more about **the "race card"** - **it will be played** – but let us hope and expect that it will turn out **to be a joker, a losing card.** And, that **the hand that comes face up** on November 4th will **be won or lost on the cards that really count**.* [ABC News, July 31, 2008]

b. *But **how will the race card play in the high stakes presidential poker game now doubling down**, when hidden decisions taken in darkness center on the real possibility of a real "first black president?"* [huffingtonpost.com, January 29, 2008]

The RACE CARD metaphor is creatively exploited in conceptual blending in order to criticize the prominence of the metaphor itself, as well as the frequency of using racial issues in politics for various purposes, as in the examples in (6).

(6) a. ***The race card is creased and tattered now, its flashy symbols worn and faint**. Even in Mississippi and Louisiana, **it doesn't play like it used to***. [Timesunion.com, May 17, 2008]

b. ***That card has been played so often it's dog-eared***. [UnionLeader.com, August 7, 2008]

In the examples in (7), the members of the discourse community reject the use of the RACE CARD metaphor and question its appropriateness and validity in the context of American politics by wording their views in metadiscursive comments.

(7) a. *Oh, and in response to the inevitable complaints that **I am playing the race card** – **race isn't a political parlor game***. [Newsweek, September 19, 2009]

b. *Everybody, stop saying "**race card.**" As semi-evolved humanoids, we need to be able to talk about how racism, a colossal disgrace in the history of Western Civilization, might affect an election **without reducing it to a breezy metaphor that evokes Casino Royale***. [huffingtonpost.com, August 25, 2008]

In addition, in the political cartoon in (8), the RACE CARD metaphor is pictorial exploited in order to ridicule and criticize the use of racial issues in the world of politics.

(8)

Source: http://politicalhumor.about.com/od/politicalcartoons/ig/Political-Cartoons/.

In all of the examples above, marginal facets of the card game input, ranging from the popular card game of blackjack, including its elaborate rules, to the value of individual cards such as the joker card, are projected to the blended space, creating richer images in the blends. The rich conceptual knowledge about the source concept which is at disposal to the members of the discourse community is creatively exploited, reinterpreted, and modified in conceptual blending. The creative figurative language produced in this way is rhetorically effective because the arguments are presented in a convincing, simple, and memorable manner. Therefore, figurative creativity through blending additionally boosts the argumentative potential of texts by making them memorable and straightforward. In addition, by exploiting familiar concepts shared by a discourse community, the creative stretching of a conventional metaphor produces greater cognitive effects but at the same time remains understandable to the members of the discourse community. However, it has to be mentioned that, as Coulson and Oakley (2006: 56) claim, "the rhetorical efficacy of the text depends on the reader's willingness to integrate and elaborate the models in a way that yields the desired emergent structure and affective responses".

4. Conclusion

This paper has shown that conventional metaphors can be creatively stretched through conceptual blending, producing instances of creative figurative language which contributes to achieving different discourse goals and discourse coherence at intertextual level. Applying conceptual integration theory, the paper has analyzed innovative conceptual blends, motivated by the conventional CARD GAME metaphor, which are used to keep political discussions alive but also to promote a certain rhetorical agenda.

Conventional metaphors and their conventional mappings initiate the launch of conceptual blends. The rich encyclopaedic knowledge about the source concept allows speakers to use certain aspects of the source concept that are not conventionally used metaphorically, enriching the image in the blend and producing novel and even more creative blends. Recruiting marginal facets of the source concept produces more striking examples of figurative creativity, both linguistically and conceptually. In attempts to be rhetorically effective, the members of the discourse community shape their views in creative figurative language produced in a series of complex cognitive operations in conceptual blending. The product of conceptual blending is creative, simple, and memorable language which contributes to various aspects of discourse, from creating the text to shaping its message.

In that sense, highly creative figurative language produced in conceptual blending can intertextually connect political discourse on the same subject. Alluding to a particular metaphor or using a metaphor as motivation for imaginative conceptual blends, different texts on the same topic are intertextually connected. The prominence of a certain metaphor can form a micro-tradition of discussing particular issues within a political discourse community predominantly in figurative terms. Therefore, the creative stretching, exploitation, reinterpretation, and modification of a prominent metaphor through conceptual blending in dynamic discourse situations contributes to achieving overall conceptual and textual coherence of political discourse on a particular subject.

In addition, creative and memorable language produced in conceptual integration contributes to achieving rhetorical goals in political discourse. The argumentative potential or rhetorical efficiency of figurative creativity lies in the fact that creative conceptual blends are motivated by the conventional CARD GAME metaphor and exploit the shared knowledge about the source input of card games. It is believed that creative figurative language in political discourse produces great rhetorical and ideological impacts.

This case study also reveals important insights into the ways in which conceptual metaphor and conceptual blending interact. Combining these two cognitive linguistic theories paints a fuller picture of the complex cognitive processes involved in producing figurative creativity in discourse, which contributes to discourse coherence and its rhetorical message. In addition, this case study shows that CMT and BT and not only compatible theories, but they are also theories which can benefit from each other, uncovering complex creative processes taking place in human minds.

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ČAROBNI TRIKOVI S *ADUTOM RASE*:
TEORIJA KONCEPTUALNE INTEGRACIJE I POLITIČKI DISKURS

Rad istražuje uporabu kreativnog figurativnog jezika u američkom političkom diskursu fokusirajući se na uporabu izraza *to play the race card* i kreativnog figurativnog jezika potaknutog uporabom tog izraza. Cilj je ovoga rada pokazati da konvencionalne metafore mogu biti kreativno elaborirane u konceptualnoj integraciji proizvodeći kreativni figurativni jezik koji doprinosi povezivanju teksta i prenošenju retoričkih poruka. Primjenjujući teoriju konceptualne integracije, rad analizira inovativne konceptualne *blendove*, motivirane konvencionalnom metaforom KARTAŠKE IGRE, koji se koriste kako bi oživjeli političke rasprave, ali i promicali određene političke ideje. Također, kreativni metaforički *blendovi* doprinose povezanosti teksta na intertekstualnoj razini, povezujući različite dijelove diskursa.

Ključne riječi: konceptualna metafora; konceptualna integracija; politički diskurs; retorički ciljevi; intertekstualna povezanost.