
To Awaken a Sleeping Giant

Cognition and Culture in September 11

Political Cartoons

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1 Political Cartoons and Cognitive Linguistics

America has a long tradition of political cartoons (Hess & Northrop 1996), dating back at least to Benjamin Franklin's famous call for the colonies to "join or die" in 1754 (Figure 1). This chapter analyzes political cartoons for the role that three cognitive mechanisms - conceptual blending (Fauconnier & Turner 2002), conceptual metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson 1980), and cultural models (Holland & Quinn 1987) play in them, focusing on cartoons that appeared in the week following September 11, 2001.

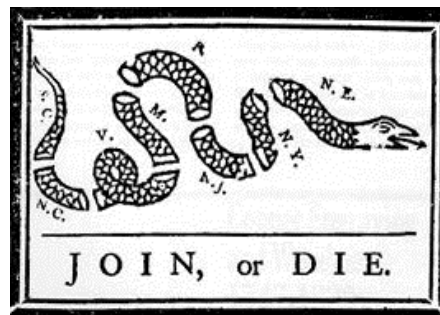


Figure 1: Cartoon by Benjamin Franklin, 1754

As is demonstrated by this first example, political cartoons provide a means of expressing usually critical political and social commentary, through a visual format that may include images, words, or both. Like other editorial outlets, they both reflect and influence trends in public thought. One particularly salient example is the famous Harper's Weekly cartoonist Thomas Nast, who never backed a losing presidential candidate .

We can also see from this first example that political cartoons are also an independent source of evidence on the creative use of cognitive mechanisms such as conceptual integration (or blending - see Fauconnier & Turner 2002), conceptual metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, Lakoff 1993, and Kövecses 2002), and cultural models (Holland & Quinn 1987). In Figure 1, for example, the American colonies are depicted as disjointed segments of a snake, the implication being naturally that just as a snake cannot function as an organism, more specifically cannot remain alive, without all of its parts intact, so the colonies are unable to function or continue to exist as political entities without joining together to form a coherent larger organization. This inferential reasoning can be analyzed as resulting from metaphorically understanding colonies or other political entities as organisms through the metaphor ORGANIZATIONS ARE ORGANISMS, where in this case, a particular type of organism, a snake, and its parts are mapped onto the set of particular organizations represented, such as Virginia, New York, and so on.

Political cartoons are thus a source ripe for cognitive linguistic analysis (see, for example, Coulson In Press). They make use of many of the same mechanisms that everyday as well as political language do. Since political cartoons use these functions in a different modality from the conventional linguistic one, the discovery of the use of common metaphors, blending strategies, or cultural models in language and in editorial cartoons can serve to confirm the non-linguistic nature of these cognitive mechanisms. Finally, since they usually address issues of current public interest, it is often possible to directly compare the way the various cognitive mechanisms are used in language and in cartoons.

There are some stumbling blocks, though, in studying cognitive linguistic mechanisms in editorial cartoons: First, because editorialists take varied perspectives, it is often difficult to disentangle the message they wish to convey from the tools used to express it. In other words, if cartoonists use different cognitive mechanisms to convey different messages, it is often difficult to determine whether the differences in the cartoons are due to the different messages, or whether they are simply different ways of conveying the same information. A second difficulty is that, because editorialists are usually critical of social and political institutions and individuals, thereby clashing with advocated political positions, it can be hard to compare the

cognitive linguistic mechanisms in political discourse with those of this visual medium

2 Cartoons Following September 11

These difficulties can be resolved, however, by restricting study to cartoons that express very similar messages, and which are in line with public discourse. American political cartoons in the week following September 11, 2001 fit the bill precisely. During this period, their usual diversity was replaced by large-scale uniformity - most of them conveyed quite similar messages. Also absent was their hallmark criticalness of American institutions and individuals. Instead of lampooning political figures and decisions - they mirrored the current political discourse

Political cartoons from this week can therefore be used as in informative case study (1) for variation in how cognitive linguistic mechanisms are applied to conveying a particular message, and (2) as a basis for comparison with linguistic expression of the same content. This study is based on 219 political cartoons that appeared in the week following the attack on the World Trade center and Pentagon (downloaded on September 25, 2001 from <http://cagle.slate.msn.com/news/attack/>). Of particular interest are the following questions: How do these political depictions relate to political discourse in the week following September 11? How are cognitive linguistic mechanisms used in these cartoons?

In the week following September 11, politicians (and others) responded to the tragedy using language that gave evidence of cognitive linguistic mechanisms. For example, Bush's representation of the United States a person in (1a) is licensed by the metaphor NATION IS A PERSON. In example (1b), we see a depiction of terrorists as vermin through the metaphor IMMORAL PEOPLE ARE LOWLY ANIMALS. (This and other examples of the same metaphor can also be found in Lakoff (Unpublished ms.).) In a last example, the events of September 11 and their consequences are blended together with the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.

- (1) (a) "This nation is peaceful, but fierce when stirred to anger."
George W. Bush, Sept 14 2001
- (b) "We will find who did it, we'll smoke them out of their holes,"
– George W. Bush, Sept 15 2001
- (c) "This is the second Pearl Harbor."
– Sen. Chuck Hagel, R-Neb, Sept 11, 2001

Since political cartoons in the week following September 11 so closely mirrored government discourse, these same mechanisms were in evidence

in numerous political cartoons. Examples of each are shown below in Figures 2 through 4. Figure 2 demonstrates the NATION IS A PERSON metaphor - compare with (1a). This particular representation of the United States seems to modify the traditional icon Uncle Sam, giving him Rambo-like strength. Notice that metaphor in editorial cartoons is indicated through the depiction of a target domain entity using source domain images, often with target domain labels. We see in this image that a number of the other elements of this metaphor also enter into the cartoon. The economic functioning of the nation corresponds to the physical well-being of the individual, and the military might of the nation is the physical strength of the individual. Of further interest is a point that there is not sufficient room to explore in depth here: this representation of the nation as a person incorporates, metonymically, elements of the individuals in the nation. The weeping Uncle Sam in the first frame most likely represents the reaction of individual citizens to the attacks, rather than some metaphorical aspect of the nation.

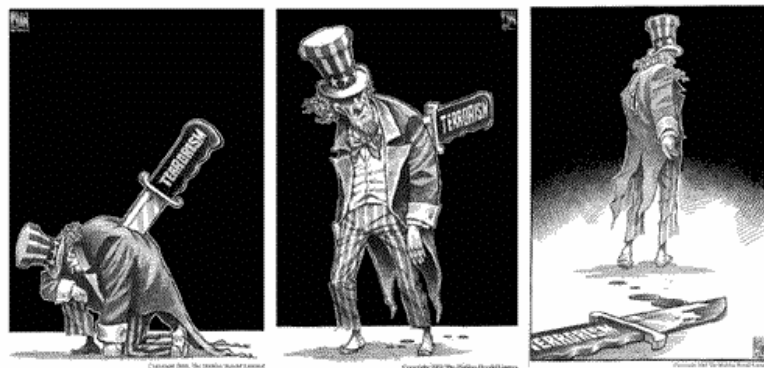


Figure 2: Cartoon by Nick Anderson of The Louisville Courier-Journal

In Figure 3, we see a depiction of a particular terrorist as a rat. Other cartoons depicted terrorists as snakes, cockroaches, and other canonical vermin, all through IMMORAL PEOPLE ARE LOWLY ANIMALS. Again, this is a clear example of political cartoons mirroring political discourse, as seen in (1b).

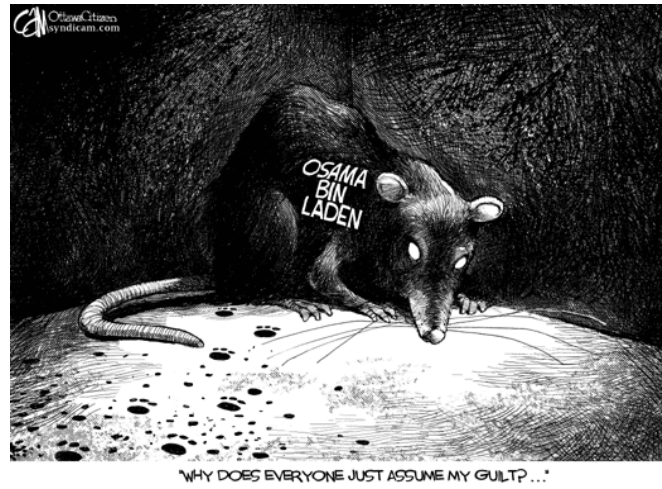


Figure 3: Cartoon by Cameron Cardow of the Ottawa Citizen



Figure 4: Cartoon by Nick Anderson of the Louisville Courier-Journal

Our final example (Figure 4) results from a blend whose inputs are the attack on the World Trade Center, and particularly its aftermath, on the one hand and the attack on Pearl Harbor as the other (as in (1c)). Note that in this last case, the blend is cued by the combination of a familiar image from one input - the remains of the World Trade Center - with language associated with the other input - a quote from a Japanese admiral. A slightly more detailed analysis of how blends work in political cartoons, particularly how they are cued, follows in the next section.

3 Blends in September 11 cartoons

Conceptual blending is pervasive in political cartoons (see, for example, the analyses in Coulson (In Press)). A number of blends were used in the political cartoons analyzed, including blends of the Grim Reaper (already a conventionalized blend itself) with the Statue of Liberty; of firefighters erecting a flag on the rubble of the World Trade Center with the famous image of the flag going up on Iwo Jima; and of a commercial airliner with a bomb, among many others. In this paper, in order to conduct a systematic comparison of how blends are expressed, we will look only at the most prevalent one, which takes the Pearl Harbor and the World Trade Center attacks as inputs, as in Figure 4. As mentioned earlier, there was tremendous uniformity in the cartoons, so a large number conveyed this same message using similar mechanisms.

A range of techniques are used to indicate blending in political cartoons, among which are the following: language from one input and an image from the other (Figure 4); juxtaposition of two images and potentially associated language (Figure 5); merger of language from the two inputs (Figure 5); and merger of images from the two inputs (Figure 6).

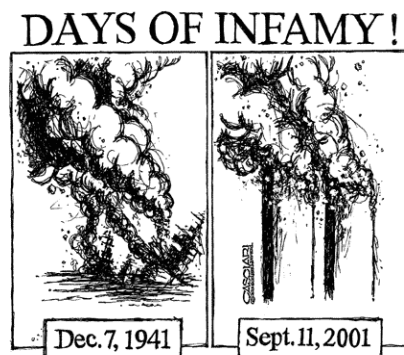


Figure 5: Cartoon by James Casciari of Scripps Howard News Service

Just like linguistic blends, blends in political cartoons can display emergent properties, properties that are not drawn from either of the input spaces, but rather are specific to the blend itself. Taking Figure 7 below as an example, we can see several examples of emergent elements. First, corresponding to the fact that at the time the cartoon was drawn the perpetrators of the September 11 attack were unknown, the plane is identified with a question mark near its tail, rather than a red circle representing Japan or the name of a commercial airline company.

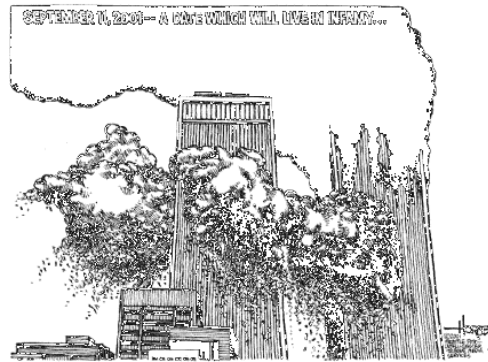


Figure 6: Cartoon by David Horsey of The Seattle Post-Intelligencer

Second, the plane is intact, as in the Pearl harbor bombing, but in concordance with neither of the inputs, someone in the airplane is yelling “Terror! Terror! Terror!”, rather than “Tora! Tora! Tora!”, the call that the Japanese used to start the attack. Of course, since there is no corresponding airplane leaving the scene in the World Trade Center input, this must be an emergent property of the blend. A final emergent property of the blend is the depiction of sinking intact buildings, with smoke rising from them. While both the ships that sank at Pearl harbor and the World Trade Center towers suffered significant damage before collapsing, in Figure 7 we see a fully intact pair of towers sinking diagonally. Most likely, the cartoonist was attempting to establish a correspondence between the sinking ship and the falling towers, and in pictorially doing so rendered the towers as the turrets and other above-deck structures of a sinking warship.



Figure 7: Cartoon by Steve Benson of the Arizona Republic

4 Blending and Metaphor

Blending and metaphor may interact in several ways (Grady et al 1999). Compared with the linguistic combination of blending and metaphor, their pictorial deployment allows these devices to be combined with greater freedom. This is due in part to the reification in images of the metaphorical source domains, which can then be manipulated.



Figure 8: Cartoon by Milt Priggee, self-syndicated

As an example of the complexity of such metaphor-blend combinations, let us consider the cartoon in Figure 8. In this image, the nation is represented through the pervasive metaphor NATION IS A PERSON as a stern Uncle Sam. But beyond this, the nation-person is also blended together with the World Trade Center, as indicated clearly by the smoke billowing from his person. Since the element that is blended with the world Trade Center is not only the nation but also a metaphorical person, the net result is that the smoke has a function both as literal smoke indicating the blend and also as an indication of metaphorical anger on the part of the nation through ANGER IS HEAT (Lakoff 1987). Moreover, since we see that the nation-person-tower has an air of determination, we know that the end result in this blend will not be like the falling of the tower in the World Trade Center input space, but rather its perseverance, as in the nation-person space.

The combination of metaphor and blending in this cartoon is quite complex, even without mentioning other apparent complications, such as the use of a Pearl Harbor-September 11 blend through the caption or the possibility that Uncle Sam is also metonymically representing individual citizens. While a message such as this one might possibly be conveyed using language alone, this task would be much more challenging.

5 Metaphor and Cultural Models

In general, as in metaphorical expressions, metaphorical political cartoons depict their target domain elements as their corresponding source domain elements. These representations in both modalities also interact with cultural models.

One prevalent cultural model, which we find in combination with the metaphor IMMORAL PEOPLE ARE LOWLY ANIMALS, is the extermination model. In much of Western society, certain animals identified as vermin are deemed for various reasons such as health and cleanliness to be threatening and undesirable, and are thus justly subject to extermination. We can see from Figure 9 that because their source domains are both compatible with it, IMMORAL PEOPLE ARE LOWLY ANIMALS and NATION IS A PERSON can both combine with this extermination model. In doing so, it becomes natural and irreprehensible that the nation-person should want to exterminate the people-vermin, since they are dirty and unhealthy, and it is equally natural for the people-vermin to slink into a deep dark hole underground and hide. This particular combination of metaphor with cultural models is nearly the precise realization in cartoon form of President Bush's remarks in (1b) above.

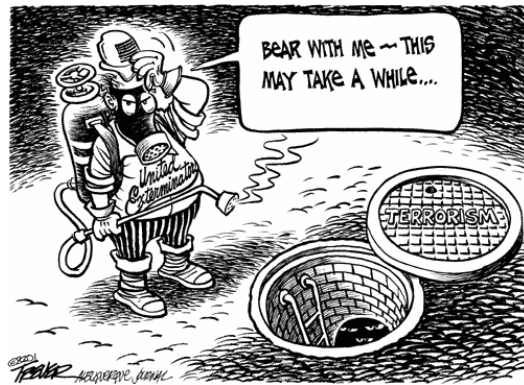


Figure 9: Cartoon by John Trever of the Albuquerque Journal

Another cultural model, which appears almost as frequently in political discourse as it does in children's stories and action movies, is the fairy tale scenario (Lakoff 1991). In this model, an innocent victim is morally wronged by an evil villain. The hero, who may be the same person as the victim, sets forth on a long and difficult road of retribution, where the moral scales are righted by exacting revenge on the villain or retrieving whatever he took from the victim. The villain cannot be reasoned with (perhaps be-

cause he is inhuman) and must be defeated in order to restore the moral order.

The metaphor NATION IS A PERSON can combine with the fairy tale scenario such that within the community of nations, one state acts as the villain, and another as the victim, and may potentially also be the hero. There are moral scales among the various nations, which when unbalanced must be righted if possible. Figure 10 is a demonstration of one cartoon (again, among many) that make use of this particular metaphor-model combination. In it, the United States is depicted as a canonical hero and its foe as something like a canonical villain - an inhuman monster incapable of reason.

What makes the cartoon in Figure 10 unique among the political cartoons using this metaphor and cultural model, is that it combines the product with the metaphor KNOWING IS SEEING to yield a villain who is only partly visible, thus only partly known. Interestingly, the artist of this particular cartoon made the instructive choice of depicting the body, where the dragon might be vulnerable, as invisible, and the teeth and claws, with which the dragon inflicts damage, as visible.

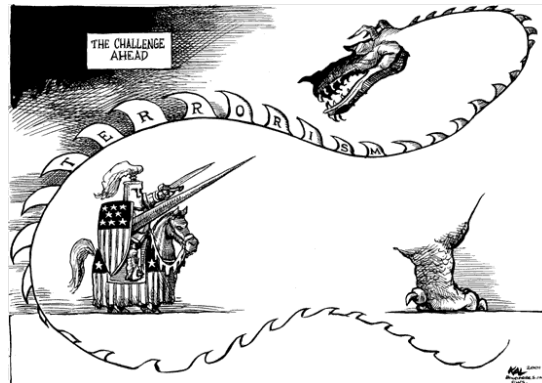


Figure 10: Cartoon by Kevin Kallaugh of the Baltimore Sun

By comparison with the use of this cultural model in U.S. editorial cartoons, the foreign press often depicted the United States (in Figure 11, metonymically through Bush) as a failing, would-be hero. Notice that the particular version of the fairy-tale scenario used in this cartoon is a rather sordid one - the Crusaders are not universally considered to have been engaging in the just restoration of the moral order, although they may have considered themselves to have been doing such. Moreover, this particular crusader is hindered by his inability to wear his crown or to wield military power effectively.

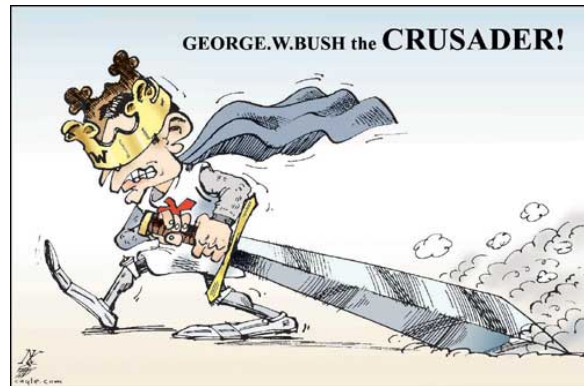


Figure 11: A foreign spin on the fairy tale scenario

6 Conclusions

In the week following September 11, 2001, blending, metaphor, and cultural models independently showed significant similarities in the political discourse and political cartoons at this particular time and place in history. As we have seen, they seem to interact more easily in political cartoons than they do in language, perhaps due to the fact that the metaphorical and blended elements must be reified visually, and are thus available for further manipulation.

We can also see how cartoons benefit from using these mechanisms. They are rendered more accessible and their messages more tangible if they reify relatively abstract concepts like the nation or war in visible and recognizable concrete domains through the use of conceptual metaphor. Rendering these metaphorical depictions in terms of cultural models yields the added benefit of placing these metaphorical depictions within the context of a known frame of reference. Blending them together with other known scenarios provides the basis for analogies and comparisons.

These are of course very much the same purposes these cognitive mechanisms serve when they surface in conventional language, as well. Investigating them in the context of separate modalities allows us to fully realize the domain-generality of blending, metaphor, and cultural models, and to investigate which of their characteristics are the product of those modalities.

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