Should liberals use conservatives’ metaphors?
Cognitive Linguistics meets Sociolinguistics

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NDCL-2, Cardiff, August 2007
Lakoff:
The conservatives are winning…

(Lakoff, 1996; 2004; 2006)
Lakoff:

…so Liberals should learn to talk like Conservatives!

- Reframe issues in terms of new metaphors.
- If the metaphors don’t exist, invent them.
Conceptual Metaphor Theory

\[
X_f = \left( \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{n_f} w_{if} c_{xif} X_{if}}{\sum_{i=1}^{n_f} w_{if} c_{xif}} \right) + b_f
\]

*time*
- long vacation
- short concert
- approaching deadline

*ideas*
- rising unemployment
- middle class
- low price

*math*
- large sum
- small divisor
- narrow distribution

(Clark, 1973; Gruber, 1965; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, 1999; Talmy, 1988)
Experimental evidence for CMT

LONG TIME = LONG DISTANCE

HIGH PITCH = HIGH LOCATION

SIMILARITY = PROXIMITY
GOOD = UP, BAD = DOWN

(Casasanto, 2007; Casasanto & Boroditsky, 2007; Casasanto & Lozano, 2006, in press)
But, wait…

*Maybe* Liberals should talk like Conservatives

…but only if what works for Conservatives will also work for Liberals.
Will the strategies that work for Conservatives also work for Liberals?

“...what’s good for the goose is good for the gander…”

(Lakoff, 2006)
Our Plan

1. A closer look at Lakoff’s proposal
   • What does Lakoff suggest Liberals do?
   • Will these suggestions work?

2. Experiments on Metaphor & Social Identity
   • Are all metaphors created equal?
   • Do Liberals and Conservatives expect people to talk differently?
   • Do different metaphors have different social meaning?
Rhetorical Strategies

Votes
Reframing Taxes

Conservatives’ Metaphor:

“Tax relief” activates TAX = AFFLICTION

Liberals’ New Metaphor:

“Country Club dues” activates TAX = MEMBERSHIP FEE

(Lakoff, 2004)
Renaming ‘Tort Reform’

Conservatives:  
Tort Law needs “reform”  
Tort Law  
Trial Lawyer  
Frivolous lawsuits

Liberals:  
--> Tort Law protects us  
--> Public Protection Law  
--> Public Protection Attorney  
--> Protection from Corporate Negligence

(Lakoff, 2004)
Shades of Newspeak?

Liberals
Tort is Public Protection Law
Taxes are Country Club Dues

Conservatives
Clear Skies Initiative
Operation Iraqi Freedom

Orwell’s ‘Ingsoc’
War is Peace
Freedom is Slavery
Ignorance is Strength
"Those conservatives are bad people; they are using Orwellian language. They are saying the opposite of what they mean. They are deceivers. Bad. Bad."

"The notion of reframing sounds manipulative. How is framing different from spin or propaganda?"

(Lakoff, 2004)
Rhetorical Strategies

Identity

 Votes
Identity & Voting

“People do not necessarily vote in their self-interest. They vote their identity. They vote for who they identify with.”

(Lakoff, 2004, pg. 19)
Identify and win!

Bush to a room full of Southern Baptist clergy:

“How do I speak to the soul of the nation?”
Identify and win!
Identify and win!

Kerry on Bush’s 2004 Republican Convention Speech:

“All hat, no cattle.”
Mis-identify and lose!

John Kerry

All hat
No cattle
Our Claim:

Rhetorical strategies are *sociolinguistic resources*.

- Rhetorical strategies, themselves, have social meaning.

- Using a sociolinguistic resource identifies the speaker as a member of a certain social group.

- Rhetorical strategies that conservatives use may be linked to a conservative identity.

- To use a strategy effectively, speakers need *authenticity*: metaphors must match the speakers’ social identity.
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Two ordinary metaphors

BAD STUFF

DARK

DOWN
How do Conservatives and Liberals use these ordinary metaphors?

BAD STUFF

DARK

DOWN
Bush’s metaphors

…the only way to defeat the terrorists is to defeat their dark vision of hatred and fear…
(President Discusses Progress in War on Terror to National Guard, Feb. 9, 2006)

…one day this untamed fire of freedom will reach the darkest corners of our world.
(President Bush's second inaugural address, Jan. 21, 2005)

You [veterans] were there for dark times...
(President Bush's speech to the American Legion National Convention, Aug. 31, 2006)
Kerry’s metaphors

…the credibility of this administration is so low, that they have great difficulty…
(Interview with Larry King, July 8, 2004)

…from that moment on, it's been downhill with North Korea.

…this administration has let them down…
(Transcript of John Kerry Responding to Attacks on his Remarks)
How ‘metaphorical’ are these metaphors?

a dark time

a low point
Experiment 1
Which is more ‘metaphorical’?

Question 1
A. There’s a dark side to entering politics.
B. There’s a down side to entering politics.

Question 2
A. It was a dark time in our country’s history.
B. It was a low point in our country’s history.

Which statement seems more metaphorical (A or B)? ______
Which makes the historical era sound worse (A or B)? ______
Not all metaphors are created equal.

Proportion of Responses

More Metaphorical?  Worse?

Low Metaphors  Dark Metaphors

$P = .002$  $P = .001$
Experiment 2
Do Liberals and Conservatives expect different metaphors?

Item 1
There’s a dark side to entering politics.
or
There’s a down side to entering politics.

Item 2
It was a dark time in our country’s history.
or
It was a low point in our country’s history.

Not at all likely 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Very likely
Politics affects metaphor attribution

Subject’s Political Orientation

Dark Metaphors

Low Metaphors

Left

Center

Right

*
Experiment 3
Do we expect different metaphors from Liberals and Conservatives?

**Item 1**
There’s a **dark side** to entering politics.
or
There’s a **down side** to entering politics.

**Item 2**
It was a **dark time** in our country’s history.
or
It was a **low point** in our country’s history.
Some metaphors are more conservative than others

Interaction of Metaphor X Political Orientation ($F(2,62)=3.34$, $p=0.04$)
Summary

• DARK is BAD metaphors are more “metaphor-y” than DOWN is BAD metaphors.

• Conservatives expect people to use DARK is BAD metaphors more, whereas Liberals expect people to use DOWN is BAD metaphors more.

• Everybody thinks DARK is BAD metaphors are more conservative than DOWN is BAD metaphors.
More “metaphor-y” metaphors are both more expected by conservatives and more often attributed to conservatives.

Different metaphors have different social meaning.

Liberals may not be able to use Conservatives’ metaphors effectively because they cannot use them authentically.
Should liberals use conservatives’ metaphors?

• Cognitive Linguistics tells us that the way we talk about issues affects how people think about them.

• Sociolinguistics tells us that the way we talk about issues affects how people think about *us*!

• Applying findings from CogLing in the real world without integrating findings from SocioLing (e.g., *authenticity*) could be disastrous.
Thank you

NSF Graduate Research Fellowship
NRSA Post-Doctoral Fellowship #F32MH072502
Spanish Ministry of Education and Science #SEJ2006-04732/PSIC, DGI