

Obamagasm, Bushvestite and Camillagate: language change and variation in British and American political discourse. A Conceptual Blending analysis.

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The creativity and potential that reside in thought and language ‘depend on our capacity to manipulate webs of mappings between mental spaces’ (Fauconnier 1997: 149) Contemporary political discourse offers enormous interpretive possibilities in the field of lexical semantics, revealing its rapid change, variation and dynamicity. One way of capturing linguistic variation and dynamicity is to adopt a Conceptual Blending Theory perspective on words’ meanings as proposed by Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner (cf. Fauconnier and Turner 2002; also Libura 2007). Neologisms such as American *Obamagasm*, *Bushvestite* and *Reaganomics* or British *Camillagate* and *Blair googles* that are used in political discourse point to the vital role the construction of meaning plays in our understanding of reality, an understanding which involves the combination and activation of knowledge from various domains and which cannot be detached from context-dependent, on-line interpretation (cf. Coulson 2001; also Kemmer 2003). The Conceptual Blending Theory as proposed by Fauconnier and Turner seems to fully meet the requirement of the ‘on-line’ contextual interpretation of a word’s meaning. Assuming that the dynamicity of each linguistic expression is inextricably bound with linguistic variation, the paper undertakes to develop a conceptual blending analysis of ‘seemingly simple’ words or phrases used in British and American political discourse such as *Reaganomics*, *Clinton* or *the Gore Effect*. We will argue that a new word meaning is created as a result of the combination of totally different input spaces non-computable from the meaning of its parts. A claim will be made that the sources of linguistic variation are not merely a result of the way we speak but they should primarily be traced to the level of conceptual structure.

(273 words)

REFERENCES:

- Coulson, S. 2001. *Semantic leaps: frame-shifting and conceptual blending in meaning construction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Fauconnier G. 1997. *Mappings in thought and language* . Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.