

Grammatical and multimodal patterns of compression in political discourse

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Human cognition has the astonishing ability to range far outside local scale, across causation, agency, time, and space. Human beings can think about past and future political structure and action at global scale, taking place over decades or millennia, involving thousands or millions of agents, and extending across vast causal networks. *Compression* makes such thinking possible: it creates human-tractable blended conceptions giving congenial access to otherwise intractably complex conceptual networks (Turner, 2014; Fauconnier & Turner, 2002; McCubbins & Turner, 2013; Turner, 2019). This talk considers conceptual, grammatical, and multimodal patterns for compression in political thinking, especially when it focuses on energy. The forms of compression examined in this talk are all cases in which the conceptual integration network contains some human-scale meaning that provides tight, intelligible structure to the blend and thus makes it tractable. There are many such patterns. Here are four:

1. In image-schematic compression, a vast conceptual network contains a simple image-schema or blend of image-schemas. In such cases, the blended space in the network relies heavily on the image-schema. Examples include the blend of the planet Earth with a single coronavirus-19 particle ("it's going global," cover of *The Economist* for March 2020). Percentages blend vast conceptual networks with *linear scales* that additionally use 0 and 100 as polar cognitive reference points, and a partition into equal constituent line segments. Political thinking and discourse often rely on compression to percentages (e.g. political discourse about the future impact of the war in Ukraine on European imports of Russian goods often used percentages, as will be discussed, but that compression to percentages was often flawed and misleading). Journey (source-path-goal) compressions are also very common: *crossroads*, *fork in the road*, . . .
2. In force-dynamic compression, a vast conceptual network contains a simple force-dynamic structure, or a relatively simple blend of force-dynamic structures, and the blended space in the network relies heavily on the tractable force-dynamic structure. Examples include *tipping point*, *choppy waters*, *jujitsu defense*, etc.
3. Mechanical compression often uses both image-schematic and force-dynamic compression. Examples: an *indefatigable well-oiled machine*.
4. In sensation compression, ranges of the complex network are blended with a particular somatic loop to give an immediately tractable compression. Examples include *taste of victory*, *sting of defeat*, etc.

There are many patterns of compression in political thought and discourse besides these four. This talk will pick just two to focus on: (1) Blending the future with a "cone of uncertainty," including multiple interacting cones of uncertainty (Langacker, 2008, p. 300). The center of the cone, as its radius increases, is seen as most likely, with less probable futures lying further from that center. (2) Blending a vast conceptual network with a single agent, especially in discussing energy (e.g. Reddy Kilowatt) and climate (e.g. a polluted natural landscape as a plaintive spirit).

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