Visual Metaphors and the Construction of Political Identities:

An Analysis of the 2012 Hong Kong Legislative Council Election

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7-ICOM

June 11, 2014
Visual metaphors in political discourse
Acknowledgments

We wish to gratefully acknowledge funding from the Hong Kong Polytechnic University (Internal Competitive Research Grant 2012-2014, HKPU G-YK85) for the research project entitled “Establishing Common Ground in Public Discourse: An Analysis of Electoral Speeches, Press Conferences and Q&A Sessions in Hong Kong”.

We also wish to thank our friends and colleagues for valuable feedback: Francis Low, I-wen Su, Dennis Tay, Brian Wai, Steven Wong, Tak-Sum Wong and Vivien Yang.
Overview

1. What is (visual) metaphor?
2. Types of visual metaphor
3. Why look at metaphor in political – in particular, electoral – discourse?
4. Data and methodology
5. Analysis of a visual metaphor in HK electoral discourse
   - The cushion metaphor
6. Summary
What is a metaphor?
Metaphor Mapping (Lakoff & Johnson 1980)

Life is a journey.

Life

Journey

Target domain

Source domain
Conceptual blends
(Turner & Fauconnier 1995; Fauconnier & Turner 2002)

November 2001, The Arizona Republic
Forceville (1996, 2010) identifies 3 different types of visual metaphors:

- Simile
- Hybrid metaphor
- Contextual metaphor
Simile

mapping based on resemblances
(Forceville 1996)

The Adidas swimsuit is a second skin as smooth as the skin of a dolphin.
Simile

mapping based on resemblances
(Forceville 1996)

The Adidas swimsuit is a second skin as smooth as the skin of a dolphin.

The Adidas-clad swimmer has the sleekness (and speed) of a dolphin.
This visual metaphor is a simile because the source domain and the target domain are visually presented SEPARATELY.
'Ready to bake at home.'
Hybrid metaphor

convergent mapping of different domains into one

(Yeung, Yuen & Fan 2013)

‘Ready to bake at home.’

BAGUETTE

SLIPPERS

Which is primary? Which is secondary
Hybrid metaphor

convergent mapping of different domains into one

(Yeung, Yuen & Fan 2013)

‘Ready to bake at home.’

BAGUETTE

SLIPPERS

WARM & COMFY
This visual metaphor is a hybrid metaphor because both the source and target domains are MERGED TOGETHER into a single entity.

‘Ready to bake at home.’
La chaussure en beaute
Contextual metaphor
contextualized mapping
(Forceville 1996)

A Clerget shoe, like the tie, is a most beautiful accessory.
Contextual metaphor

contextualized mapping
(Forceville 1996)

Clerget shoes are not just for the feet.

Wear them with pride.

Matching black suit
This visual metaphor is a contextualized metaphor because the intended meaning of the target domain is understood within the context of the source of the source domain.

La chaussure en beaute
Why use visual metaphors?

Visual metaphors are “innovative and creative; they do not stem from pre-existing similarities, but induce similarities between different objects”.

In this way, they help trigger a sense of awe, wonder and delight in us and “contribute to our new understanding and perception of the world”.

(Yeung, Yung & Fan 2013: 7; citing Hausman 1989)
Why look at visual metaphors in political discourse?

Metaphors abound in political discourse, often with no shortage of them in electoral speeches.
Political leaders often use metaphors to establish common ground with the public.
At the same time, they also often use metaphors to criticize their rivals, and thus indirectly promote themselves.

Research Question:
How and why do politicians use metaphors – in particular, visual metaphors – in electoral discourse?
Metaphors are highly valued because:

- they add a touch of novelty and wit to what is said, and thus greatly enhance the speaker’s positive self-image;

- at the same time, they can also be used as verbal indirectness strategies to mitigate potential face-threats to both speaker and addressee.

(Kuo 2003; Obeng 1997; Wilson 1990)
Political Metaphors are often accompanied by humor (sometimes with a heavy dose of sarcasm as well).

This combination is frequently used to criticize rivals without excessive violations to politeness maxims.

(Kiley & Shuttleworth 1971; Inge 1990; Lewis 2006; Taskona 2009)
Objectives

To examine how and why politicians use visual metaphors in electoral discourse.

HOW:
- Using visual similes, as well as hybridized and contextualized visual metaphors to convey their otherwise abstract messages.

WHY:
- To construct favorable political identities for self, and unfavorable ones for rivals.
Methodology

Discourse analysis of visual metaphors

Some visual metaphors used in the 2012 Hong Kong Legislative Council Election Debates

The cushion metaphor

The ladder metaphor

The ‘Oscar Award’ metaphor
Database: 5 televised debates hosted by RTHK

Period: 18th August – 1st September 2012

50-60 minutes each
Total minutes of data: 290 minutes

Total no. of metaphors: 48 (visual and non-visual ones)

Gift-giving session (送大禮環節) inside the debate: Candidates can present gifts, either to the public or to particular rivals. Most of the candidates would make use of this chance to attack the opponents.
Positive vs. Negative Metaphors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intended referent</th>
<th>Metaphors with positive connotations</th>
<th>Metaphors with negative connotations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opponents</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>43</td>
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Types of metaphors
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Types of metaphors</th>
<th>Number of tokens</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Characterization</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Event</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>Ball</td>
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<td>Plant</td>
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<td>Stone</td>
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<td>Plate</td>
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<td>Seat</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubbish</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
我想將這個軟墊送給曾鈺成
Cushion = Minion metaphor

Powerful ruler = Beijing
Liberal Party vs. DAB

DAB

Liberal Party

- LAU Kin Yee, Miriam 刘健仪
- Conservative
- pro-Business
- pro-Government
- Sometimes pro-Beijing

Attacks DAB for being pro-Beijing using a cushion (=minion) metaphor
Liberal Party vs. DAB
(Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong)

DAB

- TSANG Yok Sing, Jasper 曾鈺成
- Conservative
- pro-Government
- Very pro-Beijing

Liberal Party

- LAU Kin Yee, Miriam 劉健儀
- Conservative
- pro-Business
- pro-Government
- Sometimes pro-Beijing
Minion Metaphor

HKIsland_57:00-57:23_LauKinYee

01 我想將呢個禮物，呢個cushion呢，
ngo5 soeng2 zoeng1 lei1 go3 lai5mat6 lei1 go3 le1
1SG want BA DEM CL gift DEM CL PRT

02 就送畀阿曽鈺成嘅。
zau6 sung3bei2 aa3Zang1Juk6Sing4 ge3
INT give Tsang.Yok.Sing SFP

‘I want to present this gift … this cushion to Tsang Yok Sing.’

Visual humor
'Because many people say... That is DAB... that is, they kneel down once they hear (the Chinese central government) blowing whistles (implied: Whenever the Chinese government requests, they comply with her wishes). So this cushion would be very useful (for them).'}
‘But I still appeal to… that is, to DAB, as for the issues involving the (violation of) the core values of Hong Kong people, as a conservative party, you should still dare say no.’
如果係咁嘅話，呢個咕𠱸可以用好耐。

'Ridicules the opponent’s party (DAB) → makes the denigration more potent'

‘If (they act) in such a way, this cushion can be used for a long time.’

Humorous parting shot
Order from the Master

Minion/servant

Cushion

= Kneeling down to the Master => Compliance

Requests (from the Central government)

Compliance with Central government directives

Input Space\(_1\) (Target domain)

Central government

DAB

Input Space\(_2\) (Source domain)

Master

Minion/servant

Order from the Master

Cushion

= Kneeling down to the Master => Compliance

(Target domain)
Input Space$_1$ (Target domain)

Central government

Requests (from the Central government)

Compliance with Central government directives

DAB

Input Space$_2$ (Source domain)

Master

Minion/servant

Order from the Master

Cushion

= Kneeling down to the Master => Compliance

Generic Space

Superior & subordinate relationship

Request/order from superior

Compliance of subordinate
Generic Space

Superior & subordinate
Request/order from superior
Compliance of subordinate

Input Space$_1$
(Target domain)

Central government
DAB
Requests (from the Central government)
Compliance with Central government directives

Input Space$_2$
(Source domain)

Master
Minion/servant
Order from the Master
Cushion
=Kneeling down to the Master => Compliance

DAB
Request (from the Central government)
Cushion
=Kneeling down to the Master => Compliance = Compliance with Central government directives

Blended Space
DAB

Minion/servant

Cushion

Input Space$_1$

Implied Input Space$_2$

Input Space$_2$
Liberal Party vs. DAB
(Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong)

DAB

TSANG Yok Sing, Jasper
Conservative
pro-Government
Very pro-Beijing

Liberal Party

Rebutts by remarking that it is odd that the traditionally pro-establishment (i.e. pro-Government and pro-Beijing) Liberal Party now projects the image that they DARE SAY ‘NO’.
This time, (the situation) is very funny: The opposition parties advertise themselves as rational and pragmatic. Then, the one that is usually called “the conservative party” advertises itself as “the one that dares to say no”.

‘You say how funny it is!’
DAB
(intended addressee engages in rebuttal)

Minion/servant

Cushion

Implied Input Space \(_2\)

Input Space \(_1\)

Redistributed Input Space \(_1\)

Liberal Party
(=original speaker)

Redirected Input Space \(_2\)
Generic Space

Superior & subordinate
Request/order from superior
Compliance of subordinate

Request (from the Central government) = Kneeling down to the Master => Compliance with Central government directives

Input Space \textsubscript{1} (Target domain)
Central government
Requests (from the Central government)
Compliance with Central government directives

Input Space \textsubscript{2} (Source domain)
Master
Minion/servant
Order from the Master
Cushion
= Kneeling down to the Master => Compliance

DAB Liberal Party

Blended Space
A case of ‘the pot calling the kettle black’

Requests (from the Central government)
Compliance with Central government directives

Master
Minion/servant
Order from the Master

Cushion
= Kneeling down to the Master => Compliance

DAB Liberal Party
Request (from the Central government)

Cushion
= Kneeling down to the Master => Compliance
= Compliance with Central government directives

Input Space₁
(Target domain)
Central government

Input Space₂
(Source domain)
DAB Liberal Party

Generic Space
Superior & subordinate
Request/order from superior
Compliance of subordinate

Blended Space
Generic Space

Superior & subordinate
Request/order from superior
Compliance of subordinate

Input Space$_1$
(Target domain)
Central government
Requests (from the Central government)
Compliance with Central government directives

Input Space$_2$
(Source domain)
Master
Minion/servant
Order from the Master
Cushion = Kneeling down to the Master => Compliance

DAB Liberal Party
A case of ‘the pot calling the kettle black’
Implication: Why don’t you keep the cushion for yourself!

DAB Liberal Party
Request (from the Central government)
Cushion = Kneeling down to the Master => Compliance
= Compliance with Central government directives

Blended Space
The cushion metaphor triggered a negative image of the speaker’s political rival.

This visual metaphor allows a political candidate to criticize her rival yet at the same time mitigate potential face-threat to herself as well as others. (Lau Kin-Yee)

Humor can be used to deflect and mitigate criticisms induced by visual metaphors in critical political discourse. (Tsang Yok-Sing)
What the visual ‘cushion’ metaphor does

Through the use of the ‘cushion’ metaphor, the speaker cleverly paints a negative picture of a rival party by depicting them as ‘political knee-benders’ who are more inclined to listen to the Central government than to represent the voice of the people.

The speaker also narrows the distance between herself and the audience by dis-aligning herself from those subservient to the Central government, and in this way portray herself and her political party as ‘a voice for the people’.
What the visual ‘cushion’ metaphor does

- Heighten the curiosity of the audience.
- Engage the audience in deeper thinking through a rich network of mental maps.
- Provide a visual cue to make a more lasting impact in the memory of the audience.
- Create negative images of rivals through verbal indirectness.
- Protect the speaker’s positive self-image – Lau Kin-yee is applauded for her creativity and excused for criticizing others because she does it in an entertaining way.
令副房居民可以盡快入住公屋
The Ladder Metaphor

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OFe0KiYSQGc (00:47:52–00:48:36)
Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong vs. League of Social Democrats

DAB 民建聯

- Chan Han Pan (CHP) 陳恒鑌
- The largest party in LegCo
- Centre-right
- Conservative
- Pro-Government
- Very pro-Beijing

3 ladder metaphors

Presents a ladder to the Hong Kong people, wishing them good prospects under the government’s housing and youth development policies.

The ‘ladder gift’ is also used to ridicule the Democratic Party.
01 CHP: 我哋 呢 今日 喺 呢一度 送 張 梯 界
go5dei6 le1 gam1jat6 hei2 lei1jat1dou6 sung3 zoeng1 tai1 bei2
1PL PRT today at here give CL ladder DAT

02 全港 嘅 市民。
cyun4gong2 ge3 si5man4
call.Hong.Kong ATTR citizen

‘We are here today to present a ladder for all Hong Kong citizens,’
‘hoping that our housing policy is the ladder for (solving) our housing (problems), so that those who live in sub-divided units can move into public housing estates more quickly.’
children that.is young ATTR friends PRT can buy-POT house

middle.class PRT also EMP NEG necessary do housing.slave

‘(We also hope that) the next generation can afford to own a house, (while) the middle class do not need to be the slaves of housing.’
Cliché metaphor

**Target domain**

- Hong Kong people who fail to own a house
- Good progress of the housing policy

**Source domain**

- One that offers emotional support
- Those who need to climb up from the bottom, typically a position of disadvantage

**Generic Space**

- A person who offers help
- A helpless person
- A crucial tool for reaching the goal
- The goal

**Blended Space**

- Ladder
- Stable living environment (e.g. moving into public housing estates, owning a house)
亦都係要送畀全港嘅嘅青年人，

亦都係要送畀全港嘅嘅青年人，

亦都係要送畀全港嘅嘅青年人，

(I would) also give it to all youngsters in Hong Kong, hoping that there will be a way (lit. ladder) for upward mobility in terms of home ownership, studies, career opportunities and business entrepreneurships.”
Democratic Party 民主黨

- Third largest party in Legislative Council
- Centrist
- Pro-democracy
- Constant internal strife since handover in 1997
  - Discord between Young Turks (People advocating reform) and members from Meeting Point, who are considered as founding members of the Party
  - Members from Young Turks camp left the party one after another owing to their dissatisfaction of the party
‘(I) should also present this gift to (the members) of the third tier of the Democratic Party, hoping that you have a chance to climb up (i.e. enter the Legislative Council).’
Generic Space

- A person who offers help
- A helpless person
- Means of improving the current situation
- The current problem
- The desired goal

Source domain

- One that offers support
- Those who need to climb up from the bottom
- Lower rung of the ladder
- Higher rung of the ladder

Target domain

- Junior members of the rival Democratic Party
- Chances of improving their political standing
- Currently with little political clout
- Opportunity to win Legislative Council seats will be seen as a promotion

Blended Space

- DAB offering emotional support
- Junior members of the Democratic Party
- Opportunity to win LegCo seats = Ladder
- Little political clout
- Greater political clout

Cliché metaphor

- There is internal strife within the Democratic Party - Senior members in the party do not give chances to the junior members
Mocking DAB by using the ladder metaphor but invoking a different source domain – the ladder as the jumping-site for suicides

Meaning:
DAB is not helping HK people but sending them to death.
‘DAB presented this ladder so as to force Hong Kong people to climb up higher and jump to death from the roof. It is because the housing price has gone up by ten percent since Leung Chun Ying came to power.’
Incompetent leaders intensifying stress
Those with unmanageable stress in life
Pressures of life that induce those in despair to commit suicide
Deteriorating situation and loss of hope
Ladder
Jumping to death from rooftops

Hong Kong people
C-Y Leung coming to power
Stagnant housing policy
Soaring property prices
A dire situation in which Hong Kong people cannot afford to own a flat

Abettor
Victim in a tragedy
Factor which aggravates the situation
Tool which contributes to the tragedy
Problems that the victim is facing
Result of the tragedy
A person who offers help
A helpless person
A crucial tool for reaching the goal
The goal

One that offers emotional support
Those who need to climb up from the bottom, typically a position of disadvantage
An elevated position, usually more advantageous

Stable living environment (e.g., moving into public housing estates, owning a house)

Hong Kong people who fail to own a house
Good progress of the housing policy

Shifted metaphor

DAB

67
A person who offers help false hope
A helpless person
A crucial tool for reaching the goal contributing to a tragedy
The goal A tragic end

Source domain
Those who need to climb up from the bottom, typically a position of disadvantage

Target domain
DAB
Hong Kong people who fail to own a house
Good progress of the housing policy
Stable living environment (e.g. moving into public housing estates, owning a house)
Soaring property prices

Counter-metaphor

Stable living environment (e.g. moving into public housing estates, owning a house)
Soaring property prices

DAB advocating a failed housing policy
Hong Kong people under stress

Ladder = failed housing policy

An elevated position, usually more advantageous to end one’s life
One that offers emotional support induces stress
Those who need to climb up from the bottom, typically a position of disadvantage

Ladder

Soaring property prices ➔ people jumping off rooftops
Why ladder metaphors are employed?

A ladder can be used to symbolise the following:

(1) The progress of the housing policy (by Chan)

(2) Upward mobility – a better life for the general public and career development opportunities for the younger generation (by Chan)

(3) Encouragement to rival party – seen as ‘fake goodwill’ and hence a sarcastic remark (by Chan)

(4) The current stagnant housing policy, which becomes a tragic inducement for some who despair to unfortunately end their life (by Tsang)
Competing symbolic representations behind the same metaphor

Good progress of housing policy

Upward mobility

The current stagnant housing policy

DAB, you who always support the government’s decisions, you are hypocritical -- contrary to your claims, you do not really fight for the benefit of Hong Kong people

DAB 民建聯

NO! You are the ladder to destruction

LSD 社會民主連線
Using the ladder metaphor as an example, we show how political identities are constructed and reconstructed by rival parties.

This is possible because symbolic representations behind a given metaphor can be interpreted differently by different political parties and these different interpretations are then used to compete for the audience’s attention.
Politicians often engage in adversarial talk with their opponents. Yet at the same time, they often deploy verbal indirectness strategies to mitigate face threats through witty talk. This often includes the use of metaphors. Humor is often used as well, frequently to deflect face-threats.
Occasionally, sarcasm is used in counter-attacks. This heightens the face-threat, and is sometimes chosen in situations where frustration is high and the speaker feels a strong message has to be delivered regardless of violations to politeness maxims.

Despite the rivalry, and sometimes the vitriol as well, both parties are aware that the verbal sparring is part of ‘the political game’.
Among the skills needed is the ability to ‘attack’, ‘defend’ or ‘deflect’, and ‘counter-attack’.

The subtle and skillful use of verbal indirectness strategies including characterization metaphors is useful in creating positive political identities for selves and negative ones for others.

And when ‘attacked’, politicians also need to develop skills at deflecting and reconstructing damaged identities as well.
At the same time, it is important for the general public to understand the nature of this political game, so they can tease apart the ‘performance’ and ‘the message’, as this has important consequences for their choice of leaders and the policies that affect their welfare.
References


