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Conceptual Integration, Categorization, Metaphor and Idiomaticity in the New European Monetary Union (the Euro)

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Abstract
The purpose of this paper is to analyze the new conceptual reality that the European Union and, more specifically, Spanish speakers face nowadays. We will see the cognitive mechanisms that speakers activate in order to face such reality and how Conceptual Integration (Turner and Fauconnier 1995, 1998, 1999) is the basic conceptual mechanism that makes the change possible and therefore, communication successful.

In this work we analyze how speakers face the situation when it comes to deal with a new monetary reality and its retort in language and thought. A somehow imposed new conceptual reality is reflected in the language and shown through the conflict or “epistemic impasse” (Bretones & Martín-Morillas 2000) that speakers face when they use concepts such as peseta or money, and idiomatic expressions such as “Nadie da duros por pesetas” (‘No-one gives dimes for cents’) meaning “nobody gives money away”.

Keywords

1. Introduction: February 2002
For the Spanish, the calculation is an awkward one. The exchange of 166.386 pesetas to the euro makes for a tricky operation. A calculator is coming in handy. Everybody needs an euro-converser. No-one memorizes the exact equivalent amounts, and you listen to all kind of sliding scales, formula and ‘rules of three’ that become our ‘rule of law’. But, in fact, we realize that we need to learn it all ‘by rule of thumb’ (‘por experiencia o por costumbre’) and acquire the new conceptual reality living it.

Prices in euros look very exciting. What used to cost 6 000 now costs 36. But beware, it is the same price: ‘no-one gives an euro away in return for a peseta’ (‘nadie regala euros a 1

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1 In theory, the definition “The peseta is the unit of money that is used in Spain” (Ex. In Collins Cobuild Dictionary 1987) is no longer associated to the concept ‘peseta’, specifically since January 2002. Those dictionaries are now wrong.
pesetas’). In fact, the metaphor that we all try to keep in mind now is the conceptual metaphor LESS IS MORE.

The detailed nature of our bodies, our brains, and our everyday functioning in the world structures human concepts and human reason, and also human mathematical reasoning. We believe the basic metaphor NUMBERS ARE THINGS in the world (Lakoff 2000) and we all think that ‘more numbers are more things’. But our perception and cognition can betray us now that there is a change in that world, and make us think that what used to be more now costs less. So, we try hard to keep an imposed metaphor in mind, that is, to remember that LESS IS MORE (the Euro is More, now 1 is 166.386), and although this metaphor is not unconscious it must become so (thanks to conceptual integration) in order to avoid conflict, frustration or other psychological retorts.

The return of the cent, which disappeared from Spanish purses three decades ago, means even more complications when counting change. Then we try to remember again that the Cent is More (1 cent is 1.66 pesetas). Patience is recommended when standing in lines or queuing for the right change. We know that TIME IS MONEY, but this time less money than ever (Time is Few Money). We also know that the new coins and notes are an invitation for the unscrupulous to take advantage of the most defenseless (Money is Evil). The answer for many is to keep one’s eyes peeled and check the small change. In extremis, even tipping is avoided just in case either you are giving too much or giving a ridiculous amount, -tough solution for the tipped and sometime unpleasant for costumers who now are not forgiven a cent. Funny situation, isn’t it?

2. Cognition and Categorization

This paper reflects current views and models of cognition and neural information processing. The relative small size of the neural networks and the relative simplicity of the environments in which they evolve, coupled with the availability of full information on both the agents and their environment, make these networks amenable to functional and structural analysis.

Conceptual Metaphor is the cognitive mechanism by which the abstract is comprehended in terms of the concrete (Lakoff 2000). Most of the abstract inferences—and much of the lexicography—for abstract concepts comes via metaphor. It functions primarily to allow sensory-motor reasoning to apply to subjective judgments. No concept is wholly metaphorical though; there is usually some minimal conceptual skeleton in the target domain—though not enough to do much reasoning with (Lakoff’s lectures 2001). The mechanism called Conceptual Blending (Fauconnier and Turner 1995, 1998, 1999), shows how distinct conceptual structures such as metaphors can be bound together in well specified ways. Grady, in his 1997 dissertation, found persuasive linguistic evidence that complex metaphors of the sort described
by Lakoff and Johnson (1998) should actually be described as conceptual blends of simple metaphors (primary metaphors) that arise by conflation. For example, if you want to achieve a *purpose*, it is common to have to go to a particular *destination* to do it (PURPOSES ARE DESTINATIONS). Grady’s research gave substance to Johnson’s conflation research and Narayanan’s neural recruitment model, since it showed that apparent counterexamples (apparently ungrounded complex metaphors) were actually blends and extensions of primary metaphors.

Mental Spaces\(^2\) and Conceptual Integration\(^3\) are used to infer universals of human reasoning process and depend centrally on projection and dynamic simulation to develop emergent structure in a Blend. They promote novel conceptualizations, involving the generation of inferences, emotional reactions, and rhetorical force. The fundamental idea of Mental Space Theory is that thinking and speaking involve the constant activation of related mental representations. The mental spaces are set up and structured by world knowledge, cultural knowledge, and language.

“Conceptual categorization” is a very important process. Its simplest description would be the simple recognition of a single entity, as when we look at a coin and perceive the coin. But, as neuroscience has shown, the many aspects of the coin – the color of the coin, the shape, the material, the texture of the surface of the coin, the position and location of the coin, the cold feel of the coin in the hand, the reaching for the coin, and so on and on - are apprehended and processed differently in anatomically different locations, and there is no single site in the brain where these various apprehensions are brought together. How can the coin, so obviously a single thing for us at the conscious level, be so many different things and operations for the neuroscientist looking at the unconscious level? How we apprehend one thing as one thing has become a central problem of cognitive neuroscience, called “the binding problem”. Normally, we do not ask ourselves how we can see one thing as one thing because we assume that the unity comes from the thing itself, not from our mental work. But we see the coin as one thing because our brains and bodies give it that status and human scale in an imaginative achievement. We evolved to be conscious of only the result, the Blend.

In contrast, the development of sciences, for instance, requires explicit unpacking, - unpacking of cause and effect. But it is often desirable to decrease the extent to which consciousness lives in the full network. Expert performance consists in having acquired the blended pattern in such a way that it is felt consciously as primitive. Learning letters keeps a forceful distinction between seeing a shape and seeing a letter: the first causes the second. But

\(^2\) Mental spaces are the mental representations mediating between language and the real-world referents.

\(^3\) Conceptual Integration, or Conceptual Blending, works by finding counterparts through projection with the purpose of relating novel conceptual structure to preexisting knowledge.
we cannot distinguish the cause from the effect and we can no longer see the shape without seeing the letter (Fauconnier & Turner, forthcoming).

On this regard, Eleanor Rosch (1981) had demonstrated that basic-level categories have cognitive properties that are different to superordinate categories. They are defined by our capacities for gestalt perception, motor movement, and mental imagery. Compare chair and furniture. You can get a mental image of a chair, but not of a general piece of furniture (as opposed to a chair, bed, table or couch). You have motor schemas for interacting with chairs, but none for interacting with general pieces of furniture. So that, the basic level is the highest level at which mental imagery, motor schemas, and gestalt perception characterize the entire category and the optimal level at which people interact with objects (Lakoff, lectures 2001). As we see in the blend analyzed below, Spaniards seem to get those schemas from interacting with pesetas, not with money. This appears to be the level at which we have evolved to function optimally in the physical environment given our sensory-motor systems.

The basic-level, which is a reality about human conceptual systems, is not a mere reflection of external reality, but a matter of our interaction with our environments. Our concept of a chair has to do, after all, with our ability to sit, which has everything to do with our bodies. Our concept of money has to do with our ability to exchange (transaction is a crucial concept for society or civilization). Those are fundamentally embodied concepts.

3. Basic-Level Category, Relation and Conceptual Integration

An old lady arrives at a small grocery shop and after getting what she needs she says to the cashier (a) “I am paying in money” (‘te pago en dinero’). She means that she is paying not in euros, but in pesetas. The concept of money, having simultaneously the concept peseta blended within it (see Blend in figure 1 and explanation below) is at the basic-level because it becomes crucial to our understanding and interaction with the world in a specific frame, the commercial transaction frame. In expressions like (a), we are prompted to integrate information from different domains in order to produce the framing. The concept of money is understood not only as ‘coins or bank notes that you use when you buy something or when you pay for a service’, but also as ‘the old and always used kind of coins and notes, i.e., the only ones known and used by an individual in a specific location (Spain) at a certain time (until now)’. It is not just a metaphor because it is not to say that ‘money is pesetas’, it is much more.

According to what we have mentioned above, Money would be an abstraction acquired through metaphor. Peseta would be the result of the interaction with the world object, i.e, the concept peseta would be at the basic level supplying schemas of interaction with the real world. The blend money is possible thanks to both, abstraction and integration.
Category is described by Fauconnier and Turner (forthcoming) as an inner-space Vital Relation. Blending can compress outer-space Vital Relations like Metaphor into Category in the blend. Those relations could be called Basic-Level Relations, i.e., relations that make possible basic-level categorization, and that are used in a specific conceptual situation, - in this case in the European one.

What starts out as an outer-space analogy between, let’s say, what you use to buy things and an ideal monetary communitary unit (euro) in a continent (Europe) is now compressed into a Category relation in the blend. So, now the euro has value, location, time, schemas, and all the properties that peseta used to have, but one more. Money has a new property, it has value outside the frontiers of your country. What is outer to money at the beginning, like Euro, can become entrenched by conscious imposition.

Property, like Category, is a Vital Relation in an obvious way: a small coin has the property small. The most obvious status of a property is as an inner-space vital relation: in the space of the coin, the coin is intrinsically hard. Blending often compresses an outer-space vital relation of some sort into an inner-space relation of Property in the blend. For example, outer-space Cause-Effect links can be compressed into Property relations in the blend. A note is something that allows you to get things, not something that is more than paper and ink itself, but in the blend, it has the property valuable. In the blend the coin can be small not only in size but in value.

In our new monetary situation we must be aware of the blend, or keep the blend more active (keep the blend, which was entrenched before, on-line now). Expressions such as (a) show that we are conscious of the blend so that we are able produce on-line structure showing the difference, that now ‘money are euros’. Although we know that this must be felt unconsciously as primitive, and in this way made totally unconscious.
The elementary social structure of buying and selling as we know it emerges in this blended space. There is constraint in the emergent structure of the blend that one of the exchanged objects must be money. Money, in the form of pesetas, i.e., bills and coins, provides a key material anchor for a tight compression of the notion of goods and how to exchange them. But, when someone says “I pay with money”, the linguistic expression sounds funny, unexpected and even comic (see ‘comic blends’ in Coulson 2001). In the commercial transaction frame we always find the frame element ‘money’, but when the frame element is instantiated (conflated in the lexeme ‘pay’) the reduplication makes it funny.
You could specify in what kind or form money appears, but it is obvious that ‘money’ is always involved when ‘paying’. This is not the case for the lady saying (a), who is showing that her conceptual structure arises from the new monetary reality. According to her construal she excluded explicitly euros from the category money and implicitly transmitted that exclusion it in the blend.

4. Idiomaticity

A somehow imposed conceptual reality is reflected in the language and thought, and shown through the conflict or “epistemic impasse” (Bretones & Martín-Morillas 2000) that speakers face when meaning understanding and production take place. They face this situation when they use concepts such as *peseta* or *money* (see above), and idiomatic expressions such as (b)“Nadie da duros por pesetas” (‘no-one gives dimes for cents’) meaning “nobody gives money away”. Subjects overcome the impasse thanks to Conceptual Integration, which make accessible the integration of new conceptual metaphors and the felicitous meaning of concepts such as *money* (see above).

Expressions such as (b) suffer innovative transformations, originally in search for a more explicit meaning, such as in (c) “Nadie da euros por pesetas” keeping the original meaning “nobody gives money away”. This kind of linguistic innovation is totally accepted in discourse and it shows that conceptual blending is the mechanism at work making recategorization possible, -either introducing euros as pesetas or as a new category. They also show the metaphoric basis of idioms and how conceptual blending is the mechanism that integrates the new metaphors that make them possible.

Example (c) also shows that blending originates such “innovated idiomatic expressions”, i.e., cases of idioms that, like regular linguistic expressions and concepts, are created in order to be more suitable in a new conceptual situation. This kind of expressions has established idiomatic anchors that make them have a different status (because they are not totally innovative). They don’t have a mere creative aim but an adaptive one.

Idioms from a specific frame are normally subject to belong to the “innovated” category when a specific conceptual blend is made entrenched and omnipresent in the language. The new idiomatic expressions used by Spaniards nowadays in the commercial transaction frame are innovated idiomatic expressions coming from productive idioms thanks to new concepts such as *money* and *euro* and to idioms that are considered “syntactically productive” (Gibbs 1990:421). Speakers are not taught which ones are and which are not, but it is sure that idioms are partially analyzable and that any idioms are motivated by people’s conceptual knowledge (Gibbs 1990: 422).
Let’s take, for instance, the case of expressions in which *euro* is introduced instead of *duro* (five pesetas coin): “La casa que se han comprado no vale ni un euro” (‘the house they bought is not worth an euro’) meaning ‘The house they bought is awful’; “Ese chico no vale dos euros” (‘that guy is not worth two euros’) meaning ‘That guy is not handsome’; “No doy un euro por esa relación” (‘I don’t give an euro for that relationship’) meaning ‘I don’t think that relationship is working’, “Yo no pagaría por eso ni un euro” (I wouldn’t pay an euro for it’) meaning ‘I wouldn’t buy it’.

We support our argument with counterexamples in which Conceptual Integration is not possible and, as a result, the expressions cannot be said – taken for dissonant and wrong. That’s the case of (a) again, turned into “*Nadie da euros por céntimos de EUROS*” (‘Nobody gives EUROS for cents of EUROS’). That sentence does not work.

The mappings represented in figure 2 show how the basic metaphor working in the examples is Less is More, and it makes possible metaphors such as Euros are Duros and Pesetas are Cents (of Euro).

### 5. Evasion

Intentionality covers a group of Vital Relations in conceptual integration, having to do with hope, desire, want, fear, belief, memory, and other mental attitudes and dispositions directed at content (Fauconnier & Turner, forthcoming). We interpret each other on the basis of the view that people's actions and reactions are intentional in this technical sense. Intentionality is crucial because everything we do and think and feel is based on the relations it covers. But in many occasions intentions are avoided. People wish to avoid responding to the intended meaning of another person’s message. In situations like these, speakers attempt to cleverly evade the topic, or avoid blending the direct implication of what someone else has said. Overt evasions are those in which the speaker more or less directly suggests that he or she is not going to give a cooperative answer (Gibbs 1999: 164).
There are many evasions in a new conceptual situation. For instance, in Spain for a month people avoid making judgments about what is “expensive” or “cheap”, about the “value” of things or even about “economy”. That is all due to the fact that we are not able to establish certain vital relations in the blend. Evasion is thus, the consequence of lacking specific vital relations, or what is the same, consequence of an “uneffective blend”. Blending is connected to familiarity. Relations that are vital bring familiarity to the blend (see how familiar idioms are felicitous, and unfamiliar conceptual structures are not).

A speaker may challenge the listener by condemning the original question (Gibbs 1999: 164). “A: ¿Y tú, cuánto cobras en euros? B: Lo mismo que en pesetas” (A: ‘So, how much do you eran in euros? B: As much as in pesetas’). The intention of speaker B is to avoid an answer to that question, and the meaning communicated is that if A wanted to know it, she should have asked in pesetas because B won’t tell (doesn’t know) the sum in euros. B won’t know if she should ask “Pues, cuántas pesetas? (Then, how many pesetas?)” or just change subjects. Evasion is not optional, but a necessary part of what speakers must sometimes say (Gibbs 1999:165) and in such a transitory conceptual situation it is crucial for the continuum of interaction and communication. Evasion is in fact an exceptional indicator of on-line conceptual integration.

Idiomatic expressions such as “No tengo un duro” (‘I have no money) or “No vale un duro” (‘It is not worth a dime) and which will probably become as natural and entrenched in short as “No vale una perra gorda” (‘It is not worth a cent’), for example, are getting equated to on-line innovations such as “No tengo un euro” (‘I have no money’) or “No vale un euro”(‘It is not worth an EURO’). In general, these are a bit puzzling for Spanish speakers right now and evaded. Also literal ones such as “No tengo euros”(‘I don’t have euros’) or “No tengo ni un euro en el monedero” (‘I don’t even have one euro in my purse’) sounded weird at first, but they are less and less evaded.
References


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