

# Multimodal Metaphors in Political Cartoon Discourse About Brexit—Based on “Journey” Metaphor Scenario

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Based on the perspective of multimodal metaphor, this paper makes an analysis of “Journey” metaphor scenario from a political cartoon concerning with the topic of Brexit in *Economist*, disclosing the political intention and attitude behind the humorous picture. This political cartoon conveys meanings in a vivid and interesting way with the help of “Journey” metaphor scenario, which combines the visual elements such as portraits of national leaders and iconic signs with news reports, the form of written language, reflecting the process of Brexit. Besides, the metaphor scenario also contains reporters’ personal opinions towards the leader’s policy of proceeding Brexit potentially. As the platform of hidden political ideologies, multimodal metaphor in political cartoons can be used to affect audience’s cognitive judgement towards the political affairs implicitly.

*Keywords:* multimodal metaphor, political cartoons, image alignment

## Introduction

Brexit is an abbreviation word for the phrase expression “Britain exit”, referring to Britain’s decision to leave the European Union. As one of the most influential and popular countries around the world, Britain’s decision has attracted attention all over the world. Focusing on the process of this event, many political cartoons appear in popular public media. On the one hand, political cartoons depict imaginary settings with certain degree of exaggeration deliberately; on the other hand, they reflect real political events as well (El Refaie, 2009a, p. 186). This feature leads to the feasibility of metaphorical analysis about the political cartoons to understand the potential meaning behind the pictures.

Therefore, political cartoons have received cognitive linguists’ attention from home and abroad.

Bounegru and Forceville select 30 political cartoons during the 2008 global economic crisis to study the multimodal metaphors, and they conclude that metaphor can represent thinking (Bounegru & Forceville, 2011). El Refaie (2009b) examines multimodal metaphors in political cartoons from the perspective of audience reactions.

These previous studies have obtained great achievements; however, the connection between the research paper and the specific social background is not strong. The previous study intends to conduct research in a macroscopic view which focuses on the identification and classification of the whole scenario. Detailed analysis on specific elements in a scenario is not popular among the scholars.

Considering the current situation, this study focuses on a typical Brexit political cartoon from *Economist* and analyzes the multimodal metaphor scenario in it. The study aims to find out the hidden political intention

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and ideology behind the JOURNEY metaphor scenario in the cartoon; thus, it could provide some guidance for the readers who want to have a deep understanding about the political cartoons.

### Theoretical Framework

With the publishing of the book *Metaphors We Live By* during the 1980s by Lakoff and Johnson, the Conceptual Metaphor Theory becomes popular and it is widely accepted among cognitive linguists, who admit that metaphor is more than a literal phenomenon, but it is also related to our thought and action and it is the process of mapping between different cognitive domains (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

Then with the development of cognitive linguistics, metaphors are not restricted in the form of language, but they could be found in any other form of communication, including visual symbols, gestures, sounds, music, and so forth (Forceville & Urios-Aparisi, 2009, p. 22).

When analyzing multimodal metaphors, Musolff (2006) defines the concept of metaphor scenarios as a set of assumptions about the source domain made by the members of a discourse community, which include participants, dramatic story plot, and ending of the scenario, as well as general evaluation on it. Musolff also regards metaphor scenario as a cluster of concepts that consists of multiple single concepts.

This study puts focus on the “Journey” metaphor scenario to analyze political cartoons on the topic of Brexit, which is one of the most popular metaphor scenarios in Brexit-related political cartoons. The analysis is based on the metaphor scenario defined by Musolff (2006), as well as the theory of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

### “Journey” Metaphor in Political Discourse

The “Journey” metaphor is one of the most frequently-used metaphors in political discourse. The reason might be that it actually reflects the metaphor “Purposes Are Destinations” (Koller & Semino, 2009, pp. 19-20). Political events usually involve certain purposes, such as asking for support. Thus, this kind of goal-oriented metaphor is preferred in political discourses.

As Forceville (1996, p. 23) points out, journey is a process that consists of an enormous number of elements, including starting point, destination, means of transportation, partners, scenes, unexpected dangers, costs, and many so on.

Therefore, the purposes of political events are constructed as destinations in the journey and the processes of the events are mapped to the motion during the journey (Semino, 2008, p. 109).

### Analysis



Figure 1. The road to Brexit, *The Economist Leaders*, 2016-10-08.

### “Journey” Metaphor Scenario

From the figure, the elements of car, drivers, road, and mountain make it obvious that the journey scenario is applied in the cartoon. The printed words also help to form the metaphor, following the format that A is B, that is to say, different ways of proceeding Brexit are the roads towards different directions. This metaphor is multimodal because the target, proceeding Brexit, is pointed out by the verbal representations “Brexit”, with the help of pictorial elements that depict the journey scenario.

On the whole, the figure shows that the car whose trunk is imprinted with Britain national flag is in the process of driving on the road. The car also has a license plate with the written word “BRIT”. The driving environment is complex, for there are crack, twists, bridge which is on fire, and dead end waiting ahead. The driver is recognized as Theresa May from her typical leopard-printed scarf. The man sits beside her could be identified as Trump from his physical appearance.

The road has two directions with a sign standing in the middle: The road towards left is full of dangers and twists, while the road towards right is much easier to pass, which forms a great contrast by aligning the directions together.

What’s more, from the figure we can find that the driver has obvious intention to turn her steering wheel to the left side, which is the dangerous one. However, the man is still in support of her decision with his thumb up. This passenger seems to be a pleasure-seeker, which could be judged from his smile. Neither the passenger nor the driver is looking forward in the process of driving; they are ignoring the safety.

Therefore, if taking social background into consideration, it could not be difficult to judge that the source domain in the metaphor scenario is that a person is driving towards a dangerous direction but she is unaware of the current situation, and the target domain is that Theresa intends to lead Britain to exit the EU in a hard and tough way.

Focusing on the details we can find that some of the mapping relations between two domains which could be detected from the figure include: “Britain is the car”; “process of Brexit is the road”; “Britain and America are the drivers”; “policies of Brexit are the directions”; “hard Brexit is the dead end”; “soft Brexit is the bright major road”.

After the observation of the metaphor scenario of this political cartoon as a whole, the focus of this study would be paid on specific metaphors included in the scenario.

### Theresa Is “Driver”



Figure 2. Theresa is “Driver”.

As we can see from the figure, the female driver wearing a leopard-patterned scarf in the picture can be recognized as Theresa May, who is the 76th Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, for she is famous for her fancy

for leopard-decorated clothes. In common sense, drivers should pay attention to the driving environment with great care, but apparently the driver in this scenario is absent of mind when driving: She has no aware of observing the road condition. The situation is very dangerous but she still feels at ease with a smile on her face. This female driver seems to be pleased with herself, ignoring the urgent situation and dangerous barriers waiting in the journey.

Theresa holds the view that Britain should leave the European Union so that it could become a Global Britain. To achieve this ambition, she argues that Britain should be completely separated from the EU to get back the control of its power in laws, borders, immigration, and many other important fields. Therefore, it becomes a policy that is called “hard Brexit”, with the intention to ensure Britain’s complete independence in these formal affairs. However, hard Brexit would lead to higher trade costs and a sharp increase in tariffs for some industries, which would affect Britain’s exports and economic activities negatively. Facing such urgent situation and grave consequences, Theresa still sticks to her decision to a harder sort of Brexit, which involves a thorough separation of labor force, production, and financial market. It is a risky decision, just like the driver in the cartoon who refuses to look forward and takes a wrong direction which would lead the car to a more complex and dangerous journey.

### **Britain Is “Car”**



*Figure 3. Britain is “Car”.*

The car with a Britain national flag is in the process of driving. Since the driver is Theresa, and taking the national flag into consideration, the car might be mapped to Great Britain, just like the abbreviation “GB” printed on the car. The central element, the national flag, is standing for the whole nation. As depicted in the figure, the car is in good condition, but the journey waiting for the car is full of barriers. The car itself cannot choose its direction, and it is the driver who decides which road to take. Making unsuitable and unsafe decisions when driving would lead to serious accidents. Therefore, even though residents wish to remain in the EU, and for those who agree to leave, majority would prefer soft Brexit, the future of Britain is still held by the leaders.

### **“Hard Brexit” Is Dangerous**



*Figure 4. “Hard Brexit” is the edge of cliff.*



Figure 5. "Hard Brexit" is the broken bridge on fire.



Figure 6. "Hard Brexit" is an accident.



Figure 7. "Hard Brexit" is dead end.



Figure 8. "Hard Brexit" is dangerous.

Theresa intends to choose a harder sort of Brexit, but the cartoon depicts a dangerous journey for this direction. From the Figure 4, the warning sign on the edge of a cliff is eye-catching. The triangular sign is used to inform the drivers or pedestrians that the road ahead is full of dangers so that they should be highly careful about the road condition. This warning sign represents a real warning in the process of hard Brexit, but Theresa, as the driver in the figure, is not aware of the warning and she overestimates the current situation.

Figure 5 shows a broken bridge which is on fire. The bridge is a common representation of cooperation, and it signifies the connection between Britain and the EU in reality. However, Britain sticks to the decision to

exit EU, and the connection is cut off, just like the broken bridge in the figure. Worse still, the bridge is on fire as well, with the black smoke rising up. This means that there is conflict between Britain and the EU; the negotiation on Brexit is broken. What's more, we can observe the twists ahead of the journey, which are difficult for the driver to handle with. They also symbolize the numerous dangers waiting for Britain in the process of hard Brexit. Figure 6 describes an interesting situation: A sheep is crossing the road. If the car keeps driving, it would definitely hit the sheep. On the one hand, drivers should not hurt the sheep on purpose if we take humanitarianism into consideration. On the other hand, from the perspective of culture, there is a saying that sheep is a symbol of good luck in Britain. Just like the British animation *Shaun the sheep* is popular around the world; sheep enjoys a high status in Britain. Therefore, the figure also sets out a warning that Britain should not head a wrong direction to destroy the good luck.

Circular elements are used in the Figures 7 and 8. These circles are the representations of dead ends of the process of hard Brexit. The twists are arranged in the curvilinear form, implying endless and non-stop dangers and unknown risks in the hard sort of Brexit. If Theresa sticks to the harder sort of Brexit, there would be no possibility to get out of the infinite loop. As a result, no deal would be made and Britain would be stuck in an awful situation.

#### **“Soft Brexit” Is Preferable**



*Figure 9. “Soft Brexit” is safe.*

In contrast with the dangerous road conditions such as cliff, twists, broken bridge, the journey in another direction is much more comfortable. If the driver turns right, she would face a road without hindrance. Thus, the figure contains a strong signal that a soft sort of Brexit should be selected. A successful journey is a successful political event. That is to say, Britain should not cut off the connection with the EU in such a complete way, which would bring damages to the nation.

#### **“Passenger” Is Trump**



*Figure 10. “Passenger” is Trump.*

Comparing the road conditions in two direction, dangers in the left and comforts in the right, a sensible driver would choose the latter one without hesitation. But the driver in the cartoon still intends to turn left, which is a puzzling decision. The reason might be found in the behavior of the male passenger in the car. He is smiling with thumb up, praising the driver for her decision, which evokes the primary metaphor that “Up Is Good”. His behavior seems to encourage the driver to keep driving in such a wrong direction.

Judging from his appearance, the passenger could be identified as the president of America—Trump, who has expressed his support for hard sort of Brexit. Trump even intends to encourage Britain to leave the EU without deal and negotiation, which could lead to greater conflict between the two sides, for the reason that he wants to benefit from the contradiction. If Britain leaves the EU in such a tough way, the cooperation between the two sides does no longer exist, which leaves a greater market for America to make profits. Taking these background information into consideration, the strange behavior of the passenger could be understood then.

### Conclusion

The analysis in the above section illustrates the function of multimodal metaphor used in political discourse to convey hidden opinion and attitude towards the political events. The cluster of metaphors forms a metaphor scenario, which is “Journey” scenario in the selected political cartoon in this study.

In the scenario, our familiar elements in real life such as the car, the driver, are utilized to represent the process of Brexit, which is a complex political event. What’s more, through the contrast between two different directions, this scenario also expresses the reporters’ concern and prediction about the future process (Silaški & Durovic, 2019). Therefore, multimodal metaphor could serve as a powerful method for the media group to convey potential intention and ideology; it could be a useful tool for the readers to understand the complex political affairs with the help of common experience and social background.

People would reach agreement on the rule that driving in the wrong direction means that the driver would not get to her desired destination as planned, or that she might take more risks and spend more time in accomplishing her goal. Therefore, this “Journey” scenario puts focus on the difficulties and dangers Britain may face on its hard sort of way out of the EU. Because the driver in the figure, that is to say, the leader, of Britain, is driving the car (i.e., the country) in a wrong direction. The concepts of “dangers”, “risks”, or “difficulties”, are visualized by the physical elements including “cliff”, “broken bridge”, “twists”, “disturbance of the passenger”, and so on so forth. Thus, if Britain does want to avoid dangers in the journey, Theresa, as the driver, should ignore the back-seat passenger, and focus on the road ahead to choose a proper direction.

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Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dcm.2019.100318>