How motion metaphors drive political races

Teenie Matlock, Marcus Perlman, Morgan Fleming, & Chelsea Coe
University of California, Merced

In an election year, U.S. citizens are inundated with campaign messages. Some of these messages are positive, and some are negative. Some are conservative, and some are progressive. All use framing to capture attention, sway, and persuade (Chong & Druckman. 2007; Druckman, 2001; Lakoff & Wehling, 2012). Many questions are worth exploring pertaining to how campaign messages affect people's opinions of candidates and drive their behaviors on election day. In the current work, we examine the use and understanding of motion metaphors in the context of framing messages about political races. Of special interest is the role of manner of motion and aspect in messages that include motion metaphors. We combine theoretical notions and methods from cognitive linguistics, cognitive science, and political science to investigate the role of motion metaphors in framing political discourse, including campaign ads. In the presentation, we will discuss results from experiments that extended prior work on framing effects in political talk, especially motion metaphors (Matlock, 2012) and grammatical aspect (Fausey & Matlock, 2010). We will focus on manner of motion and aspect in statements such as, "Candidate A raced/is racing ahead of Candidate B" and "Candidate A inched/is inching ahead of Candidate B". As predicted, manner of motion and aspect interacted in interesting ways, and systematically influenced people's opinions about political candidates, and who would win an election. The results are novel, and have valuable theoretical and practical implications for conceptual metaphor theory (Gibbs, 1994; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Lakoff, 1987) and political communication (e.g., Lakoff, 2008).

References

Chong, D., & Druckman, J.N. (2007). Framing theory. *Annual Review of Political Science, 10*, 103-126.

Druckman, J.N. (2001). Evaluating framing effects. *Journal of Economic Psychology*, 22, 91-101.

Fausey, C.M., & Matlock, T. (2011). Can grammar win elections? *Political Psychology, 32*, 563–574.

Gibbs, R.W., Jr. (1994). *The Poetics of Mind: Figurative Thought, Language, and Understanding.* New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Lakoff, G. (1987). *Women, fire, and dangerous things: What categories reveal about the mind*. Chicago: University of Chicago.

Lakoff, G. (2008). *The Political Mind: Why You Can't Understand 21st-century American Politics with an 18th-Century Brain.* New York, NY: Penguin Press.

Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1980). *Metaphors We Live By.* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Lakoff, G., & Wehling, E. (2012). *The Little Blue Book: The Essential Guide to Thinking and Talking Democratic*. New York, NY: Free Press.

Matlock, T. (2012). Framing political messages with grammar and metaphor. *American Scientist, 100*, 478-483.