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COMPRESSIONS IN IRONIC HEADLINES REFERRING TO POLITICIANS OF THE USA AND LITHUANIA

In the article the scientific model of conceptual blending (developed by Mark Turner and Gilles Fauconnier) is applied to the analysis of ironic headlines. It is argued that irony's ability to make use of this mechanism partially accounts for the use of ironic references in news discourse. Irony is used as a means to reveal the compressions created via blending. An ironist employs the rules of blending to present a variety of eye-catching and brief headlines that contain compressions of Time, Space, Part-Whole, Role-Value, Intentionality, and Analogy/Disanalogy that are compressed into Uniqueness. The multiple compressions of an ironic reference do not only enable the ironist to communicate complex ideas and implications at the scale of human understanding but also facilitate the economy of space (i.e. the complex conceptual integration networks operate in a way that brings elements from a variety of mental input spaces into one blend). An overview of the Vital Relations and their compressions is supported by a number of ironic news headlines collected from popular Lithuanian and American online news websites.

KEY WORDS: conceptual blending, irony, compressions, mental spaces

Introductory remarks

One of the most important developments in human information processing in recent years has been the emergence of Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner's Conceptual Integration Network theory, or "Blending" as it is more commonly known. Blending is presented as a scientific model that captures and explains many apparently divergent phenomena, from talking donkeys in cartoons to complex numbers. One of its most significant achievements is its contribution to the question of creativity, in the principled way in which it shows

how a new meaning can emerge from old information.

In 2002 Fauconnier and Turner published their major work *Conceptual Blending* claiming that due to our ability of blending different concepts, a variety of new mental spaces appear. Conceptual integration connects input spaces, projects selectively to a blended space, and develops the emergent structure. The mechanism of blending works creatively and presents a broad scope of compressions that are used to reduce the scale of events to the scale of human understanding; it gives us global insight. Certain

conceptual relations such as Cause–Effect, Identity, Space, Time, Change, etc., show up again and again in blending. These all-important relations are called “Vital Relations”¹ (relations that connect separate input spaces of the blend).

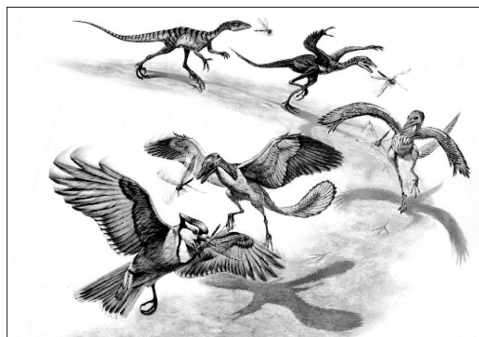
In my study, I aim to show that the mechanism of blending is applicable to irony and that irony’s ability to make use of this mechanism and to reveal the compressions created via blending partially accounts for the use of ironic references in general.

1. Compressions of Vital Relations

Fauconnier and Turner give an outline of different types of compressions that the blending mechanism is able to produce. They enumerate outer space (relations that exist outside the blended space) Vital Relations of Time, Space, Identity, Change, Role-Value, Cause-Effect, Part-Whole, Representation, Analogy, Disanalogy, and Intentionality that might undergo compressions into inner space Vital Relations (relations that exist inside the blended space) of Uniqueness, Property, Similarity, and Category.

All the Vital Relations that connect separate input spaces of the blend undergo certain compressions. This could be visually illustrated with a blend where in one short flight a dinosaur chasing a dragonfly turns into a bird (the picture taken from Fauconnier and Turner’s “Conceptual Blending”, 2002, p. 95).

Here the complex issue of evolution is compressed to the scale of human understanding. The same types of compressions of Vital Relations may be found in irony. Some of the outer space Vital Relations are



Picture 1. **The evolution of dinosaurs into birds**

more common than others, and nearly all the outer space Vital Relations in irony are compressed to the inner space Vital Relation of Uniqueness. Irony gets a great benefit when employing the techniques provided by the mechanism of blending. Complicated storylines, emotions, critical evaluation and attitudes can be compressed into one headline. What would otherwise require half a page to tell is expressed in several ironic words when blending mechanism is involved.

In my research, news headlines of a number of news websites (mainly delfi.lt and altnet.org) of the period between 2000 and 2011 were analyzed and the analysis led to the findings discussed below.

2. Conceptual compressions in irony

There are a number of compressions that are activated in irony by the mechanism of blending. The research focuses on the compressions that are employed when referring ironically to the country, presidents and politicians of Lithuania and America. The ironic headlines collected during the above mentioned period come to 256 references to the names of the two countries and well known politicians (Paksas, Grybauskaitė,

¹ Capitalised by Turner and Fauconnier.

Valinskas, Bush, McCain, Petraeus, Cheney, and others).

A closer look at the compressions that blending enables irony to undergo, reveals a set of Outer Space Vital Relations. All the Outer Space Vital Relations within an ironic headline are compressed into the Inner Space Vital Relation of Uniqueness. The mechanism of conceptual blending that irony employs in its performance enables an economy of space. The most frequent compressions found in ironic headlines focused on political figures are the following: Time, Space, Change, Role-Value, Analogy/Disanalogy, and Intentionality. Those compressions are usually activated in most of the ironic headlines simultaneously.

3. Compressions of Time

Relying on Fauconnier and Turner (2002), Time is a Vital Relation “related to memory, change, continuity, simultaneity or non-simultaneity” (Fauconnier, Turner 2002, p. 96). Inputs can be separated by time but the blends bring those inputs together. In ironic headlines, an ironist frequently gives reference to certain cultural aspects, historical events, fictitious stories, or imagined scenarios – all of which would be too broad to dwell upon in full in a headline.

Thus, the ironic headline “Will Pensive Gediminas Step over Dujotiekana’s Tube?” (“Ar peržengs Rūpintojėlis Gediminas Dujotiekanos vamzdį?” (delfi.lt)) addresses the Prime Minister Gediminas Kirkilas as *Rūpintojėlis* Gediminas and compresses time, as *Rūpintojėlis* (the Pensive Christ in English) in Lithuanian folk art has been considered a typical representation of Christ as “squatting or seated man on a stool or a throne (whose) facial expression implies contemplation and worry” (Gimbutas 1982,

p. 230–234). Such figurines are common in Lithuania between in the XVIII and XX centuries and are regarded as one of the symbols of Lithuanian soul². In the headline, the mechanism of blending enables irony to use the Compressions of Time even in two stages: the spans between the lifetime of Christ, his representation between XVIII and XX centuries, and the present day are compressed to have a present day Pensive Christ/Sorrowful God – the prime minister of Lithuania – Kirkilas. The Vital outer space Relation of Time using the mechanism of blending is compressed into a Vital Relation of Uniqueness, as in the headline we do not see three but one figure.

Similarly, in such headlines as “The Jurisdiction of Litbel” (“Litbelo teisėsauaga”(delfi.lt)), “Gediminas’ Dream” (“Gedimino sapnas”(delfi.lt)), “What Would Jesus Buy?”(alnetnet.org), etc. we detect the compressions of Time that come due to a clash of the elements in the mental input spaces separated in time. Subsequently we compress the period of 1919 and the period of independence into a single entity, the time of the establishment of Vilnius and 2006 when Kirkilas was elected Prime Minister, or the present time and the time when Jesus Christ lived.

Compressions of Time might be regarded as typical for the majority of ironic headlines referring to politicians as they are usually based on some parallels with well known earlier events. As Vyvyan Evans notices, “time is conceptualized in terms of

² Though the Pensive Christ (or Sorrowful God) is usually thought to represent the essence of Lithuanian nation, according to P.Galaunė (1930), similar images were well known in many countries of Western Europe as early as in the XVth century (such images of Christ are called “Der Schmerzensmann” in Germany or “Penseur” in France).

special relations and motion through space” (Evans 2007, p. 758), therefore compressions of Time usually appear together with compressions of Space.

4. Compressions of Space

Fauconnier and Turner (2002, p. 96) describe compressions of Space as being very similar to compressions of Time, with the only difference that compressions of Time enable two events/ that are separated in time to be joined, while compressions of Space join events/situations that are separated in space. The compressions of Space can be analyzed relying on the headline of Rūpintojėlis Gediminas discussed above. The blend has inputs separated in physical space (in this case a place close to Golgotha, Lithuanian roadside shrine crosses, and the present day Parliament), but a resulting blend has a single physical space. It is interesting to note that the network of “God (or Jesus Christ)” is activated in a variety of ironic headlines, e.g., “The Crucifixion of Michael Vick” (altnet.org) also offers an insight into the nature of a political situation by employing blending to achieve compression of Space. The compressions of Space in ironic headlines fall into two categories, i.e. joining two actual locations that belong to different input spaces (e.g. Golgotha and the Parliament in “Will Pensive Gediminas Step over Dujotiekana’s Tube”, or the spot of the third base in a stadium, Bush’ birthplace, and the White house in “The Stork Dropped George Bush on Third Base with a Silver Spoon in his Mouth”) and real locations versus imaginary places (e.g. the Parliament and Dracula’s castle in “A Tale of Dragon Zuokula and a Maiden” (“Pasaka apie slibiną Zuokulą ir mergelę”(delfi.lt)), the Parliament and the imaginary world of fairies in

“The Good Fairy of the Parliament” (“Geroji Seimo feja” (delfi.lt)), not to mention a wide range of compressions related to the country: Lithuania as the land of miracles, the land of fools, the land of kebabs, etc. The latter type of Space compressions exploited by ironic headlines proved to be much more numerous.

5. Compressions of Change

Change is a very “general Vital Relation, connecting one element to another and suites of elements to other suites” (Fauconnier, Turner 2002, p. 92) As a result, these outer space Vital Relations are usually compressed into the inner space Vital Relation of Uniqueness (e.g. in the dinosaur-bird example, we are given a compression within the blended space due to the outer space Vital Relation of Change: the whole process of evolution is seen as a change experienced by one creature within its own lifespan, i.e. the dinosaur and the bird are comprehended as one single unique being, manifesting the inner space Vital Relation of Uniqueness). Thus, the mechanism of blending provides us “an efficient compression of Change into Uniqueness at human scale” (ibid., p. 94). The outer space Vital Relation of Change often goes together with the outer space Vital Relation of Identity. If Artūras Zuokas changes into Dracula, there is no Identity connector between them, but in the blend they are a unique being. The blend of “Rūpintojėlis Gediminas” gives us an efficient compression of Change into Uniqueness at a human scale of understanding, which allows us to manage the network of change from God – to Rūpintojėlis - and then to Gediminas Kirkilas. Though there appear to be three separate mental input spaces, the connections between the blend and the inputs never disappear.

6. Compressions of Role-Value

Role-Value is one of the most common Vital Relations. All Roles have their Values. Within or across mental spaces, an element can be linked as a Role to another element as a Value. Elements are roles or values not in some absolute sense but only relative to other elements. For example, G.Bush or R.Paksas are two of many possible values for the role of "President". Analogy depends on Role-Value compression. If we have two input spaces sharing the same role, there is an identity connector between the Role input in one network and the Role input in the other network. The result is two Role-Value compression networks that have the same Role input. In other words, when, through blending, two different blended spaces have acquired a frame structure in common, they are linked by the Vital relation of Analogy. In Role-value based ironic compressions, the features typically associated with the role are transferred onto a new value, and the inadequacy between the features and the beliefs about the characteristics ascribed to the victim of irony results in an ironic interpretation. In such headlines as: "Bush's Energy Policy: Begging for More Oil" (altnet.org), "Bush: If I Were Iraqi, I'd Support My Endless, Illegal Occupation" (altnet.org), "Will Papa Bush's Old Pals Prolong the Iraq Occupation?" (altnet.org), "Top Climate Expert: Bush White House Edits Testimony of Government Scientists" (altnet.org), "Bush the 'Commander Guy' Rejects Spending on His Own War" (altnet.org), "The Bojarin of Kėdainiai to Rule Lithuania" ("Kėdainių 'bojarinas' užsimojo valdyti Lietuvą" (delfi.lt)), "The Myth of Kėdainiai Tzar Evaporates" ("Bliūkšta Kėdainių caro mitas" (delfi.lt)), etc. the inadequacy between the role and the value (Bush= beggar, Iraqi, papa, cli-

mate expert, commander guy; Uspaskich = nobleman, tsar) generates an ironic "shift of meaning" (Coulson 2001, p. 32–64).

7. Compressions of Analogy/Disanalogy

Analogy is dependent on Role-Value compressions. According to Tony Veale, analogy is "just one manifestation of creative cognition, but one that clearly illustrates this ability of creative thinkers to transcend conceptual boundaries and perform a semantic leap from one category structure to another" (2006, p. 223). The Vital Relation of Analogy is connected to the Vital Relation of Disanalogy. (For example, in separate input spaces, both Gediminas Kirkilas and the Great Duke Gediminas can be connected by Analogy, yet at the same time there are differences between them that are accounted for by the Vital Relation of Disanalogy). In ironic headlines, the evaluative attitude is often based on the Vital Relation of Analogy that connects two well-known personalities, e.g.: "Prunskienė – a more Civilised Version of Paksas" ("Prunskienė – labiau civilizuota Pakso versija" (delfi.lt)), "Why Uspaskich Resembles Madonna" ("Kuo Uspaskichas panašus į Madonną" (delfi.lt)), "A.Zuokas Equals Himself to Vytautas Magnus" ("A.Zuokas save prilygino Vytautui Didžiajam" (delfi.lt)), "Petraeus: The Paris Hilton of Generals" (altnet.org), "Paris Hilton More Accountable Than the President" (altnet.org), "Is Abramoff the New Monica" (nytimes.com), or "The Dangerous Rudy Giuliani: George Bush with Brains" (altnet.org). The Vital Relations of Analogy underlie not only parallels between people, but also between people and inanimate objects. Here the parallels are based either on some Property relation (e.g. a non-stick

material and a politician to whom criticism does not seem to stick, as in: “The collapse of Teflon Tony (The Times, November 10, 2005), “Forget Teflon Tony, Now It’s Tesco Tony!”, “Putin’s Teflon Image Takes Hit” (The Moscow Times. December 23, 2008), etc.), or serve as a means to undermine the status of the victim of irony by certain implications (e.g. references to citizens as sheep or beetroots to imply the lack of brain in: “TV Ratings, Sheep and Criminal Consciousness” (“TV reitingai, avinai ir kriminalinė sąmonė” (delfi.lt)), “Elite against Beetroots. Who Is to Win?” (“Elitas” prieš “runkelius”. Kas nugalės? (delfi.lt)), “Elite, Cucumbers, and Beetroots” (“Elitas, agurkai ir runkeliai” (delfi.lt)).

The compressions of the Vital Relation of Role-Value were most dominant in the integration networks of those headlines where irony employed metaphors (Lithuania, as a value, is given the role of a leader, European countries the roles of sportsmen, etc.). Here they go together with the Vital Relation of Analogy and are compressed into Uniqueness in the blended space; yet, though we see the blend as a single unit, this does not prevent us from seeing the input spaces as separate compound elements.

8. Part-Whole Compressions

The Part-Whole compressions are typical in cases where one input space provides the whole and the other input space contains a part of that whole. Metonymy is based on such compressions and “is commonly used to produce rhetorical effects (...); the rhetorical effects tend to derive from violations of default cognitive and communicative principles” (Radden, Kovecses 1999, p. 52). In ironic news headlines the Vital Part – Whole Relations are most visible in references to Lithuania as a Banana Republic (in: “Lithuania – a Banana Republic”

(“Lietuva – bananų respublika” (krantas.com)), “Lithuania Turns into a Banana Republic” (“Lietuva virto bananų respublika (diena.lt)), “Lithuania’s Image – the Heart of Baltic or a Banana Republic?” (“Lietuvos įvaizdis – Baltijos širdis ar Bananų respublika?” (rytas.lt)), a Cheburek Land in: “The Perspectives of Cheburek Land” (“Čeburekų šalies perspektyvos”(delfi.lt)), a Kebab Land in “Lithuania is a Kebab Land” (“Lietuva-kebabų kraštas” (delfi.lt)), etc. Irony in these headlines is communicated through a metonymic representation. We come across a pragmatic function based on metonymy – to avoid identifying the country directly only a small ‘representative’ object is mentioned. Simultaneously, the function of status downgrading is performed as the ‘small part’ deliberately chosen for representation is trivial and insignificant. The choice reveals the speaker’s derogatory attitude (had some significant object/feature been chosen for representation the irony would have been lost). The metonymical-ironic representation of the country in many cases is based on the name of a dish that in Lithuania has the reputation of low quality fast food served in kiosks and retains the pejorative function of status downgrading peculiar to the “Banana Republic” blend. The fact that a country with ambitions for a higher status (i.e. to be seen as a Western European country) is referred to through a trivial attribute (Chebureks, Kebabs) reveals a negative assessment and irony that were not inherent in any of the inputs. The cognitive principles of metonymy (outlined by Gunter Radden and Zoltan Kovecses (1999)) that require “Important over less important” and the communicative principles of clarity and relevance are overridden deliberately, therefore the resulting “non-default metonymy” (ibid.) is felt to be figurative. The blended

space generates an emergent structure where the ironic shift of meaning appears due to the incompatibility between the opinions about the country escalated by politicians (expectations) and the actual situation in the country. Here irony first of all performs an evaluative function. The assessment given to Lithuania promotes negativity, disappointment and disapproval, and emphasizes the downgrading of the country's status.

9. Intentionality

Intentionality also belongs to the relations functioning inside the blend and encompasses such aspects as "hope, desire, want, fear, belief, memory, and other mental attitudes and dispositions" (Fauconnier, Turner 2002, p.100). The inner space Vital Relation of Intentionality is usually emphasized in the blend. In ironic headlines Intentionality can be referred to as the most dominant Vital Relation. It undergoes compression and is retained in the blended space, where it implies that it is the nature of politicians or countries to intentionally strive for more negative activity. For instance, striving for more indifference in "Lithuania – the leader of indifference to its citizens" ("Lietuva – abejingumo savo piliečiams lyderė" (delfi.lt)), or participating in a drinking competition as in "Lithuania – Europe's Vice Champion in Drinking" ("Lietuva – girtavimo vicečempionė" (delfi.lt)). Here the compressions enabled by the mechanism of blending contribute to the blend by depicting indifference/drinking as an intentional activity supported by the policy of the country which is supposedly proud of its victory in this 'sports event'. The ability to express a negative evaluative attitude and criticism without direct accusation is a peculiar feature of such compressions. Ironic headlines are frequently based on

compressions of Intentionality, to mention but a few: "In the Championship of Alcohol Consumption Lithuania Takes 8th Place" ("Alkoholio suvartojimo rungtynėse Lietuva – aštuntoje vietoje" (zebra.lt)), "The Leader of Improper Taxes" ("Neteisingų mokesčių lyderė" (bernardinai.lt, zebra.lt)), "Lithuanians among the Leaders in Bribery" ("Lietuviai – tarp kyšininkavimo lyderių" (delfi.lt, 15min.lt)), "Lithuanians – the Leaders in Fake Licenses" ("Lietuviai – suklastotų vairuotojų pažymėjimų lyderiai" (lrytas.lt)), "U.S. Takes Gold in Arms Olympics" (mlive.com), "U.S. Takes Gold in Couch Potato Olympics" (mlive.com), "US Takes Gold at Computer-Gaming 'Olympics'" (newscientist.com).

Conclusions

The Vital Relations of Intentionality, Analogy and Disanalogy could be seen as the dominant conceptual relations. The majority of the outer space Vital Relations in ironic headlines is compressed into the inner space Vital Relation of Uniqueness. Uniqueness is the inner space Vital Relation that, relying on Fauconnier and Turner, "obtains automatically for elements in the blend, and we take it for granted" (2002, p. 101). Due to these compressions we see the ironic address as a single entity and not as a collection of separate references.

All the Vital Relations operating in the structures of blending are dynamic and constantly undergo various compressions and de-compressions while developing the meaning that is transmitted to and from the blended mental space. The compressions, which irony activates with the help of blending, turn irony into a creative and powerful weapon. They enable the economy of the irony of headlines and allow them to communicate complex matters at the scale of human understanding.

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Summary

The aim of the article is to apply the scientific model of conceptual blending (developed by Mark Turner and Gilles Fauconnier) to the analysis of ironic headlines. It is argued that irony’s ability to make use of this mechanism partially accounts for the use of ironic references in news discourse. Irony is used as a means to reveal the compressions created via blending. The ironist employs the rules of blending to present a variety of eye-catching and brief headlines

IRONIŠKŲ ANTRAŠČIŲ, NUKREIPTŲ Į LIETUVOS IR AMERIKOS POLITIKUS, KOMPRESIJOS

Santrauka

Šiame straipsnyje ironiškų antraščių analizei siekiama pritaikyti mokslinį konceptualiojo blendingo mechanizmo modelį (sukurtą Marko Turnerio ir Gilles’io Fauconnier). Daroma prielaida, kad galimybė per ironiją naudotis blendingo mechanizmu gali iš dalies paaiškinti, kodėl apskritai ironija yra tikslingai vartojama antraštėse ar politinių naujienų diskurse. Teigiama, jog ironija veikia kaip mediumas,

that contain compressions of Time, Space, Part-Whole, Role-Value, Intentionality, and Analogy/Disanalogy that are compressed into Uniqueness. The Vital Relation of Time can be associated with memories, historic events or periods (e.g., the beginning of our era, the 18th century, and the present day in the headline “Will Pensive Gediminas Step over Dujotiekana’s Tube?” (delfi.lt)). The compressions of Space enable the reader to see two mental input spaces related to two different physical spaces compressed into one; some compressions of space can be described as compressions between two locations, one of which is imaginary. The compressions of Change relate the elements of one mental input space to the elements of the other input space through change: Gediminas Kirkilas turns into Pensive Christ, Artūras Zuokas turns into Dracula, Viktoras Uspaskich turns into Tzar. The Role-Value and Analogy compressions are most explicit in the headlines where irony is in the mode of metaphors (e.g., Lithuania is seen as a leader among other competing sportsmen). The compressions of the Vital Relation of Part-Whole are closely related to the mode of metonymy (e.g., a part that carries a negative connotation is depicted as the most representative feature of the whole). The Vital Relation of Intentionality is most closely connected to the evaluative aspect of irony. The relations between the mental input spaces and the blended space are always maintained and dynamic. Multiple compressions of an ironic reference do not only enable the ironist to communicate complex ideas and implications at the scale of human understanding but also facilitate the economy of space.

An overview of the Vital Relations and their compressions is supported by a number of ironic news headlines collected from popular Lithuanian and American online news websites.

KEY WORDS: conceptual blending, irony, compressions, mental spaces

perteikiantis kompresijas, kurias leidžia padaryti blendingas. Ironizuojantis pritaiko blendingo taisykles, taip sukurdamas pagaulias ir trumpas antraštes, kuriose atsekamos *laiko, erdvės, dalies ir visumos, analogijos ir intencionalumo* kompresijos, pereinančios į vidinį *unikalumo ryšį*.

Esminis laiko ryšys gali būti siejamas su atsiminimais, istoriniais įvykiais ar tarpsniais (pvz., mūsų eros pradžia, XVIII amžius ir dabartis antraštėje „Ar peržengs Rūpintojėlis Gediminas Dujotiekanos vamzdį?“ *delfi.lt*).

Erdvės kompresijos leidžia sujungti į vieną dvi su skirtingomis fizinėmis erdvėmis susijusias mentalines erdves; analizuotų antraščių erdvės kompresijos gali būti apibūdinamos ir kaip kompresijos tarp dviejų lokacijų, kurių viena yra įsivaizduotina.

Per transformaciją *pokyčio* kompresijos sieja vienos mentalinės erdvės įvesties elementus su kitos mentalinės erdvės įvesties elementais (pvz., Gediminas Kirkilas tampa Rūpintojėliu, Artūras Zuokas – Drakula, Viktoras Uspaskichas – caru).

Vaidmens, vertės bei *analogijos* kompresijos geriausiai išryškėja tose antraštėse, kur ironija remiasi metaforomis (pvz., Lietuva tampa lydere tarp kitų rungtyniaujančių sportininkų).

Esminio dalies ir visumos ryšio kompresijos sietinos su metonimija (pvz., neigiamą konotaciją išreiškianti dalis pateikiama kaip reprezentacinis visumos bruožas). O *esminis intencionalumo ryšys* labiausiai sietinas su vertinamuoju ironijos aspektu.

Nežiūrint didelės įvesties erdvių elementų įvairovės, konceptualiosios kompresijos, kurios sukuriamos naudojant ironiją, leidžia ne tik suvokti daugialypę struktūrą kaip darnią visumą, bet kartu ją ir įvertinti. Ryšiai tarp mentalinių įvesties erdvių ir mišrios mentalinės erdvės yra dinamiški, nuolat palaiškomi; jie daro įtaką antraštės ironijos ekonomijai ir leidžia sudėtingus dalykus perteikti per „žmogiško supratimo lygmenį“.

Straipsnyje pateikiama *esminių ryšių* ir jų kompresijų apžvalga gausiai iliustruojama pavyzdžiais, surinktais iš populiarių Lietuvos ir Amerikos žiniatinklų.

REIKŠMINIAI ŽODŽIAI: konceptualusis blendingas, ironija, kompresijos, mentalinės erdvės

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