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35.1 Political Linguistics is just linguistics

Political Linguistics is just linguistics applied to a particular subject matter, like phonology applied to a social dialect or phonetics applied to the speech of children or historical linguistics applied to the movement of populations over time. In all cases you are looking for general principles using a form of linguistics and applying those principles to the subject matter at hand. And it is like any other science applied to a kind of situation, like applying physics to building skyscrapers. As would be expected, in order to get the politics right, you have to get the linguistics right.

Political Linguistics, for me, came out of the study of Cognitive Linguistics, which looks at the role of cognition and its neural basis in the study of conceptual systems and the linguistic forms that express, evoke and often shape ideas within conceptual systems. Political behavior is typically a consequence of having political ideas and acting on them in a natural way. Language and the ideas expressed by language play a crucial role in politics (though, of course, not the only role). The mechanism by which language and thought work in politics is neural in character. There is nothing special about this. It works the same way neural circuitry works in everyday thought and language.

What is special about political linguistics is its contribution to linguistics. Political subject matter, as we shall see, requires an expansion of what it means to apply linguistics to a subject matter.

I will be speaking here mostly of my own work. Others, of course, have applied other forms of linguistics to political subject matter.

35.2 The cognitive unconscious

The first thing to bear in mind is what all linguists know – that linguistic principles are largely unconscious. Speakers are not consciously aware of the details of their phonetics, phonology or morphology. This applies to semantics and pragmatics as well. The principles governing thought and language use in context are almost all unconscious in use – even if you are a linguist who studies them!
This is true for a simple reason. Neural circuitry operates very fast and in parallel, with connections among many brain areas operating at once. Conscious thought is about a hundred times slower and is linear, that is, in slow sequence not a fast parallelism. People simply cannot be consciously following all that is going on in their brains that is relevant to thinking and using language.

It has been estimated that about 98 percent of thought is unconscious. The exact percentage cannot be precisely measured of course, but the percentage seems to be in the right ballpark. Perhaps the most useful thing about linguistics is that, over its history, linguists have developed techniques for studying unconscious cognitive mechanisms.

35.3 Starting with frame semantics

I have been interested in politics since childhood. Where I grew up in northern New Jersey, politics was a normal part of everyday life. In the late 1960s, those of us who studied speech act theory and implicatures began to notice that they were prominent in discussions of political and social issues. The first book I was aware of applying pragmatics to social issues was Robin Lakoff’s 1975 book *Language and Woman’s Place*, which began the serious study of feminism and linguistics.

As frame semantics developed in the years after 1975, speech act structure and principles of implicature (see Chapter 13) came to be understood as special cases of the use of conceptual frames.

In 1977, my Berkeley colleague Charles Fillmore, casually pointed out to me an application of his theory of frame semantics. In Boston, a doctor who had performed an abortion went on trial for murder. The prosecuting attorney used the word ‘baby,’ while the defense attorney used the word ‘fetus.’ Fillmore pointed out to me that the frames in which those words are defined were what the case was about. The choice of frame by the jury not only decided the case; the framing issue is at the heart of the distinction between conservative and progressive politics.

For Fillmore, frame semantics was a matter of lexicography (see Chapter 12). He had studied the European linguistic tradition of semantic fields, which examined collections of related words, like *knife-fork-spoon, Monday-Tuesday-Wednesday-*..., and *buy-sell-cost-price-goods-bargain-*.... Fillmore argued that the generalizations over the semantic fields were cognitive in nature – a mode of understanding domains of experience like *Eating with Utensils, Calendars Using Weeks and Commercial Events*.

For Fillmore, a frame was a Part–Whole structure with a domain of experience as the Whole, and ‘semantic roles’ as the Parts – the people, places, and things that made up the Whole together with their properties, the relations among them, and the actions and events they took part in. All Commercial Events, he observed, have the semantic roles of Buyer, Seller, Goods and Money, with a scenario of exchanging money and goods. This echoed Fillmore’s earlier Case Grammar, which began with basic scenes of actions, experiences, and events and roles like Agent, Patient, Recipient, Experiencer, etc.

What was crucial in frame semantics was the Fillmore Hypothesis that all meaningful elements in language – words, morphemes, syntactic constructions, idioms – get their meanings from frames and are defined relative to specific frames. That hypothesis has held up over four decades in language studied by frame-semantic researchers around the world.

Frame semantics fit the times. Similar uses of the term ‘frame’ were used by Erving Goffman and Marvin Minsky, for different reasons. Goffman studied social institutions and
concluded that they were constituted by frames specifying roles; social relations in the institution; and normal actions within the institution. People working in an institution took on different roles when they went to work than when they were at home. Minsky observed that knowledge representation in Artificial Intelligence would need frames. But it was Fillmore who, more than anyone else, worked out linguistic details, starting a FrameNet project that he ran for more than two decades.

Fillmore and I differed on the importance of frame semantics. He wanted to keep it as lexicography of the sort done in dictionaries — but more precise. I saw it as a method for studying the conceptual frames making up conceptual systems in general. Fillmore had observed that frames form hierarchies: commercial events are exchanges, exchanges are mutual acts of transfer, transfers involve applying force to a possession to move it from a sender to a recipient. The frame systems bottom out in primary scenes — widespread or universal simple experiences, like transfer, the use of force, motion and possession. Complex frames depend for their meanings on such primary experiences. Since frames have semantic entailments, many of those entailments come from the primary scenes and the ways that they are put together to form frames. For example, in every commercial event, the buyer transfers money to seller and the seller transfers goods to the buyer.

The use of framing in politics makes constant use of the basics of how frames work: Part–Whole structure, semantic roles and relations among them, what happens in a frame, and frame hierarchies bottoming out in primary experiences.

But bear in mind, as we go on, that frame semantics began as the study of the general principles characterizing the relations among related lexical items: that is, general principles governing a phenomenon.

**35.4 Conceptual metaphor**

Michael Reddy and I, in our independent discoveries of conceptual metaphors in 1977 and 1978, both noticed that large groups of linguistic expressions formed what might be called metaphoric semantic fields. Reddy found over 140 examples of expressions like *You’re not getting through to me,* *Your meaning is hidden in dense paragraphs,* *The meaning is right there in the words,* and so on. He saw the general principle as a conceptual metaphor, what he called The Conduit metaphor: ideas are objects, words are containers, communication is putting words in containers and sending them to others, who take the words out the containers. He pointed out that this metaphor hid certain vital truths about communication.

I noticed that there are dozens if not hundreds of related expressions characterizing love in terms of travel: *The marriage is on the rocks,* *We’re spinning our wheels in this relationship,* *We’re going in different directions,* *It’s been a long, bumpy road,* and so on. The general principle is a Love Is A Journey metaphor with the frame-to-frame mapping: lovers are travelers, a relationship is a vehicle, consistent life goals are common destinations, and relationship difficulties are impediments to travel.

Mark Johnson and I later noticed that, like frames, these metaphors form hierarchies that bottom out in ‘primary metaphors’ that are widespread around the world if not universal: relationships are containers; intimacy is closeness; purposes are destinations; a vehicle frame, in which vehicles are *containers* in which the travelers are close, and which are used for reaching destinations; plus a culturally specific long-term love relationship frame in which the lovers are expected to have compatible life goals (where life goals are, metaphorically, destinations in life). The inferences of the Love Is A Journey metaphor arise from the inferences of the primary metaphors and cultural frames.
In short, within conceptual systems, generalizations over linguistic expressions can be seen in conceptual systems – hierarchical systems of frames and conceptual metaphors that get their meaning from basic experiences and cultural frames higher up in the hierarchy. This result has also held up for nearly four decades.

Over that period, research on the neural theory of thought and language has resulted in hypotheses relying only on basic properties of neural circuitry that fit the existing data. The hypotheses, if confirmed, would explain those data. Together, conceptual framing systems, conceptual metaphor systems, and hypotheses based on basic facts about neural circuitry are brought together in political linguistics. The method was a straightforward application of cognitive linguistics to politics.

Here is how it worked from the beginning.

35.5 What constitutes conservative and progressive thought in America?


I read that book and was mystified. Several years earlier, I had written a book on categorization, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things*. What mystified me was that I could not understand the category Conservative. I could not, for the life of me, understand how extreme conservative positions held together. What, I asked myself, does being against taxation have to do with being against abortion? What does being against abortion have to do with owning guns? What does owning guns have to do with tort reform? What does tort reform have to do with being against environmentalism? What sense does it make to be pro-life and for the death penalty? There are dozens of other positions like these. As a progressive, none of this made any sense to me. What was the general principle governing all these positions? What made one a conservative in general, not just someone with a laundry list of positions?

As a progressive, I held positions opposite all of the conservative positions. I then asked myself what the generalization was that made all of my positions make sense. And I got embarrassed. I could not answer the question. But, as a cognitive linguist and as an expert on conceptual systems and categorization, I felt I should be able to answer those questions. They were questions in my field, after all. They were like sets of sentences of the form Conservatives favor X and oppose Y. Progressives favor Y and oppose X. Just fill in X and Y. What generalizes conceptually over such sentences? There should, I felt, be an answer like those in frame semantics and conceptual metaphor generalizing over such sentences.

So I decided to start studying the phenomenon. I read all that I reasonably could from both sides – books, articles, speeches. I listened to and watched talk shows on both sides. I interviewed people on both sides. I dutifully did the groupings, applied frame semantics – and got nowhere for about six months. The breakthrough came when I was looking at conservative discussions of patriotism. I happened to remember a homework done by one of the students on my course on conceptual metaphor. She noticed the Americans have a conceptual metaphor of the Nation as a Family: we have *Founding Fathers*, *Daughters of the American Revolution*, we send our *sons and daughters* to war, JFK had said we don’t want Russian missiles *in our back yard*, … and more recently we have *homeland security*, and the *nanny state*.

I reasoned as follows:
1. If there is such a metaphor, then there would have to be two different ideal models of the family mapping to two different ideal models of the nation.

2. Conceptual metaphor theory said that conceptual metaphors are frame-to-frame mappings, mapping roles and inferences in the source domain (e.g. families) to roles and inferences in the target domain (e.g. the nation). Therefore, one should be able to work backwards through the mappings from the two different ideal models of the nation in the target domain to the two different ideal models of the family in the source domain.

That is what I did; I worked backwards from target to source. And from the details, there emerged two different models of the family – a Strict Father model for conservatives and a Nurturant Parent model for progressives.

35.6 The child-rearing situation

At the 1995 summer meeting of the International Cognitive Linguistics Association at the University of New Mexico at Albuquerque, I gave the initial presentation of my results. Afterwards, two excellent cognitive linguists who were conservatives (they were involved in Bible translation) and also personal friends led me to look at the work of James Dobson, a Conservative Christian minister who ran Focus on the Family, a conservative child-rearing organization and a major figure in conservative politics. Dobson’s classic book was *Dare to Discipline*. I bought a copy. A former student of mine, upon being told this, bought me a subscription (under a pseudonym) to Dobson’s materials. There in Dobson’s writings and in the writings of other conservative child-rearing authors much of the mapping from strict father families to conservative positions was laid out. I review that literature in Chapter 21 of *Moral Politics* (1996, 2002).

There is, of course, a tradition of nurturing parenting – from Dr. Benjamin Spock (whose *Baby and Child Care* was a best seller for fifty-two years, second only to the Bible). Afterwards, the nurturant child-rearing mantle was taken up by T. Berry Brazleton at the Harvard Medical School, and is carried on by the Brazleton Touchpoints Institute. Another nurturant tradition is Attachment Parenting, started by John Bowlby and carried on by William Sears and others. But, whereas the conservative child-rearing organizations are directly involved in conservative Christianity and conservative politics, the nurturant parenting organizations stick to parenting. The result is that conservatives tend to have a more integrated understanding of their politics and their family life than progressives do.

35.7 Morality, parenting, and politics

All politics is moral. Whenever a political leader proposes a policy, the implicit or explicit justification is that it is right, not wrong or morally irrelevant. No politicians will say, ‘Here’s my policy and do it because it is evil, it is the wrong thing to do.’ Nor will they say, ‘Do it because it doesn’t matter.’ When policies oppose each other, it is because they are based on different notions of what is ‘right,’ that is, different moralities.

In looking at the framing of public policies, I have found that they are all based (often unconsciously, of course) on family-based moral theories. In short, the strict and nurturant ideal models of the family have built-in moral systems – parents want to do what is right, not what is wrong or irrelevant, in raising their children. Thus, the metaphorical mappings of ideal family models onto politics are based on different – and many ways opposite – models of morality.
35.8 The brain and what we have learned since 1996

We are about to get into the political details and what they have to do with cognitive linguistics. But before we do, it should be pointed out that a lot has been learned since 1996, when Moral Politics came out.

1. **The Neural Basis**: All thought is physical, carried out by the embodied neural systems in our brains, which have connections throughout our bodies. Every system of thought is an embodied neural system.

2. **Limits on Understanding**: You can only understand what your neural system allows you to understand. A new piece of information, to be understood, must fit what you already know – either overlapping with current knowledge in neural form or being minimally distant and hence almost exactly fitting what is already there at a deep and unconscious level. Incoming information that does not fit will be either ignored, dismissed, or ridiculed.

3. **Bi-conceptualism**: In the USA, we grow up in a culture of TV and movies, many of which have strict or nurturant family models in them, or conservative or progressive values structuring them. And in real families, children may rebel against their family’s values, or have a mother and father operating in accord with different family models. The result is ‘bi-conceptualism.’ Many people have both strict and nurturant moral models in their brains at once, even though they contradict each other. Neurally they are related by mutual inhibition – inhibiting connections across the circuitry for the two models, so that turning one on turns the other off, and strengthening one weakens the other.

   Since these models are ideal and occur at a general level, they may differ in how they are bound to specific policies. Thus, for example, one may be conservative financially and progressive socially, or the reverse; a professor may be nurturant in politics but strict in the classroom. All sorts of combinations occur.

4. **There is no middle. There is no ideology of the moderate, no political principles shared by all moderates!** A moderate conservative is mostly conservative, but progressive on some policies. A moderate liberal is progressive on most policies, but conservative on some others. The variation is all over the place, often depending on personal experience or local history.

5. **The role of language.** Since words are defined relative to frames, experiencing or using language activates the corresponding frames in our brains. Every time a frame is activated, its synapses are strengthened – and those of its opponent frames are weakened. Thus if you hear conservative language fitting conservative frames over and over, the corresponding conservative frame-circuits in your brain will be strengthened and the progressive frame-circuits will be weakened.

   This points up a common liberal mistake in communication. The mistake is the idea that, to communicate with someone, you should use their language. In politics, this is a disaster, since using the other side’s language just strengthens their frames and weakens yours in their mind.

6. **Don’t think of an elephant!** Negating a frame activates that frame. Thus arguing against a conservative position using conservative framing and language simply helps conservatives. Conservative activists are trained not to use progressive language to argue against progressive positions; they are trained to use conservative language and their own frames to undermine progressive positions.

7. **Polling can create artificial middles.** Polls for the most part have certain constraints:
a. They use the most commonplace language recognized by as many people as possible; this is often conservative language activating conservative frames.
b. They group the responses by demographic categories: age, gender, ethnicity, income level, zip code, perhaps registered party affiliation.
c. They tend to use a four- or five-point scale: ‘strongly agree,’ ‘agree,’ ‘disagree,’ ‘strongly disagree’ – and, often, ‘no opinion.’
d. They use statistics to give the responses. In many cases, that imposes a bell curve that may not be real, with most respondents in the ‘middle.’
e. They do not group by ideal parenting models and they do not use both strict and nurturant framing for the same issues in the questions. If they did, they would most likely get two bell curves, one for each model.

Given these considerations, we move on to the applications of frames and metaphors.

35.9 A deeper generalization

The Nation-as-Family model turned out to be too specific. I found strict father and nurturant parent models in governing institutions in general – in churches, in the military, in athletic teams, in businesses, in classrooms, in hospitals, in political parties, in governments at all levels, in the market, and throughout our cultural institutions. Since we are all first governed in our families, it seems that we learn a very general metaphor: Governing Institutions are Families, with strict and nurturant variants.

Thus, what is ‘political’ is not just about elections and official ‘governments.’ The same principles governing our politics govern many of our social systems. There is a reason why politics affects all of the following: family planning clinics, contraception and sex education; what is taught in schools and whether education should be private or public and whether teachers and schools should be ‘graded’; whether specific religious symbols should be permitted in public places; whether there should be unemployment insurance; whether parents should hit their children with ‘switches’; whether concealed weapons should be allowed on college campuses; whether consensual sex should require a definite and conscious ‘yes’; who in the military should be informed of, and in charge of prosecuting, sexual assaults; whether employees who get tips should be provided the minimum wage; whether gays should be allowed to marry; what counts as free speech versus hate speech; whether trains without double hulls should be allowed to haul crude oil; whether fracking companies should have to list poisonous chemicals that they pump into the ground by thousands of tons; whether chickens should spend their lives in small cages; whether livestock raised in close quarters should be pumped full of antibiotics; whether there should be a ‘Stand your ground’ law, that is, whether someone who feels threatened can shoot to kill someone he or she feels threatened by; and on and on.

These are all political issues, correlating in most cases with the conservative–progressive divide. As we shall see, the strict and nurturant family models, via the general metaphor of Governing Institutions are Families, map onto many kinds of governing institutions throughout society, making such questions political.
35.10 The parenting models and their moral logics

Bear in mind that these are ideal models, characterized by frames and that they tend to be unconscious, like most thought. They may also be part of a real bi-conceptual system, with both models mutually inhibiting each other and applying to different issues.

35.10.1 The nurturant ideal

Let us begin with the nurturant model of an ideal family. The parents (if there are two) have equal responsibility. The parents have a number of jobs:

1. **Empathy**: To empathize with their children, to understand what they are like, what they need, and to maintain open, honest communication with them, showing them love and respect.
2. **Responsibility to act on that empathy**: First, taking care of themselves, since you cannot take care of others if you are not taking care of yourself; and taking care of their children, so that they can be fulfilled in life: keeping them safe, healthy, well-educated, well-socialized.
3. **Maintain an ethic of excellence**: Doing their best as parents and as people – working to be financially comfortable, healthy, well-educated, well-connected in the community, etc.
4. **Raise their children to be the same**: It is assumed that children are born good and can be raised to be even better: to be empathetic toward others; responsible for themselves and for others; to be cooperative and be able to function effectively in their community; and having an ethic of excellence – all so as to be fulfilled in life. These are the values to be instilled in children through being lived by parents. This means that parents have to set limits and explain why. Discipline is positive, not punitive.

In addition, it takes a community to raise children. Children need to learn from many people, which is why community participation is vital.

And nurturance starts with birth – and with proper prenatal care. What happens in the womb matters.

There is nothing easy about being a nurturant parent, and meeting that ideal takes effort.

35.10.2 The strict ideal

Ideally there should be two parents, a man and a woman.

The world is assumed to be a difficult and dangerous place, a world with evil in it. The father has to be strong and disciplined to deal with the difficulty and danger, and must have – and deserves to have – the unquestioned authority in his family to do his job: to protect the family from that evil; to support the family in the face of that difficulty; to teach his children right from wrong through punishment when they do wrong, so they will develop the discipline to do right, not wrong, and use that discipline to become strong, competitive and to prosper so as to support and protect their own families.

The father has authority and merits it. The authority of the father is not to be challenged, above all. That is the highest principle. The job of the wife is to support the authority of the father. The job of the children is obedience; no back-talk. The father is assumed to:

- Be moral: Know right from wrong and act accordingly
G. Lakoff

- Have the best judgment (‘father knows best’)
- Be strong
- Be able to protect the family
- Be able to support the family, by competing successfully in the world
- Maintain order in the family by setting the rules and enforcing them
- Teach his kids right from wrong, by punishing them when they do wrong
- It is the duty of parents to discipline their children in this way. Discipline is seen as an act of love – tough love.

Children should:

- Obey their parents
- Show respect to their parents and other legitimate authorities
- Learn personal responsibility
- Develop discipline and strength
- Learn to compete successfully
- Children who live up to these ideals should be rewarded with affection – and with material rewards as available and appropriate
- It is assumed that adult children should grow up to be strict parents of their own, at which time parents should not ‘meddle’ in their lives.

35.10.3 Other family models

There are other parenting models: In the Neglectful model, children are simply neglected. In the Anything Goes model, children can do anything they like with no limits or expectations set. The Abusive model is a variant of the Strict Father model, but one in which the father’s punishment is abusive and harmful. Both strict and nurturant parents reject such models.

But strict parents tend to see nurturant parents as being insufficiently strict and hence having an Anything Goes model with spoiled children (‘Spare the rod and spoil the child’). Nurturant parents often see strict parents as abusive.

Is there a fact of the matter? There are three forms of research that see the nurturant model as best, the strict model as bad news for kids, and the abusive and neglectful models as disastrous. They are Attachment Research, Socialization Research, and Abuse Research (cf. Moral Politics, Chapter 21, for details). Conservatives see these as biased forms of research done by liberals.

35.11 The moral family-based logics

The Ideal Families have moral logics that extend beyond the family.

The Nurturant Family model’s ideals of empathy, responsibility both for self and others, and excellence is intent on fulfillment in life for all. The focus on love, care, support, health, education, excellence and socialization is supposed to provide each family member the freedom to seek and find fulfillment. The result of mutual care, respect, cooperation should result in mutual benefit for all, both in the family and in the wider community.

Sexuality is mutual and comes from living by nurturant ideals: It is sexy for a man to be a good father.

The Strict Father model has an ideal of personal responsibility. The father – and the children he raises – must be strong and disciplined, and dependency on others would make
them weak and unable to function effectively in competition and protection. If children are physically disciplined when they do wrong, they will become disciplined in general and be able to prosper in the world. If they are not prospering, that means they are not disciplined, without discipline they cannot be moral, and hence they deserve their poverty.

The strength, discipline and deserved authority of the father comes with a form of masculine sexuality and masculine gender roles – men should be in charge of sexuality and reproduction in the family.

Importantly, the Strict Father model comes with an implicit moral principle: In a well-ordered world, those who are moral according to strict father principles should rule.

35.12 The central metaphor: governing institutions are families

We are now going to start giving examples of how the models map via this metaphor onto progressive and conservative political views, not just of government, but of every domain of life governed by institutions, that is, just about every domain of social and interpersonal life. As we go through this, bear in mind that we are looking at an analysis after the fact – an analysis that seeks to explain how all the facts in all the domains of experience fit together.

Such an explanation is the flip side of the empirical research leading to it. I started with a huge list of mysteries, how the apparently disparate views of conservatives and progressives hung together – what constituted having conservative or progressive views? Each case we will consider is at once an empirical attempt to solve a mystery, and a hypothesis that, if true, would explain why all those views fit together.

35.13 Progressive and conservative views of democracy

Progressives share an implicit (and often unconscious) ideal view of democracy that structures much of their thinking and goes like this:

In a democracy, citizens care about one another and act through their government to provide public resources for all, resources that provide for a wide range of freedoms no matter who you are.

The values of empathy, responsibility for oneself and others, excellence, and a focus on fulfillment lie behind such a view of democracy.

This view of democracy, mostly unconscious, though publicly put forth on occasion by President Obama and regularly by Elizabeth Warren, lies behind just about all progressive programs. For example, it includes things you need for business – roads, bridges, sewers, airports, the electric grid, the Internet, satellite communications, public health, public education, government sponsored research, the SEC for the stock market, the Federal Reserve, Federal Deposit Insurance and so on. American business could not run without these things and employees of those businesses could not have jobs without them. Private enterprise thus depends on public resources. Those resources allow you to be free to make a living and allow consumers to be free to have products they depend on.

Private lives depend on the public as well. Public resources include health care, safe food and drugs, necessary pharmaceuticals (developed through government sponsored research), clean water, clean air, social security and Medicare for the elderly, universities (both public and private depend on government research funding), public safety, the criminal justice system, building codes and inspectors, public parks and recreational activities, and
on and on. When you need such things to be free to live a fulfilling life, you are not free without them.

Conservatives have the opposite ideal view:

Democracy provides citizens with liberty, the liberty to seek their own interests through personal responsibility, without government interference, without dependence on anyone, and without being responsible for others (outside of our families).

Conservatives see publicly provided resources as making people dependent and weak – taking from personally responsible people and giving to irresponsible, dependent people who are undeserving. Where progressives see government as the means by which people provide vital public resources for one another, conservatives see government as oppressive, with regulations restricting their liberty and programs that, via taxes, take away what they earn.

These differences cover a wide range of progressive–conservative differences, but by no means all. Progressives seek freedom for women to control their own bodies and to function equally with men in all areas of institutional life, in education, business, sports, government, etc. This comes from both empathy and the equality of women in ideally nurturant families.

In the ideal strict father family, men control sex and reproduction and have authority over their wives. Conservatives seek laws allowing men to control the lives of women in many ways: laws banning family planning, banning paying for birth control pills as medical necessities, making abortions difficult or impossible, supporting spousal and parental notification laws for abortions, refusing to legislate equal rights for women in business. What are called ‘pro-life’ positions against abortion are called into serious question by conservative refusal to pass laws guaranteeing prenatal and postnatal care, which often determine whether a newborn lives or dies; they do not seem to care about babies once they are born. An explanation for this is that their anti-abortion stance is actually a female control stance.

What is the difference between conservative and progressive Christianity? Both have God as a Father. But progressive Christians see God as a nurturant father, while conservative Christians see God as a strict father – an authority who sets down the rules. If you obey them, you go to Heaven (to your ‘reward’); otherwise, you go to Hell and eternal punishment. Conservative Christians believe that people should be ‘God-fearing.’

You have heard the expression ‘Let the market decide.’ The subject of verb, decide, is typically a person. The market is a governing institution. When strict father families are mapped onto the market as an institution, the market itself becomes the metaphorical strict father, deciding that those with fiscal discipline should get rich and others should be poor. Such a market, according to conservatives, should not be required by government to pay higher minimum wages, or even allow restaurant workers, who earn tips, to make more than $2.13 per hour, or have health care or sick days. Empathy and living wages have no role in a strict father market, allowing only personal, not social, responsibility.

Extreme conservatives seek to minimize or end public resources and to privatize as much as possible. Government by corporation fits perfectly within a strict father market, in which corporations, like people, should have the liberty, without government regulation, to maximize their self-interest. Conservatives have no problem with extreme wealth – with the ratio of CEO income to average worker income at 350:1. The wealthy are seen as those who are disciplined and who therefore deserve their wealth, while the poor are undisciplined, lower on the moral hierarchy, and deserve to be poor.
In large corporations, there are two kinds of employees – the ‘assets’ (upper management and ‘creative’ people) and the ‘resources’ (interchangeable workers hired by the human resources department). What is corporate policy toward resources? Get them as cheaply as possible and use as few as possible. Hence the antipathy of conservatives to unions and living wage campaigns.

And what about poor conservatives, who support the full gamut of conservative positions? Why should they vote against their financial interests? So far as we can tell, they have strict father morality, live that morality at home and in their personal, social and religious lives. Strict father morality is part of their self-definition as people. Poor, sick conservatives who have benefited from the Affordable Care Act still criticize it as a government takeover, and will not vote Democrat even though it is in their financial interest. Why? Because they define themselves by their strict father morality and culture.

Strict father morality imposes a moral hierarchy, in which the moral (in strict morality) should rule. History shows what that moral hierarchy is by who has come out on top. God above man, man above nature, rich above poor, adults above children, Western culture above non-Western culture, America above other nations, and then the bigoted part of the hierarchy: men above women, straights above gays, Whites above non-Whites, Christians above non-Christians. Thus, it is conservatives who want to ban gay marriage, conservatives who support racial profiling and stand-your-ground laws, conservatives who want to arrest and deport political refugees from Latin America, including children, conservatives who want to put Christian symbols in public places.

In foreign policy, conservatives see America as being strict father to the world, with authority over other nations in the world community, authority to be enforced militarily. It is progressives who seek to avoid conflict and killing, cooperate with other nations, and show empathy for citizens of other countries who are oppressed and need aid.

What about beating children with ‘switches’ (tree branches)? NFL star Adrian Peterson was arrested for beating his four-year-old son so badly the boy received serious injuries and lacerations. His response was right out of the strict father playbook:

He said he disciplined his son the same way he was disciplined as a child. … ‘deep in my heart I have always believed I could have been one of those kids that was lost in the streets without the discipline instilled in me by my parents and other relatives … I have always believed that the way my parents disciplined me has a great deal to do with the success I have enjoyed as a man …. My goal is always to teach my son right from wrong and that’s what I tried to do that day.’

(Gray 2014)

Here we see the strict father logic of ‘discipline’ as clear as could be. Part of Anderson’s defense is that such ‘discipline’ is normal in East Texas. The East Texas prosecutor for the case agreed, saying, ‘Obviously, parents are entitled to discipline their children as they see fit, except for when that discipline exceeds what the community would say is reasonable.’

Yes to whipping with ‘switches,’ but not too far on a four-year-old (Schrotenboer 2014).

On Fox News, conservative commentator Sean Hannity said, ‘I got hit with a strap. Bam, bam, bam. And I have never been to a shrink. I will tell you that I deserved it … I was not mentally bruised because my father hit me with a belt’ (MacNeal 2014). The conservative view on the major conservative station.

The generalizations are overwhelming. Extreme conservatives – who are not bi-conceptual ‘moderates’ – have most, if not all, of the characteristics that are predicted by the metaphor
mapping strict father morality onto all manner of governing institutions. Similarly, extreme progressives – progressives who are not bi-conceptual and do not have significant conservative views, fit the characteristics predicted by the metaphorical mapping of nurturant morality onto progressive politics in the same wide range of governing institutions.

I arrived at this analysis by starting with the mysteries and a student’s suggestion of an early version of the metaphor. Using the theories of frame semantics and conceptual metaphor theory from cognitive linguistics, I worked backwards from the mysteries to the first version of the metaphorical mapping, and then to the more general version. Along the way, I brought in research on neural systems from the research at the Neural Theory of Language project at the International Computer Science Institute at Berkeley to make sense of bi-conceptualism. Since then, experimental and survey research by Elisabeth Wehling in her 2013 Berkeley dissertation ‘The US Under Joint Custody,’ has overwhelmingly confirmed most of the analysis presented here.

The major point should be clear. Political linguistics, as I have been engaged in it, is just linguistics, applied to politics as a subject matter. The linguistics started out just as early cognitive linguistics, especially frame semantics and conceptual metaphor theory. As embodied cognition and the neural theory of language has progressed, the current neurally embodied cognitive linguistics is the linguistics used – in every analysis.

### 35.14 Why conservatives do better

I have now written seven books on political linguistics, and well over a hundred articles. The latest book is *The ALL NEW Don’t Think of an Elephant!* a thorough updating and new essays on what I learned since the first version ten years ago. I have been primarily focused on the fact that conservatives continue to do better at political framing, messaging and communication systems than progressives.

Ten years ago I pointed out the mechanism by which conservatives managed to expand their political power through the use of framing and language. They understand the centrality of morality and use moral frames and the mechanisms of Real Reason – morally-based frames and metaphors, powerful images, emotion and accompanying music and language that evokes conservative frames and metaphors. Each time the language is heard and the images seen, the conservative frames and metaphors are neurally strengthened. As a result, moderate conservatives are made more conservative and moderate progressives who are partial conservatives have their conservative frames and metaphors strengthened – and they move further to the right. Repetition matters, and there is constant repetition – on TV and radio talk shows, and in venues where conservatives regularly talk, like businesses and local business groups, local high schools and colleges, churches, and the full range of social media on the Internet. Why do progressives not do as well?

Many conservatives engaged in marketing conservative ideas have actually studied marketing in business schools, and their professors have studied the cognitive and brain sciences. They know how Real Reason works. But when progressives go to college, they tend not to study either marketing, or cognitive science, cognitive linguistics or neuroscience. Instead they usually study political science, public policy, law and economics. Those fields tend to teach an inadequate view of reason – reason that lacks an understanding of:

1. frame semantics and conceptual metaphor
2. the fact that most thought is unconscious
3. embodied cognition
4. that you can only understand what your physical brain allows you to understand, and not just any idea or fact
5. that conservatives and progressives have different neural structures of thought
6. that language is not neutral but rather activates specific frames
7. that negating a frame activates and strengthens that frame as much as asserting it
8. that people vote on the basis of their personal identity, not merely on their finances.

Therefore progressives commonly just tell people the facts and assume that the facts are all that is necessary to get conservatives to come around to your side. It does not generally work. The facts are vital, but they must be morally framed in terms of the values you want to strengthen. Progressives need to catch up.

Most of all, university social science departments need to learn some serious cognitive linguistics and to recognize the inadequacies of the view of reason that they have been teaching – mostly without even noticing that it is an issue. The same is true of journalism schools. They need to teach how framing and metaphor work in the media, and why language is not neutral.

It should be clear by now that neurally embodied frame semantics and conceptual metaphor theory are necessary for making sense of the mysteries we started with and for understanding what unifies conservative and progressive thought. The reason that these forms of linguistics work for understanding politics is that they work for human thought and language generally.

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Further reading

Lakoff (2006, 2008); Lakoff and Johnson (1980, 1999); Lakoff and Wehling (2012).

References


