Comunicação Política e Económica

Dimensões Cognitivas e Discursivas

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Metaphors in rap texts. Local architecturings of political agendas

Maria Clotilde Almeida, Bibiana de Sousa and Teresa Cardoso

Abstract

In order to be considered authentic, rap texts are nowadays grounded in local ways of thinking. The conceptual metaphor life is a jungle, fuelled by the specific sense of jungle as a locus of fierce struggle for survival, emerges as critical voicing of local political agendas and agents, responsible for harsh living conditions in European metropolises. By analysing a few Portuguese, French and Romanian rap texts, we aim to unveil glocalized framings building on locally designed discourses, in which difficult life conditions are mapped onto dangerous animals or life-threatening ground hazards. It is our intention to confront the linguistic realizations of the above mentioned conceptual metaphor in French, Romanian, and Portuguese rap texts, in order to uncover locally shaped metaphor realizations. The hybrid metaphor realization “La vie c’est la jungle” from the lyrics of C’est ton destin by the French rap group Les Inconnus will be the motto for the analysis of metaphorical images from French, Romanian and Portuguese rap lyrics. As it happens, fierce political critique exhaled from the Romanian rap lyrics Egali din Nastere by Ombladon Feat. Raku, where the hazardous living conditions in Bucharest are blamed upon the capitalist system. Hence, tricky capitalist financial market operations are surgically mapped onto voracious birds of prey. As far as Portuguese rap is concerned, flaws in the Portuguese political system are mapped onto a treacherous serpent in the rap lyrics Atradores Furtivos by Mind da Gap. However, the strongest political critique stems from Dealema with the theme Portugal Surreal in which politicians are metaphorically represented both as hunters and rare animals operating on Portuguese land, a safari country.

Keywords: conceptual metaphor, glocalized framings, hip hop texts, jungle

1. Rap texts and rhetorical analysis

It should come as no surprise that rap texts are commonly associated with critical views on political agendas, since, in Terkourafi’s own words, “ [...] hip hop artists are known for being outspoken critics of the social realities around them.” (Terkourafi 2010: 2). Furthermore, he points out that they offer “incisive critiques of dominant cultures engaged with local issues of ethnicity and power [...]” (Ibid.: 3). Among the issues that have been critically addressed in recent Portuguese, French and Romanian rap lyrics we find metaphorical framings of the poor economic conditions of local populations that are due to the implementation of restrictive economic measures to overcome the crisis in all of Europe.
Although metaphorical elaborations in political discourse have been investigated from the point of view of cognitive linguistics by Musolff (2004), Carver/Pikalo (2008), Musolff/Zinken (2009), among others, they have rarely been subject of analysis in hip-hop texts in the light of the cognitive semantics paradigm. However, mention should be made of the investigation on early German hip-hop texts by Melo (2008), which, targeting a semantic demarcation of creative metaphors from both conventionalized and hipertextual metaphors, concluded for the overall prevalence of creative metaphors.

One of the strongest reasons for the scarcity of cognitive analyses on rap rhetorics lies in the fact that rap texts are quite complex and pervasive in comparisons and metaphorical concepts (cf. Androutsopulos & Scholz 2002: 4), therefore needing to be dissected at multiple levels of analysis. In the light of Androutsopulos/Scholz (2002), three levels of analysis with an array of sublevels must be taken into account for a comparative analysis of rap lyrics, namely:

1) The socio-cultural approach with two sublevels: a) a social base of hip-hop culture in each country and b) market and media infrastructure;

2) The rap discourse approach with three sublevels: a) song-topics; b) genre-typical verbal actions (speech act patterns) and c) cultural references in rap songs;

3) The linguistic patterns approach subdivided in: a) language variation; b) rhetorical patterns and c) English elements in non-English lyrics.

In view of the indisputable relationship between rap discourse and linguistic patterns in rap texts, a vast array of the textual analysis tends to blend these two approaches. It is not on rare occasions that a multileveled analysis encompassing the three approaches has been pursued, overlooking the importance of rhetorical patterns in rap lyrics.

Since figurative language is an essential part of rap lyrics, we have focused our analysis on metaphorical concepts, by identifying the source and target domain, as well as the motivational link between them.

With a firm conviction of the decisive role of rhetorical patterns in rap texts as weapons of ideological combat,1 we wish to pry into the rhetorical jungle of selected French, Romanian and Portuguese rap lyrics portrayed, respectively, in Dangereux

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1. “Potter (1995: 94) refers to such a concept when he speaks of “the recurrent metaphoric mixture of rapper’s own technologies, microphones, pencils and tongues with those armed struggle (guns, hand grenades, artillery).” (apud Androutsopulos & Scholz 2002: 5)”
2. Rap texts as convergent conceptual territories

In a world of global telecommunications, we wish to foreground the role of the internet in the diffusion of hip-hop, blurring the boundaries between regions, countries and continents. Hip-hop's quest for authenticity advocates, however, that local issues and languages must gain ground on global issues, as stated by Terkourafi (2010: 7):

[...] keeping it real to the locale can be expressed through the topics artists choose to address, as well as through the strategies they use to address them. As regards topics, references to local characters and place names, and to broader social issues of local importance (migration, societal marginalization, consumerism etc.) serve to anchor artistic production to its immediate surroundings.

This is the reason why, in southern European countries, one must necessarily add to the list of salient local issues the poor living conditions scenarios, which can be traced back to controversial political decisions or to economic guidelines pursued by allegedly corrupt politicians that clearly undermine the pillars of democratic regimes. Oppositional consciousness of rap artists in Southern Europe has urged them to report anomalies in the political system by condemning dysfunctional political agents. In order to violently attack multiple wrongdoings and the way they reflect onto the local population’s life styles, strong emblematic metaphorical images with predators by French, Romanian and Portuguese rappers were built and unveiled here as a way of acknowledging convergent conceptual territories on European soil.

3. Conceptual metaphors as tools for rap texts

By engaging with metaphor as a conceptual phenomenon with special reference to the two FAMILY metaphor versions underlying political discourse in the USA, Lakoff (1996) clearly stresses the fact that only by analyzing lexical and phraseological units in their sociodiscursive context can one get access to the underlying political value systems. The imperative need of grounding metaphor investigation in authentic corpora is corroborated by Musolff (2004: 9), as follows:

2 “Conservatism, as we shall see, is based on a strict Father model, while Liberalism is centred around a Nurturant Parent model. These two models of the family give rise to different moral systems and different discourse forms [...]” (Lakoff 1996: 12)
any claims about specific metaphorical concepts “underlying”, “informing” or “organizing” the discourse and thinking of larger social groups need to be related to empirical discourse data before any significant conclusions can be drawn.

However, in order to cope with empirical data, Kövecses (2002: 240-245) claims that it is of utmost relevance to differentiate three levels of metaphor analysis, namely “the individual level”, involved in the creation of new metaphors; the supraindividual, consisting of conventionalized culture-specific metaphors of a given language; and the subindividual level, embodying the experiential grounding of abstract concepts, normally associated with early childhood development.

In fact, it should be noticed that metaphoric images in rap texts can be accounted for as instantiations of projection mappings3 that echo supraindividual frames, yet being associated with emotional and experiential domains. As explained below, it is not by chance that the realizations of the conceptual metaphor LIFE IS A JUNGLE can be easily understood by large fringes of the population, since they are in fact anchored in supraindividual frames of the conceptual model of junglish urban life in these countries, which are in fact necessarily linked to distressing daily experiences.

However, if, on the one hand, meaning construction is based on encyclopaedic knowledge, on the other hand it constitutes a creative endeavour, since it relies upon the powerful mental skills of fabricating meaningful idealized cognitive models.4

3.1. The conceptual metaphor LIFE IS A JUNGLE

Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson 1980; Lakoff 1986; Lakoff & Turner 1989) defends that metaphors are unidirectional projections from source domain to target domain, but not vice versa (cf. Evans & Green 2006: 296). Thus, the Conceptual Metaphor LIFE IS A JUNGLE in rap texts maps dangerous animals that lurk in the jungle, namely reptiles of all sorts onto the political agents of the economic/political wrongdoings. Negative environmental conditions are mapped onto natural ground traps, namely marshes and quicksand.

3. “Another prominent theme in cognitive semantics is the idea of conceptual mappings. [...] A projection mapping projects structure from one domain (source) onto another (target).” (Evans & Green 2006: 167)

4. “[...] we organize our knowledge by means of structures calls idealized cognitive models, or ICMs, and that category structures and prototype effects are by-products of that organization” (Lakoff 1987: 68). “These [ICMs] are relatively stable mental representations that represent theories about the world. In this respect, ICMs are similar to Fillmore’s notion of frames, since both relate to relatively complex knowledge structures. While ICMs are rich in detail, they are ‘idealized’ because they abstract across a range of experiences rather than representing specific instances of a given experience.” (Evans & Green 2006: 270)
We should mention that the jungle mappings in our corpus of rap lyrics are constructed on the basis of an Idealized Model of the Jungle since, on the one hand, they are very selective by ignoring many possible aspects of the real life in the jungle, as in the case of the chain food for reptiles, and, on the other hand, they are very inventive by mapping birds of prey – which, in fact, do not belong to the real jungle conceptual model, but to the savannah or to the desert conceptual frames – onto political agents of social/economic chaos.

Moreover, it is important to stress that the life is a jungle conceptual metaphor and realizations thereof are associated with this (novel) sense of jungle, namely “the concrete jungle”, i.e. the urban jungle. In fact, the referred sense of jungle was incorporated in the Collins Concise Dictionary of English (2001: 794), as the fourth lexical entry of this word, namely: “4. a place of intense and ruthless struggle for survival.” That seems to be the reason why the mappings of ‘jungle onto life’ make sense to a fairly wide English-speaking audience.

In fact, this sense of the word jungle cannot be accounted for as culture-specific, since it is also attested in the Dicionário da Língua Portuguesa Contemporânea, as shown hereafter (2001: 3372): “4. Lugar onde se luta pela sobrevivência, onde reina a lei do mais forte. Aquela cidade é uma selva.”

We must, therefore, conclude that the conceptual metaphor life is a jungle, emerging from this specific sense of jungle, has acquired a cross-cultural dimension since it is shared by at least two languages. However, cultural-ideological specificities must also be taken into account, as pointed out by Kövecses (2006: 173):

Two languages may share a conceptual metaphor and the conceptual metaphor may be expressed by largely overlapping metaphorical expressions but the expressions can reveal subtle differences in the cultural-ideological background in which the conceptual metaphor functions.

In the case of our corpus, the subtle cultural-ideological differences in metaphorical realizations seem to play a minor role since it is really a question of the elaboration of different but coherent mappings in the rap lyrics excerpts here investigated from a double-featured intertextual/interlingual approach. So, before starting to analyse the realizations of the conceptual metaphor life is a jungle, we must also come to term with the notion of metaphorical “entailments”:5 Moreover,

5. “In addition to the individual mappings that conceptual metaphors bring with them, they also provide additional sometimes quite detailed knowledge. This is because aspects of the source domain that are not explicitly stated in the mappings can be inferred. In this way, metaphoric mappings carry entailments or rich inferences.” (Evans & Green 2006: 298)
Lakoff/Johnson (1980: 156) have suggested a number of basic premises that, in order to facilitate our comment, have been sequentially listed, as follows:

1) Metaphors have entailments through which they highlight and make coherent certain aspects of our experience.

2) A given metaphor may be the only way to highlight and coherently organize exactly those aspects of our experience.

3) Metaphors may create realities for us, especially social realities.

4) A metaphor may thus be the guide for future action. Such actions will, of course, fit the metaphor.

5) This will, in turn, reinforce the power to make experience coherent. In this sense metaphors can be self-fulfilling prophecies.

The fact that the rap lyrics here analysed have resorted to metaphoric realizations of the conceptual metaphor life is a jungle emerges from their need to categorize their experiences in a coherent fashion, as pointed out in (1) and (2), so that the public can access the social/political reality through a different perspective, as referred in (3). In fact, these metaphorical realizations in the mouth of the rappers are guides for future action, as accounted for in (4), since they themselves are constructed as weapons against allegedly misguided politicians, as will be shown below. As it happens, the rappers, invested with the power of shaping images, whereby questionable political decisions and shaky politicians come to light, position themselves as political activists who fight for a new social/political order.

3.1.1. La vie c’est la jungle

As it happens, we could also find a realization of the conceptual metaphor life is a jungle in the French hip-hop song by “Les Inconnus” C’est ton destin, to be exact in the stanza “La vie c’est la jungle”. By resorting, in the conceptual metaphor formulation, to the English word jungle the authors are clearly activating the specific sense of jungle as a locus of tough struggle for survival. However, we must point out that this conceptual metaphor realization was used ironically to deride hip-hop scenarios of hazardous living conditions in French urban “banlieus” and therefore will not be encompassed in our analysis of French rap texts.
3.1.2. Dangerous humans are serpents

On analyzing the French rap text *Dangereux*, we came across the following stanza where DANGEROUS HUMANS are mapped onto SERPENTS:

(1) _Ils déclenchent ma revanche à leurs dépens_
_Si je pouvais vivre loin des serpents_
(_They trigger my revenge at their own expense_
_If only I could live far away from the serpents_)

There is no doubt that the song title *Dangereux* mentally projects us into a perilous place infested with human predators since the mapping from the source domain to the target domain resorts to the word *serpents* in the plural. However, the subject, although acknowledging the fact that he is forced to live in this dangerous environment, is far from becoming paralysed by his wish to live somewhere, thereby proclaiming his revenge as a counter-reaction to the unacceptable *status quo* dominated by malignant human forces. By conveying the political message of “paying back to the wrongdoers”, thus going well beyond the simple outcry of revolt, the authors incite people to take action against the malignant forces.

3.1.3. Corrupt people are predators – capitalism is a serpent

In the following stanzas from the Romanian rap lyrics *Egali din Nastere* by the rap group Ombladon feat. Raku, the metaphorical mappings clearly reflect the cultural-ideological specificities of Romania in the post-communist era, i.e. in the first stages of the capitalist regime, where CORRUPT PEOPLE are mapped onto PREDATORS that steal, whenever the opportunity arises:

(2) _Ai grijă de viață, vulture planează în ceață / O ființă intinde o mâna, cealaltă poate fi hoață / În dobândă / Șarpele ascuns stă la panda._
(_Beware, the eagles are plotting in the mist / Some creatures give a helping hand while others steal what they can. Behind your back / The serpent of interest rates will attack._)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source domain</th>
<th>Target domain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eagles</td>
<td>Corrupt people</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Conceptual Mapping CORRUPT PEOPLE ARE EAGLES
Notice that the capitalist regime is held responsible for the emergence of these corrupt people, with special reference to the interest rates that have been metaphorically projected from the source domain of a serpent:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source domain</th>
<th>Target domain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Serpent</td>
<td>Interest rates</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Conceptual mapping interest rates are serpents

The Romanian rap text conveys the political message that the capitalist regime is a jungle, abounding with predators of all sorts. On the one hand, corrupt people, whose emergence is necessarily favoured by the capitalist regime, are metaphorically represented as eagles. On the other hand, interest rates are represented as a dangerous serpent, thus metonymically referring to the endemic perils of the capitalist regime. Note that the eagle, although not belonging to the prototypical scenario of the jungle, is encompassed in an idealized cognitive scenario of wildlife, where the fiercest and most feared predators survive. Furthermore, we believe that in this wildlife scenario, the conceptualization of the serpent emerges from the physical and behavioural nature of the animal. In that, it is a creeping, silent creature that strikes its preys in an insidious, sly and almost unforeseeable manner. The mapping of the serpent onto the interest rates conveys the insidious nature of this economic praxis. Additionally, we should also mention the religious connotations evoked by the snake, namely temptation, betrayal and deceit, which can also be mapped onto the policy of interest rates. This religious connotations seem to be relevant for the architecturing of the following conceptual metaphor (politicians are serpents).

3.1.4. Rappers are weapons – politicians are serpents

In the Portuguese rap text under analysis, *Atiradores Furtivos*, by the rap group *Mind da Gap*, the conceptual metaphors rappers are weapons (as in cutting identities) and politicians are serpents are called into play:

(3) MDG os inimigos do sistema instalado
    Atitudes bem fortes, cortantes identidades


Mentes independentes conscientes nas cidades
Onde as falsidades das serpentes são fluentes, sementes
Serão rudes as vicissitudes, são facas de 2 gumes
Não te iludas com o que pisas
Num momento é cimento, outro areias moviças

(MDG, enemies of the political status quo
Strong-minded people, cutting identities
Conscious, independent minds in the cities
Where the silver-tongued serpents deceive, they’re like seeds
Heavy drawbacks in life, they are double-blade knives
Don’t be delusional, watch where you set foot
Sometimes you’ll find cement, others quicksand)

It should be noticed that the referred conceptual metaphors build on the following conceptual mappings from source to target domains:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source domain</th>
<th>Target domain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weapons</td>
<td>Rappers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serpents</td>
<td>Politicians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knives</td>
<td>Politicians</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Conceptual Mappings – RAPPERS ARE WEAPONS – POLITICIANS ARE SERPENTS – POLITICIANS ARE KNIVES

Thus, a fierce fight is staged between rappers as political activists and politicians, metaphorically represented as serpents or knives, framed in an extremely dangerous political situation, metaphorically depicted as quicksand, as shown in table 4 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source domain</th>
<th>Target domain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quicksand</td>
<td>The political situation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. Conceptual mapping – THE POLITICAL SITUATION IS QUICKSAND

3.1.5. Life in Portugal is a safari – politicians are animals – politicians are hunters

Apart from the metaphorical instantiations of the conceptual metaphor LIFE IS A JUNGLE in the rap lyrics Portugal Surreal by Dealema, some other quite interesting metaphorical realizations of the conceptual metaphors LIFE IN PORTUGAL IS A SAFARI; POLITICIANS ARE HUNTERS; POLITICIANS ARE ANIMALS critically target both Portuguese cultural-ideological frames and political corruption in Portugal.
Jet-set, aldeias, novelas, touradas, IRS, fantasmas, empresas, esquemas
Safari, os animais raros conduzem carros
Entraste no Cavaquistão, veste o Camuflado!

(VIPs, villages, soap operas, bullfights, income tax, ghosts, companies, schemas
Safari, rare animals drive cars
You have entered Cavaquistan, put on the camouflage)

Special reference must be made to the metaphoric realization “os animais raros conduzem carros” (rare animals drive cars) whereby humans are viewed as fierce competitive and aggressive animals. In fact, it is a demolishing view on life in Portugal and on Portuguese politicians stemming from the following mappings:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source domain</th>
<th>Target domain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Safari</td>
<td>Life in Portugal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunters</td>
<td>Politicians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rare animals</td>
<td>Politicians</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5. Conceptual mappings – life in Portugal is a safari; politicians are hunters; politicians are rare animals

The fact that politicians are double-featured both hunters of people, taking part in a safari, and animals, having lost all human values, are the *leitmotif* for the subsequent warning to put on camouflage, in order to avoid being spotted and hunt down. However, the most violent critical view on Portuguese politicians is necessarily bound to the *locus* where the Portuguese safari takes place – an imaginary land, which emerges from the blend of Afghanistan, a violent theatre of war, with Cavaco (Silva), the surname of the Portuguese President (the song was first released in 2009).

These rap texts display a remix and interplay of urban landscapes and life threatening perils in the wild, such as:

- struggle for survival in the jungle → struggle for survival in urban settings
- struggle for survival from predators’ attacks → struggle for survival in a capitalist society
- struggle for survival in a Safari scenery → struggle for survival in a corrupt society
4. Different rap conceptual architecturings – coherent social/political realities

As we could see in figure 1, the idealized cognitive model of the urban jungle is architectured by resorting to mappings from different predators and ground hazards onto dangerous and corrupt people or environments, as follows:

- French rap text excerpt – social/political critique motivated by dangerous people in urban settings;
- Romanian rap excerpt – political critique motivated by the recent emergence of the capitalist regime;
- Portuguese rap excerpt – social/political critique motivated by corruption and ruthlessness in the political system.

These metaphorically tainted scenarios from French, Romanian and Portuguese rap lyrics excerpts constitute historical views on hazardous living conditions in European soil, which remind us that “Human classification through language is not value-free, indeed categorization (kategorein: “to accuse”) is a function of power.” (Goatly 2007: 154).

Thus, rap artists use rap lyrics as political weapons portraying social unevenness and political corruption mainly by resorting to depersonifications, as pointed out by Charteris-Black (2009: 105): “Negative evaluations may be communicated by depersonifications (Charteris-Black 2004. 168) that represent a political opponent as an animal, a parasite or a thing.”
In fact, metaphorical images of depersonification in the political discourse or politically oriented discourse, as is the case here, are very effective in that they allow the public to gain access to the Idealized Cognitive Model of life is a jungle constructed by the rap artists, leading to the meaningful activation of a set of beliefs and values in the minds of the public. This is only possible because the source concept of this conceptual metaphor, namely “urban jungle”, had already been acknowledged by people from Portugal, France and Romania in the first place, which, in fact, is grounded in Lakoff/Johnson’s argument apud Musolff (2004: 32):

An implication of the metaphorical mapping “X IS WAR” can only count as an entailment if X has already been accepted as the source concept – otherwise, as Lakoff and Johnson themselves point out, it is meaningless.

In fact, it must be highlighted that the productivity of the metaphoric realizations draws on the meaningfulness of the “urban jungle” concept, at least in European soil.

5. Concluding remarks

Rap is a global idiom with local imprints relying on the elaboration of different but interculturally/interlinguistically coherent versions of the Idealized Cognitive model of life is a jungle.

In these three European scenarios (France, Portugal and Romania) this metaphor is used with slight variation: we have the general image of the urban jungle in the French rap text, the safari landscape in the Portuguese one and the perils of the savage capitalist regime in the Romanian one. However different these three landscapes might be (as they deal with different types of political dissatisfaction), they all have in common the way dishonest politicians are perceived and their defiling of power.

We can observe that in all three scenarios the serpent is always present, which goes to show that there is a cultural bond that makes us perceive the serpent as a vicious, double-faced, creeping animal and project those characteristics onto people, thus depriving them of their human nature.

The survival of the fittest is another one of the recurrent images in these three rap song lyrics, as the image of the prey is reflected upon the ones who have to abide by the politicians’ (the predators’) rules and corruption schemes. Imperative alert messages are sent out in two of them (“Beware, the eagles are plotting in the mist” (Romanian rap); “Put on the camouflage” (Portuguese rap), while personal
affirmation as a brave potentially dangerous person that is willing to fight the system transpires in the French rap song: “I am dangerous”.

In short, the message being sent out in all three scenarios, recurring to the metaphor LIFE IS A JUNGLE and to all of the observable patterns of depersonification that this metaphor involves is that we shouldn’t be behaving as animals and should use the information we have to act as responsible human beings.

The question is: can we all get out of these junglish environments alive and well? And will we ever live as humans rather than as animals fighting for survival?

References


