Limits of Metaphorical Play on Reddit

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Master's thesis / Diplomski rad

2022

University of Zagreb

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Department of English

Academic year 2021./2022.

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Master's thesis

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Zagreb, January 2022.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction

The explanation of concepts using metaphors is one of our primary tools for understanding various experiences in the world. If we are, for example, *boiling with anger*, anger does not have the form of a fluid in a container – our bodily fluids are not literally boiling. We are mapping the concept of anger onto a concrete, physical entity – a boiling pot – to describe our emotions with clarity. The ANGER IS A FLUID IN A PRESSURIZED CONTAINER metaphor is a conventional metaphor understood by most, if not all, speakers of English, due to its constant use over many years, rooting it firmly into the language and giving it legitimacy and legibility. It would also be natural for most speakers to understand other expressions of that metaphor, such as *boiling mad* or *to blow off steam*. Nevertheless, new metaphors can be created by all speakers of a given language by explaining certain concepts in terms of more concrete concepts using appropriate linguistic expressions. These connections are called metaphorical mappings. When creating a new metaphorical concept and presenting it to other speakers of our language, it is without doubt that, if the metaphor makes sense to others, they will attempt to elaborate the fresh metaphor with new and adequate metaphorical expressions, based on their worldview and experiences. This will especially be the case if the new metaphor is perceived as something fun, something creative, or is created for the purpose of entertainment in the spur of the moment. Also, the potential to create new linguistic metaphorical expressions corresponding to conventional, widely used metaphors is always present.

This productive, spontaneous creation of metaphorical expressions is called metaphorical play, which will be discussed after elaborating the contemporary theoretical perspective on metaphor. The participants in the discourse where the newly coined metaphor is present can continue to coin new metaphorical expressions for a period of time until the play, the joke, becomes stale, and no new expressions are coined. Of course, many a metaphorical play has been played on the basis of already established, conventional metaphors, but the focus was put on highlighting novel, amusing

characteristics of the target domain. This choice of what to highlight is the basis for further elaboration of the metaphor.

In this paper I will investigate the manner in which metaphorical play ends. I will analyze various examples of metaphorical play on the internet forum-based platform Reddit, attempting to observe whether there are patterns or characteristic expressions that occur when there is no more inspiration for the metaphorical play to continue. By investigating the length and characteristics of various metaphorical games, I will attempt to discern the conditions that have to be met for the metaphorical play to continue. The focus will be put on the creation of new metaphors, that is, explanations of concepts presumed by certain posts using other concepts, elaborated in the comment sections. Investigating the expressions marking the end of metaphorical play, I will attempt to show how the participants in the play deal with the eventual unproductivity of the metaphor. I will try to answer whether the value of the metaphor contextualized in a setting of a metaphorical play is primarily based on its productivity, which provides entertainment in itself. The examples that will be discussed will be taken from comment sections of the internet forum Reddit, where instances of metaphorical play by the community are common. The metaphors explored belong to the category of multimodal metaphors.

The paper is organized as follows. In section 2, I discuss Reddit within the community of practice framework, followed by a discussion of various contemporary theoretical views on metaphor in sections 3, 4 and 5. Section 6 discusses methodology, followed by results and examples along with the discussion. The paper ends with a conclusion.

2. Reddit - The Stage for the Play

Reddit (*https://www.reddit.com*) is a website comprised of elements of forums, ranking sites and social media. Registered users create posts of various kinds – pictures with captions, text-based posts, GIFs with captions and links, among others. Posts are organized into "subreddits", which are forums dedicated to certain themes, ranging from very general to very specific. Users can create subreddits dedicated to any theme. Subreddits are stylized as *r/subredditname*, for example, *r/funny* (*https://www.reddit.com/r/funny/*), *r/politics* (*https://www.reddit.com/r/politics/*) or

r/twoxchromosomes (https://www.reddit.com/r/TwoXChromosomes/, a subreddit devoted to women*).* Each post has a number representing its score which is determined by users "upvoting" and "downvoting" posts. Comments on posts can also be upvoted and downvoted. This enables the Reddit community to self-moderate the website's content. Posts with the most upvotes are brought to the top of a subreddit's page, while Reddit's front page (*https://www.reddit.com*) features most upvoted posts across all subreddits. Users also give "awards" to posts and comments. In addition to this characteristic type of moderation, every subreddit has its own dedicated moderators (who are Reddit's employees but notable members of the subreddit's community). Appropriate behavior on Reddit is described by the *Reddiquette* (*https://reddit.zendesk.com/hc/en-us/articles/205926439-Reddiquette*). It emphasizes politeness, creating posts and comments with meaningful content (as opposed to "lol", "xD" and the like) and encourages voting as a form of self-maintenance, among other things.

The various subreddits are collections of thematically related posts. However, organization of posts according to theme is not the only function of subreddits. Subreddits also provide a framework which dictates how posts should be interpreted. For example, an original painting of a ghost can be posted both on *r/art* and *r/creepy*. The response of the community would be different on each subreddit, respectively. On *r/art*, the majority might compliment the brushstrokes or the artistic quality of the painting, while on *r/creepy* a presumably scary or creepy metaphorical play based on to some aspect of the painting might begin. The metaphorical games in the examples that follow will clarify this matter further.

A framework that can prove useful in interpreting linguistic behavior on Reddit is to consider the Reddit community, and every subreddit's respective community respectively, as communities of practice (CofP, in short). Communities of practice are groups of people engaging in a shared endeavor, which results in distinctive practices emerging in the course of the endeavor. The purpose of the shared endeavor is clear to all participants, but constantly changing, being reevaluated over time. The practices that emerge in a community of practice may be highly specific and not immediately understandable by people outside the community. Members of CofPs share a discourse that reflects a certain worldview. Also, they share means of dealing with the shared endeavor, and a jargon, along with specific shortcuts of communication (Meyerhoff and

Strycharz 2013: 430), which develop over time by mutual engagement. A shared linguistic repertoire can eventually emerge. The membership in a community is dynamic, with various levels of engagement (Donlan 2020). The community of practice framework has been most widely used in studies of social learning, but it has also been applied to studies of language change and variation. It has been widely applied to the analysis of these concepts in online communities.

Subreddits can be considered communities of practice because of the shared endeavor the users are engaging in. In this case, the shared endeavor is the discussion of various posts (textual or visual) in a manner characteristic to a certain subreddit. For example, the *r/Antiwork* subreddit is a community of practice consisting primarily of people "who want to end work, are curious about ending work, want to get the most out of a work-free life, want more information on anti-work ideas and want personal help with their own jobs/work-related struggles" (Reddit 2009). As the subreddit evolves over time, its own rules and regulations (in addition to the rules prescribed by the Reddiquette) are modified and shaped over time, primarily by the experience of the community, which is the basis of the rules prescribed by the moderators. The dynamic nature of the community is highlighted by the option to "subscribe" and "unsubscribe" to a subreddit. Active, subscribed users are called "members", and users that do not participate in discussions, but only read posts and comments, are unofficially called "lurkers". This phenomenon, along with the rapidly exchanging flow of information both by posting and by commenting, contributes to the exclusive jargon of the subreddit's communities. The metaphoric games are the result of this rapid flow of information, influenced by the linguistic practices of the unique communities of Reddit.

3. Metaphor - a Theoretical Perspective

Most contemporary inquiry into metaphors and metaphorical expressions from a cognitive linguistic perspective is based on Lakoff and Johnson's conceptual metaphor theory. It states that metaphors are devices which enable us to understand one concept in terms of another. This is unlike the traditional view of the metaphor, which sees metaphor

as a rhetorical figure used to embellish speech and writing. Usually, an abstract concept is explained in terms of a more concrete concept, which we can relate to because of our experience of the world. Take, for example, the metaphor TIME IS MONEY (Lakoff & Johnson 1980). When talking, writing, or even thinking about time, we might use expressions such as:

This assignment *cost* me a week.

You *save* time by running to work.

Is going to college *worth your while*?

The conceptualization of time by terms related to money, that is, the TIME IS MONEY metaphor, can be realized by expressions such as these. This is called a conceptual metaphor, consisting of domain A and domain B, with domain A being explained by domain B (Kövecses 2010). The domains are based on our experience of the world. The domain which is being explained by the metaphor is called the *target domain*, while the domain used to explain it is called the *source domain*. In the case of the TIME IS MONEY metaphor, the conceptual connection is made by time being a quantifiable resource, just like money, used to accomplish things. Also, in Western culture, time is associated with money by paying people by the hour, week or month.

Conceptual metaphors do not appear out of thin air. Experiences that have accumulated through our lives are the basis for their legitimacy and utility. Many experiences, or source domains, from which we draw knowledge required to explain target domains, are shared between most human beings. Take, for example, one of the most frequent source domains - the human body. A part of our body may be used for metaphorical comprehension of various concepts, for example:

the *heart* of the problem

to *shoulder* a responsibility

the *head* of the department (ibid. 18)

Without doubt, a vast majority of humans have experience with hearts, shoulders and heads. Shared experience of all speakers of English is the prerequisite for these metaphors to work, combined with their strong cultural rootedness.

Such associations between abstract and concrete concepts have produced countless metaphorical expressions across all languages. The infinity of these associations, along with the infinity of possible human experiences and interpretations, leads to the potential for new ways of pairing various source and target domains to continuously occur over time, thereby creating new metaphors. Also, new, or at least unconventional (ibid. 35), metaphorical expressions regarding existing metaphors can occur. Such new metaphorical expressions are, for instance, common in written forms of art, particularly poetry (Lakoff & Turner 1989:50).

3.1. New Metaphors

The creation of new metaphors is based on various factors. First and foremost, some characteristics of the source domain have to be appropriate in explaining the target domain. The choice of characteristics considered appropriate, and therefore the choice of the source domain, is based on past experiences, views and opinions of the person devising the metaphor. These shared characteristics are the basis for the creation of metaphorical expressions, which means that it is inevitable for a metaphor to emphasize certain characteristics of a target domain and conceal others, because it is impossible for two different things or concepts to share each and every characteristic - otherwise, they would be identical (Stanojević 2013: 86). The emphasized aspects of the target domain are most often the ones shared, explicitly or implicitly, by the source domain. In addition, only by emphasizing certain aspects and concealing others can there be a coherent system of metaphorical expressions which functions well in describing a given conceptual metaphor. By this system of highlighting and concealing, a framework for the interpretation of a target domain is established. Take, for example, the unconventional metaphor LOVE IS A COLLABORATIVE WORK OF ART and its related metaphorical expressions (Lakoff & Johnson 1980:130):

Love is work.

Love requires dedication.

Love demands sacrifice.

Love requires a shared aesthetic.

The entailments listed here apply both to LOVE, but they also apply to COLLABORATIVE WORK OF ART because of our personal experiences of work, art and collaborations. Each of these entailments can be productive in its own right, enabling further elaborations. The result is an organized, coherent network of associations, legitimized by our experience. To be productive with describing metaphors with entailments we have to draw on our rich knowledge of the world and especially the source domain (Kövecses 2010:122).

By describing love using these entailments and not others, we conceal some other characteristics of love, giving love a new meaning devoid of the concealed characteristics. Tackling this issue, Lakoff and Johnson claim that: "If those things entailed by the metaphor are for us the most important aspects of love experiences, then the metaphor can acquire the status of a truth" (1980:132). Because our experience is organized, or made sense of, by these entailments and lack of others, it makes sense to interpret, or frame, our reality according to this. The frame created by the metaphor is the basis for truth (Goffman 1974).

The creation of new metaphors has to meet all of these criteria, but often, in order for it to "work", the new metaphor has to be explained in explicit terms (Stanojević 2020:152). For example, when in the movie *Forrest Gump*, Forrest's mother claims that "Life is a box of chocolates", the metaphor is explained immediately after it is expressed; "You never know what you're gonna get". Such is the case with this "saying", which should impart sudden wisdom on the person hearing it for the first time. Note that this is an extreme example of concealment. Life, in the biological frame, is a concept and an experience which contains all other experiences, things and concepts. This saying emphasizes only a few aspects of life, like its uncertainty, or the lack of definite knowledge about what will happen in one's life. It conceals a plethora of aspects connected to life, for example, that we spend a third of our life asleep, and that we obliged by birth to satisfy basic everyday needs such as hunger and thirst. The metaphor also highlights the positive aspects of life, which

is based on the conventional and stereotypical knowledge of the pleasure we get from eating chocolate (despite the fact that this pleasure may be due to individual preference).

Some other aspect of life could be emphasized by a different source domain. Consequently, the framework, or wisdom, imparted to our worldview by the utilization of that metaphor, would be different. For example, a common metaphor used to explain life is LIFE IS A JOURNEY. Some expressions of this metaphor are:

She'll *go far* in life.

I'm *where I want to be* in life.

He's *without direction*. (Kövecses 2010: 3)

This metaphor highlights the aspect of life as a temporary phenomenon, one which passes over time. Also, one highlighted aspect is the purpose of one's life. The progress one has made on a journey is seen as relative to the purpose of life, which is the ultimate goal of the journey. In the "box of chocolates" example, the highlighted aspect was primarily the uncertainty of life, and the possible pleasures one can experience through life. Therefore, LIFE IS A BOX OF CHOCOLATES and LIFE IS A JOURNEY are two conceptual metaphors with radically different source domains, resulting in radically different frames along which we can interpret life. Both ofthese metaphors highlight only little and conceal a lot, but by concentrating on these highlighted entailments the consequences for the interpretation and further creation of metaphorical expressions are enormous.

Such frameworks, based on certain entailments, can structure and guide everyday conversation and experience, which is what this thesis is all about - spontaneous metaphorical productivity realized through commenting on Reddit. Zoltan Kövecses provides an example from everyday life, when he met his former physical education teacher in a gym. Their conversation went thus:

"TEACHER: You look like a healthy apple.

KÖVECSES: I hope it's not rotten inside.

TEACHER: I hope, too, that it will last a long time." (Kövecses 2010:123)

The basis for this conversation is the widely used conceptual metaphor PEOPLE ARE PLANTS (other common metaphorical expressions of this metaphor are, for example, "She's blossomed since she went to college", or "You're not yet ripe"). The The fact that an apple rots over time (and the details of the procedure, along with the characteristics of a rotten apple) is known to both speakers, and when the teacher mentioned that entailment, Kövecses elaborated on it and continued the conversation. Although there a lot of epistemological factors at play in this case, such conversations are not rare at all. Here's a personal example - my friend was scheduled to attend a job interview at a firm. When he was entering the firm's building, the doormanobserved that his zipper was unbuttoned, and so he remarked (in Croatian): "Your shop is open". This is a relatively common metaphor in Croatian, A ZIPPER IS A DOOR TO A SHOP, which is primarily used as a saying when one forgot to button up his zipper. My friend replied "Yes, but the boss is inside", thereby continuing the metaphorical play by using a new, unconventional metaphorical expression. Note that "Your shop is open" is a saying - the A ZIPPER IS A DOOR TO A SHOP metaphor is expressed exclusively by that metaphorical expression. The metaphorical play started by my friend creating a new metaphorical expression basedon a metaphor which is not conventionally expressed in any way other than the one mentioned before.

Kövecses does not mention what happened *immediately after* his encounter at the gym, but I presume there must have been some signal that the elaboration of metaphorical expressions related to the metaphor in question is over. When I asked my friend what happened when he replied to the doorman, the answer was that they both laughed. I believe that these codes which differentiate "play" from "serious communication" after a certain point in time exist in every instance of metaphorical play. In this work I will attempt to identify such practices, such codes for the end of metaphorical play, in various metaphorical games in the comment sections of Reddit.

3.2. Metaphorical Play and Games

In this paper, I will use the terms metaphorical play and metaphorical games to denote the elaboration of an initial metaphorical conception in an amusing and creative manner. The primary motivation for the appearance of metaphorical play in most examples in this thesis is humor. The initial, linguistic, metaphorical expression provides inspiration for further elaboration and recontextualization in a humorous manner. While elaborating and recontextualizing the metaphor that provides the basis for metaphorical play, we rely heavily on our experience and knowledge of the world, which enables us to form new metaphorical expressions for the initially elaborated metaphor. In addition, new conceptual metaphors, to which existing metaphorical expressions can apply to, can be conceived.

Tony Veale discusses such "verbal witticisms" (Veale 2004: 2), where the metaphor itself is "part of the logical mechanism that makes humour work" (ibid.). In the examples from his article, humour is achieved by various reinterpretations and recontextualizations of a metaphorical expressions' intended meaning. The participants are "players that indirectly partake in a linguistic game of wits" (ibid.). The first two examples include what Veale calls "metaphoric trumping":

"(1) "I aim for the stars"
(a coffee-table book promoting space travel by NASA scientist and former-German rocket scientist Werner von Braun, designer of the V2 rocket that ravaged London in WWII).

(2) "I aim for the stars, but I keep hitting London"
(alternate title suggested by a critic of von Braun's contribution to Nazi Germany's rocket programme)." (Veale 2004: 3)

The first example is from the title of Werner von Braun's book. It can be supposed that the title is based on the metaphor GOODNESS IS VERTICALITY, which describes von Braun's intentions of achieving technological greatness by helping mankind reach space in rockets that he had designed. The title can be interpreted both metaphorically and literally, because von Braun is talking about himself and his goals metaphorically by

using a phrase which can be interpreted literally, alluding to the rockets he creates. Example (2) recontextualizes the metaphorical interpretation proposed in (1), highlighting Braun's contributions to the Nazi regime. Furthermore, the figurative meaning intended by (1) is nullified, treating the metaphor literally, with the aim being seen as a physical target. Therefore, the second example undermines the intent of (1) by changing the semantic content. The ultimate result is (dark) humor.

The mechanism that is crucial to the recontextualization of example (1) is framing. In this paper, "framing" and "framework" will be treated as in Erving Goffman's Frame Analysis, where "framing" is a process which corresponds to the question "What is it that is going on here?", a question that is unconsciously applied by every participant in every situation, in order to make sense of the situation's basic paradigm and act accordingly (Goffman 1974). "Framework", on the other hand, will be used as a tool which allows its user to "...locate, perceive, identify, and label a seemingly infinite number of concrete occurrences defined in its terms" (ibid. 21). A "framework" is thus considered a schema of interpretation. Framing enables us the "metacommunicative management of the recontextualized text" (Bauman & Briggs 1990: 75). Bauman and Briggs list mechanisms of recontextualization and decontextualization in addition to framing in their essay, such as change of form or change of function. The interplay between these recontextualization techniques enables further semantic manipulation of the text, adding the potential to new recontextualizations. The change in the highlighting of metaphorical entailments that happens in example (2) is an example of recontextualization by means of a metaphorical expression. Unfortunately, these two examples do not show the spontaneous, real time character of metaphorical play that can be observed in everyday life (as Kövecses' example from the gym has shown).

4. Methodology

This paper explores metaphorical play, or the creation of new metaphors and metaphorical expressions used to explain these metaphors in Reddit's comment sections. Emphasis is put on the end of the production of new expressions, with the intent to discover the limits of metaphorical play and the characteristic expressions that denote its end. The examples discussed in this paper are comments on three submissions, which

were selected at random on Reddit's "front page", which is a collection of most popular submissions across all subreddits at the moment of access. All submissions that I have explored were visual – a picture of mannequins in a storeroom, a GIF of a hidden car compartment opening and closing, and a GIF of a child in a street kicking a soccer ball into a scooter, causing it to crash. I used qualitative analysis with regard to the content of the comments on these submissions, searching for comments recontextualizing original submissions and encouraging metaphorical play. Screenshots of the content from Reddit appear in the paper.

Metaphor was viewed as any *description of the original picture or GIF content in terms of another source domain*. The contemporary theory of metaphor relies on describing abstract concepts in terms of other, more concrete concepts, with the intent to make abstract concepts readily understandable by connecting them with real world experience of the source domain. In these examples, a novel, unexpected, but in some way suggested, source domain is proposed. The frame used to interpret the submission is altered, proposing a new "transcription" (Goffman 1974: 41) into a state of dreamy, metaphorical creativity. The amusement arising from this novel conceptual connection between source domains results in the production of new metaphorical expressions. Here is an example of a non-metaphorical comment on the GIF of the car compartment opening and closing:

The commenter is asking a question arising from a generally accepted view of the situation. The frame is, in this case, along with the content of the GIF, proposed by the headline above the GIF, which says "This should be a standard feature from Ford". The people in the GIF are Ford's employees, and the GIF serves as an advertisement, or showcase, of the new features that Ford is capable of implementing in their car designs in

the future. The purpose of the comment is to discuss the feature of the car, and the ways that feature is treated in the video.

Now, let us look at a comment that I will treat as metaphorical:

The commenter has implied a new frame which is used to interpret this situation. A metaphorical microcosm is formed, where the people in the video are not employees of Ford anymore. They are cartel members showcasing new means of drug smuggling. The GIF now serves as an ad for drug smuggling accessories. The metaphor that can be implied here is HIDDEN COMPARTMENT IS DRUG COMPARTMENT, or PEOPLE IN VIDEO ARE DRUG SMUGGLERS. This type of metaphor is called a multimodal metaphor, because the source and the target domain are not expressed by a single mode, but by two modes - the target domain is a video, and the source domain is textual (Forceville and Urios-Aparisi 2003: 4). The non-verbal meaning implied in the video is crucial to the construction to the metaphor.

The subsequent discussion of this GIF is based on the entailments that are attributed to these and similar metaphors (which are all interconnected because of the knowledge people share about the source domains present). Because of the novel value of the metaphorical conceptualization, users are encouraged and inspired to produce new metaphorical expressions, modifying and changing the frame proposed by the first commenter. After a series of these metaphorical expressions, the activity stops. The comments participating in the metaphorical play are no longer posted. I will investigate the manner in which this cessation of metaphorical play appears on these, metaphorical, comments by qualitatively analyzing both the metaphorical play and the chronological sequence of the comments, with special emphasis on the last comments posted.

5. Results

In this section, I present the results of the qualitative analysis of the three examples, including the initial post and a number of comment threads, focusing on those with metaphorical recontextualizations. Formally, context is provided by the original post, but the subreddit's theme also inevitably contributes to the context initially proposed by the post, due to the thematic categorization characteristic to Reddit. As noted above, I will concentrate on the comments which recontextualize the initial post and create new metaphorical conceptualizations, but please note that not all comments are metaphorical (as will be discussed below).

**5.1** Mannequin torsos in a storeroom

The initial post is a picture showing a storeroom filled with mannequin torsos wrapped in plastic. It is from the subreddit (a Reddit term designating a forum revolving around a certain theme) r/creepy. See Figure 1.

Figure 1. Mannequin torsos in a storeroom (https://www.reddit.com/r/creepy/comments/pdt5n1/_/hast4m5/?utm_source=reddit&utm_medium= web2x&context=3)

The following is the first comment that was posted below the original post. In these initial comments, there is no metaphorical play going on in the replies:
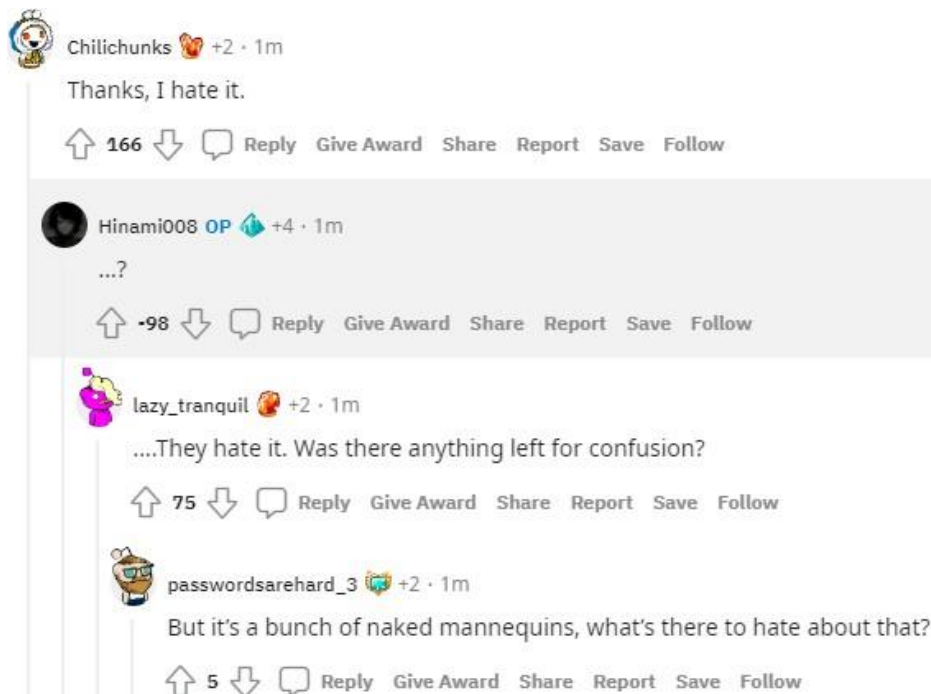
This is a discussion based on the first commenter's (Chillichunks') unambiguous statement – that he hates the picture. The original poster (OP) asks for clarification by typing "…?", and because of "reddiquette", which discourages such low quality comments, gets downvoted. Lazy_tranquil acknowledges the low quality of Hinami008 (OP's) reply by noting the obvious, unambiguous nature of the first comment. No reframing or "transcription" mentioned in the methodology happens in this comment or replies.

Here is an example of metaphorical play and a discussion of it. This comment is also the top rated, most replied-to comment.
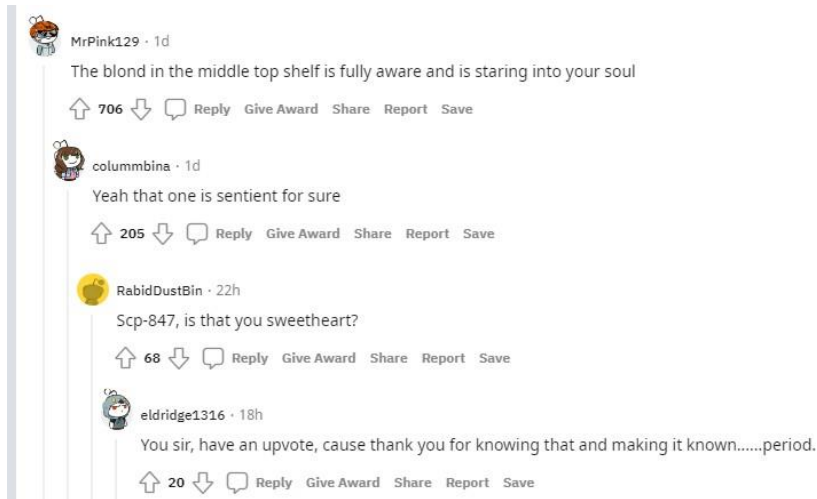
The first comment (by MrPink129) proposes a new context, which is, in this case, very clear and requires no additional explanation. The stage for metaphorical play is set because it is proposed that one of the mannequins is alive and that it has superhuman powers – looking into one's soul. This proposes a new conceptual metaphor which could be described, for instance, as CREEPY MANNEQUIN IS A LIVING SUPERHUMAN BEING. This metaphor fits in the paradigm of the subreddit, where only "creepy" photos and pictures are posted. The new context is based on highlighting a supposed "creepy" characteristic of the picture. The first reply, by user colummbina, elaborates on the newly created context by mentioning that the mannequin is sentient. This approval of the newly created context builds the sense of membership in the "r/creepy" community, with the members discussing the picture with the same goal in mind - interpreting content in a "creepy" manner. The next reply mentions Scp-847, which is a fictionalized mannequin which has become sentient. The origin of Scp-847 is the "Scp Foundation" wiki, where authors create a fictionalized universe based on the premise that the Scp Foundation deals with potential otherworldly threats to humans[1]. This is an elaboration of the first and second comment, giving way to further recontextualization, which, in this case, requires previous knowledge of the "Scp Foundation" to make sense. The final comment praises the Scp recontextualization because of the prestige that domain-specific knowledge has in the eyes of the commenter. The sense of community is reinforced by the adherence to the

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[1] More information on the "SCP Foundation" can be found on its official wiki: https://scp-wiki.wikidot.com/

rules of r/creepy and by the very acts of elaborating that occur. The final comment, its content non-metaphorical, ends the elaboration of the new context. It acknowledges and praises the domain of knowledge employed in the final recontextualization, namely, the knowledge of the "SCP foundation".

There are a number of individual comments proposing a new context, inviting users to elaborate on it further, but no elaboration, or metaphorical play, of the new context is established. Here is an example:

This comment proposes the context that Dexter Morgan, a TV series antihero, murdered these mannequins (who, in the context of this metaphor, are not mannequins, but people), and stored them in this locker. A metaphor that could be applied to this contextualization of the image is, for instance, MANNEQUINS ARE DEXTER'S VICTIMS (which can be seen as an elaboration of the MANNEQUINS ARE PEOPLE metaphor), or, THE POST IS A SCENE FROM DEXTER. But users do not engage in any type of creation of new metaphorical expressions or recontextualization. There are no replies to this comment – the metaphorical play has ended before it has even properly begun.

The reason behind the metaphorical productivity of example (2) and the unproductivity of example (3) is not entirely clear. The difference between these two examples is the fact that example (2) highlights the distinctive feature of the target domain, that is, the fact that the mannequin's eyes are turned towards the cameraman, by using the source domain LIVING SUPERHUMAN BEING and a proposed characteristic of the imaginary being – the ability to look into one's soul. Example (3) does not highlight anything, but it proposes a similar conceptual metaphor, one where mannequins are seen as dead people, who were once alive and sentient. However, this metaphor isn't elaborated in great length, nor is the "creepy" aspect crucial to the subreddit's frame so explicitly highlighted as in example (2), where "staring into one's soul" is mentioned, which is probably considered creepy by the community. This difference might be the reason for the unproductivity of example (3).

The ending of the metaphorical play in example (2) is the comment by eldridge1316 which praises the final recontextualization into the fictional "SCP Universe". It is a comment that restores the frame of interpretation to its original state. There is no further mentioning of metaphorical mappings which are proposed by the metaphor CREEPY MANNEQUIN IS A SCP FOUNDATION ENTITY. It is possible that no further metaphorical play appears here because the knowledge of the "SCP Foundation" is too specific, with a therefore lesser chance for users to creatively elaborate on that context (although, the comment mentioning SCP is upvoted 68 times at the time of the screenshot, meaning that 68 people probably recognized the context). It appears as if eldridge1316 is a spectator, not contributing to the "play", but praising its quality, which is judged by how creative the ideas behind the new metaphorical elaborations and expressions are. Although there is no criterion on the basis of which we could define how "much" one has recontextualized a metaphor through metaphorical play, it might be possible that, for this community and congregation of users, the creativity and possibilities for recontextualization have been depleted.

5.2 - Drawers hidden under the frame of a pick-up truck

The post is a gif showing a man showcasing a feature of a pick-up truck. The frame on the truck's side is lifted by a special, purpose-built mechanism, revealing two hidden compartments. Subsequently, the frame returns to its original state, concealing the drawers. See figure 2:

Figure 2. Drawers hidden in the back of a pick-up truck (https://www.reddit.com/r/Damnthatsinteresting/comments/pduyed/this_should_be_a_standard_feature_from_ford/, Link to GIF: https://i.imgur.com/OMICfyM.gif)

It should be noted that example (1) was posted on the subreddit *r/creepy*, while this example was posted on subreddit *r/Damnthatsinteresting*. I believe that a post submitted to a subreddit like *r/creepy* proposes a stronger initial frame of interpretation than *r/Damnthatsinteresting*. Consequently, the frame of interpretation provides limitations with regard to posts that can be submitted. I believe "interesting" is a much broader category than "creepy", so the initial frame of interpretation proposed by the subreddit's theme (interesting posts) is looser and less crucial to the potential metaphorical play occurring in the comments.

This example was mentioned in the chapter on methodology. Here is a comment and the succession of replies that discuss this submission non-metaphorically. The frame of interpretation is provided by the GIF; the context is not based on the subreddit's theme.

The discussion is based on the fact that the person in the video does not open the drawers, to show how useful they would be to a potential customer. The first reply is a link to a video in which a presenter opens similar drawers on a different pickup truck, with the rest of the replies commenting further on this link.

In a different chain of replies on the same comment ("Why wouldn't you open the drawers on a video like this?"), there is an instance of metaphorical play:

mattweb94 · 3m 💩 🏆

Because they didn't want to expose how tiny and basically useless the compartments are.

⬆ 6.6k ⬇ 💬 Reply Give Award Share Report Save Follow

tlhiebs · 3m

They would probably be useful as a toolbox feature. But it definitely wouldn't hold much else.

⬆ 1.5k ⬇ 💬 Reply Give Award Share Report Save Follow

jbeezcrazy · 3m

Perfect for drug smuggling.

⬆ 1.3k ⬇ 💬 Reply Give Award Share Report Save Follow

jvrcb17 · 3m 🤭

This guy mules

⬆ 637 ⬇ 💬 Reply Give Award Share Report Save Follow

lolapoola · 3m

STUPID MODIFICATION - proven to sever at least 250 limbs and fingers per year, majority of which belong to little children.

⬆ 177 ⬇ 💬 Reply Give Award Share Report Save Follow

jvrcb17 · 3m

Well, don't be transporting children in there, don't think they fit comfortably

⬆ 148 ⬇ 💬 Reply Give Award Share Report Save Follow

Fickle-Illustrator27 · 3m

Babies would fit nicely. Could pad the drawers make them comfy?

The first two comments in this screenshot reply to the question asked above. Then user jbeezcrazy reframes the video, in accordance to mattewb94's comment, by highlighting the potential for drug smuggling. The next comment "this guy mules", is a metaphorical expression of the newly coined metaphor which could be denoted as PEOPLE IN VIDEO ARE DRUG SMUGGLERS, or something similar related to drug smuggling. The metaphor is recontextualized further with emphasis, sadly, put on the smuggling of children in these small containers. Subsequently, dozens of comments (too many to list here) further elaborate the fact that these compartments can be used for child smuggling. As time passes and more and more replies are posted, the replies get fewer and fewer upvotes, and become vaguer and vaguer with regard to the original context.

Here is a metaphorical play that appears in another chain of comments and replies:
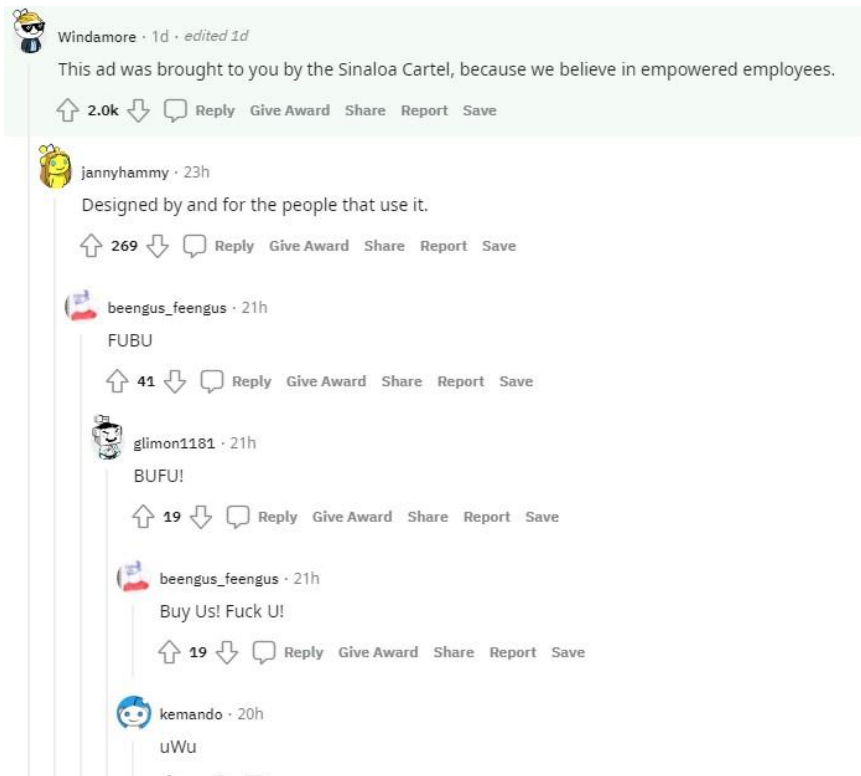
The first comment recontextualizes the gif by supposing that the concealed compartments have been installed in the car for the purpose of smuggling drugs. This is an instance of highlighting, where the nature of hiding drugs in concealed compartments is brought into focus as the key entailment of the source domain. It makes a reference to the largest cartel in Mexico, the Sinaloa cartel, supposing that the gif is an advertisement for their company, or the pick-up truck they are manufacturing dedicated to drug smuggling. The frame of interpretation is one where drug smuggling is normalized, as if the cartel was a regular company. The second comment, by jannyhammy, elaborates on that recontextualization by proposing a hypothetical slogan of the company. The following comments elaborate on that slogan, with FUBU meaning "For Us, By Us" (which is also a hip-hop apparel company) and BUFU "Buy Us, F*ck You" (Urbandictionary 2009). The comment chain ends with a supposed explanation of "BUFU" from the same commenter that wrote "FUBU", and with user "kemando" ending with a "cute face emoji" comment.

I would argue that the generic nature of the emoji is there to put the metaphorical play to a halt. The generic emoji can be applied to any situation that can appear in Reddit

comment sections; it is not conceptually linked to the sequence of recontextualization. It does not share any shade of meaning with the PEOPLE IN VIDEO ARE DRUG SMUGGLERS metaphor. Even the comments "BUFU" and "FUBU" have gone "very far" with the recontextualization of the original proposed metaphor. Further recontextualization may not be entirely possible unless the metaphor becomes something completely different. Also, the community aspect based on shared knowledge is stressed here. Recontextualization is dependent on the knowledge of basic concepts related to drug smuggling, and how the hidden drawers could be useful in that activity. It is possible that not as much people understand "BUFU", so there is a lesser chance for them to make further elaborations to that comment.

5.3 Football on the street; kicking ball into scooter driver

The post is a short video of (supposedly) Iranian teenagers playing football in the street, posted on the subreddit *r/AbruptChaos*. Two scooters are approaching and the footballers need to move. As the scooters are passing the footballers, one of them kicks the ball into one scooter, whose rider ends up falling off their motorcycle. The footballer then casually approaches the scooter rider who is lying on the ground:
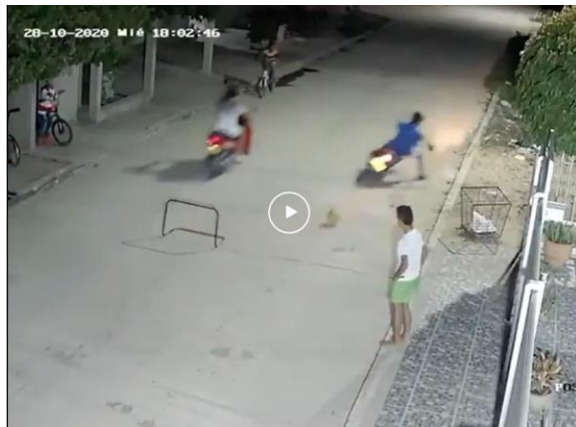

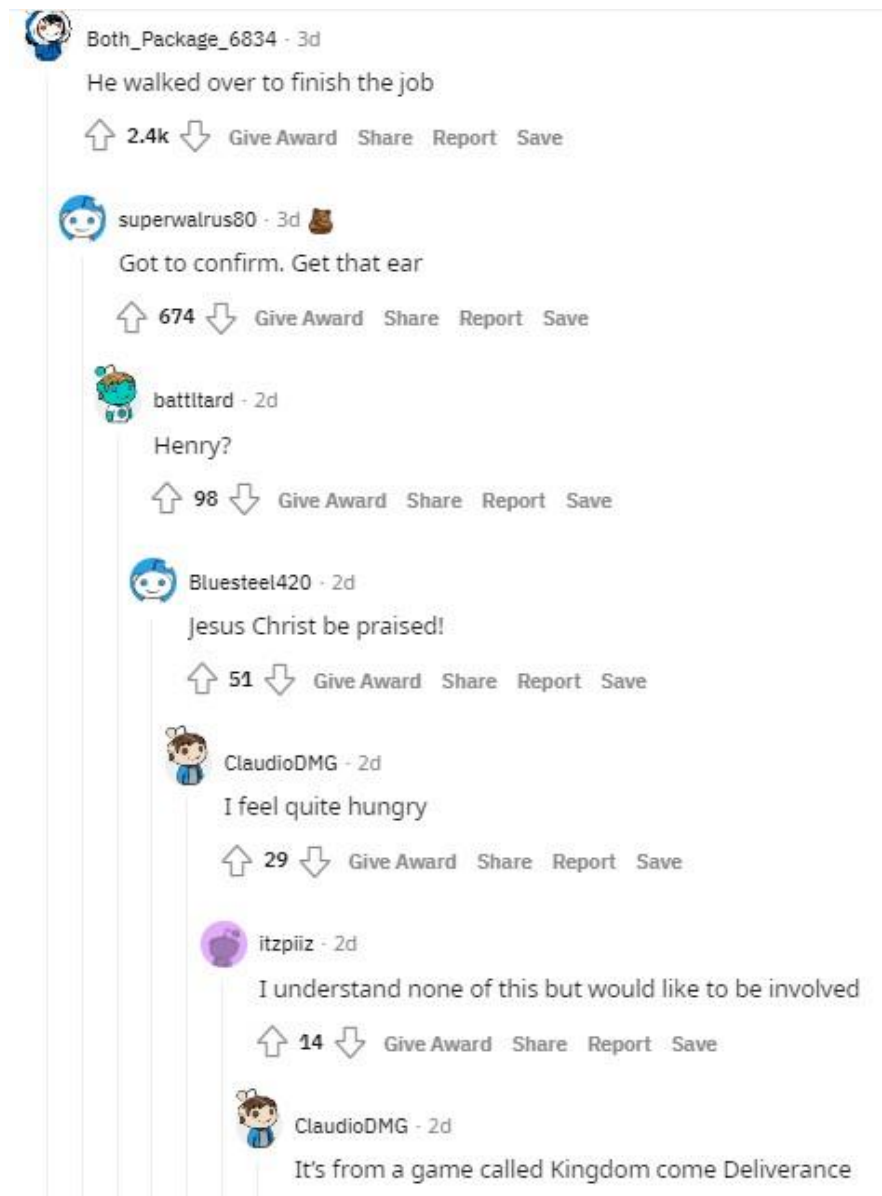**Figure 3. The footballer kicked the ball into the scooter driver, causing him to fall off (https://www.reddit.com/r/AbruptChaos/comments/pd2ddg/how_kids_be_playing_ball_in_iran_prof essional/)**

. After the non-metaphorical title "How kids be playing ball in Iran", a multimodal (because of the target domain being exclusively in the moving picture format) metaphor is introduced by the expression "professional hitman undercover".

The top rated comment is elaborating on the metaphor proposed in the title of the post:

Both_Package_6834 · 3d
He walked over to finish the job
↑ 2.4k ↓ Give Award Share Report Save

superwalrus80 · 3d 💩
Got to confirm. Get that ear
↑ 674 ↓ Give Award Share Report Save

battltard · 2d
Henry?
↑ 98 ↓ Give Award Share Report Save

Bluesteel420 · 2d
Jesus Christ be praised!
↑ 51 ↓ Give Award Share Report Save

ClaudioDMG · 2d
I feel quite hungry
↑ 29 ↓ Give Award Share Report Save

itzpiiz · 2d
I understand none of this but would like to be involved
↑ 14 ↓ Give Award Share Report Save

ClaudioDMG · 2d
It's from a game called Kingdom come Deliverance

The first comment proposes the frame where the footballer, who kicked the ball into the scooter driver on purpose, is a hitman. This example is different with regard to the recontextualization that, I believe, appears with the comment "Got to confirm. Get that ear". In order to understand the newly created context, knowledge of the plot of "Kingdom Come: Deliverance", a video game, is required. The first comment, however, does not require knowledge of a particular context; it only implies that the footballer is a hitman and that his intention was to kill the scooter driver. The second comment

elaborates on the thesis that the footballer is a hitman by saying "Got to confirm", in order to check if the job was well done. But then the reference to "Kingdom Come: Deliverance" appears. "Get that ear" is a reference to the game because of the ability to pick up ears off bandit corpses, turning them in to a local sheriff in order to pick up a bounty. After this reference, the discussion is fully developed with regard to the metaphor FOOTBALLER IS THE PROTAGONIST OF KINGDOM COME: DELIVERANCE. The commenter battltard mentions "Henry", the protagonist, asking the commenter who started this metaphor about the reference to the game. Also, this comment can be interpreted as if the commenter is checking the mutual understanding of the metaphor, like asking if everybody was at the same page.

The metaphorical play on the video game stops when the context is explicitly stated. I believe that this cause of ending a metaphorical game is common (more examples are probably required to make such a generalization). The explanation of the mystery that shrouds the context of Kingdom Come: Deliverance, which is known only to those acquainted with the game, destroys the potential for amusement that is realized through metaphorical play. The specificity of the knowledge of the video game, which is the prerequisite for the metaphorical play, has the unfortunate trait of limiting its audience and participants, but it is the exclusive participation in the community which harbors that knowledge that makes the metaphorical play attractive. When a user that isn't a member of that community asks for clarification, the metaphorical play loses its charm.

There is another instance of metaphorical play in the comments on this submission:

The reference to a generic hitman has already been noted, but this first comment contextualizes the footballer as the protagonist of another video game, or video game series, "Hitman", where the main character is a hired assassin who goes by the name of "Agent 47". The first and the second comment are phrases that appear in the video game. "Good job" etc. is communicated to Agent 47 at the end of every level, and after arriving to the rendezvous, 47 is informed that the money has been wired to his account. There are no further recontextualizations in this comment chain. The next commenter returns to the initial, "normal" frame of the situation's interpretation, by saying that they are aware of the situation's context. The final comment is notable. User "badass4102" tries to continue the metaphorical play by mentioning "Agent 69", but because contrary to the frame that the initial comment proposed it is viewed as being "against the rules". The result is that the comment is downvoted and has a negative "score". This can be seen as the community's disapproval of the wrong interpretation of the context, and also as a failed attempt at the continuation of the metaphorical play. The wrong interpretation of the context is probably due to the lack of the knowledge of the game "Hitman", which is needed in order to participate in the metaphorical play.

7. 4. **Discussion**

The metaphorical play discussed in these examples was a departure from a generally accepted, or "default", frame of interpretation that was presumed by the original post. In every example, there was a moment when users stopped replying and participating in the metaphorical play. I believe that when users started recontextualizing and reframing the original context by highlighting some aspects of the post, a pause from a generally accepted reality ensued, with the participants in the metaphorical play creating their own microcosm. The play ended when descriptions and jokes about the new reality reached a certain limit.

The three examples discussed in this chapter have shown that the productivity of metaphorical games on Reddit is primarily based on two factors. The first is the possession of specific knowledge of the world that is required to both understand and recontextualize the frame of interpretation at the beginning of the metaphorical play. The second factor is the rules prescribed by the community, both explicitly and implicitly. In other words, one needs to understand why a source domain enables an adequate explanation of a given target domain, that is, of the post in question, to creatively connect these two domains further. It is also of importance to understand the rules of a community (in this case a subreddit and the Reddit community in general), which are crucial to establishing a default frame of interpretation. Furthermore, the rules of a community provide a basic framework for further recontextualization, as we have seen on the example from *r/creepy*, where it is imperative that the topic discussed is considered creepy by the community. In fact, a metaphorical comment must satisfy the implied or explicit rules of the community, so that the community would begin the metaphorical play. Some comments show greater potential than others, as we have seen in example no. 1.

These examples have shown various reasons for the end of metaphorical games. One of them, as we have seen in the example mentioning the "SCP Foundation", is the extremely specific knowledge that is required for the understanding of the newly created context. Of course, one could produce new metaphorical expressions connected to that context, but the more specific a context is, the chances for that to happen are slimmer. Even on a platform such as Reddit, where every post and comment can potentially be viewed by a limitless audience, the metaphorical game becomes too specific for anyone

to continue; or at least find it amusing to do so. We can only guess how short a metaphorical play would be in a face-to-face conversation between two participants, with its length being determined by the knowledge possessed only by two people. However, a face-to-face conversation implies a channel of communication where two participants reply to one another; on Reddit, there may be "lurkers" who understand the ultra-specific context which has been derived from a previous frame of interpretation, but will not continue the metaphorical play. The high number of upvotes given to the "SCP Foundation" comment could be the result of this phenomenon.

There were also examples of active participation regarding the specific contexts. In example no. 1, a commenter praised the "SCP Foundation" context, without further recontextualization. This brought the metaphorical play to a halt. On the other hand, in example no. 3., there was a comment with the "wrong" interpretation of the context (regarding the videogame "Hitman"), which was massively downvoted by the community. That was the last comment in that chain of replies, resulting in an end of a metaphorical play which the community perceived as negative. The third instance when metaphorical play was ended due the over-specific nature of the recontextualization was in example no. 2., when a commenter posted a generic "cute face" smiley, which marked the end of the metaphorical play. It is possible that this smiley distanced the discussion from the specific, but ultimately vague, context presupposed with the "BUFU" and "FUBU" comments, enabling the metaphorical play to finish in a more community friendly way. Also, in example no. 3., there was an instance that the commenter directly asked about the hyper-specific context of the metaphorical play related to the video game "Kingdom Come: Deliverance", after which the methaporical play came to a halt. The specificity of the context was initially productive, but when the context was explicitly stated, the amusement factor disappeared, thus ending the metaphorical play.

The metaphorical play analyzed in this paper was heavily influenced by the format of Reddit - its subreddits and their thematic organization, the Reddiquette, which encourages certain types of behavior, and the way in which comment sections are organized and how comment chains behave on the platform. Due to Reddit's format, metaphorical play was easy to find, identify and analyze. Although the phenomenon of metaphorical play can be found in many modes of communication (as Kövecses and

Veale have shown in their examples), the distinctive format of Reddit was crucial in the choices of recontextualization by the participants, and ultimately in the ways that metaphorical play ends. Further research into metaphorical play might be based on different platforms with social media elements, such as YouTube, TikTok, Facebook or Instagram. These websites' communities are different than Reddit's communities, so the ways of dealing with metaphorical play might be different. Also, face-to-face interaction that results in metaphorical play would be interesting to research, particularly with regard to its ending. I believe that phonetic qualities of language, and specific forms of body language, would be crucial in metaphorical plays in real life.

8. Conclusion

The aim of the paper was to investigate metaphorical play and the ways in which it ends. On the basis of qualitative analysis of examples from Reddit, I analyzed the creation of spontaneous metaphors and metaphorical expressions in the comment sections related to submissions posted on the platform. Special emphasis was put on the final comments, which marked that the metaphorical play has exhausted its resources, resulting in its end. The results showed that metaphorical play was common as a form of amusement on Reddit. Furthermore, the research provided insight into the ways in which metaphorical play ends. The principle reason of the exhaustion of the resources for metaphorical elaboration of contexts was the fact that the direction of the recontextualization became too specific. The knowledge required to play became too specialized, therefore limiting the potential for metaphorical play. Also, the community inhibited the recontextualizations by various means, such as asking for clarification of contexts produced by new metaphorical expressions. Every metaphorical play resulted in a clear and obvious ending. This paper provided insight into the manner of a community based activity which uses language, along with the cognitive mechanism for metaphorical thought, as a form of amusement. The endings of metaphorical plays analyzed here showed that there is a distinctive difference between a state of play and a state of reality, which the participants clearly differentiating one from another. This also showed an ability to swiftly and adeptly construct new frames of interpretation, and move from one

to another with ease. Further research regarding similar phenomena should be carried out on other internet platforms, as well as on face-to-face conversation.

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9. Abstract

This paper explores metaphorical play, or, the creation and development of spontaneous linguistic metaphorical expressions. Emphasis is put on the limits of metaphorical productivity in this type of activity. The qualitatively studied examples were taken from the comment sections of Reddit. Metaphorical expressions that mark the endings of metaphorical plays based on new metaphors created by users of Reddit are explored. After a theoretical discussion on conceptual metaphor theory, the community of practice framework and a theoretical background on metaphors and humor, three posts from Reddit are explored. The comment sections include metaphorical games with sequences of comments where spontaneous metaphorical expressions are created over a period of time. After a certain number of replies, no more metaphorical expressions are created. Replies at the end of these sequences of replies are the focus of this paper, showing the reasons for the cessation of metaphorical plays. The results have shown two primary reasons for the ending of metaphorical plays. The first reason was that the knowledge required to develop these new metaphors became too specific. The second reason was that rules of behavior on the platform, that is, Reddit, formed the sequence and the ending of metaphorical play. The research was limited by the format of Reddit's comment sections and the nature of discussions on Reddit.

Keywords: Reddit, metaphorical play, metaphor, new metaphors.