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‘In’ and ‘Out the Game’: Framing Real Life Metaphorically in the TV-Epos ‘The Wire’

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Dealing with cultural variation in metaphor use, Kövecses (2005, 82-86) points to ‘preferential conceptualizations’ as one category of culture-specific metaphors. As an example, he refers to the study of Köves (2002) who analyses Hungarians’ different conceptualizations of life as opposed to Americans’ conceptualizations, emphasizing the competitive character of American society in which the *GAME* metaphor takes on a crucial function when people talk about their lives. The aim of the paper is to show to which extent the *GAME* metaphor shapes the lives of the protagonists in the HBO show (2002-2008) *The Wire*, which is based on real police reports. The show takes place in the post industrial city of Baltimore and sets out the interconnection of the systems of drug dealing/trafficking, police department, court, organised labour, media, public school and local policy, as well as the similar structure which all those systems are built upon. Every system has its own rules made and sustained by those who are able to ‘play’ them right while those who aren’t able to are ‘out of the game’.

First, we will draw our attention to a quantitative analyses with regard to the types and tokens of the key lexemes *game* and *play* as used in the specific (sub-)cultural contexts, revealing how the polysemy of these terms is displayed. We will also show the interconnection of real games, such as different types of sports, and their interconnection to the metaphorically conceptualised *GAME* domain.

In a second step, we will focus on the complex multimodal blending of *GAME* and *LIFE* putting into question the unidirectionality thesis (Lakoff 1990) and substituting it with an interactional blending approach (Fauconnier & Turner 2002). To illustrate this point, we will analyse a specific ‘metaphorical scenario’ (Mussolff 2003) where the concrete conventionalized ‘source domain’ (Lakoff & Johnson 1980) *CHES* is conceptualized by the source *DRUG BUSINESS* by three adolescent drug dealers because of its closeness to their experienced reality. The permanent conjunction of real games and life is another example for a bidirectional blend of realities where the enactment of real games has implications for life itself.

Finally, the results bring to the fore the consistency of the *GAME* metaphor in creating and representing a culture-specific reality with all its ‘highlighting’ and ‘hiding effects’ (Lakoff & Johnson 1980), and in guiding the actions of the interactants surviving in post-capitalist times, as sketched by the show.



References

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