Introducing Creativity and Language Play in Digital Discourse: Insights from Creative Metaphors

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摘要

創造力與語言遊戲是人類溝通的重要面向，並於數位論述中日益展現其重要性。數位環境為各類創意語言實踐提供了豐富的發展場域，而人工智慧中介互動的興起，更進一步改變了創意表達與意義建構的方式。雖然創造力與語言遊戲已分別從不同理論取徑加以探討，但其複雜性仍有賴整合性的分析架構加以理解。本文以創意隱喻為例，介紹數位語言表徵中創造力與語言遊戲的重要理論觀點，界定相關核心概念，並探討創意隱喻如何作為理解語言創造力、認知歷程與數位溝通互動的重要分析視角。本文期望為數位中介溝通情境下創造力與語言遊戲的研究奠定概念基礎，並提供未來相關研究發展之參考。

Abstract

Creativity and language play are central to human communication and are increasingly visible in digital discourse. Digital environments provide rich contexts for creative language practices, while AI-mediated interaction continues to reshape how creativity is expressed and interpreted. Although creativity and language play have been examined from diverse theoretical perspectives, their complexity calls for an integrative understanding. This article introduces key perspectives on creativity and language play in digital language representation, using creative metaphors as illustrative examples. It defines core concepts, discusses major theoretical considerations, and highlights how creative metaphors can provide insights into the interaction of linguistic creativity, cognition, and digital communication. The article aims to provide a conceptual foundation for future research on creativity and language play in digitally mediated contexts.

關鍵字：創造力、語言遊戲、創意隱喻、數位表徵

Keywords: Creativity, Language Play, Creative Metaphor, Digital Representation

1 Introduction

Creativity has long been linked to ideation and internally generated thought, yet their relationship in everyday contexts remains unclear, and these processes are not reliably associated with individual creativity. Insight experiences can be explained in terms of processing fluency, which refers to the subjective ease and speed with which a thought, idea, or solution is processed (Zeitlen et al., 2022; Topolinski & Reber, 2010). Creativity and language play are central to human communication and are increasingly visible in digital discourse. Online environments such as social media, video platforms, and interactive communities provide rich contexts for the emergence of creative language practices, including wordplay, metaphor, stance-taking, and multimodal expression. With the growing presence of AI-mediated interaction, these practices are further reshaped by new forms of human-machine engagement.

Research on creativity and language play has drawn on diverse theoretical and methodological traditions, including corpus linguistics, discourse analysis, pragmatics, cognitive linguistics, and computational approaches. However, existing work suggests that these phenomena cannot be fully accounted for from a single perspective. Creativity in digital discourse emerges through the interaction of linguistic form, constructional patterns, speaker agency, audience interpretation, and cognitive processes, while also being shaped

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by platform affordances, cultural norms, and interactional dynamics.

In their latest book, Hoffman and Turner (online first 2025; in print 2026) proposed an integration of creativity with Construction Grammar. Drawing on this framework, they cited an idea that extended Glăveanu's (2013) 5A model of creativity, which identified five crucial perspectives involved in a creative act: actors, audience, artefacts, actions, and affordances.

> As Hoffmann ([2022], 2024, 2025, fc.) points out in his 5C model [constructors, co-constructors, constructs, constructional blending and the constructional network] of constructional creativity, a Creative Construction Grammar that aims to analyze such [fabulous playfulness and] striking expressions not only needs to take into account the constructional network that underlies these creative constructs. It also must pay attention to the producer (the 'constructor') and their audience (the 'co-constructors') as well as, [...] the mental process ('constructional blending') that produces these 'creative constructs' in the working memory. (Hoffman & Turner, 2025:2)

That said, creativity alone could not be accounted for from a single perspective. Rather, it necessarily involved language and constructions, as well as the speaker, the audience, and the underlying mental processes.

2 Defining Key Concepts

Creativity in digital contexts does not reside solely in isolated linguistic forms, nor can it be explained through one theoretical perspective or methodological approach. Language play refers to the creative manipulation of linguistic forms and meanings to achieve communicative, humorous, persuasive, aesthetic, or expressive effects. In digital discourse, it encompasses practices such as wordplay, metaphor, lexical innovation, and multimodal expression, all of which are shaped by the affordances of digitally mediated communication.

For Digital language representation, it refers to how language is produced and interpreted in digitally mediated contexts including social media language, where linguistic choices are shaped by technological affordances and users' digital experience. From this perspective, digital language representation concerns how language encodes identity, stance, evaluation, and, in our case, creativity in digital communication. This offers a way to understand the affordances of digital media, namely the range of communicative actions that a medium enables, independent of entrenched conceptual mappings (Prensky 2001; Ferrari 2013; Dittes et al. 2019). This view allows digital language representation to be examined at the intersection of linguistic form (lexico-grammar and discourse patterns), technological affordance (platform constraints and possibilities), user competence and identity (e.g. digital natives versus digital immigrants), and social and evaluative meaning (stance, persuasion, and positioning) (Kesharwani 2020).

3 Insights from Creative Metaphors

For the definition of metaphor, Steen et al. (2010) identified a metaphor when a transfer of meaning occurs and when this transfer involves a comparison with a more basic sense. If a phrase has a more basic meaning in other contexts than in the context under analysis, and if the contextual meaning contrasts with the basic meaning yet remains interpretable through comparison with it, the phrase is marked as metaphorical. To illustrate, in *Her ideas finally caught fire*, the basic meaning of *to catch fire* refers to physical ignition, as when wood or paper begins to burn. The contextual meaning, however, is that 'her ideas gained sudden, widespread attention and enthusiasm.' Although this contextual meaning contrasts with the basic physical sense (no literal combustion occurs), the phrase is marked as metaphorical because it transfers meaning from the concrete domain of physical combustion to the abstract domain of idea uptake and excitement.

A creative metaphor, by contrast, typically refers to the creation of a 'new' metaphorical mapping or the novel use of an existing one. According to Littlemore, Turner, & Tuck (2023), creative metaphor arises when speakers go beyond conventional mappings to produce novel, context-specific figurative expressions that require active interpretive work from the listener. Their chapter outlines a detailed taxonomy of such creative uses. They show that creative metaphor may involve the following types or mechanisms (our own examples):

(1) Creative Metaphor Mechanisms
(a) introducing new or highly elaborated correspondences within an existing mapping;
E.g., *This grant proposal is a garden where every citation has to pollinate the next.* (Extends the familiar IDEAS ARE PLANTS)

(b) combining metaphor with other rhetorical resources such as hyperbole;
E.g., *My inbox exploded so violently this morning that even the unread messages are in shock.*

(c) recontextualising idioms or well-known phrases;

E.g., *She didn't just 'break the ice'. She carved it into little swan sculptures during the meeting.*

(d) altering the valence, tense or grammatical category of a conventional metaphor;
E.g., *His once 'sunny' optimism has gone cloudy and begun to drizzle on everyone.* (Changes the valence and grammatical behavior of WEATHER metaphors.)

(e) applying a metaphor to an unusual or unexpected target;
E.g., *The bibliography is the skeleton of the paper—delicate, cranky, and likely to fall apart if touched.* (SKELETON metaphor applied to an unexpected academic target.)

(f) combining metaphor with metonymy in innovative ways;
E.g., *The lab finally found its heartbeat again when the white coats returned from conference season*. (Here, *white coats* functions as a metonymy referring to researchers, while *found its heartbeat* is a metaphor for the lab's revival or renewed activity.)

(g) using strong or unlikely personification;
E.g., *The deadline sat on my desk tapping its foot, unimpressed with my progress.* (A deadline personified with human impatience.)

(h) constructing extended analogies or metaphorical scenarios;
E.g., *Writing this article feels like steering a small boat through shifting fog: every paragraph clears one patch only for another to thicken ahead.*

(i) producing "twice-true" metaphors or contrasts.
E.g., *Her argument was razor-thin: sharp enough to cut, but so narrow it barely held together.* (This example plays on two contrasting senses of *thin*: one metaphorically indicating sharpness or incisiveness, and the other suggesting structural weakness. Both senses operate simultaneously, creating a layered evaluative effect.)

These mechanisms highlight that creative metaphor relies not only on underlying conceptual mappings but also on the speaker's rhetorical intentions. Each type of mechanisms from (1a)-(1i) of their 'taxonomy', however, was given separately rather than as a structured network, and it offered little indication of graded similarities or relationships among the categories.

The mapping of concepts in metaphor analysis has been approached from several perspectives. Gentner and Jeziorski (1993: 430), for example, outlined a set of assumptions concerning the cognitive representation of knowledge and analogy.

(2) The listed the modern principles of analogical reasoning, including:

(a) Structural consistency. Objects are placed in one-to-one correspondence and parallel connectivity predicates are maintained.

(b) Relational focus. Relational systems are preserved and object descriptions are disregarded.

(c) Systematicity. Among various relational interpretations, the one with the greatest depth, that is, the greatest degree of common higher-order relational structure, is preferred.

(d) No extraneous associations. Only commonalities strengthen an analogy. Further relations and associations between the base and target, for example, thematic connections, do not contribute to the analogy.

(e) No mixed analogies. The relational network to be mapped should be entirely contained within one base domain. When two bases are used, they should each convey a coherent system.

(f) Analogy is not causation. That two phenomena are analogous does not imply that one causes the other.

(Gentner & Jeziorski, 1993: 430)

On the other hand, Gentner's Structure-Mapping Theory proposes that knowledge is organized as psychological systems of objects, attributes, and relations, represented as propositional networks in which relational structure plays a central role in analogy (Gentner 1983; Tversky 1977).

Following the above, an analogical mechanism (cf. Gentner 1983; Gentner & Markman 1997; Turner 2014), by definition, refers to a cognitive process through which structures, relations, or inferential patterns from one conceptual domain (or input space) are selectively projected onto another and thus enable the construction of new meanings, interpretations, or inferences. Such mechanisms do not depend on direct feature correspondence; instead, they rely on the alignment of relational structure, background knowledge, and emergent connections across domains. In the case of creative metaphor, these mechanisms allow speakers or writers to extend conventional mappings, integrate multiple input spaces, and produce novel interpretations through the theoretical framework adopted in this study, namely Conceptual Blending Theory (Fauconnier & Turner 2002). Conceptual Blending Theory accounts for meaning construction through the partial integration of multiple mental spaces into a blended space, within which new structure and inference arise beyond what any single input provides. The theory specifies coordinated roles for the input spaces, a generic space, and the blend, and it explains how novel meanings emerge from interactions among conceptual structures rather than from simple domain-to-domain mapping. In digital discourse, analogical mechanisms often involve interaction among commonsense knowledge, contextual cues, and creative reconfiguration of input spaces, which together give rise to new evaluative or persuasive effects.

As we develop shared concepts in blending, we will also need to know about the common-sense knowledge. Common sense knowledge refers to the shared, taken-for-granted assumptions that people use to interpret everyday situations and reason about how the world works. In artificial intelligence and computational linguistics, common sense has been formalized through large-scale knowledge representation projects such as Cyc (Lenat 1995), ConceptNet (Liu & Singh 2004), and ATOMIC (Sap et al. 2019), all of which aim to encode everyday expectations that humans rarely articulate explicitly. These efforts reflect the view that cognition relies not only on abstract reasoning but also on a background of widely shared, experience-based knowledge. From a social and cultural perspective, common sense is not universal but culturally situated, grounded in embodied habits and collective experience (Geertz 1975).

4 Looking Beyond Creativity and Language Play

This article has introduced key concepts and perspectives on creativity and language play in digital discourse through insights from creative metaphors. While creative metaphors provide a useful point of entry, they represent only one of many ways in which linguistic creativity is expressed in digitally mediated communication. Other forms of language play likewise offer rich opportunities for research. As digital communication continues to evolve, integrating insights from linguistics, discourse studies, cognitive science, and related disciplines will be essential for understanding how creativity is produced, interpreted, and negotiated across diverse digital contexts. It is hoped that this article provides a conceptual foundation for future research on creativity and language play in the digital age.

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