

Polish political browser games as generative metaphors: analysis of structures and functions

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This article describes a study of 33 Polish political browser games, which are left of the set of 51 applications developed by Polish Internet users from 2005 to 2020. These considerations concern mainly the metaphorical messages conveyed in these games, in particular which features make browser games metaphorical messages, and what game structure is necessary to convey such messages. Differentiation of these game types is equally important. Owing to it, they can participate in expressive and explanatory communication.

KEYWORDS: generative metaphor, expressive metaphor, explanatory metaphor, Polish political browser games

Domestic contexts

On 19 June 2007, nurses began a strike in Warsaw, just outside the Chancellery of the Prime Minister, demanding a pay raise. On the same day, they set up a so-called "white town" in Aleje Ujazdowskie. The term referred to several dozen tents, with sleeping bags, camping stoves and other items necessary to be on strike for many days. On the 20th of June, the government authorities decided to use the police to break up the protest. Several months later, a browser game appeared on the Polish Internet, in portals offering hosting for games made by independent game developers and so-called "ordinary Internet users." The plot of the game, entitled *Strajk*, [1] was based on a conflict between two characters. A player could control the character of a nurse, aiming to push away a policeman blocking her path, or choose to be a police officer and try to end the strike.

The aforementioned production is the most distinctive example of the browser game format used in Poland, and of one referring to certain current events in the social, political, geographic and cultural reality. However, it is not the only example. It is a common feature of games developed between the 2005 presidential campaign and

Introduction to an analysis of Polish political browser metaphor games

[1] The titles of Polish games mentioned in this study are written in Polish because the games can be found on the Internet only by using original key words titles. Each Polish title from the empirical set of 33 games

listed below in the tabel has the English translation. The English titles of Polish games not included in the empirical set are given in brackets after the Polish title.

the parliamentary crisis of June/July 2020 related to the presidential election that their subject matter lies within a framework that their elements-genres, objects, situations and mechanics-create, and that their meanings go beyond the mere sum of the elements. For example *Korona wybory*, a hybrid of the *collecting* and *escape* genre, which presents candidates fighting for the presidency in 2020 during the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, is more than just fights and points. These games are semiotic systems and playable situations, by which Internet users express their attitude towards the reality around them. These are comments on real events, used to express emotions concerning politicians and politics, and creations showing that – in the Internet users' opinion – something is wrong in the system of rivalry for power and its exercising. In each variant, the browser game obtains the status of structures which order the information,[2] “[...] it is associated [...] with suspending the normal [...] perception of the world”[3] and “[...] it is a call to look at the world in a different, fresh way, to see something new in it”.[4] This property of Polish political browser games means that they have to be perceived as metaphors, showing something different than what the player sees on the screen, and the function of which is different than providing entertainment. This makes Polish political browser games generative metaphors[5] of reality, “[...] special version of seeing-as by which we gain new perspectives on the world, [...] an interpretive tool for the critical analysis of social policy,”[6] a tool that produces meaning by presenting what is difficult to imagine in a way that is easy to understand, and a semiotic system that translates complex facts, events and processes into emotions, which people experience, regardless of social background or education, in similar ways.

Foreign contexts

The emergence of Polish political browser metaphor games on the Internet directs one's attention towards three very important issues which argue for the need to analyse these media forms. Firstly, it means that in 2005, Polish Internet users joined the international community, which had been playing this type of game since 2001 to express a critical attitude towards certain processes around the world and to share the anxieties caused by these processes. Since then, Polish metaphor games have had a place in international media discourse next to the political browser metaphor games developed in response

[2] M. Babecki, *Metaforyka polskich politycznych gier przeglądarkowych. Konteksty – porównania – analizy*, Olsztyn 2020, p. 89.

[3] A. Pawelec, *Metafora pojęciowa a tradycja*, Kraków 2006, p. 15 [If not indicated differently, this and other citations from papers in Polish are given in my translation – M. Babecki].

[4] Ibidem.

[5] D.A. Schön, *Generative metaphor: A perspective on problem-setting*, [in:] *Metaphor and Thought*, ed. A. Ortony, Cambridge 1993, p. 137.

[6] Ibidem, pp. 138–139.

to events of importance for the international community (fearing, for example, the North Korean nuclear programme in such games as *Kim Jong Il: Missile Maniac, Terror Gnome*) and individual nations. Games from Poland can be mentioned along with those developed in response to important situations for the Americans (e.g. *New York Defender*, [7] *War on Terrorism*), British (e.g. *Big Ben Boris, Dancing Blair, Downing Street Streetfighter*), French (e.g. *DSQ et la femme de chambre, Presi Game, Sarkozy Simulator*), Jews (e.g. *Irone Dome, Save Israel*), Russians (e.g. *Don't Mess the Putin, Putin's Olympic Game*) and Ukrainians (e.g. *Putin's Threat to Ukraine*).

Secondly, it shows that Polish Internet users expanded the international media agenda to include their views on important domestic issues. Thirdly, it reveals that Polish political browser metaphor games are another important source of information which can be used to express a judgement on objects, people and processes.[8] These games become digital documents with image and sound, capturing a certain section of the reality and, with it, the opinions of people, the observers of the events presented in the applications.

The three issues mentioned above have inspired me to deal with Polish political browser metaphor games and to identify the key research problem of the article: “[...] the anatomy of the making of generative metaphor”[9] encoded in these games. It also encourages me to formulate three extremely important research questions, which are answered by the analysis presented in this study: 1) what are the necessary features of browser games that make them generative metaphors of reality and 2) what is the structure of such browser games? The multitude of applications created by Internet users also makes the third question important: 3) do the generative metaphors encoded in Polish browser games differ from one another?

Unlike the first American games that were published on the Internet several hours after the attack on the WTC, the development period of Polish games includes the years 2005–2020. It was probably during the 2005–2006 period that the first games were published: *Walka prezydencka* and *Sejm 2005. Shoot Out*. The latest ones made it to the Internet in 2020: *Korona wybory, Głosowanie korespondencyjne* and *Sfalszowane wybory*. Although the initial set comprised about 51 metaphor games, the empirical sample, i.e. one including the games still available on the Internet and which are analysed in this study, comprises 33 applications.

The empirical set of games: situational framework

[7] Probably the first game of its kind published on the Internet.

[8] M. Łobocki, *Metody i techniki badań pedagogicznych*, Kraków 2010, p. 216.

[9] D.A. Schön, op.cit., p. 138.

Table 1. The empirical set of 33 Polish political browser games

No.	Game title	Primary frame
Expressive metaphors		
1.	<i>Ali Majewski Show</i>	polity
2.	<i>Chłaśnij Giertycha [Lash Giertych]</i>	politics
3.	<i>Głosowanie korespondencyjne [Voting by Correspondence]</i>	politics
4.	<i>Kopnij aferzystę [Kick the Swindler]</i>	politics
5.	<i>Nerwowy rzut [Nervous Throw]</i>	politics
6.	<i>Niemcy mnie biją [Germans Are Beating Me]</i>	polity
7.	<i>Puknij kłamczucha [Knock a Liar]</i>	politics
8.	<i>Rozróźnij Kaczyńskich [Distinguish Kaczynski Brothers]</i>	policy
9.	<i>Sex afera [Sex Scandal]</i>	policy
10.	<i>Sfałszowane wybory [Rigged Election]</i>	politics
11.	<i>Ubierz Romka [Dress Up Romek]</i>	politics
12.	<i>Wiejskie śpiochy [Sleepyheads in the Sejm]</i>	polity
13.	<i>Zbieramy na Radio Maryja [Fundraising for Radio Maryja]</i>	politics
Explanatory metaphors		
1.	<i>Autobus [The Bus]</i>	policy
2.	<i>Bitwa o krzyż [Battle for the Cross]</i>	politics
3.	<i>Fabryka polityków [Politician Factory]</i>	polity
4.	<i>Korona wybory [Corona Election]</i>	politics
5.	<i>Obroń rydza [Rydzik Defender]</i>	policy
6.	<i>Obrońca krzyża [Defender of the Cross]</i>	politics
7.	<i>Ofiara spełniona [Charity Fulfilled]</i>	politics
8.	<i>Paparazzi</i>	polity
9.	<i>Pasjans polityczny [Political Solitaire]</i>	policy
10.	<i>Polish Show</i>	polity
11.	<i>Posteruj sobie Kaczyńskim [Control the Kaczynski]</i>	polity
12.	<i>Rzut beretem [The Beret's Throw]</i>	policy
13.	<i>Sejm 2005. Shoot Out [Parliament 2005. Shoot Out]</i>	polity
14.	<i>Strajk [Strike]</i>	polity
15.	<i>Trzy berety [Three Berets]</i>	policy
16.	<i>Uratuj stocnię [Save the Shipyard]</i>	polity
17.	<i>Walka prezydencka [Presidential Struggle]</i>	politics
18.	<i>Wąż Jarosław [The Jarosław Snake]</i>	polity
19.	<i>Wybory 2007. Może pozostać tylko jeden [2007 Election: Only One Can Stay]</i>	politics
20.	<i>Wyścig do Pałacu Prezydenckiego [Race for the Presidential Palace]</i>	politics

Difficulty in identifying the date of the first game publication and in establishing the total number of games, comes from several places. Unlike a book or a press publication, a browser game does not always have a publication date. Therefore, if the publication date is not communicated precisely (dating is obvious, for example, with *Kolej przyspieszenie* [*Railway Modernization*], presented at a press conference on 5th July 2011) or the portal does not reveal its publication date, the event presented in the game refers to it indirectly. However, the information delay must be taken into account. Even if the game represents the DIY media type characterised by Alexandra Renzi,^[10] i.e. it is easy to prepare and upload to the web with no IT or programming skills, this process can take anywhere from several hours to several days.

The Internet is an open, highly variable media, totally unstable compared to print media. When some elements disappear from it, others are added to it. Some Polish political browser metaphor games, such as *Uratuj Warszawę* [*Save Warsaw*] and *Kaczuszki* [*Little Ducks*], disappeared from the Web when Agora S.A. closed down its Blox.pl blogging platform. This platform hosted the Hegemon.net blog, containing the largest number of Polish political applications. Others, including, for example *Buraczana kampania* [*Redneck Campaign*], became unavailable as soon as the respective election campaigns ended. Others, like *Pysiu Krzysia* [*Krzysio's Sweet Face*], a game aimed at damaging the public image of Member of Parliament Krzysztof Bosak, disappeared along with the websites, since the situation groups who developed such applications split up. That was the fate of such websites as www.cfaniacy.pl and www.gryznie.pl.

However, even the games that disappeared from the web left some traces. They have been preserved in comments left by users on various forums devoted to diverse games, in messages on non-active domains,^[11] as well as on Polish websites archived by the international community of the non-profit organisation called the Internet Web Archive.

A review of the 33 games, which requires running each game, helps to identify the specific topics which became dominant in the communication situations created in them. These topics concern: 1) the 2005 parliamentary election (e.g. *Sejm 2005. Shoot Out*); 2) the 2005 presidential election (e.g. *Walka prezydencka*); 3) the 5th term Sejm session of 2005–2007 (e.g. *Pasjans polityczny*); 4) the sex scandal in the *Samoobrona* political party, revealed by journalists and described in the Polish press (e.g. *Sex afera*); 5) the 2007 parliamentary election (e.g. *Wybory 2007. Może pozostać tylko jeden*); 6) the nurses' strike of 2007 (e.g. *Strajk*); 7) the 2008 European Parliamentary election (e.g.

[10] A. Renzi, *The space of tactical media*, [in:] *Digital Media and Democracy: Tactics in Hard Times*, ed. M. Boler, Cambridge 2008, p. 71.

[11] A similar situation occurred in France and involved an Internet portal www.jeux-internet.com.

The games listed on it are non-active. Internet users can only read their descriptions. See: www.jeux-internet.com, accessed: 6.12.2020.

Polish Show); 8) the situation following the plane crash in 2010, in which President Lech Kaczyński died (e.g. *Obróńca krzyża*); 9) the 2010 presidential election (e.g. *Bitwa o krzyż*); and 10) the political crisis associated with the 2020 presidential election during pandemic (e.g. *Korona wybory*).

Interdisciplinary methodology

It was possible to examine Polish political browser metaphor games, an interdisciplinary task by its very nature, once the empirical set was completed. However, an analysis can be started, performed and completed only when the analyst employs well-directed, appropriate and effective study methods. I would argue that such tools should include visual semiology, elements of transactional analysis, framework analysis and metaphor analysis based on the substitutive and comparative theory.

An analysis of the metaphor games under study compared to non-metaphor application analyses is a specific task because metaphoric communication is veiled; a metaphoric message is hidden in a communication transmitted by a browser game. It must be found, revealed and decoded according to the intention of its author, i.e. someone who developed the game or had it developed. Objects are iconic signs, e.g. faces of real politicians or representations of real buildings, e.g. the Sejm in Wiejska Street, Warsaw, or the Presidential Palace in Krakowskie Przedmieście. The display area is dominated by symbols, e.g. the Polish flag, political party logos which – together with the iconic signs – refer to the prototypical reality, i.e. that from outside the media.[12] Visual semiology becomes useful for uncovering and deciphering the meanings of objects.

I would argue that relationships between what is depicted by the game and what happened in the prototypical reality are best shown by elements of transactional analysis. However, the use of the theory of personality or the psychotherapy system[13] is not the point. The point is that certain specifically-marked objects used by game developers to evoke associations with contemporary history can be distinguished and categorised. These elements are recognised in procedures called diagnoses: historical, social and behavioural. The use of such diagnoses results in obtaining knowledge of which period of history is shown in a browser game.

A historical diagnosis allows one to recognise an event which inspired a game developer to prepare it and publish it on the Internet. Social diagnosis is used to accomplish three goals. The first goal is to describe the internal context, i.e. relations between characters and other objects featured in a game. The second goal is to describe the relationship between a situation in the game and a situation in the

[12] G. Rose, *Visual Methodologies: An introduction to the interpretation of visual materials*, London 2001. Polish translation: *Interpretacja materiałów wizualnych. Krytyczna metodologia badań nad wizualnością*, trans. E. Klekot, Warszawa 2010, p. 107.

[13] I. Stewart, V. Joines, *TA Today: A new introduction to transactional analysis*, Nottingham 1987. Polish translation: *Analiza transakcyjna dzisiaj*, collective trans., Poznań 2016, p. 6, 39.

prototypical reality, i.e. the relation between the internal and external contexts. The third goal is to describe what the public says about the real event featured in a game. The behavioural diagnosis detects and deciphers the meaning of the activities that the player has to perform using the objects featured in the game. These actions were designed by the game developer. They reflect the actual processes occurring at a specific time and place.

Hidden and created meanings may be recognised by the literary science methodology. Specifically, it is the substitutive and comparative theory of metaphors. A games researcher may use them to be able to decipher the metaphorical meanings encoded in an application and determine whether she or he is dealing with an expressive or explanatory metaphor.[14] Owing to these theories, the researcher can establish whether the metaphors will be visible to the player (visible metaphor) or the player may fail to notice them (invisible metaphor). The set of methods is complemented by a framework analysis, which may be used to determine which fragment of history the game concerns.

Owing to the framework analysis, a researcher can detect an interpretation scheme, which is key to reading the metaphor later. According to the theoretical interpretation presented by Erving Goffman in the field of sociology to explain how people understand situations, events, images, metaphors and many more different messages,[15] and later expanded in the same field by Todd Gitlin,[16] the situational framework creates an opportunity for a media researcher, in the field of media studies, to answer what is happening in the medium of the game. Therefore, the framework analysis may help decipher the political message contained in a metaphor game, generated with objects describable using visual semiology. If characters representing politicians and objects modelled on national authority institutions appear in the game, the framework analysis can be performed to determine what political process is presented by the actions described by the behavioural diagnosis, etc. The presence of framework analysis in the methodological model proposed in this paragraph emphasises the complementarity of the methods mentioned above.

Categories of political messages

Depicting all the events mentioned in the paragraph “The empirical set of games: Situational framework” means that a browser game must have specific features. This is an introduction to an analysis that provides an answer to the first research question. Polish political browser metaphor games acquire these features in a two-stage process. The

Framework, structure and function analysis of Polish political browser metaphor games

[14] P. Stockwell, *Cognitive Poetics: An introduction*, London – New York 2002. Polish translation: *Poetyka kognitywna. Wprowadzenie*, trans. A. Skucińska, Kraków 2006, p. 155.

[15] E. Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An essay on the organization of experience*, Harmondsworth 1974.

Polish translation: *Analiza ramowa*, trans. S. Burdziej, Kraków 2010.

[16] T. Gitlin, *The Whole World Is Watching: Mass media in the making and unmaking of the new left*, Los Angeles – London 1980.

process of imparting these features to games must be orderly, and this is the introduction to an analysis that provides an answer to the second research question. A specific political situation is depicted in the first stage of the development of a political browser game.

The framework analysis shows that the situation is depicted properly if two very important components (mini-plot components) are present in such a game. These components are called “situational frames” – the primary and the issue frame – which must interrelate: the issue frame must be included in the primary frame. Which browser games have the status of political messages is determined by the primary frame, i.e. political communication.

Bogusława Dobek-Ostrowska, a social communication researcher, explains that political communication is a process that involves “[...] manifestation and presentation of politics which includes *polity*, *politics* and *policy*.”[17] *Polity* indicates “[...] the formal, statutory, normative, institutional and organisational framework of political processes.”[18] Each game analysed in this paper whose framework comprises *polity* will be about what is happening in the Polish state, perceived as an institution or administration. The Sejm can be the place of action. This is the case e.g. in *Wiejskie śpiochy*, which shows parliamentarians as lazy individuals, napping in their benches during parliament sessions. A ministry, e.g. the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, can also be such a place. The *Polish Show* presents this ministry in an ironic manner, as a stage of struggle for positions. In both cases, in the model of the game, in the frame of the metaphor – the interior of a state institution, which is typical for the category *polity* – “politicians” (playable characters) behave in a very inappropriate way. They sleep, fall off their chairs or fight for their seats.

Politics manifests itself in games by depicting conflicts and problems with characters fighting for power as their participants. For example, rivalry for the presidency is depicted in this manner. This is also how the method used by one political party to handle its smaller and weaker coalition partners is shown in the game *Wąż Jarosław*, in which its title character, modelled on Jarosław Kaczyński, swallows up his coalition partners. In this case, in the model of a game, in the frame of the metaphor – the pictured state process characteristic of a democratic state and typical of the category *politics* – there is behaviour that violates democratic custom or law. “Politicians” (playable characters) violate the law and uniformed services fail to uphold it.

Policy, or political tactics, comprises “[...] the contents of politics, subjects and problems.”[19] A game in which primary frame contains this element presents an individual conflict, such as the conflict between a police officer and a nurse in *Strajk*. In this case, in the model of the game, in the frame of the metaphor, is shown a conflict between a “man”

[17] B. Dobek-Ostrowska, *Komunikowanie polityczne i publiczne*, Warszawa 2007, p. 130.

[18] Ibidem, p. 129.

[19] Ibidem, p. 321.

representing one element of the state's institutions (playable character) and a "man" representing another element of the state's institutions (playable character). Conflict of this kind is typical of the category *policy*.

Structures of political messages

The primary frame in the framework analysis shows the general idea of the game. In the communicative approach, the primary frame is the activity that the player takes up by controlling playable characters and objects (balancing a sleeping character, struggling for a chair, swallowing up coalition partners, controlling the character of a nurse, aiming to push away a policeman blocking her way, boxing an opponent, controlling a car representing a political candidate). In game studies, the primary frame is a specific genre of game. Game developers enjoy great freedom in this regard, being able to choose from the 42 game genres described by Mark J.P. Wolf.^[20]

The primary frame is complemented by the issue frame which is included in it. A framework analysis shows that the issue frame consists of a specific event, and that it can manifest itself in the game as a character or a place (two characters and a boxing ring may evoke an election campaign; a character/politician and an object/cake may evoke disapproval of a politician). The message is complemented and made more specific by its use. In the communicative approach and using visual semiology, the issue frame is a visual element with specific features. These include, for example, characters representing specific politicians: Andrzej Duda, Bronisław Komorowski, Jarosław Kaczyński, Donald Tusk or others. They are also recognisable places, e.g. the Presidential Palace in Warsaw in the game *Korona wybory*. They are logos of Polish political parties in other games. In game studies, the issue frame is a playable object or a static one which is part of the scenery. Both issue frames can be included in one primary frame in the same game.

The relationships between the element categories mentioned above can be analysed, with the game *Wyścig do Pałacu Prezydenckiego* as a clear example. According to the framework analysis, the primary frame, i.e. *politics*, is the election process, in which candidates for the office of the President of Poland participate. In the communicative approach, the activity is the race of objects. In game studies, this process is reflected in *racing games* (e.g. a car race). According to the framework analysis, running for the presidency is the issue frame. The frame is made up of playable objects, controlled by the player, i.e. cars symbolising politicians, and static objects, i.e. background elements, such as a winding road to the Presidential Palace and the building itself. The objects have specific features. These are symbolic features: colours and acronyms of the political party names which link the cars to presidential candidates' campaign headquarters.

[20] M.J.P. Wolf, *Genre and the Video Game*, Austin 2001, pp. 113-116.

Showing the political process and the presentation of objects and the relationships between them ends the first stage of developing a political browser game. In the second stage, the game is equipped with features that will make it a metaphorical message. At this stage, the game becomes a generative metaphor of reality, i.e. of the contemporary history of Poland in the applications under study.

In the literary science approach, the metaphorical message consists of two major elements: the metaphor source (e.g. the character of the politician in a strange activity, like fighting in the style of karate) and the metaphor frame (e.g. the street in front of the Polish Parliament).[21] The Polish political browser games structure varies and the metaphorical functions of these games can also vary. An analysis of the metaphorical message featured in Polish political browser games must take into account two metaphor theories: substitutive and comparative ones.

Metaphor functions and structures of metaphorical messages

The analysis of Polish political browser games shows that the metaphorical messages present in them carry only negative content. They also show that, according to their developers, something is wrong in the Polish political system; it has some flaws. The presence of those different functions combined with the metaphorical messages in games provides answers to the third research question of this study. Generative metaphors indeed differ with respect to the method of encoding in Polish political browser games. Various metaphor functions and types result in differences in the message structures.

Metaphorical messages contained in the games can have an expressive or an explanatory function. Therefore, a metaphor can be used to express some emotions encoded by a developer of the game (expressive function), or be part of an explanation of why some democratic processes go wrong (explanatory function), also encoded by the developer. The empirical set includes 13 games containing expressive metaphors and 20 games containing explanatory ones (see Table 1).

- Expressive metaphors

Expressive metaphors have one important application. They are used to express negative opinions concerning a process, event, place or person. The game entitled *Głosowanie korespondencyjne* presents a negative opinion on the decisions of politicians who wanted to organise presidential elections in May 2020, during the great threat of the COVID-19 epidemic.

Structuralism plays the main role in hiding a metaphorical meaning in a browser game. How the message is hidden depends on the structure of the metaphor source and frame elements. The source

[21] M. Black, *Metaphor*, "Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society" 1955, 55, pp. 273-294. Polish translation:

Metafora, trans. J. Japola, "Pamiętnik Literacki" 1973, 3, p. 219.

of a browser game – an expressive metaphor – always contains several elements. There must be at least two of them, because the player must be impersonated and shown on the screen. The presence of a frame means that at least one element must be present. There can be many of them, and each one makes a project more difficult to execute. A political browser game gains a metaphorical meaning by means of the relationship between the metaphor source and frame. A generative metaphor is generated only when a contradiction exists between its elements, i.e. a collision mechanism.[22]

According to the metaphor theory, by using the metaphor source, the player performs an action “targeted” at the metaphor frame in collision with the source. According to game studies, the player uses certain objects visible on the screen to perform actions on other visible objects. The action depends on the game genre. It will involve subjugating some objects to others or destroying some objects by others e.g. in a *capture game* or a *torture game*. According to visual semiology, objects in the analysed games should be marked to evoke associations with Polish political communication.

In practice, in expressive metaphors, the player can take actions that will have more or less devastating effects on the game character or its image. In the least destructive variant, a character may be ridiculed by performing ridiculing actions which the player controls (strange dancing, strange clothing, throwing a cake at a target, in e.g. *Nerwowy rzut*, *Ubierz Romka*, *Wiejskie śpiochy*). In the most destructive variant, a character may be beaten by an avatar the player controls, hit with a virtual object the player controls, or “killed” because the player cannot control some virtual objects devastating her or his avatar (e.g. *Chłasnij Giertycha*, *Głosowanie korespondencyjne*, *Kopnij aferzystę*, *Puknij kłamczucha*).

These object structures and the relationships between them are shown in the clearest way in *Puknij kłamczucha*, an application containing an expressive metaphor. The main game frame element involves politicians as “talking head” animations, embedded in the non-playable frame of dodgeball, which is known from amusement parks. The action of hitting an element to eliminate it is a source consisting of two elements. It is performed with a wooden hammer icon, visible on the screen, on the frame objects, i.e. on the politicians’ “talking heads.” Such an expressive metaphor, as an example of a generalised judgement about politicians and politics, can be communicated in a clear and easily legible phrase: “politicians are incompetent,” “politicians are buffoons,” “politicians are swindlers,” “politicians are liars,” “politicians are risk takers.” Judgments can vary and depend on the action the player takes regarding the game character.

Since a browser game of this type is used instead of an equivalent literal phrase, its creation is explained in literary science by the

[22] Idem, *More about metaphor*, “Dialectica” 1977, 31, pp. 431-457. Polish translation: *Jeszcze o metaforze*,

trans. M.B. Fedewicz, “Pamiętnik Literacki” 1983, no. 2, p. 266.

substitutive metaphor theory. A distinctive action affecting the method of discovering the message makes the metaphor visible.

- Explanatory metaphors

If a browser game's metaphorical micro-storyline depicts the developer's opinion, the game belongs to explanatory metaphors. Developing an explanatory metaphor in the first stage of the process is the same as with an expressive metaphor. Differences appear in the second stage, when the developer's task is to hide the metaphorical meaning and to design a method for its discovery and deciphering by the player.

The source and the frame of a browser game – an explanatory metaphor – may contain several elements. As with a browser game, which is an expressive metaphor, the player using the source must also be personified and shown on the screen. The main difference lies in two factors. According to the metaphor theory, the first one concerns the action performed by the player which, in game studies, depends on the game genre. This time, the action must suggest which flaw of the political process the game will concern (e.g. unfair, brutal car race evokes unfair, brutal election campaign). The second factor means that the generative metaphor model does not contain a collision mechanism; its elements do not create a conflict of meanings. This time, the metaphor frame is not the “target” of the player's actions, but his or her “partner” in the action resulting from the game genre. According to game studies, the player uses certain objects visible on the screen or display to perform actions with or next to other visible objects. For example, in the hybrid of *collecting* and *escaping game*, *Korona wybory*, the player controls the avatar of a political candidate, avoiding obstacles on the road to the Presidential Palace (different game genres evoke different activities).

A difference between an explanatory metaphor and an expressive one manifests itself in the method of marking the objects, which is noticeable thanks to visual semiology. This time, objects should be marked in such a way as to make the formulated message a hyperbole. From the literary science point of view, the means of expression may include irony, parody, pastiche or satire. Only in this manner will the marked objects allow one to notice a similarity to the depicted object or process and to see a flaw both in the object and in the process. The flaw manifests itself in the metaphor source and spreads over its frame.

In practice, in explanatory metaphors, the player can take actions which draw attention to a flawed element of the political process or to the process as a whole. Game genres are also responsible for magnifying the scale of phenomena and showing the extent to which these processes are flawed. One game genre can depict multiple processes. A race can be unfair, as well as violent and dangerous (e.g. *Korona wybory*, *Wyścig do Pałacu Prezydenckiego*). A fight can be “just” unfair, as well as murderous (e.g. *Walka prezydencka*, *Wybory 2007. Może pozostać tylko jeden*). The treatment of coalition partners can be “just” unfair or brutal (e.g. *Pasjans polityczny*, *Wąż Jarosław*).

These object structures and the relationships between them are shown most clearly in *Wybory 2007. Może pozostać tylko jeden*, an application containing an explanatory metaphor. A character very similar to Jarosław Kaczyński, controlled by the game system, is the main element of the multielement frame. It is accompanied by scenery elements resembling the Sejm building on Wiejska Street in Warsaw. The metaphor has its source in the fight, i.e. an interaction in which the “Jarosław Kaczyński” character encounters one representing the player, who is similar to Donald Tusk. The *fighting game* genre and the symbolism of punches make it possible to suspend the normal perception of reality. This metaphor shows a political election process not as an act regulated by the Constitution, a privilege and an honour to represent one’s electors, but as a brutal fight with no rules, the outcome of which is decided by force rather than by the political agenda.

An explanatory metaphor cannot be presented as an easily formulated example of a generalised judgment about a political process or its elements expressed in an assertion like that of an expressive metaphor. Processes are complex in nature and have multiple stages, and games in this category of metaphors depict them in the same way as people use comparisons when looking for the most significant reference points.

Since a browser game of this type uncovers a hidden analogy, as stated, literary science explains its development by comparative metaphor theory. A browser game is, therefore, a visible comparison showing that e.g. “election campaign is like a race with obstacles on the road,” “elections are like a brutal fight,” “domestic politics is like a playing cards” and “elections in a pandemic are like a running with murderous obstacles.” This kind of comparison construction applies to all games belonging to the category of the explanatory metaphors mentioned in this paper.

Digital games can play various functions and serve various purposes. According to general opinion, games perform a ludic function and are used mainly for entertainment. However, this study shows that a certain group of games can have different applications, provided they meet certain criteria regarding the visual material, game structure and the rules governing the control over objects visible on the computer screen or the player’s mobile device display, as well as the rules of the player’s acceptable behaviour. Fifty-one applications metaphorically describing political events of the contemporary history of Poland were published on the Internet in 2005-2020, via Polish portals, blogs and websites. Thirty-three games are still available on the Web. Among other Polish ludic games, they have some unique features and structures, and they are generative metaphors. Thirteen of them are expressive metaphors. They show Polish Internet users’ critical attitude towards certain elements of the democratic political system, and to pathologies in certain areas of the government administration. They also present

Conclusion

negative comments on Polish politicians' behaviour. Twenty applications are explanatory metaphors, showing that some things in the Polish democratic system do not function as they should. These defects receive negative comments from so-called "ordinary Internet users" and from politicians who commission individual games. Both groups of games prove that Polish political browser games, as so-called "DIY media", allow users to manifest their opinions and propagate them in the public space via portals, blogs and websites. Additionally, politicians prove that games can be used to communicate with the electorate and to battle political opponents during election campaigns.

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