Cognitive Semantics Study of Metonymical Expressions in Johnson's Speeches about COVID-19

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Abstract

The study is an attempt to investigate the conceptual metonymies is used in political discourse about COVID-19. Thus, this study tries to analyze and investigate how the conceptual metonymies in Johnson's speech about coronavirus are constructed.

This study aims at: Identifying how are metonymies relevant to understand the messages in Boris Johnson speeches and to find out how can conceptual blending theory help people to understand the messages in the political speech about COVID-19. Lastly, it tries to Point out the kinds of integration networks are common in political speech.

The study is based on the hypotheses that conceptual blending theory is a powerful tool for investigating the intended messages in Johnson's speech and there are different processes of blending networks and conceptual mapping that enable the listeners to identify the messages in political speech.

This study presents a qualitative and quantitative analysis of four speeches about COVID-19; they are said by Boris Johnson. The selected data have been tackled from the cognitive-semantic perspective by adopting Conceptual Blending Theory as a model for the analysis.

It concludes that CBT is applicable to the analysis of metonymies in political discourse. Its mechanisms enable listeners to analyze and understand these speeches. Also the listener can identify and understand the hidden messages in Biden and Johnson's discourse about COVID-19 by using different conceptual networks. Finally, it is concluded that the double scope networks are the most common types of blending of metonymies in the political speech.

metonymical expression historical event to refer to COVID-19.

Although many studies have already been carried out to investigate how conceptual metonymies are expressed in a number of influential figures speeches. However, and to the best of the researcher's knowledge, little are known about how these conceptual metonyms are constructed in political speeches, especially, in the speeches of Boris Johnson. As he is regarded one of the most

1- The Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic shines a light on the world's political leaders. Differences in how leaders communicate during a pandemic might promote better confidence and create an effective response in a community.

For example Boris Johnson uses the metaphorical expression (invisible killer) to refer to Corona, and the

The study of cognitive semantics focuses on conceptual organization, and hence on content experienced in consciousness. That is, the primary area of the study for cognitive semantics is qualitative mental phenomena as they occur in consciousness. Cognitive semantics is therefore a subfield of phenomenology, especially the phenomenology of conceptual content and its organization in the language (ibid).

One of the central tenets of traditional theories of meaning is that firstly, it is mind-independent, objective, and widely accessible. Secondly, the meaning of a word corresponds with things in the world, and third, the meaning of a phrase is based on truth conditions: a statement is true if the words fit the current state of events in the world (Lakoff and Johnson 1999 cited in: Benczes, 2006: 42).

3- The Concept of Conceptual Metonymy

Lakoff (1987: 78) defines metonymy as a stand-in relationship that exists in only one ICM. A conceptual domain, or ICM, can be thought of as a whole made up of pieces; more specifically, the conceptual entities, or elements, are the parts that make up the ICM. The "stands for" relation that may exist between two components A and B, such that one element of the ICM, B, may stand for another element A, is one of the background conditions of a given ICM. Given this perspective, ICM's metonymies can appear in one of two methods: (1) a whole can stand in for a part or a part can stand in for a whole. (2) a part stands in for another part (Kövecses, 2002: 150).

Metonymy concepts are systematic which can be identified in the following metonymic models (Lakoff and Johnson, 1987: 37-39):

i.   THE PART FOR THE WHOLE
     E.g. *There are a lot of good heads in the meeting.*
ii. PRODUCER FOR PRODUCT
     E.g. *He's got a Picasso.*
iii. OBJECT USED FOR USER
     E.g. *The buses are on strike.*

influential figures in the world, in which he carries the responsibility towards his audience and taking into consideration the variety of backgrounds of the audience. Thus, this study tries to analyze and investigate how the conceptual metonymies in Johnson's speech about coronavirus are constructed; the present study is an attempt to solve this problem by finding answers to the following questions: To what extent metonymies are relevant in perceiving the messages in Boris Johnson speeches during COVID-19? How can conceptual blending theory help people to understand the messages in political speeches? What kinds of conceptual metonymies and integration networks are common in Johnson's speeches related to COVID-19?

The metonymical expressions that are employed by Johnson will be evaluated by using the conceptual blending theory.

2- Cognitive Semantics: An Overview

Cognitive semantics started in the 1970s as a reaction against the **objectivist world-view** assumed by the Anglo-American tradition in philosophy and the related approach, **truth-conditional semantics**, developed within formal linguistics, which was described by Eve Sweetser, a leading cognitive linguist(Evans and Green,2006:156) , as:

"By viewing meaning as the relationship between words and the world, truth-conditional semantics eliminates cognitive organization from the linguistic system" (Sweetser 1990: 4).

In contrast, cognitive semantics sees linguistic meaning as a result of conceptual structure and this is what makes it a unique approach to linguistic meaning (ibid)**.**
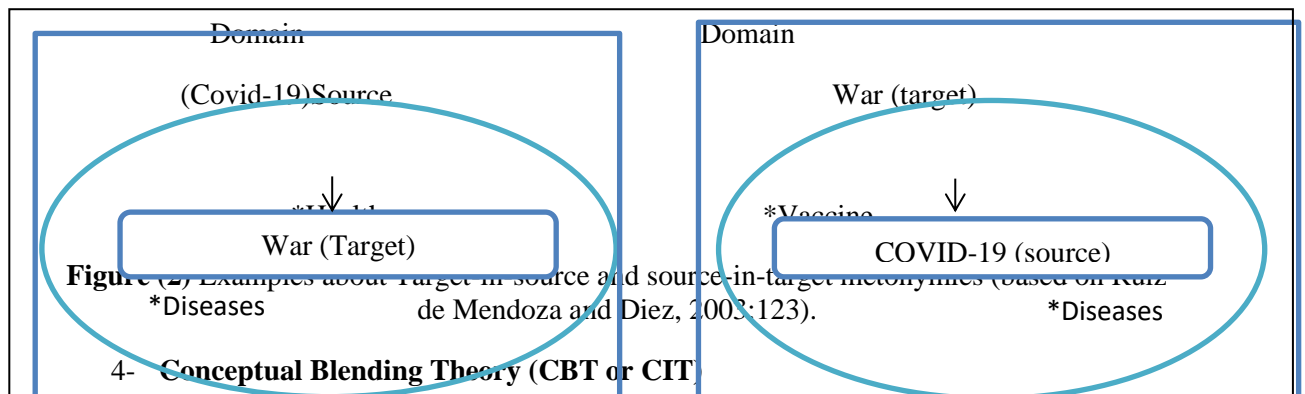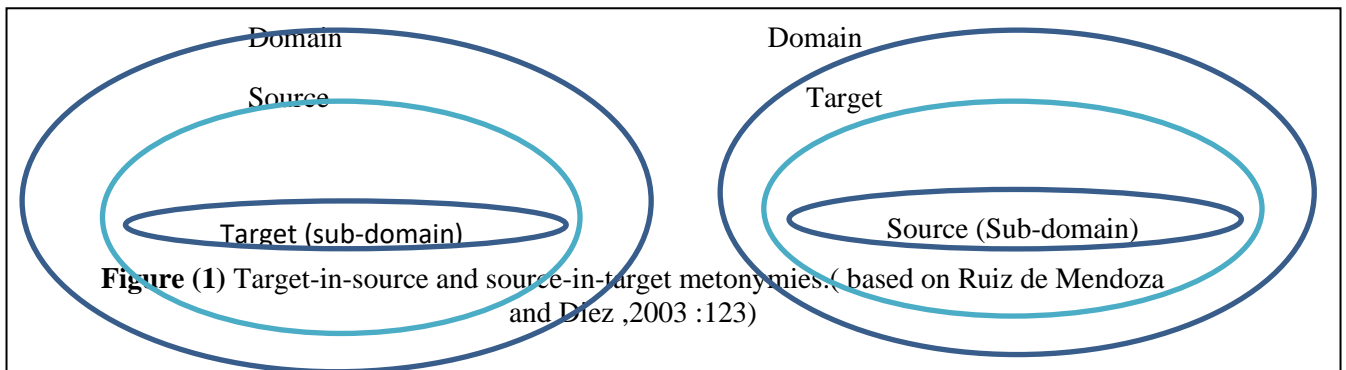
Talmy (2000:4) points out that *semantics* is intrinsically *cognitive* and it is "especially concerned with the conceptual organization of language". Therefore, the word *cognitive* is redundant and it is added to distinguish this conceptual view of semantics from other views of meaning as independent of mind.

for another part within one conceptual domain, as in the following example: "an increase in body heat stands for love " reflected in the sentence "I felt hot all over when I saw her" (Kövecses 2000 cited in (Kövecses, 2008:381).

Metonymies, on the other hand, can be described as instances of one correspondence mappings, have been divided into *target-in-source* (the source domain stands for a target sub-domain) and *source-in-target* (a source sub-domain stands for a target domain) metonymies (Ruiz de Mendoza and Diez ,2003:122-123).

iv. CONTROLLER FOR CONTROLLED
     E.g. A Mercedes rear-ended me
v.   INSTITUTION   FOR   PEOPLE
     RESPONSIBLE
     E.g. *Chanel has raised its prices again.*
vi. THE PLACE FOR THE INSTITUTION
     E.g. *The White House is not saying anything.*
vii. THE PLACE FOR THE EVENT
     E.g. *Remember the Alamo*

Metonymy aims to provide mental access to a conceptual domain using the same domain, proposing that metonymy has a referential function through a STAND FOR RELATIONSHIP, e.g. a part stands for the whole or a part stands

Figure (1) Target-in-source and source-in-target metonymies.(based on Ruiz de Mendoza and Diez ,2003 :123)

Figure (2) Examples about Target-in-source and source-in-target metonymies (based on Ruiz de Mendoza and Diez, 2003:123).

4- **Conceptual Blending Theory (CBT or CIT)**

Conceptual integration - also known as "blending" is a basic mental operation whose uniform structural and dynamic properties apply over many areas of thought and action, including metaphor and metonymy. Conceptual integration creates networks of connections between mental spaces. Some of these mental spaces serve as inputs to a

Fauconnier and Turner (1994; 1998) provide a more contemporary paradigm that aims to explain the conceptual phenomenon of metaphor and metonymy. Many characteristics of CMT are shared by this framework, which is also known as the theory of blending, CB, and conceptual integration (CIT) (Grady et al.1999:101).

CBT is identified by Turner and Fauconnier(2002:469) as the following:

speakers try to share and to represent what they regard or disregard is a fundamental component of communication. For example, the metonymic expressions, virus, COVID-19 and corona can be used to refer to the (novel) coronavirus, the disease, the pandemic etc.

6- Methodology

This chapter is devoted to present the fundamental theoretical framework of the current study and the methods that are used in the analysis of the selected data. This chapter clarifies the method used in collecting the data; the data selected as a sample of the current study, as well the description of the model used in the analysis of the selected data.

The analysis of this study depends on one model, namely, Conceptual Blending Theory (BT) by Fauconnier and Turner's (2002). This theory introduces a set of cognitive processes and operations to produce conceptual images by using a network of mental spaces and there are four mental spaces which are, two inputs (specific idea or situation), generic space (the conceptualization that is shared by all inputs) and the blend space, which involves the interaction between some elements from the two inputs. In addition, it involves emergent structure which includes multiple directions of elements from the input spaces onto the blended one. And it results because of three processes, composition, completion and elaboration.

6.1 **The Data**

6.1.1 Data Description and Collection

The data of the current study chosen intentionally by the researcher , therefore , it limited to five speeches said by Boris Johnson (in full **Alexander Boris de Pfeffel Johnson**) about COVID-19. He is the prime minister of the United Kingdom since July 2019 about COVID-19 .

The British data are collected from the following websites:

new, blended mental space that typically develops emergent meaning not contained in the inputs. In the case of metaphor, a source and a target serve as inputs to the blend. Creating the blend often involves the exploitation of metonymies.

As well, they indicate that the structure-mapping from a source (or base) to a target has been central to contemporary theories of metaphor and analogy. These mappings might take advantage of the existing common schematic structure between domains or project new structures from the source onto the target. Studies on CB have revealed that, in addition to such mappings, there are dynamic integration processes that create new "mixed" mental spaces. Such spaces acquire emergent structures, which is elaborated in the on-line production of meaning and acts as a key focus of cognitive activity (Turner and Fauconnier, 2002: 470).

5- Metonymies and COVID-19

The study of metonymy has focused primarily on its referential and illocutionary roles, but it has other functions as indicated by Littlemore (2015: 65) "*when we look at metonymy in real-world data, we can show that it accomplishes much more than this.*" (ibid) points that:

Metonymy can be used to support highlighting and construal, anaphoric reference, cohesiveness and coherence, exophoric reference, illocutionary activities, relationship-building, and the establishment of discourse communities.
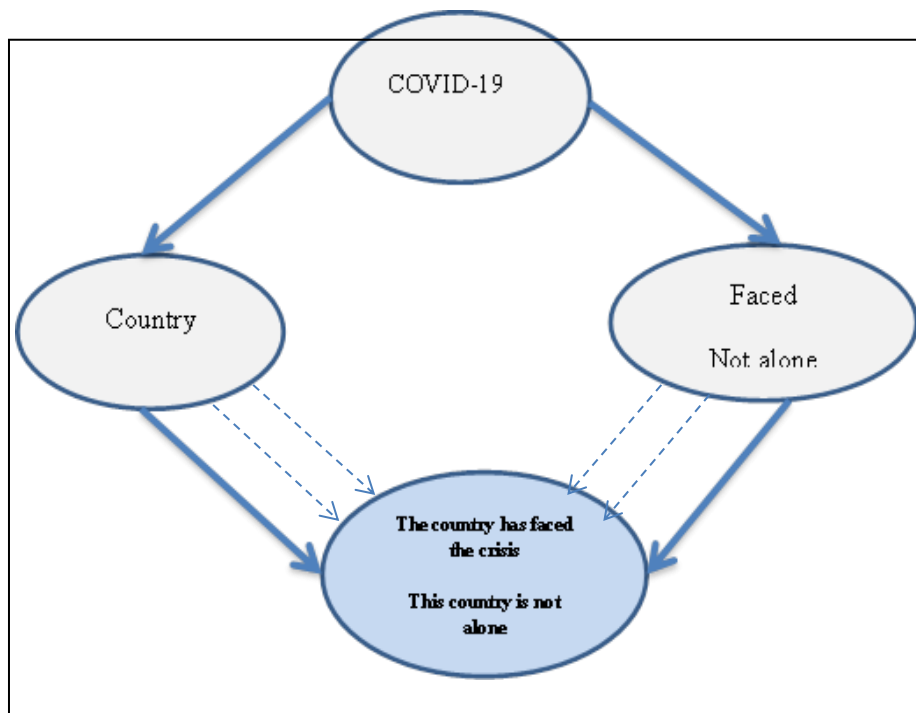
Expressions choices by governments play a very important role in controlling the COVID-19 pandemic, Linguistic elements of individuals and groups, including metonymy, are affected by this global challenge because choosing appropriate words to communicate what

approaches. Firstly, by describing each word contains the conceptual metonymy qualitatively and then the Frequencies and Percentages of CINs will be discussed. BT will be used for the analysis of the data concerning the metonymical expressions.

The analysis of this study depends on Conceptual Blending Theory (BT) by Fauconnier and Turner's (2002).

- https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/
- https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news
- https://www.wbca.org.uk/news
- https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-54255898

6.1.2 Data Analysis

The analysis of the data follows the qualitative and the quantative

Speech (1)

*The coronavirus is the biggest threat this country has **faced** for decades and this **country is not alone.***

Figure (3) Analysis of speech (1) according to CBT

employed in input 2, but not in the input 1 component. The two inputs interact with each other. The third space is the generic space, which includes the idea of *COVID-19* despite the fact that it is never explicitly stated. However, everybody who has been infected with this virus is aware that the infection centers on COVID-19. The output, or blended space, is a new assumption that elaborates a schematic connection between the two inputs in the fourth space in *double scope network*, the

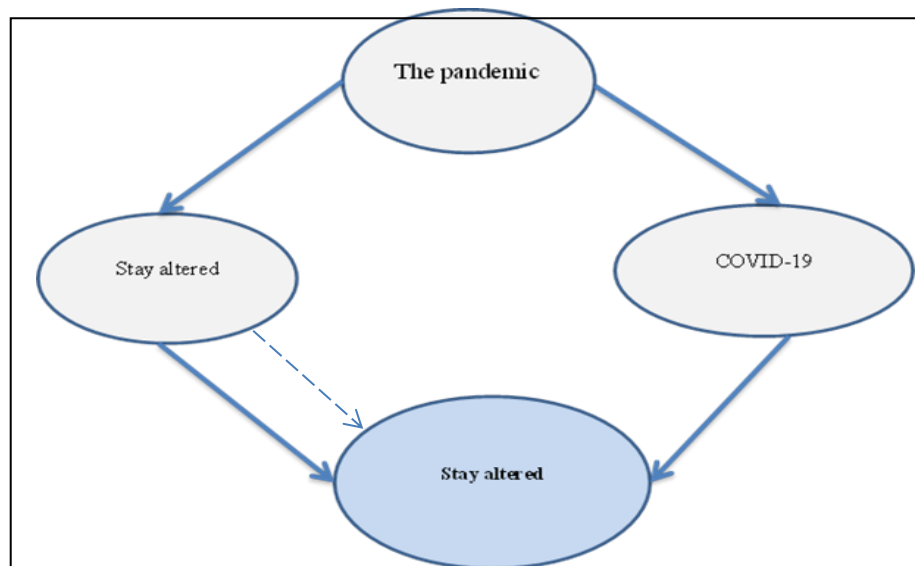Boris Johnson calls in UK COVID-19 'the biggest threat this country has faced in decades' on March 22, 2020.

A metonymic mapping of *state-person* is reveled in the analysis of conceptual metonymy. The blended space or framework is created by combining four mental spaces that are linked together in vast conceptual systems. The concept of *country* is employed in the first space, input 1. *Faced and not alone* concepts are

despite the effects of the virus; it is also morally strong. The COVID-19 is omitted from the blended space, which is consistent with the selective character of a projection and the emergent qualities of the outputting structure.

Speech (2)

> *We must stay alert.*
> *We must continue to*
> *control the virus and*
> *save lives.*

The Analysis

blended space, which includes *The country has faced the crisis / This country is not alone* relationship.
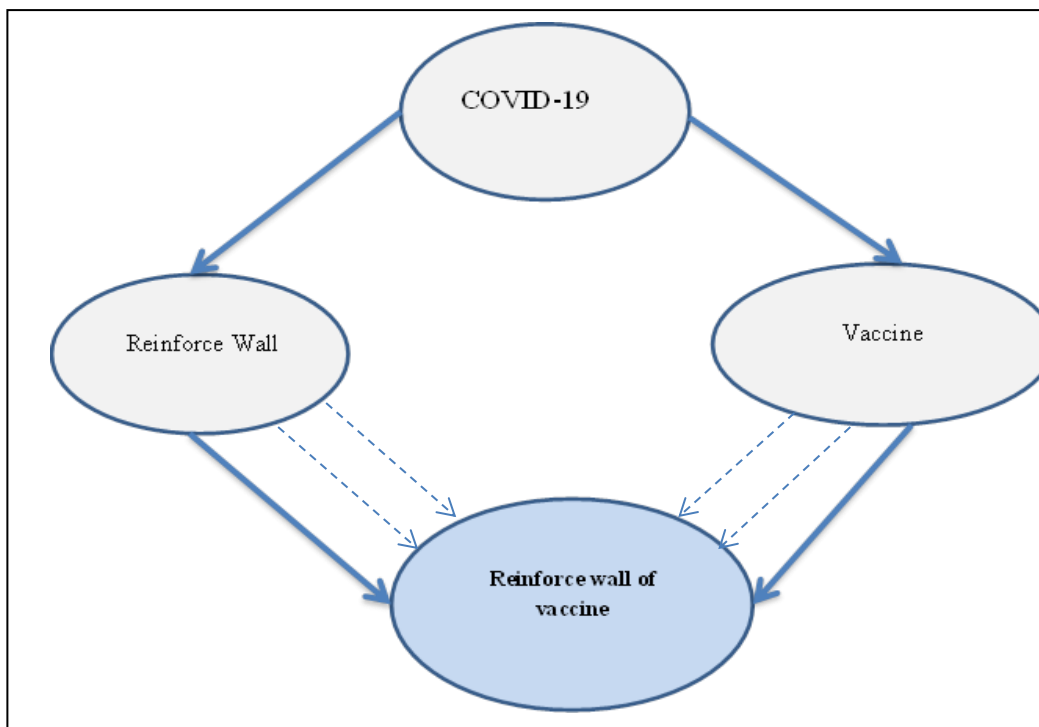
Boris Johnson uses the phrases *faced and not alone* to characterize the strength of British community. Simultaneously, he draws a parallel between the status of *humans* and the *country* in order to comfort the British people that UK has enough qualities to threat of the virus.

So United Kingdom, conceptualized as a human body, is not only physically strong and therefore in good health,

Figure (4) Analysis of speech (2) according to CBT

input 1, the concept of *stay altered* is used. The input 2 component uses the *COVID-19* concept, but not the input 1 component. The two inputs are connected to each other. The third space is the generic space, which, despite not being expressly stated, includes the concept of *pandemic*. The output, or blended space, is a new assumption that elaborates the blending of the first input in *single scope* connection, the blended space, which incorporates *stay altered* relationship.

This announcement is said by PM Boris Johnson on May 10, 2020 to support British people and make them aware of the crisis of COVID-19.

The analysis of conceptual metonymy in Johnson's discourse reveals a metonymic mapping of psychological state for social effect. The blended space or framework is made up of four mental spaces that are connected in massive conceptual systems. In the first space,

Speech (3)

> *"We must urgently **reinforce our wall of vaccine** protection to keep*
> *our friends and loved ones safe."*

The Analysis

Figure (5) Analysis of speech (3) according to CBT

Furthermore, agreeing with the assumptions of a projection's selective character and the outputting structure's emergent properties, the concept of *COVID-19* is not stated directly in the inputs or in the blended space, but the image is clear conceptually to everyone has experience the pandemic .

7- Results and Findings of the Analysis

1- The relation between metonymies and COVID-19.

Concerning the selected speeches of PM Boris Johnson, they show that most metonymies are used to reassure and encourage the nation to threat this virus and to follow the restrictions as in speech (16)" *this country is not alone*".

In COVID-19 speeches, metonymies were used to extend meanings, enhance readers' imagination, and increase their emotional impact. As well, the use of figurative language may be problematic since not all readers will be able to decode the true meaning that metaphors and metonymies attempt to express.

The PM stated on December 13, 2021, that the British people should work together to face the pandemic and overcome the virus, by taking the vaccine which is the wall that could save their and others lives.

Four conceptual spaces are used to represent the metonymical mapping and show the conceptual integration process between the four conceptual spaces in the light of understanding metonymy as a series of integration networks, it could be seen that *reinforce the wall* in input 1 and *vaccine* in input 2, in addition to COVID-19 in the third space which is referred as a generic space. The output or the blended space elaborates *double scope network* and arises as a new predication relation that elaborates a schematic relation in the fourth space which is the blended space, and it includes reinforce the wall of vaccine. This mapping does not elaborate the PART-to-WHOLE and WHOLE-to-PART relations. But it refers to *cause – effect* metonymical relation and it contains more elaborate and complicated integration and following the rules of mental space integration theory by Fauconnier and Turner.

No. of spe.	Blending types		Tot.	Per.
	Sing	Doub		
Spe.1	0	2	2	50%
Spe.2	1	0	1	25%
Spe.3	0	1	1	25%

Table (1) Frequencies and Percentages of Metonymical Blending

Figure (6) Percentages of Metonymical Blending Types

Thus, the study shows that there are two types of CIN which are single scope and double scope networks and the most common type of CIN is the double scope networks. This verifies **the hypothesis** of the study which reads "The double-scope and single

2- **CBs help people to understand the messages in political speech**es.

The CBT observed to significantly assist the addressee in understanding political speeches and their intended meanings after analyzing the selected speeches.

The speaker can detect the elements of each input space apart from the others via CBT, and then derive the items shared by these inputs. The listener's familiarity with politics is an essential need. The blending process can produce an emerging structure in the blended space. This new structure, which does not appear in any of the input spaces, is required to accomplish a certain function. The three activities that produce the emergent structure are:

a- Composition which provides relations between elements from separate input spaces.
b- Completion which gives additional meaning associated with the elements in the input spaces.
c- Elaboration which represents the dynamic running of the blend for the emergence of meaning.

Obviously, not everything from the input spaces is projected to the blend; selective projection might be used in blending, as in **speech 18** *" Yes this enemy can be deadly".* Whereas COVID-19 is never explicitly addressed, the listener can infer the meaning based on background knowledge.
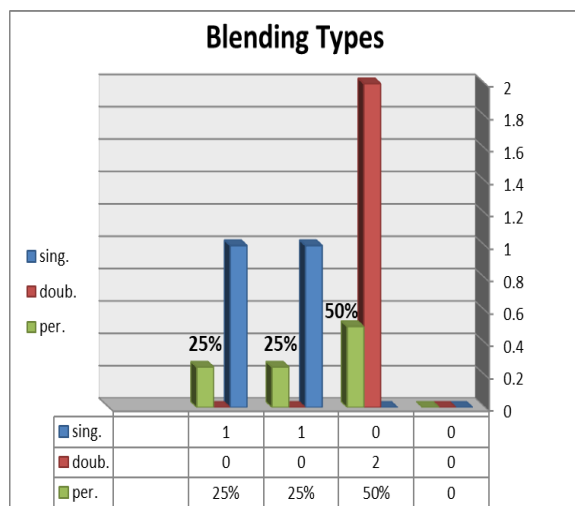
3- As well the statistical analysis of metonymies of CB in table (1) and figure (5) reveals that *double-scope networks* are used to explain the process of meaning construction more than the other kind, which is *single scope network*. It occurs (3) times out of the total number (4) and constitutes (50%).

Web sources

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scope networks are common in political speech".

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