

Do metaphors really matter politically:

Assessing the political impact of metaphors on citizens' perception of Belgian federalism

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Introduction

- Interdisciplinary project
 - Linguistics & political science
 - Metaphors in political discourse
 - Context: Belgian federalism
 - Use of metaphors
 - Citizen data
 - Production and reception
 - Political impact of metaphors?

Belgian federalism?

Du. “Normale partijen die een staatshervorming willen enzovoort die willen eigenlijk hetzelfde als we zo zeggen een ernstige *LAT relatie* in dit land.” (PBN, M5, 3130-3131)’

c’est comme dans un *ménage*, on ne règle jamais les solutions une fois pour toutes. On se *marie, ou en vit ensemble*, peut importe, à 20 ans, puis on a des enfants, puis les enfants deviennent grands, puis le bonhomme fait sa crise de la quarantaine, puis on se dit que tout compte fait, on se dit que c’était quand même pas si mal et puis rien, et puis entre, temps, madame est ménopausée et puis... (...) puis..... Puis elle a perdu son job, puis les enfants se sont mariés, voilà que la maison est trop grande... les situations évoluent et je ne pense pas qu’on va rêver d’avoir une situation immuable. (PBF, B8, 1968-1977).



L2: “het is vergelijken met dat *huwelijk* he. De Belgische staat is een *gearrangeerd en geforceerd huwelijk* geweest.” (2263-2266) (...)

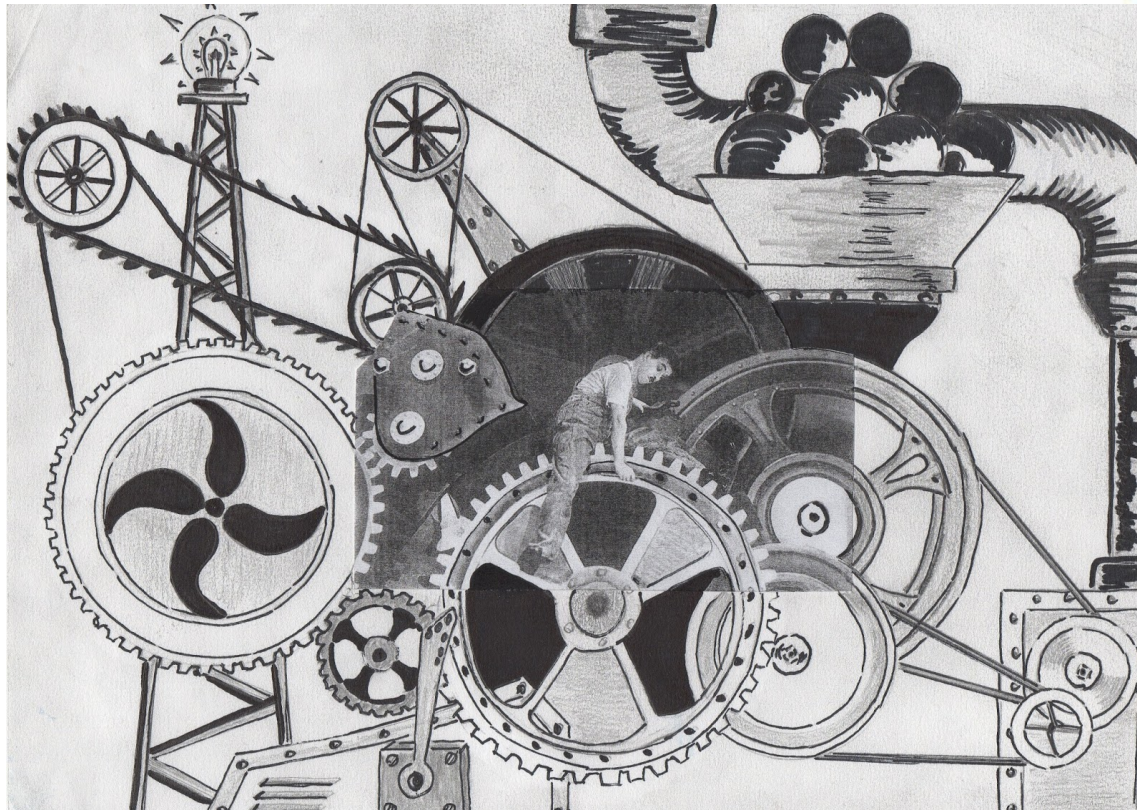
L6: “het is inderdaad een *gearrangeerd huwelijk* en het is *gearrangeerd* door de internationale gemeenschap” (2268-2269) (...)

L6 : “een *gearrangeerd huwelijk* kan ook ontbonden worden, zo moeilijk is dat allemaal niet. Het moet gewoon erkend worden door de internationale gemeenschap.” (2279-2280)

L2 : “ja maar dat *is getrouwd voor goede en kwade dagen* en wij zijn nu in kwade dagen.” (2281-2282)

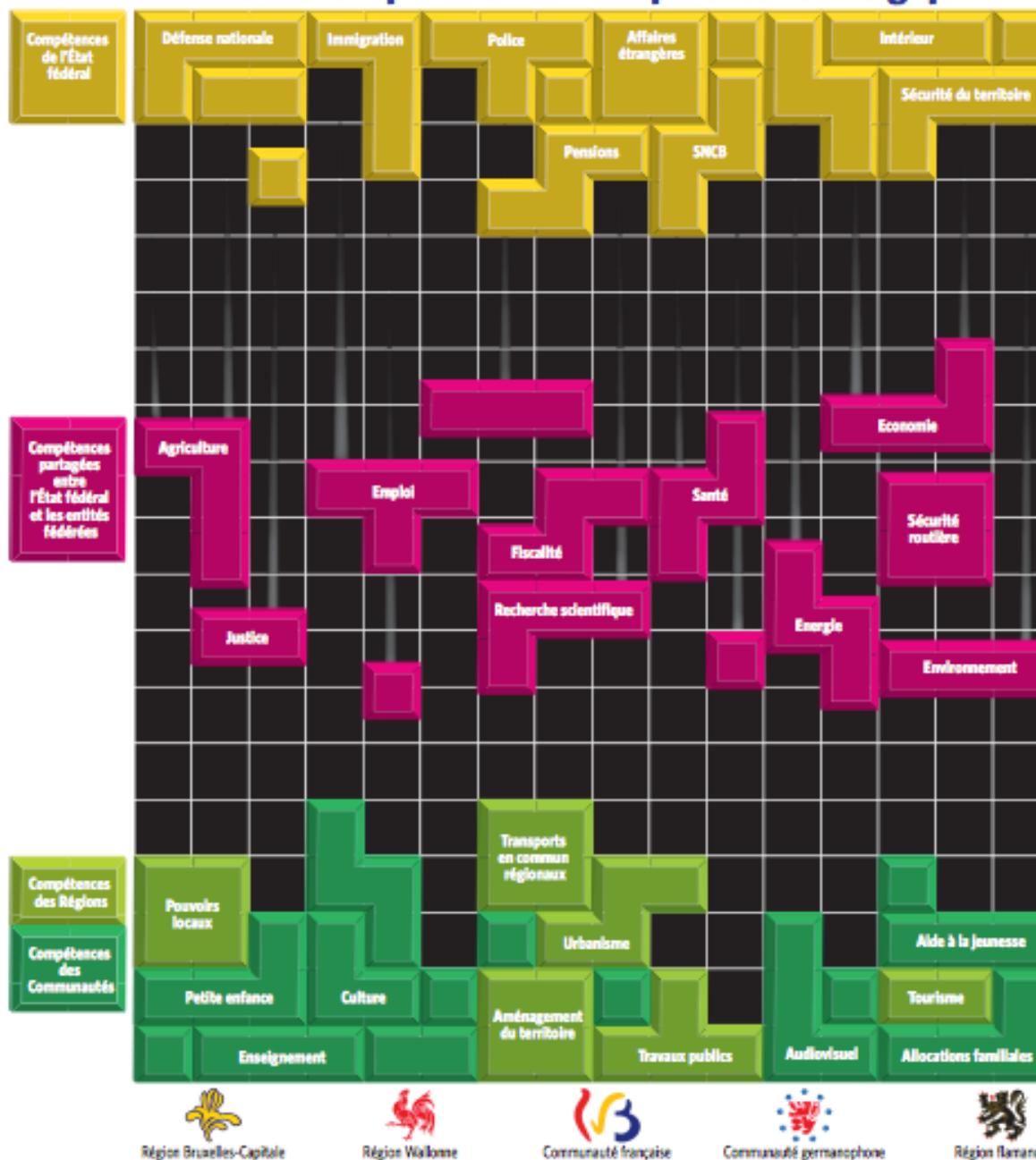
L6 : “maar bij een *gearrangeerd huwelijk* is het niet *in goede en kwade dagen* vrijwillig, maar is het verplicht in *kwade dagen*. (...) ik hoop toch dat we zover zijn *dat huwelijken niet meer verplicht* zijn ofwel?” (2283-2287)

Fr. *On a coupé le citoyen du fonctionnement d'une espèce de mécanisme, de machine folle lancée sur elle-même.* (PBF, B8, 839-840)



Du. “Maar ik denk dat je kunt concluderen dat het federalisme zoals het nu is dat het niet *werkt*” (PBN, N4, 3318-3319)

La nouvelle répartition des compétences en Belgique



Le Tétris belge
De 1831 à 1970, la Belgique politique se résumait à l'État central, les provinces et les communes. Sauf les prérogatives attribuées aux pouvoirs locaux, l'État s'occupait de tout. En 1970, le Constituant a créé de nouvelles institutions : les Communautés et les Régions. Et chaque réforme de l'État a été l'occasion de prélever des compétences à l'État (appelé désormais État fédéral) pour les attribuer aux pouvoirs fédérés. C'est le grand Tétris belge, où l'on voit l'étagage du dessus qui se décompose peu à peu, morceau par morceau, au profit des autres pouvoirs. Dans certains cas, le législateur transfère des blocs homogènes (comme l'Enseignement, attribué aux Communautés en 1989). Dans d'autres, il ne transfère que des éléments d'une compétence (c'est le cas de la fiscalité : la Région reste compétente mais accorde aux pouvoirs fédérés certaines prérogatives). Désormais, on distingue ainsi trois types de compétences. Celles exclusivement exercées par l'État (la Défense, par exemple). Celles exclusivement exercées par les Régions et les Communautés (Enseignement, Urbanisme, Travaux publics, etc.) Et celles où chaque pouvoir a une possibilité d'intervention. Dans le domaine de l'Emploi, par exemple, l'État est compétent dans certains domaines (régulation du chômage, par exemple) et les Régions sont compétentes pour d'autres (placement et formation des chômeurs). (7/26)

Research question

- What political impact(s) could this metaphor have on the people to which it is addressed.
- Crucial question in CL
 - CMT (Lakoff & Johnson 1980)
 - Metaphors have the ability of highlighting and hiding specific aspects of a target concept
- Framing
 - “[...] select[ing] some aspects of a perceived reality and mak[ing] it more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the described item” (Entman, 1993, p. 52)
- Production > reception

Do metaphors influence reasoning?

CRIME

Thibodeau & Boroditsky 2011, 2013



MORE SOCIAL INTEGRATION



MORE REPRESSION

Do metaphors influence reasoning?

- Thibodeau & Boroditsky 2011, 2013
 - Crime = virus => more social integration
 - Crime = beast => more repression
- Steen, Reijnierse & Burgers 2014; Reijnierse, Burgers, Krenmayr & Steen (submitted)
 - Reading about crime increases people's overall preference for enforcement, regardless of the metaphorical frame
 - => Under which circumstances do metaphors influence reasoning?

XP design

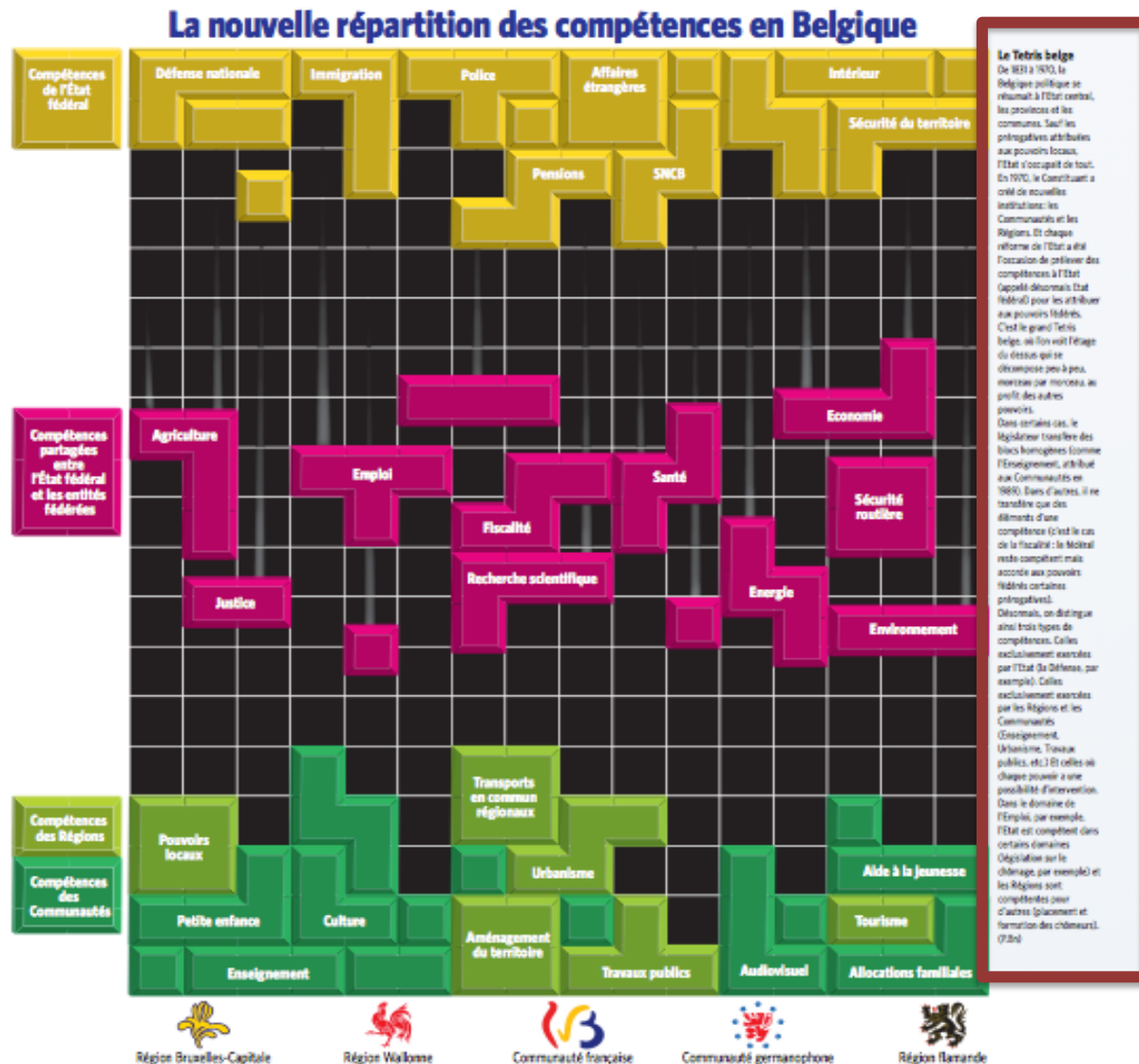
- Central questions
 - Does the Tetris metaphor have an impact on the representations of Belgian federalism by the citizens?
 - If it does, what type of impact?

Tetris Metaphor

- 2 experiments (Online, limeSurvey protocol)
 - Experiment 1 (2013) => *Metaphor and the Social World* (to appear)
 - Experiment 2 (2014)

Experiment 1 in a nutshell

Experimental material - Image



Experimental material - Text

Le Tetris belge

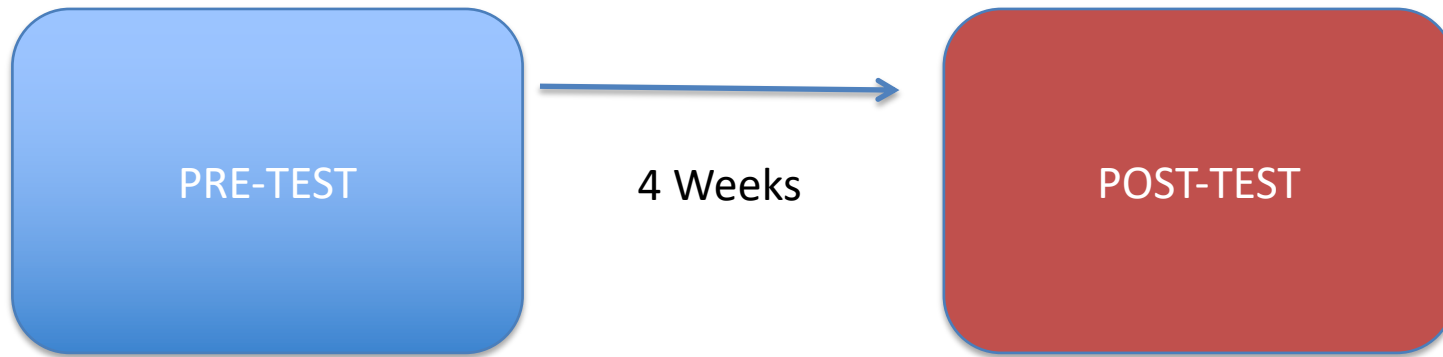
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The Belgian tetris

From 1831 to 1970, Belgium came down to the central state, the provinces and the municipalities. Except for the prerogatives devolved to the local authorities, the State took care of everything. In 1970, the constituent power created new institutions: communities and regions. And every state reform has been the occasion to take competences from the state (from there on called the federal state) to redistribute them to federal authorities. This is the big Belgian Tetris, where we see the upper floor that is falling apart (decomposing) , block by block, at the benefit of other authorities. In certain cases, the legislator is transferring homogeneous blocks (like education, handed over to the communities in 1989). In other cases, what is involved is just transferring some elements of a competence (it's the case of tax system: the federal state remains competent but assigned certain prerogatives to the federal entities). From now on, we therefore make a distinction between three types of competences. The ones that are exclusively exercised by the federal state (like Defense, for example). The ones that are exclusively exercised by the Regions and Communities (Education, Town planning, Public works, and so on). And the ones for which each power has some possibility of intervention. In the area of employment, for instance, the (federal) State is competent for certain domains (unemployment legislation, for instance) and the Regions are in charge of other ones (training courses of unemployed people).

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INPUT

FREE DESCRIPTION TASK

Describe Beglian federalism in your own terms

IMAGE ASSOCIATION TASK

POLITICAL KNOWLEDGE QUESTIONS

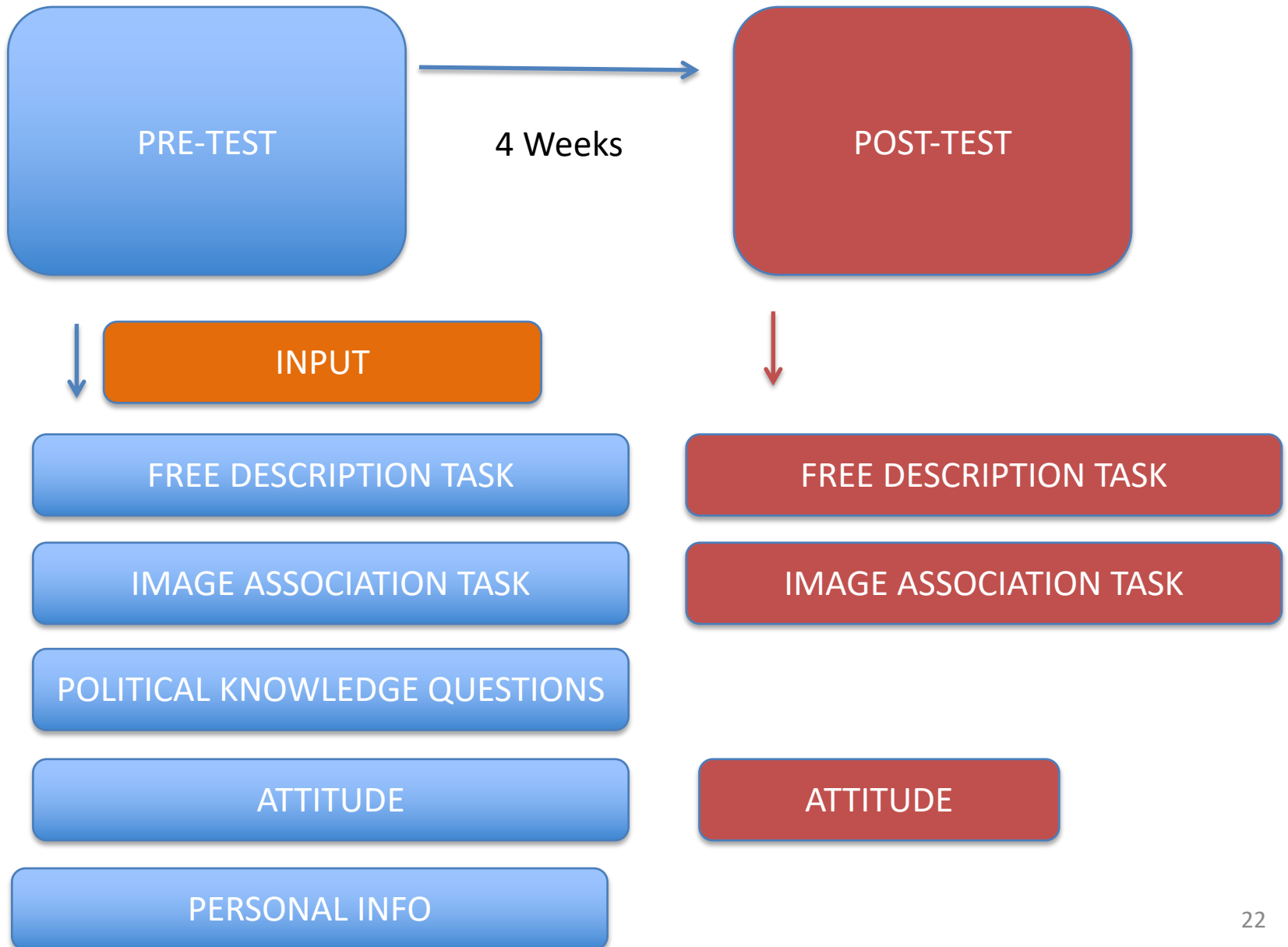
Which political function can you fulfill without being directly elected?

ATTITUDE

"To what extent should Flemish people and Walloon people live together in the same country?"

PERSONAL INFO

"Belgium is like a couple, a better communication will pacify the relations between Flemish and Walloon people"

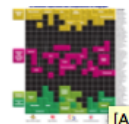


XP1 - Participants & method

- Pre-test: N = 493 / Post-test: N = 300
- Linguistic analysis of the **description task**
 - *To what extent do the participants talk differently about Belgian federalism when having been exposed to the input material?*
 - 1) Length of the productions
 - 2) Lexical influence of the experimental text
 - 3) Keyword analyses
 - 4) Corpus-based content analysis

XP1 – Main findings

- Subject who have been submitted to the textual stimulus tend to:
 - Produce longer descriptions
 - Be lexically influenced by the input text to a higher extent
 - Use different words in their descriptions
 - To frame their answers differently
- No differences anymore in the post-test
- No impact of the image



XP1 – Main findings

- Central question

(1) Does the Tetris metaphor have an impact on the representations of Belgian federalism by the citizens?

- Results for the image condition tend to suggest there is no direct impact of the Tetris metaphor on the representations of the participants
- However, **reading the text** appears to have an **impact** on the representations of the participants, which might suggest an indirect impact of the metaphor.

Experiment 2

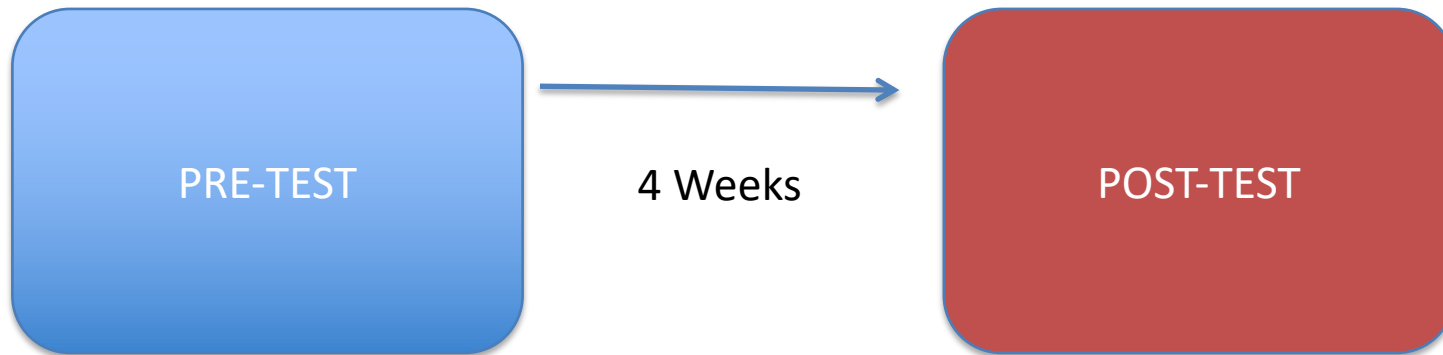
- 2 versions of the experimental text
 - Original version with the Tetris metaphor
 - Neutral version without the Tetris metaphor

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3 XP Conditions

TETRIS
CONDITION

NEUTRAL
CONDITION

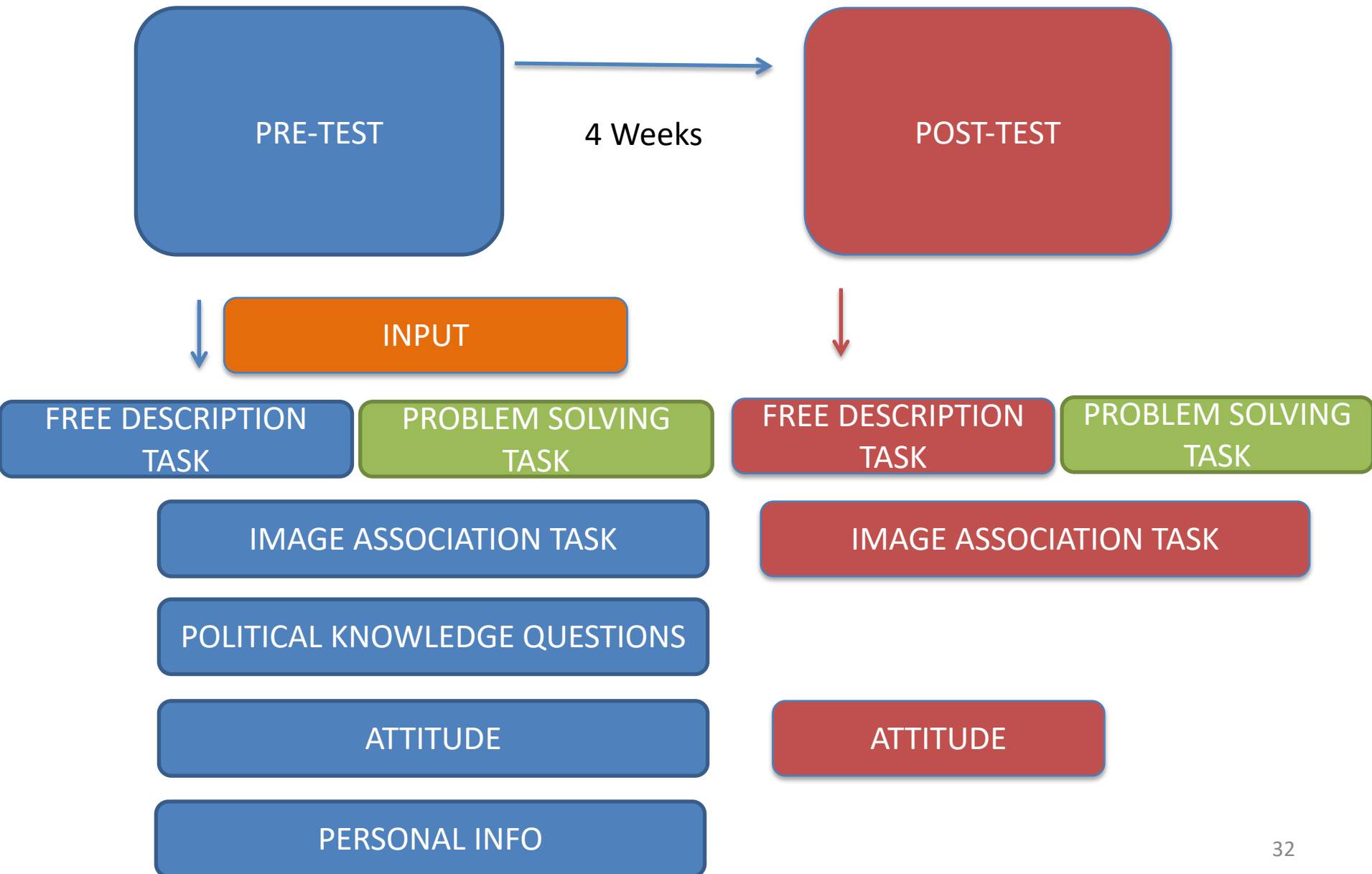
CONTROL
CONDITION

The Tetris video

From 1985 to 1995, Tetris was one of the most popular video games, and the most popular. It was the first video game to be ported to the Atari 2600. The game was designed by Alexey Pajitnov, a Soviet computer scientist, and was first published in 1985. The game was designed to be played on a computer screen, and was first published in 1985. The game was designed to be played on a computer screen, and was first published in 1985. The game was designed to be played on a computer screen, and was first published in 1985.

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Participants

PRE

	Description	Solution	Total
Control condition	106	89	195
Neutral condition	110	95	205
Tetris condition	110	96	206
Total	326	280	606

POST

	Description	Solution	Total
Control condition	80	65	145
Neutral condition	76	75	151
Tetris condition	91	68	159
Total	247	208	455

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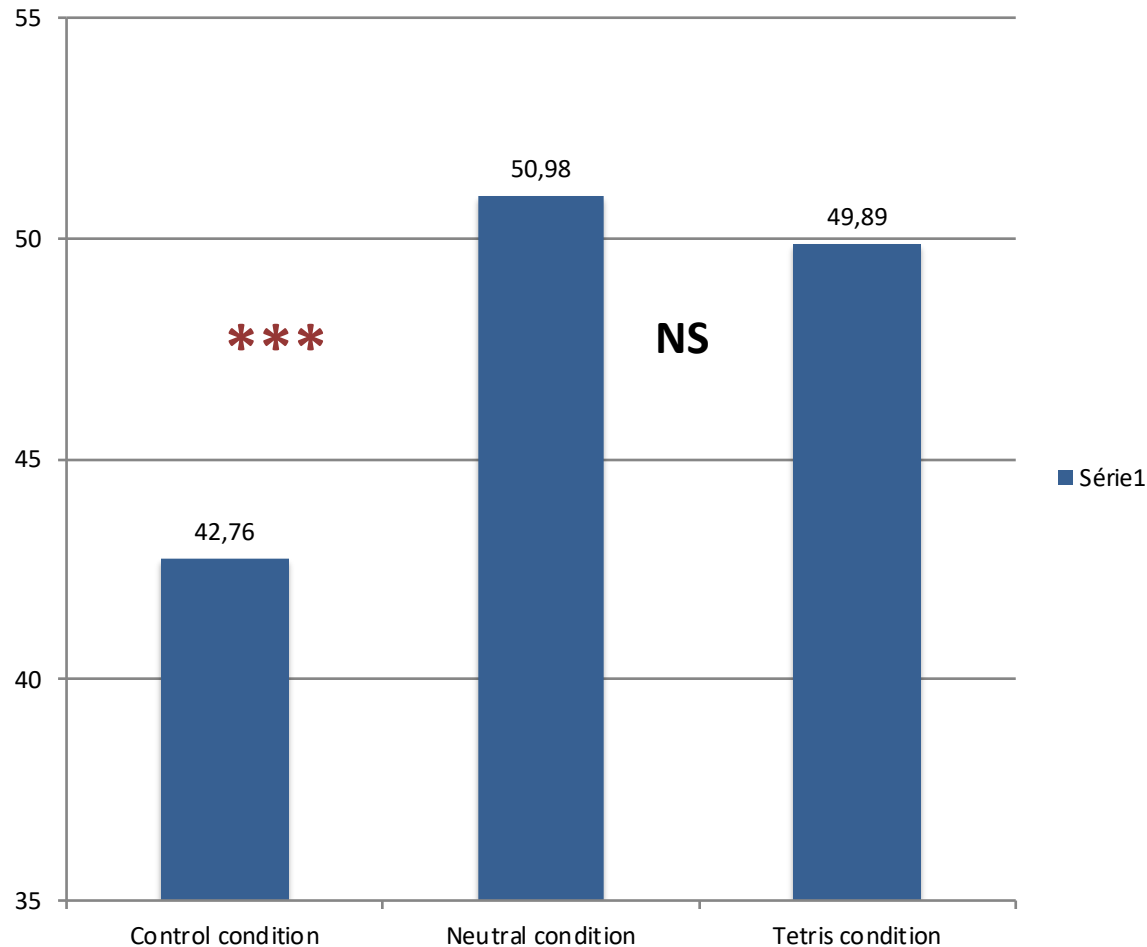
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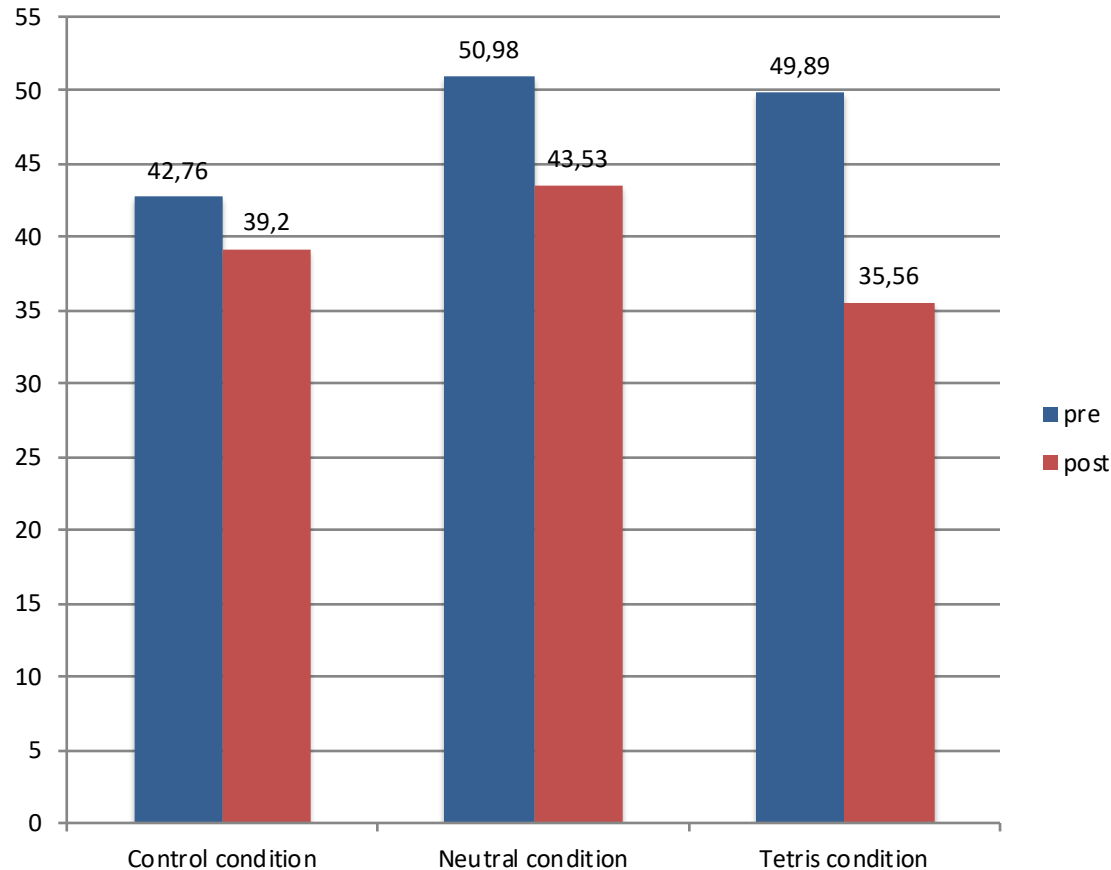
Experiment 2 - Results

- *To what extent do the participants talk differently about Belgian federalism when having been exposed to the input material?*
 - Political science analysis
 - Linguistic analysis of the description task
 - 1) Length of the productions
 - 2) Lexical influence of the experimental text
 - 3) Keyword analyses
 - 4) Corpus-based content analysis

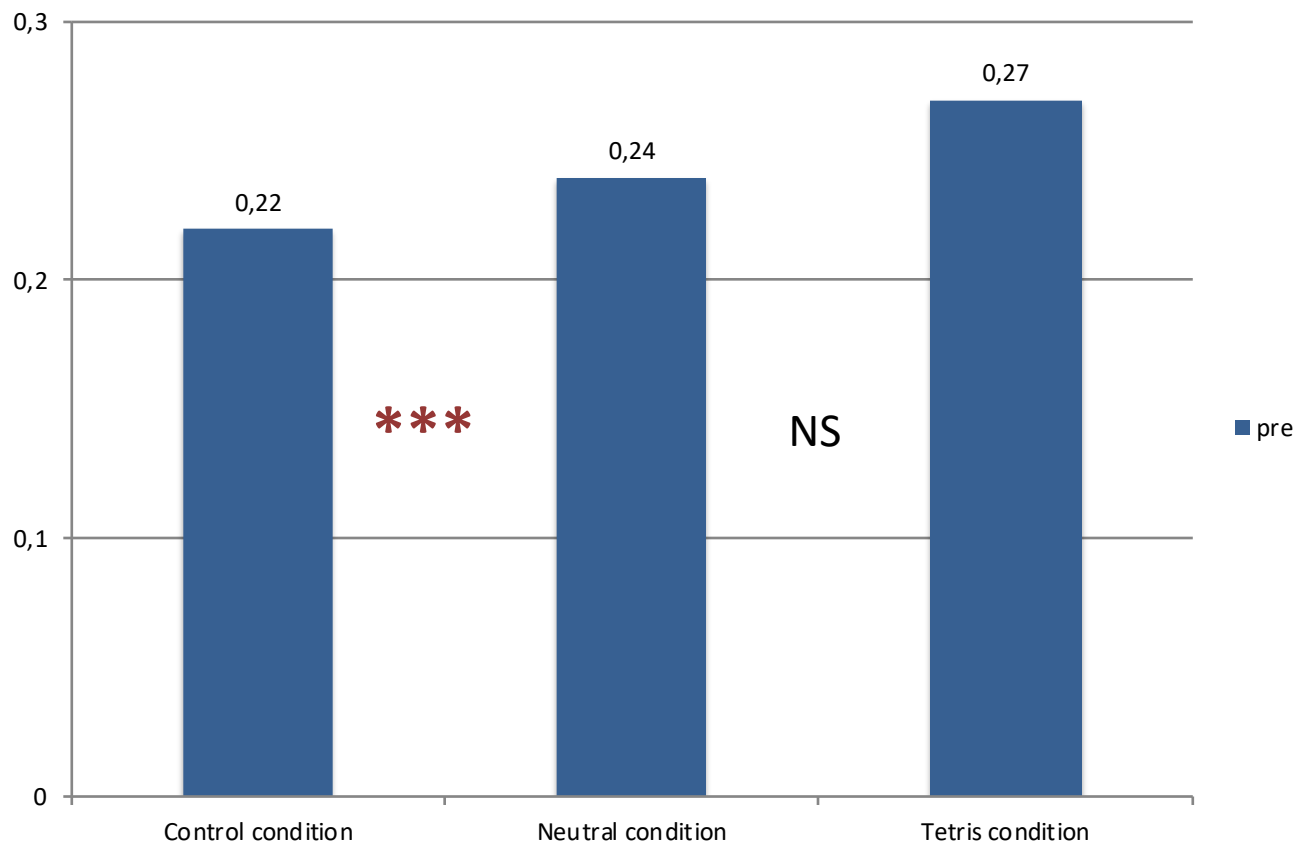
Results (1) – Length of the descriptions (pre)



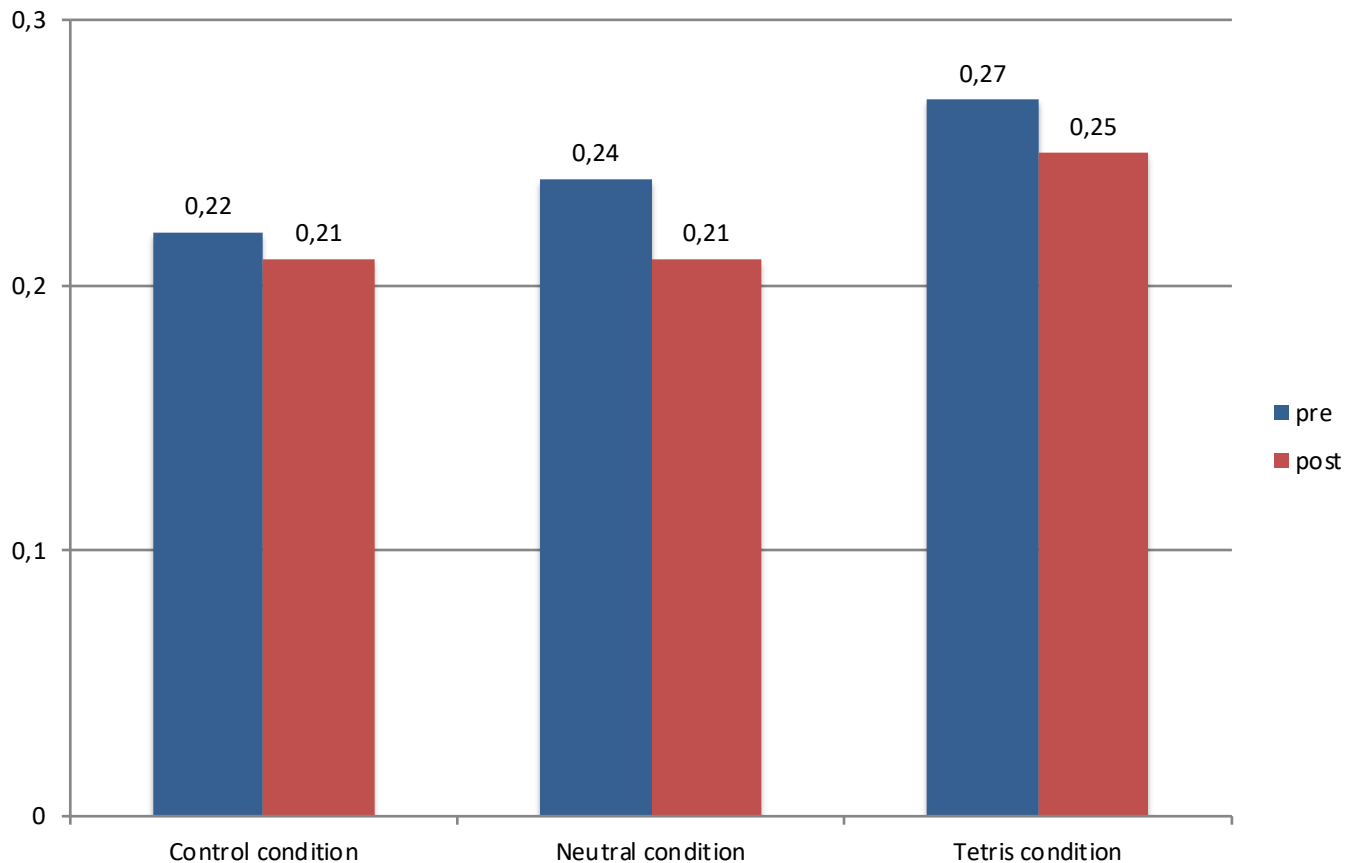
Results (1) – Length of the descriptions (pre+post)



Results (2) – Lexical coverage (pre)



Results (2) – Lexical coverage (pre+post)



Results

- Keyword analyses + content analysis
 - 6 subcorpora from the descriptions of the participants
 - Wordsmith Tools (Keywords)
 - Unitex (Content)

	PRE	POST
Control condition	4.560 words	3.182 words
Neutral condition	5.796 words	3.344 words
Tetris condition	5.691 words	3.318 words

Neutral condition vs. Control condition (PRE)

Key word	Freq. NEUTRAL	Freq. NO INPUT	Keyness	P
ETAT	106	31	27,91	***
COMPETENCES	88	41	11,65	***
PARTIE	10	0	11,65	***
TYPES	10	0	11,65	***
DEPUIS	20	3	10,39	***
CENTRAL	18	3	8,65	***
OCCUPAIT	7	0	8,15	***
COMMUNAUTE	9	27	-14,22	***
PAYS	13	34	-15,41	***
SYSTEME	21	46	-16,51	***
FLAMANDE	4	21	-17,08	***
REGION	6	30	-23,72	***

Level of significance: $p < .001$

Tetris condition vs. Control condition (PRE)

Key word	Freq. TETRIS	Freq. NO INPUT	Keyness	P
ÉTAT	184	67	35,70	***
COMPETENCES	99	41	16,06	***
POUVOIRS	42	11	13,46	***
INSTITUTIONS	15	1	11,94	***
PARTIE	10	0	11,87	***
PETIT	10	0	11,87	***
CERTAINES	24	5	9,88	***
DEFENSE	15	2	8,71	***
NOUVELLES	7	0	8,31	***
TYPES	7	0	8,31	***
POLITIQUE	11	24	-8,10	***
NOTRE	4	14	-8,20	***
RÉGION	12	30	-12,28	***

Level of significance: $p < .001$

Tetris condition vs. Neutral condition (PRE)

Key word	Freq. TETRIS	Freq. NEUTRAL	Keyness	P
PETIT	10	0	14,13	***
PROFIT	6	0	8,48	***

Level of significance: $p < .001$

The Belgian ~~tetris~~-federalism

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Results (3) – Keyword analyses

- Keyword analysis (summary)
 - Pre-test
 - Control condition
 - Higher frequency of words relating to Belgian federalism from an identity point of view
 - » *Brussels, Belgium, Flemish*
 - Broad political terms
 - » *Country, gouvernement*
 - Neutral & Tetris conditions
 - More specific terms
 - » *State, competence, institutions,...*
 - Neutral vs. Tetris
 - No differences
 - Post-test
 - No differences

Results (4) – Content analysis

- Domain analysis
 - Different framing of the descriptions?
 - Deconstructing the Tetris
 - Tetris is a **game**
 - Tetris is a **puzzle game** // complexity of the system
 - Tetris includes **levels** (// federal entities) and **blocks** (// competences) moving between the different levels => construction domain
 - Construction of the lower level
 - Deconstruction of the upper level

Results (4) – Content analysis

- Content analysis
 - Different framing of the descriptions?
 - Defining onomasiological profiles of 5 domains related to the Tetris metaphor (Unitex)
 - Game domain
 - Complexity domain
 - Construction domain
 - Deconstruction domain
 - Transfer domain

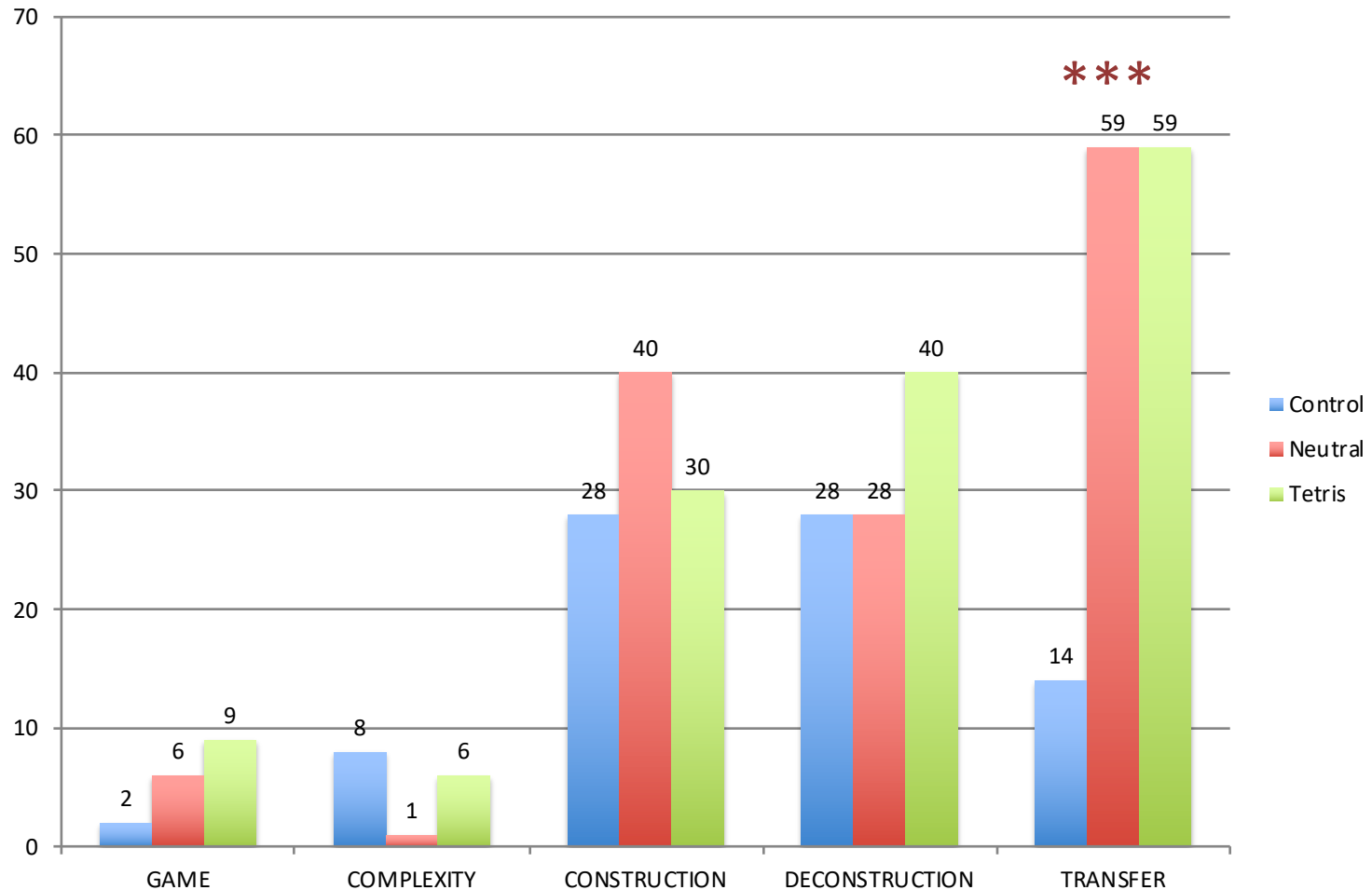
Onomasiological profiles

Fields	Expressions	Examples
Game	<i>case</i> ('square'), <i>compétition</i> ('competition'), <i>défaite</i> ('defeat'), <i>gagner</i> ('win'), <i>jeu</i> ('game'), <i>jouer</i> ('play'), <i>joueur</i> ('player'), <i>match</i> ('match'), <i>participant</i> ('participant'), <i>participer</i> ('participate'), <i>perdant</i> ('loser'), <i>perdre</i> ('lose'), <i>pion</i> ('pawn'), <i>puzzle</i> ('jigsaw'), <i>règle</i> ('rule'), <i>stratégie</i> ('strategy'), <i>tactique</i> ('tactics'), <i>Tetris</i> ('Tetris'), <i>vainqueur</i> ('winner'), <i>victoire</i> ('victory'),...	Les pièces ne s'emboîtent plus toutes et tout les cases empiètent un peu sur les autres. C'est le grand jeu du Tetris belge ou à chaque fois on déconstruit l'étage du dessous
Com-plexity	<i>casse-tête</i> ('headache', 'puzzle'), <i>cogitation</i> ('cogitation'), <i>complexe</i> ('complex'), <i>complexifier</i> ('make more complex'), <i>complication</i> ('complication'), <i>complexité</i> ('complexity'), <i>compliqué</i> ('complicated'), <i>difficile</i> ('difficult'), <i>difficulté</i> ('difficulty'), <i>ne pas comprendre</i> ('not understand'), <i>peu/pas compréhensible</i> ('little or not understandable'), <i>problème</i> ('problem'), <i>réflexion</i> ('thinking'),...	Système compliqué qui fait de notre pays un casse-tête constitutionnel. Ce qui fait que la résolution de problème des compétences doit passer par une labyrinthe de réseaux complexes entre le fédéral et le fédéré
Construction	<i>base</i> ('basis'), <i>bâtiment</i> ('building'), <i>bâtir</i> ('build'), <i>bloc</i> ('block'), <i>brique</i> ('brick'), <i>chantier</i> ('construction site'), <i>ciment</i> ('cement'), <i>construction</i> ('construction'), <i>construire</i> ('build'), <i>créer</i> ('create'), <i>échafaudage</i> ('scaffolding'), <i>édifice</i> ('building'), <i>étage</i> ('floor'), <i>fondations</i> ('foundations'), <i>immeuble</i> ('building'), <i>maison</i> ('house'), <i>niveau</i> ('level'), <i>pilier</i> ('pillar'), <i>stable</i> ('stable'), <i>structure</i> ('structure'),...	<i>Selon moi, le problème majeur du fédéralisme belge est la "construction" de ce fédéralisme.</i> Plus de compétences pour les régions en gardant un confédéralisme comme bloc.

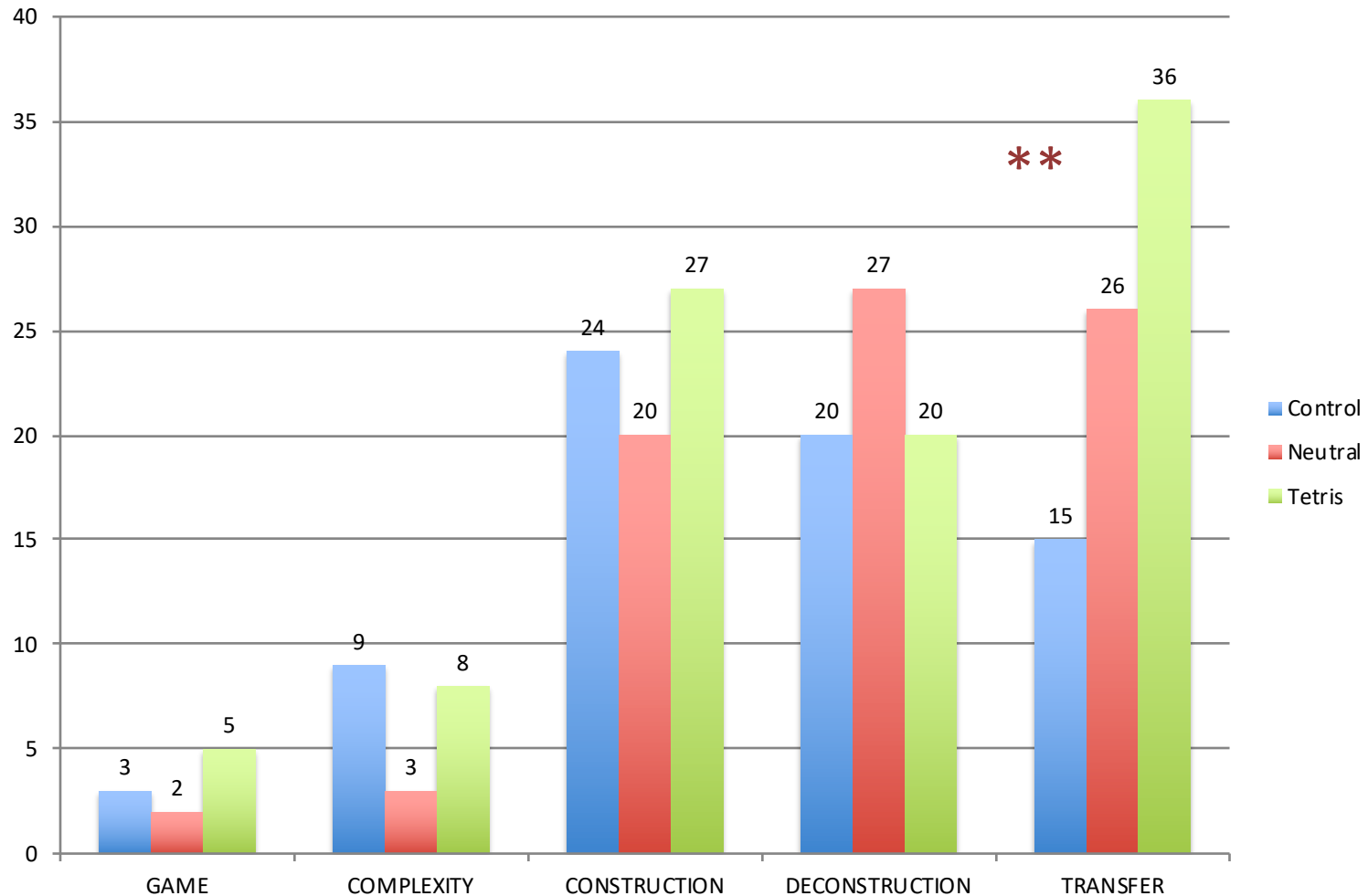
Onomasiological profiles

Fields	Expressions	Examples
Deconstruction	<i>abattre</i> ('pull down', 'destroy'), <i>clivage</i> ('divide'), <i>décomposer</i> ('break down'), <i>décomposition</i> ('decomposition'), <i>déconstruction</i> ('deconstruction'), <i>découper</i> ('divide'), <i>découpage</i> ('division'), <i>démolition</i> ('demolition'), <i>démolir</i> ('demolish'), <i>destruction</i> ('destruction'), <i>détruire</i> ('destroy'), <i>diviser</i> ('divide'), <i>fracture</i> ('fracture'), <i>morceler</i> ('divide up'), <i>scission</i> ('split'), <i>séparation</i> ('separation'),...	À l'heure actuelle, l'état est morcelé et il n'existe pas de solution évidente au problème. Le fédéralisme belge est la décomposition d'un pouvoir central en plusieurs unités fédérales
Transfer	<i>attribuer</i> ('allocate'), <i>confier</i> ('entrust'), <i>déléguer</i> ('delegate'), <i>délégation</i> ('delegation'), <i>donner</i> ('give'), <i>distribuer</i> ('allocate'), <i>obtenir</i> ('obtain'), <i>passer de ... à ...</i> ('pass on to'), <i>recevoir</i> ('get'), <i>redistribuer</i> ('reallocate'), <i>répartir</i> ('share out'), <i>répartition</i> ('sharing out'),...	après des années de querelles communautaires, il a fallu déléguer certaines compétences aux Communautés et aux Régions Et dans d'autres cas le Législateur redistribuait les pouvoirs seulement aux Régions et aux Communautés

Results (4) – Content analysis (pre)



Results (4) – Content analysis (post)



XP2 - Results - Summary

- The participants who have read the stimulus text tend to:
 - Produce longer descriptions
 - Use more words from the input text in their descriptions
 - Use different words i their descriptions
 - To stress different aspects of Belgian federalism
- // results from XP1
- Tetris metaphor?
 - Does not lead the participants to produce different descriptions
 - // Steen and colleagues

Discussion

- Framing?
 - Under what conditions can a given metaphor influence the perception of political issues?
 - ‘Raising questions about when metaphors do and do not influence reasoning’ (Steen et al 2014)
- Extendness?
 - Support for a given metaphor?
- Frequency?
 - How often have been exposed to a given metaphor?



**THANK YOU FOR
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