

Shaping citizens' representations and preferences of federalism: the impact of the Tetris metaphor in Belgium

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Belgium - The state of the Federation

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Discourse & Politics

- New “discursive institutionalism”

=> **Discourses matter in politics**

“ They exert a causal influence in political reality and, thereby, engender institutional change (or continuity)”
(Schmidt, 2008:306)

- Discourse

≠ **panacea** for explaining all institutional changes

= **must be taken seriously** as part of the story

(Panizza and Miorelli, 2013)

=> **Discourses contribute to explain institutional changes**

Assessing the impact of discourse on citizens' preferences of federalism

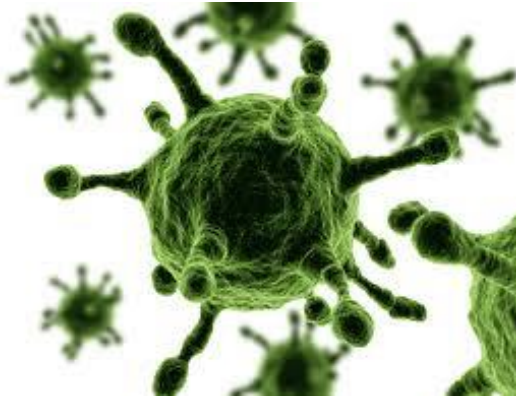
- Discourse on Belgium federalism has evolved since the 1960s: **From the “F word” to acceptance towards confederalism** (Deschouwer 2015).
- How discourses affect **citizens' own representations and preferences about Belgium federalism?**
 - Representation**: the way federalism is objectified and anchored in voter's mind.
 - Preferences**: institutional preferences about regional autonomy.
- For that purpose, **metaphors constitute a strong heuristic tools** to analyse how citizens' pref & rep are affected by discourses.
- B. De Wever: "Wallonia is like a Junkie vis-à-vis financial transfers".

The effects of metaphor: an interdisciplinary approach

- Impact of metaphor is a 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

CRIME

Thibodeau & Boroditsky 2011, 2013



MORE SOCIAL INTEGRATION



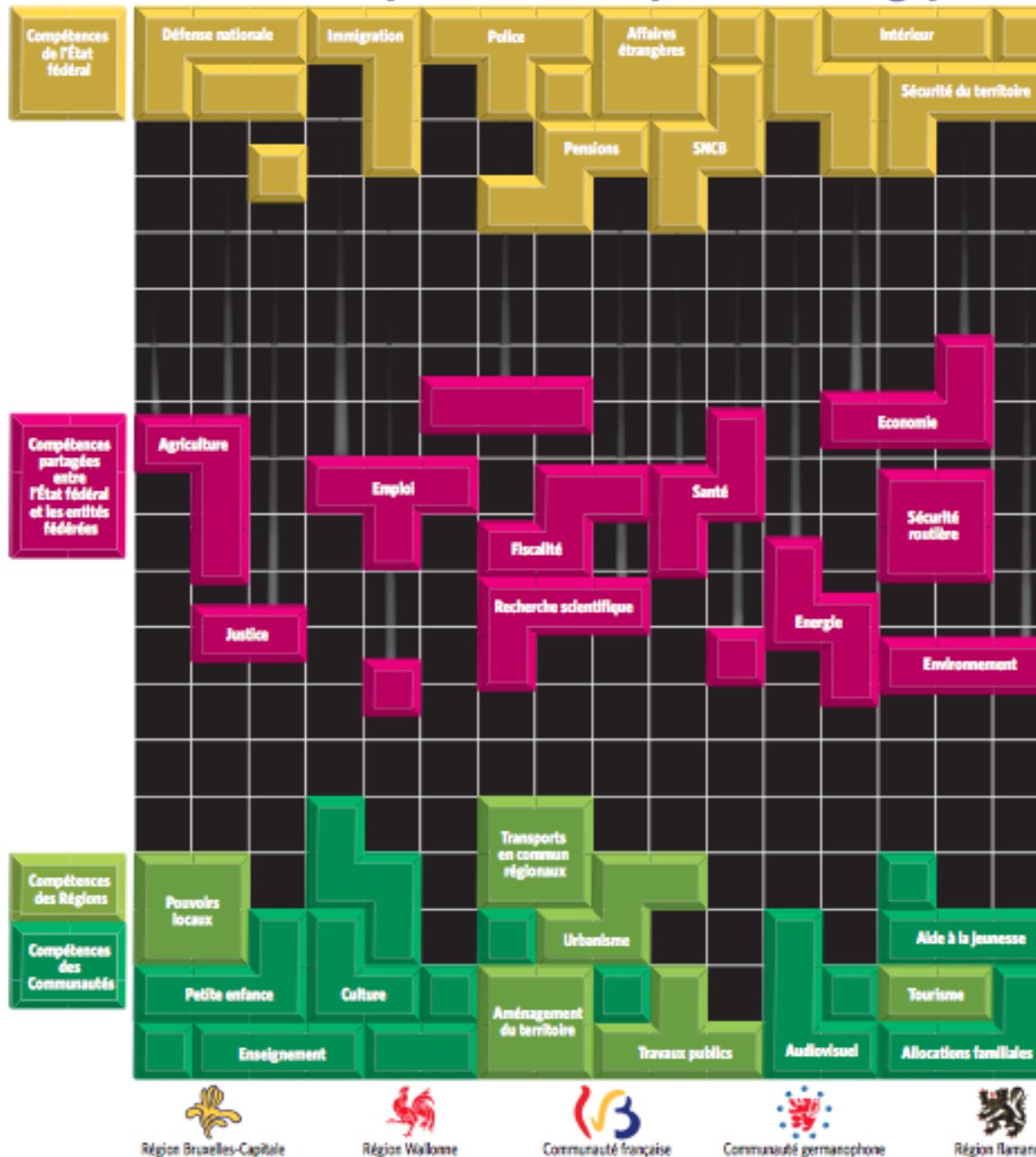
MORE REPRESSION

Methodology

- Experimental design: protocol



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: le Mémorandum de 1989 a accordé 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). (7.2)



The **Belgian tetris**

From 1831 to 1970, Belgium came down to the central state, the provinces and the municipalities. Except for the prerogatives attributed to the local authorities, the State was taking 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 attribute 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, attributed to the communities in 1989). In other cases, it is only transferring some elements of a competence (it's the case of the 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 a possibility of intervention. In the domain of employment, for instance, the (federal) State is competent for certain domains (unemployment legislation, for instance) and the Regions are competent for other ones (training courses of unemployed people).

Methodology

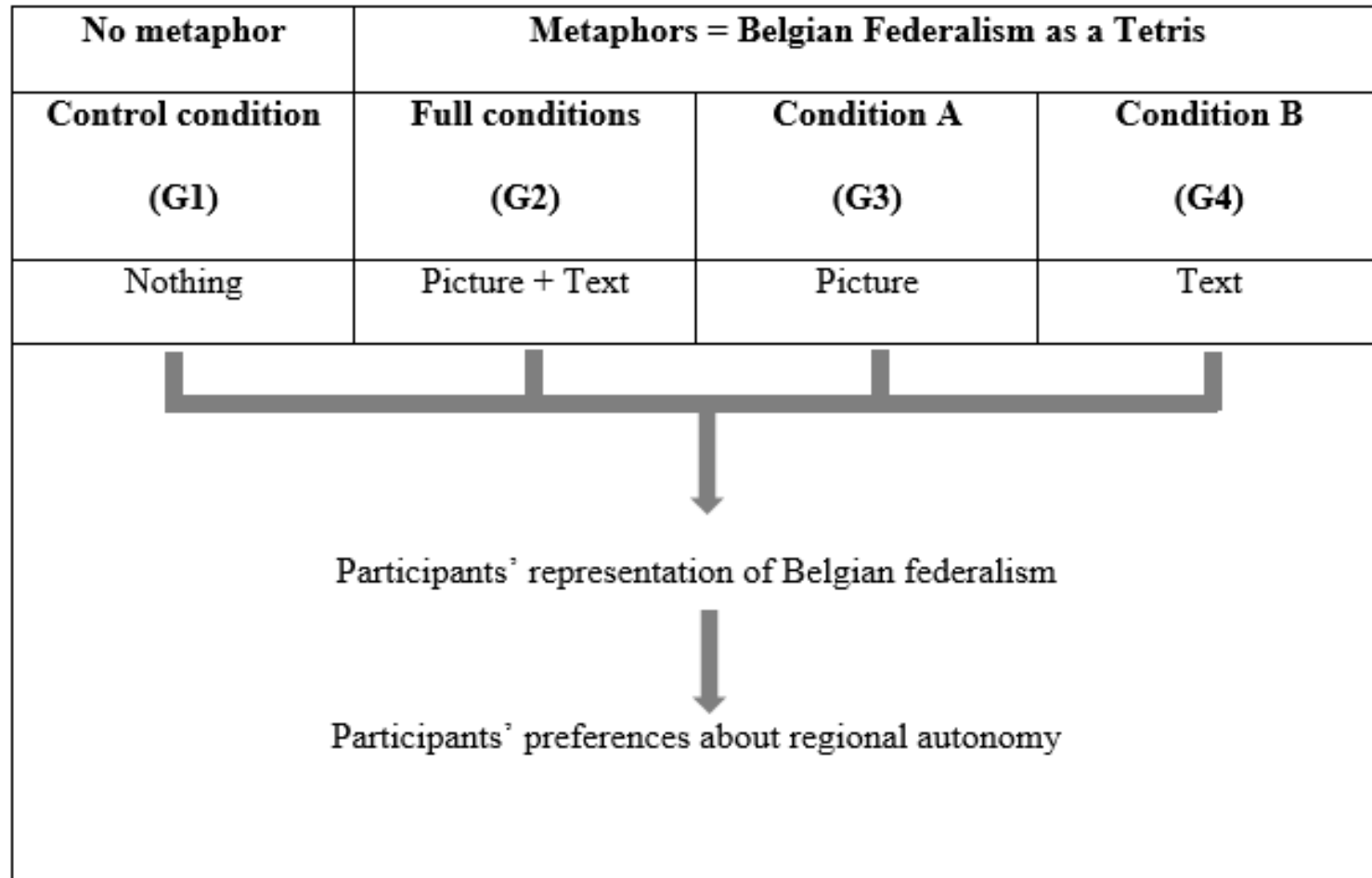
- Experimental design: 4 groups (students)

	N	%	PK (0-5)	PI (0-10)	Gender (% Men)	Belgian (0-10)	Walloon (0-10)
Control	131	25.8	2.85	5.96	49.2	8.15	6.44
Full	131	25.8	2.88	5.88	47.7	8.61	6.84
Picture	120	23.6	2.90	5.67	41.8	8.76	6.63
Text	126	24.8	2.83	5.64	44.4	8.51	6.34
Total	508	100.0	2.87	5.79	45.9	8.50	6.56
Chi ²	-	-	F _(0.127) =.078	F _(3.16) =.551	F _(0.138) =.554	F _(8.22) =1.51	F _(6.237) =0.458
test			p=.927	p=.648	p=.646	p=.328	p=.712

Key: PK= political knowledge, PI=political interest

Causal mechanism

Figure 1. Summary of the experimental research design and the causal mechanism



Hypotheses

Without metaphors, student participants would behave like the average “French-speaking voters”.

-H1: In absence of metaphor, community accounts would prevail in participants’ representations of Belgian federalism.

-H2: In absence of metaphor, participants are more unitarist while participants exposed to metaphor are more regionalist.

Two depend variables: operationalization

- **Representation of federalism:** participants' free task in their 'own words' (Lexical analysis)
- **Institutional preference:** devolution scale 0-10

=>**Linear regression:** controlling for Walloon and Belgian identities (0-10), political knowledge (0-5), political interest (0-10), gender (ref=female students).

(1) Results:

Participants' representations of federalism

	G1	G2	G3	G4	Chi-square tests
	(Control group)	(Picture +Text)	(Picture only)	(Text only)	
History	5,0%	12,8%	0,6%	25,8%	(57.82, df = 3)****
Institutional	56,1%	68,6%	48,5%	68,4%	(19.274, df = 3) ****
Identity	51,1%	32,1%	21,5%	25,2%	(34.99, df = 3) ****
Linguistic	7,2%	3,2%	4,3%	2,6%	(4.45, df = 3)
Organization	61,9%	66,0%	46,6%	65,8%	(16.866, df = 3) ****
Dynamic	40,3%	19,9%	22,7%	18,7%	(23.27, df = 3) ****

Sig. codes: ****p<.000

(2) Results: Participants' constitutional preferences

	Beta	Std. error	Pr(> t)	
(Intercept)	6.105	0.474	0.000	****
Gender	0.258	0.199	0.196	
Belgian	0.082	0.043	0.054	*
Walloon	-0.093	0.031	0.003	***
Political knowledge	-0.143	0.083	0.085	*
Political interest	0.124	0.045	0.006	***
<i>Groups (Ref= control group)</i>				
G2 (text + picture)	-0.469	0.265	0.077	*
G3 (picture only)	-0.248	0.273	0.365	
G4 (text only)	-0.658	0.267	0.014	**

N=481 observations

F-statistic: 3.894 on 8 and 462 DF (****)

R²= 0.063, Adjusted R²=0.047

Sig. codes: ****p<.000, ***p<.001, **p<.01, *p<.05, *p<.10

Discussion



**THANK YOU FOR
YOUR
ATTENTION**

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