

# Review of: "Conceptual oxymoron, oxymetaphor, and oxymetaphonymy: inclusive border and violent inclusion in close-up"

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This is an interesting article which, as other reviewers have noted, focuses attention on an important linguistic and rhetorical phenomenon. Other reviewers have addressed the stylistic issues (spelling, grammar, organization, use of specialized terms without defining them) and the need for a much more careful editing; I will focus on some conceptual issues that, in my view, detract from the argument.

First I might note that the article addresses two separate objectives: It is an analysis of some rather odd uses of two phrases, *inclusive border* and *violent inclusion*. It also presents an analysis of conceptual oxymoron in relation to metaphor. My comments will focus primarily on this second topic, oxymoron as metaphor, but will also suggest ways in which the discussion of the two phrases might be strengthened.

To begin with the first example, "Inclusive border" might equally or even more reasonably be classified as a tautology rather than an oxymoron. Merriam-Webster's first definition is "an outer part or edge - at the *borders* of the forest," their third definition is "boundary," as "on the border between New York and Canada; crossed the border into Italy." Both of these definitions imply inclusion at least as much as exclusion. The borders of a forest include the trees and other plant forms typical of the forest; the border of New York includes the cities, farms, etc. that constitute that state. (The borders of most forests are quite permeable in both directions: trees straggle outward into the plain, grasses straggle inward. The same is true of cultural borders, but political borders are usually quite precise.) In both senses, *inclusion* is just as basic a feature of *border* as *exclusion*. A forest is defined by the trees included within its borders; a state by the lands and the citizens included within its borders. The authors claim that "borders divide by definition," which is certainly true, but it is at least equally true that they *include* by definition – not "in some refined sense" but as a central function.

From this perspective, the author's first example, "Safe and **inclusive Border** between (sic) Slovakia and Ukraine" is a very odd usage, an oxymoron only because the context implies a weakening or even negation of the inclusion / exclusion dichotomy that the word *border* implies. Here, "inclusive" seems to be used as a synonym for "permeable," and as such is a qualifier but not necessarily an oxymoron: the farms, villages, and citizens of Slovakia are still *included in* that nation and those of Ukraine in that nation – even when they work, shop, and vacation on the other side of the "inclusive" (permeable) border. (The Cold War phrase, "*iron curtain*" metaphorically expressed the *impermeability* of that border.) The other three examples have a similar quality.

The case for “violent inclusion” is stronger, primarily because recent political and social uses of “inclusion” and “inclusive” have emphasized connotations of fairness: Merriam-Webster gives examples of “...promote *inclusion* in their workplace ...” and “Meaningful civic *inclusion*...” But in the context of political boundaries, it must be noted that *violent inclusion* within a nation’s borders is a frequent motive for and consequence of wars, as exemplified by the current conflict between Russia and Ukraine, and indeed by much of the historical expansion of the borders of the United States. The Cold War “*iron curtain*” represented a border characterized, literally, by *violent inclusion*. Thus, *violent* may be seen as a qualifier for *inclusion*, denoting the actions that lead to and enforce inclusion. “*Violent inclusion*” may be metaphorical in some contexts, hence a metaphorical oxymoron, but in political contexts it is often lamentably literal – and the objective is to expand and enforce what is included within the border, not what is excluded.

With respect to the second objective of the article, the example “*cruel kindness*” is more evidently an oxymoron, and might furnish the basis for a detailed discussion of the relationship of oxymoron to both irony and metaphor. It also illustrates yet another crucial aspect of metaphors, which often force a particular and often metaphorical interpretation of an associated word. *Kindness* implies both an emotional quality of an action and an action ordinarily used to express that quality. “*Cruel*” focuses on the action and implies a context in which the action is (ironically) not at all *kind*. “*Kind cruelty*” and the more common “*tough love*” afford a similar analysis.