

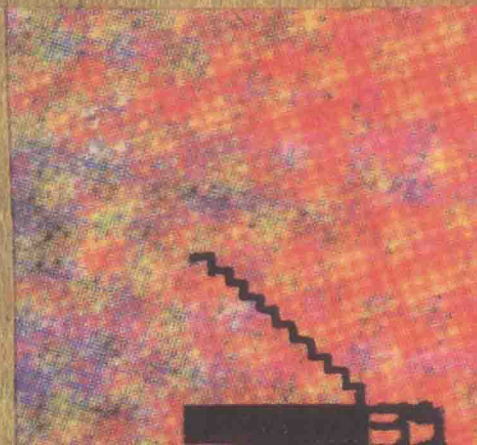
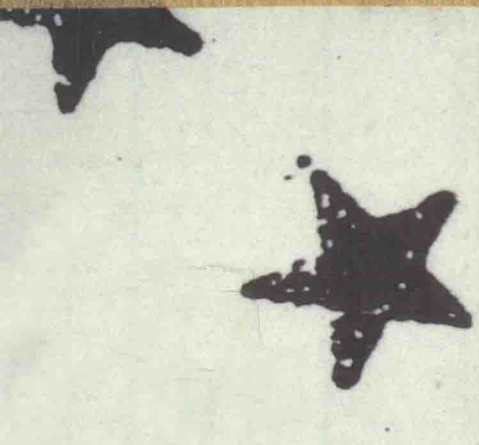
STUDIES IN
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UNDERSTANDING

METAPHOR IN

LITERATURE

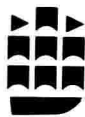
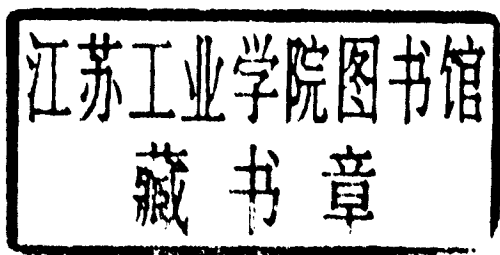
GERARD STEEN



UNDERSTANDING METAPHOR IN LITERATURE:

AN EMPIRICAL APPROACH

GERARD STEEN



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Preface

Metaphor has been the subject of such rich and varied investigation that it may be asked why it is necessary to add yet another publication to this stock. The reason is simple: although philosophical and theoretical speculation have been rife across the centuries, attributing a crucial function to metaphor for the way we make sense of all sorts of phenomena, such ideas have only recently been put to the test in empirical research on the actual usage of metaphor by people. This situation obtains even more for the particular aspect of metaphor that is the focus of the present book, understanding metaphor in literature.

Metaphor in literary reading involves psychological processes which have not received much attention from psychologists. It is true that psychologists have studied various aspects of metaphor processing in the recent past, but metaphor's specifically literary function, if it has one, has hardly been addressed. Nor have text-linguists and psycholinguists looked at literary text processing in much detail, so that there have not been many treatments of metaphor in literary reception from this quarter either. Finally, the few empirical researchers of literature with a psychological bent have produced interesting but scattered observations, mainly unconnected with mainstream psychological research on metaphor.

That metaphor in literary reception involves psychological processes is due to the fact that reception is a mental process taking place on the basis of individual acts of reading. If this seems a superfluous observation, it has been largely ignored by linguistics and literary theory, the other two disciplines that have a stake in the study of metaphor in literary reception. There is little informed attention to psychology in the writings of most linguists, who have mainly concerned themselves with the formal characteristics of metaphor. Linguists have been the originators of what has come to be known as the two-stage theory, which privileges literal meaning over other kinds of meaning, but this grammatical point of view does not translate directly into a two-stage psychological process. This difficulty,

however, has not had a great effect upon the way most linguists have subsequently conceived of the role of literal and metaphorical meaning in actual usage.

Since Aristotle, literary critics and theorists have speculated on the aesthetic function of metaphor in literature. Metaphor, they have asserted, is especially suited to opening the eyes of the reader to previously unnoticed aspects of reality, and to expressing vehement or subtle emotions. To what extent these ideas about the cognitive and affective function of metaphor can be seen reflected in the actual processing of metaphor in literature by readers, however, has not been part of their concern. Although it is true that reading and interpretation have been at the centre of literary studies, literary scholars and critics have been largely interested in their own acts of reception, eventually to be laid down in professional publications. This kind of activity bears a very tenuous relationship with 'ordinary' literary reading.

How readers understand metaphors in literature is therefore still a very unclear matter. If the essential functions accorded to metaphor by a long tradition of thinking amounts to anything in the case of literature, it ought to be possible to collect evidence from the behaviour of readers which corroborates this view. It is the aim of this study to present aspects of an empirical theory of metaphor in literary reception and to show how evidence can be collected from readers' processing of metaphor in literary texts, in order to evaluate how that processing relates to the function of metaphor in literature.

The book is divided into three parts. Part One is called 'Reader, Text, Context'. It will provide an account of the empirical study of understanding metaphor in literature by discussing present-day developments in psychology and linguistics (Chapter 1) and literary theory (Chapter 2). I will argue that metaphor processing is affected by the three factors of text, reader, and context, and that understanding metaphor in literature can be conceptualized as embodying one specific type of configuration of these factors. In Chapter 3 I will make a first attempt at examining whether there is an observable and determinate relation between metaphor processing and literary reading by presenting two empirical studies on the relation between readers' experience of literariness and metaphors. Text, reader, and context variables were manipulated in order to investigate their effect on the experience of literariness through metaphors.

Part Two is concerned with 'Processes'. Understanding metaphor in literature is not a unitary process, and a number of processing distinctions are proposed in the context of the psychology of reading in Chapter 4. These distinctions are further developed by means of a series of pilot studies in thinking out loud about literary texts, which are presented in Chapter 5. This in turn leads on to a comparative study of the incidence of

various kinds of metaphor processing in literary and journalistic reception in Chapter 6.

In Part Three, called 'Properties', I turn to the role of differences between metaphors. Chapter 7 presents a theoretical framework for the conceptualization and measurement of differences between metaphors. Literary and journalistic metaphors are then compared in Chapter 8 by means of two rating studies designed to tap five basic metaphor dimensions which can be presumed to be valid for all metaphors. Chapter 9 examines the effect of two of these dimensions, one cognitive and one affective, on the processing data reported in Chapters 3 and 6. In Chapter 10, I will discuss the bearings my findings have on linguistic, psychological, and literary approaches to metaphor.

The theories and hypotheses put forward in this book have been tested by means of a statistical analysis of data collected from readers of literature (Chapters 3, 6, 8, and 9). I have taken care not to bother the non-initiated reader with extensive discussions of technical points about figures. All necessary details regarding the test statistics have been moved to end notes, and I have attempted to explain the results of most tests in succinct and common language. Given the experimental nature of my research, though, it is unavoidable that students of language and literature with a more traditional training will have to deal with a partially unfamiliar type of academic discourse. I trust they will soon feel sufficiently at ease with cognitive psychology to appreciate its use as a fruitful approach to the study of understanding metaphor in literature.

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Contents

Preface	ix
Publisher's acknowledgements	xii
Author's acknowledgements	xiii

Part one: Reader, text, context

CHAPTER 1	<i>From metaphor as cognition to metaphor in discourse processing</i>	3
	1.1 The cognitive turn	3
	1.2 Conceptual and linguistic metaphor: A structural view	6
	1.3 Metaphor as non-literal analogical mapping: A processing view	10
	1.4 Analogical mappings in discourse processing	15
	1.5 Linguistic metaphor	22
	1.6 Conclusion	25
CHAPTER 2	<i>Metaphor in literary discourse processing</i>	27
	2.1 Literary criticism and the psychology of reading	27
	2.2 Metaphor in literary discourse	32
	2.3 Typically literary metaphors	37
	2.4 Typically literary use of metaphors	41
	2.5 Conclusion	47
CHAPTER 3	<i>Metaphor and literariness</i>	50
	3.1 Attention to metaphor	50
	3.2 Effects of literary socialization and degree of metaphoricity	52
	3.3 Effects of discourse context	63
	3.4 Conclusion	73

Part two: Processes

CHAPTER 4	<i>Aspects of metaphor processing</i>	83
	4.1 Aspects of text processing	83

CONTENTS

	4.2 Metaphor in text processing	90
	4.3 Metaphor in literary text processing	99
CHAPTER 5	<i>Metaphor processing in thinking out loud</i>	107
	5.1 Thinking out loud in the empirical study of literature	108
	5.2 Pilot studies in thinking out loud	115
	5.3 Conclusion	128
CHAPTER 6	<i>Metaphor processing in literature and journalism</i>	132
	6.1 Introduction	132
	6.2 Method	135
	6.3 Results	136
	6.4 Discussion	142
	6.5 Additional analyses: textual interest and reader performance in thinking out loud	146
	6.6 Conclusion	153
<i>Part three: Properties</i>		
CHAPTER 7	<i>Dimensions of metaphor</i>	161
	7.1 Metaphors and types of discourse	162
	7.2 The role of the text	164
	7.3 Dimensions of metaphor	167
	7.4 Metaphors in science and literature	171
	7.5 Poetic and constructed metaphors	178
	7.6 Conclusion: literary and non-literary metaphors	180
CHAPTER 8	<i>Literary and journalistic metaphors</i>	183
	8.1 Dimensions and properties of 96 English-language metaphors	184
	8.2 A follow-up study with 164 Dutch metaphors	196
	8.3 Conclusion	206
CHAPTER 9	<i>Properties and processes</i>	214
	9.1 Metaphor properties	215
	9.2 Properties and processes in underlining	218
	9.3 Properties and processes in thinking out loud	224
	9.4 Conclusion	230
<i>Conclusion</i>		
CHAPTER 10	<i>Understanding metaphor in literature</i>	241
	Bibliography	248
	Name Index	257
	Subject Index	260

PART ONE

Reader, Text, Context

CHAPTER ONE

From metaphor as cognition to metaphor in discourse processing

1.1 The cognitive turn

Until quite recent times, metaphor was seen by most linguists, philosophers, and other researchers of language as a linguistic oddity, lying outside the centre of their daily occupations. Metaphor was 'deviant', *'impropre'*, *'uneigentlich'* (Mooij 1976: 8). It was regarded as 'fancy language' used by poets, politicians, or people otherwise mentally unbalanced. Statements like (1–3) were considered to lie outside the rules of language:

- (1) Juliet is the sun (Shakespeare)
- (2) Religion is the opium of the people (Karl Marx)
- (3) Football is war (Rinus Michels)

As a consequence of its alleged odd status, metaphor was not deemed worthy of a place at the core of linguistics. Its study was hence mainly left to the literary critics.

At the end of the 1970s, however, landmark publications such as Ortony (1979a), Honeck and Hoffman (1980), and Lakoff and Johnson (1980) completed what may be called the 'cognitive turn' in metaphorology. From the resurgence of metaphor' (Sampson 1981), through its promotion to a position as 'the figure of figures' (Culler 1981c), we arrived at 'the ubiquity of metaphor' (Paprotté and Dirven 1985). Dirven and Paprotté (1985: viii), for instance, say that metaphor is now seen as 'being situated in the deepest and most general processes of human interaction with reality'. It is a cognitive mechanism, 'helping in the construction of a conceptual world with its own laws' (1985: viii). Metaphor has become intelligible as a highly revealing instance of the human capacity for making sense. This cognitive approach to metaphor has grown into one of the most exciting fields of research in the social sciences, with psychologists leading the way for cognitive linguists, anthropologists, and poeticsians.

Illustrations of the cognitive power of metaphor are readily given. If Juliet is the sun, then she is the centre of the speaker's universe. If religion is the opium of the people, then it keeps them happy but incapable of independent judgement and action. And if football is war, then almost anything is allowable to attain the goal of victory. Other consequences of (1-3) may be imagined without difficulty. These examples show how common rules of inference also apply to metaphors, producing implications and entailments of varying validity (Lakoff and Johnson 1980).

Metaphor has thus become comparable to other instruments of conceptualization, like models and theories in folklore and science. This was foreseen before the current fashion in metaphor studies in such seminal philosophical publications on metaphor as Black (1962), Turbayne (1963), and Hesse (1966). Other important books developing the cognitive approach in more recent times are MacCormac (1985), Kittay (1987), Levin (1988), Soskice (1988), and Winner (1988). New collections have been edited by Haskell (1987), Van Noppen (1990), Fernandez (1991a), and Shen (1992). Moreover, Lakoff and Johnson's *Metaphors We Live By* has been followed by Lakoff (1987a), Turner (1987), Johnson (1988), Kövecses (1988), and Lakoff and Turner (1989). With the founding of the special journal *Metaphor and Symbolic Activity*, the institutionalization of metaphor as a specific domain of research in the social sciences was completed.

The revaluation of metaphor as an important topic for cognitive and social research has happened on a scale that does not have an equal in history: Van Noppen et al.'s (1985) recently published bibliography, covering the past fifteen years, contains more entries than the one by Shibles (1971), which deals with a previous period of more than fifteen centuries (also see the complement by Van Noppen and Hols, 1991). What is more, the subject of the above-mentioned collection of papers by Van Noppen (1990), *How to Do Things with Metaphor*, is of course not simply an allusion to one of the important approaches to metaphor in the twentieth century (the pragmatic tradition of speech act theory initiated by Austin); it also shows that the state of metaphor studies is regarded as mature enough for a consideration of its practical relevance and opportunities of application. We have come a long way from the traditional view of metaphor as a mere linguistic quirk.

The cognitive turn has had three significant consequences. First of all, metaphor has had its notorious stigma of abnormality or deviance removed. Note the recent well-known titles *The Rule of Metaphor* (Ricoeur 1979) and *Metaphors We Live By* (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). Metaphor has become the thing to be expected in cognition instead of the thing to be avoided in language. It is now much less the Aristotelian mark of genius, literary or scientific, and much more the property of all men, women and children. This makes metaphor an attractive object for interdisciplinary research into

the relation between language and thought and related topics, such as the social construction of reality.

The second consequence of this new situation is less fortunate. For with metaphor's conquering of the social sciences, it has lost its comfortably clear character as an apparently well-defined problem within rhetoric and poetics. As noted above, modern metaphorology incorporates work by psychologists and other social scientists, besides both familiar and novel variants of semantic and pragmatic analysis. Dirven and Paprotté (1985: ix), representatives of one recent approach to metaphor within the framework of cognitive linguistics, go much further when they claim: 'One main result of metaphor research in linguistics and psychology has been that the disciplines now find themselves challenged to redefine their scope, their aims and their methods.' To what extent this is solely due to metaphor is a moot point, but it is true that changes are occurring both in the field of linguistics and in other disciplines involved with metaphor. This makes it more difficult to assess the results of modern metaphor research, for sometimes they come with their own novel scientific criteria for evaluation, as is the case in cognitive linguistics itself. Indeed, the tendency in cognitive linguistics to attribute a cognitive function to all metaphorical elements that can be detected in the language system is one which may be questioned from the angle of language behaviour. Some examples of metaphor as cognition as proposed by some cognitive linguists seem to be a product of the strong swing of the pendulum from metaphor as expression to metaphor as cognition. One aim of this book will be to redress the balance between research into the structure of metaphorical language on the one hand and the way it is processed in actual usage on the other. As will be argued in this chapter, there is no one-to-one relation between the results of linguistic analysis and those of empirical work on discourse processing. From this starting-point we may be able to make progress from the recently achieved theoretical perspective on metaphor as cognition to the development of a cognitive view of metaphor in discourse processing.

The third consequence of the revaluation of metaphor is the framing of a question which is a result of the other two consequences, and the main subject of this book. If people's use of metaphor has become part and parcel of our view of cognition, and its proverbial relation to literature has been undermined, what is the relation between metaphor and literature? Can we still speak of such a thing as 'literary metaphor'? And do metaphors in literature have a special cognitive function which can be differentiated from the cognitive function of metaphors elsewhere? Where do we have to look to find an answer to these questions: in language, in cognition, or still other areas related to literariness? To suggest answers to these questions will be my main concern in this book.

But first it is the goal of this chapter to trace some of the features of metaphor research in the new, cognitive paradigm. I will make an attempt in particular at restoring the equilibrium between metaphor as a kind of *expression* and metaphor as an *idea* in discourse. There is a distinction between *linguistic metaphor* and *conceptual metaphor*. Both can be regarded as *information structures*, but they have a basis of their own in the systems of language and knowledge. Both the linguistic and conceptual information structures of metaphors are processed by language users, including readers of literature, when they understand metaphors in discourse. In this chapter I will attempt to show how the linguistic and conceptual dimensions of metaphor can contribute in different ways to the on-going understanding process of metaphor in discourse.

I will begin by briefly introducing the important difference between linguistic and conceptual metaphor and place them in context. This structural view of metaphor is then complemented by a processing view in section 1.3, which will present the generally accepted cognitive approach to metaphor processing as a kind of analogizing. These sections form the preparation for section 1.4, which is concerned with the role of analogical mappings in discourse. The main points of this section will be two: (i) what may be *analysed as* an analogical mapping when we talk about linguistic metaphors *in texts* does not necessarily have to be *realized as* an analogical mapping *by readers* when we talk about their role in discourse processing; and (ii) when it *is* a matter of actual analogical mapping during discourse processing, this still does not require the postulation of pre-existing conceptual metaphors in the mind. These points go against the views of one of the most important metaphor theorists on the cognitive scene, George Lakoff. As a result, Lakoff's interesting proposal for a definition of linguistic metaphor will have to be amended – this will happen in section 1.5.

1.2 Conceptual and linguistic metaphor: A structural view

The most provocative linguistic account of metaphor that has emerged from the cognitive turn is that of George Lakoff and his colleagues. Theirs is a radical departure from the position that metaphor is a figure of speech. Instead, Lakoff (1986a) argues, metaphor is a figure of thought. Figures of speech are just a surface manifestation of such metaphorical figures of thought, and, indeed, figures of thought can be expressed by other means than language (Kennedy 1990). Lakoff and Johnson (1980) thus speak of

conceptual metaphor, suggesting that metaphor is a matter of understanding one thing in terms of another. Lakoff (1987a) approaches understanding, one of the basic objects of study for psychology, in terms of *gestalts*, whence experience, perception, and categorization are linked. As a result, the linguistic study of metaphor needs to be informed by the psychological study of cognition.

Lakoff and Johnson have become famous for their proposal that we understand arguments as wars, love as a journey, or theories as buildings. To give a less familiar example, consider (4):

(4) LIFE IS A GAMBLING GAME

I'll take my chances. The odds are against me. I've got an ace up my sleeve. He's holding all the aces. It's a toss-up. If you play your cards right, you can do it. He won big. He's a real loser. Where is he when the chips are down? That's my ace in the hole. He's bluffing. The president is playing it close to his vest. Let's up the ante. Maybe we need to sweeten the pot. I think we should stand pat. That's the luck of the draw. Those are high stakes.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 51)

Lakoff and Johnson claim that many such conceptual metaphors (standardly indicated by capitalization) have become highly conventionalized. There is nothing innovative or deviant about them, as can be seen from the plenitude of familiar linguistic expressions that are available to convey them. They argue that conventional conceptual metaphors belong to the common knowledge of the language user, and that they are stored as conceptual units in the mind. This is a structural view of metaphor as cognition or conceptualization: it is claimed that the available metaphorical structures in long-term memory are applied to the understanding of metaphors during discourse processing.

It follows that the verbal aspect of metaphor ought to be regarded as dependent on, or derived from, conceptual metaphor. Lakoff and Johnson have coined the term *linguistic metaphor* for the verbal manifestations of conceptual metaphor, and this is the term that I will also adopt here. It should be realized, however, that the relation of linguistic to conceptual metaphor is one of partial autonomy. There are various ways in which the linguistic expression of a conceptual metaphor can affect the appearance of the conceptual metaphor in question.

Grammar is one area in which this loose relationship between conceptual and linguistic metaphor can be noted. The cognitive approach to metaphor provides a sound explanation of the fact that one conceptual metaphor may manifest itself in many grammatical variations of linguistic organization (Dirven 1985). As can be seen from (4), the conceptual metaphor LIFE IS A GAMBLING GAME is realized by various grammatical means. 'He's