

HUMAN
COGNITIVE
PROCESSING 26

Researching and Applying Metaphor in the Real World

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John Benjamins Publishing Company

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Amsterdam / Philadelphia



The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences – Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48-1984.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Researching and applying metaphor in the real world / edited by Graham Low ... [et al.].

p. cm. (Human Cognitive Processing, ISSN 1387-6724 ; v. 26)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. Metaphor. I. Low, Graham.

P301.5.M48R48 2010

808--dc22

2010026150

ISBN 978 90 272 2380 7 (Hb ; alk. paper)

ISBN 978 90 272 8777 9 (Eb)

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John Benjamins Publishing Co. · P.O. Box 36224 · 1020 ME Amsterdam · The Netherlands

John Benjamins North America · P.O. Box 27519 · Philadelphia PA 19118-0519 · USA

Editors' introduction

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Few researchers in applied language studies and related disciplines can be unaware of the explosion of interest in metaphor in the last three decades. Metaphor is now studied in a wide range of academic disciplines, using data from many diverse contexts, and in many languages. This current interest in metaphor was initially driven by work within the cognitive linguistics tradition, still probably the dominant strand within metaphor research today. With the publication of *Metaphors we live by* (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980) and related articles, George Lakoff and his fellow cognitive linguists advanced the framework known as 'conceptual metaphor theory', or 'cognitive metaphor theory'. Much metaphor research still either works within this framework, or, increasingly, is testing its boundaries as an explanatory and predictive theory.

Although many of the stronger claims put forward by the developers of conceptual metaphor theory are still the topic of debate and challenge, the theory has offered insights that are central to metaphor research, and which underpin most current work, across many disciplines. These insights include:

- The ubiquity of conventional metaphor;
- The central importance of metaphor to the expression of abstract ideas;
- The ideological role of metaphor;
- The systematicity of much metaphor.

However, cognitive linguists do not – directly – set out to offer explanations for the social aspect of human behaviours, discourses and language, and many applied researchers therefore view their work as partial, albeit immensely valuable. In recent years, the gap in research that takes a social as well as a cognitive approach is gradually being reduced. There has been a slow but steady increase in the number and range of studies that explore metaphor in use in social interaction

and studies that are concerned with the implications and applications of metaphor. This developing strand is termed here 'real-world metaphor research'.

What characterises real-world metaphor research is its determination to take account of the importance of two key factors in theorising and empirically investigating metaphor: use in context, and language. Firstly, metaphor is assumed to be shaped by its use in contexts of human communication; how people use metaphor, for particular purposes and in specific situations, gives rise to the nature of metaphor. Furthermore, because use in context often involves other people, either directly or indirectly, social factors must take their place alongside cognitive factors. Secondly, the language of metaphor is assumed to be much more than simply the verbal expression of a conceptual mapping; the language resources available to a language user in a particular context will influence how metaphor is formulated and what can be done with it. The commitment of real-world metaphor research to these two assumptions influences the kind of research that is carried out. Real-world metaphor researchers often select research questions or problems in order to bring about positive change in contexts of use. They will try to collect naturally occurring data in the context of use, or, if doing more quantitative or experimental work, will attempt to maximise ecological validity. Research reports will include justification for the choice of data, methods of data collection, analysis and interpretation in terms of maintaining connections with the context of use. Metaphor identification procedures will be designed or chosen to cope rigorously with metaphor as it is actually used. The commitment to the importance of language in metaphor use leads real-world metaphor researchers to question some of the assumptions of conceptual metaphor theory, particularly those about the pre-existence of conceptual metaphors in the minds of individuals. No single united response to conceptual metaphor theory has yet emerged, however; as will be clear from this volume, real-world metaphor researchers deal with the issues raised by conceptual metaphor theory in different ways. A further implication of taking language seriously is the need to investigate metaphor at all levels of language, from genre to lexeme, and in all types of language, from poetry to the most prosaic, since it cannot be assumed that metaphor takes the same shape or works in the same way. Cross-linguistic studies of metaphor in use may suggest helpful interventions in language-learning contexts.

The eighteen chapters in this collection reflect this drive in the range and variety of their approaches to real-world metaphor research. They were written by researchers working within their various contexts to address practical problems in their own disciplines. The researchers are from diverse academic and applied fields, including language teaching, applied linguistics, psycholinguistics, literary studies, and computational linguistics.

While the chapters by Cameron, Deignan and Low were specially written for this collection, the remaining fifteen started life as conference presentations at the sixth conference on *Researching and Applying Metaphor* (RaAM), held at the University of Leeds, England, in April 2006. This was the tenth anniversary of a conference that has grown from small beginnings, and it is worth briefly summarising its history at this point. The first event in the RaAM series was also held in Yorkshire, England, at the University of York, in January 1996. A seminar, which brought together about 20 metaphor scholars and was made possible by a grant from BAAL (the British Association for Applied Linguistics) and Cambridge University Press, was organised by Lynne Cameron and Graham Low. The collection *Researching and Applying Metaphor*, edited by Lynne Cameron and Graham Low (1999), was developed from some of the papers from that first event. The second RaAM conference was held at Copenhagen, in May 1997, followed by the third at the University of Tilburg, the Netherlands, in July 1999. RaAM ventured outside Europe, to the University of Manouba, Tunisia, for the fourth conference, in April 2001. The fifth conference was held at the University of Paris in September 2003. Each successive conference has attracted more delegates and presenters; RaAM 6 had six parallel sessions, with over 100 delegates. A number of publications have resulted from RaAM conferences after 1996, including Collin (1999), Steen (2004) and Maalej (2005).

Raymond Gibbs has given a plenary paper at each of the six conferences up to and including 2006. He is the author of Chapter 1 in this collection, where he establishes a set of basic criteria for real-world metaphor research and hazards a glimpse into the future concerning research problems that need solving or which researchers are starting to explore. It is perhaps more usual to preface an edited collection of papers with a longish overview of the field by the editors, but in this case it was felt that Gibbs's chapter, based on his plenary talk, covered much of the relevant ground and could serve as the intellectual springboard for the other chapters.

Researching and Applying Metaphor in the Real World is then divided into three sections, each reflecting central strands of interest. The first comprises six papers on aspects of language learning. The processes involved in learning to use metaphor in a foreign or second language are explored, as are the selection and presentation of metaphors in language teaching materials and cross-cultural responses to metaphor. Researchers with experience of English Language Teaching (ELT) practice have contributed importantly to the development of metaphor within applied linguistics (for example, Low, 1988; Littlemore and Low, 2006). They have a concern with central and typical language use, as that is what their students need to learn. They are also concerned with the processes involved in

learning metaphors in a foreign language; a deeper understanding of these will help teachers to support learning more effectively. As well as the more familiar ELT world of the teenage and adult learner (Chapters 3 and 4 by Golden and Philip), the newer and expanding field of young foreign language learners is represented in these papers (Chapter 2 by Piquer-Píriz, with Amaya Chávez in Chapter 5 covering both primary and secondary levels). This section also includes a comparative study of Chinese vs English speakers (Chapter 6 by Wang and Dowker). The chapters also cover a range of approaches. While Piquer-Píriz and Golden report studies which involved working directly with learners, Wang and Dowker compare children with adults, Philip uses examples of learners' writing as evidence for her thesis and Amaya Chávez examines textbooks that learners use. The second section consists of studies that in different ways develop research methodology and classifications. They attempt to identify and analyse metaphors in a way that is robust, explicit, systematic and reliable, and they point to the inherent difficulties that are raised. They also reflect the interest of metaphor scholars in cross-linguistic and cross-cultural issues, here interpreted in the widest sense. The section begins with comparative studies of metaphor use between cultures separated by time (Tissari in Chapter 7 on Early vs Modern English; Terkourafi and Petrakis in Chapter 8 on the evolution of the computer 'desktop' metaphor over 30 years), and between different modes of communication (Terkourafi and Petrakis). The use of introspective studies with a small number of informants has sometimes led to comparative metaphor studies which are simplistic and even inaccurate. These contributions avoid that danger by employing data from language in use, as well as experimental data; and their findings point to the key role of context in shaping metaphor use.

Ahrens (Chapter 10) notes methodological problems with going 'below' the level of conceptual metaphor (and using, for example, Grady's primary metaphors), while Wallington (Chapter 11) argues conversely that analysts would be better off restricting the complexity of the sets of correspondences they attach to individual conceptual metaphors. Studies in this section contribute to addressing a range of weaknesses in some previous work in metaphor, including the fact that the frameworks put forward were rarely falsifiable, and that reliability checks have, until recently, rarely been undertaken outside psycholinguistic research (both points, as Steen and colleagues argue in Chapter 12, simply reinforcing the need for transparent, theory-neutral metaphor identification procedures). Caballero and Suarez-Toste in Chapter 13 pursue questions of appropriateness by suggesting the value of pairing insider and outsider perspectives in the analysis of specialised discourse, thereby removing some of the tension between -emic and -etic research (see Lillis, 2008). Brouwer too in Chapter 14 is concerned about appropriate analysis of

specialist discourse, but for her the problem is how to isolate and describe the poetic, if conceptual metaphor theory sees 'poetic' metaphor everywhere, including in non-specialist discourse.

The third and final section attends to metaphor in specific types of discourse, with each chapter making use of corpus data to understand more about the specific nature of metaphor in use. Although conceptual metaphor theory contributed to opening up research into metaphor in discourse and in particular the ideological rôle of metaphor, it fails to offer a sufficiently specific theoretical account for the intricate patterns revealed by new data analyses. Low in Chapter 14 finds no support for the assumption that metaphoric similes would appear frequently and in explanatory analogies when he examines four spoken university lectures. Similes in fact occurred very rarely, mainly in the more conversational style lectures, and when they did occur they were not global or overarching, but used to manage local interaction problems. Skorczynska Sznajder (Chapter 15) investigates the marking of metaphor in the discourse of business periodicals, in which various expressions around metaphor appeared to be designed to signal or anticipate metaphor use. Metaphor marking is found not to be related to the novelty or conventionality of metaphors but rather to their function in the specific discourse context and cotext. Mueller (Chapter 16) explores metaphor creativity in the genres of political speeches, and finds it often generated by creative combinations of metaphors. His close examination of particular metaphors reveals the difficulty of identifying mappings from discourse data, in turn raising doubt about theory which requires metaphors to be based exclusively on underlying mappings. Cameron's chapter (17) examines how people engaged in face-to-face conversation make use of a particular kind of expression related to metaphor that she calls "physical-and-speech-action" expressions. She traces the complex relations between language and context, moving between particular discourse settings and a larger corpus. Like Deignan in the following chapter (18), she finds conceptual metaphor theory too broad to account for the particulars of real-world language use, and suggests an alternative theoretical account. Deignan investigates the discourse phenomenon of metaphor evaluation using corpus techniques that she has developed for metaphor research. Corpus analysis shows multiword figurative expressions to be important numerically, and possibly more important than individual words as the locus of metaphoricality. Again, theoretical explanations of metaphor in discourse are required to take account of the highly specific characteristics of the evaluative force that metaphorical expressions develop through use.

Together, the collection provides a snapshot of real-world metaphor studies that attempt to uphold the highest standards of empirical research and to address,

without compromise, data of real-world phenomena, qualities that we hope characterise RaAM conferences and the recently established association that the conferences have led to. As ever, successful research studies, such as those reported here, open up possibilities for further work. The dynamic and ever-changing nature of human communication means that, while we are unlikely ever to reach a full understanding of it, researching metaphor use in human communication remains an intriguing and exciting venture.

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CHAPTER 1

The wonderful, chaotic, creative, heroic, challenging world of Researching and Applying Metaphor

A celebration of the past and some peeks
into the future

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This chapter provides a brief overview of the many intellectual accomplishments of real-world metaphor scholars during the past ten years, and offers my personal speculations about the course of future research on metaphor in the real world. I pay particular attention to methodological advances and the willingness of current metaphor scholars to address difficult problems in trying to study metaphor in various real-world contexts. This attention to methodological problems has direct implications for contemporary theories of metaphor, and several questions will likely attract the attention of metaphor scholars over the next ten years, many having to do with understanding the complexity of metaphoric meanings in context.

Keywords: metaphor, real world, future research

1. Introduction

Soon after I entered graduate school in cognitive psychology back in the late 1970s, I decided to study the topic of metaphor. Although I had support on this from my academic advisor, there were many people, both at my university and from elsewhere, who tried to dissuade me from starting out on this journey. “Metaphor is too hard”, “Metaphor is just poetry”, or even “Metaphor is a career-killer” were among the many pessimistic phrases I heard from others. But there was something about the topic that I found fascinating and I was convinced that understanding how metaphor worked and was interpreted could offer significant

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challenges to contemporary theories of language processing and human cognition, more generally. So I persevered, and after my first year, discovered the first bibliography that listed virtually every notable article that had ever been published on metaphor (Shibles, 1974). I took it upon myself to find every one of those articles, read them, and learn what I could about the topic. At this time, I spent hundreds of hours alone in a special area of my university library, digging deep, and thinking hard about what I soon discovered was indeed a difficult topic.

During this time “I wandered lonely as a cloud”, finding intellectual friendship only through the metaphor scholars whose work I read. But my reading of this work gave me several distinct impressions about the nature of metaphor research. First, people in my own field of experimental psycholinguistics were primarily studying people’s learning and understanding (and sometimes memory for) isolated metaphorical expressions apart from realistic social and linguistic contexts. Philosophers were also interested in isolated metaphorical expressions, yet even worse, in my view, focused their attention on only a few treasured examples such as “Man is wolf” or “Juliet is the sun”. Linguists generally studied the ways that individual verbal metaphors did, or did not, violate selectional restriction rules. In all of these cases, the debates concentrated mostly on the ways that the tenor and vehicle terms contrasted, compared, or interacted, as well as on the ways that verbal metaphors literally deviated from potential pragmatic contexts of use. The rise of cognitive linguistic research in the early 1980s significantly reoriented the study of metaphor and alerted people to the possibility that systematic patterns of metaphorical language directly reflected enduring patterns of metaphorical thought. Yet here too, the strong emphasis was on individual linguistic expressions apart from their real-world contexts, or what speakers/writers might intend to communicate by the use of these expressions.

Most generally, the interdisciplinary study of metaphor treated the topic as if it were (in Eliot’s words) “like a patient etherized upon a table”. Like pathologists hovering over a corpse, metaphor scholars would poke at “Man is wolf” or “kick the bucket” wondering if these were really dead or alive, sometimes turning the body over or around, to see if it looked different; does “Man is wolf”, for example, mean something different than “Wolf is man”? But, again, there was little concern with where metaphor came from, or what metaphor actually does when bouncing around in the real world of human speakers and interaction. Even as I, and others, began to conduct experimental studies in the late 1970s and 1980s, looking at the effect of context on different aspects of figurative language interpretation, the emphasis was really on how short discourse contexts facilitated people’s comprehension of some statement (like “Regardless of the danger, the troops advanced”) as having metaphoric as opposed to literal meaning. What metaphors actually communicated in real-life situations, the roles that metaphors had in structuring

certain domains of thought, and how metaphors shaped and reflected culture, were not topics that attracted much attention.

In 1995 Lynne Cameron and Graham Low invited me to attend a conference in York, England entitled “Researching and applying metaphor”, that gathered together a small set of metaphor scholars from a variety of fields and perspectives to share their common interests in understanding metaphor in research and applied contexts (Cameron & Low, 1999). I was excited to receive this invitation and was delighted when I attended the conference, met these other metaphor scholars, and realized that there were others out there who shared my interest in studying metaphor in the real world, and wanted to openly discuss some of the challenges that an ecologically-valid study of metaphor entailed.

My aim in what follows is to review some of the accomplishments within this tradition, note some of the enduring issues that metaphor scholars continue to struggle with, and offer some speculations on the future directions in interdisciplinary and real-world metaphor research.

2. The scope of real-world metaphor research

I want to begin by suggesting a number of general propositions about what is needed to research the way(s) in which metaphor is used in the real world, or can be applied to real-world issues.

Firstly, there is the simple point that speakers/writers use a whole variety of metaphor types when they speak or write; real-world metaphor research cannot be limited to the analysis of just certain types of metaphor.

Secondly, there is a similar need to expand theoretical perspectives to account for empirical data that is encountered (I shall deal further with this point below). It is fair to say in recent years that a significant amount of discussion and criticism has been focused around Conceptual Metaphor Theory (with about as much negative evidence presented against this perspective, as positive evidence shown to support it). Many real-world metaphor research programs, have however, embraced more than one theoretical perspective, or at least included some discussion of how particular data, whether they be linguistic examples/corpora, or psychological results, relate differently to different theoretical perspectives.

Both the above propositions derive from the more general requirement that real-world metaphor research should aim to be ‘ecologically valid’. By this I mean that it should not base its conclusions purely on constructed, decontextualized examples. What is good is that real-world researchers have begun to study metaphor in virtually every type of discourse, in fields as diverse as politics, the law, music or food. At the very least, such research collectively provides evidence on

the incredible ubiquity of metaphor in language, and just as importantly, shows the particular functions that metaphor has, often in different ways, across a variety of discourses. In a related way, this research reveals the incredible extent that metaphor infiltrates, and indeed significantly structures, a large variety of linguistic and non-linguistic domains, from conversation and musical lyrics, to dance and synaesthesia.

Thirdly, there is a need to examine metaphor across and within many different languages and cultures, and here the interests of real-world metaphor research coincide with those of 'traditional' research perspectives. The good news is that a vast number of languages have in fact been studied. Indeed, no language has ever been found to not use metaphor, and this research provides additional evidence on the ubiquity of metaphor in language and thought. A real-world approach has also made clear the extent to which language differences are rooted in varying conceptual or thought patterns, or conventional aspects of culture.

Fourthly, a real-world approach to metaphor needs to relate psychological states and processes, such as 'understanding', closely to the actual contexts in which those understandings are constructed, are used and/or are constrained. I argued in 1994 that, as regards understanding at least, researchers need to differentiate between four things:

Metaphor processing: The very fast, mostly unconscious processes that lead to metaphor comprehension in real-time listening and reading.

Metaphor interpretation: The slower, sometimes conscious, reflective processes associated with richer, deeper metaphoric meanings being understood.

Metaphor recognition: Both the processes by which ordinary people sometimes, but not always, recognize that a particular word or phrase conveys metaphorical meaning, and the strategies by which analysts identify metaphors in speech and writing.

Metaphor appreciation: The processes that lead to metaphors being appreciated or evoking affective responses.

It has sometimes been mistakenly assumed that the study of just one of the above can provide a comprehensive overview of metaphor understanding, and that a theory of metaphor recognition is equivalent to one of metaphor understanding. Perhaps the most serious error occurs when theorists embrace their own conscious intuitions about metaphor interpretation as if they were a direct insight into all parts of metaphor understanding. Real-world metaphor studies have, however, begun to examine all four aspects of how metaphors are understood, recognized, and appreciated.

Lastly, real-world metaphor research needs to explore situations which are as much social as psychological and to try and examine how both aspects interact. Thus there needs to be, and has been, research into: the neuropsychology of metaphor comprehension and use, metaphor use in different bi- or multilingual contexts (including the role of metaphor in translations), the development of metaphor understanding and use in children, and developing control over metaphor in second/foreign language acquisition.

3. Ongoing struggles

As researchers have struggled to put some or all of the above propositions into practice over the last decade or so, a series of themes have emerged, involving questions about the following six contrasts:

Diachronic–synchronic

To what extent are linguistic analyses of metaphors in speech and writing reflective of diachronic as opposed to synchronic processes?

Language as system – language as use

To what extent are linguistic analyses of metaphor reflective of generalizations about the language system as opposed to actual language use?

Idealized speaker/hearer – real speaker/hearer

Similar to the previous contrast, to what extent are analyses of metaphor in speech/writing reflective of idealized speaker/hearers or actual speaker/hearers in the real world?

Context and conceptual metaphor

How does one identify conceptual metaphors in real discourse? What replicable, reliable procedure can be developed to do this?

Intuitions of the analyst – objective assessments

Should judgments about metaphor (e.g., the identification of metaphorically-used words and phrases, the identification of conceptual metaphors) be performed relying on the intuitions of individual metaphor analysts, as opposed to through the application of a more objective procedure or assessment?

Mind–language/language–culture

What kind of inferences about human cognition and culture can analysts make from linguistic analyses of metaphor?