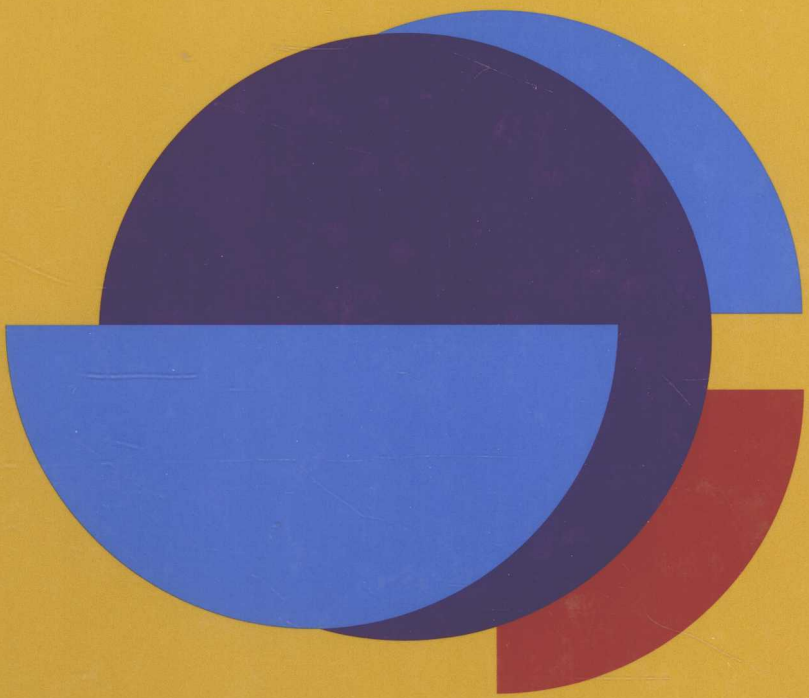
Finding Metaphor in Grammar and Usage

Gerard J. Steen



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Finding Metaphor in Grammar and Usage

A methodological analysis of theory and research

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To Charlie, Jet, and Annemieke

Preface

This book presents one side of a dialogue with Ray Gibbs that we kept going for more than five years. We had been invited by Bertie Kaal and Günter Radden to write a joint book on finding metaphor in language and thought for the John Benjamins textbook series *Cognitive Linguistics in Practice*, and I received a one year grant from the Netherlands Organization of Research, NWO, to finish a first draft between 2002 and 2003. But as I kept working on the manuscript, the text was becoming mine more than ours, gradually shifting positions on a scale from textbook to monograph. By mid 2006, we agreed in excellent friendship to split our ways. I removed Ray's contributions and, being a linguist, decided to adjust my perspective to finding metaphor in grammar and usage, the contrast between language and thought getting demoted to secondary importance. I completed my personal conceptualization of the book and produced new sections and chapters on metaphor in thought that were restricted to language research. I hope that my reduction of our dialogue to this one-sided monologue does sufficient justice to my intellectual and personal debts to Ray.

The book has also benefited a lot from other people's comments and queries. Responses to a previous, then still jointly written version were offered by Antonio Barcelona, Ewa Biernacka, Alan Cienki, Lettie Dorst, Anna Kaal, Irene López-Rodríguez, Maria del Carmen Molina Cano, Pilar Mompeán Guillamón, Tryntje Pasma, and Francisco Ruíz de Mendoza Ibañez. Parts of the present manuscript were read in final draft by Alan Cienki, Dedre Gentner, Zoltán Kövecses, Tina Krennmayr, and Cornelia Müller, while Joost Schilperoord provided excellent feedback on the manuscript as a whole.

I am grateful to the staff of John Benjamins, who made sure that the production of the book was a simple pleasure.

And I am grateful beyond expression to my family, for making this book possible.

Gerard Steen, Amsterdam, July 2007.

Acknowledgements

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Table of contents

PART 1

Foundations

CHAPTER 1

Mapping the field

George W. Bush is so famous for his malapropisms and incorrect syntax that the internet features a number of sites displaying his 'Bushisms'. One quotation reveals that he has difficulties using the word *commensurate,* inadvertently pronouncing it as *commiserate.* Another quotation involving the same word shows how he is monitoring and correcting himself, producing the following utterance:

> See, without the tax relief package, there would have been a deficit, but there wouldn't have been the commiserate – not 'commiserate' – the kick to our economy that occurred as a result of the tax relief.
>
> (http://www.slate.com/id/76886/, 21 September, 2006)

In order to avoid the four-syllable Latinate *commensurate*, Bush makes use of the one-syllable Anglo-Saxon *kick*. As he does this, he also changes from complex noun phrase to simple noun phrase, dropping the hindersome adjective and moving into metaphorical language use. The question is, does he also have a mental picture of physical engagement with the economy? Or does he simply replace one construction by another while continuing to think as before about the effects of the tax relief package on the economy? And would *kick* even count as metaphorical to all analysts of language?

In this book I offer an analysis of the most important methodological issues involved in finding metaphor in language in order to construct a methodological guide of this process for researchers of language. I address questions about the various areas of research that may be distinguished for the study of metaphor, with special attention to the difference between grammar and usage. The Bush example is an individual usage event that can be described in some detail regarding its unique properties, but how, precisely, can it be related to more general considerations of the position of metaphor in grammar? I also look at the theoretical and operational definitions of metaphor, and at the methods and techniques by which manifestations of metaphor in language can be collected and analyzed. Thus, when Bush says that the tax relief program gives a kick to the economy, is this metaphorical because there is some similarity, or comparison, or analogy between the tax relief program and somebody kicking? Or is it because he is recategorizing the economy as something that can be kicked? And, can researchers rely on their own intuitions when they analyze such data, or should they look for some sort of confirmation outside themselves? These are some of the questions that play a crucial role in any research that attempts to find metaphor in language.

My main aim in reviewing these questions is to bring some order to this discussion from a number of interrelated perspectives. My concern with present-day metaphor

research is that different schools and researchers conflate these perspectives in diverging ways, confounding or concealing issues which need to be kept distinct. I hope that disentangling the dimensions and approaches involved will offer a clearer view of the nature of metaphor identification in various areas of research. There is more common ground than is acknowledged by some, but there are more distinct difficulties for different areas than is acknowledged by others. As a result, this methodological analysis of theory and research can be seen as a rough guide to the land of metaphor research. If my analysis can offer a more integrated but differentiated perspective on metaphor identification in language which can help researchers in orienting themselves towards methods and techniques for doing better research, this book will have served its purpose.

The starting point of my analysis lies in cognitive linguistics since this is the school which has recently had most impact on the field. This viewpoint will be used to consider a wide range of methodological issues in cognitive linguistics. I will also make forays into other schools and traditions of linguistics, however, as well as into other disciplines concerned with the study of language. My sympathy for the cognitive-linguistic undertaking does not mean that I am blind to its problems. My main audience is therefore the community of linguists at large, including other students of language who are interested in the identification and study of metaphor in grammar and usage, with special interest into its cognitive nature, function, and effects.

In this first chapter I will put my methodological cards on the table so that my game will be clear from the start. Methodologists make a basic distinction between three stages of research: data collection, data analysis, and interpretation of the findings. Their handbooks and courses usually focus on the first two stages, which can be formally instructed in rather general terms, interpretation being left to the experts in the particular fields in which the methods and techniques can be applied. Yet interpretation is essential for any appreciation of the methodological efforts made by researchers when they investigate metaphor in grammar and usage in various ways: some methods and techniques and their data are much more closely associated with some areas of metaphor research than others, and this fundamentally affects the interpretation of findings across the entire field. That is why I will begin this book with a discussion of the various dimensions of metaphor in language that determine the interpretation of any evidence. This will provide a map of the field of metaphor identification within which data collection and analysis can be systematically discussed in relation to the particular area in which they are employed.

The map presented in this first chapter will be based on a distinction between three commonly used contrasts in research on language:

- grammar versus usage;
- language versus thought;
- symbol versus behavior.

Combining these contrasts leads to a 2*2*2 configuration, producing eight distinct areas for locating different types of language research. After a brief characterization of

the nature of metaphor identification in each of these areas I will proceed to discuss some of the associations between them. This leads to the question how different types of evidence for metaphor can be connected with which area of research, with some attention to what counts as converging evidence for a particular phenomenon. The chapter will then end with an outlook on the rest of the book.

1.1 Grammar versus usage

Cognitive-linguistic research on language makes an important distinction between usage and grammar. In cognitive linguistics, and elsewhere, grammar, including the lexicon, is derived from usage, by children, language learners, language users, and by linguists (e.g. Langacker 1987, 1988, 2000; cf. Barlow & Kemmer 2000; Butler 2003; Bybee & Hopper 2001; Tomasello 2003). In fact, grammar, meaning lexico-grammar, is the socio-culturally conventionalized and cognitively entrenched part of the many concrete events of usage that occur in reality.

Grammar is the area of research that contains form-meaning pairings that are relatively fixed as opposed to ad-hoc or novel or in change. One manifestation of this degree of conventionalization is that descriptions of these relatively fixed form-meaning pairings may be found in culturally sanctioned repositories, such as dictionaries and grammars, or public institutions, such as language schools. They are also presumably stored in some form in the individual mind of each language user. The special status of grammar as opposed to usage is quite secure, even though its boundaries may be hard to fix in the same way for all research purposes.

Grammar displays a good deal of metaphor, which by definition is conventional. This may be found at all levels of linguistic organization: morphology (*brain-drain, frogman*), vocabulary (*defend, attack, support*), phraseology (*treading the water, holding your breath*), and more schematic constructions (such as the conventionalized metaphorical use of ditransitives, as in *He gave me a headache*). All of these examples are socially conventional to the extent that they can be looked up in dictionaries, for instance, or can be found in foreign language course books (e.g. Deignan 1995; Holme 2004). They are also offered as publicly available symbols to children during language acquisition (Tomasello 1999, 2003). And they are cognitively entrenched to the extent that they cannot be bypassed when language users have to interpret expressions that are ambiguous between a metaphorical and a non-metaphorical meaning (e.g. Glucksberg, Gildea, & Bookin 1982). It is one of the great contributions of cognitive linguistics that figuration is now seen as part and parcel of lexico-grammar and its semantics.

Meaning in usage is relatively more situated and specific than in grammar, both conventional meaning as well as novel or obsolete meaning. This is due to the individual, unique nature of any usage event, which involves particular language users with their own topics, goals, means and contexts of communication. The general and schematic meanings in grammar are the result of the grammarian's goal to describe