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Metaphor in Use

Context, culture, and communication

Edited by
Fiona MacArthur
José Luis Oncins-Martínez
Manuel Sánchez-García
Ana María Piquer-Píriz

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Volume 38

Metaphor in Use. Context, culture, and communication
Edited by Fiona MacArthur, José Luis Oncins-Martínez, Manuel Sánchez-García, and Ana María Piquer-Píriz

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The Seventh International Conference on Researching and Applying Metaphor (RaAM7) was the first of the RaAM conferences to be organized under the auspices of the recently created Association for Researching and Applying Metaphor (http://www.raam.org.uk). It was held in May 2008 at the Faculty of Arts of the University of Extremadura (Cáceres, Spain) during the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue. In line with the European drive to foster increased awareness of cultural diversity, the hosts of this international conference – the editors of this volume – chose as its overarching theme 'Metaphor in Cross-Cultural Communication'. The Year of Intercultural Dialogue, like the conference itself, aimed to encourage all those living in Europe and elsewhere to explore the benefits of our rich cultural heritages and to take advantage of opportunities to learn from different cultural traditions.

Like previous RaAM meetings, RaAM7 gathered metaphor researchers from many disciplines from all over the world, providing a forum for high-quality research into metaphor in 'real world' contexts. Many of the chapters included in this volume were originally presented as papers at this conference and were subsequently enriched by the supportive and sometimes lively debate and discussion that characterizes RaAM meetings. We gratefully acknowledge the expert advice and support given to the local organizers by the RaAM Association, and most particularly that of Lynne Cameron, Graham Low, and Jeannette Littlemore, respectively Chair, Secretary, and Treasurer of the Association at that time.

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Table of contents

List of contributors vii
Acknowledgements ix

Introduction: Metaphor in use 1
Fiona MacArthur and José Luis Oncins-Martínez

PART 1. Contexts of research

1. An assessment of metaphor retrieval methods 21
Tony Berber Sardinha

2. Metaphor in discourse: Beyond the boundaries of MIP 51
Aletta G. Dorst and Anna Kaal

3. Metaphor identification in Dutch discourse 69
Trijntje Pasma

4. Locating metaphor candidates in specialized corpora using raw frequency and keyword lists 85
Gill Philip

PART 2. Contexts of production

5. Metaphor variation across L1 and L2 speakers of English: Do differences at the level of linguistic metaphor matter? 109
Marlene Johansson Falck

6. Metaphorical expressions in L2 production: The importance of the text topic in corpus research 135
Anne Golden

7. Researching linguistic metaphor in native, non-native, and expert writing 149
Claudia Marcela Chapetón-Castro and Isabel Verdaguer-Clavera

PART 3. Contexts of interpretation

8. Appreciation and interpretation of visual metaphors in advertising across three European countries 177
Margot van Mulken and Rob Le Pair

9. English native speakers' interpretations of culture-bound Japanese figurative expressions 195
Masumi Azuma

10. The limits of comprehension in cross-cultural metaphor: Networking in drugs terminology 217
Richard Trim

PART 4. Metaphor, topic, and discourse

11. Conceptual types of terminological metaphors in marine biology: An English-Spanish contrastive analysis from an experientialist perspective 239
José Manuel Ureña

12. Gestures, language, and what they reveal about thought: A music teacher's use of metaphor in Taiwan 261
Ya-Chin Chuang

PART 5. Metaphor and culture

13. Armed with *patience, suffering* an emotion: The conceptualization of life, morality, and emotion in Turkish 285
Yeşim Aksan and Mustafa Aksan

14. Trolls 309
Christina Alm-Arvius

15. A computational exploration of creative similes 329
Tony Veale

PART 6. Afterword and prospects for future research

16. Metaphors, snowflakes, and termite nests: How nature creates such beautiful things 347
Raymond W. Gibbs, Jr.

Name index 373
Terms index 375

Introduction

Metaphor in use

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1. Background

Although metaphor, or the human drive to 'see' or understand one thing in terms of another, is probably a universal, even perennial phenomenon, its manifestations most certainly are not. Even if we were only to consider the way that metaphor is used in communication among speakers of English, one of the most striking facts to emerge from research in recent years is how variable metaphor use is and how its production and interpretation in context depends on the interplay of many different factors. Among these is the means people use to convey a metaphorical idea, for it must be borne in mind that metaphors are not realized solely in language: gesture, visuals (whether static or moving), and other modes of expression are also vehicles that publicly display the way that people conceive of one thing in terms of another. In turn, these different modes of metaphorical communication may also interact with each other and with language in various different ways (Chuang, this volume; Cienki 1998, Cienki and Müller 2008, Forceville 2007, Forceville and Urios-Aparisi 2009), which adds further complexity to the use of metaphor in context.

Apart from the different modes employed (speech, writing, gesture, or visuals, for example), another factor that has been shown to influence metaphor production and comprehension is the time scale in which it is used. Since metaphor use occurs in real time, attention to its presence and absence as discourse unfolds reveals the variability and unevenness of this phenomenon both within and across discourse events. Several researchers have noted that metaphors are not evenly distributed in discourse events such as conversation or lectures, but tend to occur in bursts, or cluster in response to different factors, such as management of the ongoing discourse, the topic, or even interpersonal relations (Cameron 2008, Cameron and Stelma 2004, Corts and Pollio 1999). Cameron (2008: 200), for example, has observed that "when one speaker uses metaphor, other speakers seem more likely to adapt their own talk and become metaphorical in response".

Even though the primary site for human communication is conversation, speakers of English do not appear to use linguistic metaphors as frequently when they are chatting to each other face to face as they do in the written medium (Steen et al. 2010), so another factor that contributes to metaphor variation is the discourse contexts in which it is used. Furthermore, certain written registers display a much greater density of metaphor use than others. Steen et al. (2010) have found that metaphor is used much more frequently in academic discourse than in fiction, a perhaps somewhat surprising finding given the traditional emphasis on metaphor as a trope peculiar to poetry and fictional prose. But even within academic discourse, for example, metaphor use varies: different academic discourse communities use metaphor in different ways. The metaphors used by economists, for example, when writing and talking about their discipline are not the same as those used by architects when dealing with theirs (Alejo 2010, Caballero 2006), for the metaphor systems or models that constitute particular theories or frame the problems that disciplines seek to explore and resolve (Kuhn 1993) vary across different areas of enquiry. Indeed, major paradigm shifts may be marked by changes in the metaphors conventionally used in a field of scientific enquiry (see, for example, Aitchison's [2003] discussion on competing metaphors for understanding linguistic change), which recalls the importance of the diachronic dimension as one more factor that contributes to metaphor change and variation.

When studied in a historical time scale, metaphor has been revealed to play an important role in motivating semantic change in English (e.g. Allan 2008, Kay 2000, Sweetser 1990), and research adopting a diachronic perspective on metaphor use has not only provided details about the processes involved in how word meanings change in the course of time, but has also shed light on the status of particular utterances as "metaphors" for speakers of earlier and later generations (Alm-Arvius, this volume; Geeraerts and Grondelaers 1995, Oncins-Martínez 2006), for consideration of metaphor in various time scales reveals that what might count as a metaphor at one time and in one context might be regarded somewhat differently in another. For example, one of the time scales in which metaphor has been widely researched – the ontogenetic – has further revealed the complexity of this phenomenon and how difficult it may be to decide on whether the unconventional 'metaphor-like' utterances of children should be considered metaphors at all (Cameron 1996). Piaget (1962) reported his daughter between the ages of 3 : 6 and 4 : 7 saying that a winding river was like a snake and comparing a bent twig with a machine for putting in petrol. While Piaget himself regarded these as 'child metaphors' as opposed to 'real metaphors' (describing them as nothing more than products of the symbolic, imagistic type of thinking that characterizes the pre-operational stage), other researchers have used different criteria to distinguish metaphors and pseudo-metaphors in children's speech (e.g. Billow 1981, Nerlich et al. 1999, Vosniadou and Ortony 1983, or Winner 1988), reaching different conclusions about what distinguishes a child's use of metaphor from an adult's, and how the changes in children's use and understanding of metaphor at different ages can be accounted for.

The complexity of the task of researching metaphor is perhaps most apparent when we move away from a consideration of metaphor solely in relation to English speakers or even speakers of other standard European languages. As Leezenberg (2001: 15) has pointed out, there are certain "cultural prerequisites for a notion of metaphor". A similar point is made by Goddard when he notes that the term 'metaphor' lacks precise equivalents in many of the world's languages, and warns of the dangers of uncritically adopting the category as a starting point for cross-cultural comparison (2004: 1212). Both authors discuss the issue in relation to A is B (active or expository) metaphors, and Leezenberg (2001: 15) cites the disagreement over interpretations of the much debated utterance of the Bororo Indians of Brazil *pa e-do nabure* ('we are parrots'). Early accounts (e.g. Durkheim and Mauss 1963: 6–7) suggested that the Bororo did not distinguish between the categories of people and animals, and this expression could not therefore be classed as a metaphor. However, close attention to the linguistic form of the utterance (Turner 1991: 135–136) has provided grounds for thinking that it should not be regarded as a 'literal' statement or a conflation of the categories PEOPLE and BIRDS/ANIMALS, because it can only be used to refer to men and the verb is marked for 'customary form' rather than 'permanent state' (Leezenberg 2001: 16). In the light of close linguistic analysis, then, the utterance can be regarded as instantiating the metaphorical mapping PEOPLE ARE ANIMALS. In fact, as numerous studies over the years have shown, there appears to exist a very widespread tendency to 'see' people as animals, although the instantiation of the mapping varies considerably across different language-speaking communities. The use of the same animal names to refer to people may be similar or quite different in different languages (e.g. Hines 1999, Hsieh 2006, López Rodríguez 2009, Talebinejad and Dastjerdi 2005), as are the preferred ways of instantiating the metaphor in everyday speech (Deignan 1999). Similarly, while it seems true that "the existence of the semantic prime BODY invites people to theorise about the other parts of a person" (Goddard 2003: 122), the way that speakers of different languages establish these relations varies considerably. The head, the heart, the liver, the ear, and the stomach are some of the body parts and organs associated with 'thinking' or 'feeling' in different languages (Goddard 2003, Wierzbicka 1992, Yu 2007, 2009) but although BODY PART FOR THOUGHT/FEELING might be a common pattern, the type and value of the thoughts or emotions associated with each body part is often different across languages. Goddard (2003: 124) describes, for example, the *hati* (liver) concept in Malay as:

> very 'feeling-oriented' but focused primarily on interpersonal feelings. [...] the *hati* is viewed as an inner domain of experience, but there is a heightened emphasis on its motivational consequences, along with a certain moral ambivalence. On account of the *hati*, a person may have an urge to do bad things as much as good things (hence one ought not unthinkingly or impulsively follow one's *hati*; as the saying goes, *ikuthati mati* 'follow the hati, die').

Likewise, although several languages instantiate a HAND FOR CONTROL metonym, the way that it is realized and used by different language-speaking communities can also vary. Yu (2000), for example, finds that English and Chinese highlight different subparts of the hand in expressing this relation. More importantly, perhaps, the evaluation conveyed by the expressions that instantiate this metonym may be quite dissimilar: Charteris-Black (2001) notes that Malay expressions with *tangen* imply interference or meddling while English equivalents with *hand* evaluate this control positively. Researchers may be content to note that socio-cultural factors cause such cross-linguistic and cross-cultural differences or seek to find more detailed explanation for them (e.g. MacArthur 2005). However, this should not cause us to lose sight of the possible consequences that such differences may have for cross-cultural communication, where more applied metaphor research is still needed. For instance, misunderstandings or miscommunication may result when speakers whose languages differ from each other in these subtle but important ways communicate with each other, as happens when native speakers of English interpret Japanese figurative expressions using body part terms when these are translated into English (see Azuma, this volume).

In short, although metaphorizing may be "a natural function of the human mind" (Morgan 1993: 132) and metaphor may be used by people all over the world, the metaphors found in different linguistic communities are subject to the contextual variation observable in a single language, and a search for universal patterns may thus detract attention from the diverse and variable ways that metaphor is employed by speakers in different cultural contexts.

In an increasingly globalized world, where communication between different cultural groups is not only facilitated by media such as the Internet but indeed made necessary by large-scale transnational migration or the federation of nation states, such as the European Union, the growing interest in the relationship between metaphor, culture, and context is to be welcomed. In recent years, various studies have done much to contribute to our understanding of cross-cultural and cross-linguistic differences in metaphor use worldwide and context induced variation (e.g. Kövecses 2005, 2010). For example, Kövecses (2000) describes how metaphors may be motivated by the culturally or physically salient experiences of particular language-speaking groups which may, in turn, vary quite substantially from one to another. This would account for the fact that certain source domains motivate a large number of metaphorical expressions in certain languages but not in others (e.g. Boers 1999). This would explain why a speaker of Spanish might use a metaphor such as *echar un capote a alguien* (lit. 'to throw someone a cape') in order to express the notion of helping another person, while a speaker of English would not, for bull-fighting is not an everyday, familiar area of experience for those from outside the Spanish-speaking world. However, it does not explain why an English speaker (and not a Spaniard) might use a maritime metaphor like 'bail someone out' to express the same idea, because the sea is salient not only for people from the British Isles: Spain, along with other countries, also has a long sea-faring tradition. Indeed, the difficulty of establishing a direct relationship between metaphor and culture

(Deignan 2003, Deignan and Potter 2004) has led Deignan to propose that the relationship is indirect, and that many metaphors may survive in languages as "cultural relics" (Deignan 2003). This conclusion is not altogether surprising or unusual. After all, as Tomasello (1999) has pointed out, one of the important functions of language is to preserve the cultural lessons of the past, and to ensure their transmission – even when some may have become irrelevant or obsolete. Language can be seen as the prime means for communicating cultural ideas and beliefs (Sperber 1996). Language is both a part of a people's culture and a vehicle for its transmission,

It is tempting to see culture as a set of ideas and beliefs shared by a community that influence in relatively predictable ways the actions and behaviour of that group (e.g. Hall 1981, Hall and Hall 1990, Kövecses 2005). However, it may be more helpful to understand cultural conceptualizations as more variable and dynamic than this. For example, Sharifian (2011) considers culture as one type of complex adaptive system, which is, in turn, nested in other complex adaptive systems, including individual people, the language they speak, or the physical environments they inhabit. In this view, cultural cognition – or the shared views of a community of people – is a complex system in that an individual's cognition does not capture the totality of his/her cultural group's cognition (Sharifian 2011: 23). Furthermore, cultural cognitions – just like individual cognitions – have their own unique history of interactions that constantly construct and reconstruct the system. And among the history of interactions of individuals or groups that are of particular interest in an era of globalization are those that involve contact with other groups, a phenomenon that has always been of interest in diachronic studies of individual languages, but less so to metaphor researchers (but see Trim 2007, this volume). An example of how contact between different cultural groups may bring about changes in metaphor use is provided by Goddard (2004). He describes how speakers of the Western Desert language Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjakjara now employ a certain number of expository metaphors in non-traditional discursive domains (for example, in talk about Christianity), which Goddard attributes to contact between the aboriginal peoples and speakers of English, particularly through missionary efforts (Goddard 2004: 1218–1219). New metaphorical language may emerge from such situations of contact and, on occasion, become entrenched in the language used by a group of speakers. Thus, a regional variety of a standard language may show traces of prolonged situations of language contact. For example, the interlanguage of Irish Gaelic speakers of English resulted in the coinage of the metaphorical idiom used in Hiberno-English: 'to put something on the long finger' (from Irish Gaelic *chuir ar an méar fada é*) (Odlin 1991). In this regard, then, studies of metaphor use in the interlanguage systems of learners of a foreign language, like those of Golden and Johansson Falck in this volume, are relevant not only to applied linguists interested in making pedagogical use of such studies, but also for understanding the processes involved in the emergence of new metaphorical uses of language and the short and long-term consequences for the varieties of languages that emerge from such contact. Sharifian (2010) rightly states that "it would be naive to expect a speaker to become a

culturally and emotionally different person when speaking a second language", so it is not surprising that culturally induced ways of 'seeing-as' should lead to new metaphorical language uses, an area of study of particular relevance to the phenomenon of global Englishes. At present, non-native speakers of English far outnumber those who speak it as a first language (Kirkpatrick 2010). The spread of English is resulting in the rise of varieties that are different from native speaker norms, and these differences are also apparent in metaphor use in different varieties. For example, Polzenhagen and Wolf (2007) have described the culture-specific conceptualization of corruption in African English and how this is reflected in the linguistic metaphors speakers of this variety use when talking about this topic.

2. The contributions to this volume

As these introductory remarks have aimed to show, metaphor is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. Indeed, it seems well-nigh impossible for any one theory of metaphor to account fully for the complexity of metaphor as used by human beings in communication with each other, as Gibbs (2006: 435) has pointed out. It is thus not surprising to find that the sixteen chapters in this volume should not adhere to one single method or approach, but range from the computational (Veale or Berber Sardinha, for example) to more traditional, philological approaches (Alm-Arvius or Trim) through research guided by the precepts of conceptual metaphor theory or CMT (Johansson Falck or Aksan and Aksan). What they all have in common, however, is their focus on the situated use of metaphor in different contexts and their use of real data to underpin the research they report, whether this comes from very large, commercially available corpora (for example, Johansson Falck or Dorst and Kaal), data gathered with the help of Internet search engines such as Google (Alm-Arvius or Veale), specially compiled corpora (for example, Golden, Trim, Chapetón-Castro and Verdaguer-Clavera, or Aksan and Aksan), or smaller amounts of real world data gathered for the specific purposes of the research being carried out (Van Mulken and Le Pair, Chuang, or Azuma). Indeed, one of the charges made against CMT is that the linguistic data used to illustrate conceptual mappings has often been the result of the analyst's introspection and that the examples used to support their proposals often do not fully account for the way that metaphors may be realized in language (Ritchie 2003, Semino 2005, Stefanowitsch 2006). In this regard, one of the contexts of research that has revolutionized the way that metaphor may be studied in the last 30 years or so is the availability of large electronic corpora that allow researchers to have access to much larger amounts of linguistic data than was formerly possible. This new research context has contributed to providing more robust descriptions of the way that metaphors are realized in everyday discourse (for example, Deignan 2005, Gries 2006, Hanks 2006, Stefanowitsch 2006). At the same time, the task of identifying and quantifying metaphors in large corpora poses a number of challenges to metaphor researchers and

raises a number of questions. Among these are: how can metaphors be identified and retrieved in very large corpora? How can they be quantified? Is it necessary to have identified metaphorical language uses in advance or is it possible to mine large corpora in a data-driven way? Are the methods that have been developed for identifying metaphors in English applicable to other languages as well? The four chapters that make up the first part of the book address these issues.

2.1 Part 1: Contexts of research

In the first chapter, "An assessment of metaphor retrieval methods", **Tony Berber Sardinha** evaluates a number of different techniques and tools for retrieving metaphor in large corpora, explaining in detail for researchers who are not experts in computational linguistics themselves how each can be used and how reliable each procedure is in terms of the number of metaphors retrieved. As Berber Sardinha's work in this field has shown, the methods and techniques he explores are applicable to both English and Brazilian Portuguese.

The second chapter, "Metaphor in discourse: Beyond the boundaries of MIP", by **Aletta G. Dorst** and **Anna Kaal**, two researchers in the MIPVU project at the Free University of Amsterdam, is similarly concerned with the identification and accurate quantification of metaphor in discourse, but takes a much closer look at the decisions that must be taken by researchers when identifying metaphorical uses of language. Dorst and Kaal describe some of the problems that arise in applying the Method for Identifying Metaphors (MIP) (Pragglejaz Group 2007) to direct metaphors and metaphorical comparisons, explaining in detail how decisions can be taken in order to provide robust and replicable methods of metaphor identification in discourse, which is important, above all, in quantifying such uses of language for comparative purposes.

Chapter 3, "Metaphor identification in Dutch discourse", is by another researcher in the MIPVU project, **Trijntje Pasma**. Unlike her colleagues, the author discusses MIP in relation to Dutch and illustrates how the method, originally conceived to deal with English discourse, can be used to identify metaphors in another European language when appropriate modifications are made for the morpho-syntactic peculiarities of the language involved.

The last chapter in this section – "Locating metaphor candidates in specialized corpora using raw frequency and keyword lists", by **Gill Philip** – is concerned with the automatic retrieval of metaphors from large corpora. However, unlike Berber Sardinha, Philip deals with corpora made up of homogeneous texts (that is, texts that all deal with the same topic), a characteristic that allows the researcher, with the help of keywords and raw frequency lists, to distinguish between metaphors and 'terminology' (i.e., words and expressions that appear metaphorical to people from outside the discourse community that uses them, but that may not be regarded as such by members of the discourse community that uses them with particular fixed or stable meanings). Philip is also concerned with explicating a method for automatically retrieving

metaphors from large corpora without the need for a researcher to have advanced command of corpus linguistics methodology or tools, and one that uses commercially available software. And, in line with Pasma's chapter, she explains how this method can be applied to another language, in this case, Italian.

The four chapters in this first section, then, explicate ways of identifying and retrieving metaphorical language uses that can be applied by metaphor researchers with no background in computational linguistics or by those who do not have access to the specialized software that has been developed for these purposes. Furthermore, the various methods described extend the contexts in which metaphor identification may be reliably carried out, by considering their use with languages other than English. Although the focus here remains on standard European languages (but see Chuang, this volume, for an illustration of how MIP was applied to Mandarin Chinese), they may suggest ways of developing methods of metaphor identification and retrieval applicable to other, typologically different languages, in order that future research into metaphor use in these contexts may contribute to similarly robust findings that can be compared with each other and with studies that have been carried out into English.

2.2 Part 2: Contexts of production

The three chapters in this section all examine how metaphorical language is used by non-native speakers (NNS) of a language, comparing this with native-speaker (NS) norms as found in the control corpora used. In this regard, one thing that all these studies reveal is the importance of the appropriate choice of the NS corpora, depending on the research questions the analyst is seeking to answer.

The study reported in Chapter 5, "Metaphor variation across L1 and L2 speakers of English: Do differences at the level of linguistic metaphor matter?" by **Marlene Johansson Falck**, focuses on the linguistic realization of motion metaphors (ACTIONS ARE SELF-PROPELLED MOVEMENTS, PURPOSES ARE DESTINATIONS or AN ACTIVITY IS A JOURNEY) in 'path', 'way', and 'road' expressions. It offers a detailed analysis of how these are used by advanced learners of English with Swedish as their mother tongue in comparison to how these expressions are used by NSs of English in the texts contained in the British National Corpus (BNC). Johansson Falck's study is specifically concerned with discovering to what extent the linguistic means for expressing motion metaphors in Swedish influence these learners' use of similar metaphors in English, as Swedish has only two forms, *stig* and *vag*, to describe the different types of routes that can be taken – literally and metaphorically – from one place to another. The very detailed analysis offered of the use of 'path', 'way', and 'road' in English in these two contexts reveals that, while the Swedish speakers of English as a second language with advanced competence in the language did not produce any erroneous or incomprehensible utterances, there were interesting quantitative and qualitative differences between their uses of these expressions and that of NSs, suggesting that even when two languages share primary and complex metaphors, the precise way that these are expressed in the