METAPHOR
Traditional and cognitive linguistic view
7 May 2008
WHAT IS METAPHOR?

- For most of us, metaphor is a figure of speech in which one thing is compared to another by saying that one is the other, as in *He is a lion*.

- Encyclopaedia Britannica says: “*metaphor is a figure of speech that implies comparison between two unlike entities, as distinguished from simile, an explicit comparison signalled by the words like, or as*”.

- We would probably also say that the word is used metaphorically in order to achieve some artistic and rhetorical effect, since we speak and write metaphorically to communicate eloquently, to impress others with *beautiful*, esthetically pleasing words, or to express some deep emotion.

- This is a widely shared view, the most common conception of metaphor, both in scholarly circles and in the popular mind, but this is not the only view of metaphor.
This traditional concept can be briefly characterized by pointing out five of its most commonly accepted features.

1. Metaphor is a property of words; it is a linguistic phenomenon.
2. Metaphor is used for some artistic and rhetorical purpose, such as when Shakespeare writes “all the world’s a stage”.
3. Metaphor is based on resemblance between the two entities that are compared and identified.
4. Metaphor is a conscious and deliberate use of words, and you must have a special talent to be able to do it and do it well. Only great poets or eloquent speakers can be its masters.
5. It is also commonly held that metaphor is a figure of speech that we can do without, we use it for special effects, and it is not an inevitable part of everyday human communication.

A new view of metaphor that changed all these aspects of the powerful traditional theory in a coherent and systematic way was first developed by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in 1980 in their seminal study *Metaphors We Live By*. Their conception has become known as the *cognitive linguistic view of metaphor*.
Lakoff and Johnson challenged the deeply entrenched view of metaphor by claiming that:

1. Metaphor is a property of concepts, and not of words.
2. The function of metaphor is to better understand certain concepts, and not just some artistic or esthetic purpose.
3. Metaphor is often not based on similarity.
4. Metaphor is used effortlessly in everyday life by ordinary people, not just by special talented people;
5. Metaphor, far from being a superfluous though pleasing linguistic ornament, is an inevitable process of human thought and reasoning.

Lakoff and Johnson showed convincingly that metaphor is pervasive both in thought and everyday language.
CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR

- He’s *without direction* in life.
- I’m *where I want to be* in life.
- I’m *at a crossroads* in my life.
- She’ll *go places* in life.
- He’s never let anyone get *in his way*.
- She’s *gone through* a lot in life.
CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR

- Given all these examples, we can see that a large part of the way we speak about life in English derives from the way we speak about journeys. In light of such examples, it seems that speakers of English make extensive use of the domain of journey to think about highly abstract and elusive concept of life.
- Cognitive linguists suggest that they do so because thinking about the abstract concept of life is facilitated by the more concrete concept of journey.
- In the cognitive linguistic view, metaphor is defined as understanding one conceptual domain in terms of another conceptual domain. Examples of this include when we talk and think about life in terms of journeys, about arguments in terms of war, and so on.
- A convenient shorthand way of capturing this view of metaphor is the following:

CONCEPTUAL DOMAIN (A) IS CONCEPTUAL DOMAIN (B)

which is what is called a **conceptual metaphor**.
- So, here we have an example of a conceptual metaphor: LIFE IS A JOURNEY.
- We need to distinguish this conceptual metaphor from **metaphorical linguistic expressions** (previous slide in italics).
**CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR**

- The use of small capital letters indicates that the particular wording does not occur in language as such, but it underlies conceptually all the metaphorical expressions listed underneath it.

- The two domains that participate in conceptual metaphor have special names. The conceptual domain from which we draw metaphorical expressions to understand another conceptual domain is called **source domain**, while the conceptual domain that is understood this way is the **target domain**. Thus, life and argument are target domains, while journeys and war are source domains.
**EXAMPLES OF CONCEPTUAL METAPHORS**

- **AN ARGUMENT IS WAR**
  
  Your claims are *indefensible*.
  
  He *attacked every weak point* in my argument.
  
  His criticism were *right on target*.
  
  I *demolished* his argument.
  
  I’ve never *won an argument* with him.
  
  You disagree? Okay, *shoot*!
  
  If you use that *strategy*, he’ll *wipe you out*.
  
  He *shot down* all of my arguments.
EXAMPLES OF CONCEPTUAL METAPHORS

- LOVE IS JOURNEY
  
  Look *how far* we’ve come.
  
  We’re at a *crossroads*.
  
  We’ll just have to go our *separate ways*.
  
  We can’t *turn back* now.
  
  I don’t think this relationship is going *anywhere*.
  
  *Where* are we?
  
  We are *stuck*.
  
  It’s been a *long, bumpy road*.
  
  We’ve gotten *of the track*.
  
  This relationship is a *dead-end street*.
EXAMPLES OF CONCEPTUAL METAPHORS

- IDEAS ARE FOOD

All this paper has in it are raw facts, half-baked ideas, and warmed-over theories. There are too many facts here for me to digest them all. I just can’t swallow that claim. Let me stew over that for a while. That’s food for thought. She devoured the book. Let’s let that idea simmer on the back burner for a while.
EXAMPLES OF CONCEPTUAL METAPHORS

- SOCIAL ORGANISATIONS ARE PLANTS

He works for the local *branch* of the bank.
Our company is *growing*.
They had to *prune* the workforce.
The organisation was *rooted* in the old church.
There is now a *flourishing* black market in software there.
His business *blossomed* when the railways put his establishment within reach of the big city.
Employers *reaped* enormous benefits from cheap foreign labour.
KINDS OF METAPHOR

- Conceptual metaphors can also be classified according to the cognitive functions that they perform. On this basis, three general kinds of conceptual metaphors have been distinguished: structural, ontological, and orientational.
Structural Metaphors

So far we have been concerned with what we shall call structural metaphors. In this kind of metaphor, the source domain provides a relatively rich knowledge structure for the target concept. In other words, the cognitive function of these metaphors is to enable speakers to understand target A by means of the structure of source B. This understanding takes place by means of conceptual mappings between elements of A and elements of B.
STRUCTURAL METAPHORS

- TIME IS MONEY

You’re wasting my time.
This gadget will save you hours.
I don’t have the time to give you.
How do you spend your time these days.
That flat tire cost me an hour.
I’ve invested a lot of time in her.
I don’t have enough time to spare for that.
You’re running out of time.
Put aside some time for ping pong.
Do you have some time left?
He’s living on borrowed time.
Thank you for your time.
ONTLOGICAL METAPHORS

- **Ontological metaphors** provide much less cognitive structuring for target concepts than structural ones do. Their cognitive job seems to be to give an ontological status to general categories of abstract target concepts.

- That means that we conceive of our experiences in terms of objects, substances, and containers, in general, without specifying exactly what kind of object, substance, and container is meant.

- In general, ontological metaphors enable us to see more sharply delineated structure where there is very little or none.
ONTODOLOGICAL METAPHORS

- Given that undelineated experiences receive a more delineated status via ontological metaphors, speakers can use these metaphors for more specific jobs:

  1) To refer, to quantify, to identify aspects of the experience that has been made more delineated. For example, conceiving of fear as an object, we can conceptualise it as *our possession*. Thus, we can linguistically refer to fear as *my fear*, or *your fear*. Cases like this are the least noticeable types of conceptual metaphors.

  2) Once a *nothing* experience has received the status of a thing through an ontological metaphor, the experience so conceptualised can be structured further by means of structural metaphors.
ONTOLOGICAL METAPHORS

- THE MIND IS A MACHINE
  We’re still trying to grind out the solution to this equation. My mind just isn’t operating today.
  Boy, the wheels are turning now!
  I’m a little rusty today.
  We’ve been working on this problem all day and now we’re running out of steam.
ONTOLOGICAL METAPHORS

- We can conceive of personification as a form of ontological metaphor. In personification, human qualities are given to nonhuman entities. Personification is very common in literature, but it also abounds in everyday discourse.

- Examples:
  - His theory explained to me the behaviour of chickens raised in factories.
  - Life has cheated me.
  - Inflation is eating up our profits.
  - Cancer finally caught up with him.
  - The computer went dead on me.

Theory, life, inflation, cancer, computer are not humans, but they are given qualities of human beings, such as explaining, cheating, eating, catching up, and dying. Personification makes use of one of the best source domains we have – ourselves. In personifying nonhumans as humans, we can begin to understand them a little better.
ONTOLOGICAL METAPHORS

- We are physical beings, bounded and set off from the rest of the world by the surface of our skins, and we experience the rest of the world as outside us. Each of us is a container, with a bounding surface and an in-out orientation. We project our own in-out orientation onto other physical objects that are bounded by surfaces. Thus we also view them as containers with an inside and an outside.

- We give this orientation to many objects, such as clearing in the wood, solid objects like rocks, and so on.

- But even when there is no natural physical boundary that can be viewed as defining a container, we impose boundaries.

- Bounded objects, whether human beings, rocks, or land areas, have sizes. This allows them to be quantified in terms of the amount of substance they contain.
EMOTIONAL OR PHYSICAL STATES ARE CONTAINERS

She’s in love.
We’re out of trouble now.
He’s coming out of the coma.
I’m slowly getting into shape.
He entered a state of euphoria.
He fell into a depression
He finally emerged from the catatonic state he had been in since the end of finals week.
ORIENTATIONAL METAPHORS

- **Orientational metaphors** provide even less conceptual structure for target concepts than ontological ones. Their cognitive job, instead, is to make a set of target concepts coherent in our conceptual system. The name derives from the fact that most metaphors that serve this function have to do with basic human spatial orientations, such as up-down, centre-periphery, etc.
ORIENTATIONAL METAPHORS

- HAPPY IS UP; SAD IS DOWN
  I’m feeling up. That boosted my spirits. You’re in high spirits. Thinking about her always gives me a lift. I’m depressed. He’s really low these days. I fell into a depression.

- CONSCIOUS IS UP; UNCONSCIOUS IS DOWN
  Get up. I’m up already. He rises early in the morning. He fell asleep. He’s under hypnosis. He sank into a coma.

There is a physical basis of these metaphors.
ORIENTATIONAL METAPHORS

- HEALTH AND LIFE ARE UP; SICKNESS AND DEATH ARE DOWN
  He’s at the peak of health.
  Lazarus rose from the dead.
  He fell ill.
  He’s sinking fast.
  He came down with the flu.
  He dropped dead.

- MORE IS UP; LESS IS DOWN
  The number of books printed each year keeps going up.
  His draft number is high.
  My income rose last year.
  The number of errors he made is incredibly low.
  He is underage.
  His income fell last year.