RELEVANCE THEORY AND METAPHOR

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1. INTRODUCTION: METAPHORICAL LANGUAGE AS A PRAGMATIC PHENOMENON

Metaphor is without doubt a phenomenon of language. It may also be a phenomenon of thought, but that is less obvious and needs to be argued for. In this chapter, the starting position is that metaphors arise from linguistic communication, they are the result of speakers and writers employing words to achieve particular effects on hearers and readers, and so they fall within the discipline of pragmatics. The questions to be addressed are why speakers use metaphors, how addressees grasp the meanings thus expressed, what cognitive processes or mechanisms are involved, and what cognitive effects or benefits arise from using language in this way. The particular approach to pragmatics which is the focus of this chapter is that developed within the framework of Relevance Theory (RT) (Sperber and Wilson 1986a/95; Carston 2002; Wilson and Sperber 2004).

The range of metaphorical language to be discussed runs from highly conventionalised single-word uses, such as those in (1), through cases employing familiar metaphorical schemes, whether lexical or extended, such as those in (2), to novel, creative, perhaps poetic/literary uses, whether lexical or (much more) extended, such as those in (3):[1]

(1) a. Jane is an *angel*.
b. Her boyfriend is a *pig*.
c. I must *fly*.

(2) a. It was daily *warfare* between my parents when I was a kid.
b. Life is a *journey*, with *mountains to climb*, *rivers to navigate* and other *travellers* to *walk with* or *flee from*.

(3) a. 'The gold standard performance comes from McDiarmid. Vocally, he is spell-binding, giving lines *dexterous topspin* and unexpected bursts of power.'
(Theatre critic David Jays, reviewing a play, *The Sunday Times*, 04/09/2011)

[1] What exactly falls under the label 'metaphor' is, of course, an open question and far from being resolved; for instance, are 'extended metaphors' such as (3b) metaphors properly speaking or more like allegories, and in what ways do allegories differ from clear cases of metaphor? Terms like 'metaphor', 'hyperbole', 'simile', allegory' etc. are pre-theoretic folk labels and an account of the cognitive processes/mechanisms employed in understanding/ interpreting them may end up distinguishing cases quite differently from these intuitive categorisations.

b. Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more: it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.

(Shakespeare: *Macbeth V.v. 24-30*)

Fundamental to the relevance-theoretic (RT) approach to metaphor is the view that it is a pervasive feature of everyday linguistic communication and one that does not differ in kind from other instances of loose use (that is, cases where the speaker is not strictly literal in her use, as demonstrated in section 3 below). According to the theory, there are no mechanisms or processes specific to the recognition and comprehension of metaphor which is understood in essentially the same way as literal and loose uses. There are essentially three periods in the development of the RT account of metaphor, which can be characterised by the following moves: (a) the claim that metaphorical use of language is a kind of loose use (mid 1980s); (b) the assimilation of metaphorical uses of words into 'lexical pragmatics', a sub-theory within RT pragmatics, according to which words are frequently used to communicate a different concept from the one they linguistically encode (mid 1990s); and (c) the proposal that there are two distinct relevance-driven routes to metaphor understanding, depending on a range of factors including degree of familiarity, complexity and creativity of the metaphor (late 2000s). An interesting issue that cross-cuts all of these stages is that of the role and status of such non-propositional (experiential) effects of metaphor as imagery, sensation and affect.[2]

Before addressing these matters in some detail, I briefly set out some essential components of the general relevance-based approach to pragmatics in the next section. Then, in sections 3 and 4, I discuss the two key components of the orthodox RT account of metaphor, that is, loose use and ad hoc concepts. This is followed in section 5 by a brief overview of some issues/objections to the account, and then a discussion of current research within the framework which goes some way towards addressing the issue of imagistic effects. I conclude with a short review of directions for future research.

2. BACKGROUND: LINGUISTIC UNDERSPECIFICATION AND RELEVANCE-THEORETIC PRAGMATICS

It is widely recognised that the linguistic expressions that speakers utter standardly do not encode the thoughts (or propositions) that they are used to communicate. This applies not only to the obvious case of the thoughts that speakers (merely) implicate but also to those that are more closely associated with the linguistic meaning of their utterances and can be thought of as

[2] It is assumed in relevance theory that we communicate propositions (or thoughts), that is, descriptions of the world that can be evaluated as true or false. What is not so clear is whether we also communicate non-propositional effects, like images and feelings, which are not truth-evaluable.

explicitly communicated (explicatures, in RT).[3] Consider the following rather ordinary exchange between two university lecturers, focusing on what Amy means by her utterance:

(4) Bill: Did the staff-student meeting go well?
Amy: We gave up – the students wouldn't engage.

Clearly, what Bill takes Amy to be communicating depends on a rich background of assumptions that Amy assumes are accessible to him, but we all have access to some of these assumptions (based on general and cultural knowledge) and can surmise that she has communicated at least the following two propositions (or very similar ones):

(5) a. Amy and the other staff members at the meeting gave up on their attempt to discuss certain issues with the students who were at the meeting because those students would not engage with these issues.
b. The meeting did not go well (from the point of view of Amy).

There is a considerable gap between the meaning of the sentence types used by Amy ('We gave up', 'The students wouldn't engage') and the meaning she conveyed. Not only does Amy implicate a thought, (5b), that is entirely distinct in content from the sentences she uttered, but her explicature, (5a), although incorporating the meaning of the sentence uttered, involves considerable pragmatic inferential development. This gap is a perfectly general phenomenon of linguistic communication and it is the business of a pragmatic theory to explain how it is bridged, that is, how hearers are able to recover rich specific messages on the basis of utterances of linguistic expressions that radically underspecify those messages. There are many different manifestations of this linguistic underspecification of what the speaker meant (or communicatively intended): ambiguities (lexical and structural), referential indeterminacies such as 'we' and 'the students' in Amy's utterance above, unspecified quantifier domains as in '*Everyone* left early', incomplete expressions as in 'The students didn't *engage' [with what?]* or 'Mary is *ready' [for what?]*, vague expressions like 'He is *young*' or 'They live *nearby*,' implicit clausal connections like the sequential and cause-consequence relation between the two parts of Amy's utterance above.

An interesting subset of cases of this phenomenon of speaker meaning being underspecified by encoded linguistic meaning consists of those in which the concept expressed/ communicated is different from the concept encoded: it may be more specific (narrower in its denotation), more general (broader in its denotation), both of these (that is, more specific in some respects and broader in others, so that its denotation merely overlaps with that of the encoded concept), or a case of what is sometimes called 'transfer' (so there is no overlap in denotation

[3] In a sense, talk of propositions being 'explicitly communicated' is paradoxical, since virtually no 'explicature' is fully explicit, but is a hybrid of linguistically encoded and pragmatically inferred content. The point, though, is that this is in the very nature of linguistic communication so that the propositions pragmatically developed from linguistic meaning are as explicit as it gets (Carston 2002).

between the encoded and the communicated concepts, although the two concepts may be closely associated). Here are plausible examples of each of these possibilities:

(6) a. It's not *open* yet.
b. The children formed a *circle*.
c. My husband is a *bachelor*.
d. *The Ford Capri* is deliberately cutting in front of us.

In the case of (6a), there are many possible specific concepts that could be communicated by the use of the very general (literal) concept OPEN encoded by the adjective 'open'; for instance, there are quite distinct kinds of opening stereotypically associated with a door, a book, a lap-top, a shop, a tomb, a washing-machine, etc. any one of which could be being referred to by the use of 'it' here; each of these concepts is a narrowing (or specification) of the encoded lexical concept. The use of 'circle' in (6b) is an approximation, allowing for quite a degree of irregularity in the shape the children formed, hence the concept communicated is broader than the encoded lexical concept. In (6c), the concept communicated can be roughly paraphrased as 'man who behaves in irresponsible, uncommitted ways' and its denotation includes some married men (hence is a broadening of the encoded concept) and excludes some actual bachelors (hence is a narrowing). Finally, the referent of 'The Ford Capri' in (6d) is not a car but the driver of that car – this sort of metonymic use of a word is neither a narrowing nor a broadening of denotation but works in some other way. As we'll see in section 4, on the RT account, metaphorical uses of words and phrases are taken to fall into this lexical modulation process, specifically involving a denotational broadening, as in (6b) and (6c).

According to the relevance-theoretic approach, the processes responsible for recovering all of the various pragmatic components of meaning are constrained by addressees' context-specific expectations of relevance. More fundamentally, all our cognitive processing is seen as relevance-driven, that is, it is geared toward deriving as many cognitive benefits as possible (increasing the accuracy, richness and well-organisedness of our representation of the world) for as little processing cost as possible. Among the stimuli we process, verbal utterances, along with other communicative gestures, have a special status, in that they are 'ostensive': they overtly demand the addressee's attention (hence effort) and encourage him[4] to explore the communicator's intentions in producing them, with the expectation that particular cognitive benefits will be derived and there will be no gratuitous processing effort involved in their derivation. Thus, what licenses an addressee's expectations of relevance (of cognitive effects to be gained and effort to be expended) on any particular occasion of utterance is a completely general presumption of 'optimal relevance' conveyed by all utterances (ostensive stimuli). This is the presumption that it is relevant enough to be worth processing, and as relevant as the communicator is able and willing to make it.[5] On this basis, the comprehension heuristic

[4] I follow the standard practice in relevance theory of treating the speaker as female and the addressee as male.

[5] This is the RT approach to pragmatics in a nutshell. For a more detailed summary, see Wearing (2014b), and, for the full account, see Sperber and Wilson (1986a/95), Wilson and Sperber (2004).

standardly employed by addressees in processing an utterance is to follow a path of least effort in constructing an interpretation of the utterance (including such processes as resolving ambiguities and referential indeterminacies, enriching and adjusting lexical meaning, and computing implicatures) up to the point at which their expectations of relevance are satisfied. How this works in practice will be demonstrated in section 4 for cases of metaphorical use.

3. METAPHOR AS A KIND OF LOOSE USE

The foundational claim of the RT account of metaphor is that it is a kind of 'loose use' of language (Sperber and Wilson 1986a/95, 1986b). This remains a central component of the RT account to this day, although, as will be discussed in subsequent sections, the way in which this loosening (or broadening) of linguistic content is taken to manifest itself has changed over the past 25 years.

Obvious instances of loose use include approximations like 'Oxford is *sixty miles* from London', 'The children formed a *circle*', and cases where absolute terms that denote the absence of some property, like 'raw', 'painless', 'silent' and 'bald' are relaxed so as to include a low level of the property (e.g. 'The house was *silent*' uttered when, strictly speaking, there were various sounds of creaking and dripping), the use of brand names for the more generic object or activity, such as 'I need a *kleenex*', 'Please *xerox* 50 copies' and hyperbolic uses like 'The queue for tickets is a 100 miles long'. The radical claim made by Sperber and Wilson was that 'there is no discontinuity between those loose uses and a variety of "figurative" examples which include the most characteristic examples of poetic metaphor.' (Sperber and Wilson 1986a/95: 235).

In this early RT work on loose use (including metaphorical use), the idea was that speakers express propositions that they do not endorse and that they do not expect their addressees to believe; that is, they don't *communicate* the proposition expressed, but rather employ it as a vehicle for the communication of a range of implicatures. For example, an utterance of the sentence in (7a) might express the proposition given in (7b), but this is not a component of the speaker's meaning, which consists of a set of implicatures such as those in (7c). The utterance has no explicitly communicated content (other than the higher level proposition THE SPEAKER HAS SAID THAT THE STEAK$_X$ IS RAW; note: the subscript 'x' indicates that a specific member of the category of steaks has been picked out).

(7) a. This is raw.

b. THE STEAK$_X$ IS RAW.

c. THE STEAK$_X$ IS VERY UNDERCOOKED.
THE SPEAKER REGARDS THE STEAK$_X$ AS INEDIBLE.
THE STEAK$_X$ SHOULD BE RETURNED TO THE KITCHEN FOR FURTHER COOKING.

An essential ingredient of the account was the idea that one propositional form can be used to represent another one, where the relation between the two forms is one of 'interpretive resemblance', that is, of resemblances in the logico-semantic content of the two propositions. On

a literal use, a speaker employs an utterance whose propositional form is identical to the propositional form of the thought whose content she wants to communicate, so that the two forms share all their logical and semantic properties (entailments, contextual implications). In fact, rather few utterances are wholly literal, but the following is a possible case: 'Some oak trees are deciduous'. On a loose use, the propositional form of the utterance shares some, but not all, of its logical properties with the propositional form of the thought it is being used to represent. In (7), for instance, the proposition expressed shares with the speaker's thought the implications in (7c), which are communicated, but it also carries the implication that the steak in question has received no cooking at all (the literal meaning of 'raw'), which is not shared with the thought the speaker has in mind and is not communicated. For this to work, it is crucial that addressees have the ability to sort out those implications of the utterance's propositional form which are meant by the speaker from those which are not. That they can and do achieve this sorting follows directly from the precepts of relevance theory: addressees follow a path of least effort in deriving contextual implications from the utterance, using the most accessible items of encyclopaedic information associated with lexically encoded concepts, and the inferential process ends when their expectations of relevance are satisfied. In the case of (7), as uttered in a typical restaurant scenario, the implications most easily derived concern the edibility of the steak and its qualities as a satisfactory meal. It is unlikely that the implication that it totally lacked any cooking would be accessed, and, if it were, it would be immediately discarded as incompatible with what we know about the standard practices of restaurants.

More generally, the idea is that quite often a literal interpretation of an utterance is not intended and would not satisfy the presumption of optimal relevance because it would require unnecessary effort to derive the intended cognitive effects when those effects could be derived more economically from a loose use. This is especially evident in cases involving numbers, so telling someone that I earn £2,000 a month (rather than £1,983, which, let us suppose, is in fact the case) will enable him to derive the intended implications about my living standard, my status, and purchasing power, with less effort than processing the strictly correct amount. In the case of the loose use of 'raw' in (7), this is a more economical and effective way of conveying the speaker's thought(s) about the steak than any attempt at literal encoding, such as 'This steak is undercooked to the extent that I find it repellent to contemplate eating it'.

In other cases, there may simply be no linguistic encoding of the thought(s) the speaker wants to convey, not even a long or complex one, so she has no option but to choose an expression whose loose use will enable the addressee to infer the content of the thought(s). This may be the case for quite a few metaphors, in particular, those that are felt to be especially evocative or poetic. Consider, in this regard, two of the more novel and creative metaphors given above in (3) and repeated here as (8a) and (8b):

(8) a. Vocally, he is spell-binding, giving lines *dexterous topspin* and unexpected bursts of power.

b. Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player

That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more: it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.

Taking (8a) first, the phrase 'dexterous topspin' is typically used to describe a particularly skilful hitting or throwing of a ball in tennis or cricket, a technique that makes the ball rotate forwards as it moves through the air, so that it falls earlier and faster than normal and is consequently hard for the opponent to return. As used here, to describe the way an actor spoke his lines, the literal meaning drops away and what is communicated is an array of implications concerning the skill with which the actor used his voice, its compelling effect on the audience and, perhaps, the difficulty the other actors had in matching it. Doubtless, this description does not do justice to the cognitive (and perhaps sensory) effects of this metaphor, but it suffices to indicate, not only the relevant semantic resemblances between the speaker's intended meaning and the proposition expressed by his utterance, but also the lack of any literal language by means of which that intended meaning could have been expressed. Turning to (8b), this unparaphraseability is all the more apparent: what is communicated are implications about the brevity and pointlessness of life, the self-important delusions that drive us, how little real value there is in our frantic efforts to achieve, etc. Again, this characterisation of the meaning conveyed is no more than an indication, as there simply is no fully adequate way to express it literally.

Not only is it not possible to give literal expression to the implicatures of the examples in (8), there is a degree of indeterminacy about them, especially in the case of (8b): while one member of the audience might derive implications about the meaninglessness of human existence, another might focus more on implications concerning the high ambitions and terrible compromises one makes only for it all to come to nothing in the end. These facts about the variability of equally good interpretations are usually ignored by pragmatic theories, but they are explained in the RT framework by its account of communication as occurring with different degrees of strength. The strength with which a proposition is communicated is a matter of the degree to which the communicator makes evident her intention to make that particular proposition manifest to the addressee. The implicature of Amy's utterance in (4) is strongly communicated, in the sense that she can be taken to have specifically intended it, while those conveyed by (8a) and (8b) are considerably weaker, in the sense that the speaker/author need not specifically intend that particular propositions are recovered, but rather that the audience infer some of the propositions that fall within a wide range made manifest to some degree by the utterance, enough of them to satisfy their expectations of relevance. Metaphorical utterances, like all other uses, literal or non-literal, may communicate some implicatures strongly and others relatively more weakly, so, for instance, the author of (8a) strongly communicates that the actor delivered his lines skilfully and effectively, but weakly communicates other propositions concerning the pitch changes of his voice, his interaction with his fellow actors on stage, the effects of his speeches on the audience, etc. Different readers will derive different subsets of these weak implicatures. When an utterance or piece of text achieves most of its relevance through a wide array of weak implicatures, as in the case of (8b), the resulting effect is what

Sperber and Wilson (1986a/95: 222) term a 'poetic effect'. Despite the 'weakness' of the implicatures in such a case, the effect on the audience is often very powerful, due both to the density of the array of propositions made weakly manifest, and to the responsibility, hence the personal engagement, of the audience in recovering particular propositions from the wide range the speaker/writer has encouraged him to explore.[6]

4. METAPHOR, LEXICAL PRAGMATICS AND AD HOC CONCEPTS

The development of a subfield of 'lexical pragmatics' in the mid-1990s brought with it a change to the way in which metaphor and (other) loose uses of language have been explained in RT. As mentioned in section 2, the modulation of encoded word meaning in context may result in a concept that has a narrower and/or broader denotation than the concept encoded by the word. The claim is that there is a single process of accessing items of encyclopaedic information and using them as contextual assumptions to derive contextual implications. These, in turn, lead to adjustments of the concept which made those encyclopaedic assumptions accessible. Whether the resulting concept is narrower or broader (or both) in denotation than the encoded lexical concept is entirely a function of the encyclopaedic information deployed in the given case. The following example should make the process clear.

Consider an utterance of (9), where the speaker is the mother of a five-year-old boy, Billy, and the addressee is the boy's father who is angry with him for breaking a toy:

(9) He's just a child.

Plausible implications of the mother's utterance, derived via highly accessible background information associated with the concept CHILD, are that Billy's behaviour is due to him being very young and inexperienced and is, therefore, understandable and forgivable. Arguably, this results in a concept CHILD* which is somewhat narrower than the lexically encoded concept CHILD, roughly paraphraseable as 'child who is not yet physically and psychologically developed'. Now consider a different scenario, in which (9) is uttered by a woman who is referring to her husband, Mike, who avoids household chores and spends many hours a day playing computer games. Here, the implications communicated are that he is not fulfilling normal adult responsibilities, assumes he can play while others work, is morally underdeveloped, etc., which, by backwards inference, results in a concept CHILD**, which is broader than the lexically encoded concept CHILD, including in its denotation not only actual children but also adults who behave in certain childish ways.

In both cases, we talk of the pragmatically inferred word meaning as an ad hoc concept (indicated by asterisks to distinguish it from the linguistically encoded concept) and it is a

[6] The explanation of communication as varying in degree of strength is an important feature of RT and unique to it, as far as I know. For a fuller and more technical account of strong/weak implicatures and poetic effects, see Sperber and Wilson (1986a/95; 2008), and for their application to creative and/or literary metaphors, see Pilkington (2000).

component of the explicature of the utterance. So, for the case of concept broadening, that is, the loose use of 'child' on the second scenario, the resulting interpretation looks like the following:

(10) Explicature: MIKE$_X$ IS JUST A CHILD**
Implicatures: MIKE$_X$ IS IRRESPONSIBLE
MIKE$_X$ SPENDS HIS TIME PLAYING RATHER THAN DOING USEFUL WORK
MIKE$_X$ HAS THE PSYCHOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT OF A BOY RATHER THAN A MAN

An important mechanism involved here is that of 'mutual parallel adjustment' of explicature, contextual assumptions and contextual implications (or implicatures): the lexical concept CHILD has associated with it an encyclopaedic entry of items of information (general and cultural knowledge about children, specific episodic memories of children), with fluctuating degrees of accessibility of the component items, strongly influenced on any occasion of use by the specifics of the context of utterance. In the current case, information about the lack of responsibilities of children, their dependence on others, and their freedom to play would be highly accessible and would be recruited as contextual assumptions, leading, by deductive inference, to the contextual implications about Mike suggested above. Then, by a process of backwards inference, the lexically encoded concept CHILD is adjusted to the ad hoc concept CHILD** which warrants just these context-specific implications. There may be several iterations of these processes of mutual parallel adjustment of explicature, contextual assumptions and implications, until the overall interpretation meets the addressee's specific expectations of relevance, based on the general presumption of 'optimal relevance'.

The RT claim about metaphorical use is that it works in exactly the same way, as do all the other cases of loose use discussed above (approximations, category extensions, hyperboles, and so on), which vary only with regard to the specific items of encyclopaedic information accessed and so the implications inferred (that is, the particular way in which the utterance achieves relevance on the particular occasion). A clear case of a metaphorical use of 'child' is given in (11), in discussing Mary, who after 15 years' of dedicated work, has finally finished her treatise on the yin-yang duality in British politics:

(11) I wonder how she'll cope now that her big project is finished. It's been central to her life for so long. It was her child.

Again, certain encyclopaedic assumptions, accessed via the concept CHILD, are more accessible than others, in particular those whose activation is increased by their connection with concepts made available by the earlier part of the discourse and the wider context. The ad hoc concept communicated here, CHILD***, is inferred from such contextual implications as that the project was of great importance to Mary, she lavished much care and attention on it over a long period of time, she will miss it badly now that it is no longer part of her daily life, etc. Note that the variable degree of strength/weakness of implicatures (and hence their indeterminacy), as discussed in the previous section, carries over to the lexical pragmatic account and, in fact,

extends to the ad concept communicated, hence to the explicature. It is likely that the speaker of 'It was her child' in (11) does not specifically intend particular individual implicatures but rather leaves it to the hearer to derive some subset within a range of activated assumptions concerning Mary's relation to her cherished project, her 'child'. Given that the ad hoc concept the hearer forms is, to a large extent, driven by the relevance of these contextual implications, the characteristic of indeterminacy must carry over from them to that concept and so to the explicature of which it is a constituent.

Most people judge (11) to be a clear case of a metaphor, probably because the use of 'child' here involves shifting from one domain or category (human beings), to which its literal denotation pertains, to another entirely distinct domain (intellectual endeavours or areas of study). However, some might also think that the use of 'child' in (10) to describe a grown man is metaphorical, since it can be argued that children and men belong to distinct categories (or subcategories within the category of human beings). It is unclear what constitutes a sufficiently distinct or distant domain/category for a word use to count as metaphorical. Others might think that (10) is a hyperbolic use of 'child' (a blatantly exaggerated way of characterising Mike's behaviour), or that it is both hyperbolic and metaphorical to some extent. These variable judgements are just what Sperber and Wilson's view would predict: 'we see metaphors as a range of cases at one end of a continuum that includes literal, loose, and hyperbolic interpretations' (2008: 84); 'the absence of any criterion for distinguishing literal, loose, and metaphorical utterances [is] evidence […] that there are no genuinely distinct categories,' (2008: 95). Most importantly, as demonstrated with the 'child' examples, one and the same relevance-based inferential process is used in interpreting all these different cases (literal/encoded, literal enriched, loose, hyperbolic, metaphorical). Thus, the RT view of metaphor is very 'deflationary': 'There is no mechanism specific to metaphors, no interesting generalisation that applies only to them.' (Sperber & Wilson 2008: 84).

5. CONTENTIOUS ISSUES AND CURRENT RESEARCH

There are several issues that have been raised for the RT account of metaphor, both by people working within the framework and by those pursuing alternative approaches. I will briefly mention some of these before focusing on one in particular.

First, within the 'cognitive linguistics' framework, metaphor is viewed as originating in thought and many of the abstract concepts we employ are taken to be inherently metaphorical, their use and understanding being dependent on mappings to other more concrete concepts (see chapter 2). Often cited cases of such 'conceptual metaphors' are LIFE IS A JOURNEY, TIME IS SPACE, ARGUMENT IS WAR, and there are many more (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). A key source of evidence cited in support of this cognitive/conceptual view of metaphor is the systematic nature of much of our metaphorical language. For example, we talk of ourselves (our lives) as 'reaching a cross-roads', 'forging ahead', 'taking a new direction', 'being derailed', 'getting back on course', and so on, all of which can be seen as surface manifestations of the mapping between the abstract conceptual domain LIFE and the more concrete conceptual domain JOURNEY. This raises

several questions for the RT account, which takes metaphor to arise not in cognition but in linguistic communication, as a result of speakers using language loosely in an attempt to convey complex thoughts, which need not themselves be metaphorical. One question is whether or not the two approaches can be reconciled, perhaps with a role for conceptual metaphors in the pragmatic processes of understanding metaphorical language (see Tendahl and Gibbs (2008) for positive suggestions). Another question is whether the RT account can explain the existence of families of related metaphorical uses such as the various aspects of life described as aspects of a journey in the examples just mentioned. In response to this, Wilson (2011) has set out an account of how repeated encounters with linguistic metaphors linking two conceptual domains (e.g. the domains of life and journeys, or time and space) could lead to this kind of systematicity of metaphorical use.

A second set of issues concerns the phenomenon of so-called 'emergent properties' and whether and how the RT account can explain these (see chapter 3). These are properties which are understood as being attributed to the topic of the metaphor but which are not part of our representation of the metaphor vehicle. Consider the following two examples, the first fairly conventionalised, the other relatively novel (adapted from (3a) above):

(12) a. I'm afraid to ask my line-manger. He is such a *bulldozer*.
b. The actor gave his lines *dexterous topspin* and unexpected bursts of power.

Among the properties we might plausibly take the speaker of (12a) to be attributing to her line-manager are: insensitivity, strong and simplistic views, refusal to take account of other people's opinions. For (12b), properties attributed to the actor's delivery of his lines may include skilful variations in pitch and startling acoustic effects. These properties are not part of our information store about bulldozers (heavy machinery) or topspin (a motion of a ball), respectively, that is, they are not directly recoverable from the encyclopaedic entries associated with the literal encoded concepts BULLDOZER and TOPSPIN. This issue has been confronted to some extent within the RT framework: see Wilson and Carston (2006) and Vega Moreno (2007) for discussion of more conventionalised cases such as (12a), and Wearing (2014a) for discussion of the more novel case in (12b), with regard to which she suggests an element of analogical processing may be required in deriving implicatures and thus constructing the ad hoc concept TOPSPIN*.

A third area of contention for the RT account concerns the phenomenology of metaphor understanding, an issue which is a focus of my current research. What people often find most striking about a metaphor are what seem to be sensory, imagistic or affective effects, making for a qualitative experience, which is not obviously captured by the amodal propositional representations (explicatures and implicatures) that, according to the theory, comprise the communicated content. Although Sperber and Wilson's approach is notable for its engagement with the rich, open-endedness of the effects that many metaphors (and other evocative uses of language) can have, their account remains resolutely propositional: 'What look like non-propositional effects associated with the expression of attitudes, feelings and states of mind can be approached in terms of weak implicature' (1986a/95: 222), and 'if you look at these apparently affective effects through the microscope of relevance theory, you see a wide array of

minute cognitive effects' (ibid: 224). Whether or not this is true of apparently affective effects of particular uses of language, [7] I do not think it can be true of the mental imagery that seems to be characteristic of many metaphors and which I will focus on here.

The following is a strikingly clear case of a metaphor which requires us to actively visualize what is described by the literal content of the metaphorical language, and to use that mental imagery in imagining the taking off and flight of the bird:

(13) … a heron launched itself from low ground to our south, a foldaway construction of struts and canvas, snapping and locking itself into shape just in time to keep airborne, … (From: R. Macfarlane *The Old Ways: A Journey on Foot,* p.298)

A famous 'image' theory of metaphor is that of Davidson (1978), who maintains that metaphors do not communicate cognitive contents, neither implicatures nor ad hoc concepts, but rather prompt us to notice a wide range of non-propositional aspects of the topic just as pictures and photographs do. In his view, the literal content of a metaphor (which is its only 'meaning') evokes an image or images and the result is that we see one thing as another (the boss as a bulldozer, Mary's thesis as her child, the heron as a foldaway construction …).

However, while the example in (13) seems to support Davidson's view, in that any attempt to say what propositions it implicates or what ad hoc concepts are communicated by 'foldaway construction', 'struts', 'canvas', etc. seems misplaced, this is less obvious for some of our earlier examples. A speaker who says 'I must fly now' seems to be expressing a proposition, one which can be embedded in the scope of operators like the conditional or negation (e.g. 'If you have to fly now, we can defer our discussion to tomorrow') and, in fact, to be making a statement, one that the addressee might question or disagree with ('No, you have plenty of time'). Of course, this is a fairly conventionalised case and it might be supposed that Davidson's 'image' account applies only to novel metaphors while propositional accounts, such as the RT ad hoc concept account, apply only to established cases whose imagery potential is much reduced.[8]

My approach is conciliatory. Taking aspects of both the RT propositional account and Davidson's image theory, I have argued that there are propositional and imagistic components across the whole range of metaphors, but that these components differ greatly in their relative weightings in different cases. My proposal is not that there are two distinct classes of metaphor, but that there are two different routes to the understanding of metaphors - the quick, local, on-line meaning-adjustment process, as discussed in section 4, and a slower, more global appraisal of the literal meaning of the metaphorical language from which inferences about the speaker's meaning are made (Carston 2010). This latter route is especially likely to be taken when the addressee is processing a new, creative and/or extended metaphorical use of language, that is, when the

[7] Pilkington (2000) emphasises the centrality of the qualitative, non-propositional effects of metaphor and a need for more attention to them within the RT framework.

[8] However, it is clear that this is not what Sperber and Wilson intend with regard to the ad hoc concept account; see, for instance, their discussion of 'The fog comes on little cat feet' from the poem by Carl Sandburg (Sperber and Wilson 2008).

metaphor places such demands on the interpretive process that it is diverted from its standard quick mode of meaning adjustment. As regards mental imagery, while it may be evoked even for familiar cases like 'I must fly', 'Life is a long hard journey', 'John is a pig', etc.', that is, those for which the ad hoc concept account works well, it will generally be more attended to by hearers/readers (more noticed/experienced by them) on the literal meaning route. This is at least partly because this route involves a delay in deriving any communicatively intended propositional meaning, as the literal meaning is processed in a more reflective mode than is typical of the process of ad hoc concept construction.[9]

To illustrate the second 'literal' route, consider again the moderately extended and creative metaphor in (3b), repeated here:

(14) Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more: it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.

(Shakespeare: *Macbeth V.v. 24-30*)

After the introduction of the topic, 'Life', virtually every word here is used metaphorically. According to the ad hoc concept account, there would be constant lexical adjustments, with the derived concepts WALKING-SHADOW*, POOR-PLAYER*, STRUTS*, FRETS*, HOUR*, STAGE*, etc., replacing each of the literal lexical meanings in the developing interpretation. According to my alternative account, what happens here is that the literal meaning is highly activated while processes of ad hoc concept formation are overly demanding, so that the literal meaning stays in play until a later stage of the understanding process. That is because, in this extended metaphor, the linguistically-encoded concepts are sufficiently closely related that they semantically prime and reinforce each other, to the extent that their activation levels are so high that a literal interpretation unfolds – a description of an indifferent theatre performance, with accompanying mental imagery of the inadequate entertainer briefly moving about on the stage, performing his prescribed script, and then exiting. Of course, this is not what is communicated by the speaker since she obviously does not endorse any of the literal representations as factual. Rather, this set of literal representations is framed or metarepresented as an imaginary or fictional world, which is subject, as a whole, to further reflective inferential processing. This process effectively extracts implications about life that are relevantly and plausibly attributable to Macbeth at this stage of the play (when all his grand ambitions have come to nought) - concerning its brevity and pointlessness, the deluded self-importance of each of us, how little our best efforts are valued by anyone else, and so on. It is these that are taken to have been (weakly) implicated and which, therefore, constitute the meaning of Macbeth's soliloquy. For further examples and discussion of

[9] Note that the same point holds for literally used language. There is evidence that in processing quite banal utterances, like 'The ranger saw an eagle in the sky', we automatically token visual imagery (Zwaan and Pecher 2012) and that for more evocative literal descriptions we are consciously aware of and attend to mental imagery.

why and when the processing of a metaphor is tipped into this second processing mode, see Carston (2010) and Carston and Wearing (2011).

6. FUTURE DIRECTIONS

While the ad hoc concept account of metaphor understanding is well developed and quite widely accepted, the alternative literal meaning (or 'metaphorical world') account is fairly new and needs much more development, both with regard to the factors that trigger it and the nature of the 'reflective' pragmatic processes that operate on it to derive the intended propositional meaning. These processes are just as much driven by the goal of finding an optimally relevant interpretation as any other pragmatic process, but the claim is that something about the metaphorical use in these cases induces a change of gear: processing is slowed down and extra attentive effort is expended so, as predicted by RT, extra effects are achieved, which, in many instances, will include an array of weak implicatures. An important question concerns the status of the non-propositional imagistic effects that many hearers/readers experience, whether they are to be construed as components of the intended effects (along with implicatures) or as just a by-product, albeit a pleasing one, of the greater attention given to the literal meaning of the metaphor.

As well as further work needed on the theoretical side, future research must focus on spelling out precise predictions of the RT accounts where possible and testing them experimentally. This has already begun with experimental investigations of the orthodox RT 'loose use continuum' view of metaphor, testing whether or not there is any clear interpretive distinction between what are pre-theoretically taken to be two distinct tropes, hyperboles and metaphors (Rubio- Fernández, Wearing and Carston 2015). And there is experimental work now underway to test the idea that there are two routes to metaphor understanding, one of which proceeds via ad hoc concept construction and the other of which employs the literal meaning of the metaphors to build a metaphorical world, from which the implicatures of the utterance are inferred.

Finally, it will be worth investigating what some of the current intensive work on embodied cognition and processes of sensory-motor simulation in language comprehension (Dove 2011) might contribute to the RT account of metaphor. In this respect, fMRI experiments by Desai et al. (2011) are encouraging in that they report that, while sensory-motor areas of the cortex are activated to some extent for all action metaphors (e.g. 'grab life by the throat'), they are considerably more active for unfamiliar cases than for familiar cases. Based on the observed areas of brain activation, Desai et al. also report that 'metaphor understanding is not completely based on sensory-motor simulations but relies also on abstract lexical semantic codes' (ibid: 2376). I take this to be at least consistent with the position in Carston (2010) that there are both propositional and imagistic components involved in metaphor understanding and that their relative weightings vary depending on a range of factors including novelty/familiarity.

RELATED TOPICS

Chapter 2: Cognitive metaphor theory, by Zoltán Kövecses
Chapter 5: Metaphor, language and dynamic systems, by Raymond W. Gibbs Jr.
Chapter 14: Conventional and novel metaphors in language, by Gill Philip
Chapter 15: Creative metaphor in literature, by Marco Caracciolo

FURTHER READING

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

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