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Introduction*Metaphor and the Issue of Universality*

What does metaphor have to do with culture? A short (and vague) answer may be that metaphor and culture are related in many ways. For example, one way in which metaphor and culture are connected in our mind arises from what we have learned about metaphor in school: Creative writers and poets commonly use metaphors, and because literature is a part of culture, metaphor and culture can be seen as intimately linked. After all, metaphor can be viewed as the ornamental use of language. Thus, metaphor and culture may be seen as being related to each other because they are combined in literature – an exemplary manifestation of culture. This is a possible way of thinking of the relationship, and I will deal with it in various places in the present work.

But this is not the kind of relationship between the two that interests me in the present context. I have in mind a much more fundamental connection between them that can be explained in the following way: In line with some current thinking in anthropology, we can think of culture as a set of shared understandings that characterize smaller or larger groups of people (e.g., D'Andrade, 1995; Shore, 1996; Strauss and Quinn, 1997). This is not an exhaustive definition of culture, in that it leaves out real objects, artifacts, institutions, practices, actions, and so on, that people use and participate in in any culture, but it includes a large portion of it: namely, the shared understandings that people have in connection with all of these “things.”

When we think of culture in this way, the connection between metaphor and culture emerges in a straightforward manner within the cognitive linguistic framework initiated by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's (1980) work *Metaphors We Live By*. One of Lakoff and Johnson's main points was that metaphor does not occur primarily in language but in thought. In other words, they argued that we actually understand the world with metaphors and do not just speak with them. (In the second chapter, I will present experimental evidence that proves the validity of this claim.) Thus, the shared understandings suggested by anthropologists as a large part of the definition of culture can often be metaphorical understandings. They can be metaphorical when the focus of understanding is on some intangible entity, such as time, our inner life, mental processes, emotions, abstract qualities, moral values, and social and political institutions. In such cases, the metaphors we use to understand these intangibles may become crucially important in the way we actually experience the intangibles in a culture. In short, on this view of metaphor, metaphors may be an inherent part of culture. (Interestingly, as I will show in chapter 9, there are anthropologists who accept the view of culture as in part comprising shared understandings without simultaneously embracing the view that metaphor, in the sense indicated, is an inherent part of it.)

Given this way of thinking about the connection between metaphor and culture, we can ask, *To what extent do people share their metaphors?* This seemingly trivial question becomes much more interesting and significant if we ask the larger and more significant question of which it forms a part: *To what extent do people around the world share their understandings of aspects of the world in which they live?* It is this question that is of particular interest to me in this book.

THE MAIN ISSUE: UNIVERSALITY AND VARIATION IN METAPHOR

According to the "standard" view of metaphor in the Lakoff–Johnson framework, metaphors are based on embodied human experiences (e.g., Lakoff and Johnson, 1999; Grady, 1997a, 1997b). For example, we metaphorically view affection as warmth (Kövecses, 1986: 101) because of the correlation in our childhood experiences between the

loving embrace of our parents and the comforting bodily warmth that accompanies it. This gives us the “conceptual metaphor” AFFECTION IS WARMTH. (The small capital letters indicate concepts, rather than words.) Thinking (by means of AFFECTION IS WARMTH) and talking (e.g., “We have a *warm* relationship”) of affection in terms of warmth arise naturally from our embodied experience. Probably no one would be surprised to hear that affection is universally conceptualized as warmth, rather than coldness. To learn such “primary” metaphors is not a choice for us: It happens unconsciously and automatically. Because this is a universal bodily experience, the metaphor corresponding to it may well be universal. In other words, universal primary experiences produce universal primary metaphors.

And yet, when we look at metaphors in the world’s languages, we have the distinct impression that there is a large number of nonuniversal metaphors as well, and that they may be just as numerous as the universal ones, if not more so. In other words, variation in metaphor appears to be just as important and common as universality (as pointed out, for example, by Kienpointner, n.d.). As I will show in later chapters, variation in metaphor takes many forms, and in one of the most common a particular abstract domain is understood in a variety of cross-culturally different ways. Examples of this kind of variation abound: Love is conceptualized as a JOURNEY, UNITY, HUNTING, and so forth, in many cultures, including English, Hungarian, and Chinese, but in certain dialects of Chinese LOVE IS FLYING A KITE (Yang, 2002); anger is understood as a fluid or gas in many cultures, but in Zulu anger is understood as OBJECTS IN THE HEART (Taylor and Mbense, 1998); life is commonly viewed as a JOURNEY or STRUGGLE, but in Hmong it is viewed as a STRING (Riddle, 2000).

If variation in metaphor is so common, we need to be able to provide an explanation for it. So we have a serious challenge: *How can we construct a comprehensive theory that can account for both the universality and the variation in our use of metaphor?*

To account for this, the standard theory of metaphor in the cognitive linguistic mold would continue as follows: There are many primary metaphors; in addition to AFFECTION IS WARMTH, we have

CAUSES ARE FORCES (e.g., “You’re *driving* me crazy”)

EVENTS ARE MOTIONS (e.g., “What’s *going on* here?”)

PROGRESS IS MOTION FORWARD (e.g., “We haven’t made any *headway*”)

PURPOSES ARE DESTINATIONS (e.g., “She’s *reached her goal*”)

DIFFICULTIES ARE IMPEDIMENTS (e.g., “Let’s try to *get around* this problem”)

In this view, primary metaphors may be put together in particular languages and cultures to form “complex” metaphors, such as LIFE IS A JOURNEY and LOVE IS A JOURNEY, in which they function as “conceptual correspondences,” or “mappings,” between the “source” domain of JOURNEY and the “target” domains of LIFE and LOVE. The combinations of primary metaphors may be language-specific. (I will provide several examples for this in later chapters, especially in chapter 3.) The point is that the primary metaphors are likely to be universal, whereas the complex ones that are formed from them are much less likely to be so. Cultures greatly influence what complex conceptual metaphors emerge from the primary metaphors.

In my view, all of this is surely part of the explanation, but there is a lot more that must be added to make the cognitive linguistic view of metaphor a more comprehensive and sophisticated account of both the universality and the variation of metaphor. In particular, I will suggest, among other things, the following:

- Universal experiences do not necessarily lead to universal metaphors;
- Bodily experience may be selectively used in the creation of metaphors;
- Bodily experience may be overridden by both culture and cognitive processes;
- Primary metaphors are not necessarily universal;
- Complex metaphors may be potentially or partially universal;
- Metaphors are not necessarily based on bodily experience – many are based on cultural considerations and cognitive processes of various kinds.

In other words, I claim that if we look at the currently available evidence in the world’s languages and cultures, as well as within languages and cultures, what we find is that the present version of the cognitive linguistic view of metaphor is not comprehensive and

subtle enough to account for these data. Thus, my major goal in this book is to offer a more comprehensive and sophisticated version of the theory, one that is capable of accounting for the evidence available at the present time. No doubt, new evidence and data will present themselves as research continues, and it is our job constantly to modify the theory that is developed here.

COMPONENTS OF THE COGNITIVE LINGUISTIC VIEW OF METAPHOR

Before I go on to give a preliminary outline of the theory that I propose to handle the issue of universality and variation in metaphor, let me characterize the cognitive linguistic view of metaphor as I see it today. This theory of metaphor is a complex one. In it, metaphor is seen as being constituted by a variety of parts, aspects, or components that interact with each other. The components include the following:

1. Source domain
2. Target domain
3. Experiential basis
4. Neural structures corresponding to (1) and (2) in the brain
5. Relationships between the source and the target
6. Metaphorical linguistic expressions
7. Mappings
8. Entailments
9. Blends
10. Nonlinguistic realizations
11. Cultural models

Let me briefly explain each of these for the sake of those readers who are not intimately familiar with the cognitive linguistic view of metaphor that has developed from Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) work. (A book-length introduction to the past 20 years of the theory can be found in Kövecses, 2002.)

- 1–2. Metaphor consists of a source and a target domain such that the source is a more physical and the target a more abstract kind of domain.

Examples: Source domains: WARMTH, JOURNEY. Target domains: AFFECTION, LIFE, LOVE. Thus: AFFECTION IS WARMTH; LIFE IS A JOURNEY; LOVE IS A JOURNEY.

3. The choice of a particular source to go with a particular target is motivated by an experiential basis, that is, some embodied experience.

Examples: Affection correlates with bodily warmth; forces often act as causes; motion is a type of event.

4. Embodied experience results in certain neural connections between areas of the brain (these areas correspond to source and target).

Potential example: When the area of the brain corresponding to affection is activated, the area corresponding to warmth is also activated.

5. The relationship of the source and the target is such that a source domain may apply to several targets and a target may attach to several sources.

Example: The JOURNEY domain applies to both LIFE and LOVE, given the linguistic evidence in English.

6. The particular pairings of source and target domains give rise to metaphorical linguistic expressions; linguistic expressions thus are derived from the connecting of two conceptual domains.

Examples: “warm relationship” (from AFFECTION IS WARMTH), “get around a problem” (from DIFFICULTIES ARE OBSTACLES).

7. There are basic, and essential, conceptual correspondences, or mappings, between the source and target domains.

Example:

Conceptual metaphor:

LOVE IS A JOURNEY

Mappings:

travelers → lovers

vehicle → love relationship

destination → purpose of the relationship

distance covered → progress made in the relationship

obstacles along the way → difficulties encountered in the relationship

8. Source domains often map ideas onto the target beyond the basic correspondences. These additional mappings are called *entailments*, or *inferences*.

Example: If love is conceptualized as a journey and the vehicle corresponds to the relationship, then our knowledge about the vehicle can be used to understand love relationships. If the vehicle breaks down, we have three choices: (1) we get out and try to reach our destination by some other means; (2) we try to fix the vehicle; or (3) we stay in the vehicle and do nothing. Correspondingly, if a love relationship does not work, we can (1) leave the relationship; (2) try to make it work; or (3) stay in it (and suffer).

9. The joining of a source domain with a target domain often results in blends, that is, conceptual materials that are new with respect to *both* the source and the target.

Example: Take the sentence “He was so mad, smoke was coming out of his ears.” In this example we have an angry person as the target domain and smoke (fume) in a container as the source domain. The target (the angry person) has no smoke emerging from it and the source (the container with hot fluid) has no ears. But the example conceptually integrates the two: We have a container that has ears that have smoke blowing out of them. This is a blend (Fauconnier and Turner, 2002 and chapter 11).

10. Conceptual metaphors often materialize, or are realized, in nonlinguistic ways, that is, not only in language and thought but also in social–physical practice and reality.

Example: Given the IMPORTANT IS CENTRAL conceptual metaphor and its linguistic manifestations (such as “the *central* issue”), at meetings and various other social events important people (e.g., people in higher positions) tend to occupy more “central” physical locations in the setting than less important ones.

11. Conceptual metaphors converge on, and often produce, cultural models that operate in thought. These are structures that are simultaneously cultural and cognitive (hence, the term *cultural model*, or *cognitive model*), in that they are culturally specific mental representations of aspects of the world.

Example: An integral part of our understanding of time is that it is an entity that moves. This is because our cultural model of time is based on (created by) the conceptual metaphor TIME IS A MOVING ENTITY.

Metaphorical Language

As is clear from the preceding characterization, in the cognitive linguistic view metaphor is only derivatively a linguistic phenomenon. It exists in language only because it exists in thought. Linguistic metaphors (i.e., metaphors in language) are expressions of metaphorical concepts in the brain's conceptual system. So, on the one hand, metaphorical linguistic expressions make conceptual metaphors manifest, and, on the other, we can use these metaphorical expressions to arrive at metaphors in thought by means of hypothetically assuming links between two domains that can, in turn, be put to the test in psychological experiments (as I will show in chapter 2).

Because we often arrive at hypotheses as to what conceptual metaphors we have on the basis of linguistic usage, it is important to know what counts as a metaphorical linguistic expression. We can ask what the criteria are on the basis of which we can decide what counts as a linguistic metaphor. There can be different answers to this question, and several researchers and research teams are trying to develop an answer (see, for example, Steen, 1999; Cameron, 2003).

What Kind of "Thing" Is Metaphor?

It should also be clear from the preceding characterization that metaphor, on the cognitive linguistic view, is not an exclusively linguistic phenomenon. It seems to belong to language, thought, social-cultural practice, brain, and body – with metaphor in thought being essential. In other words, it can be suggested that metaphor is a

- linguistic
- conceptual
- social-cultural
- neural
- bodily

phenomenon, and that it exists on all of these different levels at the same time.

The idea that metaphor is all of these “things” has not always been accepted. I believe it has required several intellectual revolutions for us to recognize that metaphor is a many-sided phenomenon that involves not only language, but also the conceptual system, as well as social-cultural structure and neural and bodily activity. I personally believe that one of these intellectual revolutions took place in 1980 with the publication of *Metaphors We Live By* by Lakoff and Johnson. Lakoff and Johnson’s main achievement in that book was that they made the claim that metaphors are conceptual in nature, that is, that they reside in the conceptual system, and not just in language (i.e., in linguistic meaning). To be sure, they were not the first to claim this. (Anthropologists have always thought of metaphor as a powerful conceptual device, rather than just a linguistic ornament.) They were the first to claim it in a systematic, generalizable, and experimentally testable way. As it turns out, time has proved them right, as I will show in chapter 2.

In my view, equally important was the step that made us see that metaphor is not simply linguistic and conceptual but also bodily in nature. This is the notion that metaphorical thought is embodied. It was again Lakoff and Johnson who made this claim most forcefully and systematically (Johnson, 1987; Lakoff, 1987; Lakoff and Johnson, 1999). Their ideas were followed up and refined by Joe Grady and his notion of primary metaphor (e.g., Grady, 1997a, 1997b). The main idea in all this work was that abstract thought, largely defined by metaphor, is the result of the way the human body constrains the way we think about abstractions such as time, emotion, morality, and politics.

And I believe that we are witnessing something crucially important again at the present time, when researchers are studying how the brain is equipped to govern metaphorical thought. Various models, or approximations, of this neural activity in the brain have been suggested and are the focus of attention in a variety of disciplines. I will say more about this in chapter 2.

But I also believe that the first major revolution occurred more than 2,000 years ago when Greek philosophers, such as Plato and Aristotle, recognized the existence of metaphor in language (and to some

extent also in thought). They were the first to point out in a serious way that there is such a thing as metaphor. This does not mean, however, that metaphor as a phenomenon had not existed previously. It certainly had, and it was widely used both by their contemporaries and by many generations of people preceding them.

These ideas concerning metaphor are embedded in a larger framework of philosophical claims made by Lakoff and Johnson (1999). It will be useful to consider them briefly here. Lakoff and Johnson suggest the following foundational propositions:

1. *Thought is largely unconscious.* This means that we cannot help thinking in the ways we do. We are not consciously aware of the way we think and reason, and we cannot think just anything.
2. *Abstract concepts are largely metaphorical.* This means that most of our nonphysical (social, psychological, etc.) reality is conceptualized via physical reality, that is, in terms of physical domains of experience.
3. *The mind is embodied.* This means that concepts derive their meaning through sensorimotor experience – either directly or indirectly (i.e., via metaphor).

Clearly, it is the second proposition that is of most immediate concern to us, but, as we will see in chapter 2 and throughout this book, the other two are just as crucial for a fuller understanding of the nature and significance of metaphor in culture.

A NEW LOOK AT THE ISSUE OF UNIVERSALITY AND VARIATION IN METAPHOR

What should a theory of metaphor that attempts to explain both universality and variation in the use of metaphor look like? At the very least, such a theory must be capable of answering questions such as the following:

1. Which metaphors are universal, and why?
2. Where is metaphor variation most likely to occur?
3. What are the aspects of metaphor that are most commonly affected by variation?
4. What are the causes of metaphor variation?