Introduction

Metonymy is a cognitive and linguistic process through which we use one thing to refer to another. For example, we might use the word 'Hollywood' to refer to mainstream American films, or the word 'Shakespeare' to refer to plays and poetry by Shakespeare. In these examples, a place and a person are used to refer to things that are strongly related to that particular place and that particular person. Metonymy often involves using a simple or concrete concept to refer to something that is more complex or more abstract, or even sensitive, so in American history the terms '9/11' and 'Pearl Harbor' are used to refer to the events that took place on that date and in that place respectively. As we will see in this book, metonymic thinking is extremely widespread. We think metonymically all the time in order to put the large amount of information that is available about the world into a manageable form. The presence of metonymy in our everyday thinking means that it leaves traces in language and in other forms of expression.

Metonymy is often discussed in relation to metaphor but the two are quite different. Whereas metaphor usually involves some sort of comparison between largely unrelated entities (or entities that are construed as being unrelated in that particular context), in metonymy, the relationship between a term and its referent is usually much closer. From the point of view of the analyst, this makes it harder to spot, but from the point of view of the user, the nature of metonymy renders it a much more subtle way of conveying nuance, evaluation and perspective.

Since the 1990s we have seen a proliferation of books on metaphor, but there are no extensive book-length treatments of metonymy that discuss its role in authentic discourse and other forms of communication. This is surprising given the ubiquity of metonymy and the key functions that it performs. As well as its referential function, which is well documented, metonymy is used, for example, to build identity within discourse communities and to facilitate speedy communication. It helps build relationships through appeals to shared knowledge and through these same processes it can facilitate social 'distancing'. Metonymy involves indirectness, which means that it underlies a great deal of euphemism, hedging and vague language. It serves important evaluative purposes and is

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often used for positioning oneself within a debate. The potential that metonymy offers for 'language play' means that it underpins a significant amount of humour and irony, and other ludic and creative uses of language. Moreover, as this book will show, the presence of metonymy in all modes of expression reflects the key role that it plays in the formulation and communication of ideas.

Because metonymy is so subtle and so nuanced, it is easily missed or misinterpreted. The most common misinterpretations occur when a metonymically intended meaning is taken literally or metaphorically, or alternatively when a literal or metaphorical meaning is understood as a metonymy. Misunderstandings such as these can occur even between people who know each other well and who have sufficient shared knowledge to facilitate the extensive use of metonymy. They can also occur in professional or academic contexts when, for example, researchers from different disciplines communicate with one another on interdisciplinary projects. As we will see in Chapter 8, misinterpretations also occur in global geopolitical settings, and these can contribute to political conflict both nationally and internationally. Misinterpretations are even more likely to occur in communication between people who have different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Because metonymy is so subtle, the reasons for these misinterpretations are often missed, and misunderstandings continue.

The aim of this book is to present a full discussion of the different types of metonymy that have been identified in the literature, the different functions that metonymy performs, the contribution that it makes to successful communication in language and other forms of expression, the role that it plays in intercultural communication, and the types of misinterpretations that can occur in these contexts. Real-world data are used throughout. The book's primary focus is on metonymy in language but it also considers the role played by metonymy in different modes of expression, such as art, music, film and advertising. I examine current theories of metonymy, most of which have been developed within the cognitive linguistic paradigm, and assess the extent to which these theories could usefully be extended to account for the complex, multi-layered nature of metonymy as it occurs 'in the wild'. I also look at how metonymy is processed in the mind and at how the ability to understand and produce metonymy develops over time in both typically developing individuals and individuals with linguistic impairments.

Contextualised examples of metonymy are analysed in depth to show how metonymy operates in spoken and written language as well as in sign language, and other forms of expression. When discussing the role played by metonymy in spoken language, I focus on the interactive, dynamic role played by metonymy in two-way communication. This allows for an exploration of the role played by metonymy in the gestures that accompany speech. I look at exchanges involving adults and children, and native and non-native speakers of English, in everyday, academic and workplace settings. The discussions of

metonymy in written language adopt a very broad definition of 'written lan-
guage' to allow for a consideration of the use of metonymy in modern media,
such as text messaging, as well as in different written genres, taken from sources
ranging from journalism, through business correspondence, to literature, narra-
tive and academic writing. The data include extracts of written language
produced by native and non-native speakers of English. Many of the examples
used in this book are taken from authentic language corpora, such as the
Bank of English (BofE), the British National Corpus (BNC), the Corpus of
Contemporary American English (COCA) and Webcorp. No artificial examples
are used. There are also discussions of the ways in which metonymy is used in
other media, which illustrate its multimodal and dynamic nature. The book thus
aims to provide an analysis of metonymy as it is really used, in order to produce
a theoretical and practical account of its role in language and other forms of
communication.[1]

Before beginning the book, we need a note on terminology. In the literature
on metonymy, individual instances of metonymy are sometimes referred to as
'metonyms' and sometimes as 'metonymies'. This difference generally reflects
the perspective of the writer. People looking at metonymy from a purely lexical
perspective generally prefer the term 'metonym', whereas people studying the
phenomenon from a cognitive linguistic perspective generally prefer the term
'metonymy'. Because the approach taken in this volume is broadly in line with a
cognitive linguistic perspective, and because the scope of the volume extends
well beyond language, the term 'metonymy' is used throughout.

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[1] All instances of metonymy that are discussed in this book were identified as such by at least two
speakers of the language in which they occurred. In order to code instances as 'metonymy',
Biernacka's (2013) metonymy identification procedure was employed. As we will see in
Section 6.2, this identification procedure is not unproblematic. Where problems were encoun-
tered, these are elucidated in the text. In order to extrapolate from a single instance of metonymy to
a 'metonymy type', an adapted version of Steen's (1999) procedure for conceptual metaphor
identification was employed. This is also explained in Section 6.2.

1 'What those boys need is a good handbagging'
What is metonymy?

1.1 Introduction

Metonymy is a figure of language and thought in which one entity is used to refer to, or in cognitive linguistic terms 'provide access to', another entity to which it is somehow related. In order to illustrate this, let us look at an example:

The trains are on strike. (BofE)

In order to understand this sentence, we use our knowledge of trains, including the fact that they have drivers, and that without these drivers no trains will run, to infer that it is not the actual trains that are on strike, but the drivers of those trains.

Let us look at another example:

The kettle boiled and bubbled. (BofE)

Here we use our common-sense or everyday knowledge of what kettles are for to infer that it was of course not the kettle that 'boiled and bubbled', but the water inside it. In these particular examples, we draw on our knowledge of the relationships between trains and their drivers and between kettles and their contents in order to understand what is actually meant. In a very basic sense, therefore, metonymy is a process which allows us to use one well-understood aspect of something to stand for the thing as a whole, or for some other aspect of it, or for something to which it is very closely related (Gibbs, 1994). It is most appropriately seen as a tool that we use to think about things and to communicate our thoughts, and, as such, it is a property of both our conceptual and our linguistic system (Gibbs, 1999).

One of the reasons why we need metonymy is that it is impossible to encapsulate all aspects of our intended meaning in the language that we use. In other words, language always 'underspecifies' meaning in that it cannot possibly express everything that is relevant to its interpretation (Radden *et al*., 2007), and inferences are needed to work out what is meant (Frisson, 2009). Related to this is the fact that we think 'metonymically' because it is physically impossible to consciously activate all the knowledge that we have of a particular

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concept at once, so we tend to focus on a salient aspect of that concept, and use this as point of access to the whole concept. For example, when asked to picture a computer, most people will picture just the screen, rather than the hard disk, the tower, the mouse and so on. When asked to think of 'France', people might picture a place in France that they visited, or a rough map of France, or an iconic representation of France such as the Eiffel Tower. It is impossible to picture the whole of France at once as this information could not be held in one's working memory, even if one had travelled extensively in France. To a large extent, therefore, it can be said that metonymy is prevalent in language simply because it is a property of our everyday thought processes (Langacker, 1993).

Metonymy is often discussed alongside metaphor and, as we will see in subsequent chapters, is occasionally confused with metaphor. However, as we can see from the above examples, unlike metaphor, which usually involves some sort of comparison between two unrelated entities, metonymy is a cognitive and linguistic process whereby one thing is used to refer to something else, to which it is closely related in some way. The relationship does not involve comparison. To illustrate, let us look at another example:

Do you want me to *pencil you in* for the time being? (BofE)

In this example, 'pencil you in' is used metonymically to mean 'make a provisional appointment'. The secretary offers to write the appointment in pencil rather than pen so that the customer can make last-minute changes if necessary. 'Pencil in' thus stands metonymically for what one might do with a pencil (i.e. write something down which can subsequently be rubbed out). The word 'you' is also used metonymically in this example to refer to 'your name'. This example is typical of the way in which metonymy is used in everyday language as a kind of communicative shorthand, allowing people to use their shared knowledge of the world to communicate with fewer words than they would otherwise need.

Although in the above example metonymy serves a mainly referential purpose, it can be used for a wide variety of communicative functions, such as relationship-building, humour, irony and euphemism (Deignan *et al.*, 2013; Panther and Thornburg, 2007; Ruiz de Mendoza Ibáñez and Otal Campo, 2002). One of its key functions is to provide a subtle form of evaluation of people or things (Levin and Lindquist, 2007). In the following example, the word 'suits' is a metonymy which refers in a negative way, to accountants and managers:

The best part of working at night is that *the suits* have gone home. (BofE)

By referring to accountants and managers via the suits that they wear, the writer manages to portray them as being somewhat characterless, conventional but powerful individuals who could simply be replaced with another 'suit' if

anything unfortunate should happen to them. Metonymy is also used in order to be deliberately vague (see Channell, 1994 for a discussion of the functions of vague language). For example, if we ask 'What are you doing at Christmas?', 'Christmas' most probably refers to the holiday period around the Christmas time of year, and not to Christmas Day specifically. It would sound unnecessarily pedantic to ask 'What are you doing on Christmas Day itself and in the days immediately before and after Christmas?'

A common type of metonymy involves the use of a producer to refer to a product, as in:

The kind of character we often find in *Dickens*. (BofE)

In this example, the 'producer' (Dickens) refers metonymically to his 'product' (i.e. books written by Charles Dickens). In the literature on metonymy, this would be referred to as an example of a PRODUCER FOR PRODUCT metonymy. It is conventional in the literature to indicate these 'over-arching' metonymy types using of small capitals, as has been done here. Other metonymies involving the PRODUCER FOR PRODUCT relationship include the following:

I softened to a mere fortissimo, trudging through *the Mozart.* (BofE)

A fifty-year-old *Steinway* that has been reconditioned. (BofE)

Another type of metonymy involves PART FOR WHOLE relationships, as in:

The perfect *set of wheels* for the young racer. (BofE)

In this example, 'set of wheels' refers to the whole car. Corpus evidence suggests that when the expression 'set of wheels' is used to refer to the whole car, it is nearly always in the context of a young man purchasing a car, or of positively evaluating a car. This positive evaluation may come from the fact that the focus is on *the wheels* and these are the key part of the car that moves; the expression may thus evoke an image in which there is nothing on the wheels to slow them down. This example shows how metonymy can be used to highlight some features of a phenomenon and leave others in the shade (Langacker, 1993). It also shows how the meaning of metonymy often depends heavily on the context in which it occurs.

At times, a single action is used to refer metonymically to a complex event, as in:

Put the kettle on. I'll be home by five o'clock. (BofE)

Here, 'put the kettle on' refers to the whole process of making a cup of tea (or coffee). It would be very odd to list all the actions involved in making a cup of tea so the use of metonymy here is necessary to allow communication to take place in an appropriate time period. In some contexts, 'put the kettle on' can have an additional pragmatic meaning of 'let's sit down and talk about it' when

someone tells a friend of a problem, as we can see in the following example
from British English:

Now dry your eyes and *we'll put the kettle on.* (BofE)

This is an instance of 'metonymic chaining' (Dirven, 2003), where one met-
onymy (in this case, 'put the kettle on' for 'make a cup of tea') leads to another
('drink tea together' for 'drink tea together while sharing one's problems'). It
could also be seen as 'metaphoreme', which Cameron and Deignan (2006: 674)
define as non-literal expression which 'combine[s] specific lexical and gram-
matical form with specific conceptual content and with specific affective value
and pragmatics'. Both of these phenomena (metonymic chaining and metaphor-
eme) are explored later in the book.

   In yet another type of metonymy, a person's salient feature (or the one that is
most relevant to the situation at hand) can be used to refer to the person as a
whole, as in:

But the brothers needed *muscle*, which is where Frankie Fraser came in. (BofE)

In this example, 'muscle' is a metonymy for a strong (and, in this particular
case, violent) person. The most interesting or relevant *characteristic* of some-
one or something is used to refer to the *person or thing*. Frankie Fraser was a
notoriously violent London gang member and criminal. The 'muscle' here is
presumably going to be used to beat someone up or to provide a threat to do so,
so we have another possible case of metonymic chaining here involving an
OBJECT FOR ACTION metonymy (the muscle stands for what it is going to be used
for) and an ACTUAL FOR POTENTIAL metonymy (the actual beating up represents
the potential threat of a beating). Other metonymies involving body parts can
involve the brain, as in 'Ayyad may have been *the brains behind* the making of
the bomb' (BofE), or the mouth, as in '*so many mouths to feed* and jobs to find'
(BofE), or just about any other part of the body. Metonymies such as these can
have a depersonalising effect and therefore can convey subtle (often negative)
evaluations of the people being talked about.

   We can see from this short list of examples that metonymy is used to
communicate fairly complex ideas relatively efficiently and that it can serve
as shorthand for much longer events or ideas. It is so prevalent that our language
would sound odd without it. Successful communication involving metonymy
requires a large amount of shared knowledge between speakers, concerning
their worldview and their expectations of 'how things should be' (Durán
Escribano and Roldan Riejos, 2008). This means that despite being an efficient
communicative device, metonymy has the potential to cause serious misunder-
standings if the shared knowledge and expectations on which it relies are not
perfectly matched. It is often difficult to pinpoint the source of such misunder-
standings, as both metonymy and metonymic inferences can be very difficult to

detect. As we will see in Chapter 8, the problem can become even more noticeable when metonymy is used in exchanges between people from different cultural or linguistic backgrounds.

Although all of the above examples have involved language, metonymy is first and foremost a *cognitive* phenomenon, and refers to any instance (regardless of whether language is involved or not) where a salient aspect of a particular entity is used to access the entity as a whole, or to a related entity (Langacker, 1993). For instance, when asked to recall the place where we grew up, we are more likely to picture a particular street rather than the whole town, and when asked to think of a friend, we are more likely to picture their face than any other part of their body. Metonymic *thinking* is what connects a part to a whole or to a related entity in our minds. This can be illustrated through an interesting series of metonymies that surrounded Margaret Thatcher during her period as the British Prime Minister (1979–90). Margaret Thatcher had a reputation for being a fierce and uncompromising leader who inspired both fear and respect among her followers. Anecdotally, members of Margaret Thatcher's inner Cabinet claimed that when she was temporarily called away from Cabinet meetings, she would often leave her handbag on the table and that its presence made them feel as if she were very much still in the room, so they would behave accordingly (Norton, 1990). Thus the handbag became a metonymy for Margaret Thatcher's presence and for her powerful personality. The image of Margaret Thatcher holding her handbag subsequently came to represent her particular (right-wing) views of politics and economics, her political persona as a shrewd and thrifty housewife, and her particular (negative) attitude towards the European Union, where she sought value for money at all costs. All of these connotations result from extended metonymic thinking processes. Linking back to language, Margaret Thatcher's handbag also lies behind the meaning of the term 'handbagging', which is used to refer to the process of receiving a stern telling-off, usually from a woman, as in the noun phrase 'a good handbagging' in the following example:

What those boys need is *a good handbagging.* (BofE)

The term 'handbagging' tends to have negative, ironic (and somewhat sexist) overtones, because of its strong associations with Margaret Thatcher and 'bossy women' in general.

The fact that metonymy is a cognitive phenomenon, not just a linguistic one, means that it appears in a range of other modalities besides language (Müller, 2008). Metonymy has been found to play a role in a wide variety of different modes of communication and meaning creation, such as art, music, film and advertising. For instance, in Japanese 'manga' cartoons, the absence of hands (and sometimes feet) in the picture of a character can metonymically represent loss of control by that character (Abbott and Forceville, 2011). Metonymy is

also prevalent in sculpture and architecture, particularly religious architecture, where various metonymic devices are exploited in several modalities at once in order to create desired 'iconic' effects. In music, repeated extracts, or more recently, sampling, can provide metonymic (often ironic) references to other pieces of music or even whole styles of music. Conducting also involves metonymy, as do the gestures employed by music teachers when teaching musical concepts (Chuang, 2010). Metonymy can also be found in forms of media that are intrinsically *multimodal*, such as film and advertising. The role of metonymy in film is well attested, reflecting the enormous potential for metonymy afforded by changes in angle and camera focus. For example, to continue with the theme of 'hands', Forceville (2009) shows how in Robert Bresson's film *Un condamné à mort s'est échappé* (A Man Escaped) close-ups of hands are used repeatedly throughout the film to metonymically represent phenomena that either aid or impede the protagonist's escape from a Nazi prisoner-of-war camp. In advertising, sought-after lifestyles and other aspirations can be hinted at through a variety of metonymic devices. One might catch a glimpse of a designer handbag, an attractive man, or the edge of an 'infinity pool', and use these to build up an image of a particular lifestyle and then picture oneself living that life. In both film and advertising, complementary metonymic messages can be conveyed in a single scene through the language, camera angle, actor movement and music. As we will see in later chapters, the ways in which metonymy works in these art forms can, at times, be different from the ways in which it works in language, although there are substantial areas of overlap.

1.2   Metonymy from a cognitive linguistic perspective

There have been two broad approaches to the study of metonymy: the cognitive approach, which is mostly concerned with the conceptual properties of metonymy, and the linguistic approach, which has tended to focus on how metonymy operates in language. These approaches generally complement one another, although there are occasional inconsistencies between them. Most of the recent work on metonymy has been carried out in cognitive linguistics, a field of study which focuses on the relationship between language and thought. The most widely agreed upon cognitive linguistic definition of metonymy is as follows:

Metonymy is a cognitive process in which one conceptual element or entity (thing, event, property), the vehicle, provides mental access to another conceptual entity (thing, event, property), the target, within the same frame, domain or idealized cognitive model (ICM). (Kövecses, 2006: 99)

As we can see from this definition, a key idea for cognitive linguists is that metonymy draws on the relationship that exists between the two items within a particular knowledge network. Some of the terminology in this definition needs

unpacking. Early work in cognitive linguistics (e.g. Fillmore, 1982) referred to these networks of knowledge as 'frames'. These are 'static or dynamic representations of typical situations in life and their typical elements' which are formed via a process of 'inductive generalisations from our everyday experiences' (Blank, 1999: 173). Blank distinguishes between 'static frames' and 'dynamic scenarios'. PRODUCER FOR PRODUCT metonymies, such as the 'Steinway' and 'Mozart' examples listed above, involve 'static frames', as there is no time element involved. In contrast, the 'put the kettle on' metonymies mentioned above involve 'dynamic scenarios' as they make reference to a series of actions including, for example, putting the teabags in the teapot, pouring the water on top of them then pouring the tea into a cup and drinking it. These actions come together to form a dynamic process, of which 'putting the kettle on' is only the start.

In reality there can never really be a cut-and-dried distinction between 'static' and 'dynamic' knowledge. To illustrate, the British Sign Language (BSL) sign for 'taxi' involves clicking one's fingers, and thus refers to a static phenomenon (the taxi) via a reference to the beginning of a dynamic process (the summoning of a taxi). Similarly, one possible BSL sign for 'bus' involves showing an imaginary bus pass, which again evokes knowledge of a dynamic nature, such as knowledge of the fact that some people have bus passes that they have to show to the driver in order to be allowed onto the bus. We can therefore conclude that the division between 'static frames' and 'dynamic scenarios' is somewhat artificial in practice.

For these reasons, it is more appropriate to talk about 'idealised cognitive models' (ICMs), as these emphasise the encyclopaedic, flexible, slightly idiosyncratic nature of the knowledge networks that we have in our heads (Lakoff, 1987; Radden and Kövecses, 1999).[1] Idealised cognitive models encompass the cultural knowledge that people have and are not restricted to the 'real world'. That is to say, they also encompass people's subjective views of a particular concept and can be highly idiosyncratic as they are an abstraction from people's encounters with that particular concept. They are highly schematic and flexible, and can be static or dynamic, or both. They are 'idealised' in the sense that they are not necessarily 'real'.

A possible ICM for 'cars' is shown in Figure 1.1. As we saw above, metonymy allows us to use one part of an ICM to refer, or 'gain access' to another. Within this driving ICM, metonymies might include:

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[1] Lakoff (1987) lists five types of ICM: propositional ICMs, image schema ICMs, metaphoric ICMs, metonymic ICMs and symbolic ICMs. What I am referring to here are propositional ICMs. The fact that Lakoff includes metaphor and metonymy in his list is somewhat infelicitous as these are best seen as operational or 'dynamic' cognitive processes rather than non-operational cognitive models. This view is also expounded by Ruiz de Mendoza Ibáñez, 1998.