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Spatial “metametaphors” concerning life: A cognitive holistic approach

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ABSTRACT: This paper contrasts how different paradigms in cognitive linguistics deal with metaphor and proposes a more schematic dimension of the phenomenon: the level of metametaphors. This archetypical tier of abstraction is argued to feed the level of conceptual metaphors, which show in everyday discourse in different linguistic expressions. Thinking/Speaking about Life in terms of Route Directions would correspond to one of these metametaphorical moulds, having as instances, at the conceptual metaphor level, LIFE IS A JOURNEY/SWIMMING ACROSS/PASSAGE..., which materialize in performance in various phrasings. A Brazilian Pop Music song, academic writing, and spontaneous language use are analyzed to illustrate the argument.

KEY-WORDS: schematicity; life; wayfinding instructions; metametaphor

Introduction

In this section, a synopsis of conceptual metaphor within cognitive linguistics will be aimed at. The retrospective is based on Cuenca & Hilferty (1999) and Croft & Cruse (2004). Figurative thinking and expressions permeate conceptualization and everyday language use (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). The influence our internalized poetics (Gibbs, 1994) exerts on each one’s verbal individual agenda, on the way we interact in social encounters by talking to one another, is paramount. Idiomatic wordings and discourse in general show evidence for the ubiquity of both metaphor and metonymy, two mental operations that prove to be very recurrent in the task of conceptualizing the world around us that makes us human.

Consider, e.g. the metaphors ARGUMENT IS WAR + THEORIES ARE BUILDINGS: Her question undermined his main thesis. In this case, the rationale is as if posing a difficult question to dismiss somebody’s line of reasoning were the same as shooting

a bazooka in order to destroy the opponent's headquarters. Now take, e.g. the metonymy ORDER FOR CUSTOMER: The ham and cheese omelet wants another orange juice. Here what a person has to eat at a snack bar or cafeteria is used to instantiate the person consuming the food and drink paid for.

The details about the difference and overlaps between metaphor and metonymy are beyond the scope of this paper.¹ But the main distinction can be summarized along the following lines: whereas metaphor involves a mapping between elements from one domain A – having to do with more direct, simple, concrete situations – onto elements of another domain B, related to more indirect, complex, abstract situations; metonymy has to do with a contiguous link that binds 2 elements in the same cognitive domain, referring to an entity not mentioned explicitly by pointing at it via explicit mention of another entity, blatantly related to it. According to Croft & Cruse, (2004), the essential distinction reads:

A cognitive linguistic analysis of metonymy is the ability of a speaker to select a different contextually salient concept profile in a domain or domain matrix than the one usually symbolized by the word (CROFT; CRUSE, 2004: 48). Metaphor involves a relationship between a source domain, the source of the literal meaning of the metaphorical expression, and a target domain, the domain of the experience actually being described by the metaphor (CROFT; CRUSE, 2004: 55).

1. Conventional, novel and image conceptual metaphors (typology and examples)

- (1) A house in Cape Cod across the ocean will cost you an arm and a leg.
- (2) I don't buy that!
- (3) Stock markets all over were falling steeply as US Government postponed the aid to the American real state and banking sector.

The HIGH PRICES ARE PARTS OF THE BODY metaphor is so common that sentences as (1), a truly conventional metaphor², have equivalents in many different languages around the world. The novel metaphor BELIEVING IS PURCHASING / IDEAS ARE OBJECTS is the one at stake in (2), in order for the speaker to declare she was not convinced by whatever the content of her interlocutor's statement might have been. I only give money for something to take it home when I am made believe this merchandise is good for me. Likewise, unless I find your argument persuasive enough, I will not accept it. (3) is an instance of the conventional metaphor LESS IS DOWN/QUANTITY IS VERTICALITY, motivated by one's personal experience of seeing, say, the level of wine in a glass or bottle decrease, as one pours the drink out of the receptacle or takes it gradually sip by sip.

- (4) My wife, whose waist is an hourglass...
(from André Breton, LAKOFF & TURNER, 1989, p.90)
- (5) Italy is a boot. (CUENCA & HILFERTY, 1999, p.104)
- (6) Rio Grande do Norte State is an elephant.

¹ For an overview in this regard, see (BARCELONA, 2003), (DIRVEN; PÖRINGS, 2002), among others.

² Conventional metaphors are more widespread and entrenched in figurative thought and language than novel metaphors. Thus novel metaphors, compared to conventional metaphors, strike us as more creative.

(4), (5) and (6) are all cases of image metaphors, whose essential trait is to be strikingly visual.

- (7) They had to prune the workforce.
- (8) He works for the local branch of the company.
- (9) There is a flourishing black market in software there.

These 3 sentences are instances of the novel metaphor SOCIAL ORGANIZATIONS ARE PLANTS that (CROFT & CRUSE, 2004, p.205) borrow from (KÖVECSES, 2002, p.8). In (7) pruning as in therapeutic gardening is extended to mean lay employees off in order to remove unnecessary growth to gain vigor. (8) views the head office of the company as if it were the trunk of a tree, and thus treats the local offices as branches stemming out of this trunk. In (9), the dynamic, thriving character of the black market is seen as a blossoming flower.

2. Gist on how some prominent paradigms in cognitive linguistics treat metaphor

2.1. Metaphor within Scenes and Frames Semantics

According to Petrucci (1996), Lawler (1988) draws and further develops Fillmore (1977), offering a careful analysis of the Commercial Transaction Frame in order to define money for the ultimate purpose of providing the details of the TIME IS MONEY metaphor. He uses this frame to provide a consistent semantics for the lexical items 'buy', 'sell', 'pay', and 'spend', thus motivating the interpretation of time as a very valuable merchandise you should therefore carefully make good use of. So, according to this paradigm, metaphor is a special way of interpreting / construing the relationship among entities in a scene, motivated by how *Frames* organize our world knowledge.

2.2. Metaphor within Mental Spaces / Conceptual Integration Networks

Croft & Cruse (2004) argue that Blending Theory (FAUCONNIER & TURNER, 2002) advances significantly over Lakoff and colleagues' traditional view of conceptual metaphors. This is because instead of dealing with only 2 cognitive domains (Source and Target), Blending Theory postulates on-line meaning construction enabled by the arrangement of at least 4 conceptual spaces. Input space 1, Input space 2, Generic space, and Blend space. As Grady; Oakley; Coulson, (1999) demonstrate, if the emergent structure projected selectively from Input space 1 (surgery), input space 2 (butchery) and Generic space (the abstract equivalences between them) have to do with metaphorical projections, in the Blend, new meaning that sees an incompetent surgeon as a butcher will arise. So conceptual integration networks treat metaphor as a special kind of Blend in which language users see one thing as another. It conceives of metaphor as a trigger for the novelty in signification arrived at in the Blend Space, which sees an entity as something else, due to the fact that it has peculiar properties in this emergent structure.

2.3. Metaphor within Construction Grammar

Following Goldberg (1995, 2006) metaphors are extension/inheritance links allowing the language to organize itself in a specific way among several relationships that may hold between constructions (pairings of form and meaning). E.g. the Resultative Construction ‘Pat hammered the metal flat’ is analyzed as metaphorical extension of a Caused Motion Construction, as in ‘Pat threw the metal off the table’(X caused Y to move Z). This sentence instantiates literal caused motion, whereas in ‘Pat hammered the metal flat’, the result phrase ‘flat’ is clearly interpreted or conceived of as a metaphorical type of goal.

Another example is the metaphorical reading assigned to the No-Oblique-Complement Intransitive Motion Construction. ‘Bob went crazy’ (metaphorically went to the state of being crazy), instead of ‘Bob went to Paris’ (literally). Or ‘Mary fell asleep’ (metaphorically fell into sleep) instead of ‘Mary fell into the hole’ (literal reading).

2.4. Metaphor within Langacker’s Cognitive Grammar

Langacker’s Cognitive Grammar does not tackle metaphor overtly. “Lakoff and Johnson’s (1980) theory of metaphor is an example of another widespread type of linguistic conceptualization that is not discussed explicitly by either Langacker or Talmy” (CROFT; CRUSE, 2004, p. 44).

My guess would be to say that, although left in the shadow, metaphor for Langacker amounts to one of the many semantic drives that lead to symbolization, that push syntax into this or that mould or conceptual template, that yield surface structure to take this or that shape, falling in what he calls either ‘abstract construals’, or ‘subjectivity/objectivity perspective taking’.

In personal communication per e-mail, Langacker explains:

“Metaphor is readily accommodated in CG. Linguistic meanings invoke what I call “cognitive domains” as their basis. Any kind of conception qualifies as a possible cognitive domain, and every expression invokes many domains. Metaphor is just a special case of this, where two particular domains (source and target) are related by correspondences between certain elements. The most extensive discussion is in chapter 2 of my latest book (2008) Cognitive Grammar: A Basic Introduction, that came out by Oxford University Press.”
Langacker (p.c.)

2.5. Metaphor within ‘Qualia Theory’

Moura (2002) attempts to reconcile the clash between Chomskyan and Californian cognitive linguists’ views of Grammar. He does so by defending the stance that both the generative lexicon (PUSTEJOVSKY, 1995, 2000) and conceptual metaphor theory (LAKOFF and followers) contribute to the appropriate reading – out of several possible interpretations – of metaphorical personification. The generative lexicon has an internal systematic organization, defined non-encyclopedically. It is tidied in 4 levels of representation: argument structure, event structure, qualia structure, and lexical inheritance structure. Moura explains just the 2 of them most relevant for his case: argument structure specifies the number and type of logical arguments a lexical unit subsumes, and how they are syntactically realized. Qualia

structure lists the thematic roles a lexical unit encompasses: constitutive, formal, telic (having to do with function), and agentive.

The idea is that each lexical item gives prominence to a different quale. Hence, depending on the type of word that is employed to construct the metaphor – whether it is an institution (abstract object), an artifact, or an event – the indeterminacy problem of the metaphorical interpretation speakers agree on for the figurative language use at hand will be more easily solved. In other words, the personification metaphor involves different possible interpretations, but the right one is chosen depending on which word was used to instantiate the trope. E.g.: ‘ethic and organic sugar’, ‘a nervous goal in soccer’, and ‘an arrogant Government’. It is not that personal attributes are being assigned out of the blue to sugar, a soccer goal, or a Government. Sugar is a cultural artifact. It is a product whose origin has material and economic underpinnings that necessarily include people. Thus, to interpret this personification, we have no trouble to arrive at the reading ‘sugar produced organically and ethically’. Now take ‘a nervous goal’ in a soccer game. The lexical representation of ‘goal’ has an agentive quale role. A player shoots a goal. So the reading ‘a goal scored nervously’ is licensed by this event noun. What about ‘an arrogant Government’? Since people and social institutions are linked by a part-whole (meronymy) relationship, it is possible to predicate arrogance of the ruling of a country. Because the reading is ‘the Government is composed of arrogant politicians’. Moura’s (2002) point is that both the linguistic content (the lexical properties of the words used to materialize the metaphor) and the conceptual content (the cognitive analogical correspondence between domains as such) contribute their share to zoom in onto the adequate reading among a few possible interpretations available for personification metaphor phrasings.

To sum up, Moura (2002) proposes an analysis of metaphorical language and thought dealing with personification that mingles Pustejovsky’s generative lexicon framework with the treatment of the matter Lakoff and followers have inaugurated in cognitive linguistics: the homologies between domains that characterize metaphors have their share of contribution, and the type of word used to instantiate these correspondence mappings play their role as well to solve the indeterminacy problem in the interpretation of this particular kind of figurative conceptualization / language use.

3. The cognitive holistic approach we advocate: spatial ‘metametaphors’ concerning life

It is not difficult to realize that all the cognitive linguistics schools or trends briefly revised in the previous sections do not treat metaphor in a mutually incompatible, exclusive manner but rather in a complementary fashion. Our suggestion here will be to take a Langackerian move and go one step deeper in abstraction by proposing that there is an extra, archetypal dimension in which template-like metaphors – let us call them “metametaphors” – exist. One of such kind would be provided by route directions. At a level of schematicity furthest removed from the surface of text processing in everyday discourse, we would then have this ideational shape type of metaphor, say, A WORTHWHILE LIFE IS INTELLIGENT MOTION/WELL ORIENTED MOVEMENT yielding the occurrence of several conceptual metaphors in ordinary thought, which, by their turn would pop up in spontaneous language use tailored in different phrasings or expressions. *Route directions*, aka *path descriptions* or *wayfinding instructions* are a specific *genre* of verbal semiosis that involves a three-faceted model (knowledge+discourse+dialog) so that interactants agree on

the conceptualization of an itinerary guiding an agent from a starting point to a destination in unfamiliar surroundings Mendes (2003, 2008³).

The discourse facet of the model has to do with speech bubbles that Informant and Beneficiary mentally construe together in order to felicitously conceptualize the trajectory at stake. The interlocutors go knitting step by step a mesh of conceptual worlds, speech bubbles, prompted by the linguistic expressions that happen to be chosen by the Informant to trigger in the Beneficiary's mind a certain web of conceptual domains anchored in local geography but also fleshed up by the partners' cultural/world knowledge in general. *Speech bubbles* or *text worlds* are a notion we developed from Werth (1999), an attempt to construct a version of the then existing Mental Spaces Theory that could account more satisfactorily for the macrolinguistic (going *de facto* beyond the mere sentential level of analysis) tier of meaning construction in discourse. Mendes (2006) further emphasizes the larger granularity of the approach by proposing route directions as a specific type of discourse-level construction, à-la-Östman (2005).

Now, Werth (1999) as well as (REQUEJO, 2003, p.133) put forward the notion of 'megametaphors'. A 'megametaphor' is an undercurrent sustenance that feeds a few interconnected cognitive metaphors over an extended text, allowing extremely subtle conceptual effects. It enables "target meanings to be understood in terms of domain properties" (WERTH, 1999, p.324) according to these interrelated correspondence mappings.

The notion we want to make a case for in this paper is somewhat different. Put simply, human beings keep moving around from birth to death. Apart from those moments we are standing still or sitting to perform whatever task, or lying in bed for our regular bit of sleep, or maybe in a hospital ward undergoing medical treatment, we are walking, driving, or taking buses, subways, trains, planes, or ships here and there. Thus we can think about finding our way around in life as following good route directions. A purposeful life would be movement that gets us somewhere, figuratively speaking. That is, leading a worthwhile life could be thought about as progressing towards good jobs, self rewarding social activities, a balanced family, deeds to be proud of, and so on and so forth. Regardless of who or what we get this guidance from: God, fate, role models we met personally or paragons we only had vicarious access to from history, kin, close friends etc.

Conceiving 'Life' as 'Targeted Kinesis'⁴ can lead to several conceptual metaphors such as LIFE IS A PASSAGE/SWIMMING ACROSS/JOURNEY... that, by their turn will pop up in everyday discourse dressed up in various costumes, taking up more conventional or more creative wordings. Martins (1999) proposed the metaphor LIFE IS A STRETCH/WAY/PATH/LANE/TRACK (*A VIDA É PERCURSO*). Vereza (2007) defends, among others, LIFE IS A TERRITORY. If you think of life as a piece of land with a particular character, it needs to be explored, and such exploration requires a plan in order to be effective. Sampaio (2008) argues for the equation LIFE IS A NAUTIC PASSAGE / A CROSSING. (*A VIDA É TRAVESSIA*). And Sardinha (2007, work in progress) investigates LIFE IS A TRIP (*A VIDA É UMA VIAGEM*). All these conceptual metaphors are, we argue, instantiations of the metametaphor **LIFE IS KINESIS**, or, to be more specific, **A SENSIBLE LIFE IS TARGETED KINESIS, A WORTHWHILE LIFE IS MEANINGFUL MOTION/WELL ORIENTED MOVEMENT**. Let us now exemplify this at the level of linguistic expressions. To use Taylor (2002: 93) terminology, let us go one step lower at the schema-instance cognitive relations metaphors can hold. For Taylor (2003: 69-72, 74), the level of

³ This is the recent publication in traditional book format of the PhD dissertation published on-line in 2005, available electronically as a .pdf document. Cf. bibliography below.

⁴ We take here 'targeted kinesis' as a cover term for route directions, in the sense of correctly guided motion.

metametaphors we propose would correspond to the ‘super-schema’ tier of elaboration of a category.

4. Some usage-based attested cases

(10) *Ele está fazendo o mapeamento da função e da estrutura da literatura. A estrutura como começo, meio e fim. Ponto de partida, e ligação até o ponto de chegada. E a função como processo humanizador. Ela exprime o homem, e assim atua na sua própria formação...*⁵ {He is drawing a map of the function and of the structure of literature. The structure as beginning, middle, and end. And the function as a humanizing process. It [= literature] expresses man, and so it acts on his own formation/education.}

(10) was a comment a colleague, Dr. Leontino Gondim, made during a presentation on 04/28/2008 for our research group seminar, while giving a talk on an essay by Antônio Cândido.⁶ The referent of ‘he’ is then Antônio Cândido, who develops an argument for the role literature plays in rendering society more humane. We see here the metametaphor A SENSIBLE LIFE IS TARGETED KINESIS underlying the conceptual metaphor LIFE IS A TRIP, since the structure of literature – literature being the essence of a man of letters’ existence – is seen as a journey, and the interaction between man and literature, experiencing this journey, is seen as these partners exerting influence on each other. So we have a two-way road, so to say: Literature expresses man. Man learns about himself influenced by literature.

(11) (...) *Porque o voto não é só um botão que você aperta. É um caminho que você escolhe para o seu futuro.* {Because the vote is not only a button you press. It is a way you choose for your future.}

(11) was taken from a TV campaign by the Ministry of Electoral Justice, in order to raise the population’s awareness of the importance of going voting. SBT channel. 09/23/2008. 09:54 pm. Here the metametaphor we are focusing on, A WORTH-WHILE LIFE IS WELL ORIENTED MOTION, cascades onto the conceptual metaphor LIFE IS A WAY, since your life in the next four years from the elections is seen as leading you somewhere only if you follow the right route directions, namely, vote for the best candidate running for mayor.

(12) *Lanterna na proa: sobre a tradição recente nos estudos da lingüística. Rerler a tradição é tarefa indispensável a todos nós que nos aventuramos pelos mares da lingüística. Tão volumosa e dispersiva é a produção contemporânea que se torna difícil ao navegador achar um norte. Assim, é tentador proceder como o memorialista e acender uma lanterna na popa.* {Lantern on [the ship’s] bow: on the recent tradition in linguistics studies. To reread the tradition is an indispensable task to all of us who venture around the seas of linguistics. Contemporary production is so voluminous and dispersion causing that it turns out difficult for the sailor to find a North. Hence, it is tempting to proceed as a memorialist and to light a lantern on [the ship’s] stern.}

The first sentence in (12) is the title of a paper by Margarida Salomão (2007) in the issue 23 of the scientific journal Gragoatá. The three subsequent sentences are the first ones in the initial paragraph of the article. Interestingly, Salomão resorts to a double figurative reasoning having to do with a boat trip. We find the metametaphor LIFE IS MOVEMENT GEARED TO A TARGET again, this time as a schematic elaboration of the conceptual

⁵ Since the illustration data tokens are all in Brazilian Portuguese, I gloss them in English in curled brackets right next to their transcription.

⁶ At the time this article was written, I was working at Rio Grande do Norte State University, where I was the leader of a research group on linguistics and literature. Dr. Leontino Gondim was the pivot of the Literature and Society line of investigation in this group.

metaphor LIFE IS A NAUTIC PASSAGE, because scrutiny of a discipline is seen as a boat or ship voyage. Undertaking measures so that this area or field of knowledge advances is seen as doing research to further illuminate this domain. The title of the paper subsumes all such contemporary moves by different scholars or trends. But since science is a cumulative enterprise, always building on previous discoveries, to light up a lantern on the boat's stern, i.e. to do a review of the forerunners in each of today's state-of-the-art fronts is something one is very much tempted to do. So, methodologically, Salomão will propel the boat backwards, so to say, and explain how we ended up sailing on the waters we are moving across nowadays.

(13) *Você é meu caminho* {You are my way}
Meu vinho, meu vício {my wine, my vice}
Desde o início estava você {since the beginning you were [there]}
Meu bálsamo benigno {my benign balm}
Meu signo, meu guru, {my zodiac, my guru}
Porto seguro, onde eu voltei {safe harbor, where I came back}
Meu mar e minha mãe {my sea and my mother}
Meu medo e meu champanhe {my fear and my champagne}
Visão do espaço sideral {a view of cyber space}
Onde o que eu sou se afoga {where what I am drowns}
Meu fumo e minha ioga {my tobacco and my yoga}
Você é minha droga {you are my drug}
Paixão e carnaval {passion and carnival}
Meu zen, meu bem, meu mal (4 times) {my zen, my good, my harm}

(13) is a song in Brazilian Pop Music by Caetano Veloso, called *Meu bem, meu mal* {My good, my harm} from 1981. He wrote both the music part and the lyrics. It is no doubt a love song that talks about how you are absorbed in the relationship when you really fall in love with someone. You do things reason cannot cope with, because the heart does not care much for rational explanations. And, at least in some lines of the poem, the metametaphor LIFE IS WELL ORIENTED MOTION more conspicuously yields the conceptual metaphors LIFE IS A WAY (first and third lines), and LIFE IS A NAUTIC PASSAGE (lines 6 and 7). The poet's loved one is seen as **the** North, without whom the poet cannot find his way around, a mirror image of a starting point that feels like having always been there (in other words, whose existence does not even allow doubting or questioning). The muse is the poet's safe harbor: he can err around with his ship out there in the ocean but he will have a secure place to come back to whenever he returns to her. To sum up, the loved one is the poet's compass, constantly guiding his journey towards a meaningful life.

Concluding remarks

After briefly recapitulating the fundamentals of metaphor as a very recurrent operation in everyday language and thought, we attempted to review how a few central theories in cognitive linguistics have treated the phenomenon of conventional, novel and image conceptual metaphors. The bottom line was that frame semantics, cognitive grammar, mental spaces and conceptual integration networks, construction grammar and qualia analysis all handle metaphor in a complementary way. We then tried to take a step forward to deepen the comprehension of this ordinary language and thought mechanism by suggesting, from the

research we have been doing on route directions, the notion of metametaphors. The template-like metaphor PURPOSEFUL LIFE IS TARGETED AT KINESIS / INTELLIGENT MOTION or maybe A WORTHWHILE LIFE IS WELL ORIENTED MOVEMENT – in a deepest tier of abstraction – could be feeding a few conceptual metaphors that have been investigated by various scholars: LIFE IS A WAY/A PASSAGE/A TRIP/A JOURNEY/A SWIMMING ACROSS etc., which materialize in performance in different wordings. Showing the occurrence of this three-level schema-instance relationship (metametaphor, conceptual metaphor, surface phrasing) in several linguistic expressions from attested spontaneous language usage served to illustrate the argument, and thus provided us with an opportunity to give our share of contribution to account more thoroughly for the phenomenon under scrutiny.

RESUMO: O artigo contrasta como a metáfora é tratada em diferentes paradigmas da lingüística cognitiva e propõe uma dimensão mais esquemática do termo: a das metametáforas. Esse escalão arquetípico de abstração alimenta o nível de metáforas conceptuais que se mostra em discurso cotidiano sob diferentes formas lingüísticas. Pensar/Falar sobre a vida em termos de Diretivas de Rota é um desses moldes metametafóricos e tem como instâncias no nível conceptual A VIDA É UMA JORNADA/ TRAVESSIA A NADO/PASSAGEM ao se materializar no desempenho sob expressões variadas. Uma canção da MPB, a escrita acadêmica e o uso espontâneo de língua são analisados para ilustrar o argumento.

Palavras-chave: esquematicidade; vida; instruções de percurso; metametáfora

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