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ON THE GRADABILITY OF METAPHOR

Abstract. My purpose in this paper is to demonstrate that metaphor should be viewed as a gradable conceptual phenomenon, and to elucidate further the notion of minimal metaphoric mapping between subordinate level concepts dominated by the same basic level category, which I called “syntaphor” in my previous studies. Since the concepts involved in metaphor represent different conceptual distances, metaphor appears to be gradable, starting from the lowest level of syntaphors through the level of close metaphors, to the level of distant and maximally distant metaphors, which have been the focus of interest in most cognitive studies of metaphor so far. In Section 1 I describe briefly an approach to metaphor from the point of view of the theory of categorization, whereby metaphor is defined in terms of mappings between concepts rather than domains. Section 2 presents the notion and four degrees of conceptual distance between the concepts involved in metaphor based on the subordinate, basic and superordinate levels of categorization. In Section 3 four kinds of metaphor are distinguished depending on three degrees of conceptual distance between the source and the target concepts: distant metaphors, close metaphors and syntaphors. The role of syntaphors is further discussed in polysemy and novel metaphors. Some of the crucial aspects of syntaphors are highlighted when they are compared with image metaphors. The most important implications of the study for the theory of metaphor are presented in Conclusions.

Keywords: metaphor, categorization, concept, polysemy, figurativity, syntaphor.

1. Theoretical preliminaries

1.1. What is metaphor?

In the first stage of cognitive theory of metaphor initiated by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), metaphor was defined as unidirectional mapping from the source domain onto the target domain. The classic metaphors discussed in those early studies were ARGUMENT IS WAR, LOVE IS A JOURNEY, THEORY IS A BUILDING, etc. It was believed that they were conceptual mappings which manifested in different linguistic metaphoric expressions, such

as *Your claims are indefensible. He attacked every weak point in my argument. His criticisms were right on target*, licensed by the metaphor ARGUMENT IS WAR. The term “cognitive domain” was rather vaguely defined by Langacker (2002, p. 61) as “any cognitive structure – a novel conceptualization, an established concept, a perceptual experience, or an entire knowledge system – can function as the domain for a predication.” Croft (1993) interpreted the potential “can function” as a minimal condition for a concept to be considered a domain and, consequently, defined it as “a semantic structure that functions as the base for at least one concept profile”. For instance, the two-dimensional SPACE may be considered a domain since it is the base for the concepts of CIRCLE, SQUARE, TRIANGLE, etc., CIRCLE may be considered a conceptual domain because it provides the base for such concepts as ARCH, RADIUS, DIAMETER, CHORD, etc., while RADIUS probably cannot be considered a domain because it does not serve a conceptual base for any other concept. Furthermore, Croft pointed out that what is considered as a simple concept is not simple at all, and instead of domain we should talk about domain matrix, i.e. a conjunction of profiled domains. For instance, the concept of BODY must be profiled relative to such domains as PHYSICAL OBJECTS, LIVING THINGS, VOLITIONAL AGENTS, EMOTION, and probably several others. So the source and the target of metaphor were not domains but complexes of different domains, although only some of those domains are usually involved in the mappings involved in metaphor.

1.2. From domains to frames to concepts

More recently a number of researchers (Sullivan, 2013; Dancygier and Sweetser, 2014) have proposed that domains are too general and metaphors should be formulated in terms of mappings between frames. For instance, Sullivan (2013, p. 25) observes that the domain of BODY is used in a variety of metaphors, e.g. SOCIETY IS A BODY, THE MIND IS A BODY, etc. but they evoke (activate) different frames, e.g. the metaphor MENTAL FITNESS IS PHYSICAL FITNESS, entailed by the metaphor MIND IS A BODY, e.g. *a workout for your brain, to exercise mentally*, maps its structure from the EXERCISING FRAME, whereas the frame of MEDICAL CONDITION of the body in THE SOCIETY IS A BODY metaphor is activated in expressions like *a healthy society*.

The terminological and descriptive proposal I make here is similar to that of Croft (1993), who viewed metaphors as involving domains in domain matrices, but I add frames as important constituents of concepts defined by domain matrices. In other words, I suggest that what are usually considered

to be conceptual domains involved in metaphor are in fact domain matrices and frames of the source and target concepts of metaphor, e.g. the metaphor LOVE IS A JOURNEY can be described as a set of correspondences between the profiled domains and frames of the concepts of LOVE and JOURNEY, such as the domains of PEOPLE, RELATIONS BETWEEN PEOPLE, EMOTIONS, SEX, VOLITIONS, PURPOSE, as well frames of DATING and WEDDING, etc. in the case of LOVE and the domains of PEOPLE (TRAVELLERS), LOCATIONS, DISTANCE, VEHICLE, and frames of WORKING OUT AN ITINERARY, SETTING OFF, TRAVELLING AND ARRIVING AT A DESTINATION, etc. in the case of JOURNEY. Since it is the same domain matrices (as theoretical constructs) that in cognitive semantics are used as semantic representations of concepts (cf. Langacker, 1987), it seems justified to conclude that metaphor may be defined in terms of concepts, i.e. mappings from the source concept onto the target concept, or, to be more exact, mappings from the domains and frames of the source concept onto the domains and frames of the target concept.¹ Or, in Hanks' (2006:19) wording "metaphor is an interaction between two concepts which enables us to interpret the one in terms of the other."

The shift from the term "conceptual domain" to the term "concept" in our discussion of metaphor has three advantages. Firstly, it will enable us to apply what we know about levels of categorization to our discussion of metaphor. Secondly, it prevents us from the potential terminological confusion because what Langacker calls "basic domains" are not basic level concepts. Thirdly, it allows us to propose minimal-distance metaphoric mappings between highly specific subordinate concepts which can hardly be considered as conceptual domains as they, unlike basic level concepts, usually do not constitute conceptual bases for profiling other concepts; thus, e.g. there is no reason to classify the concepts TEASPOON or TERRIER as conceptual domains.

1.3. Levels of concepts

If metaphor is defined in terms of concepts, we may predict that it will exhibit different levels of specificity and conceptual distance between its source and target concepts. The levels of specificity pertain to the hierarchical, vertical structure of concepts usually described in terms of basic level, subordinate and superordinate levels of categorization², and therefore we should expect metaphors relating subordinate level concepts, basic level concepts and superordinate level concepts. For the sake of simplicity of description, we describe vertical relations between concepts in terms of dominance: a superordinate concept *W* (which is dominated by another more general superordinate concept *Q*) dominates the most conceptually salient

basic level concepts $X, Y, Z, \dots, N$, and each basic level concept may dominate a number of its subordinate concepts, e.g. X may dominate x', x'', x''' ; Y may dominate y', y'' , and so forth, as in Fig. 1. below.

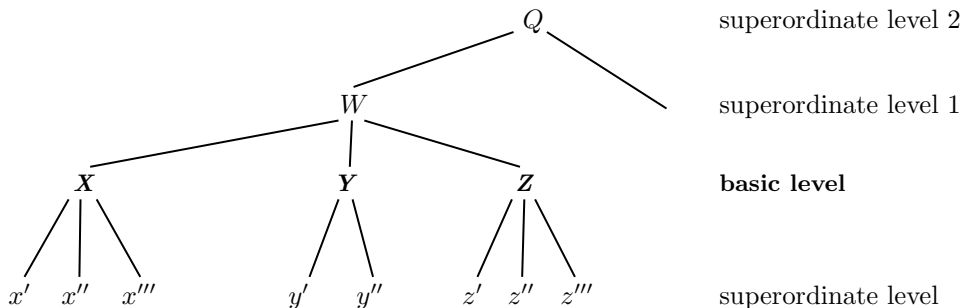


Figure 1. Three levels of categorization

1.4. Descriptive levels of metaphor vs. gradability of metaphors

The hierarchy of metaphors I propose below should not be confused with the concept of levels of specificity of metaphor which can be found in the literature on conceptual metaphors (see e.g. Dancygier and Sweetser 2014, Ruiz de Mendoza and Galera Masegosa 2014, Kövecses 2010, 2017, 2020), which I call descriptive levels of metaphor.

For instance, Dancygier and Sweetser (2014), who formulate metaphors in terms of frames and spaces, distinguish schematic superordinate frames and basic level frames, which evoke visual and motor imagery. They argue that the two expressions *Prices sank* and *Prices soared* combine the UP/DOWN schema with CHANGE IS MOTION, with specific manners of motion and moving objects evoked by the verbs *sink* and *soar* (p. 97). Thus, the descriptive levels of metaphors represent various ways of specifying (or naming) the nature and the generality of the metaphoric mappings used in particular linguistic expressions, e.g. the metaphoric sense ‘leg’ of *pin*, which we discuss below, which may be illustrated by sentence (1) below, may be specified as LEG IS A PIN, BODY PARTS ARE ARTEFACTS, BODY IS A COMPLEX PHYSICAL INANIMATE OBJECT. Likewise, sentence (2) (taken from Ruiz de Mendoza 2014, p. 97) may be described as metaphoric, based on the metaphors MAN X IS A PIG, MEN ARE PIGS, PEOPLE ARE PIGS, or PEOPLE ARE ANIMALS.

(1) Your niece has quite a nice pair of pins

(2) My ex-husband is a pig

No such choices are available in the description of the close metaphors and syntaphors discussed below, which are defined and constrained by their level of categorization. Consequently, close metaphors are defined as ONE BASIC-LEVEL MEMBER OF SUPERORDINATE CATEGORY *X* IS ANOTHER MEMBER OF *X*, e.g. ONE GENUS OF MAMMAL IS ANOTHER GENUS OF MAMMAL, one KIND OF VEHICLE IS ANOTHER KIND OF VEHICLE, ONE KIND OF FURNITURE IS ANOTHER KIND OF FURNITURE, while syntaphors are defined as ONE KIND OF BASIC LEVEL CONCEPT *C* IS ANOTHER KIND OF *C*, e.g. ONE KIND OF PIN IS ANOTHER KIND OF PIN.

1.5. Goatly and Hanks on gradability of metaphor

I am aware of two accounts of the problem of gradability of metaphor – one is Goatly (1997) and the other Hanks (2004). Goatly proposed that the distance between the source and target concepts, which he calls, respectively, “Vehicle” and “Topic”, depends on the distance between the semantic fields they represent. The fields form a taxonomic tree based on the basic ontological binary oppositions shown in Fig. 2 below.

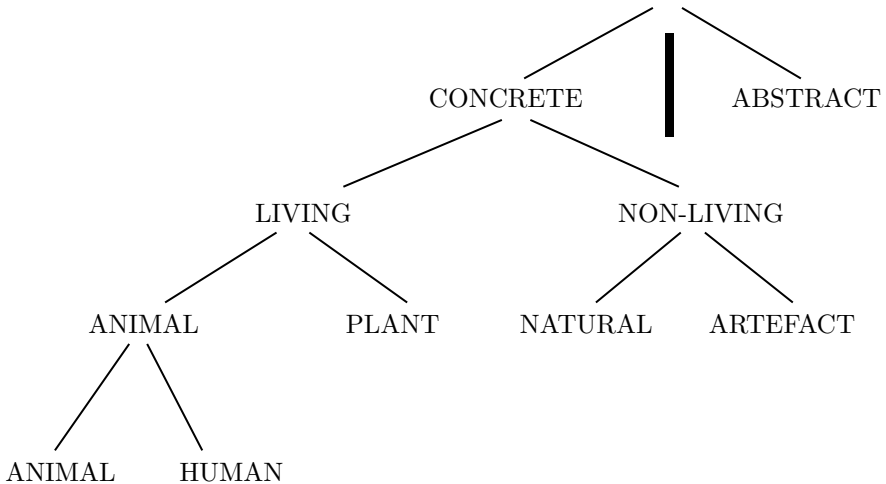


Figure 2. Goatly’s (1997:37) taxonomy of major semantic fields

Furthermore, depending on the distance, metaphors are divided into more or less Approximative and more or less Distant metaphors, with the thick vertical line dividing the most distant domains. The model rightly predicts that sentences (3) and (4) differ in the distance of their metaphors, since in (3) the target *Thatcher* belongs to the field HUMAN closely related to the field of source *lapdog* in the field ANIMAL, whereas in (4) the CONCRETE

source *box of chocolates* must cross the thick boundary to get to the ABSTRACT target *life* and, therefore, should be classified as maximally distant.

(3) Thatcher was Reagan's lapdog

(4) Life is a box of chocolates

At the same time Goatly's proposal raises a number questions. For instance, it seems that "calculating" distance only on the basis of the length of the path, the source and the target may result in intuitively wrong judgments, e.g. the conceptual distance between the fields HUMAN and ARTEFACT is intuitively greater than the distance between the fields ANIMAL and ARTEFACT, although their paths are the same length and complexity. Secondly and more importantly, Goatly ignores the internal structures of the semantic fields and mappings on different levels of categorization of those fields we discuss below. And finally, Goatly's proposal confines metaphor to mappings between simple nominal concepts, whereas a great deal of conceptual metaphors involve concepts of considerable ontological complexity. For instance, it is impossible to discuss in Goatly's framework the standard conceptual metaphors ARGUMENT IS WAR or LOVE IS A JOURNEY.

Another theory relevant to our considerations was put forward by Hanks (2004), who observed that "some metaphors are more metaphorical than others" (p. 21) and proposed to explain it in terms of shared properties (attributes) of the source ("secondary subject") and target ("primary subject"). In his own words: "In the most metaphorical cases, the secondary subject shares fewest properties with the primary subject" (p. 21). By implication, the degree of metaphoricity decreases in inverse proportion to the number of shared properties: the more shared properties, the lower the degree of metaphoricity. For instance, the expressions *sea of mud* and *see of blood*, where SEA is the source concept for the target concept VAST EXPANSE OF MUD/BLOOD, are felt to be less metaphoric than the expressions *sea of faces* and *sea of bicycles* because the former share the attributes ⟨liquid⟩ and ⟨vast expanse⟩, while the latter share only the attribute ⟨vast expanse⟩.

My purpose in this study is to demonstrate that the degree of metaphoricity indeed depends on the number of shared attributes of the source and target concepts, but this number and, hence, the degree of metaphoricity depends on the relative place of the two concepts in the hierarchical structure of concepts. Thus, in the example we have just discussed, the expressions *sea of mud* and *sea of blood* are examples of close metaphors because their source and target concepts are both basic level

concepts belonging to the same superordinate category LIQUID, whereas the source and target concepts in the expressions *sea of faces* and *sea of bicycles* are distant metaphors because their source and target concepts belong to different superordinate concepts, namely LIQUID (source), BODY PART and VEHICLE (targets). Consequently, the form and nature of metaphor and its level of specificity may depend not on our choice but on the level of the categories involved in the metaphoric mapping. For instance, the conceptual metaphor PEOPLE ARE ANIMALS is a close metaphor relating two concepts dominated by the superordinate concept LIVING BEING and cannot be represented non-tautologically³ in any more general abstract form.

2. Categorization of concepts and conceptual distances

In most cognitive studies the problem of conceptual distance between the source and the target is usually ignored and reduced to the simple qualifier “different”, the target domain, e.g. LOVE is supposed to be different from (but construed as somehow similar to) the source, e.g. JOURNEY.⁴ One of the important consequences of representing metaphor in terms of concepts is that it enables us to distinguish various degrees of conceptual distances between the source and the target concepts, which follow from their positions in the hierarchical and horizontal structure of concepts, e.g. two concepts A and B dominated by a single category C are conceptually closer than B and D if B is dominated by C, whereas D is dominated by E, e.g. the basic level concept of TABLE is conceptually closer to the concept of CHAIR, because they are both dominated by the superordinate concept of FURNITURE, than the basic level concept CAR, because CAR is dominated by another superordinate level concept VEHICLE. Likewise, the superordinate level concepts FURNITURE and VEHICLE, which are both dominated by the category of ARTEFACTS (dominated by the category of INANIMATE PHYSICAL ENTITY), are conceptually closer than the categories VEHICLE and MAMMAL because MAMMAL is dominated by a different superordinate category, namely ANIMAL (dominated by the category of LIVING BEINGS). The logic also applies to the subordinate level categories, e.g. POODLE and TERRIER are conceptually closer than TERRIER and SEDAN, because POODLE and TERRIER are both dominated by the basic level category DOG, whereas SEDAN is dominated by another basic category, namely CAR.⁵

The differences between the conceptual distances between categories are a result of qualitative and quantitative differences between and among con-

cepts on different levels of categorization in terms of representations of their meanings. If we accept Langacker's (1987) suggestion that some "basic domains", such as SPACE, TIME, COLOUR, PITCH, MOTION, EMOTION, and a few others, are directly embodied and hence cannot and need not be further defined and add to them the image schemas (Johnson 1987), which constitute the most general cognitive structures, the conceptual complexity of particular levels, expressed in terms of attributes which comprise profiled domains and frames, can be represented in the form of the following approximate chain of decreasing generality and inheritance:

(5) BASIC DOMAINS and IMAGE SCHEMAS >

SUPERORDINATE LEVEL CONCEPTS – image schematic structure
+ few general attributes >

BASIC LEVEL CONCEPTS – inherited general attributes + a large
number of specific attributes, including schematic perceptual and motor
imagery >

SUBORDINATE LEVEL CONCEPTS – inherited basic level attributes
+ new specific attributes, including more specific visual and motor im-
agery.

For the sake of our presentation, following Evans (2019) and Langacker (1987), I assume the following basic domains: SPACE, TIME, COLOUR, PITCH, TEMPERATURE, PRESSURE, MOTION, PAIN, ODOUR, EMOTION.⁶

Since, as Evans (2019: 406) points out, basic domains "are directly tied to pre-conceptual embodied experience" and, furthermore, "provide a 'range of conceptual potential' in terms of which other concepts and domains can be understood", we shall also assume a number of preconceptual image schema which provide structure to the most general superordinate level concepts. Based on Evans (2019:236) again, I assume that the following image schemas should be distinguished, which are grouped according to their experiential grounding:

Space:	UP-DOWN, FRONT-BACK, LEFT-RIGHT, NEAR-FAR, CENTRE-PERIPHERY, CONTACT, STRAIGHT, VERTICALITY
Containment:	CONTAINER, IN-OUT, SURFACE, FULL-EMPTY, CONTENT
Locomotion:	MOMENTUM, SOURCE-PATH-GOAL
Balance:	AXIS, BALANCE, TWIN-PAN BALANCE, POINT BALANCE, EQUILIBRIUM
Force:	COMPULSION, BLOCKAGE, COUNTERFORCE, DIVERSION, REMOVAL OF RESTRAINT, ENABLEMENT, ATTRACTION, RESISTANCE

Unity/multiplicity: MERGING, COLLECTION, SPLITTING, ITERATION, PART-WHOLE, COUNT-MASS, LINK(AGE)

Identity: MATCHING, SUPERIMPOSITION

Existence: REMOVAL, BOUNDED SPACE, CYCLE, OBJECT, PROCESS

The chain in (5) shows that there is a qualitative and quantitative difference between the superordinate level and the basic level concepts on the one hand, and the basic level and subordinate level concepts on the other: the former, e.g. MAMMAL vs. DOG, FURNITURE vs. CHAIR, share few attributes and those shared attributes are rather general, whereas the latter, e.g. DOG vs. POODLE, CHAIR vs. ARMCHAIR, share a considerable number of highly specific attributes, including perceptual and motor imagery. It follows that the conceptual distance between superordinate and basic categories is greater than that between basic level and subordinate level, e.g. the conceptual distance between MAMMAL and DOG is greater than between DOG and TERRIER, and the distance between FURNITURE and CHAIR is greater than that between CHAIR and ARMCHAIR.

The above considerations allow us to distinguish four kinds of conceptual distance between the source and the target concepts in metaphor:

a) Maximally distant concepts

Basic domains concepts, e.g. SPACE, TIME, EMOTION, COLOUR, PITCH, +TEMPERATURE, MOTION, etc. are maximally distant from each other as they are experientially and conceptually autonomous, i.e. they are based on direct sensorimotor experience and do not presuppose other conceptual domains.⁷

b) Distant concepts

These are represented by 1) superordinate categories, e.g. ARTEFACT (including lower level superordinate categories like FURNITURE, TOOL, VEHICLE, INSTITUTION, etc.), ANIMAL (including the subcategory MAMMAL, REPTILE, etc.), which are structured in terms of general image schemas (usually COLLECTION, PART-WHOLE and LINK, cf. Ungerer and Schmid 2006), inherit their image schematic attributes and have few own attributes, and 2) basic level concepts and their subordinates dominated by different superordinate concepts, e.g. ARMCHAIR vs. TERRIER, are distant from each other. Such distant concepts are often mapped in metaphors described at different levels of specificity, e.g. COMPLEX ABSTRACT SYSTEMS ARE BUILDINGS AND THEORIES ARE BUILDINGS, PEOPLE ARE ANIMALS AND MEN ARE PIGS, LIFE IS A JOURNEY and LIFE IS A SEA JOURNEY (cf. Bierwiazzonek 2011), COMMUNICATION IS EXCHANGE OF OBJECTS, and VERBAL COMMUNICATION IS EXCHANGE OF CONTAINERS, etc.⁸

c) Close concepts

Basic level concepts dominated by the same superordinate level concept, e.g. DOG, CAT, BEAR dominated by MAMMAL, share the inherited attributes and hence are conceptually close to each other. However, the conceptual closeness here depends on the number and importance (weights) of the shared attributes, which, in turn, depend on the position of the source and target concepts and is graded in the hierarchy of superordinate levels they belong to.⁹ The differences in position result from the fact that two concepts may be dominated immediately by the same superordinate category, e.g. DOG, CAT, and BEAR are immediately dominated by the category MAMMAL and indirectly by the higher and more inclusive category ANIMAL. Therefore, they are conceptually closer than those categories which are also animals but are immediately dominated by other superordinate categories, e.g. such animal categories as CROCODILE and SNAKE are REPTILES, whereas NEWT and FROG are AMPHIBIANS. The situation of the category HUMAN is even more complex as it seems that cognitively richer, more salient and linguistically marked are the two genders of the category – MAN and WOMAN, which therefore may be considered as basic level categories dominated by HUMAN, MAMMAL and ANIMAL.¹⁰

d) Maximally close concepts

Subordinate concepts dominated by the same basic level concept, e.g. various breeds of DOG like TERRIER, POODLE, GERMAN SHEPHERD, etc., are maximally close to each other because they inherit most of the specific attributes of their basic level concept.

Schematically, the conceptual distances between concepts on different levels of categorization can be shown using a random piece of taxonomy representing the three crucial levels of the categories of FURNITURE and MAMMAL in Fig. 3. The single vertical lines symbolize relatively close conceptual relationships on the basic level, while the double vertical line indicates a greater conceptual distance between superordinate categories. As we shall see below, the metaphors that cross only the single lines are close metaphors, e.g. DOGS ARE WOLVES or CHAIRS ARE BEDS,¹¹ while the metaphors which involve mappings across the double line represent high level distant metaphors, e.g. MAMMALS ARE FURNITURE. Generally, the horizontal mappings $\Omega - \Lambda$ pertain to distant metaphor, $A - B$, $C - D - E$ pertain to close metaphor, while the horizontal same letter mappings, e.g. $a' - a''$, $b'' - b'''$, $d' - d''$, etc., pertain to syntaphor.

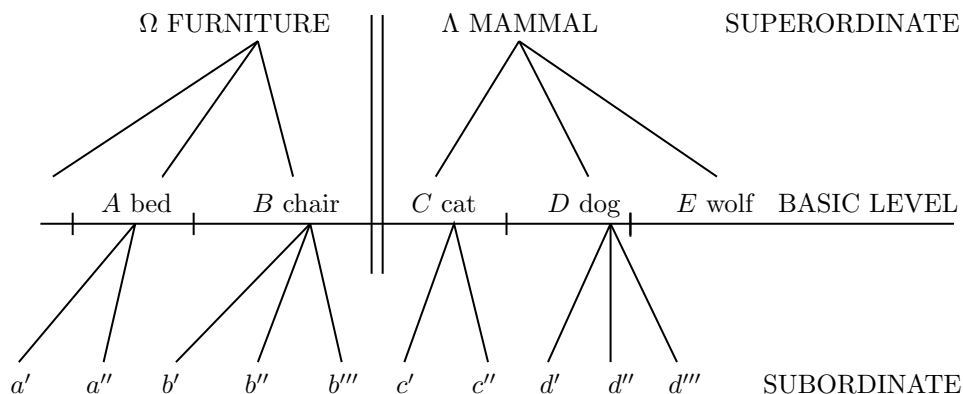


Figure 3. Schematic partial taxonomy of FURNITURE and MAMMAL and relative distances between concepts

3. Distance-based typology of metaphor

Based on the four degrees of distance between concepts which may serve as sources and/or targets of metaphors, we may distinguish four kinds of metaphors:

3.1. Maximally distant metaphors

These metaphors are based on basic domains, image schemas and the related concepts on the highest level of schematicity.

Probably the most basic metaphor operating on this level is known as EVENT STRUCTURE METAPHOR (Lakoff 1993), which maps a number of basic domains and most general concepts. Some of those mappings are presented below, along with illustrative examples.

- (6) STATES ARE LOCATIONS: *Peter is in trouble*
- (7) CHANGES ARE MOVEMENTS: *The jam went off*
- (8) CAUSES ARE FORCES: *The loss of job pushed her to the verge of suicide*
- (9) EXTERNAL EVENTS ARE LARGE, MOVING OBJECTS: *The general elections are approaching fast*

Grady (1997) and Lakoff and Johnson (1999) reinterpreted some of those mappings as correlational “primary metaphors”, which are motivated by experiential conflation of the concrete source domain and more abstract subjective target in so-called “primary scenes”, e.g. QUANTITY IS VERTICALITY, CONTROL IS UP, TIME IS MOTION, INTIMACY IS CLOSENESS, PURPOSES ARE

DESIRED OBJECTS, KNOWING IS SEEING, etc. Thus, primary metaphors seem to constitute a special subcategory of metaphors which are usually distant in terms of mappings linking different basic domains, image schemas and most general concepts, but which are experientially close because they are based on universal human experiences.

3.2. Distant metaphors

Although the EVENT STRUCTURE METAPHOR is represented in the most general terms of basic domains and concepts, Lakoff (1993) pointed out that “it is superordinate categories that are used in mappings”, e.g. LOVE IS A JOURNEY is the cognitively optimal level of representing the mapping PURPOSEFUL ACTION IS GOAL-DIRECTED MOTION.

Other distant metaphors include, THEORIES ARE BUILDINGS, EMOTIONS ARE LIQUIDS, FAMILY IS A BODY, IDEAS ARE POSSESSIONS, IDEAS ARE RESOURCES, BELIEFS ARE CLOTHES/FASHIONS, etc.

Two important kinds of distant ontological metaphors are objectifications¹² and personifications (Dancygier & Sweetser, 2014, pp. 62–64).

In objectifications, abstract entities or people are construed as concrete things, e.g. THE MIND IS A BODY/MACHINE/CONTAINER (e.g. *my mind is a bit rusty today, I'm in two minds about it*), SOCIAL GROUPS ARE CONTAINERS (*John is in our team, Joe was kicked out of the club*).

Objectification also leads to conventionalized extensions of semantic structures of nouns denoting concrete things in accordance with the metaphor PEOPLE ARE THINGS:

Battle axe – ‘a frightening and unpleasant woman with strong opinions’

Big gun – ‘an important, usually rich person’

Windbag, gas bag – ‘a person who talks too much about boring things’

(cf. Bierwiazzonek 2022)

There are numerous examples of objectification used creatively as well, e.g. in songs like *Love Is a Warm Gun* (the Beatles) or *Love Is the Drug* (Roxy Music).

Personification, whereby non-human categories are construed as HUMAN, may be either distant or close. It is distant when abstract or inanimate entities are construed as people, e.g. DISEASES, ECONOMIC PROCESSES, MECHANICAL and ELECTRONIC DEVICES are common target concepts of these metaphoric mappings. Consider the following examples:

- (10) Depression kills
- (11) Experience is the best teacher
- (12) Inflation will tell us more about our economy than politicians
- (13) My smartphone reminded me of that meeting.

Various distant metaphors of this kind have been proposed and discussed in cognitive linguistics literature since the publication of Lakoff and Johnson's *Metaphors we live by* in 1980. Many more can be found on the internet in the two editions of Lakoff and his colleagues and students' Master Metaphor List, available online as *Metaphorlist 1991*, and the University of Birmingham based Mark G. Lee & John A. Barnden's research project dealing with the mental part of the List available online at www.cs.bham.ac.uk/~jab/ATT-Meta/Papers/mml.CSRP-01-03.pdf

While distant metaphors have been studied extensively, the two kinds of metaphors which are based on close conceptual distances have often been overlooked or ignored. Therefore, we shall discuss close and maximally close metaphors in greater detail below.

3.3. Close metaphors

Close metaphors are mappings between basic level concepts dominated by a single superordinate category. Since, as we have seen, the conceptual distances between the potential source and target concepts vary depending on their positions in the taxonomy of superordinate terms, the metaphors may also be more or less close. Furthermore, since basic level categories are cognitively and lexically deeply entrenched, close metaphors are usually deployed in clear contexts and are rarely conventionalized. The reason is that such permanent extensions of basic level senses could considerably disrupt communication. For instance, in a context where the actual referent, e.g. a bicycle, is available to the consciousness of all the participants in a situation, calling the bicycle *rocket* (both *bicycle* and *rocket* being basic level terms dominated by the superordinate term *vehicle*) is legitimate and informative. However, if 'bicycle' became an additional fixed sense of *rocket*, it could cause serious misunderstandings in the situations where the referent were not available, e.g. the sentence *Bills has two rockets* would have two incompatible interpretations with quite different truth conditions and implicatures. In short, language does not tolerate too much polysemy, particularly when it is not needed. One obvious exception to this principle is the kind of personification in which lexemes denoting animal categories develop conventional human senses. Most of these personifications are more

specific gender metaphors in the sense of Bierwiałonek (2022), i.e. they denote particular subcategories of human females or males. Here are a few examples with explications from online *Cambridge Dictionary*:

cow – ‘an unkind or unpleasant woman’

stag – ‘a man who is going to get married soon, when he is at a stag party (= a party with only men to celebrate this)’

trout – ‘an old person, especially a woman, who is unpleasant or not attractive’

cougar ‘an older woman who has sexual relationships with younger men’

There are also a few cases when one animal concept has two different human senses, one of which or both refer to one gender only. Here are two rather well-known examples:

bitch

1. offensive ‘an unkind or unpleasant woman’
2. ‘someone who will do everything you tell them to do because you have complete control over them’

dog

1. (slang) ‘a man who is unpleasant or not to be trusted’
2. (offensive) ‘a woman who is not attractive’

The tendency to construe members of one basic level category in terms of another close basic level category manifests itself in a particularly telling way in the names people give their pets. For instance, some of the most common names of cats in Britain, according to the Wikipedia page “Popular cat names”, and internet lists of cats’ names, are human first names, like *Oskar*, *Molly*, *Charlie*, *Max*, *Lucy*, etc., but there are also quite a few animal names, such as *Tiger*, *Bunny*, *Panda*, and *Panther*.

Otherwise, close metaphors are often used figuratively in clear contexts, e.g. a big dog may be referred to as *a cow* or *elephant*, a dirty dog may be referred to as *a pig*, a small wet dog may be referred to as *a rat*, etc. Likewise, a simple detached house may be referred to as *a castle* or *mansion*, which is also a close metaphor, conventionalized in the British proverb *A man’s house is his castle*. Again, like syntaphors discussed below, they usually convey single mappings, e.g. calling an expensive sedan *yacht* may highlight its high quality and prestige. One of the celebrated examples of close metaphors is *My surgeon was a butcher* (Glucksberg and Keysar, 1993), where the two concepts of SURGEON and BUTCHER are members of the superordinate category of PROFESSIONALS¹³. A detailed blending analysis of this metaphor can be found in Evans and Green (2006, p. 406).

3.4. Minimal metaphor, i.e. syntaphor

In my 2020 and 2021 papers I focused on the lowest and at the same time the closest level of metaphoric mappings which result in extensions of (the prototypes of) basic level categories and may be used figuratively. For instance, the prototypical sense of the lexeme *pin* ‘thin rigid, straight wire with sharp one end’ is extended in such concepts as SAFETY PIN, BROOCH, TIEPIN, ROLLING PIN, etc., whereas the noun *limousine* may be used metaphorically to refer to an ordinary sedan or old station wagon. In my work I assumed the tripartite typology of figures of speech based on the three “master tropes”, namely, synecdoche, metonymy and metaphor, developed by Seto (1999, 2003), Nerlich (2010) and Bierwiazzonek (2013). In this typology synecdoche is defined as transfer of meaning along the vertical axis of categorization from more general terms to more specific terms typical of hyponymy, e.g. *vehicle* for CAR, *woman* for WIFE, metonymy is defined as transfer based on association (contiguity) typical of partonymy, and metaphor is defined as transfer of meaning based on similarity. Since the lowest level of metaphor combines the vertical dimension of synecdoche with the horizontal dimension of resemblance metaphors, I originally called it “synecdochic metaphor”, and later blended it to a shorter form “syntaphor”. Consequently, syntaphor may be defined as a transfer (mapping) of meaning based on similarity (like metaphor) between two concepts within the same more general basic level concept (like synecdoche). In the cited papers I tried to show that syntaphor, like other kinds of metaphor, can be found both in meaning extension producing polysemy, and in novel figurative transfers of one concept onto another close concept.

3.4.1. Syntaphor in polysemy

In cognitive semantics, the idea of prototype structure of categories such as FRUIT, FURNITURE or BIRD, studied by Rosch and her colleagues, has been extrapolated to the prototype model of polysemy (see Geeraerts 2010, Ch. 5). This was rather natural since both subcategories of superordinate categories and particular senses of polysemous lexemes are concepts. Therefore, particular senses of polysemous words which are not figurative in the sense of distant metaphor or metonymy are classified as cases of Wittgenstein’s notion of family resemblance. I suggest that since family resemblance is based on similarity and involves mapping from one close concept onto another within a single basic level category, it should be regarded as syntaphor.

In Bierwiazzonek (2021) the concept and lexeme *pin* in English is discussed, which has the prototypical sense ‘short thin piece of stiff wire with sharp end and round head, used for fastening by piercing’ and has a number

of other senses, lexicalized as *pin* (in leg surgery or in pin-plugs), *hairpin*, *tiepin*, *grenade pin*, and *bowling pin*, all based on various qualitative and quantitative similarities to the prototype, alongside the senses motivated metonymically, e.g. ‘diamond pin’ or ‘badge’, where the pin is actually part of the whole object, and the metaphoric sense ‘human leg’. The last example is important because it shows the difference between syntaphor and distant metaphor: syntaphoric senses use the prototype of the category as the source concept in order to map it onto a subcategory profiled in the same primary domains as this prototype, and hence do not cross the basic level category boundary, whereas the target of the distant metaphoric extension belongs to a different domain, in the case of *pin* the target concept LEG is profiled in the domain of HUMAN BODY.

Another example is the verb *paint* in English, which I assumed may be regarded as a basic level verb.¹⁴ Alongside simple elaborations, *paint* also has senses which represent distant metaphor and syntaphoric extensions from the prototype, which is ‘apply paint to surface’ and activates the frame of PAINTING. One of these senses is ‘apply disinfectant to a patient’s body’, which differs from the prototype in the domain of MATERIAL (DISINFECTANT) and the frame (DISINFECTING). However, since the two senses share the superordinate frame of APPLYING SUBSTANCE TO SURFACE, their conceptual distance is close and the extension should be classified as syntaphoric. Another extension is ‘describe in words’, which involves mapping from the superordinate frame of APPLYING SUBSTANCE TO SURFACE to the superordinate frame of VERBAL COMMUNICATION. Thus the concept of PAINTING is mapped on other basic level concepts of SPEAKING and WRITING dominated by another superordinate concept, which means that this extension represents distant metaphor.

The notion of gradable conceptual distances between the source and the target concepts implies that metaphor is gradable too. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that the extensions based on syntaphor are often considered to be non-figurative (cf. Geeraerts 2010). Which, in turn, implies that the sharp distinction between figurative and non-figurative language should be abandoned. This idea is not new and was discussed extensively by Gibbs and Colston (2010). As Grady (2007, p. 206) observed, “A number of scholars have concluded that it is difficult or impossible to make neat distinctions between metaphorical and nonmetaphorical language. For example, there is no sharp line between metaphor and cases where a category is “stretched” to accommodate a new item, and the difference between metaphor and literal language can be seen as a matter of degree rather than a qualitative distinction”.

Syntaphor as a figure of speech

Apart from its important role in conventional polysemy, syntaphor may also be used figuratively in novel mappings. The general form of such syntaphors is ONE SUBORDINATE CONCEPT OF BASIC LEVEL CATEGORY C IS ANOTHER SUBORDINATE CONCEPT OF C. Consider the following examples taken from Bierwiazzonek (2021):

- (14) Where's that poodle of yours? (referring to a St Bernard, ONE BREED OF DOGS IS ANOTHER BREED OF DOGS)
- (15) We bought a new armchair for our dear guests (where the noun *armchair* is used for an electric chair and *guests* for prisoners – both cases of ironic syntaphor, ONE KIND OF CHAIR IS ANOTHER KIND OF CHAIR, ONE GROUP OF PEOPLE IS ANOTHER GROUP O PEOPLE)
- (16) This was the killer's operating table (ironic, referring to a kitchen table where a murder had been committed, ONE KIND OF TABLE IS ANOTHER KIND OF TABLE)

The examples support the claim that metaphoric mappings on the subordinate level are quite possible. They are often used referentially, but their main function seems to be evaluative – the usually ironic reframing either denigrates or commends, derides or praises the referent.

3.4.2. Syntaphors vs. image metaphors

Image metaphors, often called “one-shot” metaphors because they are unique and non-systematic, were first mentioned by Lakoff and Turner (1989) in their analysis of A. Breton's line “My wife ... whose waist is an hourglass”. They are called image metaphors because they map images, in this case the image of an hourglass is mapped onto the image of a woman's waist. According to Dancygier & Sweetser (2014, p. 59), they are “the kind of metaphors that involve mapping specifically of images from one domain onto another, like hourglass waist or apple cheeks”. As such “they do not involve inferential structure or broader generalizations”.

Image metaphors are worth mentioning here because they are almost the opposite of syntaphors.

Here are the main differences:

- Syntaphors map very close concepts which share most of their conceptual structure and differ in one or two attributes, whereas image metaphors use concepts which are conceptually distant, i.e. share very little conceptual structure except for one or two salient perceptual attributes.

- Syntaphors are used figuratively for expressive, often evaluative purposes (irony, understatement), whereas image metaphors are used for descriptive purposes.
- Syntaphors are linguistically more important than image metaphors as they lead to lasting semantic extensions of existing lexemes, whereas most image metaphors are usually “one shot” metaphors.
- As opposed to image metaphors, syntaphors seem to involve inferences about the target, e.g. knowing that X is a kind of dog or a kind of chair allows us to infer quite a lot about their attributes.
- Neither syntaphors nor image metaphors are predictable. However, since image metaphors are based on distant concepts which often share very few attributes except for the salient perceptual attribute, e.g. the shape of an hourglass and waist (which often takes a poet to notice), syntaphors are much better motivated by the number of shared attributes and, in fact, there is a cline from extremely high probability, verging on the simplest cases of categorization, e.g. a dog unable to bark is still called a dog, to much less obvious cases, which can be best observed cross-linguistically, e.g. the concepts PEDAL BOAT, construed as a kind of BOAT in English, is construed as a kind of BICYCLE (*rower wodny* – ‘water bicycle’) in Polish.¹⁵

3.4.3. The problem of compatibles and incompatibles

Most of the basic level terms and subordinate terms are incompatibles, i.e. they exclude one another, e.g. since dogs, cats, rabbits, etc. are mammals, if X is a dog, then X is not a cat, or a rabbit, or any other mammal. Although the relation of incompatibility may be defined logically, as a unilateral negative implication, i.e. $F(X)$ unilaterally entails $\text{not-}F(Y)$, Cruse (2000) defines incompatibility conceptually as co-taxonymy which has the form: X is a different kind of Y from Z if X and Z are cotaxonyms of Y and prototypical X and Z are mutually exclusive. Clearly, such pairs of concepts are good candidates for close metaphor. For instance, in the superordinate category of PROFESSIONALS we find such categories as TEACHER, PLUMBER, TAXI-DRIVER, POLITICIAN, SURGEON, BUTCHER, etc., and although they are theoretically (and practically!) compatible, their prototypes exclude each other. Therefore, to take an example we have already mentioned, referring to a surgeon as *butcher* in sentence (15), should be interpreted as a case of close metaphor (if BUTCHER and SURGEON are considered as basic level categories). The same condition of incompatibility seems to apply to syntaphor, too. For instance, referring to one kind of BOAT, e.g. a yacht, as another kind of BOAT, e.g. *a pedal boat*, as in sen-

tence (16) below, requires that the source (pedal boat) and the target (yacht) be incompatible.

(15) That new surgeon is the worst butcher we've ever had in our hospital

(16) You got yourself a pretty comfy pedal boat (referring to a luxurious yacht)

However, some superordinates do seem to have members (subcategories, co-taxonyms) which are compatible, even given Cruse's rather liberal definition of incompatibility. One obvious case is the category of people having hobbies, i.e. HOBBYISTS, whose subcategories are compatible, e.g. a book-collector may also be a philatelist and gongoozler and storm-chaser and even a trainspotter. In such cases, the two concepts evoked in sentences like (17) should not be classified as metaphoric as their most likely interpretation is that the individual referred to as *the book-collector* is also a trainspotter, rather than a book-collector construed as trainspotter.

(17) That book-collector is our most famous trainspotter.

We may conclude then that syntaphors and close metaphors require their sources and targets to be incompatible. It must be remembered, however, that in/compatibility is often a matter of construal. For instance, in Olaf Stapledon's description of the American tourist the categories which to many would seem incompatible are used as oddly compatible:

(18) That strange blend of the commercial traveller, the missionary, and the barbarian conqueror, which was the American abroad. (Olaf Stapledon's *Last and First Men*)

3.4.4. From concrete to concrete and back

One of the cognitively important functions of conceptual metaphors ever since Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) seminal book has been that it facilitates understanding of abstract domains (concepts) by construing them in terms of concrete, or at least more conceptually accessible domains (concepts) (Grady, 2007; Dancygier and Sweetser, 2014), e.g. a very abstract MIND is construed as a complex concrete THING, SOCIETY is construed as a CONTAINER, IDEAS are construed as POSSESSIONS, etc. In general, such mappings are typical of distant metaphors. Close metaphors and syntaphors are different in this respect, since they tend to map one concrete concept on another concrete concept on the same basic or subordinate level of categorization, e.g. MAN may be metaphorized as MALE ANIMAL, e.g. STALLION or BULL, one kind of CAR (e.g. SEDAN) may be metaphorized as another kind of CAR

(e.g. LIMOUSINE), etc. They are also reversible, although the reverses are never equivalent – barring irony, calling a sedan *limousine* may be complimentary, whereas calling a limousine *sedan* will usually sound offensive.

3.4.5. But they are all just hyponyms or co-taxonyms

An argument may be raised that the relations between the source and the target concepts in syntaphor are just the well-known relations of hyponymy, whereby the hyperonym is a basic level concept and its hyponyms are subordinate concepts definable in terms of the “kind-of” relation typical of hyponymy. I cannot but agree. However, the fact that two or more lexemes represent the relation of hyponymy does not explain why and how some of them have become members of that relation and, secondly, why some hyponyms are better than others. In other words, syntaphor helps explain at least some of the prototypicality effects in basic category structures. For example, the semantic structure of *pin* in English in Bierwiałonek (2022) shows that one of the syntaphoric extensions of the prototypical sense of *pin*, construes it in terms of the attributes ‘straight, rigid, round, manipulable by hand,¹⁶’ instantiated by such subcategories as ROLLING PIN and BOWLING PIN. The considerable conceptual distance between the prototypical PIN and BOWLING PIN explains why speakers accept test-sentences for hyponymy like *A drawing pin is a kind of pin*, but may be less likely to accept the sentence *A bowling pin is a kind of pin* (cf. Cruse, 2000). Furthermore, it accounts for the figurative uses of co-hyponyms within the general cognitive theory of metaphor, based on four degrees of conceptual distance.

3.4.6. Close metaphors and syntaphors in grammar

It appears that the human ability and communicative need to construe and code the same referent in alternative, often opposite ways has been constructionalized in the form of the *One man’s X is another man’s Y* construction. The construction seems to have developed from a number of relatively salient and common examples, such as the seventeenth century translation of Lucretius “quod ali cibus est aliis fuat acre venenum” (what is food for one man may be bitter poison to others) as *One man’s meat is another man’s poison*, followed by a number of more or less proverbial and literary variations all the way to its modern versions attested in the BNC given below.¹⁷

(19) One man’s trash is another man’s treasure (18th c.)

(20) “One Man’s Fault is another Man’s Lesson” (1717, William De Britaine’s *Humane Prudence*)

“Thus, what is one man’s safety is another man’s destruction” (1719, Daniel Defoe’s *The life and surprising adventures of Robinson Crusoe of York, mariner*) BNC examples:

- (21) One man ’s ethics is another man’s priggery,’ said Chatterton carelessly.
- (22) All of which shows that one man’s staple is another man’s delicatessen.
- (23) One man’s nightmare is another’s dream.
One man’s prison sentence is another man’s reprieve.

Without going into the details of the form and meaning of the construction illustrated by the above sentences, let us observe that one of the constraints on the choice of X and Y is that they are both close or maximally close concepts in the sense these terms have been characterized in this study, e.g. meat and poison are two kinds of FOOD, trash and treasure are two kinds of POSSESSION, fault and lesson are kinds of LEARNING, etc. All the syntaphoric pairs we mentioned above also sound perfectly felicitous in the *One man’s X is another man’s Y* construction, as the examples below show.

- (24) One man’s sedan/truck/banger is another man’s limousine.
- (25) One man’s mansion is another man’s duplex/cottage/bungalow.
- (26) One man’s pedal boat is another man’s yacht
- (27) One man’s armchair is another man’s electric chair.

If the values of X and Y are conceptually distant, as in the examples below, the results are predictably odd and probably require extra processing effort and time to interpret.

- (28) ?One man’s battle axe is another man’s neighbour.
- (29) ?One man’s depression is another man’s mother in law.
- (30) ?One man’s anger is another man’s tea/quiet water/vodka.

Concluding remarks

Contrary to or perhaps complementing Kövecses (2020), who claims that all conceptual metaphors should be analyzed in terms of four hierarchic levels from the most abstract level of image schemas, through the

levels of domains and frames, to the most specific, heavily contextualized level of mental spaces, I tried to show that on the level of individual concepts and lexemes there are cases of rather “local” mappings based on similarity between concepts on the basic level dominated by the same superordinate concept and subordinate level concept dominated by the same basic level concept. Compared to higher levels of categorization, which involve conceptually distant general categories, such as ANIMALS, BIRDS, PLANTS, FURNITURE, VEHICLES, HOUSEHOLD APPLIANCES, etc., these concepts are conceptually much closer to each other, as they share the attributes they inherit from their superordinate and/or basic level concepts. We have referred to those conceptual distances as close, in the case of basic level terms dominated by a single superordinate term, e.g. CAT-DOG-RABBIT (dominated by MAMMAL), CHAIR-TABLE-COUCH (dominated by FURNITURE), etc., and maximally close in the case of subordinate concepts extensionally included in a single basic level concept, e.g. KITCHEN CHAIR-ARMCHAIR-DECKCHAIR (dominated by CHAIR), (prototypical) PIN, PIN in PIN-PLUG, TIEPIN, BOWLING PIN, etc. Having distinguished four degrees of distances between concepts, we have distinguished four degrees of metaphoricity, based on the conceptual distance between the source and target concepts: maximally distant metaphors, distant metaphors, close metaphors and minimal metaphors (syntaphors). If different kinds of metaphor are based on different degrees of similarity between the source and the target concepts, then close metaphor and syntaphor may be viewed as the cognitive operations which motivate Wittgenstein’s (2009) family resemblance relations within numerous superordinate and basic level categories. In addition, I showed that these two cases of close conceptual categories may also be used as source and target concepts in novel close metaphors and syntaphors. Examples of such novel close metaphors are SURGEON IS A BUTCHER (both dominated by the category of PROFESSIONALS) and HOUSE IS A MANSION (both are BUILDINGS), whereas examples of syntaphoric metaphors are ST. BERNARD IS A POODLE, ELECTRIC CHAIR IS AN ARMCHAIR, PRISONER IS A GUEST, YACHT IS A PEDAL BOAT, etc. Close metaphors and syntaphors are usually used expressively, conveying either complimentary or derogative irony, but they also evoke inferences, which makes them similar to more distant metaphors and different from image metaphors.

NOTES

¹ Similar *observations* can be found in Clausner and Croft (1999).

² There is no shortage of excellent introductions and discussions of the relevance of E. Rosch's studies of categorization and her theory of prototypes (cf. e.g. Rosch et al. 1976, Rosch 1978). Some of the best ones are certainly Lakoff (1987), Taylor (1995), Evans and Green (2006), Ungerer and Schmid (2006) and Geeraerts (2010).

³ The more general form would be tautological LIVING BEING IS A LIVING BEING.

⁴ It is not true of the so-called primary metaphors (Grady 1997), which result from experiential correlations between domains (concepts) we discuss briefly in section 3.1 below.

⁵ The neglect of the notion of conceptual distance is all the more strange in that it is one of the most important implications of the prototype theory of categorization, which represented categories in terms of gradable distances from the prototype (cf. Geeraerts 2010 for an exhaustive discussion).

⁶ An obvious basic domain missing in the list is MIND. For some reason, neither Langacker (1987, 2008) nor Evans (2019) mentioned it.

⁷ This is not to deny that some basic domains may be analysed in terms of dimensions, e.g. SPACE may be two- or three-dimensional, and the domain of COLOUR is often described in terms of hue, brightness and saturation (cf. Clausner and Croft, 1999; Evans and Green, 2006; Langacker, 1987).

⁸ Conceptual distance discussed here does not preclude experiential correlation in so called "primary scenes", which gives rise to primary metaphors, e.g. KNOWING IS SEEING (cf. Grady 1997).

⁹ Since the conceptual distance between concepts C1 and C2 is a function of the number and weights of their shared attributes, it is considered as a measure of similarity (or dissimilarity) between C1 and C2. A classic attempt to measure similarity in psychology can be found in Tversky (1977), which also addresses such problems as prototype structure and category formation on the basis of shared attributes.

¹⁰ Of course, I'm aware that the issue has become sensitive, political and extremely culture-dependent, but I think there is no denying that on the whole gender distinctions still persist and continue to be more salient than the general category HUMAN. In fact some of them are becoming even more emphatic, e.g. in the form of a growing number of feminine derivations in languages like Polish.

¹¹ Note that deckchairs can be easily construed as beds.

¹² Szwedek (2011) argues that objectification is the most fundamental metaphoric mapping based on the concept of physical OBJECT as "the ultimate source domain".

¹³ In fact, Glucksberg and Keysar claim that the metaphor forms a new superordinate category of BUNGLING AND HARMFUL WORKERS, in accordance with their categorization theory of metaphor, see also Glucksberg (2008) and discussion in Gibbs and Colston (2012). I find Evans and Green's blending analysis much more convincing.

¹⁴ Polysemy of verbs is a complex issue, discussed, *inter alia*, in Taylor (2006).

¹⁵ See Bierwiazzonek (2021) for more similar examples of motivated but different synaphors in English and Polish.

¹⁶ In the paper I use the attribute *haptic* as a shorthand for 'manipulable by hand'.

¹⁷ Most of the data in this passage come from the Internet page ENGLISH LANGUAGE & USAGE (english.stackexchange.com) accessed on 07.05.24.

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