Metaphor Revisited
Cognitive-conceptual versus Traditional Linguistic Perspectives

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The present contribution reviews two of the most prominent and recent models of metaphor, one rather traditionally linguistic (interactive property attribution), the other cognitive (conceptual metaphor). By contrasting and comparing them the paper attempts a synthesis, which is to demonstrate the closeness and compatibility of the two approaches. Two small extensions seek to apply the methodological insights gained from the review of the theories to diachronic lexicology and to multimodal text analysis. Two major points emerge from these short applications. First, conceptual metaphor theory can make transparent what language development obscures in the process of semantic de-motivation. Second, metaphorical expressions intricately and densely interconnect in text and discourse to act as a powerful text-generating principle, which is also suited to connect various semiotic modes, e.g. picture and language.

1 Introduction: the significance of metaphor

Metaphor is a central object of linguistic enquiry which has bothered scholars through the ages; and it is not hard to see why. First, metaphors confront us with the conundrum of saying one thing and meaning another, associated with a more or less distant idea – this concerns the notion of non-literal or figurative language use. Second, metaphorical language constantly reminds us of the apparently huge significance of mental imagery for the production and processing of natural language (Makkai 1993, Gibbs 1994). Third, the lexicons of natural languages are littered with the debris of metaphorical meaning transfers, a sign-generating principle that remains active to date. When examined etymologically an overwhelming proportion of the words
ultimately turn out to be dead or fossilized metaphors (Haser 2000, Sweetser 1991). Finally, all registers and genres re-produce or invent metaphorical expressions in large numbers – from the salient metaphor of a poem (e.g. there is a garden in her face, Thomas Campion 1567–1620), to the inconspicuous metaphor of a newspaper article (e.g. chilly encounter, give ground, be under fire) and the often highly suggestive metaphor of a scientific theory or taxonomy (e.g. big bang, junk DNA, gene taxi, zinfandel zebra fish). In short, it is its inevitability and its underlying playfulness of the mind which fascinates linguist and literary scholar alike.

In the present paper I should like to show that theories of metaphor have come a long way – from treating metaphor as a fancy rhetorical trick with words to acknowledging the all-pervasive cognitive operation surfacing in a multitude of linguistic expressions. The core of the article (2, 3) contrasts two current models, one linguistic, the other cognitive and aims at a synthesis of both approaches showing overlaps, potential interfaces and differences. Two application sections are to illustrate the usefulness of metaphor analysis in linguistics. They are meant to enable the reader to judge the merits of linguistic and cognitive approaches. In section 4, I will show how conceptual metaphor theory can be applied to historical semantics. Finally, in section 5 I will point out the use of metaphor as a text-generating principle and a powerful analytical device in the service of multimodal text analysis.

2 Linguistic vs. cognitive approaches to metaphor

Looking back over a long story of theorizing (Ortony 1979, Kittay 1991, Goadly 1997, Jäkel 1999, Stern 2000), it seems that metaphor models are mainly concerned with three issues: (1) How is metaphor verbally produced? (2) How is it mentally or cognitively handled? and (3) What are its effects on the recipient? In the rhetorical tradition of antiquity (Aristotle 1544) and the Renaissance (Puttenham 1970) much thought went into examining the first and the third issues. Current accounts of metaphor, however, are rather generalized models of metaphor’s mental representation and processing. As far as one can see, the two most consistent theories of metaphor available are Glucksberg’s (2001) property attribution model and an elaborated version of conceptual metaphor theory as developed by Lakoff/Johnson (1980), perhaps best summarized in Kövecses’ 2002 textbook. Let me briefly explain

and compare these two approaches to metaphor in order to see their relative strengths and weaknesses.

Fig. 1: Schematic depiction of property attribution

2.1 Metaphor as interactive property attribution – a linguistic explanation

A linguistic-semantic metaphor theory like Gluckberg’s treats any metaphorical utterance as a class inclusion statement, that is a statement that one semantic category is assigned to another. So in a utterance like In last night’s concert that Schumann string quartet was the hors d’oeuvre that whetted the audience’s appetite. (cf. fig. 1), hors d’oeuvre exemplifies a super-ordinate ad hoc category, call it ‘pleasurable situation of consumption’. The class-inclusion statement made in this utterance would be to attribute the string quartet to this category. In metaphor theory parlance we could say that in any metaphorical expression a topic (string quartet) is treated as belonging to a semantic category which the vehicle (hors d’oeuvre) calls up or creates ad hoc. Most importantly, then, semantic properties of the vehicle are transferred or attributed to the topic. In our example such semantic features as the savoury qualities, the small size/amount of an hors d’oeuvre (compared with the main course), the location of starters in a sequence of courses, and associated with this, perhaps, the feeling of anticipation and joy connected with the eating experience would qualify as attributable vehicle qualities.

From a linguistic point of view, what is crucial for the functioning of metaphor is the ‘dual reference’ of the vehicle. That is, any vehicle in a metaphorical utterance must be fit to simultaneously refer to both the designated

1 See Kövecses (2002: 68f.) for a succinct explanation of the central tenets of traditional metaphor theory.

2 Recent approaches to metaphor have tended to focus on researching the functions and forms of metaphor usage in text and discourse. For some programmatic ideas on this see Cameron 1999, Gibbs 1999a and Steen 1999.
category (literally) and, as a result of some kind of semantic switching, to a super-ordinate category set up ad hoc (or entrenched in linguistic knowledge). A concomitant precondition of metaphor understanding (and construction) would also be to know which vehicle properties are to be transferred onto the topic. In order to explain this, the model makes use of Max Black’s (1962) interaction theory,\(^3\) which says that topic and vehicle in any metaphorical utterance interact. Sam Glucksberg (2001: 53) introduces the notion of topic dimensions and vehicle properties, which come together in a metaphor and provide for a negotiation of semantic features. So, first, the topic sets a local context for the vehicle to operate by indicating a semantic frame which guides the transfer of potential vehicle properties, selecting some and rejecting others. Second, the vehicle makes available a number of properties which enable the combination with certain topics but not with others. Applied to our example, the Schumann string quartet is a relatively high-constraining topic because it only has few semantic dimensions available and relevant. Similarly, the vehicle hors d’oeuvre is capable of exemplifying an appropriate super-ordinate category fairly unequivocally due to its basic-level category status. So here a relatively high-constraining topic and a fairly unambiguous vehicle provide easily accessible metaphoric meaning.

We might ask, at this point, what makes interactive property attribution a linguistic theory of metaphor. Its main claim is that metaphors are verbal statements about the inclusion of one semantic category in another. So it is semantic knowledge, knowledge of word, phrase and sentence meanings and their relations to categories and concepts which informs the handling of metaphors. Treating metaphors as linguistic phenomena also means to assume they are not themselves stored as fixed mental units so that they have to be construed every time they are encountered. In order to construct or interpret a metaphor language users have to engage in an active utterance processing.

Perhaps, most importantly, interactive property attribution relies heavily on prototype semantics. The central element in the model is the semantic switch from the vehicle given (hors d’oeuvre) to the super-ordinate category instantiated by it (‘pleasurable situation of consumption’). For this to work flexibly, language users need to have a representation of semantic concepts organized along prototypes, allowing for graded membership in radial categories and semantic concepts with fuzzy boundaries.\(^4\) Experimenting a little with our example, it is easy to see that basic level categories obviously work best to create the envisaged super-ordinate category. If we choose a vehicle on a higher level, say food, the metaphorical statement is put at stake, whereas selecting a lower-level category with a higher degree of specificity, say tomato salad, asparagus soup or prawn cocktail, the metaphorical statement stays intact but shifts its focus. A vehicle then needs to be able to function both as a classifier (‘food’/‘consumption’) and as a prototypical instance of a category (‘typical part of a meal’).

Property attribution also preserves some of the older metaphor theories, most notably the interaction and comparison view. There is interaction between the semantic frame of a topic and selectable vehicle features. But interaction might also quite suitably be interpreted as the wider interrelation between metaphorical utterance and the surrounding discourse, which gives the language user keys to potential readings of a specific metaphorical expression. This would be a pragmatic and textual interpretation of interaction theory. It stresses an idea crucial in social semiotics (van Leeuwen 2005: 4f.) that meanings made from signs are hardly ever definite, but open up “fields of possible meanings” to be navigated by the discerning text recipient. Comparison comes into play in working out metaphorical meaning, too, as determining which features to project from vehicle to topic might involve – more often than not – establishing similarities or analogies, even if only on a very abstract level (concerts are like dinners).\(^5\)

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\(^3\) Other major linguistic theories of metaphor are aptly described and contrasted in Goatly 1997: 10ff., 116ff.


\(^5\) Cognitivists are adamant in pointing out that any similarities involved in metaphor cannot be pre-existing. (Kövecses 2002: 71ff.)
2.2 Conceptual metaphor – a cognitive explanation

Contrary to a semantic explanation, cognitive theory locates metaphor in conceptual structure, not in linguistic knowledge. Metaphor is thus granted a mental representation which underlies the functioning of language. Metaphorical linguistic expressions, therefore, merely realize certain conceptual metaphors. This view claims that metaphors are systematic connections or sets of mappings between conceptual domains, which come about through correspondences between target and source domain. What underlies our example (cf. fig. 2) is the conceptual metaphor IDEAS ARE FOOD. Here, IDEAS is the ‘target’, the domain we are trying to understand by drawing conceptual entities from the ‘source’ domain, FOOD. IDEAS ARE FOOD makes available a number of conceptual mappings – these are perceived structural similarities between the two concepts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>preparing food</th>
<th>producing an idea</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>taking in food</td>
<td>perceiving an idea</td>
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<tr>
<td>processing food</td>
<td>understanding an idea</td>
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<tr>
<td>nourishment/pleasure from food</td>
<td>physical/mental well being from an idea</td>
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For these similarities to become obvious at all, the mind needs to be conceived of as a container and ideas as entities which we receive from outside the mind and which can go into the container. Lakoff & Johnson (1980: 25f.) have called these basic-level connections between concepts *ontological metaphors*, which, in turn, derive from non-metaphorical assumptions about the human body gained from physical and sensory experience (body – container, food – objects and substances, objects go into container). So here is a step-by-step explanation of how metaphor, or rather the conceptual structure underlying it, manages to provide similarity between distant domains.

It should be easy to see the conceptual metaphor IDEAS ARE FOOD in our sample utterance, provided you know that *hors d’oeuvres* includes certain types of food and that *string quartets* are a musical genre. However, there is additional knowledge that we bring to bear on the interpretation of the metaphorical utterance. What we know about hors d’oeuvres is that they precede the main course in a sequence of meals all contributing to a social event regulated by convention. So there are implications here of small size or amount and little time needed to consume the food. Also, we know that hors d’oeuvres are relished by many as food to increase feelings of anticipation. These pieces of knowledge can all be mapped onto the target and enrich the reading of the underlying conceptual metaphor. Kövecses (2002: 93ff.) calls this mapping of everyday rich knowledge of the source *metaphorical entail-

ments*. Any aspect of the source thus has conceptual elements, which together constitute the source’s entailment potential.

**TARGET ASPECT 1: ‘high quality of music/experience’**
That was a champagne performance of a Schumann string quartet.
The opus 41 no 2 is vintage Schumann.
The Schumann string quartet was the icing on the cake/the cherry on the trifle.

**TARGET ASPECT 2: ‘knowledge/enjoyment of music’**
I particularly relished the Schumann string quartet.
The audience savoured every note of the Schumann string quartet.
He’s got a refined taste in music.

**TARGET ASPECT 3: ‘accessibility of music’**
That innovative choral symphony gave the audience something to chew on.
I find Mendelssohn’s early symphonies more palatable than his later ones.

**TARGET ASPECT 4: ‘character of music’**
His new symphony is a hotchpotch of diverse ingredients. Still it seems bland.
Dvorak’s late string quartets are a spicy concoction of rhythms and tunes.

Fig. 3: Various aspects of the target domain MUSIC

How much of the entailment potential is mapped onto the target depends on the image-schematic structure of the target concept. Some elements are compatible with it, others are not. So while taste, short duration and location in the sequence of a meal can be mapped onto the string quartet, chewing and swallowing are unlikely candidates in this local context. On the other hand, talking about complex and long symphonies one could utilize other aspects of the source domain. For example, one might say: *The early Mendelssohn symphonies are more palatable than the later ones.*, or *This innovative symphony gave the audience something to chew on.* Interestingly enough, if we sample possible ways of talking about music in culinary terms (cf. fig. 3), it is obvious that a whole variety of aspects and elements from the domain food can be used to talk about the target domain (music). The skeletal structure of the concept ‘musical composition’ obviously lends itself to focusing the following aspects: high quality of the music/experience (champagne, vintage, icing on the cake, cherry on the trifle), a knowledge/enjoyment of music (relish, taste, savour), accessibility of the music (palatable, to chew on) and the composition/character of the music (blend, concoction/to concoct, hotchpotch, bland/spicy). So here is one way in which conceptual metaphor theory allows for a systematic inspection of linguistic expressions.
Another way would be to examine how many different sources can be applied to a given target. With a more abstract target like, for example, ‘happiness’ a whole list of possible sources can be drawn up, which demonstrates how various source domains are needed to structure the target to the full (HAPPINESS IS BEING OFF THE GROUND, VITALITY, FLUID IN A CONTAINER, LIGHT, INSANITY, NATURAL FORCE, ANIMAL LIVING WELING, AN OPPONENT, etc.). This phenomenon is known as the partial nature of metaphorical mapping (cf. Kövecses 2002: 79ff.). In any one metaphoric linguistic expression it is usually only one aspect of the source which is utilized to highlight one aspect in the target.

3 Comparing linguistic and cognitive metaphor models – a synthesis

Let us now briefly compare the linguistic and the cognitive metaphor models. My claim is that, given the ambiguous evidence we have from psychological experiments, the two models do not necessarily contradict one another. They could – in a pluralistic vein – even be synthesized to form a more flexible model.

In comparison with property attribution, which portrays metaphor as a dynamic semantic process of meaning construction, conceptual metaphor theory seems rather static. Once you hold the required conceptual metaphor in your mind, you will be able to understand any metaphorical linguistic expression that refers back to it. So, whereas here, metaphorical understanding seems to mainly boil down to ‘mechanical’ recognition or retrieval, in property attribution it is active semantic engineering, which also factors in pragmatic and context information. Consequently, bold and unconventional creative metaphors can more suitably be explained by property attribution. In contrast, the conventional, familiar metaphorical expression rather lends itself to conceptual metaphor.

On the other hand, there is also an aspect of mental economy involved, which somehow favours conceptual metaphor theory: It would seem more economical to be able to process a metaphorical expression by retrieving underlying metaphorical representations which come equipped with a whole set of mappings than having to work out topic dimensions and vehicle properties and make them compatible.

What needs to be considered, too, is how both theories relate to the pictorial or sensory nature often granted to metaphorical expressions. Here, again, it would seem that conceptual metaphor fares better as it offers an explanation of why there is metaphor in the first place. Pre-linguistic sensory and motor experience is used to conceptualise our understanding of abstract, intangible phenomena. This basic notion of metaphor as embodied experience (Johnson 1987) emphasizes the associative tie between language and the perceptual system (i.e. vision, hearing, taste, smell, touch). In contrast, property attribution cannot really explain why many metaphors are pictorial or experiential as here metaphor understanding is based on the manipulation of undifferentiated semantic features.

On further reflection, however, the differences outlined have to be put into perspective. For one thing, activating a conceptual metaphor need not necessarily be as static as one may assume. Language users will have to focus on those available mappings which bear on the metaphorical expression in question. They are also, as we have seen, free to add from their rich knowledge anything which might facilitate metaphorical entailments (Kövecses 2002: 93ff.). Taking these processes into account it seems metaphor recognition or retrieval is less automatic and more active than may be assumed. On the other hand, interactive property attribution is likely to be less of an active process, the more metaphors are lexicalized and conventional. In this case – as McGlone (2001: 99) argues – the metaphorical meaning is already part and parcel of the semantic features of the vehicle. Consequently, understanding the metaphor might simply involve retrieving the metaphorical reading of an expression.

Summing up, both models are weak in one respect, which traditional linguists would probably see as paramount. Both explain metaphor understanding as an analysis of their semantic components – either on the basis of conceptual mappings or knowledge of semantic features. With any lexicalized metaphorical linguistic expression (e.g. opaque idioms: bite the dust, kick the bucket) the more likely hypothesis might be that its meaning does not need to be derived but can simply be retrieved from the mental lexicon. As the issue of the mental representation of language is bound to remain a minefield, it is probably safest to say that in any process model of metaphor the following components might be utilized: (1) semantic features, frames and scripts of topic/target and vehicle/source; (2) [if available] conceptual metaphor and its mappings, (3) encyclopaedic, symbolic and sociocultural knowledge; (4) sensory experience.

4 Extension/application 1: historical semantics

This section aims to show how conceptual metaphor theory can usefully be applied to diachronic lexicology. It does so by presenting a brief sketch of an

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6 The example draws on Kövecses 2002: 84ff.

7 For a discussion of some of the current processing models see Brugman/Lakoff 1988 and Cocioclaru/Tabossi 1993.
investigation into the metaphorical etymology of English expressions for stupidity. This small chapter attempts to outline just some of the ways in which onomasiological studies of subsections of the English lexicon may benefit from an historical approach to conceptual metaphor.

In diachronic linguistics, metaphor and metonymy⁸ have long been acknowledged as catalysts of semantic change (cf. Traugott 1985, Blank 1999). Why semantic change occurs in the first place is a matter of much speculation. According to Rudi Keller's (1994) idea of an "invisible-hand process", it is the language performance of individual speakers and its cumulative effects which form the primary source of all semantic shifts. In this view, metaphorical expressions are innovations aimed at impressing the communicative partner (Geeraerts 1999: 103 calls this hearer-oriented expressivity). If such innovations are perceived as useful by a speech community, they will be adopted, irrespective of how obvious the metaphorical motivation of the expression is.

Semantic change might conveniently be subdivided into three stages. Lüdtke (1999: 50) labels these outset – the single act of innovation in speech, intermediate – a period during which the speech community gradually adopts a new expression or a new sense of an existing word, and outcome – a point in time when the innovation is established and has become part of normal language behaviour. Whereas at stage 1 a borrowed or newly coined word seems novel, it gradually loses its novelty during stage 2, and at stage 3 it has become fully integrated into the system. This effect of increasing familiarity and decreasing salience is normally termed de-motivation. Historical linguists try to trace the original motivation behind semantic innovations and shifts, that is, they are interested in re-motivating the sense of a word. To engage in this kind of work means to focus on the cognitive processes which members of a speech community must have practiced when they innovated or made sense of lexical-semantic innovations. This job could easily be called cognitive diachrony, as Lüdtke (1999) suggests.

The interface between historical semantics and cognitive linguistics offers two perspectives. On the one hand, diachronic linguistics might be considered a testing ground for all kinds of cognitive theories of language. On the other hand, cognitive theory can be used as a practical toolkit in doing diachronic linguistics. Conceptual metaphor theory proved to be especially powerful here as it helped explain processes of lexical-semantic change. It has been applied to words of cognition and emotion in Sweetser's (1990) and Hasebrink's (2000) work, to the polysemy of prepositions in Brugmann/Lakoff's (1988) and Boer's (1996) studies and most recently to lexical-semantic fields in the projects of Fabian (2002) and Gevaert (2002). Within the broad scope of diachronic linguistics all these lines of research are underrepresented.

In order to illustrate how semantic domains can be studied diachronically from a cognitive perspective, I shall, in the next section, briefly present my own rough-and-ready investigation into the conceptualisation of STUPIDITY in the English lexicon.

My methodological approach was simple: From a thesaurus I sampled words denoting the quality of stupidity. These were either adjectives and their corresponding abstract nouns or idiomatic expressions. All adjectives (+ nouns) were then checked against the OED in order to determine their origin, underlying semantics and the time when they entered the English language. This kind of information was supposed to clarify two points: (1) How many different conceptualisations of 'stupidity' are there? (2) Is there a way of charting the historical development of those linguistic conceptualisations? What is important to note at this point is that the different conceptualisations can only be worked out by looking at the original, i.e. historical senses of the lexemes involved and tracing how these shifted to become usable as expressions of 'stupidity'. (Example: mad < Goth. gamaips, original sense: 'crippled' later used for quality of the mind)

The first observation is that there is quite a number of different ways of lexically representing the domain of stupidity. All in all, 9 major conceptualisations can be defined (cf. fig. 4). On further inspection, it seems that some are metaphorical in nature (STUPIDITY IS HAVING BLUNT INSTRUMENTS), whereas others seem to be based on metonymy (STUPIDITY IS PROVOKING LAUGHTER). Most conceptualisations build on the ontological metaphors THE MIND IS A CONTAINER and/or MENTAL ACTIVITY IS PHYSICAL ACTIVITY. This is in accordance with the folk knowledge that the location of intelligence (stupidity = lack of intelligence) is the brain and that some processing needs to be going on inside it. As there is no way of immediately inspecting the brain and its activities, all sorts of basic physical properties have been projected onto them. Perhaps the most prominent and frequent sources in the conceptual metaphors for stupidity are: ABSENCE OF BRAIN SUBSTANCE, IMPROPER BRAIN SUBSTANCE, IMPAIRED SENSORY PERCEPTION AND PHYSICAL WEAKNESS (this, in fact, is based on a metonymy: BODY FOR THE MIND). Other sources complement the conceptualisation. There is the obvious connection of stupidity with SLOWNESS and BEING BEHIND SCHEDULE (ontologically), which add a temporal dimension. Another conceptualisation establishes a link between BLUNT INSTRUMENTS – and by implication – the action of CUTTING, which indicates one way of how we conceive of human rational cognition.

⁸ For a distinction between the two phenomena from a cognitivist perspective see Kövecses 2002: 143ff. and Radden 2002.
A sideways glance at major conceptualisations of intelligence reveals antonymic source domains in similar conceptual metaphors. So, intelligence is perceived as **SPEEDY PROCESSING** (quick), **SHARP INSTRUMENTS** (acuto, pono- trating, sharp, trenchant, smart, sagacious), **SPLITTING OPEN** (perceptive) and **PHYSICAL STRENGTH** (able, clever). Similarly, **LIGHT** (bright, brilliant) and **SEEING** (alert, perspicacious, insight) are source domains in clear opposition to the domain of darkness found in fig. 4.

In a historical perspective, the oldest expressions (OE/ME) seem to be based on the conceptualisation of stupidity as an **ABSENCE OF A SUBSTANCE** – e.g. memory, attention, consciousness, care (e.g. unwise 825, mindless 900, witless 1000, wormless 1200, foolish 1275). The only non-negated adjectival meaning here is **foolish**, which equates the contents of the brain with air as a folk equivalent of nothing. Conceiving of stupidity as **SLOW PROCESSING** (slow 888), as **HAVING BLUNT INSTRUMENTS** (dull 940), as **IMPAIRED PERCEPTION** (dumb 1000, blind 1000) and as **PHYSICAL WEAKNESS** (mad 1000) is equally old. ME introduces the conceptual connection between stupidity and **IRREGULAR OR HIGHLY IDIOSYNCRATIC BEHAVIOUR** (idiotic 1300, lunatic 1290) as well as **DARKNESS** (dim 1350). In EME new conceptualisations appear, such as understanding stupidity as **IMPROPER BRAIN SUBSTANCE** (thick 1597, crass 1600, half-baked 1621), as **PROVOKING LAUGHTER** (ridiculous 1550) and as **BEING BEHIND SCHEDULE** (immature 1635, puerile 1685). Of course, it was particularly during the EME period that conceptualisations already existing at that time were added to by frequent borrowings from Latin. The same holds for later stages in the development of English, when older conceptualisations are taken up again.

What can be generalized from this diachronic look at conceptualisation is that apparently stupidity was initially regarded as the absence of something unknown. Subsequently the notion of what could be inside the container guided further conceptualisation. At this early stage there is both a focus on brain substance and brain 'physics'. Attributing qualities to the mental substance is obviously the guiding momentum behind innovation in the EME period. But also behavioural effects of stupidity are metonymically used. Finally, it seems that the majority of the conceptualisations were basically in existence as early as OE and ME, while later stages merely refined them and added lexemes to them.

The practical use of studying semantic fields in a cognitive-diachronic vein seems obvious: such studies provide insights into which “metaphonymies” (Goossens 1990) drive the semantic development of the vocabulary for a specific domain. This may shed light onto conceptualisations current at certain historical periods, thus telling us something about the mindset of a speech community at a given point in time. Also, such information can be put to use in comparative linguistics, where one might look at the spectrum of existing conceptualisations in a number of different languages and inspect how richly or poorly lexicalized they are. Which part socio-cultural factors play in giving prominence to some conceptual metaphors and suppressing others can also be revealed by diachronic semantic studies.

A few cautionary words, however, also seem in place here. It must remain a matter of speculation whether the introduction of a new vocabulary item for an existing concept necessarily involves fully comprehending its underlying conceptual metaphor or metonymy. This might be a part of a lexical innovation at the outset, but need not be. As for the historical development, the reliability of the OED is perhaps doubtful. In order to give an adequate account of the evolution of a semantic field, one would need to consult corpus evidence. This is the only way to move beyond alleged first appearance and to be able to say something about the frequency and real stylistic currency of a word in various text types at various historical stages.

### 5 Extension/application 2: multimodality – text linguistics

So far I have only been looking at metaphor in isolated linguistic expressions and utterances. However, the real site of metaphor generation and understanding, after all, is pragmatically situated text and discourse, especially...
semiotic objects that involve other modes beside language. So, in order to do full justice to metaphor one needs to ask how metaphors behave in texts.

This final section intends to sensitize us to the fact that an investigation of metaphor in use has to draw on both a linguistic and a cognitive account of metaphor. The cognitive angle seems profitable when we are interested in underlying conceptual domains used in texts and the metaphoric mappings between them. The linguistic view will particularly take note of the various forms and expressions in which metaphors materialize and the subtle semantic differences between them. It takes a text-linguistic and text-pragmatic viewpoint to work out the interconnections between various metaphorical expressions and their functional impacts on the text. In what follows I will very briefly show how these different methodologies may be applied in practical text analysis.

The claims I will be making stem from my work on language-image texts (Stöckl 2004) and from observations on recent trends in social semiotics (van Leeuwen 2005). Even though the sample text (cf. fig. 5) might be an extreme, it is well suited to point to at least three aspects of metaphor usage and analysis in the multimodal text.

1. Metaphors can be constructed in modes other than language (cf. Kövecses 2002: 57ff.), e.g. in visual images. Accompanying verbal text, however, plays a crucial part in focusing and shaping the visual metaphor.

2. In texts, metaphorical expressions may be interconnected to form intricate patterns of semantic and pragmatic relations, which contribute to the coherence of the text. Here, metaphor acts as a text-generating principle.

3. In a very wide cognitive view, metaphor can be understood as a meaning making principle active in and across various semiotic modes. Any sign may be understood metaphorically when recipients activate, from their semantic experience, meanings which are related to the sign through contiguity, co-occurrence in perception, or similarity.

Let us take a look at the Toshiba advert (cf. fig. 5). Its pictorial message displays a hybrid object, which merges features of tins with those of laptops. In the discourse context of advertising, where the advertised product takes priority, recipients are likely to perceive this visual metaphor as a statement about laptops.11 So the laptop acts as the target and the fish tin as the source in a conceptual metaphor, which — however vaguely — brings together the domains of computer manufacturing and fish processing (i.e.

11 Forceville 1996 combines conceptual metaphor theory with relevance theory and points out how recipients need to establish relevance in order to be able to allocate pictorial elements or lexemes to source or target.

Fig. 5: Toshiba Advertisement, The Sunday Times Magazine 14 September 1997: 2f.

We’ve squeezed a desktop into a portable. No catch (1). The only difference between a Toshiba portable and a desk-top is scale. When it comes to size and weight the two are oceans apart (2). And for power, function and features our portables are no small fry (3). Features like the best chips, Intel MMX, the largest screens, 13.3” and the fastest CD-ROM drives, mean our portables are a good haul (4). And the PC Card Slots on every Toshiba mean our portables can take the bait of most networks (5). Whilst our innovative firsts have always created waves (6) amongst desktop and portable manufacturers alike. It’s because we would rather lead the shoal than swim with it (7), that makes us the world leader in portable computing. Our portables have consistently landed prizes from PC Magazine for Service, Reliability and Technical Innovation. If you’d like to take the plunge (8) and see why more people are working wherever and whenever they like, call us on … Hopefully you’ll agree, Toshiba really do have portable computing canned (9) …

MANUFACTURING LAPTOPS IS CANNING FISH). This reading of the metaphor is also facilitated by the claim in the headline We’ve squeezed a desktop into a portable, which foregrounds purposeful actions involving tins and laptops rather than just the objects.

Against the backdrop of this visual metaphor a fair number of metaphorical expressions link up to create an intricate semantic network (cf. fig. 6).

First, individual idioms are connected because the lexemes in them (e.g. catch, ocean, small fry, haul, bait, waves, shoal, to swim, plunge, canned) refer — in their literal senses — either to the semantic frame ‘sea/water’ or ‘fishing’. Second, the idioms also pragmatically cohere, as — in their meta-
phorical senses — each fulfills prototypical speech acts of an advertising text. So some promise product qualities (no small fry, good haul), others describe or evaluate them (take the bait from most networks), while yet others appeal to the customer (take the plunge) and promote the advertiser’s image (rather lead the shoal than swim with it, have portable computing canned). Third, and most importantly, the metaphorical expressions generate strong coherence as all of them fulfill functions in extending and colouring the metaphor which the picture plus headline introduced and which organizes the text conceptually.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SOURCE DOMAIN</th>
<th>METAPHORICAL EXPRESSION</th>
<th>TARGET DOMAIN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Action of catching</td>
<td>no catch (1)</td>
<td>Toshiba/company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sea/water</td>
<td>oceans apart (2), create waves (6), take the plunge (8)</td>
<td>Market</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quantity/quality of catch</td>
<td>no small fry (3), good haul (4)</td>
<td>Quality computers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruments for catching</td>
<td>take the bait from most networks (5)</td>
<td>Flexible instruments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fish</td>
<td>rather lead the shoal than swim with it (7)</td>
<td>Business philosophy/claim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Processing/canning</td>
<td>have portable computing canned (9)</td>
<td>Perfection</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 6: Metaphor as a text-generating principle — metaphorical expressions and their sources and targets for the example in fig. 5

Readers may only arrive at this kind of reading if they invest semiotic work and open up the meaning potentials inherent in the idioms and their textual structure. It is social semiotics among other schools which emphasizes that despite the conventionality of expressions, there is nothing static about meaning making in texts. In the Toshiba advert recipients need to somehow oscillate between literal and metaphorical interpretations, but they also have to activate conventional knowledge of relevant domains (computing/fishing) and relate them to each other. It is not surprising then that van Leeuwen (2005: 29ff.) in his latest textbook advocates a very wide notion of metaphor. In particular, he argues that nearly all signs in any modality can be extended or enriched metaphorically, when the sign users activate the experiential basis of the signs in their contexts. In the sample text, we, given our knowledge of computer networks, have no difficulty interpreting bait as data which computers draw from networks. Metaphor in this broad sense would then encompass all transfers of meaning conditioned by knowing that any one sign is linked to another — be this through similarity (haul/purchase), contiguity (tin/fishing), or causality (leading/better).

6 Conclusions

What I hope to have shown in this paper is that metaphor must count as an extremely powerful cognitive process — both in the historical development of languages as well as in their current use in text and discourse. Even though we cannot at present know which mental reality metaphor has, it definitely drives semantic change and innovation. One main point of my argument was that it may be helpful to be pluralistic in explaining the workings of metaphor. What are often portrayed as mutually exclusive theories are in fact rather the starting point for a synthesis which enriches our understanding. The second point I made emphasises that whereas diachronic de-motivation obscures metaphorical processes in language development conceptual metaphor theory makes transparent what the ‘invisible hand’ has created. And finally, I argued that metaphor can be a potent text-generating principle and an essential way of understanding discourse realized in various semiotic modes.

7 References


