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Beyond the Frontiers: Perspectives on Pragmatic Theory and Practice

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BEYOND THE FRONTIERS: PERSPECTIVES ON PRAGMATIC THEORY AND PRACTICE

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THE QUESTION OF METAPHORICITY: A RELEVANCE-THEORETIC PERSPECTIVE²

Abstract

The paper deals with the question of the status of metaphoric expressions depending on the interpretative processes they require. I begin with lexicalized metaphors which, in fact, do not have the status of a metaphor since their interpretation requires mere decoding. Turning to genuine metaphoric expressions, the first question I attempt to answer is – what makes an expression metaphoric? This question is relevant for establishing demarcation between metaphor and other loose uses of language. Once the criterion is clearly set, the question of the level of metaphoricity imposes itself. Hence, the main aim of this research is to suggest a possible solution for the continuum of metaphoric expressions – from those that represent a descriptive language use to those that are highly unconventional and frequently involve mental imagery. The proposed continuum goes from instances of descriptive language use whose interpretation results in formation of *ad hoc* concept, through instances of interpretative language use where the communicated concept departs even more from the encoded one, to extended poetic metaphors whose relevance lies in the weak implicatures.

Key words: metaphor, polysemy, interpretative language use, descriptive language use, *ad hoc* concept, mental imagery

1. Introductory remarks

The level of metaphoricity has been a subject of debate in various linguistic, as well as psycholinguistic and literary studies. Psycholinguistic research points primarily to the processing differences between conventionalized and novel metaphoric expressions. The research shows that novel and literary metaphors require more cognitive effort and elicit distinct neural responses (e.g. larger N400 and LPC amplitudes)³, while the conventionalized metaphors are processed much like literal language (Lai and Curran 2013, Goldstein et al. 2012, Camp 2006). The studies have also found that novel metaphors can become conventionalized rather rapidly through repeated exposure or explanation

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³ N400 (Negative-going potential at ~ 400 ms) and LPC (Late Positive Component) are event-related potential (ERP) components measured in EEG studies of language processing (for further information see e.g. Goldstein et al. 2012, Lai and Curran 2013).

altering their processing mode and neural signatures (Mashal and Faust 2009, Browdle and Gentner 2005). This transition involves a shift in brain activity with novel metaphors engaging the right hemisphere more while conventionalized show more bilateral or left-hemisphere processing (Cardillo et al. 2012, Mashal and Faust 2005). When it comes to linguistic research into literary metaphors it is suggested that poetic and everyday metaphors share cognitive mechanisms (Rasse et al. 2019, Bambini et al. 2014). They do, however, differ in features such as familiarity, ease of interpretation and semantic relatedness (Jakobs and Kinder 2018).

Within the field of cognitive approaches to metaphor three main strands stand out – psycholinguistics, cognitive linguistics and cognitive pragmatics. Psycholinguistic research yielded analogy (see Gentner et al. 2001, Holyoak and Thagard 1995) and categorization (see Kintsch 2000, Glucksberg and Keysar 1990) approaches that focus on information-processing models. The most influential approach in cognitive linguistics Conceptual Metaphor Theory (henceforth CMT) links metaphor comprehension to embodied cognition and presupposes the existence of cross-domain mappings (see Kövecses 2010, Lakoff 1993, Lakoff and Johnson 1980, Lakoff and Turner 1989). Cognitive pragmatics focusses on the interpretation of metaphoric expressions and the pragmatic processes involved (see Carston 2010, 2018, Vega Moreno 2007, Wilson and Carston 2006). I believe that cognitive pragmatics can offer adequate tools and mechanisms that can fill the gaps attested within the psycholinguistic approaches (see Holyoak and Stamenković 2018) since these approaches are concerned with metaphor processing and interpretation. On the other hand, CMT and the potential existence of cross-domain mappings will be taken into consideration in this research in order to try and examine what their place is (if any) in the proposed classification. Therefore, the main aim of this paper is to attempt to establish categories of metaphoric expressions according to the interpretation procedure in line with the framework of Relevance Theory (henceforth RT), a cognitive-inferential approach to communication.

There are two main reasons for this approach and the choice of the subject matter. First, as previously stated, there is ample evidence for different levels of processing of metaphoric expressions, so a valid way of classifying them would have to involve differences in the interpretation process. Secondly, so far, to the best of my knowledge, the cognitive-inferential approach to communication has received the fewest revisions in the last forty years since its conception (unlike the previously mentioned psycholinguistic and cognitive-linguistic approaches) and has maintained (most of) its initial postulates. Furthermore, there have been fewest critiques regarding RT treatment of metaphors within the scientific community. Therefore, I hope that the discussion presented in this paper will contribute to the overall debate regarding the status of expressions glossed as metaphoric.

2. Relevance theory

In this section I shall briefly present the main tenants of RT (Sperber and Wilson 1986/95, 1987; Carston 2002a) and its approach to communication and cognition. More detailed and/or specific points will be discussed within the sections that follow.

RT is a cognitive-inferential approach to communication, grounded in the view that human cognition is geared towards the maximization of relevance. It builds on Gricean pragmatics but departs from it by postulating a single, unified inferential mechanism for deriving both what is said and what is implicated. The key tenets of the theory are the *Cognitive Principle of Relevance* and the *Communicative Principle of Relevance*. The former posits that human cognition tends to maximize relevance while the latter stipulates that every ostensive act of communication carries a presumption of its own optimal relevance. In this framework, relevance is defined as a function of contextual effects (strengthening of an existing assumption, contradiction or elimination of an assumption, or yielding a contextual implication) and processing effort.

Relevance Theory maintains that linguistic expressions do not determine full propositional content on their own. Rather, they provide input for a schematic logical form that requires inferential enrichment in order to be fully propositional. This enrichment involves pragmatic processes such as *reference assignment*, *disambiguation*, *saturation*, *free enrichment*, and *ad hoc concept construction*. The result of these processes is the *explicature* of an utterance - the communicated proposition intended by the speaker and derived by pragmatic development of the logical form. In contrast to explicatures, implicatures are propositions inferred from the explicature and contextual assumptions. A further distinction is drawn between strong implicatures, which, apart from being crucial for arriving at the intended meaning, are clearly intended by the speaker and are more readily derivable, and weak implicatures, which are less determinate and open to interpretation. This gradience in communicated content reflects the fundamentally inferential and context-sensitive nature of communication.

Importantly, relevance is always evaluated relative to the cognitive environment of the individual. What counts as relevant depends not only on the content of the utterance but also on the background knowledge and assumptions accessible to the hearer. The hearer stops processing when an interpretation satisfying the expectation of optimal relevance is reached. This is known as the least effort strategy, according to which interpretation proceeds via accessible hypotheses until the relevance criterion is met.

2.1. Relevance and metaphor

In the RT framework, metaphor is treated not as a deviant or ornamental use of language but as an instance of loose use within a continuum ranging from literal to hyperbolic and metaphorical expressions. According to the explicature analysis (EA), metaphor involves pragmatic adjustment of the

encoded lexical concept to yield an *ad hoc* concept suitable for the intended context (Wilson and Carston 2006, Carston 2002b). The metaphorically used expression contributes directly to the propositional form of the utterance.

More recently, the modified explicature analysis (MEA) has been proposed to account for interpretative uses of language where the metaphorical expression does not contribute a constituent to the explicature but rather represents a type of attributive concept (Rasulić and Mišković-Luković 2021, Mišković-Luković 2013). We believe that whether a metaphor is treated descriptively or interpretatively depends on the degree of conventionalization and routinization of the expression.

These approaches do not exclude one another and will be discussed further within the following sections that deal with the division of metaphoric expressions proposed in this paper. However, what is important to note at this stage is that in relevance-theoretic accounts, metaphor interpretation is a wholly inferential process. It does not require domain mapping or analogical reasoning but relies on the hearer's ability to construct an *ad hoc* concept that yields enough cognitive effects to satisfy the expectation of relevance. This approach allows for a flexible and context-sensitive treatment of metaphor and accommodates both novel and conventional metaphors within the same interpretive framework. Moreover, RT's distinction between strong and weak implicatures provides a principled way to account for the open-endedness and variability of interpretation of certain metaphors. Some metaphorical utterances yield multiple weak implicatures, with the strength and accessibility of each implicature depending on the hearer's cognitive environment, his preferences and abilities.

Thus, Relevance Theory offers a unified and dynamic model for understanding how metaphor is processed, interpreted, and communicated, situating metaphor firmly within the inferential architecture of human communication.

3. When is a non-literal expression metaphoric?

In this section I will first consider the issue of widely accepted conceptual metaphors and the role they (might) play in our classification and in pragmatic treatment of metaphors in general. I shall then focus on precise criteria that make an expression count as metaphoric by comparing it to hyperbole.

3.1. Is there a place for conceptual metaphors?

It has been suggested in literature that cognitive-linguistic and cognitive-pragmatic approaches share some similarities and could benefit from one another (Rasulić and Mišković-Luković 2021, Wilson 2011, Tendahl 2009, Tendahl and Gibbs 2008). Let us examine this possibility.

CMT presupposes a mapping from a source domain (a more concrete domain, usually grounded in perception) onto the target domain (the more abstract domain). For instance, in the expression *give someone an idea* we can observe the underlying conceptual metaphor IDEAS ARE OBJECTS and MENTAL

TRANSFER IS PHYSICAL TRANSFER. This reasoning was further reinforced by the procedures introduced to make metaphor identification procedure more unified and justifiable – MIP followed by MIPVU (Steen et al. 2010, Pragglejazz 2007). In short, this procedure instructs researchers to compare the listed meanings of a lexeme suspected to be used metaphorically, and if the meaning attested in the corpus being examined is not the most basic (e.g. easier to imagine and/or perceive, usually related to bodily experience), the researcher is to gloss the lexeme as MRW (metaphor related word). Furthermore, CMT claims that these mappings are preexisting and that they exhibit the way human cognitive system is organized. From RT point of view the said expression (*give someone an idea*) would not be deemed metaphorical at all, as is the case with the majority of examples used in CMT.⁴

Namely, humans have access to a much greater number of concepts than there are words (Wilson and Carston 2019: 35). We are capable of creating a vast number of concepts with very little effort, based on the existing concept and a given context in order to satisfy the expectation of relevance. Some of these idiosyncratic concepts become lexicalized due to frequent or prolonged use in a given (language) community. In time it becomes easier, faster and cognitively “cheaper” to access these once novel concepts. In fact, adjustment of an encoded concept is a very frequent occurrence in language. The encoded (lexical) concept is the literal meaning of a word and a constituent of the logical form. It serves as the basis for the formation of the communicated concept – a concept arrived at by *ad hoc* concept construction that the speaker intends to communicate and whose truth value she warrants (Mišković-Luković 2018: 151). According to the lexical underdeterminacy hypothesis, lexemes are incomplete representations of concepts whose meaning needs to be resolved in context via pragmatic processes. Non-literal meanings exhibit different levels of departure from the encoded meaning – hence the question: how “far” and in what way does the communicated concept need to depart from the lexical concept in order to be deemed metaphorical?

Let me further elaborate my stance that there is (almost) no place for conceptual metaphors in pragmatic theory. The conceptual mapping view, as previously mentioned, focuses on conventional metaphors, and uses lexical metaphors to prove the existence of conceptual ones (Holyoak and Stamenković 2018: 649). That these expressions are not metaphoric at all is not a new idea. For example, Holyoak and Stamenković (2018: 654) state that CMT “tends to blur the distinction between metaphorical and literal language”. Furthermore, the psycholinguistic hypothesis of the career of metaphor presupposes that novel metaphoric mappings can create new word meanings and that metaphor has two generative functions: when first encountered, it serves as a structural enhancement of the target based on the source, and as the lexical extension of the source which is the essence for an abstract category (Bowdle and Gentner

4 For a more detailed critique of the proposed metaphor identification procedures see Manojlović 2024.

1999, 2005). This hypothesis is an attempt to unite analogy and categorization approach and is the closest view to the one presented in this paper. I shall argue that instead of the structural enhancement of the target, interpretation, following the path of least effort, results in an *ad hoc* concept (or an attributive concept, as we shall see). All other expressions mainly used in CMT are instances of literal use of a polysemous word.

It is widely acknowledged that polysemy is omnipresent in language and every content word *is* polysemic or potentially polysemic – if it isn't polysemic already, it is only a matter of time when it will become polysemic (Carston 2019: 151-152). It is almost inevitable that a word becomes polysemic and Carston (2019: 152) argues that the majority of different meanings of the same lexeme originate from pragmatic processes. The process goes as follows: the speaker uses a lexeme with an established meaning to communicate different concept/meaning relying on the addressee's knowledge of this established meaning and his ability to construct *ad hoc* concept based on the expected relevance of the utterance in the given context. If the said lexeme becomes established in a given community the lexicalization process results in redundancy of *ad hoc* concept formation – mere decoding is needed. One of the most important functions of pragmatic inference is overcoming lexical differences among the speakers of a community (Wilson and Carston 2007: 241). People who differ in the determined meanings of lexemes that they have stored in their mental lexicon may arrive at the same interpretation of an utterance, although by different processes – lexical decoding or pragmatic inference (Wilson and Carston 2007: 241). Mental lexicon, or more precisely, C-lexicon (*communication lexicon*), is a collection of concepts available to a speaker of a certain community during communication. Certain meanings can become completely conventionalized so that, during inference, they are accessed by the process of decoding (Carston 2019).

Additionally, evidence from psycholinguistic experiments show that literal meaning is always activated initially and that it remains activated well beyond the point at which the relevant (metaphorical) interpretation has been recovered (Rubio Fernandez 2007). This suggests that higher-level processes are needed than those involved in e.g. disambiguation, where the contextually irrelevant meaning is dropped rather quickly (Carston 2010: 305). There is a point to be made here, regarding the question of metaphoricity of conceptual metaphors. The non-activation of the source domain (as studies suggest) when interpreting conventionalized metaphors seems to suggest further that these expressions are not metaphoric (e.g. the literal spatial meaning in expressions like *on Monday*, *point of view*, etc.) since they are cases of disambiguation rather than *ad hoc* concept construction.

Further evidence that conceptual mapping is highly questionable is provided by neural studies of metaphor comprehension which don't support the claim that literal expressions (such as previously mentioned *give somebody an idea*) necessarily require access to the conceptual mapping (Holyoak and Stamenković 2018: 654). Holyoak and Stamenković (2018: 649) further

note that computational models based on CMT do not specify the learning mechanisms that could generate conceptual mappings, while CMT researchers still focus on treating metaphor within the general “embodied” or “grounded” cognition framework. Corpus linguistic research also suggests that the mapping theory of metaphor is insufficient to account for the patterns found in language (Deignan 2008: 287).

However, there exists a large body of research that does show the tendency of human cognition to conceptualize certain abstract domains in a particular way. Since the linguistic expressions that are used as evidence for these conceptualizations cannot be considered metaphoric, as I have shown, I shall admit to the possibility that these preexisting mappings might have a function in aiding the interpretation process by reducing the cognitive effort due to exposure to particular mappings. These expressions will not be included in our categorization of metaphoric expressions since, as Holyoak and Stamenković (2018: 644) note, conventionalized metaphors should be of interest to etymology, not to cognitive science.

3.2. *What makes an expression metaphoric?*

Hyperbole, approximation and metaphor are considered to be loose uses of language, along with other instances of loosening (broadening) of concepts.⁵ With approximation the communicated concept differs minimally from the encoded (lexical) concept, while the difference between the encoded and communicated concepts is the greatest in metaphoric expressions. I illustrate this with the following example (taken from Carston 2010: 301):

(1) The water is boiling.

If the expression in (1) is used literally (i.e. to mean *to reach or be brought to the boiling point, producing bubbles of gas that rise to the surface of the liquid, agitating it as they rise*)⁶, there is no departure from the lexical concept BOIL. If the same expression is used as an approximation (‘about to boil’) the departure is minimal, i.e. the denotation of the concept BOIL is broadened so as to include those instances of liquid being about to boil. In hyperbolic reading (e.g. *I cannot shower with this water, it’s boiling!*) the departure from the lexical concept is greater but the core component of the meaning is retained – high temperature of a liquid. However, if the lexical concept BOIL is used metaphorically to describe, for example, turbulent sea, the communicated concept

5 The pragmatic processes of loosening (broadening, weakening) and strengthening (narrowing) stand in opposition, but frequently co-occur. Lexical loosening is an inferential process of pragmatic adjustment of a lexical concept so that the word is used in a more general meaning than the encoded one – the denotation is broadened. On the other hand, lexical strengthening occurs when a word is used in a narrower meaning than the encoded meaning – the denotation is narrowed (e.g. certain information from the encyclopedic entry of the conceptual address is transferred to the logical entry as a defining characteristic) (Mišković-Luković 2018: 141).

6 <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/boil>

BOIL**⁷ will have very little in common with the encoded concept. In this case certain assumptions regarding the appearance of a boiling liquid are retrieved from the encyclopedic entry in the conceptual address.

Apart from the criterion concerning the degree of departure from the encoded meaning, Rubio-Fernández et al. (2015) demonstrate that there are *at least* descriptive and psycholinguistic differences between hyperbole and metaphor even though the same pragmatic mechanisms account for the interpretation of both non-literal uses of language. With hyperbole there is a change in the range between the encoded and the communicated concept, while metaphor involves a qualitative change. Hyperbole would be a case of a typical loose use of language (Rubio-Fernández et al. 2015: 26) where one key property of the lexical concept becomes loosened/broadened. On the other hand, metaphor never requires merely a quantitative change, but also disregarding the defining property of the lexical concept and, most frequently, focusing on peripheral properties from the encyclopedic entry (Rubio-Fernández et al. 2015: 26), which example (1) confirms. Therefore, hyperbole involves broadening of the range on a scalar component that is an essential component of the encoded meaning, while interpretation of metaphoric expressions leads to both broadening and narrowing of the concept (Rubio-Fernández et al. 2015: 26-27). They illustrate this with the lexeme *marathon* as a hyperbole (e.g. *My morning jog was a marathon*) and as a metaphor (e.g. *Writing my thesis was a marathon*). As can be seen from this example in metaphoric interpretation the defining property (running) is dismissed from the logical entry and the focus is transferred on the peripheral information and properties from the encyclopedic entry of the encoded concept (e.g. 'psychologically strenuous').

Now that a fairly sound and experientially confirmed (see Rubio-Fernández et al. 2015) criterion for determining what counts as metaphoric has been established, the next section will be dedicated to further exploration of different levels of metaphoricity.

4. The (potential) categorisation of metaphors

Since the conceptual metaphors have been excluded as literal language and (at least one) criterion for glossing an expression as metaphoric has been established, in this section I will further explore the differences between metaphors on the metaphor continuum.

Although it is tempting to view polysemy as an entirely pragmatic phenomenon, so that once a meaning becomes completely conventionalized it becomes a part of the mental lexicon as a separate unit/word, a less radical

7 The communicated concept is both narrowed and broadened (as signaled by the double asterisk). Namely, the communicated concept is broader since the defining property from the logical entry of the lexical concept is dropped, so that the communicated concept has broader denotation that can include the sea. On the other hand, the communicated concept is narrower since the information from the encyclopedic entry – regarding the appearance of a boiling liquid – is transferred to the logical entry and becomes the defining property of the communicated *ad hoc* concept.

approach is more likely. There might be meanings of a certain word that are completely lexicalized but whose connection to other conventionalized meanings remains real to certain users of that language and has to be recorded in some way in their mental lexicon (Carston 2019: 154). Carston (2019) calls this a polysemic cluster of related conventionalized meanings, which is a meaning component of a lexical entry. Creative uses of language frequently do not end up as conventionalized meanings so that each instance of their interpretation requires *ad hoc* concept construction. However, certain meanings can become established among the speakers of a language community. Carston (2019) exemplifies this with the verb *houdini* made from a proper noun. Not all users of English language will arrive at the intended interpretation by use of the same pragmatic processes. If the said verb is established or conventionalized in a certain community, hence it comes to form part of their C-lexicon, one might assume that these users will access it through decoding. For others, the interpretation will involve mutual adjustment for creating an *ad hoc* concept. Furthermore, if one is not familiar with the work of Houdini, this verb is an attributive concept, and unless there is enough contextual information, the interpretation might even fail. As we can see from this one example, it is rather common that interpretation of an expression depends on the abilities and preferences of the addressee. This is one of the starting points for our further discussion.

The division between two different modes of metaphor processing was put forward by Robin Carston (2010). She suggested that one mode involves a fast, online *ad hoc* concept construction process whereas the other involves a process whereby the literal meaning of a metaphorically used expression is retained and metarepresented, and “subjected to slower, more reflective interpretative inferences that separate out implications that are plausibly speaker-meant” (Carston 2010: 308). In this paper I shall argue for a third possibility, put forward by Mišković-Luković (2013), which, on the metaphor continuum, lies in between the two modes proposed by Carston.

4.1. First order (weak) metaphors

What falls under this group of metaphors are expressions that require *ad hoc* concept construction, in line with the explicature analysis (Carston 2002a). Within this approach metaphor is seen as a special case of a wider linguistic phenomenon – sentence/utterance meaning is fragmentary and the intended meaning significantly surpasses the linguistically encoded meaning. Figurative use of language clearly illustrates the difference between what is encoded and what is communicated.

Basic assumptions of this approach to metaphoric expressions are: a) metaphoric expressions are part of a continuum of loose use of language (including, for example, approximation and hyperbole); b) the interpretation of metaphoric expressions is entirely inferential process that does not involve associative mapping from one domain to another; c) the formation of emergent

property does not involve special interpretative mechanisms other than those involved in the interpretation of literal expressions (Wilson and Carston 2006). EA⁸ is a model of lexical-pragmatic approach within the relevance theory which postulates that the pragmatic processes of narrowing (strengthening) and broadening (weakening) are treated in the same way – as means of pragmatic enrichment of the basic proposition of an utterance (Mišković-Luković 2013: 50). We shall illustrate with the following example (taken from Wilson and Carston 2006):

- (2) Caroline is a princess.
- (2a) CAROLINE_x IS A PRINCESS**⁹

The communicated concept PRINCESS** is pragmatically adjusted and is a constituent of the proposition expressed, contributing to the truth conditions. Namely, if Caroline is not a member of a royal family, the broader concept PRINCESS* is constructed, the denotation of which includes all females, not only those of royal descent. At the same time, accessing the encyclopedic assumptions available based on the context and the encoded concept PRINCESS, and assuming that Caroline is a member of the subset of females that these encyclopedic assumptions can apply to, it is possible to arrive at sufficient number of contextual implications that will make the utterance relevant in the expected way. Adopting these assumptions strengthens the encoded concept, so that the communicated concept PRINCESS** is narrower in the sense that it applies only to the subset of real princesses (that are, for example, spoilt, demanding etc.). These constitute the emergent properties of the encoded concept that now become the defining properties of the communicated concept.

Metaphoric expressions that are interpreted by constructing an *ad hoc* concept fall at the end of the continuum of loose use of language. However,

- 8 A neo-Gricean approach put forward by Bach (1994, 2001) follows a very similar line of reasoning. According to Bach, at least some sentences express a minimal proposition and instead of explicature he proposes the notion of *implicature*. Implicature is a pragmatically enriched version of Gricean semantic construct, a third category of speaker meaning – between *what is said* and *what is implicated*. It is in fact what is implicit in what is said. Implicature is not the semantic content of the minimal proposition, but of some other sentence that is not explicated. The verb *implicite* means to say something partially, while the verb *implicate* means to say something and intend to say something else. Similar to post-Gricean, cognitive-inferential view, semantically underdetermined sentences require enrichment in order to become fully fledged propositions. If the sentence lacks at least one constituent (e.g. *She is too old* [for what]), then the enrichment process is *completion* and when a sentence lacks elements that are part of speaker's meaning (even if the sentence expresses a minimal proposition), the enrichment process is *expansion* (e.g. *You are not going to die* [from that cut]). Implicature is a notion connected to nonliterality and figurative language counts as constituent nonliterality (1994: 135). After undergoing the process of expansion, metaphoric expressions are constituents of the implicature (for detailed discussion see Manojlović 2023) and since the notion of implicature can be viewed as a parallel notion to that of explicature, it can be said that the described neo-Gricean approach has certain traits in common with the EA approach within the post-Gricean cognitive-inferential theory.
- 9 The sign “X” that stands with the subject is a symbol for the pragmatic process of reference assignment.

as previously stated, metaphoric expressions, unlike other instances of loose use of language, involve a qualitative change. The question I pose here is – if there exist various degrees of qualitative change and reasonable grounds for the notion of metaphor continuum, could there be a criterion for a further division on the metaphor continuum according to the level of metaphoricity? I explore this idea within the following subsections.

4.2. Second order (strong) metaphors

Second order metaphors would comprise more creative (novel) metaphors – expressions that usually serve idiosyncratic use (for one-off occasion). During the interpretation of such expressions the addressee bears a greater responsibility for arriving at the intended/communicated meaning. In such cases interpretation may differ, to a lesser or greater extent, from one addressee to another, in connection to emergent properties, or the encyclopedic information taken into account as the defining property (or properties) of the communicated concept. These expressions are not poetic or extended metaphors yet, it is just the case that the qualitative change is greater and (perhaps due to unfamiliarity) interpretations may vary. The switch from descriptive to interpretative use happens when the certainty in the communicated content falls below a certain threshold, so the communicated concept becomes attributive.

This is in line with MEA (*modified explicature analysis*) proposed Mišković-Luković (2013; see also Rasulić and Mišković-Luković 2021). According to this approach, metaphor is an instance of interpretative language use (like irony) instead of descriptive language use as was the case with EA. This way metaphoric expressions lose the truth-conditional constraint (Mišković-Luković 2013: 54). According to this approach, the encoded concept PRINCESS in (2) would be interpreted as attributive (the basic proposition/explicature is given in (2b):

(2b) 'Caroline_x is a „princess” (as one would say or think)'

Implicatures would be contextually driven and generated in the same manner as was the case with the descriptive approach to metaphoric expressions (EA). The difference here is that interpretatively used expressions are those that are not routinised enough (i.e. new or highly creative expressions) or there exists a certain *contextual deficiency* (or both), so the abovementioned threshold of certainty regarding the communicated/intended meaning is crossed. For instance, the concept PRINCESS would normally be interpreted via *ad hoc* concept construction, given the adequate context and the addressee's abilities including his cognitive background. The communicated concept will be narrowed differently according to the contextual information (compare e.g. *She doesn't want to do any chores, she's a real princess* and *She bought a new dress for the prom, she's a real princess*). Repetition of certain metaphoric expressions (i.e. routinization) can contribute to their cognitive storage. Consequently, such expressions will be accessed inferentially (depending on the level and frequency of exposure to the said expression), which, in turn, reduces the cognitive effort in utterance interpretation (Mišković-Luković 2014: 353).

However, without adequate context, or the addressee's background knowledge, the concept may be an instance of interpretative language use. If we go back to the *houdini* example, this becomes more obvious. We illustrate with the following example:

(3) A: Did he pay that fine?

(3a) B: He just *houdinied*.

(3b) B: No, he just *houdinied* his way out of it.

Let us imagine three scenarios from the hearer's perspective. In the first scenario, the verb *houdini* is frequently used within a speaking community and the addressee constructs an *ad hoc* concept based on the lexical concept and contextual information. In the second scenario, the verb is unfamiliar to the hearer. In interpreting (3a) the responsibility for arriving at the communicated/intended meaning is greater for the hearer – this is then an instance of interpretative language use (“*houdinied*” [as one would say or think]). The context for (3b) warrants the hearer's reaching the intended interpretation. The third scenario involves an addressee who is not familiar with the proper noun the verb was derived from. This would certainly be an instance of attributive concept in both (3a) and (3b). However, in (3a), following the path of least effort, the addressee might not even arrive at the interpretation that would satisfy his expectation of relevance. On the other hand, given the extended co-text in (3b), the hearer may satisfy his expectation of relevance even though the concept HOUDINI is attributive (“*houdinied*” [as one would say or think]).

Attributive concepts are not infrequent in language and communication. We use them to communicate without any difficulty. Concepts frequently start their acquisition process as attributive concepts. Some never become fully descriptive (the information in the conceptual address remains incomplete). For example, many native English speakers can be familiar with certain legal terms (e.g. *misdeemeanor*, *felony*) and know that they refer to certain illegal actions, but not what type of acts they actually refer to. Similarly, newly coined expressions or slang expressions, or expressions specific to a certain community, are often permanently attributive concepts whose descriptive content of the concept may never be fully discovered (e.g. *sigma*, *skibidi*, *staycation*, etc.).

To elaborate further on the distinction between first and second order metaphors, let us consider the following examples:

(4) The leaves *danced* in the wind.

(5) My thoughts *danced* from the excitement.

First order metaphors would be those expressions where the emergent properties that become the defining properties of the communicated concept are warranted by the context of use and routinization of the expression used. These properties need not be completely peripheral or marginal. However, they are extracted from the encyclopedic entry, and the *ad hoc* concept construction does involve a qualitative change – dropping a defining property from the logical entry of the conceptual address of the encoded concept. The lexical

concept DANCE suggests movement (*to move one's feet or body, or both, rhythmically in a pattern of steps, especially to the accompaniment of music*¹⁰). The communicated concept in (4) retains merely one property from the logical entry, which is not the defining one (*movement* is a rather broad concept). Furthermore, the implication of intentional movement is missing, along with other defining properties (rhythmically, accompanied by music, etc.). On the other hand, the communicated concept in (5) lacks physical movement as a property. Rather, it takes an extremely marginal property of (involuntary) erratic and fast movement, further narrowed down by the additional context (*from the excitement*).

Sperber and Wilson (2008: 102) note that even common metaphors (e.g. *Keep your paws off me!*) achieve some of their relevance through an array of weak implicatures. They go on to discuss Sandburg's famous lines *The fog comes/ on little cat feet* and conclude that the underlined expression evokes a wide range of implications in connection to silence, smoothness, and stealth. In defining what the explicit content of the concept ON-LITTLE-CAT-FEET* is they conclude that the concept in question is "the concept of a property that is *difficult or impossible to define*, a property possessed in particular by some typical movements of cats (though not all of them – little cat feet can also move in violent or playful ways) and, according to the poem, by the movement of fog" (Sperber and Wilson 2008: 102, my emphasis). According to the classification proposed in this paper, this would be an instance of a strong metaphor, and the constituent of the explicature would be "on-little-cat-feet" [as one would say or think]. The reason for this proposal is explained by the emphasized part of the quote above – property that is *difficult or impossible to define*. The threshold of certainty in the intended content of the communicated concept is crossed. Of course, here, at least for some recipients/readers it is expected that this expression may also invoke mental imagery. Accordingly, this example is closer to poetic metaphors (discussed in the following subsection) than to weak metaphors that involve ad hoc concept formation.

What further separates the two types of metaphors is that strong metaphors would likely be paraphrased differently by different recipients while weak metaphors would be paraphrased much in the same way by different recipients (at least regarding some implications that are central to the concept). In other words, strong metaphors would have more or less varying paraphrases (depending on the contextual information available) given the hearer's greater responsibility for arriving at the intended meaning and the fact that the conceptual content of strong metaphors is less definite.

4.3. Poetic (extended) metaphors

Finally, I turn to literary or poetic metaphors. Numerous researchers have marked these expressions as separate instances of metaphor. Lakoff and Johnson (1980/2003: 53) note the existence of *imaginative* or *figurative*

10 <<https://www.dictionary.com/browse/dance>>.

metaphors. Likewise, Kövecses (2002: 49-62) analyses metaphoric expression he calls *literary metaphors*, which, even though considered a special kind of metaphors, involve the same mechanisms as other conceptual metaphors. The deficiency of the conceptual mapping approach to accounting for actual language use has already been discussed in this paper and previously confirmed by corpus linguistic studies (see Deignan 2005, 2008). However, it is interesting to note that, even though these different types of metaphor have been recognized, they weren't given proper treatment within conceptual mapping theory. One of the instances of gross neglect is especially evident when the very procedure that aims at establishing a scientific method within a field fails to recognize a demarcation point. Namely, Steen et al. (2010: 6, 17) state that the contextual meanings of *novel* metaphors are rarely found in dictionaries and further elaborate that this does not present a problem for the procedure (MIP/MIPVU) since, like in any other case, meaning in context is compared to the basic meaning of the expression in question and marked metaphoric (with the proposed cross-domain mappings proceeding in the same manner as is the case with conventional metaphors). Since it is fairly certain that poetic metaphors have nothing to do with cross-domain mappings, based on psycholinguistic and corpus linguistic studies, the proposed RT account of these expressions will be adopted in this paper.

Carston (2010) notes that there exists a vast range of instances of metaphoric expressions and that utterances with different metaphoric expressions have more or less clear propositional content. Vega Moreno (2007) also notes that there is an indeterminacy continuum among the metaphoric expressions – from highly conventionalized uses on one end on the continuum to the novel poetic (artistic) on the other. Wilson and Carston (2019: 31) state that by the use of creative metaphors a less specific content is communicated, which can be best described as a vague impression (potentially intertwined with mental imagery), or the *weak propositional effects* (instead of non-propositional effects, since they consider that these effects are very present in communication and the majority of them cannot be analyzed in a propositional sense) (Wilson and Carston 2019: 32-33, 37). Weak propositional effects are characterized by the fact that different recipients will paraphrase them in very different ways; there is no one paraphrase that captures all the nuances. They are frequently described as 'open ended' effects, and often require the activation of perceptive, emotive and sensorimotor mechanisms (Wilson and Carston 2019: 32). In fact, when it comes to creative metaphors, a whole spectrum of propositions is communicated, hence it is unlikely that all these propositions will be replicated in the addressee's mind during the interpretation process.

Weak propositional effects and mental imagery (which are not only important for interpretation of metaphoric expressions, see Wilson and Carston 2019) are considered as instances of weak communication.¹¹ The

11 The fact that the weakening of a constituent results in a weaker explicature is not overlooked here. Namely, each utterance that contains an expression used metaphorically has a weaker

weaker the communication the less manifest the speaker's intention and the greater responsibility on the part of the addressee to decide on the intended meaning (Wilson 2018).

Carston (2010) explores the expression she calls *extended literary/poetic metaphors* and notes that within these expressions the constituents are, in fact, used literally, while the relevance is in implications *probably* intended by the speaker (Carston 2010: 310). The switch to this mode of interpretation happens "when a certain processing threshold or tipping point is reached, when the effort of local ad hoc concept formation is too great relative to the dominance, the high accessibility, of the literal meaning. There may well be individual differences with regard to this threshold" (Carston 2010: 308-309). This is mostly the case with extended literary metaphors, but not necessarily. She provides the following example (2010: 309):

- (6) My Life had stood – a Loaded Gun –
In Corners –

In the case of the metaphor above, instead of forming an *ad hoc* concept LOADED GUN*, it seems more likely that the encoded meaning is retained. The literal meaning 'loaded gun' is metarepresented as 'LOADED GUN' which suggests a deliberate cognitive process. This process involves accessing implications and associations that this conceptual representation conveys and selecting those that can, with great certainty, be characteristic of human life, especially one that 'HAD STOOD IN CORNERS' (Carston 2010: 309). In such poetic (often extended) metaphors, due to literal meanings being persistent (since the excessive cognitive effort would be needed to form a succession of non-literal ad hoc concepts) and quite odd and unusual, a more deliberate pragmatic processing is needed accompanied by a more attentive focus on the imagery, compared to ordinary literal language use (Carston 2010: 313-314).

Therefore, apart from the rejection of the conceptualized metaphorical meaning and putting an emphasis on the literal meaning, Robin Carston puts imagistic effects in focus stating that "by staying with the literal meaning and the images it evokes we may come, at least partially, to understand how the world looks and feels to the poet in his exalted state of mind" (Carston 2010: 311). Empirical research in psycholinguistics suggests that mental images are evoked immediately and without much effort or awareness during the interpretation of ordinary language as well (Carston 2010: 312). However, in poetic metaphors the scrutiny of mental images could play a crucial role in inciting conceptual representations (or weak implicatures) that are part of the author's communicative intention (Carston 2010: 314). Furthermore, the role of images could explain the abovementioned emergent properties – properties that are not directly associated with the literal meaning of the metaphorically used

explicature in comparison to an utterance whose constituents are used in their literal meanings. The question of degree is in focus here.

expression (Carston 2010: 314). To explore this further I will use the lines from Sylvia Plath's poem *Tulips*:

- (7) My body is a pebble to them, they tend it as water
Tends to the pebbles it must run over, smoothing them gently.
They bring me numbness in their bright needles, they bring me sleep.

We can assume that no ad hoc concept PEBBLE** will be formed, or an attributive one – 'pebble' [as one would say or think]. Rather, the relevance here lies in the implications prompted by mental imagery (involving pebbles and water flowing over them) and context. Some of these conceptual representations may well include that the poet – the pebble – feels insignificant, inert and passive; small and lifeless, while the hospital staff – the water – care for the pebble impersonally but persistently, softening the pebble, shaping it, but also eroding it. Further weak implications would be connected to soothing care and loss of individuality, desire for detachment, numbness, loss of identity and self. Some of the properties that the metaphoric vehicle *pebble* brings to the table are not normally found in the conceptual address PEBBLE – e.g. insignificant, lifeless, passive. Rather the mental images that intertwine – the water running over the pebble and hospital staff tending to the subject (poet) – give rise to accessing the said properties as relevant during interpretation.

5. Conclusion

In this paper I have examined the possibility of providing demarcation points along the metaphor continuum. Firstly, I excluded *conventional* metaphors as being metaphoric, since they represent literal language use. However, the potential conceptual mappings could play a role in reducing the cognitive load in metaphor processing and ad hoc concept formation by making certain contextual assumptions more accessible (as suggested by Holyoak and Stamenković 2018, Wilson and Carston 2006). Secondly, since the division between 'ordinary' metaphors and more poetic metaphors (see e.g. Carston 2010) has been established and researched, we ventured to examine all the 'in-between' cases of non-literal language use.

The division proposed in this paper – between first and second order metaphors – is a suggestion for differentiation between those metaphoric expressions whose interpretation is largely warranted by the context of use and the encoded meaning (even though at least one defining property from the logical entry of the encoded concept is dropped) from those whose interpretation may vary, more or less, depending on the interlocutor.

Numerous empirical research conducted during the last decades seem to point to opposing conclusions – from those suggesting that there is no difference in cognitive effort when interpreting metaphoric and literal expressions to those pointing to a substantial difference in cognitive effort (see Carston and Yan 2023). One of the reasons for the attested difference in cognitive load could be due to the difference in processing referentially and predicatively used

metaphoric expression (Carston and Yan 2023). We believe that differentiating between metaphoric expressions based on the level of certainty and definiteness of the content of the communicated concept (e.g. examples 4 and 5) could contribute to this current debate.

On the other hand, the suggested differentiation is motivated by the two different approaches within cognitive-inferential pragmatics – EA and MEA. First order (weak) metaphors would be instances of descriptive language use that requires constructing ad hoc concepts that are constituents of the proposition expressed. Second order (strong) metaphors would be instances of interpretative language use, i.e. attributive concepts that do not contribute to the truth conditions of the proposition. Additionally, there is a greater responsibility on the part of the hearer in determining the speaker's intended meaning. It has been noted that the process of ad hoc concept formation cannot account for expressions expanding further than the ordinary (more conventional) metaphoric expressions into poetic extended metaphors (Carston 2010: 306). However, I believe that not all metaphoric expressions for which ad hoc concept does not seem a plausible solution can be interpreted as literal with rich mental imagery and dense cluster of weak implicatures. Hence the proposed division of expressions on the metaphor continuum, summarized in Table 1 below. The shift between first and second order metaphors happens when the threshold of certainty in the content of the communicated concept is crossed, while the shift to the interpretation that relies on implications (*probably* intended by the speaker) and mental imagery happens when the processing threshold is crossed and the effort for local concept adjustment becomes too great.

Type of expression	Interpretative process output	Descriptive/interpretative language use
Non-metaphors (potentially once conceptual mappings)	Decoding	Descriptive
First order (weak) metaphors – more routinised expressions; the literal meaning active, can involve imagery	Ad hoc concept construction	Descriptive
Second order (strong) metaphors – less determinate content; the literal meaning is active; can involve imagery	Attributive concept	Interpretative

Poetic (extended) metaphors – literal meaning is the constituent of the proposition expressed; pervasively involve imagery	Decoding (with main function to trigger the derivation of (weak) implicatures and other implications)	Descriptive
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Table 1: The suggested categorization of metaphorically used expressions

Clear-cut distinction between weak and strong metaphors is not possible. The amount of certainty in the content of the communicated concept is not a measurable quality. Similarly, there is no strict distinction between these expressions and poetic metaphors. Images play essentially the same role in all discussed processing modes; the difference is a matter of degree – “of time and effort expended on mental ‘looking at’ the image” (Carston 2010: 314-315). In these expressions imagery is “central and ‘different in kind’ from whatever conceptual content or cognitive effects are conveyed” (Carston 2010: 317).

I believe that the absence of clear demarcation does not present a problem for RT treatment of metaphor. Relevance itself is not quantifiable, it is always relevance to an individual. When it comes to weaker forms of communication the speaker and the hearer might end up entertaining different propositions out of the range of propositions made manifest by an utterance, without it creating an error in communication (Wilson and Carston 2019: 36). For one interlocutor certain expression will be descriptively used, while for another interpretatively. This has to do with the routinization of an expressions and the meanings stored in C-lexicon. Gibbs (1996: 313) has noted that there is a vast number of linguistic, psychological and anthropological studies that prove the hypothesis that, depending on the circumstances, humans understand certain experiences or concepts differently and hence conceptualize them differently. He considers that the existence of alternative conceptualizations is essential for adequate understanding of experiences and abstract concepts and that concepts are indeed temporary dynamic representations that depend greatly on the context. Furthermore, it is not unusual that the same expression, literally used, can be descriptively interpreted for some language users and interpretatively for others (e.g. the abovementioned *misdeemeanor*, *tort* and *felony* are attributive concepts for majority of native speakers of English, but fully descriptive for legal experts). The same holds for metaphoric expressions on the metaphor continuum.

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