

Re-thinking "The Way We Think" – Metaphor, Metonymy & Blending in Usage-based Linguistics

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Abstract:

Conceptual Metaphor Theory and Conceptual Integration Theory, two highly influential cognitive semantic theories of meaning making, have over the past years come under considerable attack from usage-based and functional branches of linguistics. This varied volume sets out to explore the expository potential of both theories within a usage-based framework and, in most contributions, offers empirically solid applications as well as suggestions for theoretical reconfigurations.

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Handl, Sandra and Hans-Jörg Schmid (eds.): *Windows to the Mind. Metaphor, Metonymy and Conceptual Blending*. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, 2011. 314 p., Hardcover, 99.95 Euro. ISBN 978-3-11-023818-1

The central tenet of cognitive semantics holds that everyday figurative language allows the identification of the conceptual Metaphors We Live By (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) that in turn provide insight into The Way We Think (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002). Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Lakoff & Turner, 1989) and the later Mental Spaces and Conceptual Integration (Blending) Theory (Fauconnier & Turner, 1998, 2002) have enjoyed significant influence, yet have over the past decade or so come under considerable attack. It is especially the usage-based branch of linguistics that criticises the theories' perceived lack in empirical rigour and their failure to account for contextualised, actual language usage (cf. e.g., Croft, 2009; Gibbs, 1999, 2000).

Windows to the Mind now seeks to offer empirically solid applications of both, Conceptual Metaphor (CMT) and Conceptual Integration (CIT) theory. Moreover, it discusses solutions to the methodological problems inherent in these largely intuition-based theories. The volume is divided into three parts. While the first two sections concentrate on metaphor and metonymy within a broadly conceived CMT framework, the last section treats issues of context in CIT.

The first section, entitled "Metaphor and metonymy: Fundamental issues", offers a heterogeneous collection of papers. In the opening chapter, Zoltán Kövecses discusses in detail methodological issues in CMT research. Although admitting to the principal validity of the criticism voiced, he largely defends intuition-based research in CMT. Kövecses rests his argumentation mainly on the case that usage-based and psycholinguistic approaches have so far largely confirmed the intuitive-based findings made by first-generation CMT researchers. His programmatic call for traditional and usage-based approaches to metaphor to complement each other, taking into account both regularity and irregularity in balanced analyses, is, however, highly relevant to the methodological and theoretical furthering of CMT.

Aivars Glaznieks' paper on domain knowledge in children's comprehension of metaphors, on the other hand, leaves the reader slightly puzzled. Starting with the question of the impact source domain knowledge has on metaphor comprehension, Glaznieks confronted children of varying age groups with German metaphoric expressions for fear and anger from various

source domains. However, the metaphors he used in this study are conventionalised expressions such as "Blut und Wasser schwitzen" or "Gift und Galle speien". Apart from such lexicalised expressions being stored and learnt as multi-word units (cf. Tomasello, 1999), they hardly originate from the source domains Glazniek identifies. For example, "Gift und Galle speien" stems from the theory of the four humours and not the ANGER IS SICKNESS domain it is listed under in Glazniek. What he is consequently really testing with these conventionalised idiomatic expressions is lexical rather than metaphoric competence. He addresses these points in the final section of his paper, stating that the expressions used in the study might be "comparable to words; they are learned as fixed phrases during early childhood" (p. 77). This insight leaves one wondering why he nonetheless opted to go for this elaborated research design that would not allow any viable insight into the research question posed originally. This contribution illustrates a major problem in CMT research: that of researchers superimposing somewhat artificial, post-hoc constructed categories on conventional metaphoric expressions, thus trying to systematise the irregularity that is inherent to metaphor, and often neglecting diachronic and 'cultural' components.

The heterogeneity of the first part is also found in the second, which offers usage-based applications of CMT and metonymy on levels so diverse as media discourse and construction grammar.

Monica Petrica discusses metaphors surrounding Malta's EU accession, yet her paper remains somewhat superficial, mainly listing metaphors found in various media and proposing a rather plain dichotomy between the pro-European discourse of major EU countries such as the UK on the one hand, and the Maltese Labour Party opposing EU membership on the other. Petrica then resorts to Lakoff's (1996, 2004) model of family metaphors to account for differences in political opinion. She here claims that due to the strong influence of the Catholic Church in Malta, it could be expected that the 'nurturing model' of full EU accession should prevail in Catholic circles, whereas demographics with a more liberal outlook on family (favouring domestic partnership over marriage) should prefer political partnership with the EU. This assessment feels slightly simplified, as different types of Catholicism (which, with its patriarchal structures, could in theory also support a strict-father model) as well as Liberalism are not discussed and instead, monocausality seems to be assumed. Petrica's conclusions thus seem slightly speculative and do not add to the further development of CMT.

Kathleen Ahrens' paper, on the other hand, offers an excellent treatment of Lakoff's family metaphors in US presidential speeches that is both methodologically sound and providing insightful reconfigurations on a theoretical level. She explicitly addresses the methodological circulus in probando problem inherent in many CMT studies by using WordNet to choose lexemes representing the family models identified by Lakoff. In a well-conceived corpus study, she then compares the frequency of nurturing and strict-father lexemes in speeches by Democratic and Republican US presidents, essentially confirming Lakoff's hypotheses, but also critically reflecting on her findings and suggesting further refinements of her approach, such as the further inclusion of contextual and lexical meanings rather than subsuming both force

and work force under the header STRENGTH. This paper shows how CMT and usage-based approaches can be put in fruitful alignment to yield empirically solid and meaningful results.

The final section of the book tackles CIT, mainly applying the theory to compounds and evaluation. All four contributions target the lack of consideration for (broadly conceived) 'context' in canonical CIT. Hans-Jörg Schmid here suggests to address this problem by placing further emphasis on relevance as a constraint on blending, and integrating a notion of relevance that is akin to Sperber & Wilson's (1986) model. This approach could certainly be fruitful to further develop CIT following the 'social turn' (Croft, 2009) in cognitive linguistics.

Kok & Bublitz in this regard propose to incorporate the notion of 'common ground' and make a strong case for the explicit treatment of context in CIT. The contributions in this final section show promising ways of reconfiguring CIT to address major problems within the theory, yet do not propose radical reconfigurations, as, for examples, Brandt & Brandt (2005) or Oakley & Hougaard's (2008) volume have done.

All in all, *Windows to the Mind* provides a somewhat heterogeneous overview of the methodological problems CMT and CIT encounter in usage-based approaches to language on various levels, with a small number of papers unfortunately rather performing these problems than providing the highly relevant and insightful suggestions and methods almost all other papers in the volume offer. These latter papers, however, contribute greatly to furthering a cognitive semantics that is answerable to and compatible with usage-based and functional linguistics.