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dimension of metaphor**

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A spotlight on the overshadowed communicative dimension of metaphor

Elisabetta Gola, Francesca Ervas (eds.). 2016. *Metaphor and Communication*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

The book *Metaphor and Communication*, edited by Elisabetta Gola and Francesca Ervas, is a collection of fifteen articles that deal with the communicative dimension of metaphor from a mostly cognitive linguistic perspective. It is the fifth volume of the series *Metaphor in Language, Cognition, and Communication*, which is, according to the editor of the series, aimed at publishing state of the art of theoretical and empirical interdisciplinary research on metaphor in language use (see series description in preliminary book remarks). By choosing the communicative dimension of metaphor as their overarching topic, the editors of the volume picked the broadest topic of the series so far; other volumes deal with comparably clear-cut contexts (e.g. psychotherapy or educational discourse) or a specific phenomenon (e.g. mixed metaphors). While choosing such a broad topic makes it easier to include approaches from multiple interdisciplinary and intradisciplinary perspectives, it also makes it more difficult to create a coherent picture.

Metaphor is a much-discussed phenomenon within the discipline of linguistics (mainly Cognitive Linguistics and Applied Linguistics). Lakoff and Johnson triggered the discussion more than 30 years ago by developing the Cognitive Metaphor Theory (henceforth CMT), which they firstly formulated in their publication *Metaphors We Live By* (1980). Since then, there has been a rapid growth in publications concerning this omnipresent phenomenon and the interest in metaphor also sparked to neighboring disciplines. Till today, Lakoff and Johnson's work remains a key reference in the field of metaphor studies, which can be demonstrated by the fact that all but two authors of *Metaphor and Communication* refer to their seminal work. Despite the multitude of academic texts on metaphor as linguistic and cognitive phenomenon, the editors of *Metaphor and Communication* argue that a crucial aspect of metaphor has been neglected so far: the communicative dimension. This claim is certainly a good catalyst to keep the discussion about metaphor going and growing.

In the opening chapter of the book, Gola and Ervas state that “[c]ommunicative aspects had been overshadowed by the predominance of analyzing the conceptual characteristics of metaphors” (p. 17). A lot of metaphor studies that are based on CMT start from the premise formulated in the well-known statement: “*the essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another*” (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 5, italics i.o.).

As Müller and Schmitt (2015: 311) have pointed out, most scholars focus on the ‘understanding’ part of this statement and thereby highlight the conceptual dimension of metaphor. Certainly, this focus is already suggested in the very name of *Conceptual Metaphor Theory*. But it is not so easy to just blind out the conceptual dimension and focus on the communicative dimension of metaphor. If metaphor scholars analyze language in use, it is problematic to distinguish which interlocutor understands a matter metaphorically (and to which degree), once a metaphor referring to this matter is expressed verbally (or in a different modality) in a communicative act. Müller (2008: 8) suggests, with regard to activated metaphors, that what is *interpersonally* salient is also salient *intrapersonally*. From this it can be concluded that an activated, verbal metaphor is part of the process of meaning making for the speaker as well as the listener, that is, it potentially facilitates understanding not just for the speaker, but for everybody involved in the communicative act. Therefore, it is highly difficult with most linguistic methodological tools, if it is possible at all, to distinguish between the conceptual and the communicative dimension of metaphor. The editors of *Metaphor and Communication* are aware of this difficulty. Even though they criticize that linguistic/cognitive layers are “conflated” (p. 1) with the communicative dimension of metaphors, they also admit that communicative aspects and conceptual characteristics of metaphors are “inextricably linked” (p. 17); therefore, they define the aim of the book as follows:

At the same time, the volume does not aim to argue in favour of a complete detachment of the communicative dimension of metaphor from its cognitive and linguistic components. It instead aims at showing that they mutually shape and influence each other in a variety of ways, according to the communicative functions of metaphor (such as persuasion, instruction, entertainment) and its application to specific domains of discourse (such as politics, media, advertising, education, poetry, music). (p. 18)

After an introductory article, the book is divided into two parts with seven articles each. The first part is dedicated to the cognitive and linguistic dimension of metaphor and the second part to the communicative dimension of metaphor. It seems odd that the editors devote half of the book to the dimension of metaphor, which, so they argue, overshadows the communicative dimension in the linguistic discourse about metaphor. But at least most authors of the book's first half address communicative aspects of metaphor in their article, notwithstanding that their main focus lies on the above mentioned two dimensions. The articles in the second part of the book are focused on the main issue of the edited volume. While the main argument and the orchestration of the overall structure give cause for a critical discussion, there are many wonderful chapters in *Metaphor and Communication*, which can be fully recommended. Three of them will be presented here.

In the chapter *Selling and buying, killing and wounding: (Un)conventional metaphors from two different semantic fields*, Sandra Handl discusses metaphors from the fields of COMMERCIAL TRANSACTION and BODILY HARM regarding their conventionality/creativity. With a corpus-based study she shows that frequency is not equivalent with conventionality and, furthermore, that the two dominant theoretical approaches in cognitive-linguistic metaphor studies, neither CMT nor Blending Theory, suffice to explain and describe the (un)conventional use of verbal metaphors thoroughly. According to Handl, CMT falls short in accounting for “emergent structures and particular pragmatic effects caused by it” and Blending Theory, on the other hand, integrates those details, but is focused on the unusual, and “runs the risk of losing sight of the conventional parts on which many blends are build” (p. 76). She links both approaches with the notion of *intersubjectivity*, which Verhagen described as “mutual management of cognitive states” (2005: 1). From this perspective, common ground – not just as starting point, but also as desired outcome – becomes the central focus of communication and therefore the notion of intersubjectivity “strikes a balance between the two theories by approaching linguistic communication from the point of view of the interlocutors’ need for cognitive coordination, which embraces two vital parts: known and shared conventions on the one hand and pragmatic aims on the other” (p. 76-77). On a more general note, Handl’s chapter points out that metaphor research needs to pay more attention to pragmatic information, which forms part of the communicative function of metaphor.

The chapter *Metaphors and online learning* by M. Beatrice Ligorio, Marianna Iodice, and Stefania Manca deals with the possible functions of metaphors in online learning experiences. The authors focus especially on the social role that metaphors play in expressing emotions and establishing intimacy in communication and, moreover, on the importance of metaphors for understanding and sharing knowledge in a group. They discuss two cases with the following results. In the first case, where people who are new to online learning were analyzed, “metaphors sustain participation, emotional sharing and mark relevant moments such as face-to-face encounters” (p. 246). In the second case, where people who are accustomed to online learning are the object of research, “the production of metaphors is anchored to the phases of discussion and the process of collective knowledge building” (ibid). Inspired by these results, the authors propose that metaphor analyses can be applied to “assess and monitor the quality of online activities” (ibid.). Therefore, this chapter shows that metaphor research can be most effective, if it analyses real-life data, and, on top of that, aspires to improve the way people communicate.

The final chapter, *Metaphor and the concept of sound in contemporary music* by Ewa Schreiber, is a great example for an interdisciplinary approach to metaphor and a fantastic final chord to the book. From a musicologist's perspective, Schreiber analyses the metaphoric concepts of sound of three contemporary composers. They relied on metaphors because "[o]ur culture has been dominated thus far by visual terms and has not developed adequate words to describe sound phenomena" (p. 272), which led to the following challenge for musicians: "In the description of complex and heterogeneous musical matter, traditional categories proved inadequate, hence the search for new vocabulary and the reference to other disciplines that allowed sound to be present in all its richness – as an auditory and aesthetic experience, but also as a social and acoustic phenomenon" (p. 267). The differing approaches to music are reflected in the differing metaphoric concepts (sonic object, soundscape and sound organism) the three composers express in their writings. In this final chapter, one difficulty of the whole volume, which has been addressed here before, becomes particularly obvious: it is hard to separate the conceptual from the communicative dimension of metaphors. While metaphoric concepts "influenced their [the composers] creative imagination and aesthetic approach" they simultaneously searched for ways to communicate precisely and unambiguously about musical concepts, that is, metaphors helped them to understand, but likewise to express themselves and make others understand.

Regarding the audience, *Metaphor and Communication* as a whole is intended for experienced metaphor scholars. In addition, it is also an invitation for scholars, who study the domains of discourse, which are analyzed in the single chapters of the book, such as politics (see chapters by Giovanni Damele, Elisabeth Wehling, and Michela Girodano), advertising (see chapter by Sabrina Mazzali-Lurati and Chiara Pollaroli), education (see chapter by M. Beatrice Ligorio, Marianna Iodice, and Stefania Manca), or sign language (see chapter by Rachel Sutton-Spence), and are rather unfamiliar with metaphor studies so far. The range of topics discussed in the book suggests that every scholar interested in the wide field of language, cognition, and communication will find aspects in it that will enrich his or her own research perspective.

In conclusion, *Metaphor and Communication* is a rich and diverse source, with a table of contents, which offers a chapter of interest to everyone. On a critical note, it should be noted that the authors still shine lots of light on the cognitive and linguistic dimensions of metaphor, which, according to the main argument of the editors, already overshadow the communicative dimension in the field of metaphor studies. Nonetheless, it is an inspirational

impulse to dedicate further research and discussion to the communicative dimension and the pragmatic functions of metaphor outside the realms of traditional CMT perspectives.

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