

CHAPTER 12

Extensions of meaning

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Extensions of meaning

12.1 Literal and non-literal meaning

Most people (adults, at least) are aware that if someone says *Jane's eyes nearly popped out of her head*, a **literal** truth has not been expressed, Jane's eyes were not, as a matter of fact, on the point of being projected from her head; the message is rather that Jane was very surprised. At the everyday level, the contrast between literal and figurative use does not seem problematical. It is not so easy, however, to be more precise about what 'literal meaning' really is. Let us look at some possible ways of pinning down the essence of literalness.

The reading of a word with the earliest recorded use. Dictionaries often organize their entries historically, with the earliest first. It would be a reasonable requirement of a dictionary that it should indicate which meanings are literal, and which figurative: most users would probably assume that the literal meaning would be given first. However, this is not really a satisfactory explanation of what literalness is. The most obvious objection is that while we might reasonably expect an intelligible path of change from past meanings to present meanings, most speakers are ignorant of the history of their language, so history cannot be the (direct) cause of current intuitions.

The most frequently occurring reading of a word. Frequency is another common principle for organizing entries. At first sight this seems more promising as a rationale for intuitions of literalness. However, this turns out not to be so. An example is the verb *see*. Two of the readings of this verb are "have a visual experience" and "understand" (as in *Do you see what I mean?*). There can be little doubt that it is the first of these readings which intuition points to as the literal reading. Yet it appears that the second reading has a greater text frequency. Clearly, we must look elsewhere for an account of literalness.

The default reading of a word. The **default** reading of a word is the one which first comes to mind when the word is encountered out of context, or the reading which one would assume to be operative in the absence of contextual indications to the contrary. This criterion would seem to give the right answer for *see*: it is the first

meaning to come to mind, and if, say, a foreigner were to ask the meaning, one would hardly begin by saying that it meant to "understand". However, even if the literal meaning coincides with the default reading, there remains the question of why this reading is the default.

The reading from which the most plausible path of change begins. Consider the following three readings of the noun *position*:

- (1) Mary has been offered an excellent position with a firm of solicitors.
- (2) What is your position on the single currency?
- (3) This is an excellent position from which to watch the parade.

It seems implausible that one could begin with either (1) or (2) and derive the remaining two readings by metaphorical extension. On the other hand, starting from (3), involving location in physical space, the extensions to mental space in (2) and to a place in an institutional hierarchy in (1) seem relatively natural. Again, it is easy to derive the "understand" reading of *see* metaphorically from the "have a visual experience" reading, but not vice versa. In both these cases, the most plausible starting point is also intuitively the literal reading. But what about *expire*, with its two readings "die" and "come to the end of a period of validity"? In this case, either reading can be convincingly derived from the other. Which, then, is the literal reading? According to my intuitions, the expiring of driving licences is the extended reading, but to my undergraduate students, it was the other way round. It is not clear what the basis for the differing intuitions is.

The reading most closely related to basic human experience. This criterion follows from a claim that not only much of language, but also many conceptual categories, are metaphorical in nature, and are extensions from basic experience, especially, but not exclusively spatial experience. On this basis, the "location in physical space" reading of *position*, the "have visual experience" reading of *see*, and the "die" reading of *expire* would be literal, and their other readings figurative/extended. However, on its own this factor cannot explain why my students feel that the "driving-licence" reading of *expire* is the literal one.

Perhaps a distinction ought to be made between diachronic and synchronic processes of extension. It seems that for diachronic change, the 'plausible path' criterion and the 'basic experience' criterion give the right answer. Let us suppose that if there is only one plausible path, then the diachronic literal/figurative relationship will persist in the face of later frequency changes. However, when there are alternative metaphorical extensions, while these criteria give the right answer for historical development, synchronically, an individual will judge the most frequent/familiar reading (which will probably, incidentally, also be the one which is learnt first) to be the literal one, and the least familiar as the extended one. (Notice that the two directions of derivation for *expire* produce two distinct metaphors, not two variants of the same metaphor.) For this explanation to be correct, it would have to be the case that when I first encountered the word *expire*, the "die" reading was much more frequent than it is now.

12.2 Naturalized, established, and novel extensions

12.2.1 Naturalized extensions

What is historically no doubt an extended meaning may be so entrenched and familiar a part of a language that its speakers no longer feel that a figure of speech is involved at all: such readings of a word (or expression) will be said to be **naturalized**:

- (4) He's **in love**.
- (5) It's hard to **put into words**.
- (6) The **kettle's boiling**.

12.2.2 Established extensions

There are also readings which are well established, and presumably have entries in the mental lexicon, but are nonetheless felt to be figures of speech:

- (7) John's a **parasite/a lounge lizard/a couch potato**.
- (8) She **swallowed** the story.
- (9) There are too many **mouths** to feed.

12.2.3 Novel extensions

Nonce readings are ones for which there are no entries in the mental lexicon; they therefore cannot be 'looked up', but have to be generated and interpreted using strategies of meaning extension such as metaphor and metonymy. The following are selected (almost) at random from Patricia Cornwell's best-seller *Hornet's Nest*:

- (10) West gave him a look that was heat-seeking, like a missile.
- (11) He had never told her his fantasies about being overpowered by her, cuffed, pinned, held, yoked, and hauled away in the paddy wagon of erotic captivity.
- (12) His heart rolled forward at such a pitch, he could not catch up with it.

12.3 Metaphor

A typical dictionary definition of metaphor is: "The use of a word or phrase to mean something different from the literal meaning" (*Oxford Advance Learner's Dictionary*). This is not very enlightening: since it does not even hint at any rationale for such a curious practice; it makes metaphor seem, at best, carelessness, and, at worst, perversity. However, as Lakoff (and others) have persuasively

argued, metaphor is all-pervasive in language, and is for the most part effortlessly interpreted, so it deserves more constructive consideration.

12.3.1 Approaches to metaphor

There have been many more or less suggestive commentaries on metaphor, most, however, leaving much to be explained. The Greek word from which the term *metaphor* originated literally meant “transfer”. For Aristotle, what was transferred was the meaning of one expression to another expression: for him, a metaphorical meaning was always the literal meaning of another expression. (This is the so-called ‘substitution’ view of metaphor.) Although Aristotle recognized the crucial role of resemblance in metaphor, in the classical tradition, metaphor was regarded essentially as a decorative device.

Another aspect of metaphor—the usually incongruous nature of the expression on a literal interpretation—was pointed out by Dr Johnson, who defined it as “heterogeneous ideas yoked by violence together”. There is still a degree of disagreement (and confusion?) over the exact role of semantic deviance in metaphor; we return to this topic below.

In modern times, I. A. Richards is usually credited with giving an impetus to metaphor studies. He made a distinction between three aspects of metaphor: (i) vehicle, the item(s) used metaphorically, (ii) tenor, the metaphorical meaning of the vehicle, and (iii) ground, the basis for the metaphorical extension, essentially the common elements of meaning, which license the metaphor. For example, in *the foot of the mountain*, the word *foot* is the vehicle, the tenor is something like “lower portion”, i.e. the intended meaning of the vehicle, and the ground (never properly spelled out by Richards) is (presumably) the spatial parallel between the canonical position of the foot relative to the rest of the (human) body, and the lower parts of a mountain relative to the rest of the mountain.

This account at least focused attention on the fact that there must be some essential connection between tenor and vehicle—a word cannot be used to mean just anything—but the nature of the connection, the ‘how’ of metaphor, was not really elucidated. Richards also rejected the notion that metaphors can in general be translated into literal language, pointing out that there was a species of interaction between meanings (“the interanimation of words”) that cannot be reproduced in literal language.

12.3.1.1 Haas: the interaction of semantic fields

A more thoroughgoing interaction theory, and more solidly grounded in language, was that of Haas. For Haas, the meaning of a word constituted a semantic field (see Chapter 11.2.2.2). This consisted of all the possible contexts of the word organized in terms of normality, the most normal contexts forming the core region of the field, and the least normal forming the periphery. Essentially, the semantic field of every word encompassed the whole vocabulary, but each word imposed a different ‘core-periphery’ organization on it. When two words were brought into interaction,

a new semantic field was created, whose core was formed by the contexts with the highest joint degree of normality for both words. This new semantic field defined a new meaning, the metaphoric one. For instance, referring to the metaphor *leg of the table*, Haas has the following to say:

... a word e.g. *leg*, is transferred to new contexts: from its normal *of the* — contexts (*of the man/woman/child/horse*, etc. to the given new context *of the table*; and we select from the more or less normal contexts of the displaced *legs* just those that fit. Though the legs of a table do not *move* or *stretch* or *hurt*, are neither *quick* nor *slow*, not *muscular* or *energetic* or *tired*, they are still found to be *long* or *short*, *strong* or *weak*, *thick* or *slim*, *beautiful* or *ugly*, they *stand (on)* and *support*, may be *broken* or *cut*, etc.

Although Haas would have no truck with feature theories of meaning, his account of metaphor is similar in spirit to analyses in terms of semantic features, in which semantic anomalies are resolved by eliminating incompatible features from a composite expression, and allowing only compatible features to form part of the resultant meaning of the expression.

12.3.1.2 Black: analogue models

One of the virtues Haas claimed for his account of metaphor was that it avoided reference to 'pure ideas', 'private thoughts', and 'hidden intentions', and referred exclusively to 'public occurrences of words—occurrences in the contexts, present or remembered, of other words and of situations.' Most modern accounts, on the other hand, unashamedly embrace pure ideas (in their modern guise of concepts, domains, and so on).

The ideas of Max Black have been influential in the development of modern theories of metaphor. First of all, Black rejected both the **substitution** view of metaphor (see above) and what he regarded as a special version of it, the **comparison** view, according to which, the literal equivalent of a metaphor is the corresponding simile, so that, for instance, the literal equivalent of *the leg of the table* would be *the part of the table which is like a leg* (Haas used to maintain that no distinction could be drawn in principle between metaphor and simile).

Black's picture of the mechanism of metaphor involved the projection of a set of **associative implications** derived from one entity (the **secondary subject** onto another entity (the **primary subject**). In Black's own example:

(13) Marriage is a zero-sum game.

the primary subject is *marriage* and the secondary subject is *zero-sum game* (Black makes it clear that the relevant entities ('subjects') are notions in the minds of speakers and hearers). The relevant associated implications of the secondary subject might be as follows (after Black 1979: 29–30):

- (i) a game is a contest
- (ii) between two opponents
- (iii) in which one player can win only at the expense of the other.

The metaphor works by imposing the same implications (or similar/analogous ones) onto the primary subject, as follows:

- (iv) A marriage is a sustained struggle
- (v) between two contestants
- (vi) in which the rewards (power? money? satisfaction?) of one contestant are gained only at the other's expense.

The notion that the implications are not necessarily identical for the two subjects is important: Black sees the **implicative complex** of the secondary subject as an **analogue model** of the implicative complex intended to be inferred for the primary subject. It is hard to see a Haasian selection of normal contexts achieving this. On the other hand, Black's view of the workings of metaphor is remarkably similar to the more recent Lakoffian picture of the projection of the structure of a source domain onto a target domain (see below).

12.3.1.3 Relevance Theory and metaphor

In Relevance Theory (Sperber and Wilson 1986), a distinction is made between **representative** and **interpretive** uses of language, which for our present purposes we can take as parallel to the literal/figurative distinction (for a fuller account of Relevance Theory see Chapter 20). This account of metaphor incorporates two significant claims. The first is that metaphor is nothing special or deviant, and is simply an extreme case of 'loose talk'. Take the case of *The children stood in a circle round the teacher*. Do we imagine the children forming a geometrically exact circle? No, only a shape which has a sufficient resemblance to a circle. We do not feel this to be metaphorical, but this is perhaps merely a function of the degree of resemblance: for instance, some people probably find *electronic pet* slightly metaphorical; a greater proportion will feel the presence of metaphor in *emotional blackmail*, and so on. But the mechanism of interpretation is the same for all these: look for relevant resemblances (this does not explicitly include, but nor does it explicitly exclude, wider-ranging structural parallels). The second point highlighted by the relevance-theoretical treatment is that the interpretation of an utterance used interpretively is very much a function of context: interpreters look to maximize contextual relevance with the least expenditure of effort (this notion is explained in greater detail in Chapter 20). This point is also well made by Black, but it is given less prominence by cognitive linguists.

12.3.1.4 Lakoff and 'conceptual metaphor'

According to Lakoff, metaphors are not merely decorative features of certain styles, but are an essential component of human cognition. Nor are they purely linguistic, but are conceptual in nature. They are "a means whereby ever more abstract and intangible areas of experience can be conceptualised in terms of the familiar and concrete".

Metaphors involve (i) a **source domain**, usually concrete and familiar, (ii) a **target domain**, usually abstract or at least less well structured, and (iii) a set of

mapping relations, or **correspondences**. For example, the ARGUMENT IS WAR metaphor uses notions drawn from the domain of war, such as winning and losing, attacking and defending, destroying, undermining, and so on, to depict what happens during an argument. Likewise, the LIFE IS A JOURNEY metaphor borrows structuring ideas from the domain of a journey and applies them to life: *We've come a long way together, but we have decided to take our separate paths; He has come to a crossroads in his life; This young man will go far.*

The correspondences involved in metaphor are of two kinds, (i) **ontological**, involving entities in the two domains, and (ii) **epistemic**, involving relations of knowledge about the entities. This can be illustrated using Lakoff's example of the metaphor which he expresses as ANGER IS HEAT OF FLUID IN CONTAINER (Lakoff 1987: book ii, ch. 1):

(i) Ontological correspondences:

source: HEAT OF FLUID	target: ANGER
container	body
heat of fluid	anger
heat scale	anger scale
pressure in container	experienced pressure
agitation of boiling fluid	experienced agitation
limit of container's resistance	limit of person's ability to suppress anger
explosion	loss of control

(ii) Epistemic correspondences:

When fluid in a container is heated beyond a certain limit, pressure increases to point at which container explodes	When anger increases beyond a certain limit, 'pressure' increases to point at which person loses control
An explosion is damaging to container and dangerous to bystanders	Loss of control is damaging to person and dangerous to others
Explosion can be prevented by applying sufficient force and counter-pressure	Anger can be suppressed by force of will
Controlled release of pressure may occur, which reduces danger of explosion	Anger can be released in a controlled way, or vented harmlessly, thus reducing level

An important feature of metaphor is that the mapping from source to target domain is partial: for instance, in the ARGUMENT IS WAR metaphor, there are ARGUMENT correspondences for:

winning and losing
taking up positions
defending one's position against attack

attacking and demolishing opponent's position
 probing opponent's weaknesses
 using weapons
 shooting down opponent's aircraft, etc.

but no correspondences for:

taking hostages/prisoners
 field hospital
 anti-personnel mines
 parachutes, etc.

Similarly, in the ANGER IS HEAT OF FLUID IN CONTAINER metaphor, the "cooking" aspect of, for instance *boiling* and *simmering* has no correspondence in the ANGER domain.

Lakoff emphasizes that metaphors are conceptual, not merely linguistic. Speaking of another metaphor, LOVE IS A JOURNEY (which underlies such expressions as *We've come a long way together* and *We've decided to go our separate ways*), Lakoff has the following to say:

What constitutes the LOVE IS A JOURNEY metaphor is not any particular word or expression. It is the ontological mapping across conceptual domains, from the source domain of journeys to the target domain of love. The metaphor is not just a matter of language, but of thought and reason. The language is secondary. The mapping is primary, in that it sanctions the use of source domain language and inference patterns for target domain concepts. The mapping is conventional; that is, it is a fixed part of our conceptual system, one of our conventional ways of conceptualising love relationships. (Lakoff 1993: 208)

Sometimes the strong claim is made that without metaphor, certain conceptual domains would have no structure at all. For instance, speaking of the LOVE IS A JOURNEY metaphor, Kövecses, a follower of Lakoff, says (2002: 7):

Constituent elements of conceptual domain A are in systematic correspondence with conceptual elements of domain B. From this discussion, it might seem that the elements in the target domain have been there all along and that people came up with this metaphor because there were pre-existing similarities between the elements in the two domains. This is not so. The domain of love did not have these elements before it was structured by the domain of journey.

In support of this claim, he points to the difficulty of thinking of the salient aspects of a love relationship without using the metaphor:

Try to imagine the goal, choice, difficulty, progress, etc. aspects of love without making use of the journey domain. Can you think of the goal of a love relationship without at the same time thinking of trying to reach a destination at the end of a journey?

Furthermore, he points to the frequent difficulty in naming the elements of the target domain without using the language of the source. For instance, the notions of "progress" and "goal" used in the previous quote are also metaphoric extensions from literal meanings which are spatial in nature. That is to say, there is no

way of escaping the metaphor: the *concept* of love is fundamentally a metaphorical one.

One consequence of the conceptual nature of metaphor is that often a range of different linguistic expressions can tap the same metaphor, and this can be done flexibly and productively. For instance, the lexical resources of the source domain can be exploited in the target domain (this means that a conceptual metaphor cannot be reduced to a finite set of expressions). What Lakoff calls **elaborations** involve more specific versions of the basic metaphor whose characteristics in the source domain carry over to the target domain. For instance, the difference in intensity between *boil* and *simmer* in reference to a heated liquid carries over to indicate corresponding differences in degree of anger in *to boil with anger* and *to simmer with anger*.

Another consequence of the conceptual nature of metaphor is that certain patterns of reasoning may carry over from the source domain to the target domain. Lakoff calls these **metaphorical entailments**. For instance, if you destroy all your enemy's weapons, you win the war; similarly, if you demolish all your opponent's points in an argument, you win the argument.

The existence of a conceptual metaphor explains why new and imaginative extensions of the mapping can be understood instantly. Lakoff (1990: 50) illustrates this using a line from a song:

We're driving in the fast lane on the freeway of love

This, according to Lakoff, exploits the LOVE IS A JOURNEY metaphor (lovers = travellers; relationship = vehicle; shared experiences = journey). When you drive in the fast lane you go a long way (have a lot of shared experiences) in a short time, and it can be exciting (sexually) and dangerous (relationship may not last/lovers may be hurt emotionally).

It is not only complex and intangible concepts like emotions which are understood metaphorically. According to Lakoff, basic semantic notions such as time, quantity, state, change, cause, and category membership are also metaphorically understood as extensions of basic conceptual elements which he calls **image-schemas**, involving space, motion, and force.

(i) **Categories.** Categories are understood in terms of containers/bounded regions of space. Something can be in or out of a category, and can be put into, or removed from a category, just as with a container. The logic of categories is the same as (may even be ultimately derived from) the logic of containers. If X is inside container A and container A is inside container B, then X is inside container B: this transitivity carries over into category membership.

(ii) **Quantity.** Two metaphors are involved in the conceptualization of quantity:

(a) MORE IS UP; LESS IS DOWN. This metaphor is exemplified in the following:

- (14) Output rose dramatically.
- (15) Fatal accidents are well down on last year.
- (16) Efficiency savings have plateaued.
- (17) Our pass rate is much higher than theirs.

(b) LINEAR SCALES ARE PATHS. This metaphor appears in the following:

- (18) John is by far the best in the class.
- (19) Bill has been catching up fast, and he's now about level with John in ability.
- (20) John is streets ahead of Bill in academic ability.

(The logic of paths carries over into the logic of linear scales. For instance, if C is ahead of B on a path, and B is ahead of A, then C is also ahead of A; similarly, if C is ahead of B in ability, and B is ahead of A, then C is ahead of A (i.e. has more ability than A).)

(iii) *Time*. Time is understood in terms of things, locations, distances, and motion. Times are things; the passing of time is motion; time intervals are distances; future times are in front of the observer, past times behind. The passage of time can be construed in two ways, according to whether the speaker/observer is stationary or moving (it is always the case that one thing is moving, and the other is stationary).

Events stationary, observer moving:

- (21) We're coming up to exam time.
- (22) I don't know how I'm going to get through next week.
- (23) We have left all that behind us.

Events moving; observer stationary:

- (24) The exams will be upon us soon.
- (25) The day just rushed past.
- (26) Doomsday is edging closer.
- (27) The holidays passed peacefully enough.

(iv) *Causation*. Causation may be seen as a force which produces movement (i.e. change) towards a location, which may be an action (as in (28)), or a state (as in (29)):

- (28) Frustration drove Jane to murder.
- (29) John's words sent Jane into a state of panic.

Lakoff's arguments that metaphor has (or at least, has had) an essential constructive role in our mental life are persuasive. But a number of questions remain. One of these concerns the status of metaphorical processes in adult cognition. Obviously, they come into play in the interpretation of fresh metaphors (novel readings); but many of the metaphors Lakoff discusses are fully naturalized in the language, others are at least established; for both types it seems necessary to

assume that they are permanently laid down (entrenched) in the mental lexicon. Interpreting these would seem therefore to be a matter of selection of existing readings, rather than generation using metaphorical strategies (although we still need to explain the intuitive distinction between naturalized and merely established metaphors—perhaps this is due to a subliminal activation of the metaphorical process in the latter case). However, it is possible that metaphor is vitally operative either at earlier stages of the development of a language (or, indeed, at earlier stages in the evolution of language), or at earlier stages in the acquisition of language, for every individual.

In spite of Lakoff's insistence on the constructive role of metaphor, and his criticism of earlier views of metaphor as merely decorative, some of the metaphors that he discusses are arguably decorative in function. One of these is the following, a translation of an Indian poem:

Slowly slowly rivers in autumn show
sand banks
bashful in first love woman
showing thighs

Lakoff calls such metaphors **image metaphors**: they are characterized by the fact that both source and target domains are well structured in their own right. What is the function of the metaphor here? It seems to be merely to invest the natural features of a landscape with an erotic aura—surely a species of 'decoration'? Lakoff (1990: 67) argues that the success of such a metaphor is a function of the richness of the image-schematic correspondences between the two domains. ('We suggest that conventional mental images are structured by image-schemas and that image metaphors preserve image-schematic structure, mapping parts onto parts, wholes onto wholes, containers onto containers, paths onto paths, and so on.') There are certainly many correspondences in the above metaphor between the colour, shape, and untouched smoothness of the sand banks revealed by the slowly falling water level in the river and the thighs of a shy young woman divesting herself for her first lover. But while the richness of the correspondences may be necessary for a successful metaphor, they surely are not sufficient—just as important is the appropriate selection of domains in the first place.

12.3.1.5 Criticisms of Lakoff

Lakoff's model of metaphor has been highly influential, but it is not without its critics. Four lines of criticism may be singled out.

- (i) **Lack of context sensitivity.** Stern (1999) criticizes Lakoff on the grounds of its lack of context sensitivity. He argues that the aspects of a source domain that are relevant to a target domain are dependent not only on the domains themselves, but on the whole context of the utterance, and that this aspect cannot be explained by a model, like Lakoff's, that depends on fixed structures in the mind. He argues that every context affects the way domains are

construed in a characteristic way, in terms of what is salient and what is backgrounded, what patterns of inference are relevant, and so on. He illustrates the dependence of metaphor on context by contrasting a number of different metaphors using *the sun* as source domain. The first example is from Shakespeare (uttered by Romeo in *Romeo and Juliet* II.ii):

- (30) But soft, what light through yonder window breaks?
It is the East, and Juliet is the sun.

Stern glosses the metaphor as follows: '... she is exemplary and peerless, worthy of worship and adoration, one without whose nourishing attention another cannot live, one who awakens those in her presence from their slumbering, who brings light to darkness' (Stern 1999: 9). Stern contrasts this with *Achilles is the sun*, where it 'expresses Achilles' devastating anger or brute force'. A third example is taken from the Talmud: *Before Moses' sun had set, the sun of Joshua had risen*, 'where it expresses the uninterrupted continuity of righteousness, which, according to the Talmud... preserves the world'. The final example is from Wittgenstein (1980: 15): *The works of great masters are suns which rise and set around us. The time will come for every great work that is now in the descendent to rise again*. Here, according to Stern, Wittgenstein's use of *the suns* in this quotation '... expresses the cyclicity and eternal recurrence of greatness, that things once great will be great again...'.

- (ii) *Alleged lack of structure in target domains*. The strong view, attributed above to Kövecses, that metaphors exist primarily to allow domains with no structure of their own to 'borrow' structure from better articulated domains, has also been challenged. One answer from the Lakoff camp given by Mark Turner (1990: 252) amounts to a weakening of this position. He suggests that 'In metaphor, we are constrained not to violate the image-schematic structure of the target...'. Lakoff (1993: 216) refers to 'target domain overrides', when an aspect of the image-schematic structure of a source is suppressed in a metaphor by existing structure in a target. For this to happen, the target domain must have its own structure. An example is *to give someone an idea*. In the source domain of giving, if A gives B C, then A no longer has C, but this does not apply to the giving of ideas, because it conflicts with our existing knowledge about ideas. However, to the extent that a target domain has its own structure, an important motivation for creating a metaphor is weakened. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argue that although target domains may have their own structure, it is insufficient for everyday functioning, and in such cases the source domain provides the necessary additional structure.

It is possible that a metaphor might have a function over and above mere decoration even where the target domain is fully structured conceptually, if the structure was not adequately **lexically** structured. In such a case, the metaphor could act as a convenient source of **terms** (languages in general show no resistance to polysemy).

(iii) *Fusion not accounted for.* In Lakoff's model, the interaction between the source and target domains is limited to the projection of structure from the source domain to the target domain by means of determinate correspondences; otherwise, the domains remain distinct. However, many metaphors arguably involve a much more intimate fusion between the domains. Consider the following metaphor (one of many effective examples) from Patricia Cornwell's *Black Notice*:

- (31) A myriad of ugly, dark thoughts clung to my reason and dug in with their claws.

The source domain for this metaphor is that of ugly creatures with claws that cling to a person (the creatures are not explicitly mentioned—they are evoked by *claws*); the target is the domain of unpleasant thoughts that one cannot banish from one's mind. In one sense, the creatures with claws are metaphorical and the thoughts are literal: the speaker is actually experiencing the thoughts but is not actually assailed by ugly creatures. However, our conception of thoughts undergoes a change not suffered by our conception of claws (and their creatures). There is a fusion of thoughts and ugly clawed creatures to produce what is experienced as a single unified gestalt—a conceptual monstrosity—of 'thought-creatures': these thoughts are not just *like* ugly creatures, they *are* ugly creatures. This effect of fusion contributes strongly to the emotive force of the metaphor. This is an effect that occurs, if at all, only weakly in similes. A further example, also from *Black Notice*, is (32):

- (32) My voice bounced around the near-empty space.

The speaker is in a large empty building and is calling out to see if there is anyone in it. The source domain is that of a ball bouncing off the walls of a room, rather like the ball in a squash court. There is fusion between an immaterial voice (the echo) and a bouncing ball: the voice acquires a material consistency. Once again, it is the literal entity (the voice) that undergoes fusion. The source entity (the ball, which is not explicitly mentioned) contributes to the fusion, but is not itself reconceptualized.

It is important to point out that fusion does not occur in all metaphors. Take the metaphor in (33):

- (33) I think the Minister should take an early bath.

This was said on BBC radio by a member of parliament about a minister who had been revealed to have been careless about his financial dealings. The intended meaning was that the minister should resign. The metaphor rests on a set of correspondences between a sporting event (typically a football match) and a political career. A footballer sent off the field by the referee for a particularly serious foul is often said to 'take an early bath' (incidentally, this is a case of metonymy—see below). The relevant correspondences are between a holder of public office and a footballer, between committing a foul and improper behaviour on the part of a public servant, and between being sent off the field (and taking no

further part in the game) and being dismissed from office (or resigning). What does not happen is that we picture the minister in his bath. This sort of metaphor, without fusion, was called in Cruse (2008) **analogical projection**. Many conventionalized metaphors are of this type.

(iv) *Emergent meaning*. Another shortcoming of Lakoff's model is that it cannot account for the emergence of features in the metaphor which are not present in either the source domain or the target domain. Take the case of the metaphor *That surgeon is a butcher* (discussed in Grady et al. (1999)). This clearly imputes incompetence to the surgeon, although incompetence is not stereotypically attributed either to surgeons or butchers. A model which attempts to accommodate these aspects of metaphor is Blending Theory. Whereas Lakoff's model operates with two conceptual domains and correspondences between them, Blending Theory sets up a separate representation of the metaphor which draws selected conceptual features from source and target domains and combines these to form a new structure, the **blend**. This material is then elaborated on the basis of encyclopaedic knowledge. In the case of the metaphor *That surgeon is a butcher*, the blend contains a representation of someone in charge of an operation, but using the techniques of a butcher. It is the basic incompatibility between the goal and the means which leads to the inference of the surgeon's incompetence. It is not clear whether the notion of a blend as envisaged in Blending Theory is adequate to account for the phenomenon of fusion in (31), although it is arguably a step in the right direction.

12.3.2 Metaphor and deviance

There has been much discussion—and disagreement, not to say confusion—about the relationship between metaphor and deviance, between those who maintain that the ubiquity and utter naturalness of metaphor make it perverse to qualify it as 'deviance', and those who claim that deviance is an essential clue to the fact that an expression is metaphorical (or at least, not literal). The reader will probably already have spotted the fact that these two supposedly opposed views do not really address the same issue, and we must first clarify a source of confusion (which is surprisingly prevalent in current discussions).

There can surely be no disagreement about the claim that metaphor is a natural and vital expression of the human cognitive-linguistic endowment. However, the question remains of how we recognize that an expression is not being used literally. This is where the notion of deviance, or at least anomaly, comes legitimately into the picture. It is perfectly compatible with the idea of the naturalness of metaphor to claim that figurative expressions are recognized by the fact that they are anomalous on a literal reading, and that this triggers off a search for a relevant non-literal interpretation derivable from the literal reading.

A word of caution is necessary at this point. There are current claims that there is no evidence that metaphorical meanings are computed by first computing the literal meanings. However, experiments claiming to demonstrate this do not clearly separate conventionalized metaphors from fresh metaphors: obviously, to the extent to which a metaphor is conventionalized, its activation is merely a matter of the selection of an appropriate sense, no different from what happens when the appropriate reading of *bank* in *She works in a bank* is selected. The mechanism suggested above applies only to freshly coined metaphors.

However, even with this proviso, the thesis that anomaly is an essential clue to non-literality is not universally accepted. Black (1979) gives the following example:

Suppose I counter the conversational remark, 'As we know, man is a wolf ' by saying, 'Oh, no, man is not a wolf but an ostrich'. In context, 'Man is not a wolf' is as metaphorical as its opposite, yet it clearly fails the controversion [=anomaly] test.

However, Black's point is considerably weakened by the observation that the literal reading of *Man is not a wolf* would sit very oddly in the context he provides! And in fact he concedes this point later in the same article:

The decisive reason for the choice of interpretation may be, as it often is, the patent falsity or incoherence of the literal reading—but it might equally be the banality of that reading's truth, its pointlessness, or its lack of congruence with the surrounding text and non-verbal setting.

In other words, we recognize a non-literal expression by the communicative deviance of its literal reading.

12.4 Simile

The following discussion of simile is based mainly on Croft and Cruse (2004: chapter 8). A simile is an explicit comparison between two different conceptions (entities, properties, actions, etc.). Neither of the components of a simile requires an extended construal, whereas in a metaphorical or metonymic expression at least one constituent can be expected to have a non-standard meaning. Since the comparison process is overtly signalled, there is no need for anomaly as a trigger. The different conceptions remain distinct; fusion is not characteristic of simile.

Similes take a variety of forms. The following is a selection:

- (i) *X (be) like Y*
 John is like a lion.
 His house is like a palace.
- (ii) *X (V) like Y*
 Tree branches cracked like guns going off.
 My mouth tasted like stale cigarettes.

(iii) *X (be) Adj. like Y*

Marino's voice was ... muted like bourbon on the rocks.
Her skin was dry like parchment.

(iv) *S¹ as if S²*

He acts as if he thinks he's the boss.
Louise kept on stroking the sofas and chairs as if they were animals in a zoo.

12.4.1 'Literal' vs 'metaphorical' similes

A distinction is commonly drawn between **literal** and **metaphorical** similes. The usual criterion is whether a simile can be easily transformed into a metaphor with similar meaning. Hence, (34) is a metaphorical simile because it can be transformed into (35):

(34) John is like a lion.

(35) John is a lion.

On the other hand, (36) is a literal simile, because (37) is not a metaphor of similar meaning:

(36) Your kitchen is like mine.

(37) Your kitchen is mine.

The difference seems to be that in metaphorical similes, target and source are from different domains, whereas in literal similes, they are from the same or closely similar domains. However, it is not clear that the process of comparison differs in the two types.

12.4.2 Open and restricted similes

In Croft and Cruse (2004), a distinction is drawn between two types of simile according to their form. An **open** simile is one having the form *X is like Y*, e.g. (34) and (36), in which no explicit guide is provided regarding which features of Y are to be applied to X, the choice being left to contextual relevance. A **restricted** simile, on the other hand, contains an explicit **restriction** which gives information about which features of Y are to be transferred to X. Examples of such restrictions are given in (38)–(41) (the restrictions are printed in bold italics):

(38) The shock ***chilled me*** like fog.

(39) ... her teeth ***flashing*** like steel blades in the glow of the sodium lights.

(40) Ham looked up at me and ***froze*** like someone caught stealing.

(41) Marino's voice was ***muted and soporific*** like bourbon on the rocks.

The importance of the restrictions can be appreciated by observing the effects of removing them:

- (42) The shock was like fog.
 (43) ... her teeth like steel blades in the glow of the sodium lights.
 (44) Ham looked up at me like someone caught stealing.
 (45) Marino's voice was like bourbon on the rocks.

Without the restrictions, (42) and (45) are hardly interpretable, while (43) and (44) are open to different interpretations. For instance, the intention in (43) might have been to draw attention to the sharpness of the teeth; in (44) the intention may have been to indicate a guilty look.

The presence of a restriction in a simile does not necessarily eliminate the effects of context. In some cases, these effects are minimal:

- (46) My mouth tasted like stale cigarettes.
 (47) The half-moon slipped in and out of clouds like a button.

But in some cases, context can have an effect. Consider (48):

- (48) Marino was ... breathing hard like a wounded bear.

At least the following possibilities exist:

- (i) The only resemblance is the manner of breathing. In this case, the restriction *breathing hard* is strictly observed.
- (ii) The simile is intended to evoke other aspects of a bear, such as physique, posture, and characteristic movements.
- (iii) The simile is intended to evoke a whole domain, perhaps the scenario of a hunting expedition, where a bear is wounded by hunters, and is enraged and dangerous.

The context of (48) in the context of Cornwell's novel suggests that (ii) is the intended reading.

12.4.3 Descriptive vs connotative similes

Some similes seem to be ambiguous between a purely descriptive reading and a more emotively charged reading, which we shall call **connotative**. Consider (49) and (50):

- (49) The juice of these apples is like wine.
 (50) His house is like a palace.

Both of these can be interpreted in a purely descriptive way. The apple juice in (49) may simply taste like wine, or look like wine; the house in (50) may be very large, richly furnished, and ornate. But each of these can be understood as positively evaluative, and as evoking a rich set of cultural associations of wine and palaces. On such interpretations, these similes have an effect close to that of metaphor.

12.5 Metonymy

Another major strategy for extending word-meanings is metonymy. Metonymy is responsible for a great proportion of the cases of so-called regular polysemy.

12.5.1 Metonymy vs metaphor

Metonymy and metaphor are quite distinct processes of extension, in spite of the fact that there may exist extensions that cannot be classified, because the end-point could have been reached by either route. Claimed examples of this phenomenon are *head of the bed* and *back of the chair*: is the reason we label them as we do because a person's head normally rests at that part of the bed, or a person's back rests on that part of a chair? Or is it because of some resemblance between a bed and a supine person, or between a chair and a standing person? We may never know. A succinct statement of the difference between the two tropes was suggested by Jakobson and Halle (1956), who said that metaphor was based on resemblance, while metonymy was based on contiguity, which we can gloss without too much distortion as "association".

Jakobson and Halle's suggestion captures some of the difference between metaphor and metonymy, but leaves an important point unhighlighted. Metaphor involves the use of one domain as an analogical model (in Black's terms) to structure our conception of another domain; in other words the process crucially involves two (in the simplest cases) distinct conceptual domains. Metonymy, on the other hand, relies on an (actual, literal) association between two components within a single domain (and no restructuring is involved). Take the famous *ham sandwich* case:

(51) The ham sandwich wants his coffee now.

This is, of course, 'cafe language', but is perfectly intelligible to all. The domain invoked is a cafe, or similar establishment, where a customer is (perhaps momentarily) distinguished by the fact that he has ordered a ham sandwich. This fact associated with the customer serves as a convenient identifying device. There is no question of drawing any structural parallels between the person referred to and a ham sandwich. Suppose, however, that the customer was heavy-jowled and of lugubrious mien, and the waitress had said:

(52) The abandoned bloodhound wants his coffee now.

Here the hearer is invited to see the characteristic lineaments of a bulldog's face in the customer's visage; no literal association between the customer and any actual bulldog is imputed or evoked.

While it is necessary to maintain the distinction between metaphor and metonymy as *processes*, it is important to emphasize that a clear distinction between metaphorical and metonymic *expressions* is not always possible, because of the

fact that the two processes may both contribute to a figurative reading. Lakoff points out that metonymy lies at the core of some conventional metaphors. For instance, underlying the ANGER AS HEAT metaphor is the physiological fact that an angry person subjectively feels hot. Another type of interaction between metonymy and metaphor occurs in what has been called **metaphonymy** (Goossens 1990). An example of this is *My lips are sealed*. If no metaphor were present, this could be taken metonymically to indicate that one was physically unable to speak. However, a literal sealing of the lips is not normally indicated, but a metaphorical sealing, meaning that one is under some sort of constraint preventing one from commenting on some topic. In this case, too, both metaphor and metonymy contribute to the figurative meaning.

12.5.2 Patterns of metonymy

There are certain highly recurrent types of metonymy. The following may be signalled:

CONTAINER FOR CONTAINED

- (53) The kettle's boiling.
- (54) Room 44 wants a bottle of champagne.
- (55) The car in front decided to turn right.

POSSESSOR FOR POSSESSED/ATTRIBUTE

- (56) Why is John not in *Who's Who*?
- (57) A: John Smith
B: That's me!
- (58) Where are you parked?
- (59) Shares fall 10% after Budget.

REPRESENTED ENTITY FOR REPRESENTATIVE

- (60) England won the World Cup in 1966.
- (61) The government will announce new targets next week.

WHOLE FOR PART

- (62) I'm going to wash the car/fill up the car with petrol.
- (63) Do you need to use the bathroom?

PART FOR WHOLE

- (64) There are too many mouths to feed.
- (65) What we want are more bums on seats.
- (66) I noticed several new faces tonight.

PLACE FOR INSTITUTION

(67) The White House denies the allegations.

(68) The Palace defends the sackings.

The above list is by no means exhaustive.

12.5.3 The mechanism of metonymy

This section is based on Cruse (2004). Nunberg (1995) gives the name **predicate transfer** to the process that underlies metonymy, and explains it as follows:

The principle here is that the name of a property that applies to something in one domain can sometimes be used as the name of a property that applies to things in another domain, provided that the two properties correspond in a certain way.

Two conditions must be satisfied for predicate transfer to be successful. The first is that there must be a **functional correspondence** between the two properties. For instance, in (69), the property of being parked in the next street belongs properly to the car itself, but this property can be transferred to the driver, because there is a suitable functional correspondence between the car and the driver:

(69) I'm parked in the next street.

A functional correspondence between a person and their telephone number licenses predicate transfer in (70):

(70) She's in the phone book.

But the lack of a functional correspondence between a car and the car's previous owners leads to oddness in cases like (71), spoken by someone whose only connection with Ringo Starr was that their car was once owned by him:

(71) ??I was once driven by Ringo Starr.

The second condition for successful predicate transfer is that the property contributed by the new predicate should be 'noteworthy'. There are two main ways of being noteworthy, according to Nunberg. The first is that '... a property is noteworthy if it offers a useful way of classifying its bearer relative to immediate conversational interests'. By definition, this is context-sensitive. For instance, from the point of view of, say, a garage attendant, a customer is relevantly classified in terms of the location of his car, but not in terms of who its previous drivers were. The second way of being noteworthy is for the derived property to have '... a more abiding interest or consequence for its bearer, beyond the immediate conversational purposes'. This would license an utterance such as (72), spoken by someone who had just learned that they were to be given an entry in *Who's Who*:

(72) I'm finally in *Who's Who*!

Nunberg's account of metonymy is undoubtedly on the right lines, but the following examples suggest that something is still missing:

(73) *This key is parked in the next street.

(74) *That book on suicide committed suicide himself.

From the point of view of a garage attendant charged with putting the car into the garage, what could be more relevant to the car's key than the location of the car it fits? Likewise, the fact that the author of a book on suicide killed himself is surely a noteworthy property of the book. The answer perhaps lies in a more adequate characterization of functional correspondence and/or noteworthiness, but it is not clear what the necessary modifications are.

Even if we had a fully adequate account of what licenses predicate transfer, the question would still remain of what metonymy is for. There are many cases where an indirect metonymic strategy of reference appears to be preferred to a more direct mode of reference. Take the following examples:

(75) Where are you parked?

(cf. Where is your car parked?)

(76) The kettle's boiling.

(cf. The water in the kettle is boiling.)

(77) Room 44 wants a bottle of champagne.

(cf. The occupant of room 44 wants a bottle of champagne.)

(78) Why is John not in *Who's Who*?

(cf. Why does John not have an entry in *Who's Who*)

One possible motivation is that the expression is rendered shorter, hence more economical of effort. Intuitively, although it may play a part, this does not seem to be sufficient. Perhaps metonymic reference also serves to highlight the functional correspondence(s) and/or the noteworthiness which license the expression.

12.6 Semantic change

One can hardly read a chapter of, say, a novel by Jane Austen (to go no further back in time) without becoming aware of the fact that words change their meaning through time. In the case of Jane Austen, the changes are relatively uncommon, and relatively subtle. For instance, *interfere* has not yet developed its negative aspect: its meaning is closer to modern *intervene*; *handsome* is applied indifferently to men and women (and girls); *amiable* was a much more positive recommendation of a person's character than now; *direction* no longer refers to the indicated destination of a letter . . . and so on. Historical processes of semantic change are of course intimately linked to synchronic processes of meaning extension. One possible scenario might run as follows.

- (i) Word W has established literal sense S^1 .
- (ii) Some creative person uses W in new figurative sense S^2 (according to the rules of synchronic extension).
- (iii) S^2 'catches on', and becomes established (i.e. laid down as an entry in the mental lexicons of members of the speech community), so that W becomes polysemous between S^1 and S^2 . S^1 is still perceived as literal, and S^2 as figurative.
- (iv) S^1 begins to become obsolescent. S^2 begins to be perceived as literal, and S^1 as figurative.
- (v) S^1 is lost, at which point meaning of W has changed from S^1 to S^2 .

This can be illustrated with English *expire*. First, before there were such things as tickets and licences with limited periods of validity, this just meant "die". Then, it was metaphorically extended to mean "come to the end of a period of validity", which existed as a clear figurative use alongside the literal use. Nowadays, the "die" sense is quite uncommon, and classes of students will declare that for them, it is a metaphorical extension of the "cease to be valid" sense. Stage 5 is perhaps yet to occur, but there is no doubt that the default reading has changed.

This example illustrates one way in which synchronic meaning extension forms an essential part of diachronic change (there are, of course, other scenarios). In principle, the meaning of a word may change along any of a range of semantic dimensions; however, no attempt will be made here to give a full account of historical change in word meaning.

Discussion questions and exercises

1. Conceptual metaphor

Using Lakoff's study of anger as a model, investigate the metaphorical representation of other emotional states such as fear and depression.

2. Non-literal language

How many examples of non-literal language use can you find in the following sentences (from Grafton 1994)? Classify each example as metaphor, metonymy, or hyperbole.

- (a) Occasionally I went over to the shallow end of the pool and got my feet wet. If I lowered myself into the depths by as much as six inches, I suffered shortness of breath and a nearly overwhelming desire to shriek.
- (b) I had a quick bowl of soup with Henry and then downed half a pot of coffee, managing in the process to offset my lethargy and kick into high gear again. It was time to make contact with some of the principals in the cast.

- (c) The hotel's air-conditioning, which was fitful at best, seemed to drone off and on in a fruitless attempt to cut into the heat.
- (d) I'm sorry sir, room 323 is not answering.
- (e) I went out onto my balcony and leaned my elbows on the railing, staring out at the night.
- (f) I was aware of the yawning three-storey drop, and I could feel my basic dislike of heights kick in.
- (g) His name was being withheld from the local papers because of his age.
- (h) I could practically hear Mac squinting through the telephone lines.
- (i) July in Santa Teresa is an unsettling affair.
- (j) I rolled out of bed, pulled on my sweats, brushed my teeth and combed my hair, avoiding the sight of my sleep-smudged face.
- (k) "Can you get me an address?"
"Shouldn't be too hard. She's probably in the book."
- (l) He was mortgaged to the eyeballs, so his house wasn't worth a cent.
- (m) The day seemed interminable, all heat and bugs, kids shrieking in the pool with ear-splitting regularity.
- (n) "I want to talk to Lieutenant Whiteside first. Can you have me switched over to his extension?"
- (o) Steep hills, pleated with erosion, rose up on my left, while to the right, the heaving gray Pacific was pounding against the shore.

Suggestions for further reading

On metaphor, an excellent source of readings is Ortony (1979); the present account has drawn heavily on the paper by Max Black in this volume, but many of the other papers are well worth reading, and will give an idea of a variety of approaches. Lakoff's views appear in several publications: a popular introduction is Lakoff and Johnson (1980); a later account with a literary focus is Lakoff and Turner (1989). The fullest exposition of Lakoff's approach, applied particularly to *ANGER*, is to be found in Book II, Chapter 1 of Lakoff (1987), to which may be added Lakoff (1990). An analysis of *LOVE* on Lakoffian lines is Kövecses (1988); see also Kövecses (2002) and Dirven (2002). For blending theory, see Grady et al. (1999) and Coulson (2000).

For post-Lakoff treatments of metaphor see Glucksberg (2001) (strongly critical of Lakoff) and Stern (2000). Croft and Cruse (2004: ch. 8) discusses metaphor and its relation to metonymy and simile. There is an interesting and thorough discussion of predicate transfer and related matters in Ward (2004).