

# A Course in Pictorial and Multimodal Metaphor

Charles Forceville

## Lecture 8. Concluding observations and further research

### **Introduction**

In this last lecture of the course, I will offer some further thoughts on the topic at hand, sketch some recent developments, and outline how I envisage the further theorization and applicability of pictorial and multimodal metaphor.

### **Multimodal metaphor**

In this course, the emphasis has been on the role of the visual modality in multimodal metaphor. As we have seen, however, even if a metaphor appears as a visual/pictorial monomodal metaphor, it appears almost always within a discourse in which one or more other modalities occur as well. Even if these are not part of the metaphor itself, they usually play a role in the interpretation of the discourse in which the metaphor appears. This should serve as a reminder that in virtually every (segment of) metaphorical discourse more is going on than the metaphor alone. Verbal metaphors both in poetry and advertising may increase their impact by coupling their conceptual content with a striking form. Benczes (2013) convincingly argues that alliteration and rhyme enhance the potential impact and memorability of metaphoric and metonymic expressions such as “brain gain,” “cuddle puddle,” and “street spam.” It can be added that verbal form can aid successful and memorable creative metaphors in yet other ways: surely difficult-to-pinpoint aspects of “rhythm” as well as pleasurable alliteration, assonance, and the repetition of consonants put flesh on the bare-bone conceptual metaphor RELIGIOUS LADIES ARE BRONTOSAURI in the following literary passage:

Mrs Poulteney was to dine at Lady Cotton's that evening; and the usual hour had been put **forward for what was always in essence**, if not **appearance**, a thunderous **clash** of two **brontosauri**; with **bláck vélvet** taking the **place** of íron **cártilage**, and **quotátion** from the Bible the **ángry ráging tééth**; but no **less dóur** and **reléntless** a **báttle**. (*The French Lieutenant's Woman*, John Fowles, Triad/Granada 1980, p. 88, my emphases, ChF)

It is thus a mistake to say that a (stretch of) verbal discourse “is” a metaphor; even if its overall meaning depends primarily on it; we should say that it “contains” a metaphor, or that it is to a considerable extent “structured” by a metaphor. I would want to make the same claim for other modalities. Rhythms, repetitions, and “rhymes” in visuals (and in music, sound, and gestures) can marvelously support (or if badly deployed: cringingly detract from) the conceptual content of a trope. Indeed, in genres such as advertising, a spectacular form may actually divert attention from what, in fact, is rather meagre content.

As discussed in Forceville (2007a, 2009a), music and sound may moreover play a substantial role in the cueing (single-handedly or in combination with other modes) of target, source, and/or mappable features in a multimodal metaphor. I suspect that laymen as well as experts (the latter often trained as linguists) are often insufficiently sensitive to the contribution of music and sound to the overall meaning of a metaphor. There is thus a lot of theoretical and applied work to be done in this area (for leads, see Cook 1998, Johnson and Larson 2003, Thorau 2003, Spitzer 2004, Zbikowski 2009, Górska 2010), whereas the role of touch and olfaction in metaphors constitutes virtually unexplored territory. By contrast, the study of metaphorical gesture, which is usually considered a modality in its own right, has by now developed a high degree of sophistication (e.g., McNeill 1992, Cienki 1998, Cienki and Müller 2008, Müller 2008, Müller and Cienki 2009, Mittelberg and Waugh 2009). More generally, metaphor scholars need to consider more systematically in what combination of modes metaphors can surface. The various modes can occur in all kinds of permutations. Each of the modes considered as such in this course (written language, spoken language, visuals, music, sound, gestures, olfaction, taste, touch) can in principle (help) identify a target, a source, and/or one or more mappable features. Since a metaphor may draw on more than two modes simultaneously for each of these tasks, and since each of them can constitute either the metaphor’s target and its source, the *theoretical* number of

possibilities is quite daunting. Which combinations surface in actual practice is simply a matter of trial and error to find out.

### **Metaphor and other tropes**

Gibbs (1993), Barcelona (2000), and Dirven and Pörings (2002) were among the first to remind CMT scholars that although metaphor may be the queen of tropes, not all non-literal language should be labeled metaphoric. Metaphors need to be distinguished not just from metonyms, but also from tropes such as symbolism, hyperbole, oxymoron. The goal here is to demonstrate both where the similarities (if any) and the differences between these tropes reside. Classical lists of verbal tropes, such as those suggested by Aristotle and Quintilian, and by and large adopted in the modern era (e.g., Chapters 8-10 in Leech 1969), can serve as starting points, but need to be critically examined, as many tropes are often imprecisely defined, and thus not well distinguishable from each other (see Kennedy 1982, and critical discussion in Forceville 1996, chapter 3). Moreover, they may co-occur: ironical utterances, for instance, may draw on metaphors or hyperboles (Burgers et al. 2012; see also Burgers et al. 2013).

These questions are no less pertinent for other modalities – to begin with the ubiquitous visual one. Some work has been done here (Forceville 2009b, Urios-Aparisi 2010 on metonymy, Teng and Sun 2002, Teng 2009, and Gregersen submitted on visual oxymoron; Scott 2004, Lagerwerf 2007, Andersen 2013 on irony), but this is only a modest beginning. Part of the difficulty is that if we indeed have a “poetic mind” (Gibbs 1994), charting the ways in which it deploys various tropes visually (or in other non-verbal modes) requires that the *essence* of each trope is extracted from its (relatively speaking: best-defined) verbal manifestation, in such a way that its possible manifestations can be delineated in other modes – which is what I have attempted to do for metaphor in this Course. It is important to bear in mind that as far as we know there is no Divinity that has proclaimed that there *must* be a visual (or sonic, or olfactory) equivalent for each of the classic tropes – and conversely, that it may be the case that non-verbal modalities display systematic behaviours absent in language that we might nonetheless want to label a “trope.” Possibly, “transformation/metamorphosis” is a candidate for such tropical status. Animation films, as Wells (1998: 69-76) points out, often feature elements that transform into other elements. While such a metamorphosis *may* be a way of cueing a metaphor (or another classical trope, for that matter), this need not be the case. Perhaps we should call it a “scheme” rather than a “trope.” (Leech

defines schemes as “foregrounded repetitions of expression” and tropes as “foregrounded irregularities of content,” Leech 1969: 74).

## Metaphor and Creativity

By and large until Ortony (1979) and Lakoff and Johnson (1980) – at least in Anglo-Saxon scholarship (see Jäkel 1999) – metaphor was considered as a manifestation of creativity *par excellence*, something typically encountered in poetry, fiction and, increasingly, advertising. After that, the emphasis shifted toward the way in which metaphors that were called structural, primary, or conceptual, revealed deeply-rooted, sometimes embodied cognitive processes. Lakoff and Turner (1989) reinforced the idea that almost all creative metaphors could be traced to underlying conceptual metaphors. True, they acknowledged that there are exceptions (called “image metaphors” – an unfortunate label, since this suggested that creativity in metaphor somehow has a privileged link to the visual modality), but they are supposedly rare. One of these is André Breton’s famous “My wife’s waist is an hourglass.” But surely, this metaphor can be analysed as a surface manifestation of the conceptual metaphors PEOPLE ARE OBJECTS. Similarly, on one level the Fowles metaphor discussed above could be rendered as PEOPLE ARE ANIMALS, but while not wrong this phrasing does not reveal how this specific manifestation of the metaphor is original.

In my view, Lakoff and Turner’s monograph has unintentionally but unhappily contributed to the downplaying and neglect of the creative dimension of metaphor. Let me outline a few potentially problematic dimensions of the overly exclusive link between metaphor and “embodied thought.”

In the first place, the emphasis on the ABSTRACT A IS CONCRETE B has caused a blind spot for manifestations of the CONCRETE A IS CONCRETE B variety. In fact, almost all examples of pictorial metaphor (not, significantly, of *verbo*-pictorial metaphor!) discussed in Forceville (1996) are of this latter type: the target domain here is a depicted product (or an element metonymically related to this product, as in the case of three airline tickets that are metonymically related to the service or brand advertised, the airline company that issues them, see Forceville 1996: pp. 118-120, 127) that is metaphorically to be understood in terms of another depicted, or visually suggested, entity.

Incidentally, even a liberal understanding of the A IS B formula has the unfortunate consequence of suggesting that metaphors are static rather than dynamic phenomena. Metaphors are often exhortations to consider *activities*

that can be done to or with source domain entities, or evaluations applicable to them, as mappable to the target, rather than a mere mapping of *characteristics* or *features*. Therefore it may be better to discuss metaphors in terms of A-ING IS B-ING (Forceville & Urios-Aparisi 2009a: 11). Cameron et al., in a paper focusing on how (verbal) metaphor can be used “as a tool to uncover people’s ideas, attitudes and values” (2009: 64), similarly advocate the importance of focusing on the dynamic nature of metaphorizing:

A complexity/dynamic systems perspective highlights change and connectedness in social and cognitive systems, and, when applied to the social sciences, identifies complex dynamic systems at all scales from the cultural to the individual. The perspective also changes how we see metaphor: it is no longer a static, fixed mapping, but a temporary stability emerging from the activity of interconnecting systems of socially-situated language use and cognitive activity. This dynamic perspective on metaphor raises new possibilities for investigating metaphor in discourse and thereby contributing to social sciences research (Cameron et al. 2009: 64; see also note 4 on p. 67).

A second problem with Lakoff and Turner’s views, as indicated above, is that a metaphor may strike us as “creative” because of its formal rather than because of its conceptual qualities. Alexander Pope’s famous definition of “true wit” is “nature to advantage dress’d:/ what oft was thought/ but ne’er so well express’d.” The creativity of such “wit” thus resides not in the novelty of the idea, but in the novelty of its formulation. This aspect can most easily be attested within monomodal metaphors of the verbal variety – lyrical poetry perhaps being the best genre to look for examples. But the choice of mode to cue a target or source can be creative in a way that a verbal rendering of the underlying metaphor is absolutely not (see Forceville 2012, 2013a for examples).

A brief remark on Blending Theory: while I certainly see its potential to model the often creative hybrids that are ubiquitous in pictorial, verbal, as well as multimodal discourse (see Forceville 2012, 2013b), I sometimes think that the dominance of CMT has made metaphor scholars oblivious to the strongly creative dimension of metaphors proposed by Richards (1936) and Black (1962, 1979). That being said, Veale et al. (2013) contains a number of papers that draw on the Blending Theory model to say something non-trivial about modeling creativity.

Where I see further uses for the Blending model are its opportunities to have more than two “input spaces.” A good example is Górska (2010),

discussing musician Daniel Barenboim's conceptual metaphor LIFE IS MUSIC both in verbal and musico-verbal manifestations. A metaphor by definition always has no less and no more than two elements: a target and a source. But as we have seen in this Course both of them can be cued in more than one modality. If pertinent information about a target and source is modeled in input spaces (perhaps as "satellite" spaces to target and source), this helps visualize the modalities that play a role in the construal and interpretation of a multimodal metaphor. More generally, inasmuch as most (all?) tropes involve two elements that occur in a tensive relation of some sort or another, Blending Theory may be helpful in modeling similarities and differences between tropes, irrespective of modality.

### **Recent work on pictorial and multimodal metaphor**

Forceville and Urios-Aparisi (2009b) is a collection presenting work on multimodal metaphor in a variety of genres and media, including advertising, film, comics, gestures, and music. The Adventures in Multimodality blog (<http://muldisc.wordpress.com/>) contains some reviews of the book. Of interest is also McQuarrie and Philips (2008), a collection which focuses on verbal and visual tropes from a communication studies perspective.

Coëgnaerts and Kravanja have written a series of papers (some in Dutch) in which they focus on various dimensions of metaphor in film (e.g., Coëgnaerts and Kravanja 2012a, 2012b). Ortiz (2011) demonstrates how various conceptual metaphors can be fleshed out cinematically. Kappelhoff and Müller (2012) discuss how multimodal metaphor in both film and co-speech gestures unfold and develop dynamically and trigger emotion responses. Koetsier and Forceville (forthc.) proposes the metaphor DEVIANT IDENTITY IS TRANSFORMED BODY in Werewolf films, while Forceville and Renckens (forthc.) analyse another conceptual metaphor in film: GOOD IS LIGHT and BAD IS DARK. Forceville (2011a, forthc. a) continues my own earlier work on the JOURNEY metaphor in animation film. These studies help bridge CMT and cognitivist film studies. Kromhout and Forceville (2013) argue for the centrality of the JOURNEY metaphor in three videogames. Van Mulken et al (2010) report the result of an experiment in which car advertisements containing metaphors of three different kinds (contextual, hybrid, and simile) are understood and evaluated. Hopefully the next decade will see more empirical research on visual and multimodal metaphor when more scholars with a background in linguistics are entering the discipline of visual and multimodal metaphor and metonymy, and their interaction (e.g., Sobrino

2013). Increasingly, the awareness that metaphors and other tropes do often behave differently in different genres (Forceville 2008: 478) is taken seriously (El Refaie 2003, 2009, Caballero 2006, Burgers et al 2012).

Visual/pictorial and multimodal metaphors also have very practical applications in other fields than advertising and education. Erwin (2013) shows how a focus on metaphor is one of various strategies in business contexts to help “communicate the new,” while Cila (2013) demonstrates how an understanding of visual metaphors can be deployed in good product design. Indurkya (2013) and Indurkya and Ojha (2013) present theoretical ideas for, and a partial implementation of, a computer programme (FISH, Fast Image Search in Huge database) that can search online visuals with the aim of revealing visual similarity – with metaphoric potential.

### **From multimodal metaphor to multimodal discourse**

My work on multimodal metaphor has given me many ideas about how to study multimodal discourse more generally. Multimodality research is usually associated with the Hallidayan “Systemic Functional Linguistics” (SFL) and “social semiotics” paradigms. Whereas I see exciting developments in this paradigm, I also have problems with the way many of its practitioners approach multimodality (Forceville 1999, 2007b, 2009c, 2010, 2011b). In my view the best of the SFL and social semiotics models need to be married with the best of various cognitivist models; for some ideas, see Forceville (2013a, forthc. a) and Pinar Sanz (2013), a collection of papers applying cognitive linguistics to multimodal discourse.

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[November 2013, [c.j.forceville@uva.nl](mailto:c.j.forceville@uva.nl)]

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