

Reassessing Cognitive Metaphor Theory:

Re-examining the relation between metaphor, language,
semiosis, and various sensory modalities

Joel Parthemore

Dept. of Cognitive Neuroscience and Philosophy, University of Skövde

Centre for Cognitive Semiotics
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Definition

A figure of speech in which a word or phrase that ordinarily designates one thing is used to designate another, thus making an *implicit* comparison.

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Example

The man has a heart of stone.

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Example

The road runs through the forest.

- ▶ *cf.* He was looking for a safe haven, but that's not what he found.

Conceptual Metaphor Theory

- ▶ What is metaphorical in language is first – in some substantive sense – metaphorical in thought.

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- ▶ What is metaphorical in language is first – in some substantive sense – metaphorical in thought.
- ▶ Language and systematically structured thought, as intertwined as they are with each other, do pull apart.

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- ▶ Endless arguments over what is/isn't a metaphor / a dead metaphor.

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- ▶ Assumption of a strict ontological distinction between literal and metaphorical meaning.
- ▶ Tendency – with best of intentions otherwise! – to talk about metaphor in almost strictly linguistic terms.
- ▶ Takes as the distinguishing feature of metaphor the mapping of one domain onto another, target domain.

Foundations for a modest counterproposal

- ▶ What is or isn't a metaphor, dead or otherwise, is largely a matter of perspective.

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- ▶ Metaphor is a semiotic and not simply linguistic phenomenon.
 - ▶ One consequence is that metaphor truly is modality independent to a degree that language is not.
- ▶ Essentially all meaning making involves mappings across domains.
 - ▶ Our ideas do not exist in isolation from one another.

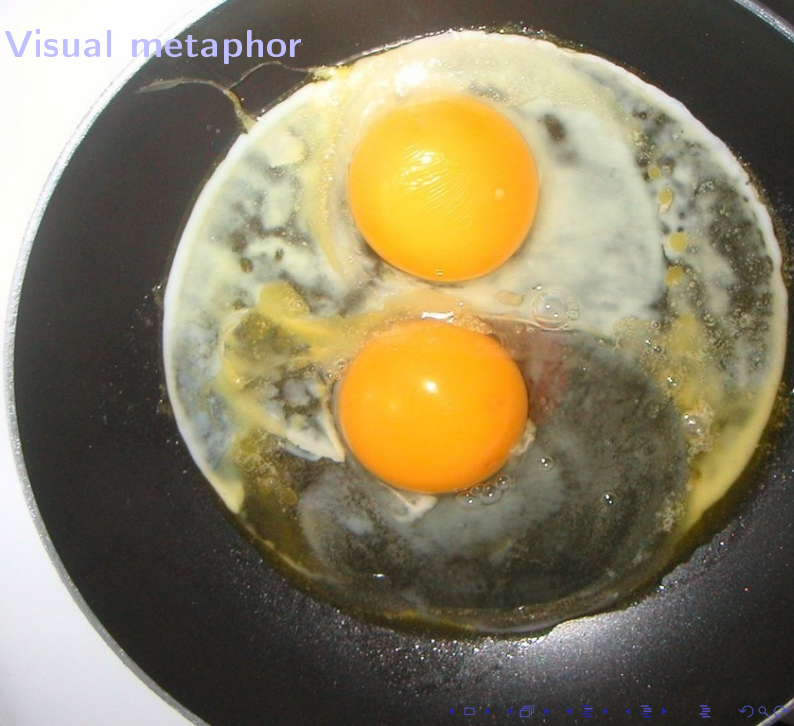
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- ▶ Essentially all meaning making involves mappings across domains.
 - ▶ Our ideas do not exist in isolation from one another.
 - ▶ They get their meaning precisely by compare-and-contrast to other ideas.
 - ▶ Consider it a spider web, where if you pull on any one thread....

Visual metaphor



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- ▶ Gay semiotics / *Hal Fischer*. "signifiers of accessibility".

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- ▶ Gay semiotics / *Hal Fischer*: "signifiers of accessibility".
- ▶ Variations: paperback books.

Theme and variations

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Theme and variations

- ▶ The loud belch at the dinner table.

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Theme and variations

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- ▶ Surface that appears soft and furry.

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A cognitive-semiotic view on metaphor: The proposal

- ▶ The defining mark of metaphor *regardless of modality* is the degree to which some instance of meaning making calls attention to itself, as opposed to simply delivering its message, seemingly transparently.

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 - ▶ The meaning cannot be too novel; why?

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- ▶ Metaphor is best understood in terms of a continuum of meanings from primary (most standard, “literal”) to secondary, tertiary, and outright novel.
 - ▶ The meaning cannot be too novel; why?
 - ▶ Metaphors follow a life cycle: they typically start out as novel usages, become conventionalized, and over time cease (for the majority of non-specialists) to be recognized as metaphors at all.

The proposal (continued)

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The proposal (continued)

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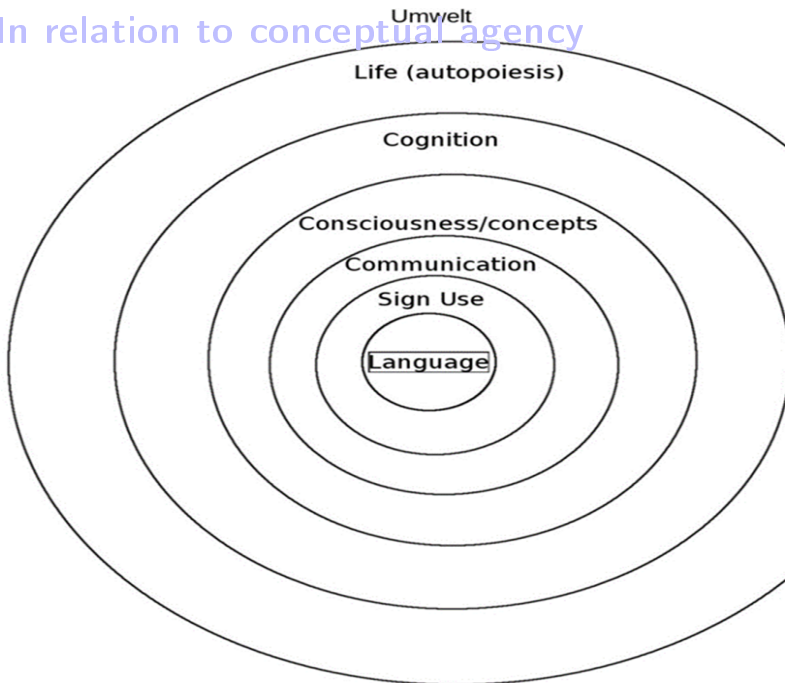
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 - ▶ The possibility of alternate interpretations.
 - ▶ The mapping of one domain onto another.
 - ▶ In the case of fictive motion: an underlying bias toward motion in structured thought and language.
- ▶ Metaphor very, very often serves to give the abstract a greater concreteness.

In relation to conceptual agency



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Umwelt

Life (autopoiesis)

Cognition

Consciousness/concepts

Communication

Sign Use

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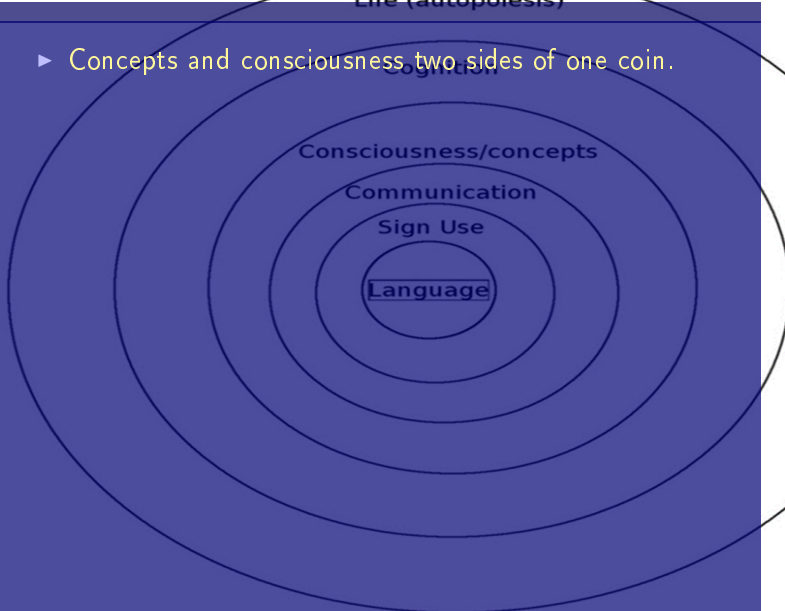
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Life (autopoiesis)

▶ Concepts and consciousness two sides of one coin.



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In relation to conceptual agency

Umwelt

Life (autopoiesis)

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 - ▶ A much greater need for metaphor.

Take-home message

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- ▶ Metaphor is only ever, and can only be, a fairly roughly defined subset of meaning making.
- ▶ Endless arguments over what is or isn't *really* a metaphor miss the point: metaphor is a matter of perspective taking.
- ▶ There is nothing straightforwardly literal about “literal” meaning, which has nearly all the shades of meaning of metaphorical meaning, even though it tends to be more concrete.

Parting words

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“Razors pain you, Rivers are damp,
Acids stain you, And drugs cause
cramp. Guns aren’t lawful, Nooses
give, Gas smells awful. You might as
well live.”