

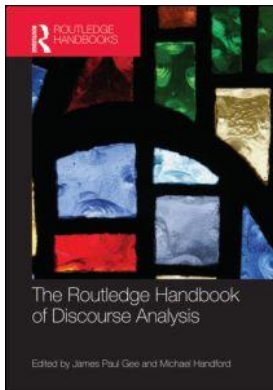
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Metaphor in spoken discourse

Lynne Cameron

What is metaphor in spoken discourse?

The historical context for metaphor in spoken discourse

To contextualize discourse approaches to metaphor, we can look back in time to the appearance of two earlier perspectives: the rhetorical and the cognitive. These earlier perspectives influence, inform and in some cases prefigure later ones.

The earliest ideas about metaphor seem to have come from Aristotle, in the *Poetics* and the *Rhetoric*, and might be labelled ‘the rhetorical perspective’. In this perspective, metaphor is figurative use of language, the introduction of a strong and vivid expression that can create powerful images and change minds by comparing one thing with another.

When the poet calls ‘old age a withered stalk,’ he conveys a new idea, a new fact, to us by means of the general notion of bloom, which is common to both things. (Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, Book III, Chapter 10, trans. Rhys)

Aristotle incorporated cognitive and discourse dimensions of metaphor within his major focus on the rhetorical function, and what he had to say about metaphor still makes for rich and relevant reading (Mahon, 1999).

In the more recent past, the arrival of a cognitive perspective took metaphor studies in a fresh direction after the publication of Lakoff and Johnson’s *Metaphors We Live By* in 1980 and opened up interest in metaphor in disciplines far beyond the confines of literary studies, where it had been principally situated up to this point. From a cognitive perspective, metaphor is principally a matter of thought and not of language. A ‘conceptual metaphor’ is held to be a mapping between two conceptual domains that structures one of the domains in terms of the other. Metaphor in language, or ‘linguistic metaphor’, is then seen as the expression of metaphor in thought; a conceptual metaphor may give rise to many connected linguistic metaphors. By examining highly conventionalized metaphors in the same terms as strong or novel metaphors, the cognitive perspective reminded us that metaphor is ordinary and everyday as well as vibrant and striking. For example, the language contains many linguistic metaphors relating to the conceptual metaphor UNDERSTANDING IS SEEING, including *that’s clear* and *I see what you mean*. (Small capitals are conventionally used to indicate conceptual metaphors and underlining to indicate linguistic metaphors.) Work in the cognitive perspective has led to development of the new field of ‘cognitive linguistics’ and produced a rich literature on metaphor that includes experimental psychological studies and theoretical development (for summaries of the field, see Gibbs, 1994, 2008).

The discourse perspective that has developed in the last decade views metaphor as discourse-based and, for some researchers, also as discourse-bound. It is inspired and informed by the cognitive perspective, but also reacts against it in seeking to re-establish the importance of the metaphorical use of language in context, which was downgraded in the cognitive emphasis on metaphor as mental mapping. From a discourse perspective, use of metaphor reveals something of a person's resources both for using language and for thinking, and studies based in this perspective tend to take a more holistic view of metaphor in the life of individuals and society than those based in the cognitive perspective. Technological advances in digital recording are now making discourse much more accessible for research, while advances in computer power facilitate automatic searches of large amounts of discourse data and enable researchers to investigate rigorously, for the first time in history, patterns of metaphor use across speech and discourse communities.

This chapter describes work on metaphor undertaken from a discourse perspective, and, in particular, metaphor in spontaneous spoken discourse activity, where speakers do not necessarily have the time to engage in thoughtful and deliberate construction of rhetorically striking metaphors but are obliged to use metaphors that 'come to mind' in the flow of talk – what I have also called 'prosaic use of metaphor', to contrast it with poetic use (Cameron, 2003).

The chapter discusses key issues, theoretical and methodological, raised by the discourse perspective and offers some solutions that have emerged from my own work. A summary of one method of metaphor analysis for spoken discourse is presented, and the chapter closes with items for future research agenda. First, however, an extract from the data is used to demonstrate something of the nature of metaphor in spontaneous spoken discourse.

Metaphor in spontaneous spoken discourse

The discourse perspective concerns itself with bringing together the local details of metaphor use with metaphor on more global or general levels. At the local level of talk, there is both regularity and variation, as the interaction of discourse participants produces varying patterns of metaphor dynamics. The amount of metaphor used varies according to what is being talked about and in relation with participants' attitudes towards the topic. Types of metaphors used by speakers vary in strength, conventionality, and frequency. Responses to the use of metaphor can produce chains of connected metaphors across episodes of talk.

The first extract is taken from a focus group discussion¹ in which eight Muslim women who live in a northern city in the UK were brought together and invited to respond to a series of questions about the effect of terrorism on their daily lives. At this point in talk, they had been discussing the question 'How do you think terrorists decide on their actions?' for several minutes, and Haifa had introduced the idea that Muslim extremism bears more resemblance to a *cult* than to a *religion*. Words and phrases identified as 'metaphorically used' are underlined.

Extract 1

- 1044 Haifa it's not even a religion at all.
 1045 Haifa it's a cult.
 1046 xxx yeah.
 1047 Haifa and they're just doing,
 1048 Haifa all the --
 1049 Haifa [the things that a cult would do].
 1050 Dina [and I think th--]
 1051 Dina they take them very young.
 1052 xx [[vulnerable]]

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- 1053 Aneesa [[yeah.
 1054 Aneesa that's when you can start brainwashing them]].
 1055 xxx yeah.
 1056 Dina because they don't have their own opinions,
 1057 Dina and if they do,
 1058 Dina they are.. very weak.
 1059 Dina you know.
 1060 Haifa I think they're putting these young--
 1061 Haifa young boys,
 1062 Haifa in the firing line,
 1063 Haifa and probably,
 1064 Haifa backing off themselves,
 1065 xx [mastermind <X isn't going to be,
 1066 xx anywhere near X>
 1067 Haifa [and they're taking most of it],
 1068 Haifa well,
 1069 Haifa they're killing themselves,
 1070 Haifa aren't they,
 1071 Haifa really.
 1072 Dina X
 1073 Dina like,
 1074 Dina they don't see it like that,
 1075 Dina though,
 1076 Dina do they.⁸
 1077 Dina they don't see it like,
 1078 Dina they're killing themselves

The extract demonstrates features found to be typical of linguistic metaphor in spontaneous spoken discourse:

- metaphor occurs fairly frequently in talk, but with uneven distribution;
- metaphorical talk most commonly features vehicle terms that enter into the flow of topic talk rather than appearing as A IS B statements;
- frequent use occurs of conventional metaphors and rather rare use of novel or striking metaphors;
- conventional metaphors often use terms relating to the physical and perceptual world that also carry affect: e.g. movement metaphors to talk about actions and events, and seeing metaphors to talk about thinking and understanding;
- very frequently used words, particularly phrasal verbs, account for much metaphor use;
- distinctions between metaphorical and non-metaphorical uses are often blurred rather than clear-cut.

We now consider each of these features in more detail.

Metaphor occurs fairly frequently in talk, but with uneven distribution

The uneven distribution of metaphors across talk, and the occurrence of 'metaphor clusters', where many metaphors are produced in short episodes of talk, are phenomena now soundly

established by empirical studies (Corts and Pollio, 1999; Corts and Meyers, 2002; Cameron and Stelma, 2004). Metaphor clusters sometimes signal critical points in discourse events, but they may also be produced by less dramatic features of talk. For example, we can see how the tendency of participants in spontaneous spoken discourse to repeat their own words or those of others when they emphasize, agree or dispute will increase the numbers of metaphors (e.g. 1074, 1077). There also seems to be a tendency for one use of metaphor to prime further metaphor, as may be happening in 1060–1064, when *putting in the firing line* is followed by *backing off*.

The metaphor density of this extract, calculated as the number of metaphorically used words or phrases per 1,000 words (Cameron, 2003), works out at 97 (11 underlined words and phrases in 113 words). Across the complete transcript, the metaphor density was 54, and this extract almost reaches the threshold for being considered as a metaphor cluster, which was set at 100 for this talk. Emotionally intense discourse events have been shown to have a much higher overall metaphor density (Cameron, 2007b), while more mundane talk such as classroom organization has a lower metaphor density (Cameron, 2003).

Metaphorical talk most commonly features vehicle terms that enter into the flow of topic talk rather than appearing as A is B statements

The Aristotelian example of metaphor: *old age as a withered stalk*, links two noun phrases and two ideas, old age and a withered plant stalk, to give a vivid way of thinking about the loss of vigour associated with age. What makes this a metaphor is that the two noun phrases and their related semantic fields are very different – humans and plants – and that joining them in metaphor adds extra meaning to the idea of *old age*. At the heart of metaphor is this kind of ‘seeing one thing in terms of something else’ (Burke, 1945); the impact of a metaphor comes from the contribution of the ‘something else’, here *withered stalk*, to the understanding of the ‘one thing’, *old age*. This type of noun metaphor can be put into the shorthand form ‘A is B’, where A stands for the topic/*old age* and B stands for the vehicle/*withered stalk*, and *is* stands for the metaphorical relation ‘seeing in terms of’. When the concern of metaphor studies was principally with rhetorical or literary uses, this noun-based shorthand worked well; but when the concern is with spontaneous spoken discourse it works less well. None of the metaphorically used words and phrases in the extract has an explicit topic term in the talk; instead these vehicle terms enter the flow of talk, and their contextual meanings are, as far as we can tell from the absence of any explicit problematizing, effortlessly interpreted by other participants. Furthermore, many of the metaphors in talk occur in the verb phrase rather than as nouns.

Frequent use is made of conventional metaphors and rather rare use of novel or striking metaphors

The strongest metaphors in this extract are probably *brainwashing* (1054) and *putting them in the firing line* (1060–1062), both of which are conventional. In the first, the process of simplifying and intensifying someone’s thinking is described in terms of washing; in the second, *the firing line* represents a dangerous position, not necessarily physical. Of course, those who become suicide bombers may literally be *put in the firing line*, although the scenario does not seem very convincing – bombers are more at risk from themselves than from finding people at the scene lined up ready to shoot them. If the topic of the conversation had been about redundancies at work, then being *put in the firing line* would clearly be only metaphorical.

Conventional metaphors often use terms relating to the physical and perceptual world that also carry affect

Backing off (1064) is identified as metaphor here because the idea of physical movement away from, and the implication of cowardice associated with such movement, is not appropriate to the discourse context; its contextual meaning is something like ‘refusing to be near to terrorist action, on the part of the people in control of the terrorists’.

Towards the end of the extract, Dina uses and repeats *see* metaphorically, to mean ‘understand’, although, more precisely, she uses *don’t see* metaphorically to mean ‘don’t understand’. We might also note that the *seeing* metaphor has an effect on the pronoun *it* that follows it: the idea that is misunderstood becomes an object that can be viewed. So, although it is clear that a metaphor is being used, deciding which words are used metaphorically is not completely straightforward, because of the way the metaphoricity spreads across the utterance.

The metaphoric linking of physical semantic fields or domains to non-physical fields produces systematic patterns of metaphors in language, which speakers use automatically or which sometimes they more deliberately select for affect, as with *backing off*, which does concern MOVEMENT but also carries a sense of cowardly retreat in a dangerous situation, rather than just ‘moving away from’. It seems that our basic interactions with the physical world provide a rich source of metaphorical ways of talking and thinking about more abstract ideas, but they often come with emotions or attitudes that have become attached to them through sociocultural interaction.

Very frequently used words, particularly phrasal verbs, account for much metaphor use

Two uses of the verb *take* are marked as metaphorically used (1051, 1067). In the first case, extremists are described as *taking* young people into their ‘cult’; this is metaphorical, since it does not involve physically moving people from one place to another but rather refers to convincing them of the new beliefs. In the second instance, *they’re taking most of it* seems to refer to the young extremists bearing most of the risk and death or injury; this is a metaphor because the idea of physically moving something from one location to another is applied to the very different idea of bearing risk.

Another example of a highly conventionalized metaphor would be the word *things* in line 1049. The argument for including this as metaphor rests on the distinction between *things* as concrete objects and *things* in a non-concrete sense, here related to some kind of action.

Distinctions between metaphorical and non-metaphorical uses are often blurred rather than clear-cut

Identifying *taking* and *things* as metaphors might feel uncomfortable to readers more used to thinking of metaphor as active and novel. The cognitive shift in metaphor studies emphasized the ordinariness of metaphor, and the tendency to make metaphorical use of even the most common and mundane words. Rigorous operationalization of ‘metaphor’ in order to identify instances in spoken discourse and analyse use leads to the inclusion of such common lexical items (Cameron, 2003; pragglejazz, 2007). To exclude some frequent words, such as *do* or *have*, requires the researcher to impose boundaries on the category.

Even words with more semantic content can create problems in the identification of metaphor, as is exemplified by the adjectives *vulnerable* (1052) and *weak* (1058), here used to describe young people at risk from extremists and their opinions. The second is more clearly metaphorical,

because the sense of physical weakness more strongly contrasts with the topic of emotional or spiritual weakness. The case for *vulnerable* rests on a similar contrast but is less obviously metaphorical because, in contemporary English, *vulnerable* is more frequently used in reference to susceptibility to emotional wounds than to physical vulnerability; it could be argued that this is not an instance of metaphor other than etymologically, and that the metaphorical meaning of the original Latin verb, *vulnerare* ('to wound'), has been lost as use has been extended from the physical to the emotional. The closeness of *weak* in the talk contributes to the decision here to include it as metaphor, as does finding both senses still included as active in a corpus-based dictionary. As a general principle, in my work on contemporary discourse metaphors that have become lexicalized and lost their historical connections to what was once a contrasting semantic field – what we might call 'etymological metaphors' – are not included. For example, the word *salary* has its origins in the Latin word for 'salt' and the convention of giving salt to Roman soldiers in lieu of payment. For the Roman soldiers, *salary* (in its Latin equivalent, *salarium*) was a metonymy; in earlier centuries, when the Latin origin was still generally available, *salary* would have been metaphorical because it retained the potential for connecting with salt; in the twenty-first century, connections with salt are so remote that *salary* would not count as metaphorical.

The blurring of the edges of the category 'metaphor' seems to be an inevitable outcome of the dynamic nature of language and of its evolution through use (Larsen-Freeman and Cameron, 2008), which forms a family resemblance category of phenomena we call 'metaphor'.

Metaphor in spoken discourse: summary

In summary, metaphor in spontaneous spoken discourse is occasionally striking but more often low key and conventionalized. However, the metaphors that speakers choose can be revealing of their ideas, attitudes and values. Ideas can be revealed by patterns of relations between the vehicles used and the topic ideas talked about: *brainwashing* as a metaphor for 'completely changing beliefs' and *weak* as a metaphor for 'not very entrenched' begin to build up a picture of Haifa's ideas about young Muslims and their thinking. Attitudes and values are particularly visible in metaphors: both of the above carry negative evaluations, and the metaphors of *putting in the firing line* and *backing off* carry a sense of disapproval from the speaker. This capacity for metaphor to reveal ideas, attitudes and values makes it an interesting proposition for use as a research tool as well as a research object (see the section 'The discourse dynamics approach').

What are the key issues that discourse analytic studies of metaphor have brought to light?

The discourse perspective on metaphor is producing several different approaches to data, including corpus linguistic approaches, critical discourse analytic approaches and, in my own work, the discourse dynamics approach. Each approach aims to find ways to combine analysis of the metaphors that people use with analysis of what they *do* with metaphors.

Issues around cognitive metaphor theory and discourse

Approaches vary in the strength of their allegiance to cognitive metaphor theory, and this needs to be appreciated as it reflects differing epistemologies. Strong adherence to a cognitive model of metaphor requires an assumption of 'conceptual metaphors' as large-scale, generalized mappings between concepts, established across the speakers of a language and brought 'ready made' to any specific discourse event. What is picked out of texts or transcripts is then assumed to be the verbal

manifestation of a conceptual metaphor. Issues arise from this stance around connections between individual utterances and the ‘concepts’ that are said to underlie them. For example, if metaphorical mappings between concepts are held to exist in the minds/brains of individuals, then some account is needed of how they got there in development (Johnson, 1997). How active are such mappings in any discourse episode, and how do they actually produce specific linguistic metaphors? Ponterotto (2003), for example, claims that an underlying conceptual metaphor not only influences the linguistic metaphors that people use but also acts to create coherence across talk. How this might be evidenced remains unclear.

A more moderate view accepts that the examination of large amounts of discourse data reveals systematic patterns of metaphor in a language; these patterns are likely to shape the language resources of children as they grow up, while also being open to change in the processes of social interaction (Cameron and Deignan, 2006). As people grow up within social groups, they learn the language of conventionalized metaphors and their ways of thinking are channelled in certain ways, by language and by their embodied experiences in the physical world. In the course of a specific discourse event, metaphors may be produced or understood very swiftly, as lexicalized rather than as actively metaphorical items; connections across different concepts may be generated by metaphorical language, or there may be no active metaphorical processing by participants. A direct result of adopting this view is that researchers are usually assessing ‘metaphorical potential’ rather than evidence of active metaphoric processing when they examine discourse data.

Constraints on the language of metaphor

Corpus studies of metaphor patterns have shown that there is more specificity of language form and lexical choice attached to linguistic metaphors than would be predicted by the cognitive theory (Deignan, 2005). It appears that, over time, certain forms, such as singular rather than plural forms, or continuous tenses rather than others, come to be conventionally adopted for metaphorical usage, and different forms for non-metaphorical uses. For example, Deignan shows that the verb *blossom* is metaphorical in 98 per cent of its uses, as in *funds to help budding companies blossom*, while the noun is very rarely used metaphorically (Deignan, 2005: 178–179)

Using conventionalized metaphor in discourse thus appears to be quite constrained – in form, lexis and pragmatics. Constraints on the language of metaphor probably help participants to cope with the time demands of spontaneous spoken discourse by inhibiting non-metaphorical interpretations when these are not appropriate. Findings from discourse studies of metaphor have implications for the validity of test items selected for experimental studies.

Methodological issues from using spontaneous spoken discourse

Working with metaphor in spoken discourse data raises methodological issues, not the least of which is how to identify metaphorical, as distinct from non-metaphorical, uses of words and phrases. As we have already seen, identification depends on identifying metaphoric potential rather than on finding evidence of active metaphoric processing, and on making sound decisions on category boundaries.

To understand the purpose or impact of metaphor use in spontaneous discourse requires an analysis that takes account of discourse context, how metaphor shifts in the twists and turns of talk as it happens, and the movement of metaphor across participants as they respond to each other (Cameron, 2008a, b). A sociocognitive perspective on metaphor, which connects individual use of linguistic metaphor with the local discourse context and the broader social context, as well as with mental processing/thinking, becomes inevitable.

Discourse methods combine the analysis of metaphor patterns with some form of discourse analysis. Within the social sciences, combined methods include the use of metaphor analysis within critical discourse analysis, investigating for example how marketing discourse uses relational metaphor to relate to the public (Koller, 2008), and metaphor analysis alongside content analysis to investigate how media and medical experts talk about avian flu (Nerlich and Halliday, 2007, described in Todd and Low, 2010). In the humanities rather than in social sciences, Semino and Swindlehurst (1996) combine corpus analysis with metaphor analysis to show how mechanical metaphors are used in descriptions of mental illness in the novel *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. The method that I have developed in my own work is called 'metaphor-led discourse analysis' and is detailed in the sections that follow.

The discourse dynamics approach

In my work I have tried to understand metaphor by examining it in spontaneous spoken discourse, and, more recently, I have used metaphor as a tool for researching social science problems, including the process of post-conflict reconciliation (Cameron, 2007b) and how the risk of terrorism affects people's everyday lives (Cameron *et al.*, 2009; Cameron and Maslen, 2010). This venture has involved developing tools and techniques of 'metaphor-led discourse analysis' that fit with validity into a coherent theoretical 'discourse dynamics' framework (Cameron, 2010a), described in this section.

The discourse dynamics theoretical framework

The discourse dynamics approach centralizes and starts from language use, seeing the language system as emerging from use in discourse (Larsen-Freeman and Cameron, 2008; Cameron, 2010a). It is inspired and informed by developments in cognitive psychology and cognitive metaphor theory, while resisting the latter's strong assumptions about the pre-existence of conceptual metaphors in the minds/brains of individuals, and it understands discourse as essentially a social and dialogic phenomenon (Bakhtin, 1981; Linnell, 1998). The interdependence of language and cognition in discourse is signalled by the hyphenated phrase 'talking-and-thinking', which refers to the processes speakers engage in while speaking (Cameron, 2003).

Complex dynamic systems theory provides an epistemology of, and a metatheory for, the discourse dynamics approach, understanding and theorizing human activity in terms of change over time. Activity occurs at different timescales and at different levels of social organization. Applied to spoken discourse, the timescale of the discourse event, such as a conversation or a lecture, is likely to be in the order of hours and minutes. Inside the discourse event, episodes of talk will be on a timescale of minutes and seconds, while individual utterances will be on a timescale of seconds. On a longer timescale, several discourse events may form a connected sequence, as when the same participants meet each other several times over a period of months or years. In a similar way, we can identify various levels of social organization related to spoken discourse, from the individual mind, through the dyad or small group, to larger social groups, some with tightly prescribed membership and others more loosely organized, including national or regional speech communities. The relations between timescales and levels can work both 'upwards', as when a small group of people develops a way of speaking that influences a larger group, or 'downwards', as when the language of a discourse community influences the discourse of a dyad. Interaction across timescales and levels in the discourse system sometimes leads to 'self-organization' and to the emergence of a new type of activity at a higher level or scale. Examples of emergence in discourse systems include speech genres that emerge as

a conventionalized way of using language (Bakhtin, 1986), accents and dialects that emerge within a regional social group, and, more relevant to this chapter, metaphorical idioms and proverbs that emerge with conventionalized forms and uses within speech and discourse communities. Emergence applied to metaphor theory helps to explain several empirical phenomena of spoken discourse:

Framing metaphors

When people talk together, they often converge on shared ways of referring to an idea or object. Brennan and Clark described these shared ways of referring as ‘conceptual pacts’ (1996), and Cameron (2007a) extended this to ‘lexico-conceptual pacts’, so as to include choice of language. Shared ways of talking-and-thinking are often metaphorical, as when 10-year-old pupils in a school classroom started using the phrase *lollipop trees* to refer to a way of drawing trees as a stick with a circle on top. Within the social group of the classroom, the phrase referred not only to the visual appearance, but also to the teacher’s negative evaluation of this artistic style. The phrase emerged over a very short timescale, of several minutes, into the repertoire of the class (Cameron, 2003).

When shared metaphorical lexico-conceptual pacts emerge around thematically key topics, they become ‘framing metaphors’. The reconciliation conversations produced several framing metaphors for the process of coming to understand another person in a post-conflict situation, including *A JOURNEY* and *CHANGING A DISTORTED IMAGE OF THE OTHER* (Cameron, 2007b).

Conventionalized metaphors

A similar emergent phenomenon on a larger level of social organization is the crystallization and conventionalization of metaphors across a discourse or speech community.

Discourse communities connected by shared occupations, beliefs or ways of living may develop metaphors that contribute to the cohesion and collective identity of the social group. For example, the Irish Republican Army, a paramilitary group previously active in Ireland and Britain, would refer to their conflict with the British and with loyalist activists as *the struggle*. Use of this metaphorical phrase came to mark a speaker as sympathizing with the group.

When metaphors are conventionalized, some stabilization occurs in form, meaning and pragmatics – as the corpus work mentioned above has shown, details of form become attached to particular meanings and uses. In the example of the noun phrase *the struggle*, the noun would always be preceded by the definite article as determiner and use of a modifier was very rare. Pragmatically, it would only be used by members of, or sympathizers with, the paramilitary group. This stabilization of a bundle of features – grammatical, lexical, pragmatic, referential – seems to occur at both local and global levels and applies to many conventionalized metaphorical ways of talking. It is difficult to predict exactly what kind of stabilization will occur, but that stabilization occurs seems to be predictable. These regularities of use not only help in marking social identity, but also assist the processes of discourse production and comprehension, which in spontaneous talk are strongly constrained by time pressures on participants. Cameron and Deignan (2006) suggested that such bundles of features, observed empirically, be recognized theoretically with the label ‘metaphoreme’. Cameron (2010c) develops a theoretical explanation of the affective content of many metaphoremes, using the idea of mental simulations, in which the particular forms and reference come to be associated with particular attitudes or evaluations, and then evoke these in use (Gibbs, 2006; Ritchie, 2006, 2010).

Metaphor as research tool

Within the field of metaphors studies, metaphor has, quite understandably, been principally ‘a research object’, as researchers seek to understand the nature of metaphor by investigating how it is used. A further strand of work in the discourse perspective is less directly concerned with the nature of metaphor but instead uses metaphor as a research tool in exploring discourse data, and in this subsection I explain the method of analysis developed to do this.

Firstly, what makes metaphor suitable for use as a research tool in the social sciences or humanities? For various reasons, metaphor seems to offer particularly rich insights into people’s ideas, attitudes and values. Novel metaphors can be striking and create impact in discourse, while much more frequent, conventionalized metaphors inform us about socialized and accepted ways of talking-and-thinking. Metaphors are used when talking about something emotionally charged, often in order to avoid explicit emotion. They are used when talking about something abstract, where the imagination needs some assistance. Metaphor is what we turn to when we have trouble expressing or capturing an idea in discourse; by making analogies or comparisons between what we are trying to express to someone else and something they are more familiar with, we try to get them to see the world as we do. Even the absence of metaphor can sometimes be very striking; in reconciliation conversations, talk about painful events was made highly direct by the absence of metaphor and shown to have a strong and lasting effect on the listener (Cameron, 2011). Highly conventionalized metaphors and the systematic patterns they fall into can illustrate ways of talking-and-thinking that have evolved in discourse communities. When people tell anecdotes or engage in narrative talk, metaphor often contributes to the coda, where content and feelings are summarized. Extract 2 shows an example of a coda to a stretch of talk in a focus group of Muslim men on the topic of terrorism; it comes from the same study as extract 1. The last two lines act as a coda, reformulating and summarizing what has been said in the preceding discourse, with a landscape metaphor describing how terrorism influences their lives:

Extract 2

- 315 it’s a subject which is not far from,
 316 .. our daily..life.
 317 it’s--
 318 ...(3.0) whether we discuss it or not,
 319 .. it’s there all the time,
 320 in the background.

The small cluster of connected metaphors work together to construct a metaphorical view of *daily life* as situated on a sociocognitive landscape, with a foreground and a *background*. The *subject* of terrorism is discursively placed on this landscape, firstly as *not far from our daily life* and then, in the coda, as *there ... in the background*. Affective force is conventionally attached to nearness and distance, and, in this topic’s context, nearness emphasizes the feeling of threat.

Metaphors like these offer neat ways of packaging a great deal of both information and affect into short phrases. Analysis of the metaphors that people invent or invoke can thus reveal something of their ideas, attitudes and values. Tracking and connecting metaphors across discourse events can reveal how ideas evolve in talk and how affective ‘climate’ is created and changed. The next section describes the method for doing this in more detail.

Metaphor-led discourse analysis

Identifying, grouping and tracking metaphors are the three core processes in the method of ‘metaphor-led discourse analysis’, complemented with analysis of the discourse dynamics of

metaphors, i.e. their function in the ongoing discourse activity (Cameron, 2007b; Cameron *et al.*, 2009). It makes use of techniques from conversation analysis at local level, and from the discursive psychological approach (Edwards, 1997).

Identifying metaphor in spoken discourse

Cameron (1999, 2003) discussed many of the issues that have been already mentioned in respect of identifying metaphor, and offered, as a solution, a combination of necessary conditions for metaphor together with category boundaries to exclude/include less central examples. Identification procedures were further formalized by the ‘pragglejaz group’ (2007), in a method that works through a word-by-word transcript, testing for metaphorical use and using a corpus dictionary to help establish a ‘basic’ meaning of a word, which contrasts with but transfers meaning to the contextualized meaning of the word in the discourse. The pragglejaz article includes important discussion of reliability issues that researchers need to take seriously if empirical studies are to build on each other or to be comparative.

Investigation of metaphor patterns

Once metaphors have been identified, the discourse dynamics theoretical framework suggests searching for patterns in metaphor use across timescales and levels. For example, a framing metaphor (see ‘The discourse dynamics theoretical framework’ above) is a collection of connected metaphors, used over one or more discourse events to talk about a key idea in the discourse. More generally, Cameron (2003, 2007a) has used the phrase ‘systematic metaphor’ for a grouping together, by the researcher, of connected metaphors from one or more discourse events, to talk about connected ideas around a topic. While a systematic metaphor is given the form *A IS B*, it must be remembered that it is not a single way of talking-and-thinking, but a collection of related metaphors produced in the stream of talk. The collection may also be thought about dynamically, as a ‘metaphor trajectory’ in the discourse system, and examining its evolution through adaptation and shifting across speakers can provide useful information as to how participants use metaphor in discursively constructing ideas, attitudes and values.

Research questions may relate to a longer timescale or to a larger level of social organization than that of individual discourse events, for example asking how metaphors contribute to building social identity. The data set will correspondingly need to be much larger. Techniques developed within corpus linguistics can then assist in finding patterns of metaphor use (Deignan and Semino, 2010). To compare individual use of metaphor with socially accepted norms, a small context-rich dataset can be compared with a larger reference corpus (e.g. Cameron and Deignan, 2003).

Analysing the discourse dynamics of metaphors

Metaphor alone cannot cover all that happens in a discourse event; some complementary method of discourse analysis is required. Participants’ goals (conscious or not), such as wanting to justify an opinion, disagreeing with other participants or answering a question, create dynamic forces that influence the unfolding activity of the discourse event. In metaphor-led discourse analysis, metaphors are examined within their discourse dynamics; temporal segments of the discourse event are inspected for the functions that metaphors play in the discourse activity.

Analysis of discourse dynamics proceeds by segmenting transcriptions into smaller episodes of discourse action. For example, a classroom lesson may begin with an opening segment in which the teacher organizes students and materials, followed by a teacher fronted segment that

introduces and gives an overview of the topic and tasks coming up in the lesson; the major section of the lesson then follows, as students carry out their assigned tasks, and the lesson closes with a summary of work done and more organizational logistics. Each of these lesson segments can be broken down further, perhaps by topic or by the actions of students or teacher into smaller episodes: for example, the opening may start with a greeting and organization of logistics; the teacher fronted segment is likely to contain sequences of questions and answers (Cameron, 2003).

The discourse activity analysis is mapped onto the analysis of linguistic metaphor in a detailed and recursive process, which requires close attention to lexis, grammar and rhetorical patterning, in order to reveal how metaphors contribute to discourse activity. There is no single template for the process of combining analyses of metaphors and discourse activity, since it has to be sensitive to the specific research goals (Cameron, 2010b). In moving between the metaphors and discourse activity, the researcher comes to understand how participants use metaphors to frame and elaborate ideas, and how the choice of metaphors contributes to the expression and construction of attitudes and values (Cameron and Maslen, 2010). At this stage, the method moves from analysis to interpretive synthesis, and it becomes important here to guard against unwarranted interpretations or too much idealization of the complexity and messiness that characterize spontaneous talk.

Looking to the future

Exploiting the potential for metaphor as a research tool in the social sciences is still only in its infancy. Metaphor analysis has shown its promise, but there is much room for further extending its range and for investigating how metaphor influences other aspects of the research process. My own work in the immediate future will examine metaphor in data collection and in reporting findings to research users.

I suspect too that we will see interest reviving in poetic, rhetorical and other creative uses of metaphor (Cameron, 2010c). Metonymy in discourse has received little attention to date. Its overlaps and interplay with metaphor makes it ripe for deeper investigation. Multimodal metaphor has a sound base in published work on gesture (Cienki and Müller, 2008) and on visual images (Forceville, 1994), but also promises extensive development in the near future, in its own right and as part of the development of multimodal discourse analysis.

Further reading

Cameron, L. and Maslen, R. (eds.) (2010) *Metaphor Analysis: A Guide to Research Practice in Applied Linguistics, Social Sciences and the Humanities*. London: Equinox.

An edited collection demonstrating how metaphor can be used as a tool in discourse-based research studies.

Gibbs, R. (ed.) (2008) *Cambridge Handbook of Metaphor and Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

A recent collection of writings by key scholars in metaphor studies, covering all major areas of work.

Semino, E. (2008) *Metaphor and Discourse*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

An introductory guide to metaphor for undergraduate and postgraduate students.

Journals:

Metaphor and the Social World, John Benjamins. Available online at: http://www.benjamins.com/cgi-bin/t_seriesview.cgi?series=MSW (accessed 21 April 2009).

Metaphor and Symbol, Taylor & Francis. Available online at: <http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/titles/1092-6488.asp> (accessed 21 April 2009).

Note

- 1 The focus group was one of 12 which were organized as part of a research project 'Perception and communication of terrorist risk', funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council and carried out at the University of Leeds.

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