This chapter is designed to understand aspects of acrimonious talk in facilitative conflict mediations. “Acrimonious” was chosen as a descriptor because it is associated with anger, accusation, bitterness and mean-spiritedness. These are words you can find with “acrimonious” in a dictionary definition or thesaurus, and in a Google Scholar search for “acrimonious dispute”, the first twenty examples described everything from families to scholars to co-workers to historical situations all characterised by anger, accusation, bitterness and mean-spiritedness. These may be identified by the wording, but the means of expressing acrimony are rich, indeed. Everything from a pause when one withholds a smile to a glare to a strangled voice to adding an “unnecessary” adverb like “essentially” to a description can let the listener feel the bitterness or accusation in the speaker. Saying something “obvious” or withholding something expected, putting disdain in one’s voice or making a demeaning comparison – the means of doing acrimony are linguistic, rhetorical, nonverbal, and possibly unlimited. We decided to rely on the judgment of listeners instead of trying for an analytical definition.

Because we need to describe the mediation data we are using, the concept of acrimonious communication, Communication Accommodation Theory, Stance theory, metaphors, and some other theoretical matters, we will be a bit delayed in getting to the main event – the analysis of some disputant exchanges that are very acrimonious and that use metaphors. We think it is worth the reader’s while to stick with us to get to the main event, but we acknowledge that the opening acts are a bit long.

The mediations we collected were from a program that trains the facilitative model of mediation. There are actually many models of mediation; facilitative mediators tend to avoid giving recommendations or showing content expertise to the disputing parties who come before them; their focus is on clarification and enabling a resolution process. Acrimony is a natural barrier to a resolution that a facilitative mediator tends to want to neutralise in the process of resolving a dispute. Accusations and bitterness get in the way of respectful problem solving and negotiation. Facilitative mediators are taught to reframe and neutralise harsh communication – largely through a focus on paraphrasing and summarising and seeking new perspectives (e.g. Domenici and Littlejohn, 2001).
The analytic approach in this chapter involves metaphors used during these facilitative mediations, mostly those used by disputants. Books on mediation and conflict resolution often have sections based on a 1992 paper (McCorkle and Mills, 1992) on common conflict metaphors such as war, dance, tide, minefield or quilting influence or reflect one’s approach to a conflict with someone. Readers are advised to listen and learn from the metaphors they and others use. We put the two things together – acrimonious talk and metaphors – because we observed some intriguing instances of severely acrimonious disputant talk in the facilitative mediations we were studying to answer other questions more than because we had a theory to test. Those books that mention metaphors often suggest that when people approach a conflict (or other problem) with different metaphors, the difference can make them uncomfortable and impede their success (e.g. Hocker and Wilmot, 2017, pp.54–5). We weren’t sure that was what we were seeing, so we decided to look for examples when the same metaphors brought people together or different metaphors drove them apart.

The analysis draws from Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) (Giles et al., 1991), because it is a theory of accommodation and dis-accommodation. One of the key factors in this theory is the well-established finding that speech converges – adapts to other people and adopts their communication styles – to minimise social difference and gain approval; on the other hand, it diverges – emphasises differences – to show disapproval or increase social distance (Giles and Soliz, 2008, pp.161–73). Imagine a couple getting closer and adopting each other’s speech habits or breaking up and breaking their rhythms and feigning misunderstandings. In conflict mediation, people may try to converge to resolve their differences or diverge to stress their differences.

Metaphors are a likely feature of talk for such convergence and divergence since in other contexts people pick up metaphors used by other people (for example, Fussell and Moss, 1998, Keysar et al., 2000). Some literature suggests that metaphors may be valuable to consider in conflict mediation (see, for example, Smith, 2005, Jones and Hughes, 2003). The present research addresses this suggestion by observing how some mediation disputants employ metaphors.

We found that disputants do use metaphors, although not as many or as colorful as we expected, so we abandoned any pretence at counting and comparing metaphors. We found that the other disputants often adopt the other disputant’s metaphors so that they are using the same ones, which we thought would lead to better understanding, but we found that it doesn’t necessarily work that way. We decided to focus on some examples that highlight some of the interesting metaphors we observed and thus illustrate some ways that metaphors work in acrimonious communication. The examples in the chapter are extracts from videotaped mediations. The selection grew out of a series of incidental observations made while studying other aspects of the nonverbal and verbal content of a set of recorded facilitative mediations we made in a university mediation centre. We decided to cull through a subset of the recorded mediations to see what metaphors we found and how they worked in the mediations. The numbers and types were of little interest, but the possible functions and influences were intriguing, so this chapter presents some observations of types and functions that might suggest directions for further study.

First, we present some concepts we think are central, and then we use those concepts to analyse some examples of metaphors that we thought were provocative to our understanding of acrimonious communication and communication in mediation.

A concept that is central to this research is the notion of emotion as stance (Goodwin et al., 2012). The notion of “stance” is drawn from Goffman (1981) as a way of drawing attention to the way people shift their display of attitudes, feelings and identities dynamically.
in interaction with others. In this view, emotions emerge and get displayed based on how people are communicating with each other. Goodwin et al. have stressed that this approach is a departure from the notion of emotions as individuals’ psychological states (2012, p.16). This is not a denial that people can have psychological states, but a focus on how emotions emerge through interactions with others. The focus is on how people display acrimony, and no attempt is made to classify people as easy-to-bring-to-acrimony or hard-to-bring-to-acrimony or to investigate the internal states. A stance is something displayed that other people may (or may not) react to in the interaction between them. Rather than a psychological analysis, this is an interaction analysis in line with scholars as diverse as Goodwin and Goffman, but linked in their focus on what people do in communication, rather than what they think or inferences about what they feel.

People, of course, vary in their tendencies toward acrimony, but presumably, everyone can project or feel it. To talk about an acrimonious stance is to focus on observable behaviour (voice, words, posture, tension in the lips, etc.) rather than to focus on what we as researchers might want to infer about the emotional state of an individual. During conflict, a shift away from an acrimonious stance (and toward a conciliatory or mollifying or regretful stance, for example) may foster improvement in the conflict. A shift to an acrimonious stance may perpetuate the conflict and lose the co-operation of the other party, while a shift away from an acrimonious stance may gain their co-operation – even without a change in position on the substance. When individuals project an acrimonious stance, regardless of their claim to want to resolve conflict or accommodate the other person, the acrimony can outweigh what they say they want to do. No matter how fervently you tell me you want to get along, your stiff lip and strained voice may make me think the opposite, for example. If it turns out that the stiff lip is a family characteristic and the strained voice is the result of a cold, I will be acting on bad inferences, but I will be acting on what I see and hear that looks to me like an acrimonious stance. Sometimes participants approach a conflict with another stance in mind but “fall into” the familiar relational pattern of an acrimonious stance once they are with the conflict partner and responding to what happens in the moment instead of their hope. Repeated patterns of acrimonious stances are probably very hard to overcome. Elements of the acrimonious stance may be the most noticeable and dominating aspects of some conflict communication.

27.1 Theoretical orientations we will need

To get to the analysis of the metaphors in acrimonious communication between disputants in mediation sessions, we need what we called above the “opening acts” of theory we used in the analysis and interpretation. The topics are what we mean by acrimonious communication, some relevant aspects of metaphors, an approach to language called demonstration theory that highlights what someone is doing when talking over the words being spoken, and Communication Accommodation Theory, a well-used theory that highlights how people adapt to each other when they interact. Recognising that we cannot do justice to any of these topics in the space we have, we try to present the elements of these theories that support our focus here.

27.1.1 Acrimony and acrimonious communication

“Acrimony” is a general, negative opposition toward another person (VanderVoort, 2006). Acrimony has been defined in terms of behaviour, cognition and emotion, but especially in
terms of personality type. Acrimony seems to be a composite of multiple subjective experiences, including jealousy, bitterness, resentment, ill-will, injustice and suspicion (Buss and Perry, 1992), and negative thoughts, such as vindictiveness, pessimism, hopelessness, unrealistic expectations for self and others and the desire to avoid others (VanderVoort, 2006). With such negative subjective experiences and cognitions, people who are comfortable using acrimony tend to provoke its opportunity (Orford, 1994).

“Acrimonious communication” comprises the processes and actions by which acrimony is expressed, acknowledged, dismissed or otherwise relationally enacted. Whereas acrimony may be conceptualised as a feature of an individual, acrimonious communication is a feature of an interaction. Through this distinction, this chapter invokes the interaction perspective: acrimonious communication is discursively “done” as participants enact “being acrimonious”. Rather than study acrimonious types, this research undertook to examine features of acrimonious communication episodes in conflict situations.

27.1.2 Metaphors

Ritchie (2003, p.135) observes that

It appears that our culture has a large, complex, and densely interconnected conceptual field, a set of schemas for competition and conflict ranging from friendly, low ego-involvement games through highly competitive games, shouting matches, fistfights, brawls, all the way to full-scale war (see Eubanks, 2000 and Gibbs 2017). Within this conceptual field, we readily transfer expressions associated with one form of competition or conflict to others. For example, cable TV news-oriented programs transfer the way we talk about sports competitions to politics without even noticing. They can talk about strategy for winning without ever explaining the issues in question by transferring the way sportscasters talk about athletes and teams to parties and politicians. The schema of sports thus influences the domain of politics.

A schema is a sort of mapping the concepts of one domain (in my example, sports) on to another, unrelated domain (politics). We do this all the time as we think and talk. There is controversy over conceptual mapping between domains, though, when metaphors are used, especially the extent to which, in my example, politics is really understood the same way sports is, or, to take a classic example, an argument may actually be experienced as war. That is, perhaps the same terms are simply applied to both sports and politics or wars and arguments, and people access the appropriate meaning directly and independently without mapping one to another. (For the cognitive mapping view, see Lakoff and Johnson, 1980. For discussion, see, for example, Gibbs and Steen, 1999, Glucksberg and Keysar, 1993, Keysar et al., 2000, Cohen, 2003, McGlone, 2007.) Nevertheless, to get back to our situation of facilitative mediations, although mediations are not literally war, participants may act as if the interaction is like war, or is war. That is, they may use terms such as “defensive”, “attacking” or “ammunition”, and may experience emotions similar to this conceptual field (see Kövecses, 2008). Lakoff and Johnson (1980) focused on the conceptual field of language used. They adopted the practice of identifying conceptual metaphors like ARGUMENT IS WAR that could be seen in the use of words like “attack”, “weak point”, “right on target”, “strategy” and “shoot!” while talking about arguing. According to Lakoff and Johnson, “Metaphors as linguistic expressions are possible precisely because
there are metaphors in a person’s conceptual system”. So, they transformed the linguistic expressions into conceptual metaphors for analysis. “His criticisms were right on target” is the linguistic expression of the conceptual metaphor that argument is war. (These examples are from the first chapter of Lakoff and Johnson (1980)). Thus, the point is not to map the target of argument to the target of war, but to experience arguing through the conceptual domain of war.

Beyond conceptual mapping, another issue involves the nature of the metaphoric language – how metaphoric is it? Most of us, even linguists, think of most language as literal, sprinkled occasionally with figurative language when the literal needs some enhancement. Semantics notes, however, that much (all?) of what we see as literal consists of metaphors we have forgotten. Maybe the whole culture and all the speakers of the language have forgotten something was ever a metaphor. We usually call these “frozen” or “dead” metaphors, and the question is whether they are ever really dead. Frozen things can be brought back to life.

Words and phrases that might appear simply literal (e.g. sit down, story), are not that when examined in the dialogic dynamics of talk. Rather they are constantly shifting between literal and metaphor […] This shifting creates an indeterminacy of meaning around the word or phrase. Indeterminacy and metaphoric blurring may create a space around the meaning of the words that helps speakers feel more comfortable. (Cameron, 2007, p.220)

Think about the difference between sitting down and sitting up and suddenly, perhaps, the phrase “sit down” does not appear so literal. There is a fascinating 1997 book by Zdravko Radman on how fundamental metaphoric thinking is to the world and to language. The chapter entitled “Difficulties with diagnosing the death of a metaphor” concentrates on the limits of literalness as a concept (Radman, 1997). For those of us vaguely remembering English class, we may focus on the contrast between literal and figurative language. The world is not really a stage, those kids are not really little hyenas, but saying they are brings to mind the comparison of living in the world to acting on a theatre stage or of noisy, rambunctious children to a pack of wild jumping animals. People often focus on the kind of comparison – similes (the ones with “like”) versus metaphors (the more direct ones). The present study is not concerned with figurative language per se, but with some of the ways that metaphoric blurring and indeterminacy can shift our reference points. That is, the one-to-one mapping is not the point; the shift to a domain or a stance is what influences our thinking. So, we are not so concerned whether the invocation of war actually maps on to each action of the participants as we are concerned with how the warlike stance affects a conflict.

Some mediation theorists have suggested that conflict mediators must be trained in metaphors so that metaphors occupy a more central role in conflict mediation (Jones and Hughes, 2003, Smith, 2005). Such training may be practical for mediators and disputants alike. Smith (2005) for example, cited Schön’s observation that “differing interests in disputes are understood through metaphoric frames, and they can diverge so much that disputants can’t [even] agree on what the dispute is about” (1993, p.6). One suggestion has been that in conflict mediation, metaphors may help disputants to describe and understand multiple perspectives (Smith, 2005). In short, metaphors may allow disputants and mediators to understand and be understood by each other in a way that direct expression may not be capable of accomplishing. These ideas are yet to be tested.
27.1.3 Demonstration Theory versus Wording Theory

A theory of language that focuses primarily on words cannot be a theory of communication. We need a theory that allows us to look at communication as multimodal and interactive. Various students of language in action have developed the study of language in interaction. In this chapter, we have mentioned Goodwin and Goffman, who are otherwise quite different in their approaches. If one of the benefits of the ideas about metaphor we have discussed is a recognition of the blurring and indeterminacy of shifting stance or shifting domain, we have to ask what speakers are doing when they use a metaphor in interaction – not just what the metaphor means but what the speaker is doing by speaking it. It must have a function and an effect (at least a potential effect) on the interaction, on what the other person can say next, and so on. In the case of a metaphor, what is that? By introducing the new domain, the speaker invites the others to join him or her in using that domain to understand the situation they are in. We might say the metaphor demonstrates a way of understanding, demonstrates a conceptual domain that the speaker finds relevant to the meanings he or she is bringing to the interaction and relevant to the understanding between the participants. Herbert Clark (Clark and Gerrig, 1990) used the notion of demonstration to theorise about what people do when they quote someone. He showed that they don’t necessarily quote verbatim, even when it sounds like verbatim. They use a quotation to demonstrate selected aspects of some speaker from an earlier moment (Wade and Clark, 1993). Demonstrations can be verbal – “Trump said ‘The President can’t have a conflict of interest’”. Or they can be nonverbal – “Trump imitated a reporter with disabilities by depicting his movements”. Like figurative language, demonstrations focus on certain aspects of behaviour or comparison.

In this chapter, we decided to borrow this concept of demonstration and apply it to metaphor. Conceptual metaphors are evident in words used (like the argument words drawn from war language. They are also evident in the stances that people take toward each other. When someone uses a metaphor like “Don’t shoot me because you don’t like my argument”, the metaphor may come from the nonverbal or multimodal (embodied) aspects of the other’s behaviour. Maybe they stiffened or glared, or even did the index finger and thumb gesture for shooting (Landau et al., 2011). Maybe none of their words were related to war, but their behaviour fit that conceptual metaphor. Thus, a conceptual metaphor like ARGUMENT IS WAR can come from manner, posture, etc., as well as from words.

27.1.4 Communication accommodation theory and consequences

We approached metaphors with Communication Accommodation Theory. We wanted to examine the suggestion that using different metaphors might make it harder for people in conflict to understand each other or come together – for example, if a disputant can’t “get past” the other’s sexist language or warlike stance, she or he won’t hear the practical explanation being offered. We chose Communication Accommodation Theory because research on disputants’ convergence and divergence on other aspects of their conflict has proved fruitful (for example, Donahue, 1991, van Camp, 2006). Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) (Giles et al., 1991) aimed to explain how individuals communicatively “match” or distinguish themselves from each other when interacting. According to CAT, “convergence” occurs when a conversational participant demonstrates similarity with the other in terms of things our voices do that identify our attitudes, class, age etc. (sometimes called “vocalics”), as well as words, phrases, linguistic codes, paralinguistics, body movements (“non-vocalics”, or aspects of communication that do not come from the vocal apparatus).
The contrast is between vocal and non-vocal, instead of the more usual verbal and nonver-
bal. Some people include voice under nonverbal information, but the tone changes in the
voice are intimately tied to word and sentence meaning, while nonverbal communication
can include clothes and such. In the theory, convergence is believed to increase perceptions
of similarity, likeability, attractiveness, supportiveness, intelligence, co-operativeness, com-
petence and intimacy. “Divergence”, in contrast, is the accentuation of differences along
the same vocal and non-vocal dimensions and tends to result in consequences opposite the
consequences of convergence. CAT has been used in many contexts; only some examples
are in communication between different generations (McCann and Giles, 2006), between
different speakers of different languages (Young, 1998, Zuengler, 1992), between police
officers and citizens (Giles et al., 2005), and more. Generally, when people are motivated to
come together or be more like the other, they converge in their communication behaviour by
using the same words, ways of speaking, and so forth. When they want distance or contrast,
they seem to exaggerate differences. These processes can be deliberate or unconscious.

Though seemingly straightforward (that is, convergence = positive relational outcomes,
divergence = negative relational outcomes), as a communicative framework, CAT is very
difficult to separate from social roles and conversational rules. Goffman (1979) introduced
“footing” to model participant roles in conversation, showing the importance of the ways
people position themselves vis-à-vis each other to the way they interpret what is said. A
subordinate on the job may correct the boss’ facts or tell the boss not to call her “honey”
(diverging), while taking pains to show deference through tone or style to avoid appearing
“insubordinate” (avoiding divergence). As we know, juggling the different levels of such
interactions can make it difficult to manage complex interactions. This can seem para-
doxical and unclear. The present work answers the need to further investigate the relation
between accommodation and other conversational rules and social norms (Giles et al.,
1991, pp.20–1) by analysing how disputing speakers in mediation manage their acrimony
and manage their accommodation. (After all, they are together in the mediation rather than
out on the street.)

In this research, convergence and divergence are assessed in terms of the metaphors
used to enact acrimonious communication. Do disputants engaging in acrimonious com-
munication show convergence and divergence relative to metaphors? As proposed by CAT,
convergence and divergence of metaphor use should be distinguishable and readily appar-
et. Because convergence is proposed to increase liking and perceptions of increased com-
petence, it is possible that disputants who demonstrate convergence of metaphors would be
less likely to engage in further or more intense acrimonious communication. In contrast, dis-
putants who do not recognise or acknowledge the metaphorical footing of the other would
continue to disagree with each other, as proposed earlier by Schön (1993) and discussed by
Smith (2005, p.6), and then would likely continue to engage in acrimonious communication.

27.1.5 Theoretical and practical implications

This is the end of what at the beginning we called the opening acts. We hope you are inter-
ested by now in our areas of theory and research and eager to see what we make of it in
analysing some examples from the mediation cases. Research regarding acrimonious com-
munication is both theoretically and practically valuable. Theoretically, this chapter will,
first, clarify acrimonious communication in conflict mediation; second, it will consider how
metaphors are related to acrimonious communication while evaluating the claim that meta-
phors are essential to the mediation process; and, last, it will assess how disputants converge
or diverge in their use of metaphors in conflict mediation. Additionally, this study will assess the degree to which the CAT framework provides theoretical insights regarding metaphors in conflict mediation.

Practically, understanding acrimonious communication, metaphors and CAT in conflict mediation may present multiple implications for mediators. For new mediators, acrimonious communication during mediations may be frightening. Having a framework for managing acrimonious communication may increase mediators’ confidence in two primary ways: first, mediators would be able to make sense of and conceptualise acrimonious interactions; second, mediators would have a “how to” model to help with acrimonious communication. Also, if the use of metaphors, metaphorical footing and accommodation have direct implications for the outcomes of conflict mediations, metaphors may, indeed, be essential to mediator training as others have proposed (Jones and Hughes, 2003, Smith, 2005).

### 27.2 Method

As mentioned, we already had a set of video-recorded mediation sessions that we were studying. It was watching and transcribing these sessions that led us to questions about some really acrimonious exchanges and metaphors that we noticed. To come up with a way to focus on those questions, we adopted procedures for identifying appropriate cases and extracting a small corpus of metaphors to analyse. We describe the source of these cases, the procedures for selection and identification of metaphors, and how we organised the data for analysis.

### 27.2.1 Data source

The examples we analyse were drawn from a corpus of facilitative conflict mediation sessions we recorded in a university mediation centre over several years. On approval by the university human subjects committee, disputants who presented themselves to the mediation centre and scheduled voluntary mediations were given a permission form describing the purpose of the research (to study communication in mediation) and asking them to freely consent to video-recording. If they agreed, one or two fixed cameras were turned on by the researcher or an assistant and left running during the session. There was no other interference in the session. The permission form also allowed participants to put restrictions on showing the videos in classes or obscuring their facial features when showing to audiences. Researchers did not have access to any other information about the disputants, and the tapes were coded with the viewing restrictions designated on the permission form. If participants agreed to taping, but not to showing the tapes to anyone besides the researchers, for example, those tapes were marked for that restriction and only viewed by researchers during analysis. If participants agreed to showing the tapes, but only if their facial features were obscured, those tapes were marked for that restriction. If disputants declined to participate in taping, their mediations proceeded without the cameras, and there was no other contact with the researcher.

For this analysis, we selected ten mediation sessions from the collection, each approximately three hours long, giving us a total of 34.7 hours of interaction. The selection was a bit arbitrary; we sought a variety of topics and relationships, and we tended to choose cases we had been studying for other purposes because they were fresh in our minds. The mediations included relationships between romantic partners, friends, roommates and students. All ten mediations involved two disputants with mediators. The mediators for each session varied
but were similar in that all were new mediators, with 60–75 hours of formal training. All the sessions were transcribed and re-transcribed by more than one researcher.

27.2.2 Data selection

To begin identifying segments for study, five members of a research team viewed sessions repeatedly. First, we looked individually for segments of clearly acrimonious communication. At the time, we were a bit frustrated by the lack of an academic definition for acrimonious communication. We decided that we would delay a study to determine that and, instead, proceeded by selecting communication that five people agreed was acrimonious and then determine the features that made it so. Thus, we worked inductively from ordinary understanding to analysis instead of deductively from a definition. Once each of the five team members had rated segments as acrimonious, team members conducted cross-evaluations: at least two team members rated each of the jointly selected segments on a scale of 1 (poor example of acrimonious communication) to 10 (ideal example of acrimonious communication). We selected segments which averaged a rating of at least 5. If the ratings were widely divergent, a third rater and discussion were used to resolve the disparity. Even the disparities were of degree – how ideal was the segment as an example of acrimonious communication? None of the 5 raters rated something as acrimonious that another rater thought was not acrimonious.

A total of 40 segments from the ten mediation recordings were thus selected for analysis because they showed clearly acrimonious communication. The selected segments ranged from 23.3 seconds to 9 minutes and 18.5 seconds, with an average of 2 minutes and 31.8 seconds (n=40, ∑=41 minutes and 11.5 seconds, SD=2 minutes and 13.2 seconds). Some segments were subdivided because of interstitial talk unrelated to acrimonious communication, to more fully isolate the acrimonious communication moments.

27.2.3 Metaphor identification

The next step was to go through the 40 acrimonious segments and identify metaphors. We followed the McCorkle and Mills (1992) notion of figurative language metaphors where conflict is mapped on to some other domain. Some of the most interesting interactions were segments where the participants performed metaphorically in identifiable roles like parent-talking-to-child. Actually, we first called this bad-parent-talking-down-to-child but simplified it as PARENT/CHILD. That is, the disputant clearly demonstrated a condescending, critical parent treating a child with contempt. Using both words and behavioural demonstrations, we agreed on 32 different metaphors in the acrimonious segments. Again, the five researchers first identified these independently, and then compared notes. They discussed the possible metaphors until they reached agreement on 32. If there was no agreement or it was shaky, the putative metaphor was not included in the list for analysis. Keep in mind that we were not trying to substantiate metaphor identification, but to analyse metaphors for which we had high agreement.

Once we had these 32 metaphors, we grouped them into conceptually related domains, following the lead of Lakoff and Johnson (1980). That is, we took words like “shoot”, “army” and “battle” and identified them as the conceptual metaphor CONFLICT IS WAR. (We follow Lakoff and Johnson’s practice of writing the conceptual metaphor that the talk represents or invokes in capital letters.) The conceptual metaphor might be a word that was never used, but it summarises or names the domain of the communication that was used.
We treated the behavioural metaphors in a similar way until we could label the conceptual metaphor. So, the names of the metaphors we are using in the chapter are our names for the metaphors, to help us and the reader keep them straight. We were able to identify eight conceptual metaphors this way. Of these eight, five were selected for this chapter because they were extended in one case or frequent enough across cases to lend themselves well to assessing dimensions of convergence and divergence. These are the five metaphors analysed in this chapter: PARENT/CHILD, LEGAL, IMBALANCE, TERRITORY, and WAR.

27.3 Analysis of the metaphors in mediation sessions

Each metaphor is illustrated below with a description and examples from the mediation sessions. The description identifies content (words, phrases, actions, etc.) as well as processes (for example, continually questioning the other) so as to constitute a metaphor. The description is derived from the data and may not match previous descriptions of conflict metaphors (for example, Wilmot and Hocker, 2005 or the reconciliation metaphors of Cameron, 2007).

“Process metaphors”, akin to what Bogost (2006) calls procedural metaphors, are associated with unfolding metaphorical elements, such as speaking to another as if the other were a naughty child. In the process metaphor, the content of a parent/child relationship is not explicitly stated, but the process of speaking in a particular way is reflective of the stereotypical way a parent might talk to a misbehaving child. As a process metaphor unfolds with more frequency and prevalence, it simultaneously substantiates what this chapter terms “metaphorical footing”, based on Goffman’s (1979) notion of “footing”, or the position or perspective from which one is speaking. That is, a person takes a particular metaphor as the footing from which she or he speaks, and that metaphor becomes increasingly apparent through vocal and non-vocal channels (for example, “Why are you attacking me?” in a war metaphor, or a series of rapid questions, as in a legal metaphor).

“Content metaphors”, on the other hand, include specific words or behavioural processes that are observable and do not require the procedural context. A disputant, for example, may say, “I feel baited by you”, or may hold up the pointer finger while shaking his hand, both of which could be conveyed with one word or phrase (“baited”), or one picture (a pointer finger raised in the air). Content metaphors consist of “metaphorical features”, or components of a metaphor. Metaphorical features do not necessarily indicate adoption of a metaphorical footing. An individual may primarily be footed in a metaphor of war, but say, “That wasn’t my deal” using a metaphor based on contracts or business. The individual has employed a metaphorical feature (for example “deal”), but has not evidenced a process metaphor, nor adoption of (or change to) a footing such as contracts or business.

27.3.1 Five frequent metaphors

The PARENT/CHILD metaphor evokes an authoritarian figure dominating another in a subordinating style. Content of this metaphor includes, for example, pointing a finger, creating a physically larger presence by expanding the chest or leaning forward, “talking down to”, or using phrases such as “you should” or “you should not”. (Maybe it should be the BAD-PARENT metaphor!) Processes of this metaphor would be sequences of scolding-like behaviour (that is, one dominating and telling the other what should be done, and the other acting submissive), following-up/checking up on (that is, a series of close-ended questions in sequence) or nagging (that is, a series of “should” statements in sequence).
Nick and Amy demonstrate the parent/child metaphor in the following interaction. The metaphors are in italics; all caps indicate raised voices. M designates the mediators in each case.

A: Nick can I ask you
N: Yeah
A: Did you talk to your father about this?
N: YEAH
A: Did he help?
N: Yeah
A: Did you tell him the truth?
N: YES I told him the truth as I understood it. But the truth as I understood it is that you lied to me about some things that are pretty important. I DON’T. I DON’T WANT TO GO INTO IT. I’M NOT. IT’S NOT uh IT’S NOT AN EXCUSE
A: You’re so not ready for this

In this sequence, Amy appears to be taking a parental role, consistently questioning Nick, and Nick responds deferentially to her questions until becoming defensive with an increased tone. Amy then parentally proclaims her assessment of his capacity to participate in mediation, telling him, “You’re so not ready for this”.

The LEGAL metaphor includes language reflective of, and used within, the legal system. Examples within this metaphor include proofs, accusations, prosecution, and defending. Additionally, this category includes language associated with law enforcement, such as thievery, stalking and restraining orders.

Matt has just been accused of having a faulty memory, to which he responds with a legal metaphor, “Um, excuse me, can I appeal over here (looking to the other people)”. Another example of a legal metaphor is Amy’s, “I’ve seen a lot of first-hand evidence … this isn’t the only time that you’ve exhibited tendencies of [dangerous behaviours]”.

IMBALANCE, as a metaphor, captures a general experience of uncertainty and even precariousness. An expressed sense of loss or confusion, or accusations of emotional or mental instability fall into this category. Mental illnesses are commonly portrayed (though falsely in many cases) as dangerous and unpredictable; in this guise they fit here. Additionally, the uncertainty of outcomes may be noted in words such as “threat”, or phrases such as “the axe is ready to fall”.

Amy demonstrates the IMBALANCE metaphor in the following encounter: But I didn’t make threats against you like, I wasn’t like making you fear for your physical safety, I wasn’t harassing you”. Flo and Soo highlight mental instabilities as a particular precarious state when Flo says to Soo, “I think you should see a psychiatrist first (laughs).

The TERRITORY metaphor refers to language associated with physical, psychological, or emotional space. Words within this metaphor are related to space (for example, “public or private space”), boundary crossing, invasion (as in “invasion of privacy”), or transgression.

Mary is assessing Jane’s feelings toward her and has concluded that Jane is angry and upset. Jane refers to a trans-corporal experience, wherein her “internal space” has been brought into the conversation.

M: But you’re angry and upset
J: How do you know that? You’re not in my body, are you? (smiles, head inclined towards the Mediator)
By telling Mary that she is “not in my body”, particularly using the word “in”, Jane is using the metaphor of TERRITORY.

The TERRITORY metaphor is most obvious in the vocalic and embodied interaction between Sean and Ruth. Sean is criticising what he calls Ruth’s mixed messages to him. He tells Ruth to not say, “I don’t want any scalp massages” while she’s giving him a scalp massage, and to not playfully say, “look, there’s food on my arm and then expect me not to lick it off”. Vocally, they are negotiating territorial issues (that is, massages, licking her arm). They are also engaged in the same process through embodiment. During the sequence, Sean touches Ruth’s head, followed by putting his arm in Ruth’s face, which Ruth blocks with her arm and pushes away. In both instances, Sean is crossing physical boundaries and Ruth is responding by accepting or physically pushing Sean away. Part of their dispute is over how intimate she will allow him to be with her, and it is carried out partially through these behaviours.

The WAR metaphor is one of the most common conflict metaphors in these data, as well. Words reflective of the WAR metaphor are “attack”, “battle”, “defending”, “weapons”, “ammunition”, “divide and conquer” and “fight”. For example, referring to their history, Amy tells Nick, “I had a lot of ammunition with which to get you had I so chosen and I didn’t”. Darby, who was rejected as a resident in a co-op, says, “And I felt like they were trying to divide and conquer- … I DON’T BACK DOWN from a fight”.

27.3.2 Convergence and divergence of metaphors

During mediation sessions, do the participants accommodate each other’s metaphors? Accommodation is assessed through convergence or divergence. As noted previously, metaphors may be classified as content metaphors or process metaphors. Would there be a difference between the two types during mediation?

The first analysis concerns convergence or divergence of metaphors. The second analysis concerns the effect of convergence or divergence of the metaphors on the communication of acrimony in the immediate interaction, as well as the overall outcomes of the mediation sessions. The third analysis concerns how closely the results are predicted by CAT (that is, convergence = positive outcomes and divergence = negative outcomes).

Content convergence and divergence: The convergence and divergence of metaphor content is more obvious to identify than accommodation of metaphor processes. As disputants engage in the unfolding mediation process, they pick up on or ignore particular words or phrases. A topical stream of metaphors flows through their conversations in a pattern that might allow mediators to notice the metaphors which seem particularly salient for disputants. Examples from Bob and Alice, Flo and Soo, and Darby and Matt demonstrate this fluid conversational convergence and divergence of metaphors.

Bob and Alice demonstrate convergence of metaphorical content with the legal metaphor. Bob has presented to Alice his “problem” that she has not given any time stipulations on an ad for proof-reading her paper. She has not paid him because she felt his proof-reading was poorly done and offered no benefit to her. Alice introduces the term “fair”, and the concept of equitable exchange of goods or services, which she has valued as “nothing” and useless. Bob follows by employing the term “fair compensation”, implying that she was in violation of the fairness “according to your ad”. Alice, in turn, uses the term “fair compensation”, and again frames her statement in terms of an agreed-upon, equitable exchange, claiming she received “no help” from him. He insists on talking about their situation as if they are arguing a lawsuit.
A: So, what you’re suggesting is that uh, do you think it’s fair that I pay you 32 dollars for NOTHING, I mean, I did take a look at what you had done for me, obviously, and it’s useless right now because I have already submitted my paper, but you still feel it’s fair for me to pay you 32 dollars right?

B: According to your ad, and I’m having a struggle between just maintaining good relations and fair compensation …

A: So a fair compensation for getting no help is 32 dollars? It’s 32 dollars.

Alice and Bob both adopt the legal metaphor to discuss their transaction in terms of “fairness”, demonstrating convergence of metaphor content.

The interaction between Flo and Soo also demonstrates convergence of metaphorical content. Flo maintains that her efforts have been “to try to settle” matters between them, but Soo feels those efforts have become a nuisance and a threat. After Soo introduces the terms “threatening” and “harassing”, they are woven through their interaction.

S: No, all your efforts to me sound like threatening and harassing
F: huh, what kind of threaten and harassment?
S: Why mention go to court every time you send me email?
S: … if somebody keeps bothering you like you’re not gonna be happy about that … YEAH and after this email, I responded this is the fourth email that you’ve sent to me and I respond this is harassment

M2: Ok, wait a minute
F: What kind of harassment
S: IT IS HARASSMENT. I perceive harassment. I can call 911 - call police

Darby’s report “I felt like they were trying to divide and conquer … I don’t back down from a fight” demonstrates her conceptualisation of the situation as confrontational and warlike. However, content from other participants immediately prior to or following Darby’s turn did not make any reference to the war metaphor; she extended the metaphorical bait, but the others did not bite. Their talk diverged from Darby’s war metaphor, so there was no convergence.

Process convergence and divergence: The convergence and divergence of metaphor processes is more involved than metaphor content. Accommodation of metaphor process is primarily noticed through speech qualities, such as grammar and vocalics, like tone of voice, and through general speaking style consisting of smiles, shrugs, stares, glares, coyness, pace or a sequence of questions or accusations. Metaphor processes are perhaps best noted in examples from Ruth and Sean, Bob and Alice, and Nick and Amy.

Ruth and Sean highlight the process of convergence and divergence on the parent/child metaphor. Sean seems to initially take a parental role, while Ruth, overall, responds in the corresponding deferential child role. Sean’s parental role can be noticed by his directives toward Ruth, telling her what she “does not get to” do or say, and instructing her in what a clear message is and what is not. Although converging on the process of the metaphor (for example, accepting the dynamics of the parent/child metaphor), Sean and Ruth are divergent in terms of the metaphor content.

S: Ok, you don’t get to say, “I don’t want any scalp massages from you”, as you’re doing that to me. That’s not a clear message
R: Uh huh. OK
S: Ok, you don’t get to say, “Look – there’s food on my arm” and then expect me not to lick it off, because that’s what we’ve been …

Up to this point, Sean has told Ruth what she doesn’t get to say, and Ruth has responded in a relationally complementary style (“Uh huh”, “ok”). As the segment continues, however, Ruth diverges from the parent/child metaphorical footing process to an alternative footing.

R: I haven’t done that before. But like I do push your arm away
S: Ok well then, that’s clear
R: OK, so you’ll stop when I do that
S: YES

In this exchange, initial divergence (that is, Ruth’s minimal response) perpetuated the parent/child metaphor. However, as Ruth shifted to more convergence (by acknowledging what Sean was saying and using his term “OK” in a structurally similar fashion, as well as increasing her amount of talk), she began to disrupt the metaphor. Sean followed suit, relinquishing his role within the metaphor, allowing both to come to an agreeable solution.

Process convergence can also be noted in Bob and Alice’s interaction. Bob shows adherence to the legal metaphor through his grammatical style and his series of questions. First, he adopts legally stylised statements of proof, argument, and conclusions. His presentation style is reminiscent of Perry Mason, full of intricacies and innuendo.

B: Yes. There’s a very SUBTLE very small degree, like one degree out of 360 degrees, a one degree problem that you mentioned that’s gonna give me a problem … and that is (clears throat) uh you don’t have a DATE on here, no expiration date. If I could afford to, which I cannot, legal costs would detract, or take me away from my class and [a previously mentioned] project. Without an expiration date on this ad, since you have said I will pay and I just heard you say but I can’t pay, there is a TIME conflict that I am having …

Alice initially responds by questioning Bob’s approach, but he continues without acknowledging her, holding forth like a prosecutor who will not be interrupted. Alice’s next attempt to speak shows convergence to the legal metaphor. She first adopts the process of the metaphor (the legalised presentation style), letting herself be interrogated, like a witness who is cornered, and finally confesses:

B: ... How much time did it take you to make this advertisement? How many hours … (holding up the ad)
A: I don’t know, I don’t remember –
B: How much did it cost you to make this advertisement?
A: Well so far a lot, like two hours in the afternoon –
B: How much … how much did it COST YOU? (leaning forward)
A: I don’t know what you mean by how much does it cost me?
Mediator 1: Monetary cost?
B: Yes, dollars and cents. How much did you pay someone else to make this …
A: I, I did it myself
B: Ok
A final example of accommodation and process convergence with the legal metaphor occurs between Nick and Amy. While particular terms are picked up by disputants (for example, “justified”), Nick and Amy demonstrate how the process of the legal metaphor may unfold to become acknowledged in the content, too. Additionally, Nick and Amy demonstrate divergence out of the legal metaphor into a different metaphorical footing.

In this segment, Amy keeps pursuing an answer regarding what “I lied about”. Three successive moves on her part refer to not knowing what Nick is referring to and seeking information.

A: I just don’t understand why he seems to be saying that I lied to him and that justified him stalking me and then he won’t tell me what I lied about

N: I didn’t say I justified anything … I just said that there’s a limit to the number of things that I will take responsibility for. That’s a pretty weak statement

A: … This lie is so important. I mean I would kind of like to just know so that you’re giving me that, you know, what it is look. If you don’t want to tell them you can write it down and send it to me. I don’t know what it is …

A: Yeah, I mean I don’t know if it’s important to this process or not because I can’t tell, because I don’t know what it is

Although not questioning directly, Amy adopts the footing of one who is adamantly seeking information, similar to the role of a cross-examiner or interrogator. Nick does not answer her questions, but rather indicates that he perceives her continual interrogation as an “inquest”, a judicial process of questioning to determine the cause of death: “Why don’t we try it out without going into the inquest?” Nick converges on the process of the metaphor (demanding answers) with a response in the content of the metaphor (“the inquest”). In response, then, Amy, with increased volume, reaffirms that she has been questioning him, even though no direct question (that is, no “question”) has been asked of Nick when she practically shouts, “WHY CAN’T YOU JUST ANSWER A QUESTION?”

At this point, Nick responds briefly to her but then shifts metaphorical footing from the legal metaphor to “the real problem” that he is “too easily baited” by Amy (a hunting metaphor), and an imbalance metaphor: “I don’t want to be put in a situation where … If I just had some kind of formal indication [I was safe], that would reduce tension”.

N: Cause I feel like I’d actually have to get my diary out and write a little essay here. No, I mean I’m sorry IT’S A FLIP WAY OF PUTTING IT, but I think I would have. I feel like I’m too easily baited by you and that gets us to the real problem here today. I don’t want to be put in a situation where you can where I can uh, NO THAT’S NOT EXACTLY IT. I don’t really feel baited by you, well maybe I do now that we’re talking here. I don’t know. BUT MY GENERAL THOUGHT IS if you come up if for some reason you do come up and say something to me and I just don’t want to talk to you, if I could just say like ‘go away’ IF I had some kind of formal indication that that I could speak to you, that would reduce the tension on my part.

Thus, Nick and Amy’s dialogue converges metaphorical processes of the legal metaphor with content of the same metaphor, followed then by divergence to new metaphorical footing about rules of talking.

These examples are but a few of those available to demonstrate convergence and divergence in terms of metaphorical content and metaphorical processes within the conflict mediation setting.
27.3.3 Consequences of metaphorical accommodation

According to Communication Accommodation Theory, convergence is related to multiple positive relational outcomes. A central focus of this research was to see how convergence or divergence of metaphors between disputants affects the relationship of disputants, and the overall levels of acrimonious communication. Also, following Smith and others and CAT, greater convergence of metaphors should bring consequent increased benefits for disputants; greater divergence, however, would indicate mutual misunderstanding, and, consequently, would result in no impact or have a negative impact on acrimonious communication. That is, divergence would maintain or increase acrimony.

The data, however, show that convergence of metaphors did not consistently demonstrate the positive relational consequences. In fact, there was convergence in destructive modes, such that convergence was not necessarily a constructive or positive sign. The metaphor data highlight the concept that a yelling argument is not good convergence. Yes, it is convergence, but it does not result in the positive outcomes. Indeed, adopting the same destructive behaviour in a conflict situation often leads to escalation. A few examples will serve to demonstrate the inconsistent outcomes that resulted.

In the exchange between Sean and Ruth mentioned previously, initial divergence (that is, Ruth’s minimal response) perpetuated the parent/child metaphor. As Ruth shifted to more convergence (that is, by acknowledging what he was saying and using his term “OK” in a structurally similar fashion, as well as increasing her amount of talk), she began to disrupt the metaphor. In essence, she diverged from the metaphor (that is, she did not continue to interactionally accept the child role), but converged to share the relational space where both could dialogue. Sean followed suit, relinquishing his role as the parent within the metaphor, which then allowed both to come to an agreeable solution. Contrary to CAT predictions, convergence on the metaphor, in essence, perpetuated acrimony. Divergence, in contrast, led to an agreement and a more equitable relationship (at least for the moment).

For Bob and Alice, both demonstrated convergence of metaphorical content of the legal metaphor, employing variations of the term “fairness”. Bob used repetitive questions, similar to legal proceedings, as well as legally stylised statements of proof, argument, and conclusions. Both demonstrated some operation within a legal metaphor. In this case, the participants converged in terms of the metaphor and used it to seek a mutually acceptable fair solution by framing their dispute as an issue of justice. While convergence on the metaphor clarified some aspects of the disputants’ perspectives of the conflict, convergence on the metaphor alone did not seem to be enough to resolve the dispute. This may be in part because the legal metaphor contains the possibility of remaining in opposition to the other party. When Alice converged the closest to Bob, that is, when she adopted his legalistic talk about her ad for proof-reading, their opposition was increased. They converged on the metaphor, but the metaphor itself contained oppositional elements. Consequently, convergence alone, within this metaphor, may not be sufficient to guarantee resolution since the roles of courtroom accuser and defendant are not conducive on their face to negotiation.

In the case of Nick and Amy, although they seemed to converge in terms of what both perceived as happening (that is, Amy’s search for information and Nick’s feeling interrogated), this metaphor does not lead to resolution. Progress in their search for a solution came when the legal metaphor was interrupted by the insertion of alternative metaphors. When Nick named the metaphor they were producing as an “inquest”, Nick was demonstrating convergence with the legal metaphor and simultaneously objecting to it. Amy’s response was
increased acrimony ("WHY CAN’T YOU JUST ANSWER A QUESTION?"). Converging in terms of the metaphor seemed to exacerbate the acrimony within the mediation.

The same process occurred with Flo and Soo. Both demonstrated convergence of metaphorical content of the imbalance metaphor. The exchange, however, increased in acrimony, eventually escalating to the point where Flo, laughing bitterly, says to Soo, “I think you should see a psychiatrist first”. Soo’s riposte: “You should, too”. The mediation ended with acrimony. Tit for tat may be convergence, but it obviously is not accommodation.

One example where convergence was beneficial at a particular point in a mediation occurred between Nick and Amy with the imbalance metaphor. Both were employing terms such as “stalking”, “out of control”, returning to one’s senses (indicating being “out of their senses”, “irrational”, or “crazy”), “threat” and “killing”. Both used words demonstrating convergence on the imbalance metaphor. Although Nick did not fully adopt Amy’s assessment of “stalking”, both were using words constitutive of the imbalance metaphor:

**A:** Do you think that you weren’t stalking me?

**N:** I don’t know to me the word connotes a longer – at least a long-term or middle-term pattern of behaviour. I was out of control for a few days (…) I-I-I know I do not pose much of a threat to you. I don’t think I pose any threat to you at this point. Actually, I feel threatened ironically because of the situation we are in now. Amy, I’m not kidding about that. (Nick leaning forward, more aggressive stance)

**Mediator1:** Amy is this something that you haven’t heard from Nick before – that he feels threatened by your actions?

**A:** WELL I mean(…) that was pretty much the impression that I got was that he was feeling threatened by me. And I know that the only thing that seemed to make him stop this behaviour that I’ve defined as stalking is when I told him that I’d told my mentor and he realized that some of the academics knew. And my mentor used the phrase academic suicide and as far as I can see that’s all that brought Nick to his senses

**N:** I don’t know if you’d filed a complaint against me or something and I tried to apologize …

**A:** I mean of course I find your presence extremely unpleasant but I don’t feel personally threatened I mean I usually leave the room when you enter now because I dislike being in the same room as you not because I think you’re going to kill me …

Adoption of the imbalance metaphor was central to their conflict resolution, allowing both participants to identify what they felt threatened by. Unlike earlier examples, though, it was reciprocal. Both claimed they felt threatened by the other. Consequently, they were both able to acknowledge use of the metaphor and structure an agreeable resolution for both disputants. Convergence on the imbalance metaphor, in this instance, seemed beneficial and necessary for the dispute resolution.

### 27.4 Discussion

This chapter began by framing acrimonious communication within a context of metaphors. Metaphors, as was proposed by Smith (2005) and Schön (1993), were presented as an integral framework for conflict mediation or training mediators (Jones and Hughes, 2003,
Our examples might suggest a different approach, one that considered which metaphors may be more beneficial or detrimental to adopt. Convergence was often a problem rather than a path to solution. Tit for tat on destructive metaphors can be considered a sort of convergence but definitely not positive accommodation.

The analyses suggest three central considerations when using metaphors to frame acrimonious communication between disputants during mediation. First, the metaphors that are adopted by the other participants are indeterminate, and they change when a different person uses them. Demonstration theory suggests that speakers have their own purposes and may adopt the metaphor to twist it or reject its implications. The LEGAL, IMBALANCE and WAR metaphors in particular, seemed to have sub-components that enabled disputants to converge on the metaphor, but to adopt adversarial stances within the metaphor. The roles of prosecutor, judge, jury, defendant, etc., still allow for opposition to occur within the converged-upon metaphor, and, in fact, adopting the metaphor to reject its meaning may be a powerful move that is anything but accommodating. In practice, mediators are well-advised to consider the potential consequences – intended and unintended – of highlighting a given metaphor.

The second proposition is that the value of identifying acrimony-related metaphors in conflict resolution may not be in the metaphor itself, but in the ability of the metaphor to be a vehicle that creates increased understanding among participants. As seen in a few of the examples we showed, identification of the metaphor allowed participants to recognise the current stances of themselves and the other participant, mutually acknowledge that stance, and then decide whether to maintain that stance or change it to something more productive. From this perspective, the specific metaphors in this research are valuable because they raise awareness, in words and actions, about the conflict. In essence, the metaphors provide a rich view into relational dynamics, with an accompanying framework that allows mediators and participants to describe and then address the dynamics.

The third proposition is that for metaphors to be effectively used in conflict mediation, participants may need to integrate the same metaphor across different stages of mediation, defined by Domenici and Littlejohn (2001) as introduction, storytelling, problem-solving and resolution. That is, disputants may need to employ the same metaphorical footing as they introduce and present the conflict (the introduction), as they relate their perspective and significance of the conflict (the storytelling), as they discuss potential solutions (problem-solving) and as they reach an agreement (resolution). In our data, disputants introduced a metaphor into the dialogue, and were comfortable sharing their perspective according to the metaphor. Disputants did not, however, readily discuss problem solving in terms of the metaphor, nor did they reach resolution using processes or content associated with the particular metaphor. While maintaining the same metaphorical footing from stage to stage in mediation may facilitate understanding and consistency among disputants and mediators, switches in metaphorical footing may also impede the process by requiring that all participants assimilate and negotiate the meaning of the new metaphor within the mediation session. Each new metaphor may require a new form of meaning management, and consequently, may extend the mediation.

Accommodation, however, that is associated with respect, liking or the desire to be accepted by the other may require a shift away from such metaphors as “legal” or “scolding-parent-to-child” unless possibly they are reciprocal and lead to understanding of the other’s vulnerability. Perhaps similarity or convergence, even accommodation, per se, may not be as important as the semantic content of the communication. Metaphors like JOURNEY or GROWTH that signal progress or a more accommodating or respectful attitude may be more influential. Indeed, mediators may need to be alert for process metaphors that help to maintain an acrimonious tone, like parent/child, but are not specific labels or content to leverage for intervention. Such process metaphors may, in fact, be harder to recognise and address.
27.5 Future research

It may also be time to extend our attention from the language and interaction structure most common in our study of conflict talk to date to include more analysis of embodiment. Much of the effect of the metaphors discovered in these exchanges comes from the embodied nature of, for example, the interrogator. It is the hectoring style as much as the questions per se that creates the effect. These are metaphoric and generic – not impersonating a particular interrogator from a movie or TV, but invoking the notion of an interrogator. Cameron (2007) neatly summarised the following patterns of metaphor in discourse, to which an additional pattern may be added:

Metaphor is seen as linguistic, cognitive, affective and sociocultural. Metaphor is linguistic in that the primary data available to discourse analysts are metaphors in the utterances of discourse participants, and variation in the lexicogrammar of metaphors is significant (Deignan, 2005). It is cognitive in that individual instances of metaphor may reflect larger conceptual metaphorical structures in which larger domains are mapped on to each other (Lakoff, 1993). It is affective in that linguistic metaphors often carry the perspectival dynamics of the speaker: they are evaluative, emphatic or act to position speakers relative to other people or to the content of which they talk (Cameron, 2003, Graumann, 1990). Metaphor is sociocultural as well as cognitive, because social interaction is the site of metaphor use and evolution, and because social groups develop particular metaphorical ways of thinking, together with ways of using metaphor in language, that may act as markers or constructors of social and role identity (Quinn, 1991).

(Cameron, 2007)

The proposed addition is the performance aspects of talk, including production of intonation, pace, and so on, embodiment of posture, gesture, facial expressions, and so on, as well as footing and shifts in footing while speaking. Speaking style and production of language may be embedded in mimetic (Halliwell, 2012) moments embodying the speaking and language style of some generic personage or role. Thus, the stance of some stereotype is embodied for metaphoric effect (Goodwin and Alim, 2010, Mittelberg and Evola, 2014, p.200).

One way that participants in these mediation sessions “do” acrimony is to adopt metaphors that encompass roles such as prosecutor and scolding parent, and such conditions as imbalance. The frustration, harsh tone of voice, fast and pause-free pace, pointing and jabbing fingers, and scowls and sneers associated with acrimony fit within or even “make” the metaphor and allow for repetition and even escalation. Tannen makes the point that any repetition is a new construction because people put their own spin even on the closest quotation as they accomplish their own new meaning (Tannen, 2007, pp.21–2).

Given that acrimonious communication can destroy relations and leave personal and relational goals unmet, further analysis of acrimonious communication, including its transmission through metaphors, can be informative and enlightening. Mediators may want to consciously address the acrimonious stance, even if mediating disputants do not expressly use content that is adversarial. The emotional stance of acrimony that is produced by the interaction between such disputants may be harmful and difficult to overcome. Since it does not explicitly fall into the lists of things disputants are not supposed to do (like name-calling) and may be more in the attitude than in the language, mediators may be hard-pressed to intervene. Nevertheless, the negative consequences of acrimony require mediators to give it their best, including consideration of the role metaphors may play in the process. In words appropriate to this chapter, successful dispute resolution – especially when confronted with
the toxicity of acrimony – may depend on the mediators’ ability to employ every weapon in their arsenal, every piece of evidence in their case, and every treat in their snack bag.

Note
The paper that formed the basis of this chapter was the winner of the Top Paper in the Peace and Conflict Division of the National Communication Association, November 2014. Earlier analyses of these data were also presented at various conferences. Co-authors of those presentations were Erik Green, Andrew Tollison, Scott V. Anderson, Jill Kelly, Kelly Rosetto, Kruti Parekh, Emily Richardson, E. Nambiar and Rudy Capece, who are gratefully acknowledged for their contributions.

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