



Metaphor and Culture

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Abstract. To see and appreciate the relationship between metaphor and culture in its complexity, we have to deal with a number of basic issues. By metaphor in this paper, I will primarily mean “conceptual metaphor” that can have a number of linguistic manifestations (see Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Kövecses 2002/2010). A conceptual metaphor consists of a set of correspondences, or mappings, between a “source” and a “target” domain. The meaning of particular metaphorical linguistic expressions is based on such correspondences.

The issues that form a part of the “metaphor-culture interface” are numerous. In this paper, I will discuss the following six. First, we need to ask if there are at all universal conceptual metaphors that are in a sense culture-independent. Second, if there are (which is the case), how can we account for their universality? Third, if we also find in our metaphors variation (which we do), what are the major cultural dimensions along which the metaphors vary? Fourth, we need to examine whether broad, general cultural dimensions are sufficient to account for all variation in metaphors (they are not), or whether metaphor variation also depends on more fine-grained contextual factors. Fifth, is a more fine-grained theory of metaphor variation helpful in understanding everyday talk, poetic language, or both? Sixth, and finally, what role does metaphor play in the creation and understanding of discourse?

Keywords: conceptual metaphor, variation, embodiment, metaphor-culture interface

1. Universal metaphors

Native speakers of all languages use a large number of metaphors when they communicate about the world (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). Such metaphorically used words and expressions may vary considerably across different languages. For example, the idea that English expresses with the words *spending your time* is expressed in Hungarian as *filling your time*. The “images” different languages and cultures employ can be extremely diverse. Given this diversity, it is natural to ask: Are there any universal metaphors at all, if by “universal” we mean those linguistic metaphors that occur in each and every language? Not only is this question difficult because it goes against our everyday experiences and intuitions as regards metaphorical language in diverse cultures, but also because it is extremely difficult to study, given that there are 4–6000 languages spoken around the world today.

However, if we go beyond looking at metaphorically used linguistic expressions in different languages, and, instead of linguistic metaphors, we look at conceptual metaphors, we begin to notice that many conceptual metaphors appear in a wide range of languages. For example, Hoyt Alverson (1994) found that the TIME IS SPACE conceptual metaphor can be found in such diverse languages and cultures as English, Mandarin Chinese, Hindi, and Sesotho. Many other researchers suggested that the same conceptual metaphor is present in a large number of additional languages. Several other conceptual metaphors appear in a large number of different languages. Kövecses (2000a), based on evidence from a number of linguists who are native speakers of the respective languages, points out that English, Japanese, Chinese, Hungarian, Wolof, Zulu, Polish, and others, possess the metaphor AN ANGRY PERSON IS A PRESSURIZED CONTAINER to various degrees. Ning Yu’s (1995, 1998) work indicates that the metaphor HAPPINESS IS UP is also present not only in English but also in Chinese. The system of metaphors called the Event Structure metaphor (Lakoff 1993) includes submetaphors such as CAUSES ARE FORCES, STATES ARE CONTAINERS, PURPOSES ARE DESTINATIONS, ACTION IS MOTION, DIFFICULTIES ARE IMPEDIMENTS (TO MOTION), and so forth. Remarkably, this set of submetaphors occurs, in addition to English, in such widely different languages and cultures as Chinese (Yu 1998) and Hungarian (Kövecses 2005). Eve Sweetser (1990) noticed that the KNOWING IS SEEING and the more general MIND IS THE BODY metaphors can be found in many European languages and are probably good candidates for (near-)universal metaphors. As a final example, Lakoff and Johnson (1999) describe the metaphors used for one’s inner life in English. It turns out that metaphors such as SELF CONTROL IS OBJECT POSSESSION, SUBJECT AND SELF ARE ADVERSARIES, THE SELF IS A CHILD, are shared by English, Japanese, and Hungarian. Given that one’s inner life is a highly elusive phenomenon, and hence would seem to be heavily culture- and language-dependent, one would expect a great deal of significant cultural variation in such a metaphor. All in all, then, we

have a number of cases that constitute near-universal or potentially universal conceptual metaphors, although not universal metaphors in the strong sense.

How can we have (near-)universal metaphors?

How is it possible that such conceptual metaphors exist in such diverse languages and cultures? After all, the languages belong to very different language families and represent very different cultures of the world. Several answers to this question lend themselves for consideration. First, we can suggest that by some miracle all these languages developed the same conceptual metaphors for happiness, time, purpose, etc. Second, we can consider the possibility that languages borrowed the metaphors from each other. Third, we can argue that there may be some universal basis for the same metaphors to develop in the diverse languages.

Let us take as an example the HAPPINESS IS UP conceptual metaphor, first discussed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) in English. The conceptual metaphor can be seen in such linguistic expressions as *to feel up*, *to be on cloud nine*, *to be high*, and others. Yu (1995, 1998) noticed that the conceptual metaphor can also be found in Chinese. And evidence shows that it also exists in Hungarian. Below are some linguistic examples: (Yu uses the grammatical abbreviations PRT = particle and ASP = aspect marker.)

Chinese:

(1) HAPPY IS UP

Ta hen gao-xing.
he very high-spirit
He is very high-spirited/happy.

Ta xing congcong de.
he spirit rise-rise PRT
His spirits are rising and rising./He's pleased and excited.

Zhe-xia tiqi le wo-de xingzhi.
this-moment raise ASP my mood
This time it lifted my mood/interest.

Hungarian:

(2) HAPPINESS IS UP

Ez a film feldobott.
 this the film up-threw-me
 This film gave me a high. -This film made me happy.

Majd elszáll a boldogságtól.
 almost away-flies-he/she the happiness-from
 He/she is on cloud nine.

English, Mandarin Chinese, and Hungarian (a Finno-Ugric language) belong to different language families, which developed independently for much of their history. It is also unlikely that the three languages had any significant impact on each other in their recent history. This is not to say that such an impact never shapes particular languages as regards their metaphors (e.g., the processes of globalisation and the widespread use of the internet may “popularise” certain conceptual metaphors, such as TIME IS A COMMODITY), but only to suggest that the particular HAPPINESS IS UP metaphor does not exist in the three languages because, say, Hungarian borrowed it from Chinese and English from Hungarian.

So how did the same conceptual metaphor emerge then in these diverse languages? The best answer seems to be that there is some “universal bodily experience” that led to its emergence. Lakoff and Johnson argued early that English has the metaphor because when we are happy, we tend to be physically up, moving around, be active, jump up and down, smile (i.e., turn up the corners of the mouth), rather than down, inactive, and static, and so forth. These are undoubtedly universal experiences associated with happiness (or more precisely, joy), and they are likely to produce potentially universal (or near-universal) conceptual metaphors. The emergence of a potentially universal conceptual metaphor does not, of course, mean that the linguistic expressions themselves will be the same in different languages that possess a particular conceptual metaphor (Barcelona 2000, Maalej 2004).

Kövecses (1990, 2000a) proposed, furthermore, that the universal bodily experiences can be captured in the conceptual metonymies associated with particular concepts. Specifically, in the case of emotion concepts, such as happiness, anger, love, pride, and so forth, the metonymies correspond to various kinds of physiological, behavioural, and expressive reactions. These reactions provide us with a profile of the bodily basis of emotion concepts. Thus, the metonymies give us a sense of the embodied nature of concepts, and the embodiment of concepts may be overlapping, that is, (near-)universal, across

different languages and language families. Such universal embodiment may lead to the emergence of shared conceptual metaphors.

Joseph Grady (1997) developed the Lakoff-Johnson view further by proposing that we need to distinguish “complex metaphors” from “primary metaphors”. His idea was that complex metaphors (e.g., THEORIES ARE BUILDINGS) are composed of primary metaphors (e.g., LOGICAL ORGANIZATION IS PHYSICAL STRUCTURE). The primary metaphors consist of correlations of a subjective experience with a physical experience. As a matter of fact, it turned out that many of the conceptual metaphors discussed in the cognitive linguistic literature are primary metaphors in this sense. For instance, HAPPY IS UP is best viewed as a primary metaphor, where being happy is a subjective experience and being physically up is a physical one that is repeatedly associated with it. Other primary metaphors include MORE IS UP, PURPOSES ARE DESTINATIONS, and INTIMACY IS CLOSENESS. On this view, it is the primary metaphors that are potentially universal.

Primary metaphors function at a fairly local and specific level of conceptualization, and hence in the brain. At the same time, the brain is also characterized by much more global metaphoric potentialities, or principles. Indeed, the major research question for several cognitive archaeologists is: What kind of brain is necessary for metaphorical thought? Cognitive archaeologist Steven Mithen (1996, 1998) suggests that the brain of humans before the Upper Palaeolithic period in Europe (100,000 to 30,000 years ago) was a domain specific brain. In it, cognitive domains related to tools, the natural world, and social interaction were isolated. These early humans were not capable of metaphoric thought until the Upper Palaeolithic period, when the domain-specific brain became more fluid and allowed the interpretation of knowledge in one domain in terms of knowledge in another domain. This newer brain was a “cognitively fluid” brain. For example, in cave drawings people may be represented as animals. In the terminology of the cognitive linguistic view of metaphor, humans in the Upper Palaeolithic developed the PEOPLE ARE ANIMALS conceptual metaphor. Other conceptual metaphors pointed out by Mithen (1998: 171) include:

ANIMALS AND PLANTS ARE PEOPLE

ANIMALS AND PLANTS ARE STRUCTURED OBJECTS

PEOPLE ARE STRUCTURED OBJECTS

Furthermore, in the same way as animals can be metaphorically viewed as humans and humans can be viewed as animals, objects can be seen as humans. A famous example of this was described by Keith Basso (1967), who showed that in the language of the Western Apache cars are metaphorically viewed in terms of the human body. In addition, Bernd Heine and his colleagues’ work (Heine, Hünemeyer, and Claudi 1991, Heine 1995, Heine and Kuteva 2002) reveals other large-scale

metaphorical processes people seem to employ (near-)universally; for example, spatial relations are commonly understood as parts of the human body (e.g., the head means up and the feet means down) (for more detail, see also Kövecses 2006). These conceptual metaphors and the large-scale processes they underlie are global design-features of the brain/mind of modern humans. They represent global metaphoric potentialities, or principles, of a cognitively fluid brain.

It seems to be clear at this point that commonality in human experience is a major force shaping the metaphors we have. It is this force that gives us many of the metaphors that we can take to be near-universal or potentially universal. But commonality in human experience is not the only force that plays a role in the process of establishing and using metaphors. There are also counterveiling forces that work against universality in metaphor production.

2. The issue of embodiment

Embodiment is one of the key ideas of cognitive linguistics that clearly distinguishes the cognitive linguistic conception of meaning from that of other cognitively-oriented theories. In the emergence of meaning, that is, in the process of something becoming meaningful, the human body plays an important role (Johnson 1987; Lakoff 1987; Lakoff and Johnson 1999; Gibbs 2006). It is especially what are known as “image schemas” that are crucial in this regard. Image schemas are based on our most basic physical experiences and are inevitable in making sense of the world around us.

However, several researchers have pointed out that aspects of the view of embodiment may lead to contradictions within the theory (e.g. Alverson 1994; Rakova 2002). It can be problematic that the theory of embodiment tries to account simultaneously for universality and cultural specificity. Rakova emphasizes that a theory that builds on image schemas and, in general, on the universality of essential physical experiences cannot in the same breath be a theory of cultural variation – especially not if embodiment is conceived naturalistically. Here are some quotes that indicate her position:

The thing is that reductionism and relativism are not supposed to go together. The failure to balance these two tendencies is, I believe, the second drawback of the philosophy of embodied realism. (Rakova 2002: 228)

Thus, my claim is that experientialism is often relativism in the strong sense, and that the supposed universality of directly meaningful concepts and kinesthetic image schemas is not consistent with the idea of culturally defined conceptualizations. (Rakova 2002: 228)

The claim that there are cognitively significant cultural differences in the conceptualization of spatial relations is incompatible with the naturalistic stand that follows from the theory of image schemas. (Rakova 2002: 238)

Undoubtedly, the examples that Lakoff and Johnson provide (like the CONTAINER schema) may give the impression that Lakoff and Johnson regard image schemas and embodiment as universal experiences that make things (including language) meaningful “in a natural way”, that is, in a way that suggests that the universality of embodiment mechanically produces universal meanings.

In my view, we can refine and improve on this conception of the embodiment of meaning, and, thus, we can meet the challenge of the criticism above. In order to do that, we need to change the way we think about embodiment; we should not see “embodied experience” as a homogeneous, monolithic factor. This is made possible by the idea that embodiment (i.e., embodied experience relative to a domain) consists of several components and that any of these can be singled out and emphasized by different cultures (or, as a matter of fact, individuals within cultures). I termed this idea “differential experiential focus” in previous work (see Kövecses 2005).

Let us take as an example the kind of embodiment that makes our concepts and words relating to anger meaningful in different cultures. According to physiological studies, anger is accompanied by several physiological reactions, such as increase in skin temperature, in respiration rate, blood pressure, and heart rate (Ekman et al. 1983). These are universal physiological reactions that derive from the human body and explain why we find the same generic-level conceptual metaphor in languages and cultures that are independent from each other (Kövecses 2002/2010).

At the same time, we can observe that the different languages and cultures do not attend to the same physiological reactions associated with anger. While in English and Hungarian a rise in body temperature and increase in blood pressure receive equal attention, in Chinese the presence of PRESSURE seems to be much more focal (Yu 1998). Moreover, as Rosaldo’s (1980) work tells us, the main physiological characteristic of anger among the Ilongot of New Guinea is an undifferentiated and generalized state of physiological arousal. In other words, it seems that different languages and cultures base their anger-concepts on different components and levels of embodiment, thereby creating partly universal, partly culture-specific concepts. This account is made possible by the process of differential experiential focus.

The phenomenon of differential experiential focus can also be observed historically. Gevaert (2001, 2005) suggests that in historical corpora of the English language the conceptualization of anger as HEAT was prominent between 850 and 950. (This can be established on the basis of the number of heat related anger

metaphors in the various historical periods.) Later, however, anger was conceptualized mostly as PRESSURE, and, beginning with the 14th century, HEAT and PRESSURE jointly characterized the conceptualization of anger in English. The well-known metaphor ANGER IS A HOT FLUID IN A CONTAINER (see Lakoff and Kövecses 1987) is the end product of the process. Gevaert justifiably asks in this connection whether the Lakoff-Johnson view of embodiment can be maintained in the light of such findings. After all, it would be unreasonable to propose that the physiological responses associated with anger change from one century to the next.

The idea of differential experiential focus can serve us again in responding to this criticism (Kövecses 2005). The embodiment of anger, as we have seen above, is complex and consists of several components. Of these, as a result of certain cultural influences over the ages, different components may occupy central position in the metaphorical conceptualization of anger. In other words, the criticism formulated by Gevaert would only be valid if we thought about embodiment as a homogeneous and unchanging factor in how humans conceptualize various abstract concepts. But if we think of embodiment as a complex set of factors to which speakers can apply differential experiential foci, we can resolve the dilemma raised by Gevaert and others.

3. The issue of the relationship between metaphor and culture

However, not even the weaker and less mechanical notion of embodiment described above can provide a general account of how culture shapes metaphorical conceptualization. It is not clear what the more precise relationship is between the process of embodiment leading to universal metaphors and that of local culture leading to language- and culture-specific metaphors. More generally, the question is whether conceptual metaphor theory can simultaneously account for both the universal and culture-specific aspects of metaphorical conceptualization. This was the general issue I tried to raise and resolve in my book *Metaphor in Culture*. For lack of space in this paper, I can only briefly outline and demonstrate through some examples a possible answer to this question.

Metaphorical conceptualization in natural situations occurs under two simultaneous pressures: the pressure of embodiment and the pressure of context. Context is determined by local culture. This dual pressure essentially amounts to our effort to be coherent both with the body and culture – coherent both with universal embodiment and the culture-specificity of local culture in the course of metaphorical conceptualization. We can achieve this in some cases, but in others it is either embodiment or cultural specificity that plays the more important role.

Context may be characterized by physical, social, cultural, discourse, etc. aspects, and it consists of such factors as the setting, topic, audience, and medium, which can all influence metaphorical conceptualization. For example, Boers (1999)

showed that physical context may systematically shape the way we think metaphorically. Boers studied the ECONOMY IS HEALTH metaphor in a ten-year period, and found that the use of this metaphor is systematically more frequent in the winter than in the summer. ECONOMY IS HEALTH is a potentially universal metaphor whose use varies according to the physical context of metaphorical conceptualization.

Which metaphor is used in a particular situation does not only depend on which (potentially) universal metaphor is available in connection with the given target domain for the expression of a given meaning but also on the setting and topic of the situation in which the metaphorical conceptualization takes place. Let us take the following passages from a Hungarian newspaper (Kövecses 2005):

- (3) Levelet írt Sepp Blatter a Nemzetközi Labdarúgó Szövetség (FIFA) svájci elnöke az ázsiai szövetség (AFC) vezetőinek, melyben elfogadhatatlannak minősítette a kontinens küldötteinek három héttel ezelőtti kivonulását a FIFA-kongresszusáról, ugyanakkor megígérte, hogy megpróbál segíteni az AFC gondjainak megoldásában – jelentette kedden a dpa német hírügynökség.

Nagyon elkésérített az Önök viselkedése a Los Angeles-i kongresszusunkon. Önöknek, mint a labdarúgáshoz értő szakembereknek tudniuk kellett volna, hogy az a csapat soha nem nyeri meg a mérkőzést, amelyik a lefújás előtt levonul a pályáról – áll a levélben. (*Zalai Hírlap* [The Chronicle of Zala County], July 28, 1999)

Sepp Blatter, the Swiss president of the International Football Federation (FIFA), wrote a letter to the leaders of the Asian Football Association (AFC), in which he deemed unacceptable the behaviour of the association's delegates three weeks ago when they left the FIFA Congress prematurely. On the other hand, he promised that he would try to help solve the problems with which AFC is struggling – the German news agency dpa reported.

I was bitterly disappointed by your behaviour at our Congress held in Los Angeles. You, as experts on football, should have known that the team that leaves the field before the game is called off by the referee can never win the game – states the letter. (my translation, ZK)

The passages are about a FIFA Congress, where the Asian representatives left the meeting prematurely because of their dissatisfaction with some of the decisions of the Congress. It is the behaviour of the Asian representatives that is conceptualized metaphorically by Sepp Blatter, the president of FIFA. The target domain of his conceptual metaphor is the FIFA Congress and the source domain is football itself.

We find this completely natural. Why? In all probability, it is because the congress is about football. That is to say, the topic of the congress (football) of the FIFA meeting (the target) influences the conceptualizer to select a particular source domain (the game of football). This is a common way in which we select metaphorical source domains in local contexts.

The selection of the metaphors we use may also depend on who we are, that is, what our personal history is or what our long-lasting concerns or interests are. The Letters to the Editor sections of newspapers often offer a glimpse into how these factors can shape metaphorical conceptualization. In a Hungarian daily, one of the readers sent the following letter to the editor before Hungary's joining of the European Union:

- (4) Otthon vagyunk, otthon lehetünk Európában. Szent István óta *bekapcsolódtunk* ebbe a szellemi *áramkörbe*, és *változó intenzitással*, de azóta benne vagyunk – akkor is, ha különféle erők időnként, hosszabb-rövidebb ideig, megpróbáltak kirángatni belőle. (italics in the original; *Magyar Nemzet*, [Hungarian Nation] June 12, 1999)

We are, we can be at home in Europe. Since Saint Stephen we have been *integrated/connected* to this intellectual/spiritual *electric circuit*, and *with varying degrees of intensity*, but we have been in it – even though various powers, for more or less time, have tried to yank us out of it. (my translation, ZK)

The EUROPEAN UNION AS AN ELECTRIC CIRCUIT metaphor is not a conventional one. But, as we find out from the reader's note, he is an electrical engineer, and it was only natural for him to create and use this particular metaphor. In general, we can observe that our profession, personal history, concerns and interests all play a role in how we arrive at the most appropriate source domains for target domains in a given naturally occurring situation.

As the examples above clearly show, metaphorical conceptualization does not simply and merely utilize ready-made and/or universal metaphors. The pressure of context is another inevitable component in the use of metaphors. Our effort to be coherent with the local context may be an important tool in understanding the use of metaphors in natural discourse. This aspect of metaphor use has so far remained outside the interest and, indeed, the competence of "traditional" conceptual metaphor theory. With the help of the new conceptual tools briefly introduced in this section, the study of these exciting cases of metaphor use may open up new possibilities in our understanding of linguistic and cultural creativity within the framework of conceptual metaphor theory.

4. Dimensions of metaphor variation

I will distinguish two kinds of dimensions along which metaphors vary: the cross-cultural and the within-culture dimension.

4.1. Cross-cultural variation

The most obvious dimension along which metaphors vary is the cross-cultural dimension. Variation in this dimension can be found in several distinct forms. One of them is what I call “congruence.” This is obtained between a generic-level metaphor and several specific-level ones. Another is the case where a culture uses a set of different source domains for a particular target domain, or conversely, where a culture uses a particular source domain for conceptualising a set of different target domains. Yet another situation involves cases where the set of conceptual metaphors for a particular target domain is roughly the same between two languages/cultures, but one language/culture shows a clear preference for some of the conceptual metaphors that are employed. Finally, there may be some conceptual metaphors that appear to be unique to a given language/culture. I will demonstrate congruence and alternative metaphorical conceptualization by some examples.

Congruent metaphors. There is some evidence that THE ANGRY PERSON IS A PRESSURIZED CONTAINER metaphor may be near-universal (see Kövecses 2000a). What is especially important about this conceptual metaphor is that it functions at an extremely general level. The metaphor does not specify many things that *could* be specified. For example, it does not say what kind of container is used, how the pressure arises, whether the container is heated or not, what kind of substance fills the container (liquid, substance, or objects), what consequences the explosion has, and so on. The metaphor constitutes a generic schema that gets filled out by each culture that has the metaphor. When it is filled out, it receives unique cultural content at a specific level. In other words, a generic-level conceptual metaphor is instantiated in culture-specific ways at a specific level. This is one kind of cross-cultural variation.

Consider the following three special cases. In one, Matsuki (1995) observes that all the metaphors for anger in English as analysed by Lakoff and Kövecses (1987) can also be found in Japanese. At the same time, she also points out that there is a large number of anger-related expressions that group around the Japanese concept of *hara* (literally, ‘belly’). This is a culturally significant concept that is unique to Japanese culture, and so the conceptual metaphor ANGER IS (IN THE) HARA is limited to Japanese.

Second, Ning Yu (1998) studied the PRESSURIZED CONTAINER metaphor in great depth, and points out that Chinese uses a version of this metaphor in which the excess *qi* (i.e., energy that flows through the body) that corresponds to anger is not a fluid, like in English, but a gas. The gas is neutral with respect to heat, but it is capable of exerting pressure on the body-container. The most remarkable feature of the Chinese anger-metaphor is that it employs and is crucially constituted by the concept of *qi* – a concept that is deeply embedded in the long history of Chinese philosophy and medicine.

Third, Zulu shares many conceptual metaphors with English (Taylor and Mbense 1998). This does not mean, however, that it cannot have metaphors other than the ones we can find in English. One case in point is the Zulu metaphor that involves the heart: ANGER IS (UNDERSTOOD AS BEING) IN THE HEART. When the heart metaphor applies to English, it is primarily associated with love, affection, and the like. In Zulu it applies to anger and patience-impatience, tolerance-intolerance. The heart metaphor conceptualizes anger in Zulu as leading to internal pressure since too much “emotion substance” is crammed into a container of limited capacity. The things that fill it up are other emotions that happen to a person in the wake of daily events. When too many of these happen to a person, the person becomes extremely angry and typically loses control over his anger.

In all of the three cases, there is a generic-level metaphor and a specific-level one. The specific-level metaphors are instantiations of the generic-level one in the sense that they exhibit the same general structure. The lower-level instantiations are thus congruent with a higher-level metaphor. Where they differ is in the specific cultural content that they bring to the generic metaphor.

Alternative metaphors. There can be differences in the *range* of conceptual metaphors (or, more precisely, the range of source domains) that languages and cultures have available for the conceptualization of particular target domains. This is what commonly happens in the case of emotion concepts as targets.

Chinese shares with English all the basic metaphorical source domains for happiness: UP, LIGHT, FLUID IN A CONTAINER. A metaphor that Chinese has, but English does not, is HAPPINESS IS FLOWERS IN THE HEART. According to Ning Yu (1995, 1998), the application of this metaphor reflects “the more introverted character of Chinese”. He sees this conceptual metaphor as a contrast to the (American) English metaphor BEING HAPPY IS BEING OFF THE GROUND, which does not exist in Chinese at all and which reflects the relatively “extroverted” character of speakers of (especially American) English.

As another illustration, let us take the concept of life as target. Life is commonly and primarily conceptualized as STRUGGLE/WAR, PRECIOUS POSSESSION, GAME, JOURNEY, and in several other ways (see Kövecses 2005). However, as work by Elizabeth Riddle (2001) shows, speakers of Hmong, a

language spoken mainly in Laos and Thailand, conceptualize it very differently. They view life as a STRING that can be cut and broken. The word meaning ‘cut,’ *tu*, can also mean ‘to give birth,’ ‘to die,’ and ‘to kill.’ Riddle presents evidence for the existence of the conceptual metaphor not only from language but also from social behaviour. Although the Hmong metaphor LIFE IS A STRING resonates as at least vaguely familiar to members of the European cultural sphere who have a similar metaphor in Greek mythology (the three Fates spinning, weaving, and cutting the thread of life), the Hmong metaphor is much more clearly present among speakers of this language and seems to guide much of their linguistic and nonlinguistic behaviour.

4.2. Within-culture variation

We know from work in sociology, anthropology, sociolinguistics, etc. that languages are not monolithic but come in varieties reflecting divergences in human experience. It makes sense to expect metaphor variation in the varieties of language most commonly identified by these researchers. I will present evidence that, I believe, supports the idea that metaphors vary not only cross-culturally but also within cultures. This variation can occur along a number of dimensions including the social, regional, ethnic, style, subcultural, diachronic, and individual dimensions. I conceive of this approach to metaphor variation as the cognitive dimension of social-cultural diversity. I will demonstrate with some examples how metaphors vary along these dimensions.

The social dimension. Social dimensions include the differentiation of society into men and women, young and old, middle-class and working class, and so forth. Do men, the young, or the middle-class use different metaphors than women, the old, or the working-class? At present we do not have systematic studies from a cognitive linguistic perspective. But we do have some indication that some of these social factors might produce variation in metaphorical conceptualization.

One example of this is the man-woman dimension. This dimension seems to be operative in several distinct cases: the way men talk about women, the way women talk about men, the way men *and* women talk about women, the way men *and* women talk about the world in general (i.e., not only about the other). In English speaking countries (but also in others), it is common for men to use expressions such as *bunny, kitten, bird, chick, cookie, dish, sweetie pie*, and many others, of women. These metaphorical expressions assume certain conceptual metaphors: WOMEN ARE (SMALL) FURRY ANIMALS (*bunny, kitten*), WOMEN ARE BIRDS (*bird, chick, hen-party*), and WOMEN ARE SWEET FOOD (*cookie, dish, sweetie pie*). However, when women talk about men they do not appear to use these metaphors of men, or use them in a more limited way. Men are not called *bunnies*

or *kittens* by women. Neither are men characterized as *birds* or *chicks*, but they can be thought of as LARGE FURRY ANIMALS instead, such as bears. And women are more commonly viewed by men as SWEET FOOD than men are by women, although women can also sometimes describe men as FOOD, especially for sexual purposes.

The regional dimension. Languages often develop new metaphors when the language is moved by some of its speakers to a part of the world different from where it was originally spoken. The spread of English to the United States is one example (see Kövecses 2000b). Another is Afrikaans (Dutch spoken in South Africa). Afrikaans was carried from Europe to South Africa, and, as shown by Rene Dirven (1994), it changed its metaphorical patterns. It acquired many new metaphors based on natural phenomena and the animal world.

The style dimension. Style is determined by a number of factors, such as audience, topic, setting, and medium. All of these may influence the selection and use of metaphors in discourse. For example, slang is typically rich in metaphor and may be characterized by metaphors not found in other varieties of language.

The subcultural dimension. Each society and culture consists of a number of subcultures. Subcultures develop their own metaphors, and these metaphors may define the group. There is of course no subculture that defines itself through an entirely new set of metaphors, but some of the metaphors members of the group use may be new relative to the mainstream. For example, we can think of emotionally-mentally ill people as one such group. Although depressed people share many of the metaphors for the concept of depression-sadness that “non-depressed” people have, like DEPRESSION IS DARKNESS, DEPRESSION IS HEAVY, DEPRESSION IS DESCENT/DOWN, they also have metaphors that are unique to the group. One such metaphor is DEPRESSION IS A CAPTOR (McMullen and Conway 2001).

The individual dimension. Individuals often have their idiosyncratic metaphors. These can be entirely novel or they may be versions of already existing conceptual metaphors. Thus, one can have a view of love relationships as the action of “*pushing a wagon uphill*,” a linguistic metaphor based on LOVE IS A JOURNEY, but adding to it the aspect of requiring an effort to maintain it.

5. The effect of the immediate cultural context on metaphor use

Consider the following example taken from the *San Francisco Chronicle*, in which Bill Whalen, a professor of political science in Stanford and an advisor to Arnold Schwarzenegger, uses metaphorical language concerning the actor who later became the governor of California:

- (5) “Arnold Schwarzenegger is not the second Jesse Ventura or the second Ronald Reagan, but the first Arnold Schwarzenegger,” said Bill Whalen, a Hoover Institution scholar who worked with Schwarzenegger on his successful ballot initiative last year and supports the actor’s campaign for governor.
 “He’s a unique commodity – unless there happens to be a whole sea of immigrant body builders who are coming here to run for office. This is ‘Rise of the Machine,’ not ‘Attack of the Clones.’” (*San Francisco Chronicle*, A16, August 17, 2003)

Of interest in this connection are the metaphors *He’s a unique commodity* and particularly *This is ‘Rise of the Machine,’ not ‘Attack of the Clones.’* The first one is based on a completely conventional conceptual metaphor: PEOPLE ARE COMMODITIES, as shown by the very word *commodity* to describe the actor. The other two are highly unconventional and novel. What makes Bill Whalen produce these unconventional metaphors and what allows us to understand them? There are, I suggest, two reasons. First, and more obviously, it is because Arnold Schwarzenegger played in the first of these films. In other words, what sanctions the use of these metaphorical expressions has to do with the knowledge that the conceptualizer (Whalen) has about the topic of the discourse (Schwarzenegger), as discussed in a previous section. Second, and less obviously but more importantly here, he uses the metaphors because these are films that, at the time of speaking (i.e., 2003), everyone knew about in California and the US. In other words, they were part and parcel of the immediate cultural context. Significantly, the second film, *Attack of the Clones* does not feature Schwarzenegger, but it is the key to understanding the contrast between individual and copy that Whalen is referring to.

Given this knowledge, people can figure out what Whalen intended to say, which was that Schwarzenegger is a unique individual and not one of a series of look-alikes. But figuring this out may not be as easy and straightforward as it seems. After all, the metaphor *Rise of the Machine* does not clearly and explicitly convey the idea that Schwarzenegger is unique in any sense. (As a matter of fact, the mention of machines goes against our intuitions of uniqueness.) However, we get this meaning via two textual props in the text. The first one is a series of statements by Whalen: “Arnold Schwarzenegger is not the second Jesse Ventura or the second Ronald Reagan, but the first Arnold Schwarzenegger” and “He’s a unique commodity – unless there happens to be a whole sea of immigrant body builders who are coming here to run for office.” What seems to be the case here is that the speaker emphasizes the idea of individuality before he uses the MACHINE metaphor. But not even this prior emphasis would be sufficient by itself. Imagine that the text stops with the words “...This is ‘Rise of the Machine.’” I think most native speakers would be baffled and have a hard time understanding what Whalen

intended to say in this last sentence. Therefore, in order to fully understand the discourse we badly need the second textual prop, which is: “not ‘Attack of the Clones.’” It is against the background of this phrase that we understand what the metaphorical expression *Rise of the Machine* might possibly mean.

The cultural context in poetry

The choice of the image of Medusa by Sylvia Plath in a poem with the same name is in part motivated by the larger cultural context, of which the three gorgons of Greek mythology, including Medusa, form a part. The symbolic belief system is thus one aspect of Sylvia Plath’s cultural system. The poem continues with the following lines:

- (6) My mind winds to you
 Old barnacled umbilicus, Atlantic cable,
 Keeping itself, it seems, in a state of miraculous repair.

(retrieved from <http://www.americanpoems.com/poets/sylvia-plath/1412>)

Another aspect of the cultural context involves the entities we find in a particular physical-cultural environment. In the lines, the relationship to her mother is conceptualized metaphorically both as the *umbilicus* and the *Atlantic telephone cable*. In the former case, the generic-level conceptual metaphor PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS ARE PHYSICAL CONNECTIONS is fleshed out at the specific level as the *umbilicus*. This is of course motivated by human biology, not by cultural context. What gives a metaphorical character to it is that we know that the poet is no longer physically-biologically linked to the mother through the umbilicus. The metaphor is probably used to convey the naturalness and inevitability of a strong bond between mother and child. However, the adjacent metaphor *Atlantic cable* derives from the surrounding physical-cultural environment. The first transatlantic telephone cable system between Great Britain and North-America was laid in the 1950s, making it possible for people to communicate directly with each other at a long distance. Through the metaphor, the strength of the biological bond is reinforced, and the *Atlantic cable* can be seen as the temporal (and metaphorical) continuation of the umbilicus.

The cultural context, among other things, includes, as we just saw, the belief system of a person and the physical-cultural environment. Both of these occur in various specific forms in a large number of other poems. The cultural belief system also involves the religious beliefs that are entertained in a given culture. Let us take the first stanza of a poem, *Prayers of Steel*, by Carl Sandburg.

- (7) LAY me on an anvil, O God.
 Beat me and hammer me into a crowbar.
 Let me pry loose old walls.
 Let me lift and loosen old foundations.

(retrieved from <http://www.bartleby.com/134/39.html>)

Here the poet evokes God and wants God to turn him into an instrument of social change. This making of an “old type of man” into a “new type of man” is conceptualized on the analogy of God’s creation of man in the Bible. In other words, the source domain of the metaphor is the biblical act of man’s creation, while the target domain is the making of a new type of man who can effect social changes in the world. This means that the source domain is provided by the religious belief system in the culture of the poet by virtue of an analogy between God’s creation of man and the creation of a tool that metonymically stands for the poet (INSTRUMENT USED FOR THE PERSON USING IT), who can thus function in a new role to effect social change.

A physical-cultural element, or entity, that is significant in Sandburg’s poetry is the skyscraper. Consider the first stanza of the poem called *Skyscraper*:

- (8) BY day the skyscraper looms in the smoke and sun and
 has a soul.
 Prairie and valley, streets of the city, pour people into
 it and they mingle among its twenty floors and are
 poured out again back to the streets, prairies and
 valleys.
 It is the men and women, boys and girls so poured in and
 out all day that give the building a soul of dreams
 and thoughts and memories.
 (Dumped in the sea or fixed in a desert, who would care
 for the building or speak its name or ask a policeman
 the way to it?)

(retrieved from <http://www.bartleby.com/165/55.html>)

What makes the skyscraper such a significant symbol and what makes Sandburg choose it to talk about America? The poem was written in 1916 in Chicago. It was at the turn of the 20th century in the major American cities that skyscrapers began to be built on a large scale. The skyscraper became a dominant feature of the city skyline. Due to its perceptual and cultural salience, it became, for Sandburg and many others, a symbol of America. The symbol is based on a connection between a salient element that characterizes a place (a kind of building) and the place itself;

hence the metonymy SKYSCRAPER FOR AMERICA, which is a specific-level version of the generic-level metonymy A CHARACTERISTIC PROPERTY FOR THE PLACE THAT IT CHARACTERIZES. In this case, the characteristic property is embodied in a type of building.

What is additionally interesting about this example is that it is a metonymy, not a metaphor. It seems that metonymies are also set up in part as a result of the local cultural influence; the skyscraper was at Sandburg's time a salient feature of the American landscape that made it a natural choice for a metonymic symbol for the country.

6. Metaphorical coherence in discourse

Most researchers who work on metaphor in real discourse would agree that a major function of the metaphors we find in discourse is to provide coherence (see, for example, Cameron 2003; Charteris-Black 2004; Chilton 1996; Chilton and Ilyin 1993; Deignan 2005; Eubanks 2000; Koller 2004; Musolff 2000, 2004, 2006; Ritchie 2004a, b; Semino 2008). The coherence provided by metaphors can be either intertextual or intratextual; that is, metaphors can either make several different texts coherent with each other or they can lend coherence to a single piece of discourse.

Intertextual coherence

In some cases of intertextuality, intertextual coherence is achieved through inheriting and using a particular conceptual metaphor at different historical periods. One of the best examples of this is how several biblical metaphors have been recycled over the ages. Shortly after arriving in Durham, England, in the winter of 2008, where I did the research for some of this work, I was given a bookmark in Durham cathedral with the following text on it:

- (9) Almighty God
Who called your servant Cuthbert
from keeping sheep to follow your son
and to be shepherd of your people.

Mercifully grant that we, following his
example and caring for those who are lost,
may bring them home to your fold.
Through your son.
Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

In the prayer, the basic conceptual metaphor is the one in which the shepherd is Jesus, the lost sheep are the people who no longer follow God's teachings, the fold of the sheep is people's home with God, and for the shepherd to bring the sheep back to the fold is for Jesus to save the people. We can lay out these correspondences, or mappings, more explicitly as follows:

| Source: | Target: |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| the shepherd | → Jesus |
| the lost sheep | → the people who do not follow God |
| the fold of the sheep | → the state of people following God |
| the shepherd bringing back the sheep | → Jesus saving the people |

This metaphor was reused later on when God called a simple man called Cuthbert to give up his job (which, significantly, was being a shepherd) and become a “*shepherd* of people”. Here it is Cuthbert (not Jesus) who saves the lost people (a set of people different from the ones in Jesus' times). Finally, in the most recent recycling of the metaphor in the prayer said on St Cuthbert's day, 20th March, 2007, the particular values of the metaphor change again. It is the priests who live today who try to bring people back to the fold – again, a set of people different from either those who lived in Jesus' or Cuthbert's times.

This type of intertextuality characterizes not only Christianity (and other religions) through time but many other domains within the same historical period. Thus a metaphor can provide coherence across a variety of discourses both historically and simultaneously.

Intratextual coherence

In a similar fashion, the same conceptual metaphor can lend coherence to a single text. The metaphor that structures the discourse does not necessarily have to be a deeply entrenched conventional conceptual metaphor – it can be what we can call a “metaphorical analogy” of any kind. Consider the following three paragraphs, taken from the very beginning of a newspaper article:

- (10) Performance targets are identical to the puissance at the Horse of the Year Show. You know the one – the high-jump competition, where the poor, dumb horse is brought into the ring, asked to clear a massive red wall, and as a reward for its heroic effort is promptly brought back and asked to do it all over again, only higher.

I've never felt anything but admiration for those puissance horses which, not so dumb at all, swiftly realize that the game is a bogey. Why on

earth should they bother straining heart, sinew and bone to leap higher than their own heads, only to be required to jump even higher? And then possibly higher still.

Hard work and willingness, ponders the clever horse as he chomps in the stable that night, clearly bring only punishment. And so next time he's asked to canter up to the big red wall, he plants his front feet in the ground and shakes his head. And says, what do you take me for – an idiot? (Melanie Reid, *The Times*, Monday, February 4, 2008).

Here puissance horses are compared to people, riders to managers, the red walls as obstacles to the targets people have to achieve, having to jump over the obstacles to being subject to assessment, clearing the obstacles to achieving the targets, raising the obstacles to giving more difficult targets, the Horse Show to life, and so on and so forth. This elaborate metaphorical analogy provides a great deal of structure for the text. As a matter of fact, most of the structure of the text is given in terms of the metaphor up to this point in the article, with only the first two words (“performance targets”) suggesting what the analogy is all about.

But then in the fourth paragraph the author lays out the correspondences for us, probably to make sure that we understand precisely what she has in mind:

- (11) Thus it is with work-related targets. Most of us will in the course of our careers be subject to performance assessments, where we are examined against the objectives we were set the previous year, then tasked with new ones.

From this point onward, the article uses predominantly literal language with some of the metaphorical language of the Horse Show interspersed in the text. At the end, however, the metaphor comes back in full force:

- (12) Oh, the bar may be set at what the politicians regard as a reasonable height. Aspirational enough to keep them all in power. From the perspective of the weary horse, however, we've reached the point where whipping doesn't work, but a carrot and a short rest just might.

Clearly, the metaphor is used here at the end of the article to make a point emphatically. This is a common rhetorical function that metaphors are assigned to perform in discourse. Thus, in addition to providing some of the internal coherence of the text, metaphors are often exploited for such and similar rhetorical functions (see, for example, Goatly 1997).

7. Conclusions

I have surveyed a number of issues that form a part of the “metaphor-culture interface”. In particular, the following suggestions have been made. (Additional results of the approach can be found in Kövecses, in press/2010).

First, some conceptual metaphors appear to be near-universal or potentially universal (though not universal in an absolute sense).

Second, such universal metaphors seem to result from certain commonalities in human experience. These commonalities constitute universal embodiment on which many conceptual metaphors are based.

Third, it is important, however, *not* to think of embodiment as a mechanical and automatic force shaping conceptual metaphors (and conceptual systems in general) but as a complex set of factors to which speakers can apply differential experiential foci.

Fourth, in the course of metaphorical conceptualization in addition to the pressure of embodiment, human beings also observe the pressure of context. The effort to be coherent with the local context may be an important tool in understanding the use of metaphors in natural discourse.

Fifth, metaphors vary not only cross-culturally but also within cultures. This variation can occur along a number of dimensions including the social, regional, ethnic, style, subcultural, diachronic, and individual dimensions.

Sixth, there is some agreement among scholars that a major function of the metaphors we find in discourse is to provide coherence. This issue can be related to the notion of intertextuality.

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