## Notes Towards the Analysis of Metaphor

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**Abstract**: G. LAKOFF and M. JOHNSON's theory of cognitive linguistics and their definition of metaphor and metaphorical concepts have led to a variety of qualitative approaches whose common aim is to reconstruct metaphorical concepts and metaphorical reasoning in everyday language. Targets of these approaches were cross-cultural, cultural, subcultural, individual matters and metaphoric interaction. To illustrate this, two different strategies for a systematic procedure are briefly outlined.

**Key words**:

## 1. Yet Another Method?

For almost all qualitative methods of research, language is at the same time both subject and medium. It is used above all as a material referring to content outside language—patterns of relationships, latent structures of meaning, communicative strategies etc. The fact that, in this process, structures immanent to language and their relevance are rarely made an issue and that debates from the discipline of linguistics—with the exception of conversation analysis—are hardly taken heed of, results perhaps from the division of labour within our specialised academic world. In particular there is a lack of theories capable of bridging the gap between disciplines. Such a theory was, however, formulated by LAKOFF and JOHNSON (1980, LAKOFF 1987, JOHNSON 1987) in the overall framework of a "cognitive linguistics". Their theory of metaphor has inspired a variety of approaches to the analysis of metaphor as a qualitative research procedure. [1]

LAKOFF and JOHNSON propose a comprehensive concept of metaphor which enables the reconstruction of cognitive strategies of action. We all know, for example, the image whereby problems are portrayed as a weight which "oppresses"[1] a person. Thus in one interview, unemployment is stated to have "really *weighed down on*" ("*ganz schön belastet*") an interviewee. Or we find, as part of a philosophy of life, the formulation "Everybody has to *shoulder his burden*" ("*Jeder hat sein Päckel zu tragen*"). The corresponding moods are encoded as a metaphorical low: "to collapse, fall away" ("*versacken*"), "to be at rock-bottom" ("*am Boden sein*"), "to fall into a pit" ("*in ein Loch fallen*"). On the

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1    For interview quotations see SCHMITT (1995, 1999b).

other hand, moods felt to be positive are described in terms of geographic height: to be "*high*" ("high"), "exulting to the heavens" ("*himmelhoch jauchzend*"), to be "on top of the world"/"on top of things" ("*obenauf sein*"). This metaphoric pattern is matched by one model of psycho-social help: helpers are said to retrieve the persons concerned from the depths, to save them from "a fall" ("*Absturz*"), or to "bolster" ("*stützen*") them, "support" ("*unterstützen*") them, "get them on their feet again" ("*aufrichten*"), or "build them up again" ("*aufbauen*"). Such metaphors, however, can also, somewhat confusingly, be found also in interviews concerning day-to-day use of alcohol: after drinking alcohol, "diverse problems are ... no longer so weighty" ("*gewichtig*"), one can "have less trouble getting into conversation with people" ("*man kommt mit Leuten leichter ins Gespräch*"), "things are simply less burdensome" ("*es war einfach unbeschwerter*"), and "it lifts the mood" ("*das hebt die Stimmung*"). We can formulate this metaphorical idea in the following way: "Being drunk makes the heavy things of life less weighty". Professional help and the consolation of the psyche by means of alcohol are united by the same, culturally typical metaphorical scheme of things —"GOOD IS UP" (LAKOFF & JOHNSON 1980, S.22). [2]

This example allows one to clarify the following assumptions of LAKOFF and JOHNSON:

· *Metaphorical concepts*:
Metaphors do not appear in isolation but form metaphorical concepts which are capable of reconstruction. The number of fundamental metaphorical concepts is limited: thus from the numerous metaphors of psycho-social help just nine concepts can be constructed (SCHMITT 1995). Our experience of interpretation hitherto suggests that the more exact is the focus of research and the more closely demarcated is the area of investigation, the more specifically metaphorical concepts can be formulated.

· *Body models*:
As a rule, metaphors transfer their image structure from straightforward and *gestalt*-like experiences (e.g. height and depth) to complex, taboo or new subject-matter (e.g. "psycho-social help"). The sources of the images are often physically experienced dimensions or simple courses of events whose elementary parts can be used as models. Thus the model of the "*Weg*" ("path") with its beginning, duration and destination refers to a pattern of action experienced from early life on and which generates a multiplicity of metaphors of the "*Lebenslauf*" ("course of life") or "*Lebensweg*" ("path of life").

· *Homology of thought and speech*:
The employment and linking of these metaphors is not a matter of chance, but an indication that patterns of thought, perception, communication and action that are consistent in themselves are here coming into play. LAKOFF and JOHNSON assume a substantial homology of thought and speech; this premise is the starting point for the possibility and relevance of a analysis of metaphors in social sciences. BOCK's investigations (1981) into problem-solving behaviour from the point of view of experimental psychology point to a close connection between metaphorical cognition and the planning of action. [3]

## 2. Relevance to Social Sciences

The relevance of analyses of metaphor can be discussed on a variety of levels:

- *Transcultural metaphor*:
  LAKOFF and JOHNSON suggest that a schema such as "GOOD IS UP" may
  be present in all cultures and yet may not have the same weighting in all of
  them, with other spatial structures (centre/periphery; in the front/at the rear;
  inside/outside) perhaps being dominant. In addition, the concepts linked to
  these image sources overlap only partially from culture to culture. Thus in her
  studies on AIDS, WOLF (1996) has compared the war metaphors of the first
  world (e.g. "combating the disease" and "killer cells") with the fund of
  metaphor employed in Malawi, where the AIDS virus is conceptualised above
  all in metaphors of eating—the virus, conceived of as a worm, eats up human
  beings, just as witches and social deviants take food from other humans and
  even assail living bodies (vampire motive). In the predominantly agrarian
  region sexuality also is conceived above all in terms of eating metaphor
  (equivalent approximately to "gobbling someone up"), and so WOLF is not
  surprised to find that when condom packages which, with their pictures of
  shields and spears, admittedly portray African warriors but employ European
  concepts of combat, meet with no success in the population at large. From
  men whom she questioned on their non-acceptance of condoms she received
  the answer, "You don't eat sweets in a package".
- *Culturally specific funds of metaphor*:
  Here there are a good number of investigations, notably from a linguistic point
  of view (e.g. BALDAUF 1997: Metaphors in the Press). NIERAAD (1997) has
  described the metaphors of fascism and the actions they motivated "*Volk
  ohne Raum*" ("Nation without Living Space") and war of conquest; the
  "*Führer*" as a figure transcending democratic legitimation and change; the
  designating of political opponents as "rats" and "vermin" and biological
  programmes for their "eradication" and "extirpation"). The present author
  (SCHMITT 1999a) has ventured a survey of metaphorical concepts for
  psychological crises or illnesses—from "*Ausrasten*" ("going spare") to
  "*Zerrissenheit*" ("inner divisions").
- *Funds of metaphor in sub-groups*:
  In the field of professional psycho-social help there are several papers
  analysing milieu-specific metaphors and their implications for human action:
  SCHACHTNER 1999 has investigated diagnostic and therapeutic strategies
  among GPs with regard to linguistic images which guide action; the
  metaphorical perception and staging of inter-human contact in ward-based
  psychotherapy have been described by BUCHHOLZ and von KLEIST 1997. A
  survey of metaphorical concepts employed in the overall framework of
  seeking psycho-social help (SCHMITT 1995) has already been mentioned.
- *Metaphors as steering mechanisms for interaction*:
  BUCHHOLZ and von KLEIST 1995 describe the steering of human interaction
  through metaphor in therapeutic settings. They analyse, with reference to one
  specific example, what client and therapist envisage as metaphors of their

joint undertaking, the enactment of these metaphors in their interaction, the break-downs in understanding brought about by divergent metaphors, and the possibility of transcending obstacles to communication meta-linguistically by the use of metaphors. Quantitative studies on the use of metaphor in therapy are to be found in POLLIO et al. (1977).

· *Individual funds of metaphor*:
In the studies hitherto named, individual funds of metaphor are made an issue to varying degrees. With these case studies, metaphor analysis can give stimuli to biography research and to the evaluation of therapeutic processes. (KRONBERGER 1999: metaphorical concepts of self-perception in and after a depressive episode.) [4]

## 3. Matters of (Non-) Method

The above-mentioned analyses of metaphor reveal varying degrees of systematisation. For many linguistic studies, the systematic demands of qualitative research are an unknown factor; and equally in qualitative research one can often encounter an unsystematic emphasis on individual metaphors, which results in their being over-interpreted. Above all, the literature on the therapeutic use of metaphor reveals major conceptual heterogeneity. [5]

A systematic analysis of metaphor should be able to provide:

· definitions with practical intent (operationalisations, anchoring examples)
· and systematic manners of procedure in the gathering and evaluation of material in the form of work-aids and coding rules, in order to meet at least the basic criteria of quality such as the repeatability of the procedure and the stability of results. [6]

Currently, two systematic ways of implementing metaphor analysis are emerging: [7]

The above-mentioned BUCHHOLZ and von KLEIST (1995) employ a mixture of ethno-methodological and psychoanalytic procedures in the analysis of metaphors. Their attention to the sequentiality of speech utterance displays its merits in the above-cited analysis of therapeutic interactions. They eschew an overall analysis of all metaphors in a text with the attendant danger of the over-interpretation or over-hasty reconstruction of individual metaphors. [8]

A systematic analysis of all metaphors can be found in the procedure proposed by the author (SCHMITT 1997), where a rule-based and step-by-step approach is used to investigate a variety of text sources and thus not only interviews. The unwillingness to analyse sequential patterns means that this procedure appears of only limited use for the analysis of interaction. In this method, the limitations immanent to metaphor analysis (e.g. the non-registration of concrete, non-metaphorical information) show themselves more clearly in their pure form and suggest the desirability—depending on the particular task involved—of a

triangulation with other methods of research. The procedure can be divided into five steps:

- *Identifying the target area*
  Determining the topic, the question, the material
- *Non-systematic, broad-based collection of background metaphors*
  In preparation for the research in question, a lexicon of possible metaphoric concepts is assembled documenting the breadth of the culturally possible image models for the chosen topic.
- *Systematic analysis of a sub-group*
  In two stages, texts are analysed by means of a word-for-word analysis for their use of metaphor and a lexicon of the metaphoric concepts actually used is established:
  - Deconstructive segmentation of the texts into their metaphoric parts by means of anchoring examples and an operationalisation of the concept of metaphor; the metaphoric turns of phrase together with their immediate textual contexts are first copied out of the text into a separate list.
  - Synthesis of collective metaphoric models from the metaphoric material. This second step is the actual interpretative and reconstructive step, extracting metaphoric concepts from the word-collection by allocating all the metaphoric turns of phrase, separated according to source and target areas, to conceptual metaphors.
- Reconstruction of individual funds of metaphor against the background of collective metaphor. In this process, both independent language images and the absence of conventional metaphor usage become evident as against the comparative group.
- Triangulation of methods or linking of metaphoric concepts with other methods of research (FLICK 1995) [9]

## 4. Too Early for a Conclusion

The development of a method or of methods of metaphor analysis has yet to be concluded—indeed, the discussion as to the scope and academic deployability of its results has hardly begun. [10]

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