

Cornelia Müller. *Metaphors dead and alive, sleeping and waking: A dynamic view*. Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press, 2008. (xix, 272)

This work refers to an impressive array of sources, the more so in that it brings material and perspectives from the German language tradition to English speaking readers. The book forwards a “dynamic view” of metaphors “that takes language use and cognitive activity as points of reference” (18, 23) and forwards a “triadic” model, on which a metaphoric expression (A) stimulates seeing (B) in terms of (C) (26). The arguments presented rest on Cognitive Metaphor Theory, with the firm presuppositions of a modular theory of language.

This modular model, based on the analogy of digital computing devices, includes numerous schematic sketches and the ubiquitous use of such terminology as *on-line*, *processing* and *activation* of domains (62, et al.), along with the trope that words and meanings are *retrieved* as from a storage device (215), and the frequent application of such terms as *input*, *output*, *architecture*, *structures*, *domains*, *projection*, *trigger*, *processing*, *serial*, *mapping*, all likewise borrowed from the digital processing domain. Curiously, the tropical nature and origin of these terms is not commented upon nor does it seem to be noticed; the language theory they express simply materializes as a central presupposition of the theory advanced.

The initial point of reference mentioned above has been with us since the time of Aristotle, as the author suggests, “There are even passages in Aristotle’s *Poetics* where it seems that he connects metaphors with a specific kind of cognitive activity” (22). But I take issue with the *even* and *seems* in her remark. Aristotle’s definition in fact *rests* upon the recognition of a cognitive event:

Metaphor is the application of a strange term either transferred from the genus and applied to the species, or from the species and applied to the genus, or from one species to another or else by analogy. (*The Poetics* 81)

The “transfer” Aristotle refers to is not other than a cognitive operation, in Speaker and Hearer, i.e., this describes a cognitive activity of induction, undertaken through linguistic means. We keep in mind, along with the author, that Aristotle does not distinguish among types of metaphors (27), thus Hugh Blair’s designation of the field as a “whole tribe” (*Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, 1783). This “tribe” constitutes a *tropos* of communicating (and not merely expressing) using linguistic means, i.e., “the application of a term ...” The metaphor, an “unfamiliar word,” one employed “outside the common usage,” aids hearers in cognizing by employing a term from a compass more familiar to them (*The Poetics*, 85). Thus the frequent insistence on visual images, etc., as metaphors (e.g., 107) must taken as a *metaphorical* application of the concept. In this text, it is assumed that metaphors are “materialized products of the process of establishing metaphoricity” (23), a view consistent with activating and retrieving information (in the digital sense) from modules. But the central notion of metaphor presupposes an active cognizing consciousness which does not merely retrieve data from tables and “domains,” but perceives, grasps analogy, and interprets.

A discussion of the phenomena associated with metaphor requires some basic concepts in semiotics. Linguistic signs are said to be (in the main) arbitrary and conventional, thus symbolic. They function in a human communication system because they are conventional among users of the system and, as Saussure pointed out, “a product of the collective mind of linguistic groups” (5). Language is a socially acquired code. The *indice*, on the other hand, exists in a relation of “existential continuity” to that to which it points, e.g., foot prints in the snow refer to the person who left them. *Indices* must be worked out existentially, i.e., the beholder must cognize that sign in relation to its referent in that situation. As Georges Mounin puts it, “we do not decode *indices*, we do not read them like a message, we interpret them” (154).

Aristotle's formulation accounts for a process through which an individual speaker utilizes linguistic resources to apply a "strange term", which is to be cognized by individual hearers. This process more closely parallels the interpreting of *indices*. But through successive hearing, producing, and rehearing, the expression becomes conventional. In this way the erstwhile metaphor becomes a lexical unit in the language, socially transmitted and acquired like any other. Items that have become lexical units are "decoded," not "interpreted."

The conceptual question arising hence is whether such a conventional, socially transmitted lexical unit satisfies the criteria for a "strange term" or "unfamiliar word" used "outside the common usage," or whether it has *become* "the common usage." This problematizes the "relation between the collective system and the individual" (88). In discussing the cognitive phenomena associated with metaphor, one may speak only of the individual who interprets the metaphor existentially; the "collective system" is the (social) realm of language, i.e., of conventionalized forms. Thus, remarks like, "metaphor processing is just as effortless as literal language processing" (186) utterly misconstrue how metaphors are apprehended, vis-à-vis language.

It has long been recognized, "words which appear tropical to a [language] learner ... may, through the imperceptible influence of use, have totally lost that appearance to the natives who consider them purely as proper terms" (Campbell, 1776). With that principle in mind, beholding items that may once have been metaphorical, and investigating (or indeed mythologizing) their etymologies leads us into error. Two examples will serve here. In Chinese, *tiao* names the 'willow branch', while *you tiao* (*you* = 'oil') names 'a certain light, folded, salty fried pastry'; learners may find this term astonishing, but native speakers using it cognize only the breakfast item. The second example is the Greco-Latin loan word *idea*, whose root is an old form of the

Greek 3rd person singular copula. In both cases the process of metaphorical extension that originally produced the terms is opaque to contemporary language users, for whom the terms are not tropical.

We also must note that the press and various literature styles possess conventional systems of tropical expression. Over the last few decades, the Western press has become enamored of the pun in headlines and story titles, e.g., an interview with scholar Thomas Sowell appears under a headline, “Sowell Authority” (Orange County Register, Dec. 13, 2009). Literature styles also accrue conventionally used tropical figures, such as flowers, jewels, rays, and cuckoos in the Petrarchan Sonnet. In both situations, headline writers and poets (and their readers) become socialized to these discourse practices and develop, depending on their individual talents, a certain knack for producing instances of them. Analyzing as linguistic processes such productions, which seem to belong more to the domain of artistic expression than linguistic communication, is clearly problematic.

The distinction between metaphor in language and thought “as system” and language and thought “as use” (22) evokes Chomsky’s famous distinction. This in turn brings us to consider the conceptual basis of Conceptual Metaphor Theory, which posits that metaphorical verbal expressions are said to “derive” from “conceptual metaphors” (64). During the time this theory was being formulated, much of the world of linguistic inquiry was in thrall to Chomsky’s notion of competence and performance, which postulates a mental grammar from which utterances are derived (in the then vogue but now largely forgotten Transformational Theory), so this theory of *underling* and *derived* forms found ready acceptance among scholars socialized to the analogous notion it is based upon. While this is not the place for a broad discussion of Conceptual

Metaphor Theory, that the present work rests upon claims that follow from the premises of the theory does lead us to examine them briefly.

Clusters of metaphors of similar import are held, under the theory, to “derive” from an “underlying” general metaphor (44-5). It is claimed that conceptual metaphors represent the “way we experience life” (64, 130), and that “metaphorical expressions” (44) thus derive from this experience. But this in fact gets it backward. In fact, having experienced life events, speakers (subsequently) cognize linguistic means to communicate their experience, *viz.*, the “application of a strange term.”¹ While the attractive power of the Chomskian parallel of “underlying” and “derived” (i.e., surface) metaphors may have won the theory much popularity, the appearance of clusters of seemingly related metaphors can be accounted for with a basic, time tested principle.

During the 1990s a theory *du jour* attributed phoneme-ish power to groups of sequences called in the literature phonaesthemes. But inquisitive scholars noticed that most of the words taken as examples had appeared in the language within a hundred year period. In other words, the well established principle of *analogy* was the most likely factor in producing these words with similar sounding segments, a process which, as is universally observed, had its day and is no longer productive. Likewise, a metaphor that makes a vivid impression stimulates speakers to cognize new, similar ones by analogy, and to employ them for freshness and originality. Thus, a number of semantically similar metaphors arise and in turn become conventional.

If the “underlying” conceptual metaphor (as it is taken to be) is said to precede its “instantiations” (64) in speech (i.e., if instantiations “derive” from it), it is fair to ask from whence the “underlying” conceptual metaphor arises. Following our psychological tradition, we must choose either by (inherited) instinct or cultural transmission. If it is cultural transmission,

¹ Here it must be emphasized that the conception of metaphor given as the starting point of the discussion involves linguistic means, i.e., its application is *communicative*, not merely expressive.

we are left with the principle of induction (which follows from Aristotle's formulation) from the analogous metaphors to which speakers are exposed and may repeat, just as in Chomsky's system, where the LAD, during the productive period, samples input from the environment and induces grammatical principles.² This, as Campbell (1776) puts it, is "the natural progress of the mind, in the acquisition of its ideas, being from the particular things to the general." Here, too, the theory gets it backward. The "underlying" metaphor is in fact induced from individual occurrences in communication.

Yet another challenge comes in the accepted (by Cognitive Metaphor Theorists) assertion that the conceptual metaphor may be "dominant" while a derivative instantiation is "dead" (77). This claim makes as much sense as postulating that the plural rule in the underlying grammar is productive, while plurals it forms in utterances no longer have effects on hearer cognition, a logical process worthy of the Court of the Red Queen in Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*. Moreover, under the theory that "underlying" conceptual metaphors spawn derived "instantiations," the phenomenon of "mixed metaphors" would require that somehow contrasting "way[s] we experience life" are simultaneously and inclusively activated and retrieved. Mixed metaphors are a train wreck for Conceptual Metaphor Theory.

The reality of the process of language change that problematizes the notion of "metaphorical expression" (68) is that of metaphorical extension, which, as has long been recognized, is the primary means of vocabulary expansion. A very great number of words in the present state of any language have their diachronic roots in this process, i.e., if all such words are seen as having metaphorical meaning, almost no words would have literal (conventional) meaning. But synchronically speaking, these words are (mere) lexemes. In the text, this error is

² But crucially, unlike the LAD in Chomsky's system, the capacity to cognize analogous metaphors does not go dark after the 'critical period' has passed, but in fact intensifies with maturity. Thus it is not an "automatic" or "unconscious" process, but one that requires creative (cognizing) participation.

demonstrated by the etymological analyses rendered for alleged metaphors *depressed* (78) and *pedigree* (88), which utterly miss the reality that these, synchronically, are plain words, albeit two which belong more to the learned stratum and may, therefore, be even less vital in everyday communication.

In this text much is made of the phenomena of so-called multi modal metaphors, those which involve supposedly metaphorical speech accompanied by gesture or some other interpretive body movement which is held to represent “elements of the source domain of the verbal metaphor,” i.e, serve as a “window onto (*sic*) online thought processes” (35). In one example, a speaker uses the German *depressivität* ‘depressive-ness’ (author’s gloss) while producing a downward gesture with her hand (77 - 9). In this example, while *depressivität* is analyzed as a metaphor on the basis of its Latin etymology, so-called multi modality is attributed to “the activation of a conceptual mapping that connects” the supposed “metaphoricity” of the Latin lexeme and a manual gesture in a downward direction (80); this in turn is said to provide support for Conceptual Metaphor Theory. An impressive array of terminology occurs here, but it seems much more likely that the physical gesture is employed in the communicative situation to convey what the word simply lacks the power to do, in the consciousness of the speaker, in an effort to communicate successfully.

The theoretical difficulties enumerated here manifest themselves in some of the analyses offered for examples used in the text. In discussing the talk of a woman who describes her experience after spending time with a man she had fallen in love with by using *entblößt* ‘exposed’ accompanied by a made up story to illustrate what she meant by evoking that word (89 f), it is remarked that *entblößt*, is a “dead metaphor,” which nonetheless “inspires the spontaneous invention of an allegoric text” (90). It seems much more likely that here the speaker,

in contrast to being inspired by the “activation of metaphoricity,” felt the need to make up a story, as in the case of the speaker who made gestures to supplement ‘depressive-ness’, because she did not sense satisfying communicative reality in using the conventional term.

Much is made of a supposed mixed metaphor when an official in a dairy products trade association made remarks that a *mountain of butter is in the pipeline* (140 f). The term *mountain of butter* is undeniably metaphorical, albeit not terribly original, but *pipeline* has long been relexified (see Cole, 1975, for description of this process) as ‘a line of communication or route of supply’ (AHD 2nd ed., 1982!) and ‘in process; in production’, ubiquitous for decades in finance and manufacturing. Thus *pipeline* here has nothing to do with a physical pipe that the “mountain of butter” is somehow squeezing through, as the author would have it. Nothing has been activated, no “cross-metaphorical mapping” (144) across contrasting “domains” has occurred. It is an ordinary word, with a meaning, one commonly used in the business register with the gloss given in numerous kinds of enterprises.

An example which reveals the problems with the triadic model emerges in the treatment of *This surgeon is a butcher* (161, f). The “mapping” of the term (A) that is supposed, under the theory, to transfers the butcher’s goal “to prepare a dead animal for consumption” (B) to the surgeon (C), produces what is obviously not the correct interpretation, so she postulates a “blended metaphor,” such that “source and target domains [i.e., (B) and (C)] are projected onto a third domain [D], which is created ad hoc” (162). “Ad hoc” solutions to problems in semantic theory never work out well, and the approach constructed here just gets it wrong. The predicted “mapping” leads to a strange interpretation, in response to which the “ad hoc” solution simply restores the fourth element.

Under Aristotle's system of proportional analogy is found a consistently applicable, much simpler interpretation: Surgeon (as Butcher) (A) is to Patient (B) as Butcher (C) is to Animal (D). It is up to a cognizing subject to interpret the application of that "strange term ... from one species to another."

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