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THE DYNAMICS OF METAPHOR

Conflicting images of forest in Swedish discourse

The cover depicts two Tarot cards. Tarot is an old game of fortune-telling which consists of symbolic images of spiritual forces. There are several types of Tarot in that there are several decks involving various number of cards. The origin of Tarot is controversial; there are people who trace it to ancient Egypt, but modern Tarot decks originated in medieval Europe. I can think of no better example of metaphor than the Tarot game. Tarot plays with images to help to create structures of reality, to bring experiences into action in creative ways, which is also the case with metaphors. The magician and the fool are the first and the last cards respectively. They exemplify the opposing, but mutually dependent forces of disintegration and control. The fool adapts to circumstances, whereas the magician fights them. Together, they form a good metaphor of metaphor, i.e. conflicting images.

CONTENTS

Chapter 3 • Spiders of the Forest – Perspectives on forest in Swedish discourse 65

Bibliography 113

PREFACE

The three chapters in this thesis are based on three independent articles. The first one is, at the time of writing, a manuscript submitted to *Discourse Processes*. The second article has been accepted for an anthology concerning nature views which The Swedish Council for Planning and Coordination of Research will be publishing in the near future. The third chapter has been written more for the purpose of creating coherence in the thesis, and does not, as yet, conform to any manuscript standard.

There are a number of people who have encouraged and helped me continuously during the work with this thesis, and they all deserve credit for any good qualities.

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INTRODUCTION

The thesis consists of three independent articles presented in the form of three chapters which all deal with the interplay between discourse and metaphor. It is based on qualitative research on conceptions of forest manifest in Swedish policy concerning forest. The third article also includes an intercultural comparison with Canadian conceptions of forest management. The object of study may appear strange to cognitive scientists considering the tendency to work with mental, logical or computer-based representations of information and knowledge. Research on symbolic systems and representations is often devoid of cultural and social considerations. However, qualitative research on conceptions must be considered an essential part of cognitive science, otherwise, there would be no basis on which to develop models of the human mental faculties.

The thesis is based on a discourse analytic framework, and even if this is first and foremost a method in cultural and social studies because of a strong emphasis on qualitative research, e.g. Coulthard (1985), and rather unusual in the cognitive tradition, the method transcends most disciplinary boundaries, and does actually apply to many problems in cognitive research, (cf. Brown and Yule, 1983). In broad terms, discourse analysis deals with the dynamics of verbal forms in contexts. Contexts may range from parts of texts to cultural and social settings. With some imagination, it is evident that discourse is relevant to many parties interested in human thinking and reasoning. Studies of human conceptions and their verbal manifestations could actually be

interpreted in terms of types of discourse. Some of us choose to focus on individual faculties like problem-solving, others focus on social, cultural, or even historical contexts of conceptions manifest in verbal form.

The research on conceptions of forest relates to an interdisciplinary project aimed at understanding the human impact on forest environments in Sweden and Canada. I was given the task of discovering how metaphors affect conceptions of forest management in Sweden and Canada. Geographers and natural scientists are responsible for mapping the interplay between human activities and actual impacts on forest environments. In accordance with this larger project, the thesis is delimited by practical interests in forest management. Consequently, the cultural and social contexts of interest are not outlined solely for theoretical purposes, but are continuously specified and extended during the course of research, which is the general strategy in qualitative research. Nevertheless, the dynamics of metaphor in discourse forms the theoretical, and central object of study in this thesis.

Traditionally, metaphors have been defined in terms of invalid statements, i.e. they are not really true, they infringe verbal standards. With such a view, it becomes difficult to use metaphor analysis to document and explain conceptions because no one can believe in them anyway. The result would be either that people are irrational due to false beliefs, or that their words cannot be taken seriously. The view has a long tradition in linguistics, anthropology and philosophy, and according to Lloyd (1990), it is actually an artefact of academic conflicts; metaphors are invalid statements because they do not concern proper and scientific objects of study. The strategy has then been to discover *what people really mean* by reducing metaphors to some implicit, but true statements. According to Sperber (1976), meanings are treated as hidden true statements to be discovered by deciphering a code. However, in recent years of linguistic research on metaphor, e.g. Lakoff (1986), metaphors have taken on the opposite role in theorizing about conceptions, that is, metaphors constitute conceptions, and verbal manifestations of metaphor are really a conventional thing which need not be reduced to facts or analytic truths. With this view, every verbal expression

depends on interpretation, and consequently, an analysis should be directed more at demonstrating the conventional meanings of metaphors. Metaphors are, thus, found everywhere in language and thought. However, this new linguistic approach to metaphor creates another analytic problem; metaphors do contrast with facts and definitions, and they would not be controversial expressions if they were conventional.

The views on metaphor above do obviously range from some kind of verbal mistake to full-blown beliefs, but despite an appearance of being opposed ideas, there is a common core. Irrespective of context, metaphors are metaphors to everyone and everywhere within a culture or a speech community. Metaphors are founded on collective judgements of verbal standards, and there is thus a lack of dynamic qualities, i.e. there are no verbal disputes or arguments. For example, when dealing with a statement like "nature is our mother," collective and invariant meanings of nature and mothers are assumed to exist, and therefore, the statement is judged in the same way by all speakers of a certain language. There are no conflicts in meaning with such a view. Even in social anthropology, many social and cultural studies are conducted in the spirit of consensus, (cf. Fernandez, 1991). Either everyone in a speech community believes in a metaphor, or it is a play on words to all people involved. Cultural and social conflicts in meaning are thus neglected.

When one conducts qualitative research on when, where, and how people talk, it is quite clear that questions, statements and verbal expressions in general are not used in homogeneous and collective ways. They are deemed good or bad depending on the situation, and on the people who use them. For example, in saying that "a forest produces lumber," a forester may really mean it, whereas I experience that it is "humans who produce lumber," not the forest as such. Consequently, I have deemed it necessary to be sensitive to people's contrasting experiences, and not to statements, cultures or language at a too general level.

A metaphor is not always a "metaphor;" the same verbal form performs various tasks. An expression may be a trivial one, an analytic truth, a fact, a metaphor, or simply nonsense

depending on the people who use the expression. For example, the idea that "forest is nature" is, according to the media, often an analytic truth, but in the context of forest industry, it is, most of the time, irrelevant and strange. Forest is lumber to the industry, and the idea of nature relates to environmental radicals. Consequently, metaphor analysis must be truly sensitive to contexts of use, to dynamic qualities like speakers' attitudes and interests.

My argument is not a plea for relativism, but concerns methods of investigation. When dealing with people's statements of their conceptions, one must take their attitudes and experience into account, and not simply rely on ones own judgements of the relevance of statements. Sperber (1985) emphasizes the need to take "propositional attitudes" into account whenever one deals with people's beliefs in qualitative research, and that is rather my plea too. Metaphor analysis must involve qualitative research that relates metaphors to conceptions and attitudes that are maintained and sustained by the people who express the metaphors. Consequently, metaphors cannot be sought only on the basis of linguistic norms, but must relate to experience at a general level.

I take metaphors to be verbal expressions of conflicting experiences and conceptions. Metaphors are rhetorical tropes, and such expressions are in general used to change people's conceptions, not to express trivial things. There are scholars who claim that metaphors are new categories created out of old ones, e.g. Basso (1976), but with such a view, the actual conflicts are once again left out of account. The idea of metaphors being based on conceptual conflicts is confirmed by the rather ambiguous attitudes that we have towards metaphors. If I say that the forest is my home, I am using conventional names of things to form an expression in accordance with non-conventional experiences of forest and homes. On the one hand, there may be conventional ways to talk about forests, i.e. "trees" and "wood," but on the other hand, conflicting experiences may demand conflicting expressions, i.e. I may experience the forest as my home, not simply as trees. In saying that the forest is my home, I combine contexts in an unusual way, and other people may object, accept or ignore the statement depending on impressions of present and past experiences of both forests

and homes. If there were no conceptual conflicts involved in metaphors, there would not be any need to use them.

Metaphors are often equated with imagery, but it is very difficult to grasp in a practical way what is meant by images. Fernandez (1986) argues that imagery and metaphors are cultural activities aimed at creating coherence and order out of fragmented experiences, and my own view is also that some conceptual holism is involved. Imagery and metaphors arise out of conceptual conflicts, but they are expressed in order to transcend these conflicts. Metaphorical expressions turn conceptual conflicts into public concerns, and thereby, conceptual change becomes possible. The argument relates to Sperber's (1976) theory that metaphors "evoke" experiences of things because ordinary categories are inadequate to identify or define them. Metaphors involve cultural evocations of memories, not invocations of truth, to deal with conceptual conflicts. Naturally, if unusual experiences become usual, metaphors may very well become like any other facts or definitions, that is, uncontroversial, or "dead."

Many philosophers and linguists would claim that I am *really* breaking the rules of language in using metaphors (Levinson, 1983), and superficially, that seems to be the case. Metaphors involve conceptual change (Givón, 1989), and therefore transcend older verbal structures. However, the idea that metaphors break rules is often intermingled with arguments that they should be explained by, and derived from such rules, e.g. Levinson (1983). In other words, one assumes that there are permanent meanings or attitudes attached to verbal expressions, and by not conforming to this verbal and conceptual system, metaphors are only seen as "hiding" these true and permanent meanings. This argument is peculiar because, in Margolis' (1987) terms, meanings depend on contextual judgements, not on static systems. The question of verbal extensions is a question of human judgements, not a question of verbal conventions established by any omnipotent creature. Since metaphors extend conceptual systems, the idea of reducing them to such systems appears very strange.

> There can be "rules" for applying our concepts only because the activity of applying a rule necessarily incorporates an intuitive (in a broad sense of the term,

we might say "metaphorical") "reaching beyond" all the particular instances which have up to that time been compromised under that particular rule (Falck, 1989, p. 48).

Metaphors should not be defined solely in terms of verbal rules because they depend on people using words to express their experiences, as statements do in general. Metaphors should not be reduced to definitions or facts since they go beyond verbal predications of things. If I say that the forest is my home, I am not talking about either forests, or homes in any truly conventional way. A metaphor may be mediated by nominatives, verbs, adjectives, or, according to cognitive linguistics, e.g. Lakoff (1986), any grammatical category, consequently, it is a mistake to define or delimit metaphors in formal ways as some kind of relation between words. If I exclaim *look at my home*, I may, or may not, be using a metaphor. Perhaps, there is a forest or a home in front of me, but then, the question of metaphor is a matter of the actual application of words in everyday contexts, and thus, metaphors are not defined by verbal relations. Metaphors extend the meanings of words by mixing contexts in concrete ways, not by way of verbal analysis alone, but also through perception and interpretations based on social and cultural experience. When someone extends or delimits the word "home" to forests, the person is using a metaphor with respect to a verbal standard, and thereby, the metaphor is not a matter of congruous verbal experiences, but depends on divergent and conflicting perspectives. Since metaphors involve complex and holistic judgements, i.e. extensions of meaning, they are more susceptible to contrasting views, or conflicting images, but instead of reducing metaphors to "criminal" acts of some verbal kind, they are better seen in the light of such conflicting imagery. When contrasting experiences and conceptions correspond to the same verbal forms, they form contrasting or conflicting verbal standards. Such verbal and conceptual controversies do not make statements invalid, even if they may cause doubts, but, to relate the argument to Peirce (1990), without doubts, there would be no thinking. Conceptual conflicts and doubts are the essence of metaphors because every verbal extension is made at the risk of being misunderstood.

Metaphors indicate conceptual change, and therefore, they attract attention, and invite argumentation. Cultural and social conflicts in meaning constitute, thus, a truly dynamic quality of metaphor. Conceptual conflicts demand conceptual change, which invites metaphors to make the conflict public and subject to change. Without conceptual conflicts, there would not be any conceptual dynamics, and consequently, no metaphors. Actually, it is remarkable that there seems to be a lack of interest in conceptual conflicts in research on metaphor. Since scholars, on the one hand, claim that metaphors constitute invalid statements, and on the other hand, analyze their true meaning, the idea of conceptual conflicts would seem to be a quite natural conclusion. In a discourse analytic framework, this conclusion is, actually, a fundamental premise. A discourse analytic approach to language means that cultural and social dimensions must be taken into account, but then not in the sense of discovering only conventional meanings and consensus. On the contrary, the point is to discern real social and cultural conflicts that sustain conceptions (Parker, 1992). Instead of searching for true beliefs in some kind of direct way through verbal analysis, the quest changes to a concern for statements that express conceptions in contrasting and contradictory ways in correspondence with real social and cultural conflicts. The method is not a matter of establishing solely collective meanings, but to contrast opinions and beliefs in such a way that their verbal manifestation must be taken seriously because they are sustained by social and cultural conflicts. From a discourse analysis point of view, metaphors emerge as social and cultural conflicts in imagery, rather than existing from the beginning. Conceptual conflicts are thus the dynamics of metaphor, their source of energy.

According to Bateson (1980; 1972), every natural system of communication is based on phylogenetic and ontogenetic learning of contrasts. Since metaphors are part of human discourse, it would be strange if they did not conform to such patterns; metaphors are contrasts that matter to someone in accordance with their cultural and social experience. Consequently, and despite my earlier emphasis on verbal conflicts, discourse analysis of metaphors must also be directed at discovering coherent patterns of communication.

Verbal and social conflicts are most interesting when they are strong and enduring cultural conflicts, and consequently, give rise to elaborated patters of communication. The focus should be on rather general types of social and cultural experience, e.g. forestry, recreation, ecology, etc, since the task of documenting conceptions of forest would be quite chaotic if the focus was on any kind of conceptual contrast and conflict. The metaphors of interest are conceptual contrasts, and mixes of contexts, that cohere in discourse because of strong social and cultural foundations. The idea corresponds to some extent with the ideas of "cultural models" in anthropology (Holland and Quinn, 1987), and "mental models" in cognitive science (Brown and Yule, 1983). However, I do not seek sources of coherence in closed systems of verbal forms, which the work on models presupposes, but rather in everyday contexts. Metaphors take on coherent forms when people use language in cultural and social settings, not because of some kind of natural or inherent propensity to cohere in logical systems. Therefore, I see practical experience as a source of metaphorical coherence. Whenever people talk about things, practical experience forms perspectives that may be in conflict with other perspectives, and metaphors reveal such conflicts. The idea that perspectives govern verbal forms is much in line with the work of Markovà and Foppa (1990).

Discourse analysis may be based on diverse kinds of material, e.g. analysis of text books, journals, newspapers, interviews, everyday conversations, TV- or radio programmes, etc, and naturally, one is forced to choose what verbal material to consider relevant to the task at hand. When conducting qualitative research, the selection should not be done before the work begins, but the choice of objects of study is made continuously during the research. The criteria of relevance is something that must be understood to depend on actual research, not on preconceptions. So far in my research, I have gone through different text materials that relate to forest management from several points of view, e.g. forestry, ecology, recreation and economics, and I have conducted interviews with official representatives of institutions and organizations which I have deemed relevant to questions about forest policy. The research does not conclude with this thesis, on the contrary, the thesis concerns mainly the

methodological framework, even if it also involves a lot of examples from the research. The following articles should be seen in this light, i.e. they are all aimed at discovering how to apply a discourse analytic framework to metaphor analysis. The aim is then subordinated to the larger goal of discerning conceptual conflicts and perspectives that reveal conceptual relationships between humans and their forest environments.

The first chapter deals with the opposition between seeing metaphors as conventional statements, on the one hand, and as discursive expressions, on the other hand. Traditionally, within a Saussurian approach to language and thought, an analysis should establish conventional meanings and senses of sentences and words. However, when applied to metaphors, the method becomes problematic because metaphors break conventions for some reason. Contrasts of meaning and divergent perspectives seem therefore to be more proper qualities of metaphors. The first chapter is mainly based on analysis of text books dealing with issues of forest like forestry, economics, ecology and recreation.

In the second and the third chapter, I extend the discourse analysis to include verbal material of several types. The second chapter concerns metaphors related to nature that have been drawn from three cultural sources: idiomatic expressions, students in disciplines relevant to forest management, and the Swedish policy of nature conservation. The analysis shows that metaphors should be related to cultural contexts if their actual manifestations are to be explained. It also demonstrates how discourse analysis of metaphor should be aimed at discovering themes of cultural and social conflict if the meanings of metaphors are to be understood. The main part of the third chapter is based on extracts from interviews with official representatives of various kinds involved in Swedish forest policy. However, the analysis is also placed in a larger cultural framework by an intercultural comparison with Canadian conceptions of forest management. Furthermore, a more radical contrast is made by a short discussion of the forest-cosmology of the BaMbuti, a pygmé tribe in Congo. The last chapter exemplifies best the need of taking cultural and social conflicts into account when dealing with discourse analysis of metaphor.