

BOOK REVIEW

MacArthur, F., Oncins-Martínez, J.L., Sánchez-García, M., Piquer-Píriz, A.M. (Eds). (2012). *Metaphor in use: Context, culture, and communication*. Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Reviewed by Susan Nacey (Hedmark University College, Norway)

“Metaphor in use: Context, culture, and communications” contains sixteen papers presented at and/or inspired by the seventh conference on Researching and Applying Metaphor (RaAM7), each paper constituting one chapter in the book. The theme of this international conference, held in May 2008, was metaphor in cross-cultural communication. Like previous RaAM conferences, RaAM7 attracted international researchers investigating metaphor from a wide array of perspectives, variety that is mirrored in the contributions to this book. Its overarching aim is to shed light on different aspects of the relationship(s) between metaphor, culture, and ‘real-world’ contexts.

MacArthur and Oncins-Martínez’s introduction sets the scene, in essence acknowledging that because metaphor is such a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, there is no ‘one-size fits all’ method or approach to its study. Presumably to impose some degree of coherence onto sixteen, often quite disparate papers, the editors have chosen to group them into six general themes. As explained in the book’s introduction, *Part 1: Contexts of research* comprises the first four chapters, focusing on metaphorical identification and retrieval. *Part 2: Contexts of production* has three chapters comparing the metaphorical language of native speaker (NS) and non-native speakers (NNS) of different languages. In *Part 3: Contexts of interpretation*, three papers examine cross-cultural interpretation of metaphors. The two chapters forming *Part 4: Metaphor, topic, and discourse* look more narrowly at the importance of topic and discourse in cross-cultural metaphor research. *Part 5: Metaphor and culture* contains three papers which more fully flesh out the relationship between culture and its manifestation in language. Finally, *Part 6: Afterword and prospects for future research* consists of a single chapter.

What immediately becomes clear from the introduction is that this book is about variation, on many different levels. First, there is variation across languages under investigation, just as one would hope for in a volume inspired by a conference about cross-cultural communication. Seven of the papers investigate metaphor in languages other than English, either alone or in addition to English. Thus, we find chapters exploring metaphor in Norwegian (Golden), French, German and Italian (Trim), Spanish (Ureña), Turkish (Aksan and Aksan) and Swedish (Alm-Arvius). Pasma discusses metaphor identification in Dutch discourse, while Philip works with Italian discourse to present a methodology for locating metaphor candidates in ‘under-resourced languages’, i.e. those lacking developed tools for semantic annotation.

In addition, Azuma investigates Japanese metaphor through the medium of English by working with literal translations of cultural-bound Japanese figurative expressions. Further, although Berber Sardinha restricts himself to the exploration of English in his assessment of

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metaphor retrieval methods, he adds that his Metaphor Candidate Identifier (a freely-available online program specifically aimed at retrieving metaphorically used words) has two available versions, one for English and one for Portuguese. This volume therefore clearly demonstrates that metaphor research has moved beyond the boundaries of investigations into English alone, a criticism that could be levelled at much previously published literature.

Second, this book explores variation across proficiency levels, as several of the studies explore learner computer corpora to explore features of non-native production. Johansson Falck compares Swedish L2 English with British English, looking at differences in linguistic encodings of metaphorical ‘way’, ‘path’ and ‘road’ as a means of uncovering more about cross-cultural metaphor use. Chapetón-Castro and Verdaguer-Clavera investigate the similarities and differences between metaphors produced in Spanish L2 English and both novice and expert American English, with the ultimate aim of helping students further develop metaphorical competence in their writing. Golden begins to examine the extent to which German, Spanish and Russian L2 learners of Norwegian use metaphorical expressions in their written language through analyzing occurrences of the core verb ‘ta’ (roughly equivalent of English ‘take’).

Third, this volume addresses the occurrence of metaphor across modalities, including chapters that extend the scope of study beyond the written mode. While Chuang looks into metaphor in the gestures of a Mandarin Chinese teacher of music, van Mulkin and Le Pair investigate appreciation and interpretation among speakers of Spanish, French, and Dutch of visual metaphors –important given the important role that visual imagery may play in global advertising. These two contributions, however, comprise a decided minority of the book’s sixteen chapters, perhaps unexpected given the traditional focus on metaphor in written text. Nevertheless, a book about ‘metaphor in use’ should ideally include a greater proportion of papers examining metaphor in various modes. Particularly notable by its absence is any research about metaphor in spoken discourse. One may hope that more studies of metaphor in modalities other than written discourse will soon become mainstream, especially with technological advances making such studies more feasible.

Despite such variation, there is also a great deal that pulls the various contributions together. As the editors note in their introduction, corpus linguistics and metaphor research now go hand in hand. Twelve of the sixteen chapters discuss primary data found in various types of corpora. Some researchers use established, commercially available corpora such as the British National Corpus or the International Corpus of Learner English. Other researchers, by contrast, compile their own corpora, or access the internet and/or dictionaries in various ways. This state of affairs, where researchers base their findings on ‘real-world’ texts, is nothing short of revolutionary when one thinks about it, given a long tradition of introspection as the basis of metaphor theories prior to the wide accessibility of computerized corpora.

A particular merit of this book is its almost constant focus on methodology. By opening the volume with a section containing four chapters discussing methods and challenges related to metaphor identification, the editors transmit the overall message that metaphor researchers

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have a duty to take this crucial step in metaphor analysis seriously to validate any findings based on identification of metaphor in texts. These first four papers, taken together, equip present and future researchers with the background and tools to work with metaphor identification and retrieval. Berber Sardinha, in assessing metaphor retrieval methods, provides an overview of many of the most common methods and then focusses on accuracy issues linked to sampling techniques. To do so, he compares three tools, all of which are free software but vary in their degree of use-friendliness, and three procedures. Kaal and Dorst discuss practical issues that arose during the development of the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP), such as how to deal with similes, proper nouns, nicknames, conventionalized references, etc. They stress the importance of both consistency (treating similar cases in the same, theoretically valid way), as well as transparency (explicitly detailing decisions during the identification process). Pasma extends Kaal and Dorst's argumentation in her discussion of challenges encountered when applying MIP to Dutch, adaptations being required because the procedure was originally created to identify linguistic metaphors in English discourse. She recounts that the main complications include choice of dictionary, demarcation of lexical units, and compiling a list of metaphorical flags (equivalent to e.g. English 'like' marking simile). Philip too looks at metaphor identification in languages other than English, where no 'fancy' tools such as semantic taggers are available. She presents a method of identifying metaphors in specialized texts, using only raw frequencies and keyword lists.

Even though the primary focus of subsequent chapters is on findings concerning various aspects of metaphor research rather than methodology itself, many of the later papers also specifically detail their means of data collection and analysis. Ureña, for example, who compares Spanish and English conceptual types of terminological metaphors in the field of marine biology, explains how he identifies candidate terms through keyword searches. Veale, who presents a computational exploration of creative similes, explains his methods for collecting similes as well as a method of quantifying them according to positive or negative attitude –analysis characterized as “the largest of its kind for similes” (p.340). Chuang, whose focus is on metaphorical gesture in music teaching, also includes discussion of challenges arising from the application of MIP to Mandarin Chinese, thereby tying in neatly with Pasma's earlier paper concerning MIP and Dutch.

One weakness with respect to methodological issues, however, is the propensity for some research to rely on Google hits for linguistic evidence. This is evident, for example, in Alm-Arvius' study of the culturally-entrenched concept of 'troll' as it appears in Swedish texts. 'Googleology' is notoriously problematic in corpus research, for all sorts of reasons. For example, Google hit counts are for pages rather than instances, Google returns rounded estimates (even with multiples of 1000), and Google hit lists return 'noise' as well as credible information (see e.g. Kilgarriff, 2007). Hit counts will also vary depending on the commercial search engine employed. While results from such searches may provide tantalizing indications of particular trends or valid examples of a certain (perhaps rare) phenomenon, they should be cautiously employed. Indeed, although Alm-Arvius reports on numbers from Google

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searches, her greater focus is on mining the hits for illuminating examples of the various nuances of Swedish ‘troll’ that differ from the English usage under the influence of Swedish cultural heritage.

One point that arises in several of the chapters is the importance of topic when comparing corpora. Although Johansson Falck mentions this as a potential complicating factor, Golden goes further by detailing an instructive case where context proved crucial in explaining differences. Specifically, she finds a relative overuse of instances of metaphorical ‘ta’ (English ‘take’) in NNS Norwegian writing when compared with NS Norwegian writing. A closer look at context reveals that this finding has more to do with topic than with metaphoricity per se. It turns out that many of the Norwegian native speakers had been writing about organ donation (unlike the non-native speakers), so when the Norwegians wrote something like ‘take my heart’, there was no figurative speech involved. Golden does not explicitly chronicle whether this discovery was intended or inadvertent. If inadvertent, however, the chapter demonstrates how to turn a flaw in one’s research design into an advantage, providing a valuable cautionary lesson for future researchers.

Chapetón-Castro and Verdaguer-Clavera also take heed of the importance of topic in their work comparing metaphorical language in the discourse of different types of writers. Their work is innovative in two respects. First, they pilot a methodological approach combining MIP with Cameron’s proposed method, Metaphor Identification through Vehicle terms (MIV); in this way, they add to the methodological diversity illustrated in the book. Second, they compare metaphorical language produced in argumentative texts written by advanced Spanish L2 English learners and novice American L1 English writers, research adhering to the original vision for the Louvain collection of written and spoken learner corpora, from where Chapetón-Castro and Verdaguer-Clavera retrieve their texts.¹ Yet these authors go one step further with their research, through the additional comparison with professional American L1 English –editorials from *The New York Times*, carefully selected to match the topic of crime addressed in the two sets of learner texts. In this way, they add an important extra element to their study.

One potential pitfall in Chapetón-Castro and Verdaguer-Clavera’s choice of material for investigation deserves mention, however. In looking for an ‘expert’ alternative to the argumentative text type produced by language learners, a logical option would indeed seem to present itself in newspaper editorials. There are nevertheless problems with this choice that might not be immediately apparent. One is that editorials are written in a given context, usually responding to an issue in current events. As a result, the author may justifiably assume that the readership is familiar with the topic and therefore omit reference to a good deal of important background information, something which may not be true of learner-produced texts where an essay is often written in the absence of any wider context. This text difference may, in turn, affect findings based on comparisons. Perhaps more importantly, however, editorials are written by editors. By way of concrete example, editorials in *The New York*

¹ Information about the Louvain corpora may be found here: <https://www.uclouvain.be/en-cecl.html>

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Times are published under the name of the ‘Editorial Board’, which currently consists of 18 journalists, each of whom has a particular area of expertise.² What this means is that while Chapetón-Castro and Verdaguer-Clavera intend to compare learner-produced texts with those of “older, more expert **writers**” (p. 149, bold emphasis mine), their comparison may in fact be against the work of no more than a single writer –e.g. the editor specializing in criminal justice– or at best, the work of a handful of writers. Added to this uncertainty is the degree of influence of the editorial page editor, whose predilections may influence the text of the subordinate editors in real, yet uncredited ways. If editorials are to be used for comparison purposes, one needs to be aware of such possibly complicating factors and somehow compensate for them (thanks to Thomas Egan, Hedmark University College, for these observations).

The few studies included in the book that are not corpus-based also openly detail their methodology, in such a way that their experiments could be paralleled in future studies, if so desired. Perhaps unsurprisingly, van Mulkin and Le Pair’s study of visual metaphors does not rely on corpus data. Rather, this research team explains how they administered two questionnaires to participants from three different countries, the first questionnaire dealing with appreciation of different types of visual advertisements (carefully selected according to a scale of complexity), with the second looking into the participants’ interpretation of selected advertisements. Neither does Chuang’s investigation into metaphorical gestures rely on corpus evidence. She instead employs recorded observations of classroom teaching –later transcribed for speech and gesture– and a recorded follow-up interview with the teacher informant. Azuma, by contrast, administers a test and follow-up interviews to native speakers of English from three different countries/cultures, to test their interpretation of Japanese figurative expressions, and in this way further knowledge about language learners’ strategies with regard to understanding unfamiliar foreign metaphorical expressions. Particularly useful with respect to methodology is Azuma’s inclusion of three appendices, one of which contains the actual metaphor cognition test given to participants while the other two contain a key – handy for those readers who have not yet mastered Japanese.

When it comes to the volume as a whole, the editors have done an admirable job creating a whole out of sixteen individual contributions. Signposting in the form of cross references between texts are ample, such that readers are led from one paper to other relevant papers within the book. The editors have also chosen to sometimes insert their independent voices into the footnotes of some texts, usually to define what they presumably consider to be a relatively inaccessible term –for example ‘caudal’ (p. 220) and ‘semantic prosody’ (p. 290). On the one hand, this type of editing may be viewed as a service creating a more read-friendly text. On the other hand, one wonders why the authors themselves were not advised to clarify potentially obscure terminology themselves, such suggestions presumably being the mandate of editors. In a related vein, it is unclear why a term such as ‘metaphoreme’ requires editorial glossing when it appears in Philip’s contribution in Chapter 4 (p. 87), but not when Gibbs

² Information about *The New York Times* editorial board may be found here:

http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/opinion/editorialboard.html?_r=0

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employs it much further on, in Chapter 16 (p. 367); any presumption that all readers of the book's final chapter have also necessarily read the fourth chapter (and recall a definition offered in a footnote) is perhaps unwarranted.

Moreover, there are some additional signposts that should have been addressed by the authors, editors, and/or peer reviewers prior to publication. For example, the introduction to Veale's paper about simile claims that his fourth section contains "a statistical analysis" (p.332), something which does not actually appear there –unless the presentation of three percentages sprinkled within the text is deemed sufficient to warrant the claim (see pp 336-337). Further, at one point in the same paper, the author refers to figures said to have been previously mentioned in the fourth section (p. 338); a hunt for these figures, however, finds them in the first paragraph of section 3.2 (p. 336). Such anomalies are unfortunate as they detract from an otherwise impressive and stimulating look into the ironic use of simile. Another possible weakness concerns the main title of Trim's contribution to the volume, "The limit of comprehension in cross-cultural metaphor", a corpus-based investigation into networking in drugs terminology across four different languages. It is not until ten pages into the paper that a footnote appears explaining that the notion of comprehension is "subjective" in the sense that no research about comprehension has been carried out; rather the piece is intended as "a guideline as to what factors and parameters are likely to be involved in the degrees of interpretability" (p. 227). This type of information is essential for a proper understanding of the paper and should ideally have been moved out of a footnote and into its first paragraph so that readers are aware of this from the outset. As it stands, the danger is that the paper's title promises more than it can possibly deliver, a pity considering the intriguing conclusions drawn by the author.

Lastly, as earlier mentioned, the sixth and final part of the volume consists of a single chapter only, written by Gibbs. The editors claim that Gibbs' chapter "provides an afterward to the various strands in the different chapters" (p. 13). This is not, in fact, what the paper does, since it almost completely disregards the preceding fifteen chapters. Instead, Gibbs advances an alternative understanding of metaphor as a self-organizational phenomenon arising from "dynamical processes of mind and body along multiple time-scales" (p 353), and urges future researchers to work in this area. In short, it is appropriate that Gibbs was allotted a section unto himself. He is a force to be reckoned with, constantly pushing metaphor research in new directions.

"Metaphor in Use" is a thick book, with 371 pages excluding indices. After having agreed to review it, I decided to tackle its pages similarly to how I would treat a box of fine Belgian chocolates, by reading a single chapter each evening until none were left. However, while reading the introduction to the book, I quickly discovered a flaw in my plan, much like the challenge I run into with chocolates. Namely, the various papers sounded so enticing that I was sorely tempted to abandon my systematic strategy and jump from one particularly tantalizing topic to another. And like chocolates, some of the chapters were extraordinary, whereas others were less satisfactory –but goodness gracious, they were all good! In brief,

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anyone interested in metaphor in cross-cultural communication and/or methodological issues in metaphor research will find this book inspirational and valuable. Some will find it invaluable.

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