The Complexity of Compound Figures of Speech

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INTRODUCTION

In the last decades, figurative language has become one of the most debated topics in linguistics. Traditionally, it was thought of as being one aspect of what gives a text (in particular, a poetic text) special aesthetic value. However, over the years, scholars have pointed out that the interplay between language and thought is particularly evident in figurative language, confirming Lakoff and Johnson's claim (1980) that figurative language is a ubiquitous characteristic of speech, and its function does not only and not always fall within the domain of rhetoric. This raised the interest of scholars in the field of cognitive linguistics, who have analysed several types of figures focusing on their relation with human thought and cognition.

Only recently, however, has the attention of linguists been caught by the behaviour of figures of speech when they combine with each other. My research is focused on this specific aspect of figurative language, namely the combinations of individual tropes to form what are called compound figures.

Specifically, my analysis will concentrate on the interaction between metaphor, irony and hyperbole in combination (i.e. ironic metaphor, hyperbolic metaphor or hyperbolic irony). In order to fully appreciate the complexities of compound figures, a thorough examination of the individual figures featuring in the compounds was, however, in order, so as to highlight their specificities and the theoretical implications of individual analyses.

Although hundreds of figures of speech have been identified and described (see Lanham, 1991), only a few have been the focus of linguistic research (see Roberts and Kreuz 1994). Two of the most commonly studied forms of figurative language are metaphor and irony. A massive body of research has brought to the fore many problems connected with traditional definitions of these figures. For example, the former is traditionally defined as an implicit comparison, which is literally false, but the challenge is to spell out the process that leads from what is literally false to what is actually communicated: the literal meaning of *Juliet is the sun* is false and different from the meaning of beauty and charm the author intends to convey and which can only be grasped inferentially. On the other hand, irony is traditionally seen as a statement which conveys a

meaning contrary to what is said: *What a fine friend* (intending to convey that the friend is not good). But if both hinge upon the contrast between (false) literal meaning and (true) intended meaning, how can they be differentiated? Moreover, both tropes do not just add aesthetic value in some generalised way: they convey an emotional involvement of the speaker/writer. However, what exactly does this effect amount to, and how is it different in different uses of the same figure and different figures? A similar effect is given by another common (even if less studied) figure of speech, namely hyperbole. *There were a billion people ahead of me in the queue* not only exaggerates the number of persons waiting for their turn but, on some occasions, also emphasises the speaker's annoyed attitude.

What is the nature of literal meaning? How are literal and non-literal meanings represented in the mind? Is the interpretation of literal meaning prior to the interpretation of figurative meaning? What are the mechanisms by which we understand figurative language? These are some of the basic questions underlying cognitive research in figurative language. Scholars have tackled these questions from several perspectives, ranging from semantics to pragmatics, from psycholinguistics to the exploration of the neural underpinnings of figurative language comprehension and production. A large amount of data has been collected, and significant analyses have contributed to highlighting the complexities of figurative language. However, some aspects of specific figures of speech remain unresolved, as experimental studies, for instance, bring contrasting evidence for the same topics. The complexities become even more apparent when we observe their interactions within compound figures of speech.

These compound expressions frequently occur in everyday speech, but they have so far received less attention in the literature than has been devoted to individual tropes. The research questions concern the type of meanings conveyed and the logical, psychological and temporal order of interpretation: is an ironic metaphor first interpreted as a metaphor and then as irony, for instance, or is one interpretation conditioned on the other, and if so, how? The hypothesis I will put forward is that the actual interpretation of these multiple figure uses is context-dependent, both in terms of contextual attractors and contextual salience. The theoretical claim presupposed is that individual tropes are not represented in the mind as rigid categories but rather as multidimensional spaces including flexible sets of factors that may group together differently on different occasions to let one or the other interpretation emerge. Ultimately, my study focuses on verifying the ability of the human mind to process meanings at multiple dimensions: not only from literal to metaphorical but also from literal to metaphorical to hyperbolic (for instance).

To this aim, I selected a specific aspect of the complexity of compound figures, namely their cognitive complexity, and set up a battery of tests to investigate experimentally whether they require a bigger effort to be understood with respect to simple figures of speech. Participants included native and non-native speakers of English. The latter were further divided into subgroups based on their level of proficiency in English. Since understanding the nuances of figurative language can be a challenging task, especially for non-native speakers, studying the differences between native and non-native speakers in comprehending simple and compound figures of speech can shed light on the role of language proficiency and of the related cultures in understanding figurative language, a topic that has garnered much interest in the literature but still warrants further investigation.

A terminological clarification is in order. In this contribution, I will also use, among others, the terms figures of speech or rhetorical figures to refer to metaphor, irony or hyperbole. However, I do not consider them as pertaining to rhetoric, but as pertaining to cognition. The rhetorical figure label is used as a hold on tradition, as I actually treat them as complex conceptual representations.

The work is subdivided into six main chapters. The first chapter provides a preliminary definition of figurative compound, and several examples of the different combinations of tropes are described.

The second chapter analyses the existing literature on the three tropes whose possible combinations are studied in this research project: metaphor, irony and hyperbole.

I will briefly mention the traditional views of metaphor, the XX Century most outstanding philosophical treatments. Finally, I will concentrate on the cognitive turn which characterised linguistics in the 1980s and which shifted the focus on the cognitive operations human beings use to make sense of experience. Within this framework, metaphor occupies a central position, and several influential theories were developed in these years: Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980), Neural Theory of Metaphor (Feldman, Lakoff, Bailey, Narayanan et al. 1996), Blending Theory (Fauconnier and Turner, 1998) and Relevance Theory (Sperber and Wilson, 1986/1995).

Verbal irony was traditionally seen as meaning the opposite of what is said, but several studies underlined its complex nature. Grice remodelled the classic view of irony by making its pragmatic meaning depend on a blatant flouting of the Maxim of Quality. The criticisms directed to his theoretical framework led Grice to revise it by emphasising the attitudinal component expressed when being ironic. Attitudes gradually gained importance in the studies on irony with the development of Pretense

Theory, Echoic Theory, and recent studies by BromberekDyzman and Yus, or even a more radical view by Bertuccelli Papi, which finally stressed their role as the central component of irony.

Finally, studies on hyperbole are discussed. Hyperbole shares several features with both metaphor and irony, but in the context of my research, the most relevant feature is its capability to express a speaker's attitude toward a state of affairs. In fact, the primary goal of this chapter is to show how the studies in the literature have proved the complexity of each of the figures analysed, both in terms of their structure and as means for the expression of attitudes.

Chapter 3 presents the theoretical contributions on compound figures of speech, with specific reference to ironic metaphor, hyperbolic metaphor and ironic hyperbole. The studies on figurative compounds focus on two main topics: the logical and the psychological order of interpretation. The logical order of interpretation has been motivated within semantic, pragmatic and speech-act theory perspectives. On the other hand, the psychological order of interpretation has been analysed in experimental studies, which, in particular, investigated the differences between irony and metaphor in terms of processing and the contribution of hyperbole in the interpretation of compound figures of speech.

Chapters 2 and 3 are an essential part of this work, as they provide the foundations for the issues that will be addressed later on, concerning the complexity of the figures analysed.

Chapter 4 provides my point of view on figurative compounds. The role of attitudes in irony and, consequently, in ironic compounds is further analysed. As previously mentioned, I will argue that individual tropes are not rigid categories but flexible and multidimensional sets of features which group together differently under the action of factors that can be described in terms of contextual attractors and salience. Therefore, a digression on the studies on language as a complex system is necessary to provide the theoretical foundations for my study, and a discussion of that theoretical paradigm in connection with the Conceptual Integration Framework will follow. Finally, my position on the interaction of two or more tropes within a compound figure of speech is presented.

The fifth chapter introduces and provides the results of the case study I performed on interpreting figurative compounds. Participants, materials and research method are described, followed by the *Results* section.

Chapter 6 discusses the results recorded in the tests and interprets the data I obtained. Results are analysed according to several perspectives concerning the roles of the figures forming the compound, the complexity of the stimuli and the differences between participants.

By comparing the response patterns to different types of stimuli, I aim to provide insights into the cognitive mechanisms underlying the comprehension of figurative language and simple figures of speech. I will also point out the role of contexts and cultures in fostering the right interpretation.

In this sense, this research is not only important for linguists and language teachers but for anyone who communicates across cultures and languages.

1

COMPOUND FIGURES OF SPEECH

1.1. Definition and examples

In the literature, complex expressions that serve more than one purpose are referred to as compound figures (or figurative compounds). A figurative compound is the result of the interaction of two or more figures, and its meaning cannot be reduced to the meaning of one of the individual tropes that make it up, nor to a linear sum of the component meanings:

(1) What a delicate lacework [uttered about a messy piece of handwriting] (Stern, 2000)

This utterance combines metaphor and irony: the metaphor is employed to describe the domain of writing through the domain of sewing, and, by looking at the context outlined in (1), we can understand that the speaker is mocking the addressee for his/her lousy calligraphy.

If we interpreted the utterance as expressing the meaning carried by only one of the two figures involved, we would not grasp its actual meaning. If we only recognised the metaphor correctly, we would interpret (1) as a compliment toward that person's handwriting; an appreciation delivered through the expression of a positive judgement using a metaphor that enhances the precision, care and delicacy of that person's handwriting. On the other hand, if the hearer correctly interpreted the utterance as ironic without recognising the metaphor in it, he/she would not understand (in the lack of any context) that we are not talking about sewing but calligraphy. Thus, the utterance would be interpreted as a mocking toward an ugly lace made by someone.

We can have a complex figure of speech resulting from the interaction of irony and hyperbole, as in

(2) Mark [who has a negative opinion about Johnny]: «Johnny is an absolute genius, another Einstein» (Walton 2017)

Compared to the intended meaning, the literal meaning of hyperbole is exaggerated. Mark says that Johnny is extremely brilliant, but we know from the context that Mark is ironic and does not think Johnny is clever at all. Again, if we did not grasp Mark's ironic intention, we would interpret this utterance as an endorsement of Johnny's intelligence. On the other hand, we would only fully understand Mark's communicative intention if we grasped the blatant exaggeration. As a consequence, the ironic purpose of the utterance would be less evident (as discussed in section 3.4).

Figurative compounds resulting from the interaction between metaphor and hyperbole present their own characteristic features: we can find an example of their combination in

(3) That child is the devil incarnate (Carston and Wearing 2015)

Here, the metaphor is used to describe a particularly vivacious child, and the presence of the hyperbole increases the gap between how things are described and how they actually are (see section 3.4).

As mentioned above, complex figures of speech are particularly frequent in everyday speech. We can find several instances of them, such as:

(4) He's as charismatic as a traffic cone (Carston and Wearing 2015) simile and irony

or

(5) Her anger radiated like a nuclear explosion (Carston and Wearing 2015) simile and hyperbole

Furthermore, there are compounds resulting from the interaction of three different tropes, as in

(6) Some comments on Facebook are gold mines [talking about the comments of Covid negationists on Facebook]

Saying that comments are *gold mines* is a metaphor, used to describe the abstract value of Facebook comments through the concrete domain of a mine's wealth. In addition, gold mine is a hyperbolic term because it places these comments at the very end of a scale in which the maximum degree of the lexical semantics of wealth is expressed. Finally, we also have irony because this person does not really think the comments are

valuable in fact, he/she is mocking the outlandish information they report and the people who post them.

According to Popa Wyatt (2017, 3), these figures are subtly different to a compound sentence such as 'X and Y', where X might be ironic and Y metaphorical. For example (7), said about a person who is bullying their friend to get what she wants:

(7) Oh yes, the meeting went brilliantly, she flayed them alive.

Utterances (1) and (2) are different from (7) because in (1) and (2) the very same word "lacework" or "absolute genius/Einstein" are respectively interpreted both metaphorically and ironically and both hyperbolically and ironically. According to Popa Wyatt, one interpretation nested inside the other in (1) and (2), whereas it is not nested in (7).

The study of compound figures highlights a new perspective in which the focus is not only on single tropes' specific nature or the underlying mechanisms of their interpretation. Figures of speech, in particular metaphor and irony, have massively been studied in isolation. However, their combination brings to the fore mechanisms of meaning interpretation which need to be further explored and raises a number of questions which I will take into consideration in the following sections.

2

SIMPLE FIGURES

Due to the enormous amount of literature on figurative language, this research project limits its analysis to the interaction of 3 single figures of speech: metaphor, irony and hyperbole. The following section presents a brief overview of the most outstanding studies on each trope in the linguistics field.

2.1. Metaphor

Metaphor, from the Greek *metapherein* ('transference'), is traditionally defined as a figure of speech in which a word or phrase is used to describe something it does not literally denote, for example:

(1) "Mark's brain is a *computer*"

We probably have no difficulty understanding this sentence as meaning that Mark is quick-minded, rational, reliable or possibly a cold, calculating person. In any case, we dwell on something other than a literal reading. In other words, at no point in our reading do we think of Mark with a personal computer inside his head instead of his brain. This is because the metaphor is based on shared knowledge about brains and computers. However, there are cases of more creative metaphors that would engage our minds in more complex interpretive hypotheses.

2.1.1. Naming of parts and types of metaphors

When we use a metaphor, we talk about two things simultaneously. Two different subjects are combined to suit different purposes ranging from "using a more sophisticated language to expressing an attitude about someone or something or in an attempt to make what might initially seem indescribable into something comprehensible to others" (Nacey 2020, 363). Here is an example:

(2) “My lawyer is a shark”

According to a long-standing, time-honoured tradition, in this utterance, two different themes are placed side by side to create a rich and not entirely predictable effect. There is a primary theme, sometimes called a *tenor* or *frame* (“lawyer”); and a second theme (“shark”), which is introduced to enrich our thinking on the first one. This second theme is called *vehicle* (Richards, 1937) of the metaphor. As cognitive linguists have proved, these pretheoretic descriptions fall short of explaining the mental processes involved in understanding metaphors (see 2.1.4).

2.1.2. Classic and semantic accounts

Metaphor has been an object of study since the times of Aristotle but it gained more importance in the second half of the 20th century. During the first half of the century, writers, poets, linguists, literary critics, and philosophers from both analytical and continental traditions studied it. Two authors, Richards (1937) and Black (1955), contributed to laying the foundation for a more complex understanding of metaphor. Richards explained metaphor in semantic terms, while Black systematised this position. According to Black, metaphorical meaning arises from the interaction between lexical meanings and contexts.

2.1.2.1. Interaction View. Black (1955) rejected Aristotle’s *Comparison View* (or *Similarity View*)[1] of metaphor as an elliptical comparison and

[1] Aristotle’s analysis of metaphor in the *Poetics* is generally considered the starting point of the topic’s intellectual history. He characterised metaphor as a sign of language mastery and genius. It is worth noticing that Aristotle included in the category of metaphor also other linguistic expressions that nowadays we would identify as metonymy or synecdoche. However, he also believed it was largely ornamental, appropriate for poetry but too enigmatic to use in philosophical or scientific discourse (McGlone 2007). To Aristotle are attributed the two main classic views regarding metaphor, although it is not clear that Aristotle would have agreed to support any theory regarding metaphor. They are: the *Theory of Substitution* and the *Theory of Comparison* (or *Similarity*). According to the *Theory of Substitution*, to understand a metaphorical utterance *P* it is necessary to substitute at least some expressions in it, to obtain an utterance *R* which is precisely the meaning of the metaphorical utterance. Aristotle writes in the *Poetics* [1457 b 5] "metaphor is the transfer of the proper name of one thing to another", and, in this definition, many see the first definition of the *Theory of Substitution*. According to, *Theory of Comparison* (or *Similarity*), a metaphorical utterance has the same meaning as a comparative or similarity utterance. Thus, metaphors of

criticised what he called the *Substitution View* wherein metaphor is assumed to be a fancy substitute for literal language (McGlone 2007). Black illustrates this *Interaction Theory* with the metaphorical utterance:

(3) "Man is a wolf"

The metaphorical term *wolf* is a vehicle for a new meaning, resulting from the interaction of the ideas about wolves and ideas about men. Black's claim is: "when we use a metaphor we have two thoughts of different things active together and supported by a single word or phrase, whose meaning is a resultant of their interaction" (p. 38). Metaphor is a two-way traffic of ideas: it is not only one term that takes on the properties of another. In (3) "Man is a wolf", our perception of the man is modified as much as our perception of the wolf. This dynamic interaction of qualities makes metaphor such a powerful instrument of communication.

2.1.3. The standard pragmatic model

The classic view of metaphor was based on the assumption that language was fundamentally literal and compositional. The non-compositional and ambiguous nature of metaphor defied attempts at simple explanations. Many students of language simply ignored the problem, relegating metaphor to the realm of literary embellishment. Realising that metaphor could not be easily ignored, others began to see it as a matter not of language meaning, but rather of language use and, therefore, belonging to the field of pragmatics. This was a notable step forward in that it acknowledged metaphor as a vital part of human communication. The *Standard Pragmatic Model* saw metaphor comprehension as an indirect process. Each utterance was first subjected to an obligatory literal compositional analysis. If this analysis could not be completed because of a violation of pragmatic principles, then a special process would be activated and, using whatever contextual information was at hand, the speaker's meaning would be extracted.

2.1.3.1. H. P. Grice. In his William James Lectures at Harvard in 1967, Herbert Paul Grice claimed that the gap between formal and natural language could be reduced by distinguishing linguistic meaning from the

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form *X is a Y* (e.g. "Mark's brain is a *computer*") are understood by converting them into simile form (e.g. "Mark's brain is *like* a computer"). The idea of metaphor as a shortened simile was developed by Quintilian (3, 305) and enjoyed great success over the centuries.

speaker's meaning (Grice, 1989). He showed that, when considered in specific contexts of use, linguistic meaning can convey richer and fuzzier speaker's meanings, made up not only of "what is said" but also of "what is implicated". In doing so, he introduced new conceptual tools, particularly the notion of *implicature*, that became the foundation for modern pragmatic theories. His *Cooperative Principle*[2] ("Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged"; Grice, 1989) was intended as a general law of human rationality, which, however, paved the way to a consideration of pragmatics at the interface between language and cognition.

Grice assumed metaphor to violate one of the conversational maxims that govern communication, namely the *Maxim of Quality* (i.e., "Do not say what you believe to be false"), and thus to be defective in communicative terms compared to literal language. In order to succeed in metaphor comprehension, the hearer relies on a set of inferential rules and pragmatically works out the speaker's meaning, which is separated from the linguistic meaning. Therefore, part of the conveyed meaning is explicitly communicated, while another part needs to be inferred.

Moreover, whereas literal meaning is accessed directly, metaphor interpretation requires subsequent different stages: first, literal meaning is accessed; second, literal interpretation is detected as defective; and third, the search for another interpretation is pursued. Thus, accessing literal meaning is mandatory, and metaphor interpretation occurs indirectly. However, Grice did not intend his account of how implicatures are recognised as a psychological theory or even as a cognitive model, he intended it as a rational reconstruction. When he illustrated the ingredients involved in recognising an implicature, he was enumerating the sorts of information that a hearer needs to consider, at least intuitively, and exhibiting how this information is logically organised.

Among the various objections to his theory is the inadequacy of the explanation that he offered of metaphor and other figures of speech. Grice proposes that metaphors get interpreted as floutings of the Maxim of Quality, which states: Be truthful. 1. Do not say what you believe to be

[2] Four maxims and sub-maxims accompany this principle in Grice's account: Maxim of Quantity: Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange); Do not make your contribution more informative than is required. Maxim of Quality: Do not say what you believe to be false; Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence. Maxim of Relation: Be relevant. Maxim of Manner: Be perspicuous; Avoid obscurity of expression; Avoid ambiguity; Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity); Be orderly.

false; 2. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence. Metaphors are obviously untruthful since they are literally false. However, they communicate a meaning that the interlocutor can reach by activating an inferential process that moves from the assumption that the speaker is respecting the Cooperative Principle and relies on the fact that the interlocutor can see that he is purposely flouting the maxim of Quality in order to make his meaning go through.

One of the main objection to this view is that it is not sufficient to rely on the Maxim of Quality to explain the process of metaphorical interpretation. As a matter of fact, this maxim is also flouted by irony and hyperbole, which are literally as false as metaphor, although to varying degrees and with different effects. Therefore the mechanism proposed by Grice is not sufficiently explanatory by itself to distinguish between the meanings communicated by metaphors as opposed to the ones communicated by ironies or hyperboles.

2.1.3.2. J. R. Searle. John Searle (1979/1993) writes shortly after Grice. He is clearly influenced by the new perspectives that Grice's work offers for a pragmatic analysis of language use and proposes to analyse metaphor, adopting and deepening Grice's ideas. He also openly takes a stand against *Comparison View* (already criticised by Black) and *Interaction View* and defends a version of the *Substitution View*.

Searle analysed metaphor in terms of speech acts, focusing on how a metaphorical interpretation of an utterance is initiated. According to Searle, our metaphorical interpretation of an utterance involves at least three steps: we first perceive an incompatibility between the literal meaning and the context of utterance. Therefore, we have to choose between the literal and the metaphorical interpretation, with the former being the default option; once we know that the speaker is saying "S is P" while meaning "S is R", we process the metaphorical meaning, that is, we compute the possible values of R, based on several principles[3]; finally, we

[3] Searle (1979/1993) argues that there is a variety of principles for computing R, given P that is, a variety of principles according to which the utterance of P can call to mind the meaning R in ways that are peculiar to metaphor: 1. Things which are P are by definition R (p. 104). 2. Things which are P are contingently R (p. 104). 3. Things which are P are often said or believed to be R, even though both speaker and hearer may know that R is false of P (p. 105). 4. Things which are P are not R, nor are they like R things, nor are they believed to be R, nonetheless it is a fact about our sensibility, whether culturally or naturally determined, that we do perceive a connection, so that utterance of P is associated in our minds with R properties (p.105). 5. P things are not like R things and are not believed to be like

restrict the possible values of R by referring to contextual information and retrieving our world knowledge about S. For Searle, this alternative interpretation involved the conversion of metaphor into an analogical comparison, underlining the similarities with Aristotle's *Substitution View*.

2.1.3.3. D. Davidson. More or less in the same years, in *What Metaphors Mean* (1978), Donald Davidson put forward a totally different view of metaphor, arguing that metaphors mean nothing other than their literal sense and that they gain their effective power through their use. He claims that there is no metaphorical meaning: neither a literal metaphorical meaning, nor an intended metaphorical meaning that can be delivered from speaker to listener (Davidson's *negative thesis*).

Davidson proposes his theory: the *Brute Causality Thesis* (Davidson's *positive thesis*), where he claims that a metaphorical utterance induces certain thoughts or emotions in the listener (or reader). These thoughts are not propositional, cannot be paraphrased into utterances and are not even clearly delimitable. Therefore, metaphor gets its power solely from its effect on the hearer. This is why Davidson's thesis is called the *Causality Theory*: the idea is that the utterance produced by the speaker or writer causes certain thoughts, associations, or images in the reader or listener (but they do not necessarily correspond to either what the words mean or what the speaker wants his listener to mean).

2.1.4. The cognitive turn in linguistics

In the 1980s, a distinctive style of theorising about language, thought, and meaning took shape in the work of Charles Fillmore, Eleanor Rosch, George Lakoff, Ronald Langacker and their followers that came to be known as *Cognitive Linguistics* (Lee, 2001; Croft and Cruse, 2004).

R things, nonetheless, the condition of being P is like the condition of being R (p. 106). 6. There are cases where P and R are the same or similar in meaning, but where one, usually P, is restricted in its application and does not literally apply to S (p. 106). 7. Principles 1-6 may be applied to metaphors not having the form "S is P" but relational metaphors, and metaphors of other syntactical forms, such as those involving verbs and predicate adjectives (p. 106). 8. When one says, "S is P," and means that "S is R," P and R may be associated by such relations as the part-whole relation, the container-contained relation, or even the clothing and wearer relation (p. 107). In other words, there are no clear boundaries between metaphor, simile, synecdoche or metonymy. 9. If an association between P and R does not exist, it can be created by the metaphor itself (p. 107).

Cognitive linguists break with advocates of Chomskian *Generative Grammar*, denying that the terms on which words intelligibly combine are set by brute hardwired principles of universal grammar embodied in a special purpose language module. Instead, the terms on which words meaningfully combine directly reflect the terms on which certain strategies for conceiving concrete situations, strategies the words serve to signal and evoke, can be successfully coordinated with one another. They break with advocates of a Fodorian language of thought, denying that conceiving or thinking is a matter of manipulating sentence-like discursive mental representations in accord with syntactically stated, truth-preserving inferential rules. Instead, conceiving is a matter of manipulating unconscious mental imagery to let concretely pictured physical objects and situations stand in for the more abstract objects and situations we're endeavouring to understand (Stanford Encyclopedia 2011).

Cognitive linguists believe that the same cognitive operations that human beings use for making sense of experience, in general, are used for making sense of language. In this view, language is structured by the same principles of operation as other modalities of the mind (Kövecses, 2002).

Within this theoretical framework metaphor occupies a central position: new perspectives of observation are offered, and new hypotheses are put forward regarding its nature and mental representation.

2.1.4.1. The Conceptual Metaphor Theory. In their 1980 book *Metaphors we live by*, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson changed how linguists thought about metaphor. They claimed that: "Metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature". In other words, they underline that metaphor does not only concern rhetoric but also ordinary language. Furthermore, metaphor is both a linguistic and a conceptual phenomenon affecting language and thought. They discussed several metaphorical expressions used in everyday language, such as:

(4) Look how far we've come We're at a crossroads.

We'll just have to go our separate ways.

We can't turn back now.

I don't think this relationship is going anywhere.

They observed that all these expressions have something in common: they describe experiences of relationships but rely upon expressions that relate to the conceptual domain[4] JOURNEYS. This ability to describe a relationship like marriage in terms of a journey was so productive that it led Lakoff and Johnson to hypothesise a conventional link between the domains of LOVE RELATIONSHIPS and JOURNEYS. Thus, the target domain (LOVE RELATIONSHIPS) is structured in terms of the source domain (JOURNEYS).

This type of association, which links an abstract domain (such as LOVE) to a concrete one (such as JOURNEY), is observed in several fields, leading to the hypothesis that metaphors are indeed a way of speaking about abstract entities in terms of more concrete ones. They are, in fact, the way the mind operates to overcome the difficulties of dealing with abstract concepts. Metaphors are, therefore, claimed to be conceptual in nature. Lakoff and Johnson proposed that we not only speak in metaphorical terms, but also think in metaphorical terms. From this perspective, "linguistic expressions that are metaphorical in nature are simply reflections of an underlying conceptual association" (Evans and Green, 2006, 295).

According to Lakoff and Johnson, we establish a series of correspondences between domains. This is done through a highly structured mapping consisting of ontological correspondences, thanks to which the entities of the source domain find a systematic correspondence with the entities of the target domain. In other words, the conceptual metaphor is a unidirectional mapping that projects the conceptual structures of the source domain on the target domain, as stressed in Lakoff and Turner (1989)[5]. Thus, we can conceptualise LOVE in terms of JOURNEYS, but we can not structure JOURNEYS in terms of LOVE.

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[4] According to Langacker, 'Domains are necessarily cognitive entities: mental experiences, representational spaces, concepts, or conceptual complexes' (Langacker, 1987, 147). In other words, domains are conceptual entities of varying levels of complexity and organisation. The only prerequisite a knowledge structure has for counting as a domain is that it provides background information against lexical concepts that can be understood and used in language. For instance, expressions like *hot*, *cold* and *lukewarm* designate lexical concepts in the TEMPERATURE domain: without understanding the temperature system, we would not be able to use these terms.

[5] In MACHINES ARE PEOPLE, the will and desire of a person are attributed to machines, but in the PEOPLE ARE MACHINES metaphor, there is no mention of will and desire. What is mapped instead is the fact that machines have parts that function in certain ways, such as idling steadily or accelerating, that they break down and may need to be fixed, and so on» (Lakoff and Turner, 1989, 132).

What decides the selection of a particular aspect of the source domain to describe the target domain? Two domains can be connected only if certain conditions are respected. The mapping between the two domains follows the so-called Invariance Principle: "Metaphorical mappings preserve the cognitive topology (that is, the image schema structure) of the source domain, in a way consistent with the inherent structure of the target domain" (Lakoff 1993, 215). In other words, the connections that a metaphor establishes between two domains cannot contradict the structure of the domains.

The correspondences between the two domains are not only ontological (i.e. correspondences between the elements of the two domains) but also epistemic (i.e. the relations between the elements of one domain correspond to the relations existing between the elements of the other domain). Epistemic correspondences, therefore, require an encyclopaedic knowledge of the two domains. For example, Lakoff and Turner (1989) observed that the concept of DEATH is personified[6] in many ways. However, the human-like qualities that can be associated with DEATH are restricted: DEATH can 'devour', 'destroy' or 'reap', but as Lakoff (1993, 233) observes, "death is not metaphorized in terms of teaching, or filling the bathtub, or sitting on the sofa". In order to account for these restrictions, Lakoff posited the Invariance Principle. There are several specific death personification metaphors, including DEATH IS A DEVOURER, DEATH IS A REAPER, and DEATH IS A DESTROYER, which inherits structures from a more schematic metaphor, which Lakoff and Turner (1989) call a generic-level metaphor: EVENTS ARE ACTIONS (or INANIMATE PHENOMENA ARE HUMAN AGENTS). The invariance principle guarantees that image schematic[7] organisation is invariant across metaphoric mappings. This means that the map-ping must preserve the structure of the source domain in a way consistent with the target domain. Thus, the concept of DEATH, which is associated to a sudden change in the physical state of an entity, would not be appropriate to describe actions such as teaching, filling the bathtub or sitting on the

[6] A concept has human-like properties attributed to it, such as intentionality and volition.

[7] Image schemas (first mentioned by Johnson in his 1987 work *The body in the mind*) appear to be knowledge structures that emerge directly from pre-conceptual embodied experience. These structures are meaningful at the conceptual level precisely because they derive from the level of bodily experience, which is directly meaningful. For example, our image-schematic concept of COUNTERFORCE arises from the experience of being unable to proceed because some opposing force is resisting our attempt to move forward (Evans and Green, 2006, 301).

sofa. “This constrains potentially incompatible mappings” (Evans and Green, 2006, 301-302).

Conceptual Metaphor Theory has been criticised for several reasons and from several perspectives in the past years. One of the most common criticisms regards its circularity, that is, that “Lakoff and Johnson take linguistic metaphors as both evidence for and the result of the metaphorical nature of our conceptual system” (Ruiz de Mendoza and Hernández 2011, 165). In addition, they do not explain how the listener comes up with additional information when processing metaphorical statement. This criticism has been delivered by Fauconnier and Turner (1998), who proposed their Conceptual Blending Theory to account for meaning that is not part of the source or the target concept but emerges in online processing of the inputs.

Another frequent criticism of CMT is that researchers do not pay sufficient attention to the discourse and social-pragmatic functions of metaphor in real discourse. In other words, scholars such as Deignan (2005) and Steen (2007) claim that the study of metaphor should be based on real data rather than just lexical or intuitive data (Kövecses 2017, 44). Finally, objections are levelled to CMT by Relevance Theorists concerning the processes and principles underlying metaphor interpretations (see 2.1.4.3).

However, Conceptual Metaphor Theory is a coherent, internally articulated theory that explains major cognitive issues concerning metaphor. Furthermore, it has paved the way to several new research directions promise an even better understanding of metaphor than what we have today (Kövecses 2017, 45). In fact, CMT is part of a wider project that attempts to explain how many brain functions (including emotion and social cognition) work together to understand and learn language: the Neural Theory of Language[8].

[8] The Neural Theory of Language project began in 1988 at the International Computer Science Institute in Berkeley and continues to this day. Its main creators are Jerry Feldman and George Lakoff (Feldman, Lakoff, Bailey, Narayanan et al. 1996) and its aim is to investigate the mind and language as elaborations of the human brain (Feldman 2006, Feldman and Narayanan 2004). Within NTL there is also a *Neural Theory of Metaphor*. The major contributions in this regard are made by Joseph Grady (1997), Christopher Johnson (1999), and Narayanan and Feldman (1997). The reason behind this interest in metaphor and neural computation is that "what we have learned about the brain explains an awful lot about the properties of metaphor" (Lakoff 2008, 17).

2.1.4.2. Conceptual Integration Networks. *Conceptual Integration* or *Conceptual Blending Theory* (Fauconnier and Turner, 1998) derives from two traditions in cognitive linguistics: *Conceptual Metaphor Theory* (2.1.4.1) and *Mental Spaces Theory*[9]. From the latter derives the *dynamic* aspect that characterises Blending Theory. Unlike Conceptual Metaphor Theory, which only deals with metaphor, Blending Theory is a theory of *cognition* developed to account for other phenomena, such as if-clauses or counterfactuals.

The fundamental idea of Blending Theory is that meaning construction involves the integration of structures which let a new meaning *emerge*[10]. This new emergent meaning is more than the linear sum of the parts that constitute it.

Turner and Fauconnier employ a commonly known example to elucidate a fascinating mechanism to illustrate that Conceptual Metaphor Theory falls short in explicating its significance.

(5) That surgeon is a butcher

In Lakoff and Johnson's framework, the meaning of the expression originates from comprehending the target domain, which is SURGEON (with his/her tools, patients, etc.), in terms of the source domain (which is BUTCHER, operating with a cleaver on an animal's carcass, etc.). The sentence expresses a negative assessment of the surgeon by comparing him/her to a butcher and emphasising his/her incompetence. However, according to Turner and Fauconnier, this negative assessment does not originate from the source domain BUTCHER, as butchers are typically highly skilled professionals with knowledge of animal anatomy and the use of sharp instruments. Therefore, Conceptual Metaphor Theory alone cannot explain this interpretation, as the negative evaluation seems to be contained in neither of the metaphor's input domains. In other words, "simple" conceptual projection processes are not able to account for meaning construction. Blending Theory adopts the view that meaning construction involves emergent structure, that is, that meaning is more

[9] Developed by Fauconnier (1985, 1994, 1997). The theory claims that language guides meaning construction directly in context and is subject to situation-specific information. Sentences can not be analysed in isolation from ongoing speech. Meaning construction relies on conceptual projection, similar to Conceptual Metaphor Theory.

[10] A property of a system is said to be emergent if it is a new outcome of some other properties of the system and their interaction, while it is different from them.

than the sum of its component parts. The emergent meaning is modelled by an *integration network*, a mechanism consisting of *inputs* in which mappings link elements in each input. In this aspect, Blending Theory looks similar to Conceptual Metaphor Theory; however, some important differences exist. First, Turner and Fauconnier argue that the conceptual units populating the integration networks are *mental spaces*[11] rather than domains of knowledge[12]. Furthermore, integration networks in Blending Theory are not limited to two-space entities. Instead, they connect two or more *input spaces* through a *generic space* that contains information common to all the inputs. Additionally, Blending Theory introduces a fourth space known as the *blended space* or *blend*. This blend comprises a new or emergent structure, which contains information that is not present in either input (Fauconnier and Turner, 1998).

The integration network can be applied to example (5). We have separate input spaces for the words SURGEON and BUTCHER. In the generic space, we have information that is common to both inputs. For example, both professionals are highly skilled and work with instruments. They also have specific procedures to follow and their own workspace. The generic space provides a highly schematic representation that serves as a template for identifying shared structures between the input spaces. This, in turn, facilitates the projection of these structures into the blend. The generic space establishes *counterpart connectors* (represented as the bold lines) between input spaces, in integration network diagrams (fig. 2.1). These connectors are established by identifying the conceptual operation responsible for recognising cross-space counterparts in the input spaces. Once matched, connectors are established between the corresponding elements. This is a form of conceptual projection[13].

However, as said, the blend contains an additional structure, which is not present in the other spaces. A BUTCHER has a good knowledge of how to dissect a dead animal, the different cuts of meat, etc. However, his/her skills are inappropriate for performing surgery and "repairing" (healing) human patients.

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[11] The concept of mental spaces derives from Fauconnier's (1985, 1994, 1997) Mental Spaces Theory and accounts for local and dynamic aspects of meaning construction.

[12] The difference between the two is that domains of knowledge are relatively stable preexisting knowledge structures, while mental spaces are temporary structures created during the online process of meaning construction (Evans and Green, 2006, p. 403).

[13] In Mental Space Theory's terms (Fauconnier, 1985, 1994, 1997).

An important role is played by the contrast (which exists only in the blend) between the goal (healing) of the surgeon and the activity (butchery) of the butcher. In the blend, as a consequence of these contrasts, assessing a surgeon as a butcher brings inappropriate skills for "repairing" human beings. Therefore, the evaluation of the surgeon as incompetent emerges in the blend and represents the additional structure provided by the blend itself.

Of course, not all the input structure is projected in the blend, but only the information required for understanding the sentence (*matched information*). This selection is allowed by an important property input spaces have: *selective projection*. In other words, irrelevant information is not projected into the blend. According to Turner and Fauconnier, selective projection is one reason for different interpretations of the same sentence by different language users (or even by users of the same language).

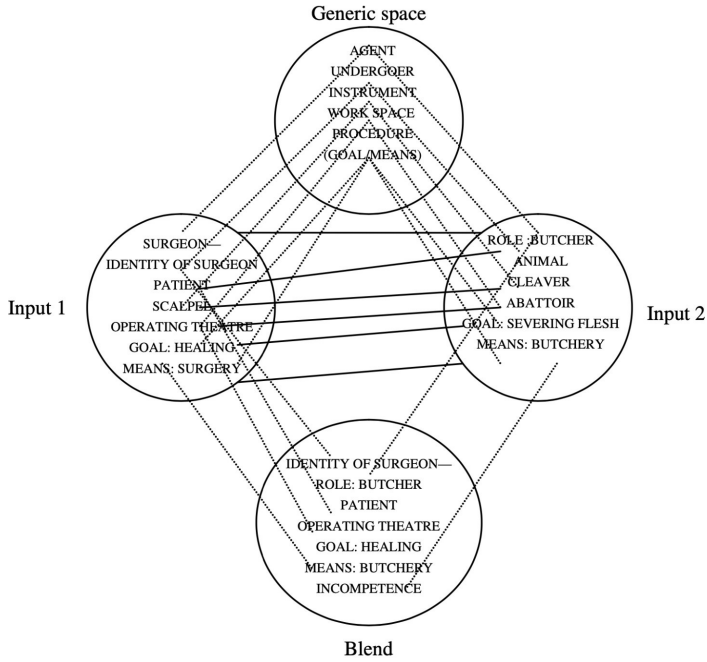

Figure 2.1: Mechanism of Conceptual Blending (Evans and Green, 2006).

Blending Theory postulates that emergent structures are formed by three component processes: *composition*, *completion*, and *elaboration*. Composition involves combining elements from different inputs. For example, the SURGEON AS BUTCHER blend combines the elements projected from the SURGEON input with those projected from the BUTCHER input. Completion involves the unconscious and effortless recruitment of background frames, also known as schema induction. Finally, elaboration is the online processing that generates unique structures for the blend. This process is sometimes referred to as *running the blend*.

This overview does not fully account for the complex nature of conceptual integration: there are other operations and governing principles that can not be described in this section. As mentioned above, conceptual integration is not a theory of metaphor, but a theory of cognition: in their 2002 book, *The way we think*, Fauconnier and Turner, indeed, argue that conceptual integration is a key mechanism facilitating not only language comprehension but influencing human behaviour and cognition as well.

2.1.4.3. Relevance Theory. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), "Metaphor is primarily a matter of thought and action and only derivatively a matter of language" (p. 153). In this approach, linguistic metaphors are not a matter of language but reflect 'deep' correspondences in the way our conceptual system is organised and, therefore, have their roots in cognition rather than in communication.

Relevance Theorists[14], on the other hand, have argued that metaphor arises naturally in linguistic communication, as language is loosely used to

[14] First proposed by Dan Sperber and Deidre Wilson (1986/1995), Relevance Theory was an attempt (then became a pragmatic framework in its own right) to work out in detail one of Grice's central claims: that an essential feature of most human communication, both verbal and non-verbal, is the expression and recognition of intentions. Grice described these expectations in terms of his Cooperative Principle and the four Gricean Maxims. The central claim of Relevance Theory is that the expectations of relevance raised by an utterance are precise enough (and predictable enough) to guide the hearer towards the speaker's meaning. The aim is to explain in cognitively realistic terms what these expectations of relevance amount to and how they might contribute to an empirically plausible account of comprehension (Wilson and Sperber 2004, 607). Thus, according to Relevance theorists, we do not need to obey a Cooperative Principle to communicate, comprehend language or focus on implicatures arising from flouting the four Maxims. Rather, utterances raise expectations of relevance (a basic feature of human cognition) and the speaker can connect an input (a sight, a sound, an

convey complex thoughts that may be vague but need not themselves be metaphorical. In this approach, there is a continuum of cases between literal talk, loose talk, hyperbole and metaphor, none of which is necessarily a surface reflection of any pre-existing conceptual mapping (Wilson 2011, 178). Therefore, in linguistic metaphors, we have words or phrases used to communicate a novel "ad hoc"[15] concept, which is broader than the encoded lexical meaning of the word or phrase. This is why Relevance theorists claim that metaphors originate as loose uses of language. Thus, linguistic meaning underdetermines both what is explicitly stated and what is communicated indirectly. The definition of both explicit and implicit content is guided by considerations of relevance, i.e. "that the utterance will be relevant enough to be worth processing and as relevant as the speaker can make it" (Wearing 2010, 203).

(6) Robert is a *computer* (Wilson 2011, 180)

In example (6), the concept of COMPUTER is the encoded lexical meaning of the word *computer*. COMPUTER denotes a type of machine used for processing information. In sentence (6), however, we are not communicating the lexical encoded meaning of COMPUTER, but an *ad hoc* concept with a broader denotation. Its meaning is processed during ongoing interpretation and applies not only to computers but also to people who share some encyclopaedic property of computers. In Relevance theoretic terms, the concept COMPUTER* is a broader[16] *ad hoc* concept, the denotation of which includes both computers and some humans (Wilson 2011, 180). Thus an implicature may arise that Robert is quick at processing information or lacks empathy, etc. In 2008, Sperber and Wilson published an influential article where they called their approach to metaphor "deflationary", a term which reflects the intention to reduce, decrease or deemphasise the interest of the figure of speech as an object of a dedicated theory: "we see metaphors as simply a range of cases at one end of a continuum that includes literal, loose and hyperbolic [or figurative] interpretations" (Sperber and Wilson 2008, 84). They argue that there is no specific cognitive mechanism or brain module behind metaphor. There is a "comprehension mechanism" (*relevance-guided comprehension heuristic or process*) that creates expectations of relevance

utterance, a memory) with background information available to yield conclusions that matter to him/her.

[15] Formed or used for specific needs or purposes (Barsalou 2003; Carston, 2019).

[16] A concept communicated by the use of a word or phrase may also be narrower (i.e. more specific).