The theses of the doctoral (PhD) dissertation

DELIMITING AND CLASSIFYING METONYMY: THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL CHALLENGES IN COGNITIVE METONYMY RESEARCH

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1. Introduction and objectives

1.1 From the “poor sister” to ubiquity

For centuries, metonymy and metaphor have been studied as figures of speech primarily within the context of rhetoric. Their position, function, and importance within the system of tropes have been in constant transition. Structural linguistics was the first school of linguistics which focused on the linguistically oriented study of metaphor and metonymy. However, the linguistic study of metonymy and metaphor, and the relation between them, was revolutionized by the appearance of Lakoff and Johnson’s *Metaphors We Live By* in 1980. Influenced by the state of the art results of cognitive psychology, the most important claim of their theory is that metonymy and metaphor are not merely linguistic ornaments, or figures of speech, but are fundamental operations in human cognition, i.e. they are figures of thought.

In the holistic cognitive linguistic (henceforth: CL) literature on metonymy, it is a very common observation that the interest devoted to metonymy shrinks into insignificance beside the attention directed towards metaphor. For a long time, metonymy was looked upon as “metaphor’s poor sister” (Brdar and Brdar-Szabó 2014) and metaphor was thought of as “metonymy’s rich relative” (Ruiz de Mendoza 1999, cited in Brdar and Brdar-Szabó 2014: 315). A closer inspection of CL works on conceptual metaphor and conceptual metonymy does indeed show that the contemporary research on metonymy has been developing in the shadow of the research on metaphor. As a result of this asymmetric interest, CL research on metonymy lags behind the intensive investigations into metaphor, while the cognitive investigations into metonymy generally run in the same direction.

The primary concern of metonymy researchers was initially the problems of metaphor-metonymy distinction and the cognitive and linguistic interaction between the two phenomena (e.g. Barcelona 2000a, Dirven and Pörings 2002), while since then, the main objective of metonymy research has gradually become to point out and to support the ubiquity of conceptual metonymy and its primacy relative to conceptual metaphor in human thinking and reasoning and in natural language (e.g. Panther and Radden 1999, Panther and Thornburg 2003a).

As a result of these endeavors, in CL metonymy is now generally considered as a cognitive mechanism that plays a central and even more fundamental role in every field of conceptual and linguistic organization than metaphor. Accordingly, the study of metonymy as
a linguistically manifest phenomenon has been pushed into the background, something which is clearly indicated by the lack of a generally accepted and functional distinction between conceptual metonymy and metonymically motivated expressions, and by the fact the relationships between these are rather vaguely formulated. Metonymic expressions are most often considered to be simply the manifestations of conceptual metonymies on the level of linguistic units. However, if we accept the ubiquity view of conceptual metonymy in its broadest form, this implies that language is essentially metonymic, which in turn leads to the conclusion that each and every linguistic expression is metonymic. This may well result in the unfortunate situation that the notion of ‘metonymy’ and especially that of ‘metonymic expression’ might become entirely limitless unless it is defined with the help of linguistically manifest properties in addition to their general conceptual metonymic motivation.

1.2 Problems under scrutiny

As a result of metonymy’s evolution from metaphor’s poor sister to a ubiquitous conceptual phenomenon, the notion of ‘metonymy’ as it is generally accepted within CL runs the risk of becoming indefinite and unlimited. This risk can be best grasped in the form of two interrelated problems, whose solution may contribute to its elimination. First, the range of metonymic phenomena is hard to distinguish from, and to delimit against, other related and similar phenomena, such as metaphor and so called active zone phenomena. Here we face a definitional and distinction problem, which can be formulated as follows:

**The problem of delimitation (P_{DEL}):**

On the basis of what criteria can metonymy be delimited against related phenomena?

Second, the notion of metonymy embraces such a broad range of heterogeneous phenomena that the possibility of formulating generalizations which are valid for the whole set of metonymic phenomena becomes very limited. In other words, the second problem is of a classificatory nature:

**The problem of classification (P_{CLASS}):**

How can metonymy be classified into relatively homogeneous classes?
Due to these unresolved issues surrounding the CL notion of metonymy, the possibility of its **empirical study** becomes problematic, and so what emerges is an empirical deficit of metonymy research. Empirical **deficits** in cognitive metonymy research are not only due to a **lack of generally accepted and practiced methods** and procedures, but also to the problem that an all-encompassing set of the most diverse phenomena is very difficult to examine systematically with empirical methods. Thus, the solution of (P_{DEL}) and (P_{CLASS}) does not only contribute to eliminating the risk that the category of ‘metonymy’ will ‘burst’ but also takes us a step closer to enhancing the empirical study of metonymic phenomena.
2. Methods

2.1 Approaching (P\text{DEL}) and (P\text{CLASS})

Two basic strategies to come to grips with the unlimitedness of a notion are (i) to define it more narrowly so that we are able to distinguish the phenomena covered by the notion from other related and similar phenomena (P\text{DEL}); and (ii) to classify the phenomena covered by the notion into relatively homogeneous sub-classes which enables us to make generalizations about them (P\text{CLASS}).


In a first step, I argue for a clearer distinction between linguistic and conceptual metonymy, then revisit the general rejection of the referential view of metonymy, and finally propose two properties of linguistic metonymy that distinguish it from some related phenomena. Throughout my argumentation, I rely on the introspective-intuitive analyses of examples from three major sources: (i) well-known examples taken from the literature, (ii) constructed examples, and (iii) authentic examples that have come to my attention sporadically (from literary works, movies, television series and online texts).

My approach to (P\text{CLASS}) relies on earlier classifications of metonymy: (i) classifications based on the relationship between source and target (e.g. Norrick 1981, Radden and Kövecses 1999, Peirsman and Geeraerts 2006a) and (ii) classifications focusing on the pragmatic function of metonymy (e.g. Warren 1999, 2002, Panther and Thornburg 1999 and 2003c). However, starting out from my solution of (P\text{DEL}), I propose a novel classification of metonymy in terms of the type of the mental contents participating in the metonymic process, i.e. the type of the target and the source content. As in the case of (P\text{DEL}),
I illustrate the five main sub-classes of metonymy I propose with the introspective-intuitive analyses of earlier examples from the literature and of authentic examples taken from a number of sources (literary works, movies, television series, online texts, newspapers, and everyday conversations).

2.3 Case studies 1 and 2

My theoretical findings are supplemented by two small-scale, quasi-empirical pilot studies. In Case study 1, I conduct a target-driven cross-linguistic analysis to examine how a range of languages conceptualizes and verbalizes a complex EVENT (PLAYING MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS). First, I scrutinize the languages I am familiar with using intuitive and introspective methods (Hungarian, German, and English), whereas in a second phase I gathered data from a larger pool of languages (Czech, Finnish, French, Dutch, Polish, Portuguese (and Brazilian Portuguese), Romanian, Japanese, Italian, Spanish (and Mexican Spanish), Thai, Lebanese Arabic, Swedish, Lithuanian, and Russian) by the method of translation elicitation from native speakers, and analyzed their translations by making use of introspection.

In a questionnaire, I asked the informants to translate the sentence Can you play the guitar? and a further five sentences from English to their mother tongue and to provide a literal English transcription of their translations so that various conceptualization strategies can become apparent. Finally, I inquired whether their translations would be any different if guitar was replaced by the following items: instrument, flute, piano, violin, drums, horn, and vuvuzela. By picking these instruments, I carefully considered that the list would include wind, string, bow, and percussion instruments, as well as more prototypical and fully marginal ones. The purpose of the question was to find out whether languages differentiate between the activities in the case of instruments of different types, and whether there is a correlation between the construal of the activity and the prototypicality of the instrument.

In Case study 2 I employ corpus linguistic procedures to argue that a substantial portion of color-smell synesthetic expressions are not metaphors but eventually PROPERTY-metonymies. To underpin my proposal, I conducted a corpus study on German synesthetic attribute-noun constructions combining COLOR and SMELL. The corpora I used were Das Deutsche Referenzkorpus (DeReKo) with the search syntax of COSMAS II_web of the Institut für Deutsche Sprache (IDS) Mannheim and the resources of the Digitales Wörterbuch der
As a **first step**, I searched for adjective-noun combinations consisting of the following color terms: *rot* (‘red’), *grün* (‘green’), *blau* (‘blue’), *gelb* (‘yellow’), *weiß* (‘white’), *schwarz* (‘black’), *orange* (‘orange’), *grau* (‘grey’), *braun* (‘brown’), *rosa* (‘pink’), and *lila* (‘purple’) and the nouns *Duft*, *Geruch*, and *Gestank* in all their inflectional forms. All hits were extracted together with a relatively large context of one preceding and one subsequent paragraph. In a **second step**, I excluded those hits where the color term was not an attribute of the noun and where the noun does not refer to an olfactory stimulus.

In a **final step**, I categorized the relevant hits into the following groups based on a qualitative analysis of their context: (i) **co-occurrence-based metonymic expressions**, (ii) **resemblance-based metonymic expressions**, and (iii) **undecided/metaphoric synesthetic expressions**. Under the latter category label, I subsumed cases where the analysis of the context did not support the metonymic analysis, nor spoke against it, i.e. there were no contextual elements in favor or against, or where an interaction of metaphor and metonymy could be supposed.
3. Findings

3.1 The solution of \( \text{P}_{\text{DEL}} \)

By giving an overview of the CL notion of metonymy and the problem of distinguishing metonymy from metaphor, I point out that delimiting metonymy against related phenomena based on an apparatus of theoretical notions pertaining to phenomena of a conceptual nature may be a slippery path (cf. Barnden 2010), since notions such as domain, contiguity, similarity, mapping, and highlighting are themselves vaguely defined and empirically difficult to access. Although the importance of these notions in the interpretation and analysis of metonymic and metaphoric phenomena is not questioned, I propose as an alternative to approach the problem of delimitation by considering the linguistically manifest properties of metonymy. My hypothesis is that those properties that constitute a linguistic metonymy may be able to distinguish it from linguistic metaphor and other related phenomena.

Linguistic metonymy is usually defined in cognitive metonymy research simply as a linguistic manifestation of a conceptual metonymy, or it is supposed to be an expression in whose motivation conceptual metonymy plays a significant role. Following a broad notion of conceptual metonymy, this leads to a situation in which any linguistic expression may turn out to be a linguistic metonymy. I hypothesize that conceptual relations exploited by conceptual metonymy do not always yield linguistic metonymies, i.e. linguistic metonymies have certain properties that distinguish them from related phenomena that are based on similar conceptual relations.

A candidate for a property that linguistic metonymies possess is being referential. This view has been generally refuted in cognitive metonymy research. This refusal may be explained by focusing on metonymy as a conceptual phenomenon and viewing reference narrowly. It is obvious that if a conceptual metonymy is not expressed linguistically, it cannot be referential; and if referentiality is restricted to noun phrases, then verbal, adjectival, or propositional metonymies are not referential. However, if we consider linguistic metonymy, and, at the same time broaden the notion of reference to other types of mental content than those designated by noun phrases, i.e. if we equate an act of reference with the provision of access to mental content of any type with the help of linguistic means with the purpose of meaning construction, then linguistic metonymies turn out to be referential.
Linguistic metonymies differ from other ways of activating mental content with linguistic means in two major respects: they co-activate mental contents and they are implicit. By co-activation, I mean that they activate the source and the target content and the relationship holding between them as a single complex. Moreover, they achieve this in such a way that only the source content appears explicitly on the linguistic level in the construal of a situation. Thus, my answer to (P_DEL) can be formulated as the following definition:

**Linguistic metonymy** is

(i) an expression motivated by conceptual metonymic processes

(ii) in that it co-activates a complex of mental contents (the source, the target, and the relation holding between them) in a way reminiscent of reference point constructions,

(iii) with the linguistic property that the target content and the relationship between source and target are not expressed explicitly or are only expressed marginally or schematically on the linguistic level.

Both these properties of linguistic metonymy are a matter of degree. The degree of activation of the source content seems to correlate with the degree of conventionalization of the expression. The more conventionalized a metonymic expression is, the less active the source content is from a meaning constructional point of view. The degree of implicitness of a metonymic expression is related to the amount of contextual support for the metonymic interpretation. The highest degree of implicitness seems to be displayed by illocutionary, propositional, and twice true metonymies, which can be interpreted as such only in the light of the broader context. Prototypical lexical metonymies are less implicit, since their interpretation is triggered by the immediate context. Metonymies resulting in a change of grammatical categories (e.g. proper noun – common noun; mass-countable; or conversion) represent an even lower degree of implicitness, since the metonymic co-activation process is indicated by a change in the syntactic behavior of the source element (e.g. inflection or use of articles). Some metonymic compounds and derivational suffixation are borderline cases, in that they either express linguistically both the source and the target, or they are simply explicitly marked.

Co-activation and implicitness distinguish linguistic metonymy from related phenomena such as zone activation and linguistic metaphor. In the case of zone activation,
no complex content is activated, and non-active zones also appear explicitly. In the case of linguistic metaphor, once an expression has been interpreted as metaphoric, the source content is no longer active. Furthermore, linguistic metaphors do not activate a single relation between source and target but open up the possibility for the activation of several correspondences between the two, which can differ in the degree of their activation. Regarding their implicitness, linguistic metaphors differ from linguistic metonymies in that metaphoric targets regularly appear in a linguistically manifest form together with the source content within the same construal of a situation. Admittedly, this latter distinction does not function perfectly in all cases, especially with conventionalized figurative expressions and in borderline cases where the target remains implicit and the source is less active. Furthermore, since both implicitness and activation are gradual, intermediary cases are possible.

3.2 The solution of (P_CLASS)

The category of linguistic metonymy, even if defined narrowly as above, still encompasses a very broad range of various phenomena. To my knowledge no categorization of metonymy has been proposed that takes into consideration the type of the mental content activated. As an answer to (P_CLASS), I argue that metonymies can be classified according to their target content and sub-classified according to the source content providing access to the target.

Based on different types of mental content, I propose a distinction between THING-, PROPERTY-, EVENT-, PROPOSITION- and illocutionary metonymies. Within these classes, we can further sub-categorize metonymies according to the type of their source content, for instance THING-THING- or PROPERTY-THING-metonymies within the category of THING-metonymies. This content-based classification has the advantage that particular types of mental content are usually activated by particular linguistic units, i.e. metonymies whose source is a THING are usually manifested as noun phrases, where it is a PROPERTY as adjectives (or nominalized adjectives), or in the case of EVENTS in the form of verbs etc.

There seems to be a strong correlation between the type of the content, the relationship between particular contents, and the role of a particular content in meaning construction. For instance, THING-metonymies tend to partake in contiguity relations in the physical domain and play a distinctive role at an initial phase of meaning construction, namely in reference fixing as a first step towards elaborating propositional meaning, whereas PROPOSITION-metonymies are based on more abstract contiguity relations and play a role in arriving at explicatures and implicatures. Considering these properties of metonymies in an
integrative framework may offer a precise description of metonymic expressions and may shed light on interesting interrelations between the type of the source and target content, the relationship holding between them, and the pragmatic function of their co-activation.

3.3 Case studies 1 and 2

My two quasi-empirical pilot studies attempt to take an initial step towards the investigation of **two relatively neglected types of metonymy**. In Case study 1, I focus on an **EVENT-metonymy** (PLAYING MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS) in a variety of languages. My analyses indicate that **complex EVENTS seem to be conceptualized by metonymic and/or metaphoric strategies** in each language under scrutiny. However, **conceptual metonymic strategies are not always exploited as linguistic metonymies** but in more explicit constructions (such as derivation by suffixation). In Case study 2, I scrutinize a **PROPERTY-metonymy** with the help of a corpus linguistic procedure. The most important finding of the study is the hypothesis that **the overwhelming majority of color-smell synesthetic expressions in German taking the form of attributive adjective + noun are not metaphors but PROPERTY-metonymies**.

3.4 Summary of the findings

As a solution to (P_DEL), I propose a **definition of linguistic metonymy** as a linguistic expression that implicitly co-activates mental contents of any type. The definition highlights two aspects of linguistic metonymy, i.e. the target content remains always implicit and both the implicit target content and the explicit source content are activated from a meaning construction point of view, which may serve as features that in certain cases can (at least partially) **distinguish linguistic metonymy from linguistic metaphor and active zone phenomena**. My **content-based classification of metonymy** offers a so far relatively neglected aspect of metonymy which in integration with earlier contiguity-based and pragmatically oriented approaches can be very helpful in solving (P_CLASS), i.e. it is able to set up relatively **homogeneous sub-classes** of metonymy, which in turn can be more effectively studied empirically, and consequently, about which generalizations can be formulated. Finally, in my case studies I concentrate on metonymies which have not been focused on in cognitively oriented linguistic research.
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The Candidate's publication data submitted to the IDEa Tuddstér have been validated by DEENK on the basis of Web of Science, Scopus and Journal Citation Report (Impact Factor) databases.

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