

Embodiment, Experiential Focus, and Diachronic Change in Metaphor

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1. Introduction

Since cognitive linguists claim that metaphor is of the mind, the brain, and the body—aspects of people that are more universal than either language or social reality—, many people who are familiar with the view of metaphor that originates from Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) *Metaphors We Live By* often expect that what we call 'conceptual metaphors' are largely or mostly universal. They also often criticize this view for ignoring the apparent diversity of metaphors across and within cultures.

It is true that cognitive linguists have so far paid less attention to the diversity of metaphorical conceptualization across and within languages and cultures than to its universal aspects. They have been primarily concerned with the question of why certain conceptual metaphors are universal or at least near-universal. The common answer to this question since 1980 has been that it is the embodied nature of these metaphors that makes them (near-)universal.

The same conceptual metaphors that have been shown to be (near-)universal have also been shown to be diachronically constant. Important evidence for this view came from work by Sweetser (1990), who pointed out that many of the conceptual metaphors that are considered to be cross-linguistically widespread metaphors today were fully functional several thousand years ago.

Given the high degree of such synchronic and diachronic universality and its explanation in terms of embodiment, do we possess an equally reasonable explanation of the fact that many conceptual metaphors vary both cross-linguistically and through time? In Kövecses (2005) I made an attempt to offer a balanced view that takes into account both the universality and diversity of metaphor. In such a view, we have to be able to answer the following questions:

- (1) What are the dimensions along which metaphors vary?
- (2) Which aspects of metaphor are involved in metaphor variation, and how are they involved?
- (3) What are the main causes of variation?
- (4) How do the causes that produce variation interact with the causes that produce universality?

Given such a theory, we can account for apparent counterexamples, one set of which involves cases of metaphor variation that should not occur but do. Work by Gevaert (2001, 2005) demonstrates that the conceptualization of anger changed considerably from the Old English to the Middle English period. On the basis of a variety of corpora, she showed that heat-related words account for only 1.58% per cent of all the words describing anger before 850. The number of heat-related words for anger dramatically increases in the period between 850 and 950. The number of these words then decreases between 950 and 1050 to 6.22%, then to 1.71% by around 1200, and then to 1.36% by around 1300. After 1300 the number starts growing again. As shown by Kövecses and Lakoff (see, e.g., Kövecses 1986, Lakoff and Kövecses 1987, Lakoff 1987), heat-related words account for a large portion of all the expressions that are used to talk about anger in present-day English.

Gevaert's findings (2001, 2005) indicate that the conceptualization of anger in terms of heat is not a constant feature of the concept of anger in English, but that it can, and does, fluctuate in the course of the development of English. This is an extremely important finding because it bears directly on the issue of universality of metaphorical conceptualization across time. If the conceptualization of anger in terms of heat is a mechanical or automatic consequence of our actual physiology in anger, this

fluctuation should not occur. It cannot be the case that people's physiology changes in anger every one or two hundred years or so. How can we account for this fluctuation then? Does our theory provide an answer that is consistent both with the cognitive linguistic view of embodiment (and consequent universality) and the obvious changes in conceptualization through time?

2. Diachronic Change in Metaphor

Sweetser (1990) showed that the conceptualization of mental processes is necessarily couched in metaphor and that many of the metaphors we have today have been with us for thousands of years. The main metaphor is MIND-AS-BODY, while several more specific metaphors reveal the details of this for particular aspects of the mind, such as KNOWING/UNDERSTANDING. She presented data that shows that the concept of KNOWING and/or UNDERSTANDING was and still largely is conceptualized as SEEING (e.g., 'I see the point') in many languages. Sweetser's study concentrates on Indo-European languages, but it seems that languages in other language families also corroborate her generic-level metaphor THE MIND IS THE BODY. However, in these languages other more specific metaphors may play a larger role than seeing for understanding what understanding is (such as KNOWING IS HEARING in some Australian languages; see, for example, Evans and Wilkins 1998).

Does this mean that the mind and mental processes have always been conceptualized in the same way at least within a single language or cultural sphere? Not at all. Notice that the SEEING metaphor is one of our most down-to-earth and everyday metaphors for knowledge and understanding in the Western world. When it comes to 'expert' or scientific theories of the mind and its operations, recent experts and scientists of old alike have often gone 'beyond' such mundane metaphors as SEEING. They have often proposed more 'elevated' metaphors, and their metaphors have often changed.

For this reason the subculture of science and its various subgroups provide an interesting example of how metaphorical source domains change over time. This is one of the most obvious cases of metaphor variation. Plato used the metaphor of a charioteer and two steeds. In this metaphor, the charioteer corresponds to reason and the two steeds to passions and appetites. Descartes thought of the person in terms of early models of automata, but the mind and person were later also conceptualized as clocks and all kinds of machines. Freud built an elaborate hydraulic model, which served and still serves as the basis of psychoanalytic theory (see Kövecses 1990: 144–159). Today the dominant metaphor is that of the computer, where the functioning of the human mind is imagined on the analogy of the computer. There is an extensive literature on this history. Lakoff and Johnson (1999) provide a systematic (though partial) survey of the evolution of the main metaphors of Western philosophy from the viewpoint of their 'experientialist' philosophy.

It may be suggested concerning many of these metaphors that they are not 'embodied metaphors' but come from a particular cultural background, and thus are 'culture-based'. If they are, we cannot expect them to be universal, so they do not present a problem to the 'standard' version of the cognitive linguistic view of metaphor. But what about cases like the ones offered by Gevaert (2001, 2005)? The ANGER IS HEAT metaphor is one of the prime examples of embodied metaphors and as such we can reasonably expect it to be universal both cross-linguistically and diachronically under our theory. However, Gevaert (2001, 2005) shows convincingly that it is not constant diachronically at all. How does the new theory of metaphorical universality and variation account for cross-linguistic and diachronic non-universality? The notion that I would like to offer as a conceptual tool for an explanation is that of 'experiential focus'.

3. Experiential Focus

As the cognitive linguistic view suggests, human beings share a great deal of bodily experience on the basis of which they can build universal metaphors. The question that inevitably arises in this connection is whether this universal bodily basis is utilized in the same way across languages and cultures or even varieties. Available evidence suggests that the universal bodily basis on which universal metaphors *could* be built is *not* utilized in the same way or to the same extent in different languages or varieties of languages. It seems useful to approach this issue with the concept of

‘differential experiential focus’ in mind (see Kövecses 2005: 246, 286–287). What this means is that different peoples may be attuned to different aspects of their bodily functioning in relation to a target domain, or that they can ignore or downplay certain aspects of their bodily functioning as regards the metaphorical conceptualization of a particular target domain.

A much-studied case in point is the conceptualization of anger in English and Chinese. As studies of the physiology of anger across several unrelated cultures indicate, increase in skin temperature and blood pressure are universal physiological correlates of anger. This accounts for the ANGER IS HEAT metaphor in English and many other languages. However, King’s (1989) and Yu’s (1995, 1998) work suggests that the conceptualization of anger in terms of heat is much less prevalent in Chinese than it is in English. In Chinese, the major metaphors of anger seem to be based on pressure, not on pressure *and* heat. This indicates that speakers of Chinese have relied on a different aspect of their physiology in the metaphorical conceptualization of anger than speakers of English. The major point is that in many cases the universality of experiential basis does not necessarily lead to universally equivalent conceptualization.

Another example of how different cultures utilize a presumably universal bodily basis in anger is offered by Michelle Rosaldo in her description of Ilongot anger (Rosaldo 1980). The Ilongot are a former headhunting tribe living in Northern Luzon, Philippines. For young Ilongot men, anger, *liget*, is a highly energized state that they need in order to successfully accomplish their headhunting raids. In Rosaldo’s words: ‘The *liget* that Ilongots associate with youthful prowess and, for them, with the universal agitation that makes young men want to kill, takes on reality and significance because it is bound up not in mystery or cosmology, but in three forms of relation central to Ilongot social life’ (Rosaldo 1980: 138). Indeed, Rosaldo glosses the Ilongot term for anger as ‘energy/anger’. This suggests that for the Ilongot anger (*liget*) figures as a generalized state of arousal that can sufficiently motivate their actions. They also think of their anger as hot but, most importantly, as an agitated and energized state that makes them want to go out and take heads. Clearly, this is, for us, a surprisingly different way of building on our presumably universal bodily experience in conceptualizing anger.¹

As a matter of fact, the conceptualization of anger in terms of heat has not always been the case even in English. As was noted above, Gevaert (2001, 2005) found on the basis of a variety of corpora that heat-related words for anger fluctuate a great deal in the Old English and Middle English period. Gevaert (2001: 93–94) provides the following table (Table 1) that indicates the linguistic expressions relating to anger in her corpora:

Table 1. ANGER expressions in Gevaert’s Old and Middle English data.²

Conceptualisation (ANGER IS ...)	OLD ENGLISH EXPRESSIONS	MIDDLE ENGLISH EXPRESSIONS
Literal	<i>irre, wraðe, gram</i>	<i>ire, wrathe, grame</i>
STRONG EMOTION	<i>anda</i>	<i>anda, mod, nith</i>
WRONG EMOTION	<i>(irre)þweorh, weamod</i>	<i>weamod, overthwart</i>
CONTEMPT	<i>modig, onscunian, unweorþ</i>	<i>scorn, forthinken, despite, spite, disdain, indignation</i>
INSANITY	<i>(ellen)wod, woffian</i>	<i>wod, out of mind, rage, frenesy, fury, mad</i>
FIERCENESS	<i>unmilts, reðe</i>	<i>grim, ege, reh, brath, breth, brem, fell, violence, tempest</i>

¹ Note, however, that the English word *passion* has both the senses ‘intense anger’ and ‘the zealous pursuit of an aim’ (*The Oxford English Dictionary*).

² According to Gevaert (2001: 92), ‘[t]he corpus used for this research consists of the Toronto Corpus for the Old English period and a selection of texts for the Middle English period ... The list of search terms was based on the information contained in the *Historical Thesaurus of English* and the OED on CD-rom, which was searched for all words containing *anger* or a synonym in the definition.’

AFFLICTION	<i>torn, gremian, tirgan, fandian, teona, geswencan, ofsettan, sare, gederian, geangsumian</i>	<i>gremen, hearmen, tenen, werien, anger, annoyen, grieven, tarien, offenden, vexen, rubben on the gall</i>
UNHAPPINESS	<i>unbliðe, unrot, gealh, sarig</i>	<i>sari, wroth, not/ill paid, mispayen, displeasen, not pleased, discontent, miscontent, not content</i>
HEAT	<i>hæte, hatheort, hathige, hygewælm, wilm, onælan, gehyrstan, onbærnan, ontendan</i>	<i>hot heart, ontenden, heat, chaufen, boilen, fervor, fume, fire, incense, inflame, kindlen, wallen, tendren, brennen</i>
SWELLING	<i>þindan, þrutian, abelgan</i>	<i>bersten, great heart, belgen, swellen</i>
BITTERNESS	<i>biter</i>	<i>bitter, egre</i>
MOTION	<i>astyrian, drefan, hrædmod, onræs, ahrean</i>	<i>stirien, mengemod, (a)moven, hastif, rese, short</i>
HUMORAL CONDITION		<i>gall, melancholy, distemperen</i>
Other	<i>grimetan, gryllan, sweorcan, hefig</i>	<i>grillen, grucchen, irish, heigh, crabbed, unsaught, wrake, wrahe, testy, wasp</i>

Gevaert also provides a chart that shows the frequency of the anger expressions; that is, how the expressions were distributed in the periods under investigation. She points out that ‘[t]he first number shows the actual occurrence of the conceptualisation in the corpus (in percentage), while the second number shows how many expressions reveal that conceptualisation’ (Gevaert 2001: 96–97):

Table 2. Quantitative results concerning ANGER expressions in Gevaert’s Old and Middle English data.

Conceptualisation (ANGER IS ...)	a850	850–950	950–1050	c1200	c1300	c1400	c1500
Literal	46.03 3	55.56 3	55.59 3	67.72 3	54.22 3	46.64 3	30.1 3
STRONG EMOTION	1.59 1	5.98 1	0.95 1	2.57 3	0.82 1	0.49 1	- -
WRONG EMOTION	0.79 1	1.06 2	2.32 2	1.14 1	- -	0.16 1	0.14 1
CONTEMPT	0.79 1	1.06 3	1.26 2	0.57 1	0.82 3	0.99 3	3.24 3
INSANITY	0.79 1	0.21 1	1.27 1	2 2	4.63 2	2.3 2	6.19 5
FIERCENESS	3.96 2	0.42 2	0.53 2	4.01 5	2.72 3	1.31 2	0.7 4
AFFLICTION	12.7 2	4.49 7	13.50 6	4 5	11.17 6	16.28 5	21.95 6
UNHAPPINESS	2.38 2	1.28 3	0.43 3	0.29 1	21.25 3	23.85 4	27.7 8
HEAT	1.58 2	12.18 6	6.22 5	1.71 6	1.36 3	2.14 10	3.64 7
SWELLING	26.19 1	10.89 2	12.87 2	11.71 4	0.82 2	0.33 1	- -

BITTERNESS	1.59 1	1.50 1	1.27 1	1.14 1	0.54 1	0.33 2	- -
MOTION	- -	4.06 4	2.85 3	0.57 1	0.54 1	1.15 4	5.48 4
HUMORAL CONDITION	- -	- -	- -	- -	- -	2.47 3	0.42 1
Other	1.58 2	1.28 3	0.95 3	2.57 3	1.08 3	1.46 7	0.42 3
number of tokens	126	468	948	350	367	608	711

These numbers indicate that the conceptualization of anger in terms of heat is not a permanent and ever-present feature of the concept of anger in English. How can this fluctuation occur in the conceptualization of anger over time? Is it because people's physiology changes in anger throughout the ages? Obviously not. I believe the answer is that universal physiology provides only a *potential* basis for metaphorical conceptualization—without mechanically constraining what the specific metaphors for anger will be. Heat was a major component in the concept of anger between 850 and 950, and then after a long decline it began to increase again at around 1400—possibly as a result of the emergence of the humoral view of emotions in Europe (see Gevaert 2001, 2005; Geeraerts and Grondelaers 1995). We see the same kind of fluctuation in the use of the domain of 'swell', which I take to be akin to what we call the 'pressure' component in the conceptualization of anger today. Pressure was a major part of the conceptualization of anger until around 1300, but then it began to decline, only to emerge strongly again, together with heat, in the form of the HOT FLUID IN A CONTAINER metaphor centuries later. The point is that we should not expect any of the *conceptualized* responses associated with anger to remain constant in conceptualizing anger (and the emotions in general) throughout the ages.

More generally, what I would like to emphasize here is that universal embodiment associated with a target domain may consist of several distinct components, or of distinct aspects. The conceptual metaphors that emerge may be based on one component or aspect at a certain point of time and on another at another point of time. Which one is chosen depends on a variety of factors in the surrounding cultural context. In addition, the conceptual metaphors may be based on one component, or aspect, in one culture, while on another component or aspect in another. Moreover, there may be cultures where people clearly have a universal physiological component, and yet the conceptualization of anger or other emotion concepts is only marginally based on metaphors or metonymies. One such language is Tsou (an Austronesian language spoken in parts of Taiwan), where the emotions are primarily expressed linguistically through an elaborate prefix system attached to emotion *verbs* (not nouns). But as Shuanfan Huang (2002), the linguist who studied the language, tells us, even in this language there exists the conceptual metaphor ANGER IS EXCESS AIR or FIRE IN A CONTAINER.

As a matter of fact, it also seems possible that universal physical or biological embodiment is entirely ignored in conceptualization. For example, we know of at least one culture where the angry person is not, or is only to an insignificant degree, viewed as a pressurized container. Cathrine Lutz (1988: 157) tells us that on Ifaluk, a Micronesian atoll, the folk conception of *song*, the counterpart of English anger, can be characterized in the following way:

1. There is a rule or value violation.
2. It is pointed out by someone.
3. This person simultaneously condemns the act.
4. The perpetrator reacts in fear to that anger.
5. The perpetrator amends his or her ways.

This model of *song* does not emerge from the mapping that characterizes the ANGRY PERSON IS A PRESSURIZED CONTAINER metaphor. The model emphasizes the *prosocial, moral, ideological* aspects of anger—as opposed to the antisocial, individualistic, and physical aspects that the PRESSURIZED CONTAINER metaphor emphasizes in Western cultures (Lutz 1988). That is, although the Ifaluk may well have very

similar physiology in anger to the English and Chinese, this fact does not necessarily lead them to conceptualize *song* as pressure in a container, corresponding to anger as a destructive force within a person. For the Ifaluk, anger is a much more social business, as their language, thinking, and behavior reveals. Does this mean that *song* is an abstract concept not motivated by bodily experience? Yes, it does, because it is not universal *bodily* experience that motivates it. Its motivation derives from the particular social-cultural practice of the Ifaluk.

4. Conclusion

In light of the examples discussed in this paper, the conclusion that seems to present itself is that ‘universal embodiment as motivation’ is not a factor in conceptualization that manifests itself mechanically. On the one hand, as Lutz’s example demonstrates, universal embodiment may be overridden by cultural factors. On the other hand, universal embodiment should not be conceived as a monolithic bodily phenomenon relating to a particular domain of experience. Rather, it often consists of a variety of different components, or aspects.

The idea of differential experiential focus is connected to this latter point. It is intended to capture the fact that universal bodily phenomena characterizing a particular domain may be attended to differentially in different cultures and subcultures (i.e., different components of the same universal bodily basis may be singled out for attention). Given this more refined view of universal embodiment, we can account for cases that are apparent counterexamples to the embodiment hypothesis. Moreover, with its help we can construct a theory that can take into account the interplay between embodiment and culture and, ultimately, a theory where embodiment and culture naturally come together in a mind that is simultaneously embodied and acculturated.

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