Culturally motivated animal metaphors in an expressive construction

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Starting point: \( a N_1 \) of \( a N_2 \)

A case of constructional homonymy:

(1) \textit{a copy of a magazine} (unmarked)
(2) \textit{a rat of a boyfriend} (expressive)

But (1) and (2) \textbf{contrast} with regard to:

- Syntactic/conceptual/expressive ‘head’
- Conceptual content (entailment)
- Referential properties
- Pragmatic function (topicality)
- Perceptual properties (fig/ground)
Panther & Radden, 2004

Studies in Linguistic Motivation
Motivation in Grammar and the Lexicon

Panther & Radden, 2011
Cognition and its interactions with other human systems including language (Panther & Radden 2011: 2)

**COGNITION**

Reasoning, inferencing, etc.
Categorizing, ecology
Framing, cognitive modeling, etc.

**Associative thinking** (conceptual metonomy)

**Analogizing** (conceptual metaphor)

Conceptual blending (integration)
Perspectivizing

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Perception
Action
Emotion
Social/Communicative Interaction
Bodily experience
Culture

Language
To account for the contrasts

(1) *a copy of a magazine* (unmarked)
(2) *a rat of a boyfriend* (expressive)

cultural models, in this case, *animal folk models*, must be integrated into the description and explanation of lexicogrammar.
Cultural model (folk model)

Quinn and Holland (1987: 4)

“Cultural models are presupposed, taken-for-granted models of the world that are widely shared (although not necessarily to the exclusion of other, alternative models) by the members of a society and that play an enormous role in their understanding of that world and their behavior in it.”
Descriptive apparatus

• Folk model of the animal in question (allows for individual and cultural variation), including:
  – ontological hierarchy
  – emotive attributes
  – evaluative attributes

• Conceptual metaphor
Expressivity & culture:

een draak van een film*

“When I told a Chinese woman that in Dutch you can say a dragon of a film, her spontaneous reaction was: ‘Oh, that means that the speaker finds the film good'. The actual meaning of this expression in Dutch is, however, that the film was annoyingly sentimental.’” [Foolen 2004: 84]

*Thanks to Esther Roth for retranslating Foolen’s translation back into Dutch.
The expressive $NP_1$ of $NP_2$ construction (Foolen 2004)

**English:** a *bear* of a man, a *hell* of a *job*, a *dream* of a *car*, a *dud* of a *film*, a *blast* of a *party*

**Dutch:** *zijn twee apen van kinderen* ‘his two *apes* of children’

**German:** *ein Engel von einer Frau* ‘an *angel* of a *woman*’

**French:** *un fripon de valet* ‘a *scoundrel* of a *servant*’

**Italian:** *una bestia di avvocato* ‘a *beast* of a *lawyer*’

**Spanish:** *el imbécil de tu hermano* ‘this *idiot* your *brother*’

The *salient attribute* is syntactically coded in the *head* position.
a $N_{ANIMAL}$ of a $N$ construction: examples

(1) Deneuve’s co-worker is mired in an abusive relationship with “a pig” of a man [...] [WebCorp]

(2) All you need is the constitution of a lion and a lamb of a husband. [WebCorp]

(3) [...] I kinda miss being a clam of a person [...] [WebCorp]

(4) Marge is a mouse of a woman, thin and frazzled [...] COCA]

(5) [...] one fella tiny, nervous, prancing sideways, shaking his glossy black mane, a racehorse of a man, sixteen if he was a day [...] [COCA]

(6) But what makes her different than the average college student who juggles a heavy workload and a rat of a boyfriend? [WebCorp]
a N of a N:
two constructionally homonymous patterns

Unmarked (more frequent):
(1) Before you pull a copy of a magazine off the shelf, get an idea of what the editors need. [Google]

Marked (less frequent):
(2) One of my favorites to watch is Vladimir Zhirinovsky, a bulldog of a man and the leader of the Liberal-Democratic Party... [Google]
Syntactic, conceptual, and expressive heads

Compare:

(1) a copy of a magazine
   
   copy: syntactic and conceptual head

(2) a bulldog of a man
   
   bulldog: syntactic and “expressive” head
   (metaphor)
   
   man: conceptual head
Table 1: Syntactic/conceptual heads & modifiers: 

\( a \, N_1 \) of \( a \, N_2 \) vs. \( a \, N_{ANIMAL} \) of \( a \, N_{HUMAN} \)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construction</th>
<th>( a , N_1 ) of ( a , N_2 ) \hspace{1cm}</th>
<th>( a , N_{ANIMAL} ) of ( a , N_{HUMAN} )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UNMARKED</td>
<td>MARKED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>syntactic head</td>
<td>( N_1 )</td>
<td>( N_{ANIMAL} )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conceptual head</td>
<td>( N_1 )</td>
<td>( N_{HUMAN} )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>syntactic modifier</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conceptual modifier</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>( N_{ANIMAL} ) (of )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>expressive head</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>( N_{ANIMAL} ) (of )</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Semantic properties 1
entailment ($\models$) vs. non-entailment ($\not\models$)

Unmarked a $N_1$ of a $N_2$ pattern:

- a member of a team $\models$ a member (of a set)
- a member of a team $\not\models$ a team
- a picture of a woman $\models$ a picture (of sth.)
- a picture of a woman $\not\models$ a woman

The syntactic head noun corresponds to the conceptual head.
Semantic properties 2
entailment ($\models$) vs. non-entailment ($\not\models$)

Marked (expressive) a $N_1$ of a $N_2$ pattern:

- a hell of a job $\models$ a job
- a hell of a job $\not\models$ a hell
- a bear of a man $\models$ a man
- a bear of a man $\not\models$ a bear

The syntactic head does not correspond to the conceptual head.
Table 2: Entailment properties of 
\( a \ N_1 \ \text{of} \ a \ N_2 \) vs. \( a \ N_{ANIMAL} \ \text{of} \ a \ N_{HUMAN} \)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UNMARKED</th>
<th>MARKED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>( \models [S ... [NP a N_1 \ \text{of} \ a N_2] ...] )</td>
<td>( \not\models [S ... [NP a N_{ANIMAL} \ \text{of} \ a N_{HUMAN}] ...] )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( \not\models [S ... [NP a N_2] ...] )</td>
<td>( \models [S ... [NP a N_{HUMAN}] ...] )</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\( \models \) ‘entails’; \( \not\models \) ‘does not entail’
Referential properties

**Unmarked** a $N_1$ of a $N_2$ construction:

[a copy] of [a book]

+ref       +ref

**Marked** a $N_1$ of a $N_2$ construction:

[a lamb] of [a husband]

-ref       +ref

+attr
Table 3: Referential and attributive properties of $a N_1$ of $a N_2$ vs. $a N_{\text{ANIMAL}}$ of $a N_{\text{HUMAN}}$

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>$a N_1$ of $a(n) N_2$</th>
<th>$a N_{\text{ANIMAL}}$ of $a N_{\text{HUMAN}}$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$a N_1$</td>
<td>$a N_{\text{ANIMAL}}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$+<em>\text{REF}</em>{\text{spec}}$</td>
<td>$-_\text{REF}, +\text{ATTR}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$a N_2$</td>
<td>$a N_{\text{HUMAN}}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$+<em>\text{REF}</em>{\text{spec}}$</td>
<td>$+<em>\text{REF}</em>{\text{spec}}$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Abbreviations: $+_\text{REF}_{\text{spec}}$ = specific (individual) reference; $-_\text{REF}$ = non-referential; $+\text{ATTR}$ = property
Anaphoric constraints 1

**Unmarked** a $N_1$ of a $N_2$ construction:

(1) John took a [*picture* of a *man*] and later [*one* of a *woman*].

**Marked** (expressive) a $N_{ANIMAL}$ of a $N$ construction:

(2) Marge has to deal with a [*rat* of a *boyfriend*] at home and [*one* of a *boss*] at her workplace.
Anaphoric constraints 2

(1) A friend$_i$ of a friend$_j$ I had met in Mansa was renovating her$_i$/her$_j$ small restaurant located across the street from the rest house where we were staying. [COCA]

Unmarked a $N_1$ of a $N_2$ pattern: coreference is determined by head noun
Anaphoric constraints 3

(2) [...] a mountain$_i$ of a man$_j$ — over seven feet tall, by the looks of it — stands in the ambulance bay entrance of a hospital. Clutched in *its$_i$/his$_j$ hands are the feet of a small woman who is dangling, fully conscious, with her head pointed straight at the floor. [WebCorp]

Marked (expressive) a $N_1$ of a $N_2$ pattern: coreference is determined by the noun in the PrepP
### Table 4: Anaphoric constraints

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construction</th>
<th>$a N_1$ of $a N_2$</th>
<th>$a N_{ANIMAL}$ of $a N_{HUMAN}$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coreference constraints</td>
<td>(i) Indefinite <em>one</em></td>
<td>(i)? indefinite <em>one</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(ii) personal/possessive/relative pronoun corefers with NP$_1$</td>
<td>(ii) personal/possessive/relative pronoun corefers with NP$_2$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Topicality

**Unmarked** a $N_1$ of a $N_2$ construction:

(1) [...] a *photograph* of an ancestor in uniform may be an admired part of the family's collection of artifacts. [Google]

   The syntactic head *photograph* is the topic of the sentence.

**Marked** a $N_1$ of a $N_2$ construction:

(2) A *bear* of a man entered the room.

   The syntactic head *bear* is not topical: The sentence is about a *man*, not about a *bear*.

   Expressive (metaphorical) function of *bear* motivates its position as syntactic head.
### Table 5: Topicality properties

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construction</th>
<th>( a \ N_1 \text{ of } a \ N_2 )</th>
<th>( a \ N_{\text{ANIMAL}} \text{ of } a \ N_{\text{HUMAN}} )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Topic</strong></td>
<td>( a \ N_1 )</td>
<td>( a \ N_{\text{HUMAN}} )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Exception:</em> When ( N_1 ) is a picture noun, e.g. <em>a photograph of a woman</em>, then by metonymic extension, ( N_2 ) is a possible topic.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Perceptual properties: Figure-Ground organization

Unmarked a $N_1$ of a $N_2$ construction:

[a picture] of [a woman]

Figure     Ground

Marked a $N_1$ of a $N_2$ construction:

[a picture] of [a woman]

Ground     Figure

‘paragon of a woman’

(figure-ground reversal)
Table 6: *a picture of a woman*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROPERTIES</th>
<th>‘a pictorial representation of a woman’</th>
<th>‘a paragon of a woman’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UNMARKED</td>
<td>MARKED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>syntactic head</td>
<td><em>picture</em></td>
<td><em>picture</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conceptual head</td>
<td><em>picture</em></td>
<td><em>woman</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>expressive head</td>
<td>–</td>
<td><em>picture</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>entailment</td>
<td>⊨ <em>a picture</em> (of x)</td>
<td>⊨ <em>a woman</em> (x)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>referentiality</td>
<td><em>a picture</em></td>
<td><em>a picture</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
<pre><code>                        | REFERENTIAL                            | ATTRIBUTIVE             |
                        | *a woman*                              | *a woman*              |
                        | REFERENTIAL                            | REFERENTIAL             |
</code></pre>

Referentiality

27
Table 6, cont’d: *a picture of a woman*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROPERTIES</th>
<th>‘a pictorial representation of a woman’</th>
<th>‘a paragon of a woman’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UNMARKED</td>
<td>MARKED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>anaphoric constraints</td>
<td>(i) indefinite <em>one</em> pronoun corefers with NP₁</td>
<td>(i) ?indefinite <em>one</em> pronoun corefers with NP₂</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>potential topic</td>
<td><em>a picture</em></td>
<td><em>a woman</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>perceptual organization</td>
<td>figure – ground</td>
<td>ground – figure</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Table 7: a N₁ of a N₂ constructions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROPERTIES</th>
<th>unmarked</th>
<th>marked (expressive)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>syntactic head</td>
<td>N₁</td>
<td>N₁</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conceptual head</td>
<td>N₁</td>
<td>N₂</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“expressive” head</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>N₁</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>entailment</td>
<td>⊨ a N₁ (of x)</td>
<td>⊨ a N₂ (y)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>referentiality</td>
<td>a N₁: referential</td>
<td>a N₁: non-referential*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a N₂: referential</td>
<td>a N₂: referential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>co-ref’l pronouns</td>
<td>(i) indefinite one</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(ii) pers/poss pronoun corefers with NP₁</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(i) *indefinite one</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(ii) pers/poss pronoun corefers with NP₂</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>topicality of syntactic head</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>figure-ground organization</td>
<td>figure-ground</td>
<td>ground-figure</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*attributive
In lieu of a conclusion

- Animal folk models reflected in the lexico-grammar of languages: conservative (exhibit "cultural lag")
- They are not immediately influenced by cultural developments, e.g. changes in attitudes towards animals.
- In contrast, in other semiotic systems (e.g. visual arts) new ways of thinking about animals (e.g. rats) may be evoked (see Panther & Thornburg 2012) that are incompatible with traditional folk models.
Will press lever for food.


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