Culturally motivated animal metaphors in an expressive construction

Klaus-Uwe Panther

Nanjing Normal University & University of Hamburg

Linda L. Thornburg

Nanjing Normal University

Starting point: *a N$_1$ of a N$_2$*

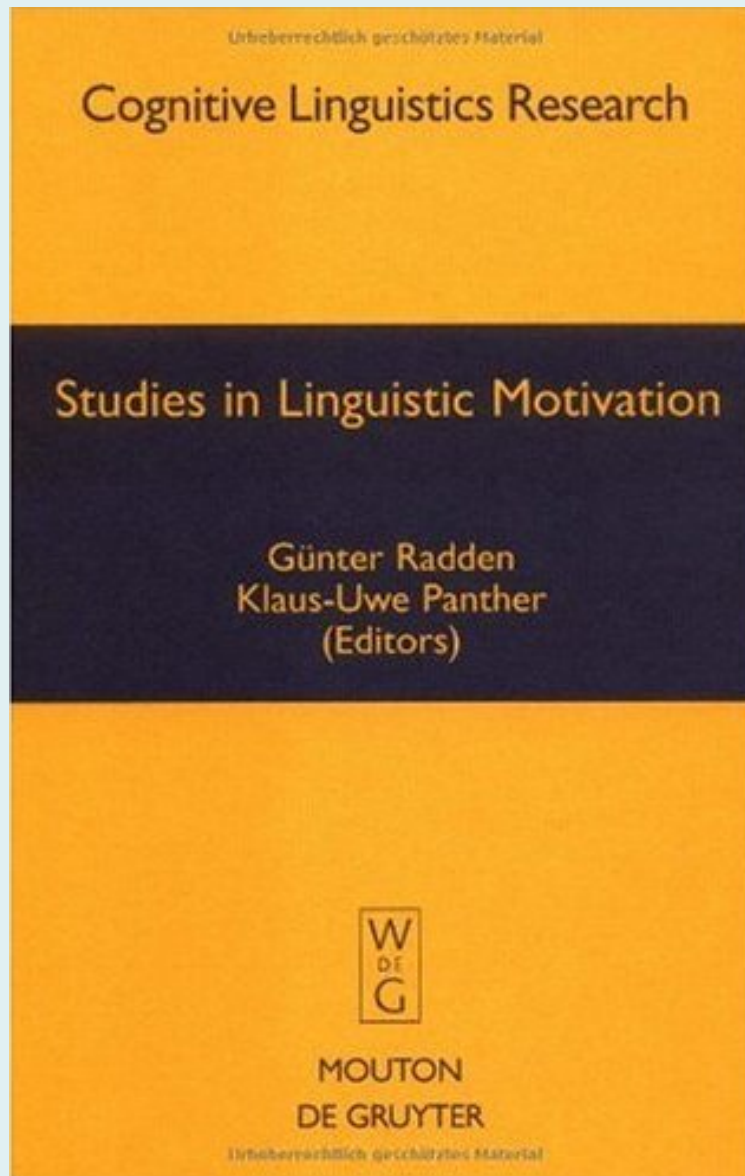A case of constructional homonymy:

    (1) *a copy of a magazine* (unmarked)

    (2) *a rat of a boyfriend* (expressive)
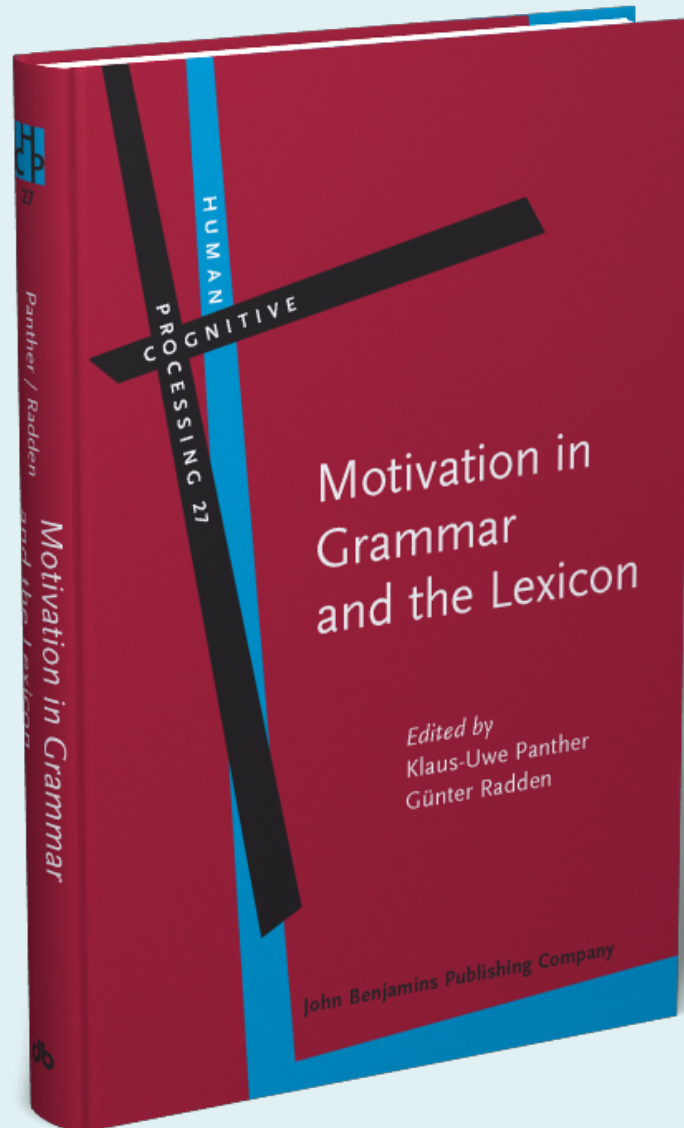
But (1) and (2) **contrast** with regard to:

- Syntactic/conceptual/expressive 'head'
- Conceptual content (entailment)
- Referential properties
- Pragmatic function (topicality)
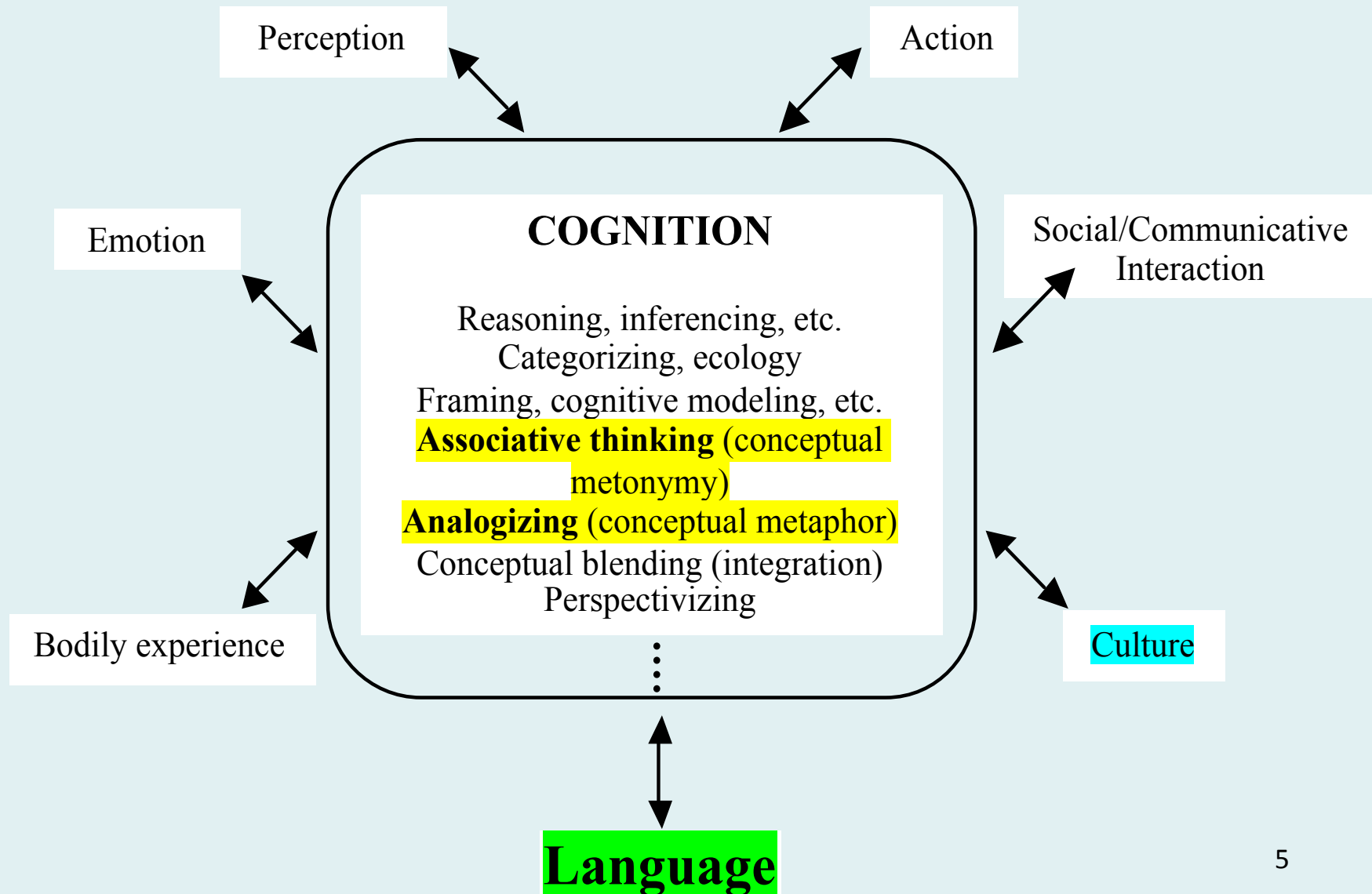- Perceptual properties (fig/ground)

Panther & Radden, 2004

Studies in Linguistic Motivation

Panther & Radden, 2011

Motivation in Grammar and the Lexicon

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

Perception

Action

Emotion

Social/Communicative Interaction

COGNITION

Reasoning, inferencing, etc.
Categorizing, ecology
Framing, cognitive modeling, etc.
Associative thinking (conceptual metonymy)
Analogizing (conceptual metaphor)
Conceptual blending (integration)
Perspectivizing

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. $a\ N_{ANIMAL}\ of\ a\ N_{HUMAN}$

Construction	$a\ N_1\ of\ a\ N_2$ UNMARKED	$a\ N_{ANIMAL}\ of\ a\ N_{HUMAN}$ MARKED
syntactic head	N_1	N_{ANIMAL}
conceptual head	N_1	N_{HUMAN}
syntactic modifier	—	—
conceptual modifier	—	$N_{ANIMAL}\ (of\ )$
expressive head	—	$N_{ANIMAL}\ (of\ )$

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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 ($\vDash$) vs. non-entailment ($\nvDash$)

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

a hell of a job $\vDash$ a job

a hell of a job $\nvDash$ a hell

a bear of a man $\vDash$ a man

a bear of a man $\nvDash$ a bear

The syntactic head does not correspond to the conceptual head.

Table 2: Entailment properties of $a\ N_1\ of\ a\ N_2$ vs. $a\ N_{ANIMAL}\ of\ a\ N_{HUMAN}$

$[_S \dots [_{NP}\ a\ N_1\ of\ a\ N_2\ ]\ \dots]$ UNMARKED	$[_S \dots [_{NP}\ a\ N_{ANIMAL}\ of\ a\ N_{HUMAN}]\ \dots]$ MARKED
$\vDash [_S \dots [_{NP}\ a\ N_1]\ \dots]$	$\nvDash [_S \dots [_{NP}\ a\ N_{ANIMAL}]\ \dots]$
$\nvDash [_S \dots [_{NP}\ a\ N_2]\ \dots]$	$\vDash [_S \dots [_{NP}\ a\ N_{HUMAN}]\ \dots]$

$\vDash$ 'entails'; $\nvDash$ '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. $a\ N_{ANIMAL}\ of\ a\ N_{HUMAN}$

$a\ N_1\ of\ a(n)\ N_2$		$a\ N_{ANIMAL}\ of\ a\ N_{HUMAN}$	
a N_1 +REF$_{spec}$	a N_2 +REF$_{spec}$	a N_{ANIMAL} -REF, +ATTR	a N_{HUMAN} + REF$_{spec}$

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

Anaphoric constraints 1

Unmarked a N_1 of a N_2 construction:

(1) John took a <u>picture</u> of a man and later <u>one</u> of a woman.

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

(2) ?Marge has to deal with a <u>rat</u> of a boyfriend at home and <u>one</u> 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

Construction	*a N$_1$ of a N$_2$*	*a N$_{ANIMAL}$ of a N$_{HUMAN}$*
Coreference constraints	(i) Indefinite *one* (ii) personal/possessive/ relative pronoun corefers with NP$_1$	(i)$^?$ indefinite *one* (ii) personal/possessive/ relative pronoun corefers with NP$_2$

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

Construction	$a\ N_1\ of\ a\ N_2$	$a\ N_{ANIMAL}\ of\ a\ N_{HUMAN}$
Topic	a N_1 *Exception*: When N_1 is a picture noun, e.g. *a photograph* of *a woman*, then by metonymic extension, N_2 is a possible topic.	a N_{HUMAN}

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)

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Table 6: a picture of a woman

PROPERTIES	'a pictorial representation of a woman' **UNMARKED**	'a paragon of a woman' **MARKED**
syntactic head	*picture*	*picture*
conceptual head	*picture*	*woman*
expressive head	–	*picture*
entailment	⊨ *a picture* (of x)	⊨ *a woman* (x)
referentiality	*a picture* REFERENTIAL *a woman* REFERENTIAL	*a picture* ATTRIBUTIVE *a woman* REFERENTIAL

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Table 6, cont'd: a picture of a woman

PROPERTIES	'a pictorial representation of a woman' UNMARKED	'a paragon of a woman' MARKED
anaphoric constraints	(i) indefinite *one* (ii) pronoun corefers with NP$_1$	(i) ?indefinite *one* (ii) pronoun corefers with NP$_2$
potential topic	*a picture*	*a woman*
perceptual organization	figure – ground	ground – figure

Table 7: a N$_1$ of a N$_2$ constructions

PROPERTIES	unmarked	marked (expressive)
syntactic head	N$_1$	N$_1$
conceptual head	N$_1$	N$_2$
"expressive" head	—	N$_1$
entailment	$\vDash$ a N$_1$ (of x)	$\vDash$ a N$_2$ (y)
referentiality	a N$_1$: referential a N$_2$: referential	a N$_1$: non-referential* a N$_2$: referential
co-ref'l pronouns	(i) indefinite *one* (ii) pers/poss pronoun corefers with NP$_1$	(i) *indefinite *one* (ii) pers/poss pronoun corefers with NP$_2$
topicality of syntactic head	yes	no
figure-ground organization	figure-ground	ground-figure

*attributive

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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.

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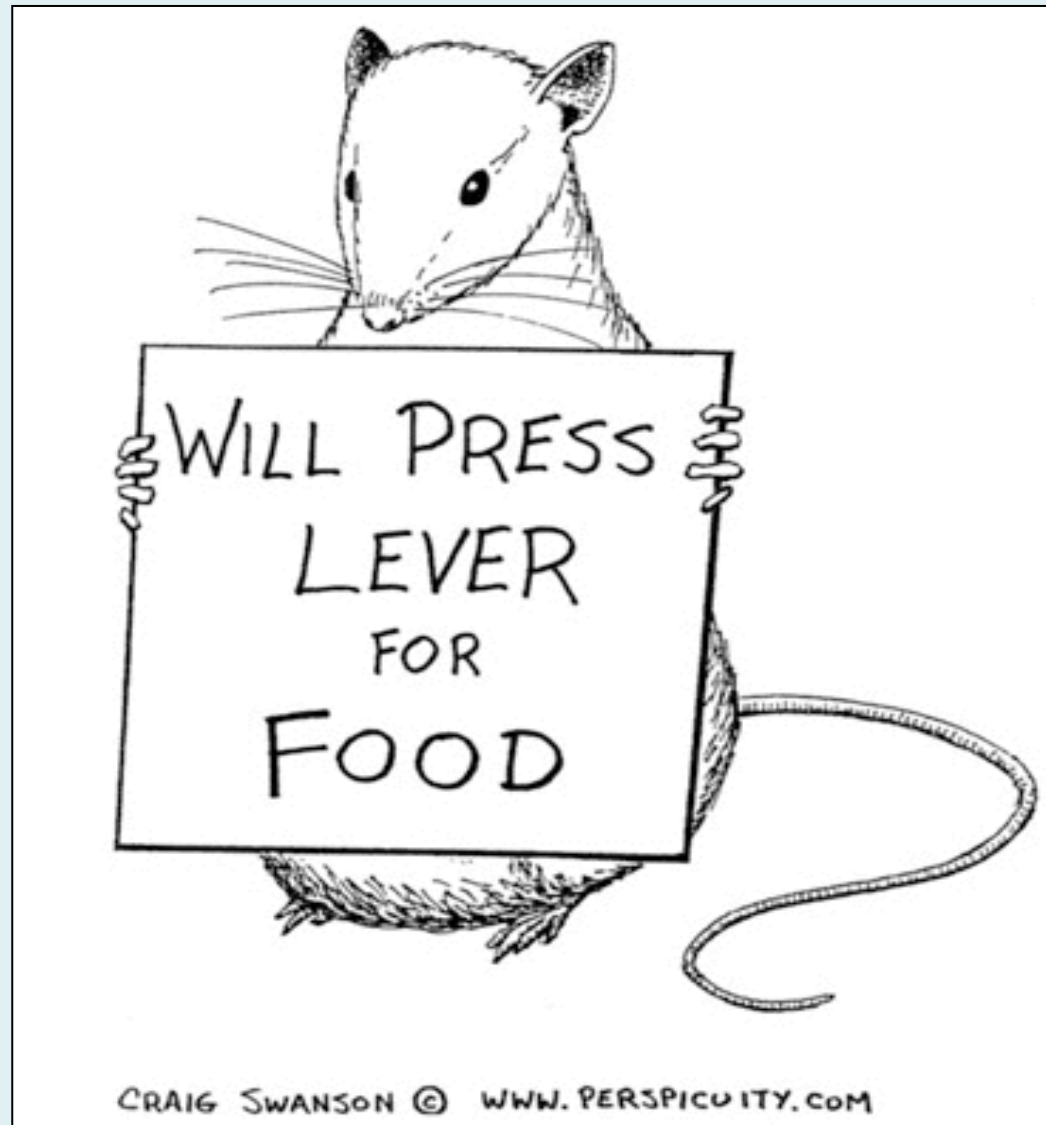
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panther@uni-hamburg.de
klauspanther@aol.com
lthornburg@alumni.usc.edu