The Role of Contrast
in Metonymy (and Other Figures):
(Comparisons and Contrasts)

[with some additions after the conference]

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Plan of Talk

- Source/target qualitative contrast in metonymy is normal
  - Cases of non-contrast
  - A reason for contrast?

- Key roles of contrast in some metonymy
  (extending comments at 2011 Stockholm Metaphor Festival)

- Related types of contrast in metaphor

- A conclusion about the typology of metonymy.

Part of a study (started with Barnden 2010) looking at dimensions cutting across different figures.

Source/Target Qualitative Difference (Contrast) in Metonymy

- Metonymy usually involves a large qualitative contrast between source item and target item.

  - Topic   FOR   physical book

  - Country   FOR   football team

  - White House   FOR   spokesperson

  - Company   FOR   its products

  - Artist   FOR   his/her artworks

  - Person   FOR   car and vice-versa

Cases of Relatively Little Contrast

- It's actually quite unusual for source and target to be of the same intuitive, qualitative type. Some exceptions:

- Some cases of SUBTYPE/TYPE metonymy (synecdoche):

  - *Coffee* break   FOR   coffee + tea + water +… break

- Some cases of PART/WHOLE metonymy:

  - *House*   FOR   house + garden + …

- Metonymy classes such as STATE FOR EVENT, ACTUAL FOR ASSIGNED, ACTUAL FOR POTENTIAL/FUTURE [cf. Radden's talk, and Boguslaw Bierwiakczonek p.c.]:

  - *Paolo Soleri is dead at 83*   [meaning he **(has) died** at 83]

  - *Is someone sitting there?*   [meaning: **is the seat assigned to someone?**]

  - *I'm out of here*   [meaning: **I'll soon be out of here**]

Relatively Little Contrast, contd

- Some types of REPRESENTATIONAL metonymy:

  - ACTOR   FOR   CHARACTER or vice versa:

    "Sean Connery defeated the evil genius once again"

    "King Henry strode onto the stage"

  - MAP ITEM   FOR   REAL ITEM or vice versa:

    "We'll get to that red region there by 5pm"   [pointing to red region on map]

    "Manchester is an inch above Birmingham"

- BOSS   FOR   ASSISTANT:

    "My boss has scheduled my meeting with her for 9am"

    instead of

    "My boss's secretary has scheduled my meeting with her [the boss] at 9am"

A Reason for Qualitative Difference?

- Most (or all?) the above low-contrast cases have – in different ways – a quality of **representativeness** – a **standing-in** or **playing-role-of** quality …

  … in the world (not just in the act of metonymy)

- Can divide metonymy into two broad types, according to whether there is that quality.

  Playing-role-of based metonymy leads naturally to low contrast.

  Other metonymy does not do so, and can be based on the many important high-contrast relationships in the world.

But …

- The qualitative difference (contrast) in above cases isn't of interest to the hearer in its own right: the type contrast is not part of the **point** of the utterance.

- But if contrast is purely incidental (a side-effect of other pressures) in much metonymy, why aren't there far more cases without contrast?

  There are important pragmatic relationships lacking contrast but that don't seem to be used in metonymy in English:

  (*) "Mary came to the party" meaning "Mary's husband came to the party"

  (*) "Mary and John came to the party" meaning "Mary and John's children came to the party"

  (*) "This sofa is comfortable" meaning "This sofa and accompanying armchairs are comfortable."

Contrast and Evaluation

- Contrast sometimes plays a key role in metonymy, notably when there is an evaluative connotation:

Euphemism

[Burkhardt 2010, Gradečak-Erdeljić & Milić 2011, Herrero Ruiz 2011.

Antonymy

[Vosshagen 1999, Panther & Thornburg 2008]

De-personalization

De-roling

Transferred epithets.

(De-)Emphasis & Depersonalization

- Metonymy is widely viewed as often serving (in part) to highlight, i.e. relatively *emphasize*, some aspect of the target [e.g. Panther & Thornburg 2007, following Radden & Kövecses 1999].

  "The White House believes that ..." emphasizes the White-House role of the actual believer(s).

- Example from Warren (2006: 32), taken from Gibbs (1994):

  "Steam irons never have any trouble finding roommates. ... Stereos are a dime a dozen. ... [O]ur electric typewriter got married and split ..."

  Warren claims this shows a ***mercenary attitude towards the people referred to***. I.e., the *depersonalization* carries a demeaning affective connotation to the understander, and is not a matter of convenience (brevity, ease of reference, ...).

- Depersonalization is one ***pressure*** towards a demeaning interpretation, not definitive.

De-Roling

- In the above cases, even when demeaning, the person's important role is however kept, and is part of the ***point*** of the metonymy. BUT …

 "***Three suits walked into the room.***"

   Reference is to corporate bosses, FBI agents, etc. Somewhat mocking affect.

 "***I don't know what upstairs would think of that.***" [Littlemore 2009]

   Said by workers in a child nursery; reference is to bosses.

- Have demeaning via depersonalization, as before.

 But NB no longer emphasizing the people's relevant roles: rather,

 DE-ROLING: ***emphasizing a functionally rather irrelevant aspect***, even though still a salient aspect and even though it suggests the role.

De-Roling: New Thoughts

- Although *"suits"* is related to the relevant role, there is a tinge of ridiculousness about grabbing such a peripheral aspect of the people or role, perhaps *drawing attention* to the fact that one is ignoring the really important things.

  This makes the metonymy *ironic*, perhaps. There could be an implicit pretence that suits are a genuinely important feature of FBI agents, much as one pretends in saying "fine friend" of a bad friend.

- Anyway, we have an important function of contrast between the type of thing that the source actually is the type of thing that the source "should" have been, namely something importantly and relevantly related to the target.

  3-way contrast: target,   source,   and better source

Transferred Epithets

"Cozy exit ahead"   [seen on a US freeway]

"idle hill"   [from poem *A Shropshire Lad* by A.E. Housman]

"female prison"

The Metonymic analysis that I prefer:

- The noun *"exit"* refers doubly, both

  (i) directly to the actual exit and

  (ii) metonymically to a hotel associated with the exit.

- The adjective *"cozy"* refers simply to its usual meaning, a physical property applying directly to hotels, etc.

Transferred Epithets: New Thoughts

- In **some** transferred epithets (e.g. *"idle hill"*) the source/target contrast is an important aspect of, or tool in, the communication.

- But this not so clear in some transferred epithets such as *"Cozy exit ahead."*

  The   cosy/exit contrast   is less than   the idle/hill contrast.

  And   *"Scenic exit"* would work, though in principle an exit itself could be scenic.

Now Metaphor: Contrast Degree

- There is a general assumption (by most researchers) of a considerable amount of qualitative contrast in metaphor, linked often to the idea of crossing between domains of life/knowledge.

- But source and target can be arbitrarily close qualitatively [e.g., Barnden 2010]:
  - *"Afghanistan is Vietnam"*
  - *"Japan is the Britain of the Far East"*
  - *"H.G. Wells is Britain's Jules Verne"*
  - *"David is our Joseph"* [David being speaker's son, Joseph being the son of another couple]
  - *"This week, Tuesday is honorary Monday"*
  - *"Purple is the new black"*

- When there is significant contrast in metaphor, it is typically more explicit than in metonymy because the target is usually explicit.

Metaphor: De-Personalization

- Moreover, in de-personalizing metaphor, where a non-person source is used for a person target, the de-personalization is potentially more intense than in metonymy, because of leaving it open how *alike* the target and source are *overall*.

- Referring to someone metaphorically as a robot demeans not only by de-emphasizing normal personal features but also implying that normal personal features don't *exist*.

  The typewriter metonymy just does the de-emphasis.

De-Roling

- *"Fancy-shoes"* [meton.] versus *"mannekin"* [metaphor],

   said of an academic colleague.

   Both de-personalizing and de-roling.

- But de-roling does not have to involve high contrast, in either metaphor or metonymy:

   Calling the above academic colleague the *"resident fashion model"* [metaphor].

   Calling Sean Connery *"James Bond"* even in his everyday activities [metonymy].

A Conclusion

- Some possible dimensions in typology of metonymy:

    - Degree of source/target contrast

    - Type of contrast (abstract/concrete, person/non-person, etc.)

    - Whether a contrast is a key aspect of the metonymy …

    - … and if it is, then in what particular way.

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