

UDC 811.111'366=111

811.111'373.612.2=111

Original scientific paper

Received on 05.06. 2011

Accepted for publication on 26.10. 2011

Vlatko Broz

University of Zagreb

Kennings as blends and prisms¹

This paper argues that recent advances in cognitive linguistics could shed more light onto solving a particular historical semantics problem, namely the semantics of kennings in *Beowulf*. The well-known figures of speech are very difficult to understand because of a rather enigmatic way of making reference to people or things (Brodeur 1960; Wehlau 1997). The first part of the paper aims to define the kenning as a particular type of compound to set it apart from ordinary compounds. The second and third parts of the paper apply recent cognitive linguistic approaches to semantic compositionality, treating kennings as composite expressions whose meaning is derived from an intricate interaction of metonymy and metaphor. For the purpose of a semantic analysis of kennings, a few of the best known examples have been selected. They are analysed first within the framework of mental space and blending theory (Fauconnier and Turner 1998 and 2002), and then they are analysed applying the prismatic model (Geeraerts 2002).

Key words: kenning; compound; blend; prism; prismatic model.

1. Introduction

Lexical structures with complex meanings such as idioms and compounds have received considerable attention from Cognitive Linguistics (e.g. Gibbs 1994; Kövecses & Szabó 1996; Geeraerts 2002; Benczes 2006). Research on processing figurative language has yielded a number of models for interpreting all kinds of expressions, but relatively little work has focused on figurative language in diachrony. The aim of this paper is to discuss the kenning, a special kind of

¹ I am very grateful to Kathryn Allan and Justyna Robinson for their comments and encouragements during the preparation of this article, which was originally presented as a paper as part of their workshop on Current Methods in Historical Semantics at the 15th International Conference on English Historical Linguistics in Munich in 2008.

compound and one of the most opaque figures of speech that can be found in Old English, and to analyse its semantic structure using two different theoretical frameworks developed within Cognitive Linguistics.

Old English poetry abounds in compounds. They are the most striking feature of Old English poetic style and there is immense poetic force in this peculiarly Germanic figure. As has often been pointed out, compounds interact very well with the verse patterns of Old English and they seem to be “intimately cooperative with the metre”, to use the words of Mitchell and Robinson (1998: 26). Mitchell and Robinson give paradigmatic examples of compounds that we can find in *Beowulf*:

- brēostwylm* “breast-welling”, meaning ‘tear’ or ‘emotion’ (line 1877)
hringedstefna “curved-prow ship”, or ‘a ship with a curved prow’ (lines 32, 1131 and 1897)
fēorhseoc “life-sick”, meaning ‘mortally wounded’ (line 820)
sceadugenga “shadow-goer”, meaning ‘a walker in the shade’ or ‘nocturnal visitant’ (line 704) (Ibid.).

Another characteristic type of two-part construction is the noun modified by a genitive or linked with another noun in the genitive case, which is used appositively (Ibid.):

- hringa fengel* ‘lord of the rings’ (line 2345)
sinces brytta ‘distributor of treasure’, meaning ‘prince’ (lines 607, 1171, 1927 and 2072)
heofones wyn ‘heaven’s joy’, meaning ‘the sun’ (line 1801)

This type of construction is functionally equivalent to a compound. Sometimes both types are used interchangeably. Mitchell and Robinson (Ibid.) point out that in *Beowulf* we can find both versions:

- eorlgestrēon* and *eorla gestrēon* “earl treasure”, ‘treasure of a nobleman’ (lines 2244 and 3163 respectively)
gumdryhte and *gumena dryhten* “lord of men” (lines 1642 and 1824 respectively)
yðgewinn and *yða gewinn* “wave strife” or ‘strife of the wave’ (lines 2412 & 1434 and 1469 respectively)

Such two-word constructions can form what are known as kennings. These compounds have attracted attention for a long time. They have been counted and

listed, and their aesthetic effect has been discussed in a number of studies (Meissner 1921; Brodeur 1960; Gardner 1969; Niles 1981 etc.).

2. What is a kenning?

In the literature on Old English poetic diction, authors disagree on what constitutes a kenning, and on what distinguishes a kenning from the wider class of compounds. Friedrich Klaeber (1950: lxii) labels as kennings any compounds made of circumlocutory words. This approach is shared by Rudolf Meissner, who in 1921 described the kenning as “Zweigliederiger Ersatz für ein Substantivum der gewöhnlichen Rede” (i.e. any two-membered substitution for a substantive of common speech). However, some scholars dislike this definition because the criteria ‘two-membered’ and ‘poetic’ are too general in nature, and could be applied to a broad range of compounds. Thomas Gardner (1972: 464) criticizes this approach for this reason; he gives examples such as *sæbat* and *sæhengest* ‘sea-stallion’ (= “ship,” “boat”), saying that both are poetic and two-membered, which would make them both kennings. Andreas Heusler offers a more restricted and precise definition in his 1922 review of Meissner’s work, proposing that the kenning is “eine Metapher mit Ablenkung” (i.e. a metaphor with an associating link) (Heusler 1922: 130). In this view, kennings are specifically only those two-membered expressions which consist of a metaphorical base or determinatum and a limiting word or determinant which links the base to its referent.

Mitchell and Robinson (1998: 26) say that a construction is a kenning when the base word is wholly metaphorical, that is when it literally refers to something different from the referent. The base word is the second element of a compound of the noun qualified by a genitive noun. They give the following examples:

<i>bānhūs</i>	“house of bone”, meaning ‘human body’ (line 2508)
<i>beadoleoma</i>	“battle light”, meaning ‘sword’ (line 1523)
<i>guðwine</i>	“war friend”, meaning ‘sword’ (line 1810)
<i>heofones gim</i>	“heaven’s jewel”, meaning ‘sun’ (line 2073)
<i>merehrægl</i>	“sea-garment”, meaning ‘sail’ (line 1905)

They go on to explain that these

... are all kennings because the human body is not literally a house, a sword is not literally a light or a friend, the sun is not literally a jewel or a candle, and a sail is not literally a garment” (Ibid.).

Mitchell and Robinson stress that these compounds should not be confused with the expressions like

<i>beaga brytta</i>	“dispenser of treasure”, meaning ‘king’ (lines 35 and 352)
<i>beahgyfa</i>	“giver of treasure”, meaning ‘king’ (line 1102)
<i>lyftfloga</i>	“flyer through the air”, meaning ‘dragon’ (line 2315)
<i>wegflota</i>	“floater on the wave”, meaning ‘ship’ (line 1907)

These do not qualify as kennings because “kings literally did give and dispense treasure, [...], a dragon was really thought to fly through the air [...] and a ship literally did float on the waves” (Mitchell and Robinson 1998: 27). These expressions may be vivid and often metonymical, but they are not kennings because they do not compare the referent with something it is not. Authors like Arthur Brodeur (1959: 247–59) and Alvin Lee (1998: 58–59) call this group of compounds *kend heiti* (‘characterised terms’), and claim that these are much more frequent than kennings. Both *kenning* and *kend heiti* are terms adopted from medieval Icelandic treatises on poetics, and their nature and uses are explained by Snorri Sturluson in the thirteenth century in his work on the craft of the trained poet (*Skáldskaparmál*). The term *kenning* is derived from the idiomatic use of *kenna við or til*, meaning “to name after” or “make known by.” The verb *kenna* in rhetoric meant “to make a characterizing periphrasis.”

Scholars have proposed radically different numbers of kennings in Beowulf depending on the definition they subscribe to. Alvin Lee identifies as kennings only 60-70 compounds among the hundreds found in Beowulf, whereas Klaeber (1950: lxiv) finds one on average in every other line. Thomas Gardner (1969: 111) thinks there are twice as many kennings as Lee—about 120—and therefore concludes that they comprise only about 2 percent of all the compounds in Beowulf. Gardner (1969: 117), as well as Heusler (1922: 122), insists on so-called ‘pure’ kennings, claiming that they are relatively rare in Old English poetry. This idea of ‘pure’ kennings is reminiscent of ‘pure’ idioms in phraseology, which also claims that ‘pure’ idioms (those whose motivation is not transparent) are very rare. Phraseology as it sprang from the Eastern European linguistic tradition regards multi-word units as located on a continuum with word combinations ranging from the most opaque and non-decomposable at one end to the most transparent and compositional at the other end. ‘Pure idioms’ are expressions such as *kick the bucket* meaning ‘die’ or *by and large* meaning ‘on the whole’, whose literal meanings give no clue to their idiomatic meaning. This notion of a continuum has subsequently been imported into western linguistic tradition including cognitive linguistics.

If we return to the definitional problem of kennings, we will see that the dividing line between the *kenning* and *kend heiti* is often impossible to draw, which those authors who follow this distinction readily admit. This is unsurprising, as basically the distinction between the two depends on the difference between a metaphor and metonymy, kennings having the underlying driving force of the former and *kend heitis* of the latter.

The problem of distinguishing between metaphor and metonymy is also identified by Karen Sullivan (2008), who investigated kennings in Old Norse skaldic poetry, arguing that many instances of metaphor are actually special instances of metonymy, namely MEMBER FOR MEMBER metonymy. For example, the sea is referred to as a river or fjord, both of which are members of the category BODIES OF WATER (Sullivan 2008: 23).

In the semantic analysis that follows in the next section, some of the standard examples have been taken from Brodeur (1960) and Gardner (1969). These fall into three groups: kennings relating to the sea (2.1), to the sun (2.2), and to the body (2.3).

2.1. *Swanrād and the kennings for ‘sea’*

One of the most famous compounds from Beowulf that traditional authors identified as a kenning is *swanrād* (“swan-road”) (line 199), one of the many compounds that stands for the ‘sea’. This example is probably the most quoted example of a kenning, but is actually quite controversial because one group of authors (including Lee and Gardner) claims that this is not a kenning but a *kend heiti* whereas others claim that it is a double kenning.

Caroline Brady (1952) explains in one paper that *rād* does not actually denote a ‘road’, but a ‘riding-place’. Brady’s explanation has been adopted by other authors, such as Woodward (1954) who claims that this was a double kenning, as its explanation depends on a further kenning in the first element of the compound. When one compares *hronrād* (“whale-road”) to *swanrād*, both meaning ‘sea’ or ‘ocean’, one will agree that it is easier to account for the meaning of *hronrād* (line 10), as the whale is an animal that lives in the sea, whereas the swan is not. Even in Anglo-Saxon times the swan was known to live in shallow and generally fresh water. So the swan should better be associated with lakes, rivers or streams, and not the sea.

Woodward cleverly points out that the swan refers to the ship—the long arched neck of the swan suggests the curved prow of the ancient Scandinavian

vessels, so *swanrād* should be interpreted as the riding-place of the ship. Is this an example of metaphor, where we have a perceived resemblance between a ship and a swan, or is it metonymy because there is an objective association, rather than any kind of analogy, between the two? Whatever the case is, the compound *swanrād* remains unusual because its first element is more enigmatic than its second element, which is the base element. And because its base element is metonymic rather than metaphoric, the whole compound is disqualified as a kenning in the very strict and narrow sense of the term, even though it contains an image metaphor in which the prow of the ship is mapped onto the image of the swan (see Figure 1).

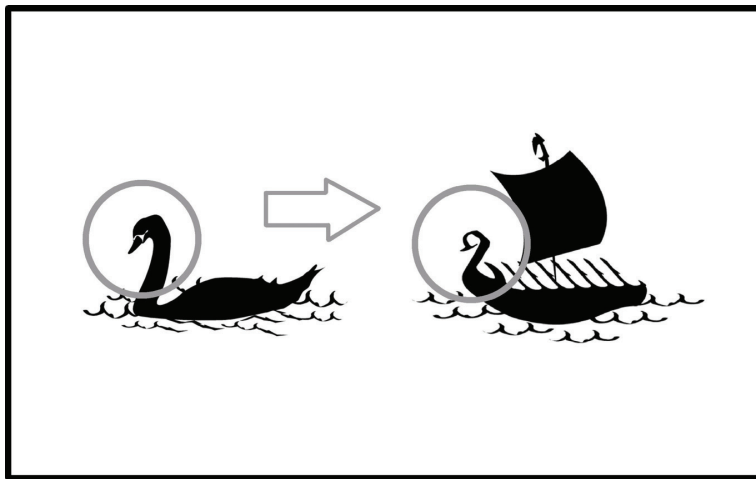


Figure 1. Image metaphor mapping of the kenning *swanrād*.

Image metaphors, to quote Lakoff and Turner (1989:89), are

“more fleeting metaphors which involve not the mapping of concepts but rather the mapping of images. Metaphoric image-mapping works in just the same way as all other metaphoric mappings—by mapping the structure of one domain onto the structure of another, but here the domains are mental images.”

In the kenning *swanrād*, the first element is a superimposition of the image of a swan onto the image of a ship by virtue of their shape. What presents difficulty for our understanding of this metaphor is our conventional knowledge of the ships of those times, or rather the lack of that conventional knowledge. If we were to see those ships in the way the Anglo-Saxons did, we would probably with less effort create a mental image of the ship, and then map the swan—or its neck—onto the ship—or its prow.

An alternative interpretation for the motivation of the swan can be found in Sullivan (2008). Instead of the image metaphor, the swan could be used metonymically for another animal, which more readily provides access to the domain of the sea. Even more likely, there is an underlying MEMBER FOR MEMBER metonymy by which sea is referred to as river or lake, all three of which are members of the superordinate category BODIES OF WATER (Sullivan 2008: 27).

Other kennings for the sea in *Beowulf* include:

merestræt “sea-street”, “sea-path” (line 514)
lagustræt “sea-street”, “sea-road” (line 239)
seglrād “sail-riding”, “sail-road” (line 1429)
windgeard “wind-yard”, “wind dwelling”
 “the dwelling place of the winds” (line 1224)

Seglrād metonymically evokes the sea in much the same way as *swanrād*, as a double metonymy. *Rād* has already been explained, and *segl* is specifically a synecdoche, pars pro toto, a prominent part standing for the whole, in this case a sail standing for the ship.

In their field guide to poetic metaphor entitled *More Than Cool Reason*, Lakoff and Turner use the example of Old Norse kennings in the chapter on Interactions of Metonymy with Metaphor. They say that kennings are typically composites of metonymies and image metaphors, which is actually a cognitive linguistic labelling for Heusler’s *Metapher mit Ablenkung* from 1922. Lakoff and Turner say that kennings are an extreme example of how metaphor and metonymy can interact to achieve a unified interpretation.

Old Norse kennings have received further cognitive linguistic treatment by Peter Orton (2007), who applied conceptual metaphor and conceptual blending theories to his analysis of the skaldic Myth of the Poetic Mead. This was in fact the first time Blending Theory had been applied to kenning studies.

2.2. Kennings for the ‘sun’

Other examples of the interaction between metaphor and metonymy can be found in kennings meaning ‘sun’. The most frequent base element to denote the sun is the word *candel*, as in

woruldcandel ‘world’s candle’ (line 1965)
rodores candel ‘sky’s candle’ (line 1572)

<i>heofoncandel</i>	‘heaven’s candle’ (not in Beowulf)
<i>wedercandel</i>	‘sky’s candle’ (not in Beowulf)
<i>swegalcandel</i>	‘sky’s candle’ (not in Beowulf)

(from Gardner 1969: 112)

The primary meaning of *candel* is ‘lamp’ or ‘lantern’, and it is a borrowing from Latin *candela*. Before the 19th century, candles were not made from wax but from tallow, which is a by-product of beef-fat rendering. The present-day meaning of that word has narrowed down to a piece of wax which produces light as it slowly burns, but still the image metaphor in which the lamp/candle is mapped onto the sun, both being shiny objects (in Latin *candēre* means ‘to shine’) is further supported by the associative links provided by the words *woruld*, *heofon*, *weder*, *swegel*.

Brodeur points out that *heofoncandel* appears in several poems with a surprising diversity of meaning: in *Andreas* it means ‘the sun’, in *Crist* both ‘sun’ and ‘moon’, in *Wonders of Creation* ‘stars’ and in *Exodus* it denotes the pillar of fire. This diversity can easily be explained—the sun, the moon and the stars are all shiny objects in the sky.

Another kenning denoting the sun, *heofones gim* (line 2073), uses the base word *gim*, meaning ‘gem’ or ‘jewel’, i.e. another shiny object. Other variations with the same base include *wuldorgimm* and *tungolgimm* (Brodeur 1960: 250).

2.3. Kennings for ‘body’ and ‘breast’

According to Gardner’s list of ‘pure’ compound kennings in Old English poetry, approximately one third refer to the human body. The concept of body itself can be expressed by the following kennings in Beowulf, grouped below according to their base element:

bāncofa ‘bone chamber’ (line 1446), *flæscofa* ‘flesh chamber’ (line 1568)
bānfæt ‘bone container’ (line 1116),
bānhūs ‘bone house’ (line 2508),
bānloca ‘bone enclosure’ (lines 742 and 818)

Elsewhere in Old English poetry we can find examples such as

eorpfæt ‘earthly vessel’, *lamfæt* ‘vessel of clay’,
feorhhūs ‘soul house’, *sawolhūs* ‘soul house’
bansele ‘bone hall/house/dwelling’
ealdorgeard ‘enclosure of life’

feorhbold ‘soul house’
flæschama ‘flesh covering/garment’, *lichama* ‘body covering’
flæschord ‘flesh treasure’, *greothord* ‘earthen treasure’, *sawolhord* ‘soul house’

The body is not a house, but it is called *bānhūs* because it contains the bones as a house contains its occupants. The body is described via an image-metaphor as a house whose occupants are bones. Bones make an essential part of the human body, so they are used as a metonymic reference to yield the concept of body.

All the other combinations work in more or less the same way: the image-metaphors map some kind of enclosure, container, house, hall, treasure onto the body, referring metonymically to parts of the body like *bān* or *flæsc*, or even to ‘soul’ and ‘life.’ For a modern audience, these might be considered metaphorical, but we can only speculate about whether they would have been perceived as metaphorical by Anglo-Saxons. Having said this, the study of kennings might give us an insight into the socio-cultural world of the Anglo-Saxons. In order to research and understand the language of the past, we need to understand the way past communities functioned and reasoned. Even though it is not likely that kennings were used in everyday language, they still had to make sense to a considerable number of native speakers of Old English. Examining kennings might help us to find out more about these communities. For example, there is another very important group of kennings which tell us much about the way the Anglo-Saxons conceptualised thoughts and emotions. The most frequently kenningsed part of the body is the breast, which, for the Anglo-Saxons, represents the seat of life, thought and emotions. And we can reconstruct the metonymic and metaphoric links that give rise to the diversity of meanings that the word ‘breast’ has, i.e. ‘heart’, ‘mind’, ‘thought’, ‘spirit’ and so on. Some of these kennings are repeated from the previous list, the kennings for the body, but again, the motivation for the link between the breast and the body is not difficult to account for—it relies on the simple metonymy PART FOR THE WHOLE. The following list gives further examples; the first example comes from *Beowulf*, and the others appear in other Old English poems.

breosthord ‘breast’s treasure’ (line 1719), *brondhord* ‘burning treasure’,
feorhhord ‘life’s treasure’, *lichord* ‘inner parts of the body’,
modhord ‘mind’s treasure’, *sawolhord* ‘soul’s treasure’
breostloca ‘breast enclosure’, *feorhloca* ‘life enclosure’, *witloca* ‘mind’s chest’,
hordloca ‘treasure chest’, *hreperloca* ‘bosom chest’

ferhþcofa ‘life chamber’, *gastcofa* ‘spirit chamber’, *hordcofa* ‘treasure chamber’, *hreþcofa* ‘bosom chamber’, *runcofa* ‘chamber of secrets’
ferhþcleofa ‘life chamber’
heortscraef ‘heart cave’

It should be noted that it may be a futile task to search out nuances in meaning in the use of one alternative expression in place of another, because, as Niles (1981: 497) pointed out, the poet’s “chief concern was not to develop subtle shades of meaning but simply to compose in alliterative form.”

The aforementioned examples basically make up most of the kennings in *Beowulf* in the narrow sense of the term. There is also a very important group of kennings related to weapons and war, which contain really interesting ways to denote a shield or battle, but these will not be considered here.

3. Kennings and Blending Theory

So far we have discussed the kenning as a semantically complex compound consisting of at least one metaphor and one metonymy. Analysing the kenning by isolating its metaphor and its metonymy is in fact not sufficient or adequate, as we do not see how the metaphor and metonymy interact in order to construe the meaning of the whole. Therefore, kennings should be subjected to some more recent meaning construction models such as Blending Theory, since they qualify as creative language that is typically analysed within this framework. This kind of analysis could possibly shed light on the dynamics of meaning construal in the semantically complex compounds known as kennings.

Blending Theory or Conceptual Integration Theory is a theoretical framework proposed by Fauconnier and Turner (1998, 2002), which was originally developed in order to account for meaning construction and processing in language, especially the imaginative and creative aspects that can be found in novel metaphors, newly coined terms, idioms, jokes, puns, advertisements and so on. Later it found its application outside linguistics in a wide range of human activity, ranging from art to computer science. Blending is a common cognitive process related to metaphor and analogy which explains how we map ideas from two or more domains and project them into blended domains in order to understand things. It builds upon theories of metaphor and metonymy by providing a model to explain more complex interactions than a simple mapping between a single source and a single target. It is therefore a promising model for the analysis of kennings, which often involve more than one type of mapping.

Unlike conceptual metaphor theory, which involves two domains or conceptual structures, a conceptual integration network consists of at least four mental spaces or cognitive domains. At least two of these are ‘input spaces’; the others are a generic space, containing conceptual structure that the inputs have in common, and a blended space, where selected elements from the inputs are merged into a new structure (See Figure 2). This emergent structure involves three blending processes—composition, completion and elaboration. Composition is the projection and fusion of elements from the input spaces into the blended space. Completion refers to the completion of a pattern in the blend, which takes place when the structure in the blend matches information stored in long-term memory. Elaboration, which is closely related to completion, is a mental simulation of the event with an indefinite number of scenarios, and this produces a structure that is unique to the blend. These three blending operations reflect the process of meaning construction.

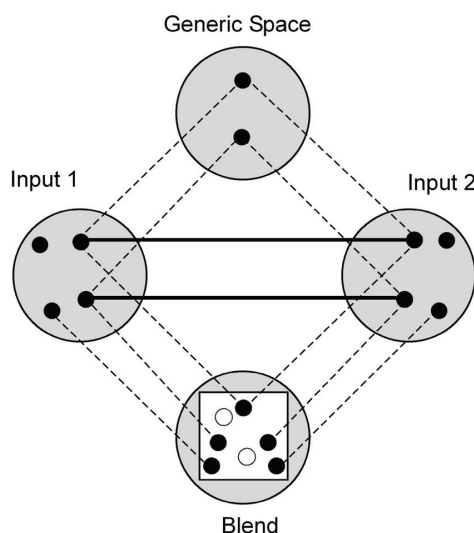


Figure 2. Conceptual Blending Schema (Fauconnier & Turner 2002).

Conceptual blending theory can account for the motivation of meaning of various language phenomena, but it is questionable whether the operation of the three blending processes (composition, completion and elaboration) in that particular order also functions in this way during on-line processing of idiomatic language (cf. Gibbs 2000: 351–352).

If we take some of the well-known kennings from the previous chapter and subject them to a blending analysis, we will quickly see what kind of problems

we are facing: what is the generic space of the two inputs?² While blending offers a promising way of analysing kennings in more detail, in practice it is difficult to identify the elements in a blend.

Let us take *hronrād* ‘sea’ as our first example. It consists of *hron* ‘whale’ and *rād* ‘road’, or ‘riding-place’ to adopt Brady’s proposed translation (‘the riding place of the whale’). For the conceptual integration theory, the most important prerequisite is to have some similarity in contents in both input spaces. This similarity enables the generic space. With this kenning, as with most other kennings, it is not at first clear what the two input spaces would have in common.

One could suggest a possible generic space along the following lines. The whale swims in the sea. This is the first input. The cart moves on the road, or else the ship sails on its riding-place. The generic space would be some sort of a movement scenario. The blended space would therefore work as follows: the whale, like a vehicle, is travelling in the sea; the sea is its riding-place or road. However, there seems to be a rather big semantic leap from the schematized movement scenario as a generic space to the resulting meaning of the sea. It seems that conceptual blending is arguably of little help in explaining this complex semantic structure.

Kennings also seem to have an important difference from some examples of blends that have been analysed, which is evident from the *hronrād* example. If we think of some of the stock examples in the conceptual integration literature such as *this lawyer is a shark* or *this surgeon is a butcher*, they all seem to be explicit, in that both of the input spaces are specified linguistically. By contrast, kennings like *whale-road* are implicit, and therefore involve more cognitive ‘work’. We do not know at first that we are talking about the sea, while in those standard examples from the blending theory literature we know that we are talking about lawyers and surgeons but with specific characteristics. With kennings, the emergent structure is hidden or conceptually distanced from the input spaces, linked only by a highly complex metaphoric and metonymic network. In other words, the process of applying blending theory to kennings is slightly different.

Let us consider other examples: the kennings for the sun—*woruldcandel* ‘world’s candle’ or *heofoncandel* ‘sky’s candle.’ The first input is *woruld* ‘world’ or *heofon* ‘sky’. The second input is *candel* ‘candle.’ What do these two concepts have in common that would form their generic space? One of the elements belonging to the domains of both the ‘world’ or the ‘sky’ (the first input

² I would like to thank my departmental colleague Milan Mateusz Stanojević for an eye-opening discussion on this question.

space) is the ‘sun.’ With ‘world.’ the sun is part of the knowledge related to the shifts of day and night, while with the ‘sky’ it is more directly related to its position or the fact that we can see the sun in the sky. As for the second input space, the candle gives light in some closed spaces or at night. The generic space is therefore an entity that gives light or illumination. The blended space could be described as follows: the sun is a candle that illuminates the space of the world or the sky.

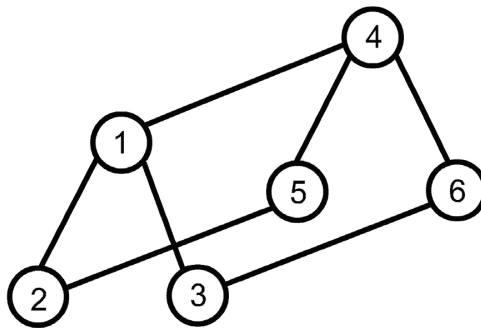
If we take a look at the further examples of any of the kennings for the body, such as *bānhūs* ‘bonehouse,’ *sawolhūs* ‘soul-house,’ *bāncofa* ‘bone-chamber’ or *flaeschama* ‘flesh covering/garment,’ we will quickly establish that the necessary knowledge that needs to be retrieved is somewhat different again, since they rely upon knowledge of the body, i.e. the knowledge that the body contains bones, has a soul, and has skin, the covering or garment for the flesh inside it. Although there are so many synonymous kennings for the body, their input spaces will be different in each case. ‘House,’ ‘chamber’ and ‘garment’ denote containers that can be inhabited by someone or something. ‘House’ in this sense is also used in the Bible, so the dualism encountered in soul-house (soul and body) is Christian. This probably explains why it co-occurs with ‘soul’—because a person inhabits a house rather than a *cofa*, a chamber that is rather small. In other words, a ‘soul’ lives in a ‘house’ and not in a chamber where bones are located. Therefore, it is no coincidence that *sawol* is not attested as an element in combination with *cofa* or other types of container. In the second input space in this blend is the person who lives in a house, or the thing that is located in a chamber. The generic space is therefore filled by the containment schema. The blended space contains the house inhabited by a soul, or a chamber containing bones, or a garment for bones.

This analysis is rather tentative and does not seem to be very convincing as the generic space for kennings is not clearly identifiable, and this seems a general problem with blending analyses. Other linguists, such as Sweetser (1999) and Benczes (2006), who have worked with Blending Theory in their analyses of compounds, have also come to the conclusion that “blending theory is not enough in itself to explain the semantics of compounds” (Benczes 2006: 59), noting that it relies too much on intuition in the process of analysis, leaving “substantial leeway for the linguist to include data based on subjective selective criteria” (Benczes 2006: 62). Bundgaard et al. (2006) have also criticized the applicability of Blending Theory to compounding, as compounds are asymmetric constructions in which one element contributes to the frame and the other specifies it. Therefore, their mental spaces do not carry equal weight when they are combined in the cognitive process of blending.

4. Prismatic approach to kennings

Geeraerts (2002) introduces the prismatic model as “a necessary addition to an analysis in the framework of mental space and blending theory” (Geeraerts 2009: 87). This model distinguishes between the paradigmatic and the syntagmatic levels of meaning in the interpretation of composite expressions such as idioms and compounds, and therefore allows a more fine-grained analysis. The paradigmatic level of composite expressions deals with the relation between literal meaning as a whole and the figuratively derived meaning. The syntagmatic level describes the compositional relationship between the meaning of the constituent parts and the meaning of the composite expression as a whole. These relationships involve two kinds of transparency: *motivation*, which is transparency on the paradigmatic level, and *isomorphism*, which is transparency on the syntagmatic level. This transparency is gradable: some relations are more transparent than others.

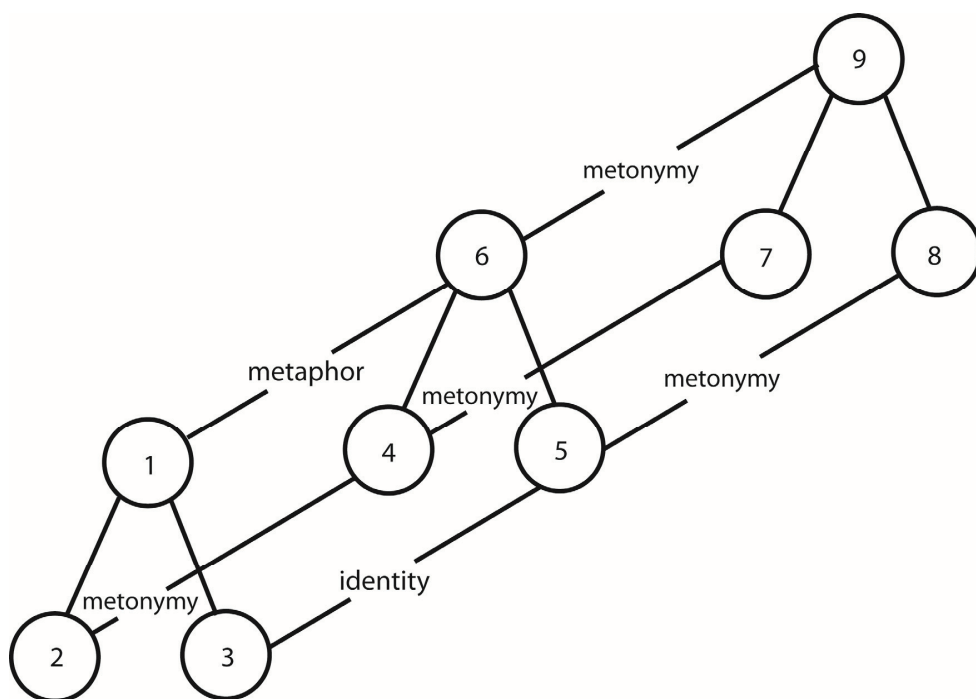
The semantic relations in composite expressions are schematically represented in Figure 3, which for the reasons of clarification refers to those expressions with two lexical items, as a minimal number. However, this schema is to be modified for each example of a kenning, even though it coincides with the number of lexical items.



- 1 Expression as a whole in its literal reading
- 2 First constituent item in its literal reading
- 3 Second constituent item in its literal reading
- 4 Expression as a whole in its derived, idiomatic reading
- 5 First constituent item in its derived reading
- 6 Second constituent item in its derived reading

Figure 3. The prismatic structure of composite expressions (Geeraerts 2002).

Geeraerts (2009) compares the blending and prismatic approach analysing the composite expression *to dig one's one grave*, a stock example in the literature on blending. Although this composite expression is technically not a nominal compound, the comparison also relates to such lexical units (and therefore also to kennings) since the complexity of their semantic structures share many similar characteristics. On formal grounds, however, the example of composite expression that comes closest to a kenning is the Dutch compound *schapenkop* 'dumb person' analysed in Geeraerts (2002: 456), which involves an interaction between metaphor and metonymy. The compound literally means 'sheep's head' and can be used with this literal meaning as well as with a figurative meaning, so it is isomorphic on the syntagmatic level and motivated on the paradigmatic level. On the basis of the conceptual metaphor PEOPLE ARE ANIMALS there is a metaphorical mapping from 'sheep's head' to 'human head,' in other words to 'a human head like that of a sheep,' or 'stupid-looking human head.' This is in turn followed by a metonymical mapping (PART FOR WHOLE) from 'head' to 'person,' ultimately yielding the reading of 'stupid person.'



1 Sheep's head – 2 Sheep – 3 Sheep's head
4 Sheep-like – 5 Human head – 6 (Human) head like that of a sheep
7 Stupid – 8 Person – 9 Stupid person

Figure 4. The prismatic structure of *schapenkop* (Geeraerts 2002).

Let us now analyse the same kennings from the previous chapter using the prismatic model.³ The kenning *hronrād* ‘whale-road’ yields the following result:

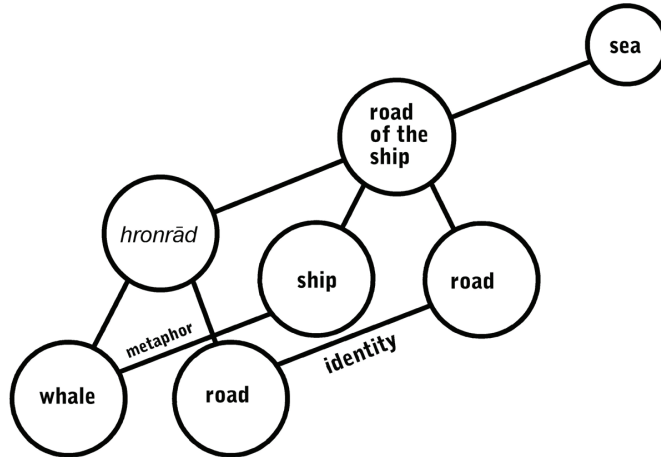


Figure 5. The prismatic structure of *hronrād*.

The first constituent in its literal reading is a ‘whale.’ Due to its size and its natural habitat, it is easily comparable to a ship, so the first constituent in its derived reading is a ship, to which we arrive via a metaphor based on similarity. The second constituent, ‘road’ or ‘riding-place,’ stays the same, so the relationship is that of identity. The road refers to a place of movement; it is the surface for travelling. The relationship between the first constituent in its derived reading and the expression as a whole is that of metonymy, as both belong to the same domain: ships are in the domain of the sea. The expression as a whole in its literal meaning is ‘whale-road,’ or ‘the road of the whales,’ whereas it metaphorically refers to the ‘sea.’

The example of *swanrād* works in much the same way. The swan as the first constituent in the expression has a metaphorical link to a ship in the derived reading of the first constituent. The parallels between a swan and a ship are somewhat different than those between a whale and a ship, but the prismatic structure is the same. The swan resembles a ship in its form and appearance, as well as in some aspects of its location and behaviour. The river or lake as a place where a swan can be found is generalised to a body of water, so that it can be compared to the sea.

³ A special thanks goes to Professor Dr. Dirk Geeraerts for an extensive discussion of kennings in a prismatic analysis, including the drawings which have been reproduced here.

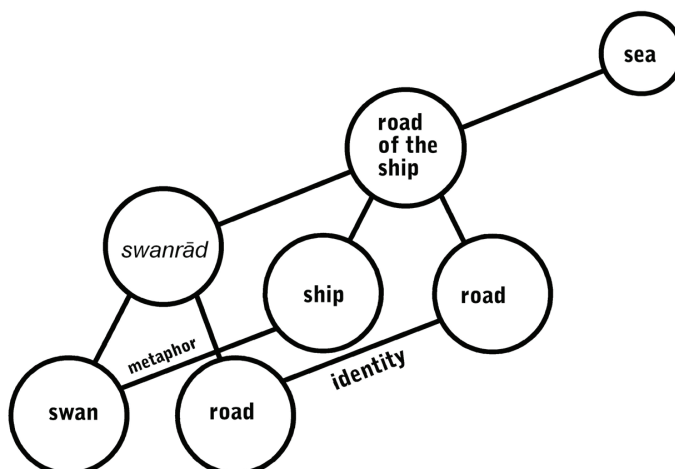


Figure 6. The prismatic structure of *swanrād*.

The prismatic links on the bottom level in the kenning for *woruldcandel* ‘the sun’ are different from the previously analysed example. The first constituent in the expression, *woruld*, remains the same in its derived reading, so that link is identity. The second constituent in the prismatic structure is *candel* in its literal reading, but in the derived reading it is the light, as it undergoes the semantic change of generalization. This link could also be regarded as metonymic, since the candle belongs to the same domain as light.

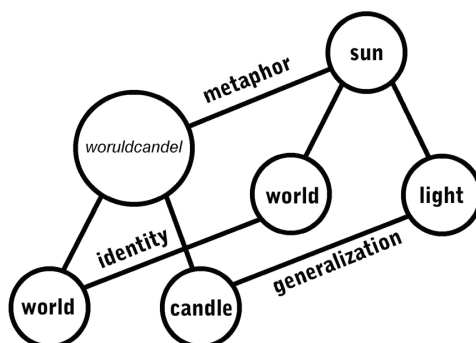


Figure 7. The prismatic structure of *woruldcandel*.

The last example considered here is the kenning *bānhūs* for ‘body.’ The relationships in the bottom level of the prism are that of identity between the first constituent in its literal reading and the first constituent in its derived reading (‘bone’), while the second constituent in its literal reading (‘house’) is metaphorically linked to the second constituent in the derived reading, which is a ‘container,’ i.e. ‘the place within which something properly belongs.’

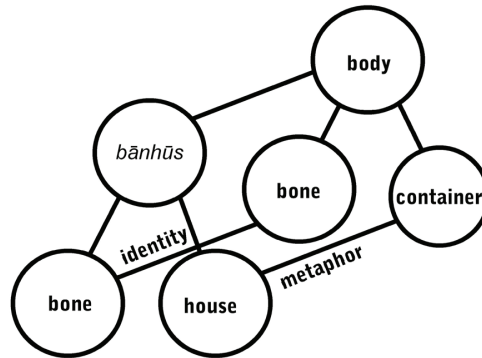


Figure 8. The prismatic structure of *bānhūs*.

5. A comparison of the two approaches

The prismatic model seems to work well with all types of compounds including the kenning, regardless of the semantic relationships (metaphorical or metonymical) present within the compound that give meaning to the expression as a whole. However, it does share some of the limitations of the blending theory in the way that it relies on an essentially ‘post hoc’ analysis or interpretation of the meaning relations between kennings and their intended meanings. This does not imply that any other theoretical approach would not be a post hoc rationalization. Both approaches are cognitive in the sense that they seek a motivated explanation for a complex process of meaning construction. The prismatic model makes better use of the conceptual metaphor theory and could in fact be looked upon as its enhancement because it is more fine-grained and because it allows for clearer identification of the elements involved at each stage.

The complex explanatory apparatus of Blending Theory posits theoretical entities such as generic and blended spaces, which do not seem to precisely reflect

or make clear the psychological processes underlying the comprehension of composite expressions such as kennings or idiomatic compounds. The prismatic model's explanatory apparatus is not any less complex, but it offers a stage-by-stage meaning development while at the same time does not require the subjective identification of generic spaces, a purportedly cognitive process that takes place unconsciously as we process (or try to make sense of) an idiomatic expression.

Blending Theory is not dispreferred on the grounds of difficulty of analysis, but because its results do not contribute any heuristic value in terms of understanding the complex semantic structure of kennings. As has been discussed in section 2, kennings are based on an intricate network of metaphor and metonymy. Blending Theory requires much intuitive elaboration in order to account for the conceptual structure in the examples that were discussed. Moreover, our knowledge of Anglo-Saxon culture is insufficient for an all-embracing speculation required to come up with a convincing blending analysis. Therefore, its applicability seems to be limited in diachronic research.

6. Conclusion

As discussed in the first part of this paper, there are problems surrounding the definition of the kenning. A relatively narrow definition, rather than the loose one which considers any periphrastic expression as a kenning used instead of a simple name or a thing, has been favoured here as the most helpful for the purposes of this study. The kenning is therefore defined as a two-part figure, which can be a one-word compound or two separate words consisting of a metaphorical base (i.e. image-metaphor) and a determinant (i.e. metonymy) which provides an associating link (*Ablenkung*). The base expresses the thing with which the referent is being compared, and the determinant, which is the first element in the case of compounds, serves to bridge the disparity of meaning between the base and the referent. Kennings have been shown to possess a riddle-like quality in that the first element provides a clue to the riddle of the second element, and are therefore particularly opaque to modern speakers. The kennings discussed in this paper are related to the concepts of the sea, the sun, the body and the breast, and these are typical in *Beowulf* and other poems of the period.

The kennings which have been analysed here provide examples on which to test two relatively recent methods of meaning construction. The first, blending theory, does not appear to be very successful as a tool for the analysis of kennings, as it seems rather difficult to determine the generic space of the two elements in the compound. In other words, it is not easy to identify the common

characteristics of the two input spaces that give rise to the blend. For this reason, the schemas involved have not been spelled out in detail, since the model has not proved to be fruitful, although at a basic level it seems intuitively helpful.

The prismatic model, on the other hand, seems to offer a much more successful analysis of the kennings' semantic structure. It allows a more fine-grained and precise analysis, since a blending analysis does not distinguish between sense developments within the expression as a whole and those within component parts.

As figurative language in diachrony is so under-researched, especially in languages other than English, the type of study illustrated in this paper can be pursued in further research. Other kinds of composite expressions can be analysed in order to explain their processes of meaning construal and other descriptive or explanatory tools can be sought or elaborated in order to analyse kennings and nominal compounds.

References

- Benczes, Réka (2006). *Creative Compounding in English: The Semantics of Metaphorical and Metonymical Noun-Noun Combination*. Amsterdam – Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Brady, Caroline (1952). The synonyms for 'sea' in *Beowulf*. Levi Robert Lind, ed. *Studies in Honor of Albert Morey Sturtevant*. (Humanistic Studies 29). Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 22–46.
- Brady, Caroline (1952). The Old English nominal compounds in *-rad*. *PMLA* 67.4: 538–571.
- Brodeur, Arthur Gilchrist (1960). *The Art of Beowulf*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Bundgaard, Peer F., Svend Ostergaard, Frederik Stjernfelt (2006). Waterproof fire stations? Conceptual schemata and cognitive operations involved in compound constructions. *Semiotica* 8: 363–393.
- Fauconnier, Gilles, Mark Turner (1998). Conceptual integration networks. *Cognitive Science* 22: 133–187.
- Fauconnier, Gilles, Mark Turner (2002). *The Way We Think: Conceptual Blending and the Mind's Hidden Complexities*. New York: Basic Books.
- Gardner, Thomas (1969). The Old English kenning: A characteristic feature of Germanic poetical diction? *Modern Philology* 67.2: 109–117.
- Gardner, Thomas (1972). The application of the term "kenning." *Neophilologus* 56: 464–468.
- Geeraerts, Dirk (2002). The interaction of metaphor and metonymy in composite expressions. René Dirven, Ralf Pörings, eds. *Metaphor and Metonymy in Comparison and Contrast*. Berlin – New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 435–465.

- Geeraerts, Dirk (2009). Prisms and blends: digging one's grave from two perspectives. Wiesław Oleksy, Piotr Stalmaszczyk, eds. *Cognitive Approaches to Language and Linguistic Data: studies in honor of Barbara Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 87–104.
- Gibbs, Raymond W., Jr. (1994). *The Poetics of Mind: Figurative Thought, Language and Understanding*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gibbs, Raymond W., Jr. (2000). Making good psychology out of Blending Theory. *Cognitive Linguistics* 11.3–4: 347–358.
- Heusler, Andreas (1922). Review of Rudolf Meissner (1921). *Die Kenningar der Skalden: Ein Beitrag zur skaldischen Poetik*. Bonn and Leipzig: Schroeder. *Anzeiger für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Litteratur* 41: 127–134.
- Klaeber, Friedrich (1950). *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*. 3rd edition with supplements. Boston: D. C: Heath.
- Kövecses, Zoltán, Péter Szabó (1996). Idioms: A view from cognitive semantics. *Applied Linguistics* 17: 326–355.
- Lakoff, George, Mark Johnson (1989). *More Than Cool Reason. A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Lee, Alvin A. (1998). *Gold-Hall and Earth-Dragon: Beowulf as Metaphor*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Meissner, Rudolf (1921). *Die Kenningar der Skalden: Ein Beitrag zur skaldischen Poetik*. (Rheinische Beiträge und Hilfsbücher zur germanischen Philologie und Volkskunde 1). Bonn: K. Schroeder.
- Mitchell, Bruce, Fred C. Robinson (1998). *Beowulf. An Edition*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Niles, John D. (1981). Compound diction and the style of Beowulf. *English Studies* 62: 489–503.
- Orton, Peter (2007). Spouting poetry: Cognitive metaphor and conceptual blending in the Old Norse myth of the poetic mead. Andrew Wawn, Graham Johnson, John Walter, eds. *Constructing Nations, Reconstructing Myth: Essays in Honour of T. A. Shippey*. Turnhout: Brepols, 277–300.
- Sullivan, Karen (2008). Genre-dependent metonymy in Norse skaldic poetry. *Language and Literature* 17.1: 21–36.
- Sweetser, Eve (1999). Compositionality and blending: semantic composition in a cognitively realistic framework. Theo Janssen, Gisela Redeker, eds. *Cognitive Linguistics: Foundations, Scope, and Methodology*. Berlin – New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 129–162.
- Woodward, Robert H. (1954). *Swanrad in Beowulf*. *Modern Language Notes* 69.8: 544–546.

Author's address:

Filozofski fakultet Sveučilišta u Zagrebu
Odsjek za anglistiku
Ivana Lučića 3
10000 Zagreb
vbroz@ffzg.hr

KENNINZI KAO INTEGRACIJE I PRIZME

U ovom se članku raspravlja o tome kako bi nedavni pomaci u području kognitivne lingvistike mogli dati više svjetla prilikom rješavanja jednog problema iz historijske semantike, a riječ je o značenju staroengleskih *kenninga* u Beowulfu. Te poznate stilske figure vrlo je teško razumjeti zbog prilično zagonetnog načina na koji se one odnose na ljude ili stvari (Brodeur 1960; Wehlau 1997). Cilj prvog dijela članka je definirati kenning kao posebnu vrstu složenice kako bi je razlikovali od običnih složenica. U drugom i trećem dijelu članka primjenjuju se nedavni kognitivnolingvistički pristupi značenjskoj kompozicionalnosti, promatrajući kenninge kao složene izraze čije značenje proizlazi iz zamršene interakcije metonimije i metafore. Za potrebe semantičke analize kenninga odabrano je nekoliko najpoznatijih primjera koji se prvo analiziraju u okviru teorije mentalnih prostora i konceptualne integracije (Fauconnier i Turner 1998 i 2002), a zatim se analiziraju primjenjujući prizmatični model (Geeraerts 2002).

Ključne riječi: kenning, složenica, integracija, prizma, prizmatični model.