Klaus-Uwe Panther and Linda L. Thornburg
Hamburg University
Department of English and American Studies
Hamburg

Introduction:
Metonymy across languages[*]

Background and motivation of the special issue

The six papers in this special issue of *Jezikoslovlje* originated as presentations for the thematic session entitled "How Universal are Conceptual Metonymies? A Cross-Linguistic Comparison," that we organized for the *7th International Cognitive Linguistics Conference* held at the University of California, Santa Barbara, CA, July 22-27, 2001.[1]

The authors of the contributions that constitute this special issue share the firm conviction that metonymy is a pervasive cognitive phenomenon with considerable impact on language use and language structure. This thesis may, at first sight, seem surprising to readers who think of metonymy as a "garden-variety" figure of speech that since antiquity has been listed in rhetorical handbooks as a stylistic device of minor importance.

In comparison to metaphor, which has always enjoyed high prestige as a trope fulfilling important stylistic and esthetic functions in literature and even argumentative functions in expository prose, metonymy has been a stepchild of rhetoric. In their influential book, *The New Rhetoric,* Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969) pay a considerable amount of attention to metaphor as an argumentative tool, whereas there is not a single entry 'metonymy' in the index of their voluminous work.

---

[1] The papers have been thoroughly revised and updated for this special issue of *Jezikoslovlje*. A seventh paper presented in the theme session, "The Metonymic Folk Model of 'language'" by Günter Radden, is available on-line at: http://www.metaphorik.de/01/radden.htm.

The *conceptual* import of metaphor has also been recognized—long before the advent of Cognitive Linguistics—by philosophers, linguists, anthropologists and literary scholars. Jäkel (1997: 121f.) provides an impressive list of precursors of the cognitive theory of metaphor containing such illustrious names as John Locke, Immanuel Kant, Giambattista Vico, Hermann Paul, and Ortega y Gasset, to name just a few. In the 20th century the philosopher Hans Blumenberg (1999) and the linguist Harald Weinrich (1976), among others, have recognized the significance of metaphor for cognition and have developed metaphoric systems that prefigure at least some of the work done by contemporary metaphor theorists (see Jäkel (1997: 128ff.) for further elaboration of this point).

In contrast to metaphor, the cognitive import of metonymy, to our knowledge, has been discovered only relatively recently. With the emergence of Cognitive Linguistics in the 1980s metonymy has begun to receive the attention it deserves as a fundamental linguistic and conceptual phenomenon (see e.g. Lakoff 1987, Gibbs 1994, and the contributions in Panther and Radden 1999, Barcelona 2000, Dirven and Pörings 2002, and Panther and Thornburg 2003a). The workings of metonymy can be observed on many levels of language structure and use: grammar, the semantic structure of the lexicon, speech acts, discourse, and more generally, in the online creation of pragmatic meaning.
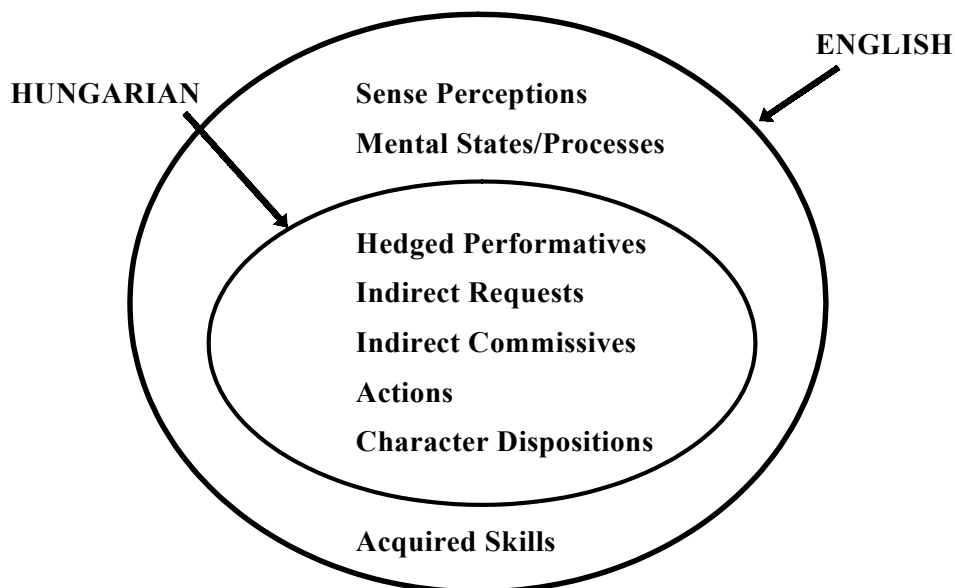
Although the contributors to the present special issue may not agree in all respects on how metonymy should be defined, they will probably accept Radden and Kövecses' (1999) well know characterization that metonymy is an operation within one cognitive domain in which a "source" meaning provides or facilitates mental access to a "target" meaning.[2] In language, this source-target mapping is achieved through a linguistic vehicle. There is also agreement that metonymy is used not only for purposes of indirect reference, but that it is ubiquitous on the levels of predication and illocution as well. The contributions to this issue reflect this.

The relevance of metonymy for language comparison and language typology

Typological research has hitherto focused mainly on morpho-syntactic differences and commonalities among the world's languages. With the exception of contrastive analyses of lexical fields, conceptual structure, to our knowledge, has not been the object of systematic cross-linguistic inquiry. The researchers who present their work in this special issue of *Jezikoslovlje* have been among the first to notice that metonymies (like metaphors) do not necessarily work the same way in all languages. They believe that new insights into language typology can be gained from looking more closely into cross-linguistic differences in metonymy exploitation.

---

[2] Our own view of metonymy is presented in e.g. Panther and Thornburg (2003b), Panther and Thornburg (2004), and Panther and Thornburg (forthcoming).

To give the reader a preliminary idea of what kind of cross-linguistic contrasts exist in metonymy exploitation, we briefly present the main differences we found between English and Hungarian with regard to the use of the POTENTIALITY FOR ACTUALITY metonymy (Panther and Thornburg 1999). Both languages exploit this metonymy, but its use is more restricted in Hungarian than in English, as can be seen in Figure 1.

ENGLISH

HUNGARIAN

Sense Perceptions

Mental States/Processes

Hedged Performatives

Indirect Requests

Indirect Commissives

Actions

Character Dispositions

Acquired Skills

Figure 1. Exploitation of the POTENTIALITY FOR ACTUALITY Metonymy:
English vs. Hungarian

The domains of sense perception, mental states and processes, and acquired skills do not seem to be available for the exploitation of the POTENTIALITY FOR ACTUALITY metonymy in Hungarian. (A similar contrast between English and Spanish in the domain of sense perception is investigated by Francisco Ruiz and Lorena Pérez in this issue.)

The kinds of intriguing empirical questions that present themselves with regard to the cross-linguistic study of metonymy include:

1. Are there metonymic principles that are operative in all languages, i.e., are there metonymic universals?

2. Is it possible to find a typological classification of the world's languages in terms of metonymic principles and how would it differ from grammar-based classifications?

3. How do metonymic principles interact with grammatical structure?

4. How do individual languages differ in the exploitation of individual high-level metonymies?

While we are not yet close to answering the first and second questions, interesting answers have been given by the contributors of this issue to the third and the fourth questions:

Antonio Barcelona presents a contrastive study on the role of referential metonymy in the emergence of proper names and their frequent re-classification as common nouns. His study compares English, French, German, Italian and Spanish.

Mario Brdar and **Rita Brdar-Szabó** explicitly address questions 3 and 4 in their cross-linguistic study on the predicational metonymy MANNER FOR ACTIVITY in English, Croatian, Hungarian and German.

The **present authors** analyze a contrast between English and French in the exploitation of two predicational metonymies, viz. ONSET FOR WHOLE EVENT and INCIPIENT PHASE FOR WHOLE EVENT, in the larger context of lexical and grammatical aspect.

Francisco Ruiz and **Lorena Pérez** are concerned with two high-level predicational metonymies, viz. OBLIGATION FOR DESIRE and ABILITY FOR ACTUALITY, detecting some important contrasts between English and Spanish with regard to the exploitation of these metonymies.

In another study, **Francisco Ruiz** and **Olga Díez** investigate the predicational metonymies ACTION FOR PROCESS and ACTION FOR (ASSESSED) RESULT, which, according to the authors, correlate with the causative/inchoative alternation and the middle construction, respectively.

Finally, **Sherman Wilcox**, **Phyllis Perrin Wilcox** and **Maria Josep Jarque** address question 3 in their investigation of the function of conceptual metonymy as well as the interaction of metonymy with metaphor and iconicity in ASL and Catalan Sign Language (LSC). They observe, for example, systematic verb-noun conversions based on the ACTION FOR INSTRUMENT metonymy result in shifts from verbs like MOVE-FINGERS (with the meaning 'type') to their corresponding noun forms ('typewriter').

We believe that the studies in the present special issue of *Jezikoslovlje* are a promising impetus for additional systematic investigations into the cross-linguistic distribution of high-level metonymies. It is our hope that the articles in this special issue will stimulate further research into what we feel is a fascinating new field of study and an innovative approach to language and thought.

References

Barcelona, Antonio, ed. (2000). *Metaphor and Metonymy at the Crossroads: A Cognitive Perspective* [Topics in English Linguistics 30]. Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter.

Blumenberg, Hans (1999). *Paradigmen zu einer Metaphorologie.* Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp.

Dirven, René, Ralf Pörings, eds. (2002). *Metaphor and Metonymy in Comparison and Contrast* [Cognitive Linguistics Research 20]. Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter.

Gibbs, Raymond W., Jr. (1994). *The Poetics of Mind: Figurative Thought, Language, and Understanding*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Jäkel, Olaf (1997). *Metaphern in abstrakten Diskurs-Domänen: Eine kognitiv-linguistische Untersuchung anhand der Bereiche Geistestätigkeit, Wirtschaft und Wissenschaft*. Frankfurt a.M., etc.: Peter Lang.

Lakoff, George (1987). *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal about the Mind*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Panther, Klaus-Uwe, Günter Radden, eds. (1999). *Metonymy in Language and Thought* [Human Cognitive Processing 4]. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: Benjamins.

Panther, Klaus-Uwe, Linda Thornburg (1999). The POTENTIALITY FOR ACTUALITY metonymy in English and Hungarian. In Klaus-Uwe Panther & Günter Radden, eds., 333-357.

Panther, Klaus-Uwe, Linda L. Thornburg, eds. (2003a). *Metonymy and Pragmatic Inferencing* [Pragmatics & Beyond New Series 113]. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: Benjamins.

Panther, Klaus-Uwe, Linda L. Thornburg (2003b). Introduction: On the nature of conceptual metonymy. In Klaus-Uwe Panther & Linda Thornburg, eds., 1-20.

Panther, Klaus-Uwe, Linda L. Thornburg (2004). The role of conceptual metonymy in meaning construction. http://www.metaphorik.de.

Panther, Klaus-Uwe, Linda L. Thornburg (forthcoming). Metonymy [Chapter 10]. *Handbook of Cognitive Linguistics*, ed. by Dirk Geeraerts and Hubert Cuyckens. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Perelman, Ch., L. Olbrehts-Tyteca (1969). *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise in Argumentation*. Notre Dame & London: University of Notre Dame Press. [Originally published as *La Nouvelle Rhétorique: Traité de l'Argumentation*, Presses Universitaires de France, 1958].

Radden, Günter, Zoltán Kövecses (1999). Towards a theory of metonymy. In Klaus-Uwe Panther & Günter Radden, eds., 17-59.

Weinrich, Harald (1976). *Sprache in Texten*. Stuttgart: Klett.