
Re-viewing Space: Figurative Language in Architects’ Assessment of Built Space.

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The innovative nature of Lakoff and Johnson (1980) resides to a considerable extent in the insight that metaphor is a matter of cognition rather than of language per se and that the mind metaphorizes systematically. This led to numerous applications and tests in other languages and in the cultures these languages both reflect and inform. The enthusiastic charting of conceptual metaphors, however, resulted in a relative negligence of the verbal manifestations from which most of these conceptual metaphors were gleaned. More recently, linguists have rightly voiced their dissatisfaction with this one-sided top-down approach. Goatly (1997) is an exponent of this line of research, modernizing an approach dating back to Brooke-Rose (1958).

Rosario Caballero’s monograph Re-viewing space: Figurative language in architects’ assessment of built space is exemplary in balancing the textual and conceptual levels of metaphor. Her book is remarkable in another respect as well: It is restricted to metaphors in one specific genre, namely the architectural building review. This is important, since such a genre-perspective contributes to “helping the researcher to develop an analytical framework for exploring metaphor in professional communication” (p. 4). For various reasons, the genre is moreover of special interest in itself. To start with, describing and evaluating a building pertains to its abstract design as well to its visual appearance--and both these very different aspects encourage the use of metaphor. The genre is furthermore unusual in providing both verbal text and visual representations (including concept-oriented plans and diagrams, and image-oriented photographs). Finally, since reviews comprise both descriptive and evaluative aspects, the genre also invites a focus on the discursive and persuasive dimension of
metaphor--an emphasis also transpiring in another recent corpus-based metaphor study (Charteris-Black, 2004). Thus, attention is paid to metaphors’ grammatical forms, to the places where they occur and form clusters (in the introduction? in the caption accompanying a photograph? in the summary?) and to strategies of persuasion and face-saving politeness. For all these reasons, Caballero’s book is of deserves the attention not only of architects and scholars of architecture--or so I trust--but also of metaphor scholars with no particular penchant for this discipline. Given my own interest and expertise, I will leave an assessment of the book’s value for the architectural community to others; in the remainder of this review, I will concentrate on its pertinence for metaphor scholars.

Chapter two provides details of the idiosyncrasies of architectural discourse and its metaphors. For instance, the author points out that the weight of the metaphors used in the profession ranges from formative to catachretic. Unsurprisingly, in the design stage of a building, metaphors are crucial: Good architects possess what Robert Oxman calls a “thinking eye” (p. 23), and visually oriented metaphors such as that of a crèche described as a “tadpole” serve the double purpose of triggering ideas about plans and designs as well as about appearance. That is, “a visual metaphor in architectural discourse may invoke both an image and a conceptual frame” (p. 25). That being said, when architects use the word “paunch” for a protruding bulge in a wall, they themselves are often unaware of using a metaphor, while it would moreover be inappropriate to conclude that its users were thinking of the conceptual metaphor BUILDING IS PERSON. Caballero furthermore notes that compared to contemporary building reviews, metaphors in the 1950s tended to be concept-- rather than image-oriented, a difference she suspects is related to the more intensive use made of computer programs in modern design. In passing she thus reminds us of the necessity of studying metaphors diachronically as well as synchronically, a point made in a very different context by Gevaert (2005).

The third chapter, “The cognitive and rhetorical dimensions of metaphor,” covers ground that is largely familiar to most readers of this journal. Notable, however, are Caballero’s suggestion that CMT’s lack of interest in creative metaphor may be due to equating creativeness with unconventionality, as well as her already mentioned point that CMT tends to neglect metaphors’ linguistic form. Finally, while acknowledging that Fauconnier & Turner’s (2002) blending theory may have its uses, the author claims that classical metaphor theory suffices for her purposes.

Chapter four charts the problems the author had to solve to be able to analyze the metaphors in the building reviews. To begin with, she points out that the issue of metaphor
identification is in fact more thorny than usually acknowledged in CMT--precisely because this paradigm, unlike approaches that concentrate on creative metaphor (e.g., Black, 1979), has strongly focused on the conceptual level of metaphor at the expense of its linguistic expression. The problem is aggravated because the creative-conceptual continuum works differently for different groups of people. Caballero emphasizes that many instances which by laymen would presumably be rated “creative” are in fact fully conventional within the professional community of architects, problematizing Lakoff and Turner’s association of image metaphors with creativity and a “one-shot” mapping (1989, p. 91). To compound the problems with this binary opposition, words like “wing,” “rib,” and “muscular” are sometimes used metaphorically in a conventional, sometimes in a creative sense, which serves as a reminder of the crucial impact of context. For lack of more specific criteria, Caballero decided to consider a given linguistic expression metaphorical “whenever it involved the understanding of and/or reference to an architectural entity, agent or process in terms belonging to an experiential domain other than architecture” (p. 68). But tribulations do not stop there. Sometimes, verbs “may co-instantiate two metaphors. This is the case with dress, clad, or wear in the review corpus, which suggest the metaphors BUILDING ELEMENTS/TRAITS ARE PIECES OF CLOTHING, and BUILDINGS ARE PEOPLE, both underlying an expression like “the building … never wore its newness with pretension”” (p. 72). In short, “both the semantic and syntactic aspects of figurative language need to be taken into account when identifying their underlying metaphors” (p. 73). Another consequence of metaphor’s sensitivity to textual, generic, and pragmatic context is that the decision which (clusters of) features are to be mapped from source to target are subject to inference processes which may differ from one person or group of persons to another. After these pertinent preliminary caveats, Caballero proposes to classify metaphors according to the following three dimensions: “The structuring potential of the metaphorical mapping instantiated in a given expression; the degree of representationality or graphicness of the metaphorical instantiation; the more or less conventional status of metaphorical expressions in the discourse community of architects” (p. 82).

Chapter five contains the first series of analyses. Advised by architectural experts, Caballero first compiled a corpus of 95 building reviews from a range of professional English-language journals spanning four years (1997-2001), and identified 1,972 metaphors. These were then analyzed according to various parameters. First she classifies the source domains deployed according to frequency. Organic metaphors account for 26% percent in the corpus, motion metaphors for just over 21%, while textile, malleability, language, machine,
experiment, and music metaphors all cover between 2% and 8% of occurrences—leaving almost 22% for “other metaphors” (p. 91). The author goes on to reflect on what kind of consequences the choice for one domain over another may have. She concludes, for instance, that malleability metaphors emphasize process over product, that textile metaphors profile the architect as an artisan, and that linguistic metaphors—drawing on words such “vocabulary,” “rhetoric,” and “syntax”—bring to the fore architects’ reliance on the set of conventional practices shared by the profession. Caballero also discusses the omnipresent CONTAINER metaphor, demonstrating that the elements of “surface” (i.e., ground covered by a building, as instantiated by plans) and the “contour” or “form” are most salient in this type of structural metaphor, accounting for 30% and over 50%, respectively, of the metaphor’s manifestations. In the last, dense part of the chapter, Caballero critically engages Grady’s (1997, 1999) distinction between resemblance and correlation metaphors by focusing on ORGANIZATION IS PHYSICAL STRUCTURE. Since in building review metaphors mappings pertain both to visual and to conceptual characteristics, the idea that resemblance and correlation metaphors are mutually exclusive becomes problematic.

The next chapter is devoted to a detailed description of the various linguistic realizations of metaphors in the corpus. Nominal metaphors cover almost half of the cases, verbal metaphors are good for just over 35%, whereas almost 16% account for adjectival metaphors. With less than 1%, adverbial metaphors are a negligible category. As in the preceding chapter, each of the categories is subjected to meticulous analysis. Among the most interesting observations is that many nominal metaphors in the corpus draw upon other connectors between target and source than the copula “be” (e.g., “look like,” “see as”) resulting in semantic modifications whose importance, Caballero warns, is normally underestimated because of CMT’s conventional A IS B notation. Another conclusion worth mentioning is that buildings are more often described in dynamic (for instance using “become”) than in static (“be”) terms. The discussion, which ties in with the issue of “fictive motion,” channels into an intriguing but difficult distinction between MOTION IS FORM and FORM IS MOTION metaphors. The author also observes that metaphors in architectural reviews, just as in literary texts, are often sustained beyond a single occurrence, which presumably contributes to their persuasive effect.

Chapter 7 zooms in on the rhetorical nature of metaphors in building reviews. The review genre combines elements of description (here of a building’s formal and technical aspects) with evaluative observations (here of its aesthetic and functional dimensions). Often, not only the reviewer’s perspective is conveyed but also, via quotes from interviews with the
building’s architect, the latter’s as well. This enables reviewers to elaborate, in a positive as well as a negative sense, on metaphors proposed by the architects themselves. (As an anecdotal aside to suggest the vulnerability of metaphors to unwanted inferences: The winning design for the Erasmus bridge in Rotterdam was baptized “the Swan,” whereupon a critic scathingly observed, “Oh, that’s nice for the people on the South bank: They look straight into its ass!”) Caballero finds that image metaphors are more often than conceptual ones hedged by their authors. She suggests this has much to do with the fact that the readers of the review can usually evaluate such metaphors for themselves thanks to the accompanying photo of the building under discussion, and interprets the hedging in terms of face-saving strategies: “The more subjective and hedged flavor of visually-driven language may […] help reviewers to fend off criticism by hinting that it is their own selves upon whom buildings suggest images of musical instruments, caves of mysteries, geodes, bellies of squashed zeppelins or other such entities” (p. 213). Caballero here also returns to the usefulness of “language” source domains in the metaphors deployed: The whole history of architecture is a vast library of “texts” to which each new building explicitly or implicitly refers “intertextually.” Consequently, architects can be considered (il)literate, or their buildings are arguments supporting or attacking predecessors’ work. It is found that quite a few image metaphors occur in captions under plans or photographs. This, incidentally, opens the way for verbo-pictorial metaphors (Forceville 1996, pp. 148ff.): The target of the metaphor, i.e., the building, is rendered primarily visually, whereas the source is, in the caption, rendered verbally.

The price Caballero pays for her painstaking analyses of textual variables that have an impact on metaphor is that chapters 5-7 are very dense with information and not always make for easy reading. Despite juicy examples such as “the almost gaseous materiality reflects the distance Mayne has come since the heavy-metal days in the 1980s, when his Schwarzenegger display of steel implied permanence and a form of unyielding truth in construction” (p. 116), readers outside of the architectural community may occasionally find the nitty gritty details of the analyses less than engrossing. A related issue is that the author manages to extract so many pertinent variables in the texts that it is impossible to discuss possible correlations between all of them. But because Caballero scrupulously describes the variables, it should in principle be possible to chart these more systematically using statistical methods. Such a future enterprise is further helped by the fact that she offers intelligent speculations about the reason why a certain phenomenon surfaces under certain conditions, and not under others, making for testable hypotheses.
Overall, the judgment must be that Caballero’s book is an innovative and thought-provoking study integrating a number of crucial perspectives on metaphor that are usually not discussed together. The fact that her detailed textual analyses are rooted in a substantial corpus of real-life (rather than invented) metaphors allows her to do justice both to idiosyncrasies and generally occurring patterns. The decision to restrict her analyses to architectural building reviews moreover highlights the importance of what is arguably the most important pragmatic factor governing the interpretation of texts—that of genre, and its concomitant discourses. *Reviewing Space* thus provides a fine starting point for research into the metaphor-use by other professional communities, since it presents a wide range of variables against which metaphors in other (sub)cultures can be measured. The author’s insistence that visual and conceptual aspects are strongly intertwined in the metaphors of the architect’s “thinking eye” as well as the fact that she takes into account both visual (plans, photographs) and verbal data are noteworthy, and her continuous confrontation of the concept-oriented “top-down” with the language-oriented “bottom-up” perspective on metaphor is an asset. Caballero’s warnings about what gets lost, oversimplified, or distorted in categorizing real-life verbal metaphors under CONCEPTUAL (but still verbally rendered!) ones moreover echo difficulties encountered in the “translation” of visual or multimodal metaphors into language (Forceville 2006). In addition to everything else, *Re-viewing space* thus serves as a healthy reminder that metaphor scholars should beware of confusing their need to verbalize conceptual metaphors for purposes of academic discussion with the unsupported assumption that we think verbally.

REFERENCES


Applications of cognitive linguistics: Foundations and fields of application. (pp. ????). Berlin & New York: Mouton de Gruyter.


