

BOOK REVIEW

Jeannette Littlemore. *Metonymy: hidden shortcuts in language, thought and communication*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015. Pp. 240. ISBN 978-1-107-04362-6

As the title suggests, *Metonymy: hidden shortcuts in language, thought and communication*, is an overview of this cognitive mechanism and its main functions in the mental and linguistic realms. Despite the unquestionable complexity of such a tremendous task, Jeannette Littlemore carries it off successfully in a 227-page volume, making it look easy. However, the reader should not be deceived: An in-depth read of the book shows that everything has been meticulously analyzed, planned, and written: from the carefully chosen title and the clearly stated aims (p. 2, and pp. 15–18 in more detail) to the updated list of references and the comprehensive, useful index.

The very title clearly anticipates the contents and tone of the volume: metonymy is described as a ‘hidden shortcut’, in an apparently simple and easy-to-understand definition that encapsulates the nature of metonymy as a way of establishing rapid connections that people unconsciously use in language, thought, and communication.

It must be admitted that nearly two decades after Antonio Barcelona’s (2000, p. 4) words (“Metonymy has received much less attention from cognitive linguists than metaphor, although it is probably even more basic to language and cognition”), things have changed somewhat, but it is also undeniable that metonymy can still be considered metaphor’s ‘poor relation’, despite the appearance of numerous papers in specialized journals and some influential publications exclusively devoted to it (cf. Benczes, Barcelona, & Ruiz de Mendoza Ibáñez, 2011; Bierwiazzonek, 2013; Panther & Radden, 1999; Panther & Thornburg, 2003; Ruiz de Mendoza Ibáñez & Ota Campo, 2002)

This volume certainly makes an important contribution in the attempt to compensate for that neglect of metonymy and has, in my opinion, two main strengths. In the first place, it adds a third dimension to the two best-explored aspects (the cognitive and the linguistic) that most scholars, even in the latest publications, have focused on. Littlemore’s third dimension is communication, which she approaches in its broadest sense: Not just linguistic but communication in its varied forms including non-verbal communication (extensive references are made to gesture and sign language), and also art, music, and other forms of expression. In addition, she not

only focuses on communication among speakers who share the same native language, but also on intercultural communication. Besides, what she explores is real communication as is manifested in authentic data.

The second main strength of this book is that it presents very complex, theoretical constructs in an accessible language, which makes it an invaluable resource for students and researchers interested in understanding metonymy in its different forms.

The book consists of nine chapters preceded by an 'Introduction' in which the main aims of the volume are clearly stated (p. 2): "to present a full discussion of the different types of metonymy that have been identified in the literature, the different functions that metonymy performs, the contribution that it makes to successful communication in language and other forms of expression, the role that it plays in intercultural communication, and the type of misinterpretations that can occur in these contexts." And it continues: "Real-world data are used throughout." This 'Introduction' provides a synopsis of the main ideas that the author develops in the forthcoming chapters, as well as making clear, from the very beginning, the solid foundations her theoretical claims rest on: an impressive bank of real examples mostly taken from large language corpora that include the Bank of English (BoE), the British National Corpus (BNC), and the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA). Each chapter bears a suggestive title that starts with a sentence illustrating the particular type of metonymy relevant to the chapter, and continues with a short caption about its contents. The chosen titles make it easy to navigate the contents of the book and all the chapters share a similar structure that resembles that of a state-of-the-art paper on each specific topic.

Following the theoretical tenets of Cognitive Linguistics (CL), metonymy has been identified as a basic mental process that is recurrently reflected in linguistic products that people employ in their everyday communicative exchanges and that consists in using something that is somehow related to something else to refer to it. One of the most widely accepted definitions was provided by Radden and Kövecses (1999, p. 21): "Metonymy is a cognitive process in which one conceptual entity, the vehicle, provides mental access to another conceptual entity, the target, within the same cognitive model." Littlemore mostly follows this theoretical paradigm, although she also acknowledges the importance of a more linguistic tradition that has also focused on how metonymy operates in language (p. 9). In fact, the two approaches are complementary and mutually enriching, and the present volume is, in my view, a good example of this. Littlemore devotes the first two chapters to clarifying the most intricate questions that have been discussed by cognitive linguists in relation to metonymy (for example, the notions of ICMs or domains or the differences between metonymy

and metaphor) and to exemplifying Radden and Kövecses' (1999) taxonomy of metonymy types and their list of principles that determine vehicle choice with an impressive number of examples taken from real-world data. The use of authentic language casts a new light on Radden and Kövecses' classification, and shows, for example, that some types of metonymies are much more productive than others, that some have strong evaluative connotations and pragmatic effects, that some typically co-occur with other kinds of non-literal language, and that, often, a preferred metonymical syntactic construction reflects a close relationship between form and function.

In Chapter 3, the most influential models of metonymy are reviewed and checked against authentic data in language, which allows Littlemore to identify their strongest points as well as some of the aspects that do not stand up to this type of scrutiny.

Chapters 4 and 5 probably comprise the most original contribution to the field made by the book. The former explores the most widely recognized functions assigned to metonymy: from its well-attested referential function (which Littlemore shows is even more prominent in sign language and gesture than in spoken discourse) to its role in highlighting and construal, anaphoric reference and cohesion, exophoric reference, illocutionary acts, relationship-building, and the establishment of discourse. Chapter 5 focuses on more attitudinal, communicative functions of metonymy such as euphemism, vague language, hedging, evaluating, and humour and irony. This latter chapter is particularly insightful as it not only departs from the traditional accounts of the functions of metonymy but it also goes beyond language and analyzes how metonymical thinking plays a key role in other forms of expression such as advertising, film, art, and music.

Chapter 6 tackles the complex issue of metonymy identification, and it highlights the three main aspects that contribute to this complexity: (i) metonymy does not only operate at word level; (ii) it is difficult to distinguish it from metaphor (and sometimes both mechanisms work together, and with other tropes, in the same linguistic strings), and (iii) it is not only a synchronic but also a diachronic mechanism that plays an important role in language change. Littlemore reviews the attempts that have been made in this area from linguistics and artificial intelligence and concludes that cross-disciplinary research will be very beneficial in future proposals for the identification of metonymy in authentic language.

In Chapter 7, the mental processing of metonymy is explored by reviewing, on the one hand, psycholinguistic and neurological studies of metonymy comprehension, and, on the other, developmental studies of metonymy comprehension and production in typically developed individuals and people with linguistic and mental disorders. Research findings in these areas

show that conventional metonymy appears to be processed in the same way as literal language, and that metonymy comprehension is significantly greater and develops faster from an earlier age than metaphor understanding. Littlemore interprets these findings as possible support for Dirven's (2002) figurative continuum (from literal, through metonymical, to metaphorical language). She ends the chapter by suggesting an important contribution of metonymy in psychotherapy.

Cross-linguistic and cross-cultural variation in metonymy is the focus in Chapter 8. Littlemore points out the wealth of literature that has explored cross-linguistic variation in metonymy and its grammatical implications across many languages, and shows how this variation can often be a source of misunderstanding in cross-cultural communication. She focuses on two main areas – second-language (L2) learning and translation – and highlights how raising awareness of the role of metonymy in language could bring important benefits for L2 learners and translators.

Finally, as a fitting ending for the volume, Chapter 9 starts by summarizing the main characteristics of metonymy in six clear statements that highlight its nature and main functions, and finishes with suggestions for further research.

This book certainly represents an important, self-contained contribution to metonymy studies by an outstanding researcher in the field, who transmits her passion for the topic and also her great expertise. Littlemore manages not only to synthesize decades of investigation into this fascinating mechanism in a single volume, but also makes an invaluable contribution to the field by pinpointing and illustrating the importance of employing a robust methodology and focusing on applied, real-world use.

I warmly recommend this book as a comprehensive introduction that will inspire and guide any reader (from the theoretical to the more applied, cross-disciplinary perspectives) interested in getting into the fascinating world of metonymy.

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Reviewed by ANA M^a PIQUER-PÍRIZ

University of Extremadura, Spain

E-mail: anapiriz@unex.es