Metaphor is Ontological Incongruity

Chu-Ren Huang
The Hong Kong Polytechnic University
20 August, 2014
VariAMU Worskshop, Aix-en-Provence
OUTLINE

- Metaphor and Simile (and other non-literal meanings)
- The Conceptual Mapping Theory of Metaphor
- Metaphor is Ontological Incongruity
- Where to go from here
Metaphor and Simile

- The following definition of metaphor and simile based on (English) syntactic structure has been widely adopted and rarely (if ever) challenged:

- **Metaphor:** X is Y
- **Simile:** X is like Y; X is as A as Y
Boundary Between Metaphor and Simile Seems to be Fuzzy

For a Young Boy Kevin

1) Kevin eats like a bear, walks like a bear, and growls like a bear.
   - He is a bear.

2) Kevin eats like an adult, walks like an adult, and growls like an adult.
   - ?He is an adult.
Observation

- The conceptual definition of metaphor as describing an abstract concept using knowledge from a more concrete domain, and simile as describing through likeness does not provide conceptual necessity for the syntactic litmus test.

- 1) seems to contradict that, as the series of purported similes seem to build up and become parts of the source domain description of the metaphor.
‘Simile’ of “As big as a house”

3) This unit/apartment is as big as a house, but without the hassle/price/maintenance..
4) This man is as big as a house, *but without...

3) shows underlines the nature of comparison and allow to continue to compare the dissimilar aspects (i.e. price, etc.). However, using the exact same expression, we found no example from Google or Brown Corpus of comments the likeness between source and target involving 4). This seems to suggest that regardless of the structure, 4) is not like simile, but requires shifting to a totally new domain in order to understand this expression.
OUR HYPOTHESES

- Metaphor requires conceptual mapping from source domain to target domain
  - (To differentiate from simile and other non-literal meaning) there must be conceptual incongruity between the two domains
  - There must be a mapping principle governing the mapping (hence to predict novel and unacceptable usages of the metaphor)
  - The conceptual mapping theory can be modelled and study by theory of ontology

VariAMU Aug2014
Metaphor Onto Incongu
Contemporary Theory of Metaphor: Conceptual metaphors are embedded in our language

- More abstract concepts are understood in terms of more concrete concepts
- Source domain – concrete concepts
- Target domain – abstract concepts
- Mapping – systematic correspondences between source to target domain
BUILDING – Source Domain

- His arguments blew up in his face.
- We need a better framework for our ideas.
- His novel lacks a discernible structure.
- Building a working hypothesis can take a lot of effort in this field.
- His theory lacks a solid foundation.
IDEAS – Target domain

- His arguments blew up in his face.
- We need a better framework for our ideas.
- His novel lacks a discernible structure.
- Building a working hypothesis can take a lot of effort in this field.
- His theory lacks a solid foundation.
Question

Is it true that conceptual metaphor mapping is conventional and based on schematic knowledge of the source domain?

- Complex theories often have **leaky plumbing**.
- His **theory** lacks a solid **foundation**.

- How can we determine the underlying reason for the source-target domain pairing?
Proposal

- Proposal: the Conceptual Mapping Principle (hereby MP) to constrain
  - Target domain
  - Source domain
  - Possible mapping
    - Especially predicting possible novel uses of metaphor
- Postulate an underlying reason for this mapping - a Mapping Principle (MP)
Hypotheses

- Source-target domain pairings do have an underlying rationale – which can be seen in frequency of use and experimental results.
- Conventional and Novel metaphors will differ with respect to participant ratings, reaction times, and cerebral blood flow.
Advantages of the MP:
1. It justifies why a particular target selects a particular source
2. It justifies what aspects of the target are enhanced through the source
3. It enables to make predictions on novel and conventional metaphors
Conceptual Mapping Model: Conventional metaphors

Mapping principle:
Underlying set of systematic mappings

*Love is understood as Food because food has different tastes and love involves different feelings.*

他嚐過愛情的滋味。

He has tasted the flavor of love.
Conceptual Mapping Model: novel metaphors

Mapping Principle

Her love is too salty for him.

她的愛對他而言太鹹澀．
novel metaphors (~MP)

她正在消化他們倆的愛情。
She is digesting their love.
Conceptual Mapping Model

- Conventional conceptual metaphors are treated on par with literal language
- Novel metaphors that follow mapping principles involve lower acceptability and interpretability ratings and slightly higher processing times

For GL, this brings the question of whether metaphors should be treated as regular ‘linked’ part of the lexicon: not coerced as part of the sense but extended through qualia
Based on corpus data, we were able to make generalizations about the mapping principle as well as the formal representation of target/source domain mapping.

With our new approach to metaphor/simile, the question is whether we can use ontology to measure the conceptual difference of the terms compared and hence classify them to different categories of non-literal meanings.
Conclusion

- The conventional dichotomy of simile and metaphor is not rigorous enough. And in fact, that the differences between simile and metaphor may involve the ontological distance and/or incongruity of knowledge between the target and source domains.

- We propose to test this hypothesis by both corpus-based distributional studies as well as off-line comprehensive/lexical decision experiments. After this first stage empirical study is completed and results confirmed, we plan to take this hypothesis along to do neuro-measurement study in the future.