HOW TO DISENTANGLE THE METONYMY – WORD-FORMATION PUZZLE

Mario Brdar
METONYMY AND WORD-FORMATION.
THEIR INTERACTIONS AND COMPLEMENTATION.

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Introduction

The book 'Metonymy and Word-Formation. Their Interactions and Complementation' authored by Mario Brdar, proposes an original, insightful and extremely valuable look into the relation between two linguistic phenomena: metonymy and word formation. By revisiting the role and, even more importantly, the impact of metonymy on the development of grammar, this work contributes to our understanding of both metonymy, as well as (its role within) the development of grammatical or, rather, linguistic systems as such. Throughout the work, existing theoretical positions are succinctly and yet very clearly reviewed and productively intertwined with novel theoretical insights and hypotheses, which are in all cases underpinned by numerous and very convincing and adequate examples taken from a variety of world lan-

guages. Apart from providing a full and accessible insight into the phenomena of word formation and metonymy, the author goes beyond the exploration of nouns functioning as referential metonymies, and examines the role of metonymy in the grammar of also verbs and adjectives, exploring the relation between metonymy on the one hand, and a series of single (non-concatenative and concatenative) word-formation processes, on the other. Centrally, he proposes the hypothesis that, differently from what has been claimed in the literature with respect to central patterns of word-formation, conceptual metonymy and word formation are not to be understood as working in unison and as one automatically triggering the other.

Before we move on to the review proper, a point of clarification is due: when not differently stated, page numbers relative to citations

which are not followed by a bibliographic source are to be intended as relative to the book under review. For citations taken from other work, the source is indicated immediately following the quote, in standard citation format.

Overview of the book

From the very first page of the book the author draws our attention to the fact that both phenomena under scrutiny have remained underexplored in the study of language. While it might be correct to say that this claim is more true of metonymy than of word formation, the attempt of the author to thoroughly analyse and explain the previously neglected interactive relation between the two phenomena under investigation, represents a striking academic move and a potentially far reaching step in the direction of a fuller understanding of figuration in language and, more generally, of the development of linguistic systems.

While word formation has traditionally received academic attention that has combined aspects of formal (morphosyntactic) and semantic (lexical) nature, it has (come to think of it, somewhat surprisingly) never gained centre stage in the study of grammar. Similarly, metonymy has for its history of existence been confined to literary studies of language and has only in recent decades gained focal interest within the cognitive linguistic framework. This surge in interest was prompted by increasing evidence supporting the view that conceptual metonymy might actually be an indicator of general human thought processes (and not just linguistic ones). Albeit their recognition within linguistics studies, neither word formation nor metonymy can be said to have been anything but marginalized when it comes to centuries of traditional mainstream study of language (and, more specifically, grammar).

In the introduction to the book (Chapter one) Mario Brdar takes us for a tour of strategies language uses for lexicalizing concepts. Among the mechanisms that world languages have at their disposal for packaging ideas (concepts) into lexical items, the author focuses on: onomatopoeia, word manufacture, lexical borrowing and the method whereby already existing lexical units are recycled. Within this latter group, two sub-methods are identified: reinterpretation (making words polysemous), and combination (which includes the well-known morphological processes which yield combinations of free with other free and/or bound morphemes). Most interestingly and most importantly for the purposes of the work

under review here, in the introductory part of his work the author draws his readers' attention to the fact that metaphor and metonymy fall within this latter group of lexicalization strategies, as they yield new senses of words, whereas – clearly – word formation would represent the second subgroup, i.e. that of lexicalization through morphological combinatory patterning. As metonymy – being one of the two central topics of the book - is dealt with in a separate chapter (chapter two), the author next turns to a concise and yet precise and very informative review of central theoretical concepts and assumptions that are at the core of (the study of) word formation (Section 1.2.). Morphology, as the linguistic discipline that concerns itself with the understanding of the structure of words, is reviewed in terms of the types of morphemes traditionally proposed on the basis of: a) their meaning (lexical or semantic vs. grammatical or functional morphemes), b) their (in) dependence status (free vs. bound morphemes), and c) their position (applied to affixes, and yielding a distinction into prefixes, suffixes, infixes with the subtype interfix, circumfix, transfix, and suprasegmental morphemes suprafix, superfix and simulfix). All instances are exemplified.

The author also positions the reviewed morphological types within a more general context of inflection and derivation, i.e. two most productive word formation processes, introducing also the distinction between concatenative and non-concatenative processes (e.g. affixation and compounding being good illustrations of the former, and conversion, clipping, back-formation, blending or reduplication being good illustrations of the latter).

The first, introductory chapter is followed by a chapter on metonymy. The notion – which together with word formation represents the focal point of the book – is in this chapter detailed both in terms of its types and functions, as well as its less known role in grammar. Given that the topic of metonymy has held central stage position amongst the academic interests of Mario Brdar over a number of years (see Brdar 2007, 2016; Brdar and Brdar-Szabó 2011, 2014, 2017) it comes as no surprise that this chapter provides a fascinating illustration of both the traditional answers to the questions of what goes on in metonymy and what metonymy brings about, as well as a thought provoking challenge that there might be more in metonymy than first meets the eye, and that this pertains to the power that metonymy has in

terms of its lexicalization (and also grammatical) potential.

Quite interestingly, in chapter two the discussion of metonymy is constantly intertwined with mention (and more!) of metaphor. The author is fully aware of this intrinsic bond and comments on the (un) natural binomial in the following way:

"It is interesting to note from a methodological point of view that while research on metaphor, cognitive and otherwise, has been able to focus on its object of interest without necessarily discussing, or even considering, metonymy, things are quite different when metonymy comes under scrutiny. Metonymy has as a rule been studied against the backdrop of metaphor. This is of course, partly due to the rhetorical tradition, and its continuation in one form or another up to the present day, where metonymy has occasionally been subsumed under metaphor as one of its specific instantiation forms." (p. 31–32).

It is also in view of the quote proposed above, that this work represents a fresh departure from the traditionally ingrained analytical views, and proposes to study the link between word formation and grammar, isolating in this latter context metonymy from metaphor.

By reviewing a number of points of similarity and difference between metaphor and metonymy, chapter two proposes both an account of established notions relative to these two linguistic concepts, while at the same time, the author manages to question some standard and generally accepted views and puts forth some novel and deeply thought provoking theoretical questions:

1) how far can we take the analogy between metaphorical and metonymy mappings and, relatedly, how can we spell out the nature of metonymy mapping;

2) could it be the case that metonymy is not a simple case of unidirectional traffic but, rather, a process of two-way mental projections; and finally

3) should we consider dropping the notion of 'mapping' within the context of metonymic processes altogether, and start treating metonymy as a discourse driven inference or pragmatic functions.

The above questions have their origin in a detailed analysis of problems and shortcomings identified with previously proposed definitions and treatments of metaphor and metonymy (and their interrelation). More specifically, Brdar takes a careful look at and, when needed, productively challenges three central points of difference which have traditionally kept metaphor and metonymy separated in the literature. They are: a) the widely

accepted theoretical claim that while metaphor is based on similarity, metonymy builds on contiguity; b) the view that the difference between metaphor and metonymy lies in the number of conceptual domains involved, and c) the position that metaphor and metonymy are to be differentiated with respect to the directionality of conceptual mappings involved.

The interesting and convincing arguments (and linguistic examples) that point to certain inadequacies and limitations of each of these three positions, together with a thoughtful analysis of the three novel questions spelled out above, lead Brdar to re-read the standard views and re-combine them in his own light. This move provides him with a new venture point, from which he can and does replace the extant - what he himself calls - 'negative type of definition' (p. 55) of metonymy, with his own definition of metonymy, which he states in the following terms:

"Metonymy can be seen as a cognitive operation of conceptual elaboration based on the part-whole relationship that is triggered by the use of an expression (or metonymy vehicle) that is associated with a certain conceptual cluster (or metonymic source) within a conceptual domain so that the activation of the source conceptual cluster

opens up a mental space that is dynamically expanded or reduced so as to come as close as possible to fitting the conceptual gabarits provided by the co(n)text of use, in the course of which the mental space thus opened and elaborated also comes very close in terms of its contents to another conceptual cluster (or metonymic target) within the same conceptual domain that may be or is typically associated with another expression" (p. 55).

Having put forth his own understanding of metonymy, in the final part of chapter two the author explores the role of metonymy with respect to grammar. In this context, he invites us to go beyond the exploration of nouns functioning as referential metonymies, and, once again, ventures along the road less travelled by proposing that word classes other than nouns can be used as referential metonyms and introduces the examination of the role of metonymy in the grammar of also verbs and adjectives.

Chapter three, while being very short, represents in a sense the centrepiece of the volume and a strong bridge between the theoretical review of extant, standard linguistic positions, proposed in the first two chapters, and the remaining, analytic part of the work where the author provides linguistic evidence for his own view of the relation

between metonymy and word-formation. In other words, chapter three is an invitation to think about and, if need be, rethink the relationship between metonymy (and, for that matter, metaphor as well) on the one hand, and word formation or – more generally – grammar, on the other. While an increasing body of work has been focused on this relation, a number of influential authors have proposed analyses that have blurred if not completely eliminated the boundary between the two, so as to ultimately equate word-formation with metonymy. The challenge of this position is, at the same time, the central hypothesis that the author puts forth in his book. The hypothesis is summed up in the claim that "metonymy operations proper and word-formation processes do not normally take place simultaneously." (p. 69)

The next two chapters, four and five, are devoted to the exploration of all the active word-formation processes (in English, occasionally contrasted with other languages) with respect i.e. in light of their relation to metonymy. These two chapters are mainly devoted to providing linguistic evidence in support of the central hypothesis of the volume. Chapter four outlines and explores non-concatenative word-formation one by one. In it, the author looks at abbreviations,

back-formation, clipping, blending, reduplication, and conversion. The author proposes that, except for conversion, no other type of non-concatenative processes appears to work in sync with metonymy. Furthermore, the author finds that metonymy may operate on the output of non-concatenative word-formation processes (e.g. in back-formation and clipping), or prior to any word-formation process i.e. on the input (e.g. in blending).

In chapter five we find the same approach – i.e. detailed analysis of linguistic examples - but relative to concatenative word-formation processes, specifically compounding (endocentric and exocentric) and suffixation. The author proposes numerous, adequate and detailed case studies which seem to support his claim that metonymic shifts take place either before suffixation and compounding, or tend to follow them. In other words, it is proposed that as a rule metonymy operates either on the input or the output of concatenative word-formation processes. Furthermore, the author also pinpoints the possibility that metonymic shifts can apply to both the input as well as the output of suffixation and compounding, which results in tiered metonymies.

Departing, in chapter four, from the more marginal word-formation

processes, and moving on – in chapter five – towards the more central ones, the author checks how each word-formation process interacts with metonymy and proposes the following conclusion: in concatenative word-formation processes, metonymy (or metaphor) may precede a word-formation process, or follow it, or both, but the two do not take place in unison, whereas in non-concatenative word-formation processes metonymy and word-formation may – but need not necessarily – apply simultaneously (in the non-concatenative category of word formation processes the question of their interrelation with metonymy is partly left open, but the claims that can be found in the literature and that identify the two, are challenged by Brdar with convincing linguistic arguments). As already pointed out, the author actually explicitly states that the only word-formation phenomenon that might genuinely involve metonymy proper is conversion.

Having reviewed the various ways in which word-formation and metonymy can interact and facilitate each other and actually prepare the ground for each other, in chapter six the author moves on to examine the complementarity of the two subsystems under investigation. In other words, chapter six looks at ways and cases in which metonymy and word-formation actually block each other, and the occurrence of one form, actually represents the reason behind the non-occurrence of the other, complementary form. For most cases complementarity is due to synonymy (the two mechanisms would yield two synonymous forms). Most commonly, simple or complex morphological forms block the application of metonymy. However, the opposite case – where metonymy blocks the coinage of morphologically complex words, seems to also be possible, albeit much less frequent. The huge validity of crosslinguistic data and examples, which are provided throughout the book, becomes particularly relevant in this chapter, as showing the complementarity between metonymy and word formation could not be possible if we were to stay within the confines of a single language. In this sense, examples from numerous languages represent an added value to chapter six as well.

In the seventh, conclusive chapter of the volume, the author recapitulates the findings stemming from the analysis of language data provided in chapters 4-6, and reiterates his hypothesis that metonymic operations and central word-formation processes do not normally take place simultaneously in English. Furthermore, on the ba-

sis of data from other languages provided in the analytic chapters, the author also states that it seems safe to assume that the hypothesis applies to other languages as well, thus providing the platform for future research.

Conclusion

In his book *'Metonymy and Word-Formation. Their Interactions and Complementation'* Mario Brdar takes his readers for an interesting and, at times, even adventurous journey into the realm of two language phenomena – metonymy and word-formation – and their interactive ties. In the first part of the book, the phenomena are explored and reviewed in a detailed and yet clear fashion at the theoretical level, whereas in the second, analytical part of the book, the relationship between metonymy and word-formation is insightfully explored on extensive linguistic data i.e. case studies from various languages.

Looking at the academic contribution of this book, it can be stated without any hesitation that given its combination of theoretical insightfulness and novelty, structural ease of exposure and logical clarity of the material covered, it provides a unique piece of work when it comes to our understanding of both phenomena in focus: metonymy and word-formation. This is true of

both phenomena in isolation, of their relationship, but also of their (joint) contribution to grammar, and – ultimately – of our understanding of the development of language systems in particular and the language system as such (given that this is a work of the cognitive linguistic nature).

By providing numerous linguistic case studies the author does an excellent job supporting the central claim of the volume, i.e. the hypothesis that conceptual metonymy and word formation are not to be equated (as some authors have tried to), nor are they to be understood as working in unison and as one automatically triggering the other. In doing that, the author also provides ample evidence supporting the claim that metonymy may play an important role in motivating whole grammatical sub-systems (distribution of elements and their division of labour).

The only aspect of the work that might leave us wishing (or perhaps only hoping) for more, relates not so much to the linguistic side of the material, as does to its cognitive dimension. In fact, while being written from the cognitive linguistic perspective, the book, upon having read it, still leaves us with more cognitive linguistic questions than answers. In other words, while contributing greatly to our under-

standing of language structure and general linguistic mechanisms, and most certainly enlightening our understanding of conceptual metonymy as a cognitive linguistic phenomenon, the book does not offer as much concrete, practical insight in the direction of our understanding of general cognitive structural elements and operation principles underlying human language. Of course, truth be told, this potential shortcoming is not so much a 'fault' of the book or, rather, its author, as it is a 'sin' of the current state of affairs within the cognitive linguistic movement (as very convincingly proposed by Dabrowska, 2016, who has criticised the framework for not having payed true service to the cognitive aspect of the cognitive commitment and having insufficiently and inadequately explored the psychological reality of the key constructs). However, in terms of the need to explore the psychological reality of – in this case metonymy – Brdar's book undoubtedly provides both very interesting language data that could be used in psycholinguistic experiments, as well as an interesting link between two crucial linguistic phenomena (metonymy and word-formation) that could, again, be of interest for psycholinguistic, neurolinguistic and related studies aimed at exploring the psychological i.e.

cognitive reality of language phenomena.

Summing up, our understanding of figuration in grammar, and – more generally – figuration in language – following the insights put forth in Mario Brdar's book 'Metonymy and Word-Formation. Their Interactions and Complementation' – have gained a new analytical perspective and I dare conclude this review by saying that this work has fundamentally and definitively changed our understanding of two very important linguistic phenomena – metonymy and word-formation, but also – given the proliferous view on the relation between the two phenomena under scrutiny – that it has impacted our understanding of the development of the language system, in all its evolutionary and structural intricacies.

Maja Brala-Vukanović

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