The International Conference on Metaphor, entitled “Metaphor and Communication”, was organised by the University of Cagliari (Italy) and the Italian Association for Metaphor Studies - Metaphor Club - and was held from the 12th to the 14th of May, 2011 at the Department of Pedagogical and Philosophical Sciences, Faculty of Education Sciences of the University of Cagliari.

The focus of the conference was on the role of metaphor in communication, analysed from different theoretical perspectives. In particular, it was divided into four sections, having as the subject of discussion some of the major issues in contemporary metaphor theories:

1. Metaphor and Linguistic Variability (Metaphor and (Machine) Translation, Metaphor and Explicit/Implicit Distinction, Metaphor and Intercultural Discourse, Metaphor in Sign Languages);
3. Metaphor and Media (Metaphor and Fiction, Metaphor and Computer Mediated Global Communication, Metaphor and Political Communication), with a specific session dedicated to Metaphor and Art;

Around these topics, questioned from different points of view, both interesting contributions that contextualized, refined and put to the test

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already known theories, and original proposals were presented. Each section was introduced by a plenary presentation followed by a thematic session with two speakers invited by Metaphor Club Committee and two speakers whose abstracts were selected by double-blind review process.

As concerns the section “Metaphor and Linguistic Variability”, the keynote speaker was Robyn Carston (University College London and CSMN, Oslo) and the theme of her presentation was “Metaphor, Hyperbole and Simile: Two Routes to Metaphor Understanding”. In line with Relevance Theory, she contended that metaphor is a case of the loose use of language and no special interpretative mechanisms are involved, because metaphor comprehension is based on the standard relevance-based inferential process of following the path of least effort in testing interpretation until expectation of relevance is satisfied. In particular, she proposed the idea that there are two modes of metaphor processing. One is a process of rapid on-line ad hoc concept formation that applies to the recovery of word meaning (literal and non-literal) in sentence comprehension. The other one requires a greater focus on the literal meaning of a sentence, which is metarepresented as a whole and is subjected to slower and more reflective pragmatic inferences. The questions whether metaphor conveys a propositional content and what is the role of imagery depend on the processing mode (Carston, 2010).

Gerard Steen (VU University Amsterdam), in his plenary presentation introducing the “Metaphor and Cognition” session, talked about “A Cognitive Model for Representing Metaphor in Language, Thought, and Communication”. He started from the idea that when people process metaphors, they have to include them in their mental representation of the discourse. He used the suggestion that discourse representation involves the construction and maintenance of more types of mental model (McNamara & Magliano, 2009) and, starting from the theory by Van Dijk & Kintsch (1983), he developed a five-step approach to the analysis of the various cognitive representations of metaphor in discourse: metaphors figure in the surface text, text base, situation model and context model of a discourse (Steen, 2009). In his talk he presented the analytical approach, its theoretical motivation, and its application in discourse analysis to different types of metaphors.

The session “Metaphor and Media” was introduced by Roberto Muffoletto (Appalachian University, Boone, North Carolina) with a talk entitled “The Romance that Never Was”. In his presentation he stated that words only mean what they mean and have connection just to the reality constructed by the
words. People make reality and reality makes people. Within this perspective, he analysed the concept of photograph, icon, and virtual reality, explaining the notion of image as a constructed concept formed by culture, technology, knowledge, and history.

Finally, Jeannette Littlemore (University of Birmingham) was the keynote speaker of the “Metaphor in Science and Education” section. She remarked that metaphor is both a cognitive process and a linguistic product and in this perspective she discussed the psychological processes involved in metaphor production and comprehension. In particular, in her talk entitled “Metaphor and the foreign language learner: Is it a problem? How is it used? Can it be taught?”, she presented the work that has conducted into the following topics: the nature of metaphor and the problems that it presents to different types of language learners; the comprehension and production of metaphor by language learners; and the effectiveness of various approaches designed to raise learners’ awareness of metaphor. The research she introduced confirms that the ability to use metaphor appropriately can contribute to a language learner’s communicative competence.

Besides keynote speakers’ presentations, which looked at metaphorical phenomenon from different and new perspectives, many other interesting topics were addressed during the Conference. Some contributions were purely theoretical, such as that by Gergő Somodi (Central European University, Budapest) on the perlocutionary effects of metaphor or that by Stefano Gensini and Stefano Di Pietro (University of Rome “La Sapienza”), who introduced a semiotic approach to the use of metaphor in political communication, through the notion of a syncretic type of “text” in which it is given attention to the nonverbal components, multimedia, etc. Rachel Sutton-Spence (University of Bristol) talked about embodied visual linguistic metaphors considering the interrelationship between iconicity and metaphor and the role of embodiment in sign languages. Lucia Morra (University of Turin) maintained a possible interaction between contextualistic and gricean approaches to metaphorical understanding. Adam Gargani (University of Salford, UK) developed the Relevance Theory account of figurative language to clarify the relationship between poetic metaphor and simile. Francesca Traina (University of Palermo) proposed an integration between Recanati’s suggestion about the role performed by pragmatic processes and some essential assumption of lexical pragmatics. Sandra Handl (Ludwig-Maximilians-University, Munich) discussed a model of integration of Conceptual Metaphor Theory and Conceptual
Blending Theory to account for conventional and unconventional metaphors at the same time. John Barnden (School of Computer Science, University of Birmingham) suggested other dimensions, more important than comparison and categorization processes, that are used in understanding metaphor, such as the degree of disparity between how the source and target items in a metaphor make its meaning and the degree to which the meaning includes, rather than merely exploits, the connection established between the source and target items. He proposed also, following an artificial intelligence approach, the possibility of pretended identification of source and target items.

But reports were not just theoretical. Many of them gave a relevant contribution to growing *Experimental Pragmatics*. Pragmatics considers communication as a result of adjustment of the lexical level of messages to their context of use, and in this perspective it investigates processes involved in the integration of linguistic and contextual information. Even though pragmatics, having a philosophical origin, is specifically a theoretical paradigm and has had little interest in experimental psychology, in recent years a part of the scientific community has understood the importance of verifying the compatibility between theoretical models elaborated by pragmatics and how the human cognitive system actually works. What are the advantages of an interaction between these two fields of research?

First, experimental evidence can be used, together with intuition and recordings, to confirm or disconfirm hypotheses. [...] Second, aiming at experimental testability puts valuable pressure on theorizing. Too often, armchair theories owe much of their appeal to their vagueness, which allows one to reinterpret them indefinitely so as to fit one’s understanding of the data, but which also makes them untestable. Developing an experimental side to pragmatics involves requiring a higher degree of theoretical explicitness. Moreover, experimentally testing theories often leads one to revise and refine them in the light of new and precise evidence, and gives theoretical work an added momentum. (Noveck, & Sperber 2004, p. 9)

From these considerations, Experimental Pragmatics has sprung up. It is a research field which builds a bridge between different disciplines such as pragmatics, psycholinguistics, cognitive science and developmental psychology.

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One of the aims of this interdisciplinary approach is to use experimental methods of psycholinguistics, such as reading-times, reaction-times in lexical decision tasks and eye movement measures, to investigate the power of explanation and prediction of pragmatic theories. In particular, it is interested in testing pragmatic hypotheses on literal and figurative, implicit and explicit, to clarify the processes involved in the production and comprehension of non-literal (especially metaphorical) uses of language. More precisely, there are three main pragmatic models that explain cognitive mechanisms of figurative language processing. According to the Standard Pragmatic Model (Grice, Austin, Searle), metaphoric meaning is reached after having rejected literal meaning and the cognitive costs to understand them are different. Direct Access Model (Gibbs) refuses the idea there is a first phase of literal processing; in an appropriate context the speaker understands figurative meaning as rapidly as literal meaning and the cognitive costs to understand them are the same. According to Graded salience hypothesis (Giora) there are two mechanisms: one (bottom-up) sensitive to linguistic information and the other (top-down) sensitive to contextual information. Differently to Standard Model, these mechanisms run in parallel. Experimental pragmatics is able to test these models through experimental techniques to verify their plausibility.

I would like to stress that the theoretical contributions to the conference mentioned before should be confirmed by experimental data and corpora analysis and there are a lot of work-in-progress researches aimed at testing these hypotheses. As a matter of fact, at the conference the need for interaction between the theoretical and experimental dimensions in order to better understand the role of metaphor in communication emerged. Let’s see some cases.

The research on conceptual metaphors has largely focused on linguistic metaphors and has generally neglected visual ones, that are those metaphors where at least one of the concepts is rendered as an image. Amitash Ojha and Bipin Indurkhya (International Institute of Information Technology, India) examined visual metaphors and elaborated a perception-based model of visual metaphor processing in contrast with textual metaphor processing. In particular, they presented the results of three experiments done to verify the role of visual-perceptual features in visual metaphor comprehension. Research has shown that perceptual experiences are evoked during metaphorical processing and metaphors are considered more apt if concepts evoke
appropriate imagery in the reader. In fact, visual-perceptual features – like color, shape, texture, and orientation of concepts – play an important role in anchoring the interpretation of visual metaphors. Further, during perceptual processing, they evoke semantically distant concepts, which help in creating non-conventional associations between the source and target concepts. The authors presented results of their experiments explaining the different phases of visual metaphor processing that starts with the search for similarity at the low-level visual-perceptual features.

Irene Ronga (University of Turin) talked about synaesthesia which consists in extending, through an analogy, the meaning of a word from one sensory modality to another. In particular, she concentrated on taste synaesthesia and showed that, differently from other kinds of synaesthesia, it seems to originate from the semantic extension of taste-related heads from the taste sensory domain to the set of perceptions, which may happen in the mouth. Combining linguistics with a neurophysiological approach, she demonstrated that taste synaesthesia, compared to other metaphors, is more strongly connected with sensory experience and embodiment, since it results from the actual combination of different sensory phenomena that occur at the same time.

Giorgio Cozzolino (University of Chieti “G. D’Annunzio”) presented theoretical and experimental research about some errors frequently met in real discourse situations and media texts where regular and well known metaphors should be used. The analysis intended to understand if wrong metaphors are real mistakes or if they are due to particular cognitive, communicative, and social reasons, and to find the cognitive reasons for the wrong metaphors production and recognition. He also introduced experimental research, to be developed at the Department of Psychology in Chieti, where wrong metaphor recognition will be tested in connection with memory tasks and other cognitive tasks.

We said that, according to Experimental Pragmatics, experimental data are necessary to confirm theoretical hypotheses or to refine them in the light of solid evidence. Confirmation can come also through another kind of empirical data. A lot of contributions at the conference examined metaphorical phenomenon through analysis of corpora that is a helpful instrument to test theoretical paradigms looking directly at the real use of communicative interactions, and to understand how a linguistic system is organized, how it evolves in time and the differences between various languages. Let’s see briefly the contents of the contributions.
Marianna Bolognesi (University of Turin) talked about the metaphorical use of motion verbs to express abstract concepts (e.g. fall in love, jump to a conclusion, run a risk). In particular, she analysed the cognitive salience and the frequency of usage of metaphorical senses of motion verbs in corpora from a bilingual perspective (Italian and English). The question was whether the salience of metaphorical senses of motion verbs applies both to native speakers and to foreign learners. Simone Müller (Justus-Liebig-Universität) discussed time metaphors across varieties of English, examining various sub-corpora of the International Corpus of English. The author presented the case of the conceptual metaphor TIME IS MONEY: analyses showed that there is no clear tendency in the use of this metaphor, at least not statistically, but there are some differences regarding frequency in certain registers as well as differences in collocations. Some non-Western countries took over the linguistic expressions for TIME IS MONEY along with the concept, but the concept has not yet been incorporated into the value set of their culture. Emiliano Ilardi (University of Cagliari) and Alessio Ceccherelli (University of Rome Tor Vergata) analysed the nineteenth century’s major novels (mostly French ones) to verify the classical idea that the role of literary text is to create metaphorical systems of mediation between subject and new contexts. Julia Williams (Pompeu Fabra University, Barcelona) discussed the use of the WAR source domain in the conceptualisation of cancer in the English and Spanish press, proposing a quantitative analysis of the data. Further, the use of corpus techniques in the qualitative contextual analysis allowed identification of the full range of topics covered by the different metaphorical expressions in the corpus. Michela Giordano (University of Cagliari) addressed the ways in which the social impact of the media represents the world, by focusing on the metaphors of evils used to describe Hillary Clinton, collected from media texts in the last ten years. John Wilson and Martin Hay (University of Ulster, Northern Ireland) analysed conceptual metaphors found in internal press media produced by the minority of Ulster Scots. John Wade (University of Cagliari) examined the use of metaphorical reference in educational discourse, through the study based on corpora consisting of conference papers and newspaper articles regarding educational issues. Olga Denti and Luisanna Fodde (University of Cagliari) discussed how the metaphorical denseness of business discourse may be affected by emerging crisis phenomena, through both a quantitative and a qualitative analysis of a corpus of a series of EU financial stability reviews, published between 2004 and 2010. The research
aimed at achieving the identification of a type of genre through the analysis of the evolution of language during a period of deep economic changes. Stefania Manca (Institute for Educational Technology, CNR, Genova) presented the results of her research on the role of metaphors in virtual learning environments based on written discourse, demonstrating in these contexts they may satisfy cognitive, emotional and affective needs of learning. Marianna Iodice and M. Beatrice Ligorio (University of Bari) analysed a corpus of metaphors produced by students in collaborative learning strategy.

The Conference showed also that areas of application of metaphorical studies could be different: Damele Giovanni (Philosophy of Language Institute, New University of Lisbon) explored the relevance of cognitive and persuasive aspects in political metaphors, using different examples of political discourses in the modern and contemporary eras. Elisabeth Wehling (University of California, Berkeley) investigated metaphorical framings used by Silvio Berlusconi in his speeches. Daniela Veronesi (Free University of Bozen) talked about metaphors in music. In particular she demonstrated how metaphors are a crucial means through which musicians conceptualise collective music making, and music teachers illustrate music qualities in educational activities. She analysed a collection of musicians’ interviews and video-recorded music workshops, clarifying functions of metaphors in pedagogical interaction and showing how metaphors contribute to shape the process of music making itself. Ewa Schreiber (Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznan) discussed the influences of the Cognitive Theory of metaphor in musicology. In particular, she analysed the theoretical writings of selected twentieth-century composers who, with the use of metaphorical language, express their different attitudes to the phenomenon of sound, treating it as an object, part of an imaginary landscape or a living organism. José Vela Castillo (IE University, Segovia; Universidad Complutense Madrid) proposed a parallelism between metaphor and architecture, starting from the ways these two spheres operate. Maurizio Galluzzo (IUAV, Venezia) talked about the window metaphor, discussing different definitions of space. Fabio Tarzia (University of Rome “La Sapienza”) questioned the relationship between metaphors, as a means of transport of the sense and the identity of a culture, and collective imagination, discussing the American case. Finally, Joan Elies Adell i Pitarch (Open University of Catalonia, Barcelona) talked about the Algherese Catalan language, a small geolinguistic island inside Sardinia that has survived throughout the centuries, despite being a harbour town, 530 km
away from Barcelona (Catalonia’s capital). The author defined Alghero as «a metaphor about the linguistic variability».

In summary, the conference, which was always enhanced by a heated, extended and deepened discussion at the end of each session, was a revealing opportunity for experts and students to take stock of the situation on the current studies about the role of metaphor in communication. The congress served as an essential and relevant contribution to the flourishing research into metaphor, providing new devices in the contemporary research on figurative language especially thanks to the importance given to the interaction between the theoretical and experimental dimensions. The Conference finished but it opened new areas of thinking, questioning and researching on this complex topic.

REFERENCES


