University of Groningen

The relevance of metaphor in argumentation. Uniting pragma-dialectics and deliberate metaphor theory
van Poppel, Lotte

The relevance of metaphor in argumentation. Uniting pragma-dialectics and deliberate metaphor theory

Lotte van Poppel [1]

Department of Speech Communication, Argumentation Theory and Rhetoric, University of Amsterdam, Spuistraat 134, Amsterdam, 1012 VB, The Netherlands

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Argumentative discussions can contain various types of metaphor, but these do not all fulfil the same function in discourse: while some seem to express part of the argumentation, others seem to be irrelevant. So far, argumentation research has not explained when metaphors should be considered relevant for argumentation. In this paper, insights from deliberate metaphor theory are combined with the pragma-dialectical theory of argumentation. Based on this framework, it can be explained that various forms of metaphor exist that have various communicative functions. Deliberate metaphors are metaphors intended to change the perspective of the interlocutor and thus may play a relevant role in a discussion. Non-deliberate metaphors have no such function. Using the concept of analytic relevance, the analyst can distinguish between relevant and irrelevant metaphors: If metaphors are used as a means to change someone's perspective on the issue at hand, they are relevant moves in light of the aim to solve a difference of opinion, whether they positively contribute to that aim or not.

© 2020 The Author(s). Published by Elsevier B.V. This is an open access article under the CC BY license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

1. Introduction

In May 2017, a few weeks before the UK elections, former Brexit secretary Mr. David Davis warned people not to vote Labour-leader Jeremy Corbyn into office, because of the impact this would have on the 'Brexit'-negotiations. According to Davis, Corbyn would take the wrong approach in negotiating the conditions under which the UK would leave the European Union, regarding the financial obligations towards the EU. Davis argued on the Yorkshire Post website:

(1) That would mean the worst possible Brexit deal for Yorkshire and the UK as a whole. Corbyn has already said he will accept any deal handed down by the European Union — no matter how punitive; no matter how costly. Common sense tells us that's the worst possible approach to take. When buying a house or a car, would you state upfront that you are willing to agree to whatever the seller demanded? Of course not. (Davis, 2017)

In this piece of discourse, Davis compares the Brexit negotiations with buying a car or a house, situations in which walking away from an offer can lead to reaching a better deal. Based on the common sense that in negotiating a price for a car or house one should not reveal one's preferred price upfront, Davis argues that Corbyn would be wrong in doing so in negotiating the financial consequences of a Brexit. In this fragment, Davis uses several metaphors: the verb *hand down* is used metaphorically as 'to officially announce', while the more basic and concrete meaning is: 'to give or leave something to people who will live after you', and the verb *tell* is used her as 'to show something' instead of the more concrete 'to communicate something'. The more salient metaphor occurs when Davis invites the reader to think of the abstract domain of political Brexit negotiations in

terms of the concrete domain of negotiating the price for a house or a car. Although these three instances could be considered as instances of metaphor, they do not all seem to fulfill the same function in the discourse: the last instance seems to form part of the argumentation for Davis' standpoint, while *handed down* and *tell* do not. This raises the question when metaphors are in fact relevant for the argumentative purpose of the discussant and when not.

The reactions that some metaphors in real life evoke, suggest that certain metaphors are considered relevant by discussion parties. Opponents in a discussion may, for instance, criticize used metaphors because they do not support the standpoint they are meant to support, or because they misrepresent the issue that is being discussed. Davis' house buying metaphor was publicly criticized as being 'wrong' and even 'dangerous' (Thrower, 2017). Several other metaphors used in the Brexit debate have also met such criticism or resistance. For instance, those used by EU's chief negotiator Michel Barnier (who argued that "Brexit is not a game") and by former UK Prime Minister Theresa May, who argued against talking about Brexit in terms of a divorce, because this would imply that the EU and the UK would not get along after Brexit. Such reactions imply that these metaphors are considered relevant by arguers and raise the question whether they should be considered relevant from an argumentation theoretical point of view. Despite the literature on metaphor within argumentation theory (e.g. van Poppel, 2018; Musolff, 2004; Oswald and Rihs, 2014; Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969; Pielenz, 1993; Santibáñez 2010; Wagemans, 2016; Xu and Wu, 2014), there is no complete answer to this question yet.

How to deal with metaphor in argumentative discourse depends largely on what conception of metaphor is adopted. This paper proposes a new way of analyzing metaphor by combining insights from deliberate metaphor theory (Steen, 2008, 2011) and the pragma-dialectical theory of argumentation (van Eemeren and Grootendorst, 1992, 2004; van Eemeren, 2010). Deliberate metaphor theory offers the theoretical distinctions between dimensions of metaphor which enables analysts to differentiate between diverging metaphor use in discourse. Pragma-dialectics offers theoretical concepts and tools to analyze metaphor as a potentially argumentative move in a discussion. This paper proposes to apply the pragma-dialectical conception of relevance to metaphor: it will be argued that only so-called deliberate metaphor use can constitute an analytically relevant move in a discussion.

In Section 2, I will explain what deliberate metaphor amounts to by introducing deliberate metaphor theory and the three-dimensional approach to metaphor introduced by Steen. In Section 3, I will introduce the pragma-dialectical theory of argumentation which provides the theoretical framework including a conception of relevance used here to ascribe different argumentative functions to parts of the discourse. In Section 4, I will present an application of this approach. Section 5 contains the conclusions and discussion.

2. Deliberate metaphor theory

Modern metaphor theory largely builds on Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) influential conceptual metaphor theory, which posits that metaphor is a cross-domain mapping in thought, connecting an abstract domain with a more concrete one (e.g., Kövecses, 2010; Gibbs, 2011). Conceptual metaphor theory argues that our thinking and speaking is full of metaphor, for example when considering an abstract concept of RELATIONSHIP in terms of BUILDINGS. When we think about a relationship (the so-called target domain), we may make use of our knowledge associated with the concept of a BUILDING (the source domain) and make all kinds of connections, or 'mappings', between these domains. Conceptual metaphor theory predicts that the conceptual structures associated with certain source domains will emerge in our language use. For instance, based on the metaphor RELATIONSHIPS are BUILDINGS, we may think about relationships that they need some kind of foundation or we may say that 'our relationship is firm' or 'is under construction'.

Corpus studies have confirmed the idea that metaphor is ubiquitous in our language use (e.g. Steen et al., 2010), but several alternative theories and approaches to metaphor have been introduced in the last decades, showing that the origin, appearance, processing and effects of metaphor are diverse and complex. Recent studies have, for instance, suggested that metaphor is related to bodily experiences (e.g., Gibbs, 2008), that metaphors are not necessarily processed through comparison, but often through categorization (Glucksberg and Keysar, 1990), and that the development of metaphors from novel to conventional affects the way they are processed and understood (i.e., 'the Career of metaphor', Bowdle and Gentner, 2005).

In an attempt to do justice to the complexity of the phenomenon of metaphor, Steen (2008, 2011) has introduced Deliberate Metaphor Theory (DMT) and the so-called three-dimensional model of metaphor. The model distinguishes three dimensions: the conceptual dimension, reflecting the idea that metaphors are a matter of conceptual mappings in thought; the linguistic dimension[2], referring to the words used to express metaphor in actual language use; and the communicative dimension, referring to the use of metaphor in interaction.

At the communicative level, metaphors can be distinguished based on their purpose in the interaction. Deliberate Metaphor Theory (Steen, 2008, 2011), posits that metaphors may be used *deliberately* or *non-deliberately*.[3] Deliberate metaphors are those that are intentionally used as metaphors between sender and addressee to invite interlocutors to view the target domain in terms of the source domain (Steen, 2017: 1). They are intended to change the perspective on the target domain by

---

[2] These dimensions are connected to the way psycholinguists, such as van Dijk and Kintsch (1983), look at text comprehension.

[3] Charteris-Black (2012) criticizes the term 'deliberate' because it assumes that researchers know what the intentions of language users are, while they cannot know for sure. Therefore, Charteris-Black proposes to use the term 'purposeful', because this term would describe the language as a speech act with a particular purpose, for instance convincing the audience.

exploiting the source domain, for instance to clarify complicated matters or to change someone's opinion. A recent example of a potential deliberate metaphor is Dutch prime-minister Mark Rutte comparing the Netherlands with a delicate vase that needs to be taken care of:

(2) I see the Netherlands as a little vase, which we are carrying with 17 million ordinary and extraordinary people. (AD, 17 Dec 2018)

Such deliberate metaphors require separate attention to the source domain as source of reference: they result in a representation of the discourse, a situation model (van Dijk and Kintsch, 1983), which includes referents of both the target (in this case, Dutch society) and the source domain (a little vase).[4] In non-deliberate metaphor this is not the case, because the intended meaning is inferred directly from the metaphor-related words without forming an image of the source domain (Steen, 2011: 102). This distinction also explains why not all metaphors work in the same way: language users may not always be fully aware of the metaphors they use (or encounter), but occasionally they use metaphor deliberately, which requires specific attention for the cross-domain mapping.

The conceptual dimension of metaphor refers to metaphor in thought. On this level, one can distinguish between novel and conventional metaphors. Conventional metaphors are commonly used in thought and discourse and do not need active mapping from source to target domain to be understood. Examples of such conventional metaphors are LESS = DOWN and RELATIONSHIP = JOURNEY, which can be traced back in linguistic expressions such as 'prices went down' and 'we are lost', respectively. Novel metaphors, on the other hand, connect a particular target domain to a source domain in new or creative ways and thus do demand active cross-domain mapping from the recipient. The quote from Mark Rutte in fragment (2) is an example of a novel metaphor in discourse. As it is uncommon to think about a society in terms of a small vase, one needs to actively compare the source and target domain to determine what they have in common (e.g., fragility) to make sense of the metaphor. In this example, with the marker 'as', the reader is in fact explicitly invited to compare the two.

At the linguistic level, metaphors can manifest themselves in various ways. The Pragglejaz Group (2007) and Steen et al. (2010) have developed a procedure to identify metaphors, or 'metaphor-related words', in discourse. This method entails determining for each lexical unit whether it has a more basic meaning than the meaning it has in the particular context in which it is used and whether the contextual meaning is sufficiently distinct from its basic meaning. If so, and if the contextual meaning can be related to the more basic meaning based on some kind of similarity between the two, the unit can be considered metaphor-related (Steen et al., 2010).

Part of the procedure to identify metaphors in language is to distinguished between so-called direct and indirect metaphors (Steen et al., 2010). In direct metaphors, a domain is introduced which is incongruous with the topic of the text, while there is no contrast between the contextual meaning of the words by which the metaphor is expressed and the basic meaning of those words. Indirect metaphors refer to words that exhibit a contrast between their contextual and their basic meaning which may be ascribed to a comparison.

An example of direct metaphor appears in Rutte's quote "I see the Netherlands as a little vase": the word 'vase' refers to an actual vase and is thus not used metaphorically. Yet, a metaphorical comparison is set up and is flagged with the words 'I see X as Y', connecting the vase to 'the Netherlands'. The same underlying metaphor is used indirectly further on in the same text by Rutte: "We have seen examples of societies where they have dropped the little vase. See Great Britain." Here, the contextual meaning of the word vase diverts from its basic meaning, i.e. a container for cut flowers. In this last fragment, the word vase refers to something like 'a shared national endeavor'.

Deliberate metaphor theory thus has a very broad take on metaphor, as it includes conceptual metaphors in thought, direct metaphorical comparisons and similes and indirect metaphors in language expressed through single lexical items (e.g., Steen et al., 2010). Metaphors may thus constitute analogies, as in "The Netherlands is like a little vase", but not necessarily. Also, analogies are not metaphorical when a parallel is drawn between concept within the same domain ('This Netherlands is like Sweden').

The three dimensions of metaphor are interrelated to some extent: the most clear-cut cases of deliberate metaphor are metaphors that are both novel and direct (see Steen, 2015). Yet, also indirect and conventional metaphors may be deliberate, depending on the context in which they are used. When an indirect conventional metaphor is extended, it may come to life again and may thus be considered as a deliberate metaphor (see Reijnierse, 2017: 111).

An example of revitalized metaphor is for instance the 'dashboard' metaphor. To monitor the spread of the Covid-19 virus, the Dutch government (following other institutions) launched an online 'dashboard' that represents data like new infections, hospitalizations, and deaths caused by the virus. The basic meaning of dashboard is the part of a car where instruments like a speedometer are, but it is conventional to use is to refer to "a visual summary of information used to give an overview" (MacMillan online dictionary). At a press conference on May 19th 2020, Dutch Minister of Health Hugo de Jonge, however, extended the metaphor in the following way:

---

[4] The deliberateness of the metaphor was enforced by the fact that Prime Minister Rutte and other representatives of the Dutch government handed actual little vases as a reward to a number of Dutch citizens who had made some outstanding contribution to society, for instance by doing volunteer work.

(3) That is why we are working on a dashboard, because it is just like in the car: you want to know how fast you are driving, in which gear and whether you can accelerate or brake. In that dashboard we are going to bring all the information together to improve the view on corona reality. On that dashboard are meters, like the speedometer in a car, that we can read very precisely […]. (my translation, Dutch Government, 2020)[5]

The term 'dashboard' is first introduced indirectly, but then De Jonge explicitly compares the use of the dashboard to monitor the virus with using a dashboard while driving a car. Several referents from the source domain of driving are introduced ('gear', 'accelerate', 'brake', 'speedometer'), thus drawing attention to this domain and inviting the recipient to make sense of the target domain in terms of the source domain. This can be considered an instance of deliberate metaphor because of the revitalization of a conventional metaphor: it draws the attention to certain (favorable) aspects of the source domain to allow a comparison between controlling the virus and driving a car.

As these deliberate metaphors intentionally introduce a new perspective on the target domain, they are the best candidates for having a relevant function in argumentative discourse. In the literature, there is no consensus on the functions of metaphor and example (1) also illustrates that not all metaphors in argumentative discourse are necessarily argumentative. This raises the question how to determine which are indeed argumentative. The pragma-dialectical theory of argumentation helps determining the potential function(s) of metaphor. It is a suitable framework for specifying the functions of discourse elements, because it offers an overview of all the moves in a critical discussion, divided in four discussion stages with particular subgoals. This framework enables distinguishing between moves with different goals in argumentative discourse.

3. A new approach to metaphor and argumentation: deliberate metaphor theory and pragma-dialectics

3.1. A pragma-dialectical approach to the analysis of argumentative discourse

The standard pragma-dialectical procedure for argumentation analysis involves identifying the discussion parties, their standpoints, the type of difference of opinion, the argument schemes and structure, the starting points and the outcome of the discussion (van Eemeren and Grootendorst, 2004). In the extended version of pragma-dialectics, the concept of strategic maneuvering was introduced which also takes into account the rhetorical aspirations of discussants (van Eemeren, 2010; van Eemeren and Houtlosser, 2000). In some other studies, metaphors are considered to be potentially relevant for argumentation, as they can express certain premises or commitments. The argumentative functions in a discussion that have been ascribed to metaphor range from (part of a) standpoint (Oswald and Rihs, 2014; Wagemans, 2016), (part of a) material or minor premise (Oswald and Rihs, 2014; Wagemans, 2016), connection or major premise (Xu and Wu, 2014; Wagemans, 2016), to starting point/ backing (Pielenz, 1993; Renardel de Lavalette et al., 2019; Santibáñez, 2010; Xu and Wu, 2014). Most commonly, metaphors are regarded as a type of analogy argumentation (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969; Reboul, 1989; Pielenz, 1993; Garssen and Kienpointner, 2011).[6] However, a metaphor and even a full metaphorical comparison does not necessarily constitute analogy argumentation, since, as Wagemans (2016) also points out, such an expression can also function as a standpoint. Still, so far, no study contains explicit guidelines for dealing with metaphors, nor does the pragma-dialectical analysis procedure.

A pragma-dialectical analysis and evaluation of argumentative discourse involves determining which speech acts performed in the interaction are relevant to consider. The discourse to be analyzed is contrasted with the ideal model of a critical discussion. The model describes four stages a discussion would run through if it were optimally geared towards resolving a difference of opinion on the merits. In the confrontation stage, the difference of opinion is externalized; in the opening stage, the discussants determine their shared starting points and their roles in the discussion; in the argumentation stage, the discussants advance and evaluate the argumentation; and in the concluding stage, discussants establish the outcome of the discussion (van Eemeren and Grootendorst, 2004: 59−62).

The analyst reconstructs from the actual discourse the commitments that can be ascribed to the discussants (van Eemeren, 2010: 14). Irrelevant elements are deleted from the discourse and ambiguous or indirect language use (e.g., polysemous words, rhetorical questions) is substituted for clear formulations (van Eemeren and Grootendorst, 2004: 95−96). When it is unclear whether certain utterances in the discourse should be interpreted as part of the argumentation, the strategy of *maximally argumentative interpretation* should be applied (van Eemeren et al., 1993: 48). This means that when it is not completely clear whether an utterance functions as argumentation (or perhaps as explanation), it is reconstructed as argumentation just in case. Discussants are assumed to design their discourse as part of a critical discussion. When the communicative function of parts of the discourse is unclear, they should thus be reconstructed as speech acts that potentially contribute to the resolution of the difference of opinion (van Eemeren and Grootendorst, 2004: 115). From this perspective, analyzing metaphors in argumentative discourse would amount to deciding on whether they should be considered as relevant discourse elements that need to be taken up into the analytic overview or whether they should be replaced by a different formulation or should even be deleted all together.

---

[5] Original Dutch text: "*Vandaar dat we werken aan een dashboard, want het is net als in de auto: je wilt weten hoe hard je rijdt, in welke versnelling en of je gas kunt geven of moet remmen. In dat dashboard gaan we alle informatie bij elkaar brengen om het zicht op de coronawerkelijkheid te verbeteren. Op dat dashboard zitten meters die we, zoals de kilometerteller in de auto, heel precies af kunnen aflezen: […].*" (Dutch Government, 2020).

[6] See van Poppel (2020) for an overview of the argumentation theoretical literature on the role of metaphor.

3.2. The relevance of metaphor in argumentative discourse

Although several argumentative functions have been ascribed to metaphor (see van Poppel, 2020), many or perhaps most metaphors are of course non-argumentative (see, for instance all the poetic examples of metaphor in Aristotle (1926) and Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969)). Nevertheless, the literature does not provide guidelines for distinguishing argumentative metaphors from non-argumentative ones.

Pragma-dialectics does not offer clear-cut guidelines for handling metaphors either, but we may infer such guidelines from the way in which the relevance of utterances in the discourse is determined. This approach can then be complemented with the distinction between deliberate and non-deliberate metaphors introduced by Steen (2017) in the 3D-model of metaphor.

Van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1992) propose the following general definition of relevance: "An element of discourse is relevant to another element of discourse if an interactional relation can be envisaged between these elements that is functional in the light of a certain objective." (141). The next step for analysts then is to determine when there is such a functional relation between different elements in the discourse.

Van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1992) argue that argumentation scholars generally either take a descriptive or a normative approach to relevance. The concept of relevance subsequently involves either *interpretive relevance* (what do the language users themselves consider relevant in the discourse at hand?) or *evaluative relevance* (what is relevant according to certain norms of discourse?). Van Eemeren and Grootendorst propose an intermediary concept of relevance, namely *analytic relevance*, referring to the functionality of speech acts to contribute to the resolution of a difference of opinion. The analyst of argumentative discourse decides whether a move is relevant by determining whether the move possibly contributes to dispute resolution. Since the resolution process ideally runs through four different stages with their particular subgoals, speech acts are only relevant in certain parts of the discussion. The moves in each of these stages ideally help reaching the subgoal of this particular stage. For instance, a critical question can be a relevant move in the argumentation stage as it contributes to the testing of the argumentation.

It is important to differentiate between these concepts of relevance to establish the function of metaphor in argumentative discourse. Language users expect the speech acts performed by discussants to be interconnected. They will also try to interpret speech acts in light of the communicative goal of the speech event they are engaged in (see Grice, 1975), but they might overlook certain relations. Only taking interpretative relevance into account would therefore not suffice.[7] Yet, if an analyst would only focus on evaluative relevance, one would disregard fallacious uses of metaphor that in fact have been brought forward to gain acceptance for a disputed standpoint. This evaluative relevance approach is in fact adopted by researchers who argue that metaphors should not be considered as analogy argument, because they are inherently weak or because metaphors do not seriously compare source and target domain but only express a general rule (e.g. Garssen, 2009). Indeed, metaphors can present a general rule, but as this rule is justified by pointing at the source domain, the reference to the source domain is relevant for the resolution of the difference of opinion and should therefore be taken up into the analytic overview. Disregarding metaphors because they would entail weak arguments would inflate the analysis and the evaluation. In the pragma-dialectical procedure, even fallacies need to be taken up into the analytic overview.

Taking analytic relevance as a starting point for the analysis of metaphors, the analyst should determine whether a metaphor has a function in resolving the difference of opinion. This approach is similar to the one proposed by Macagno and Zavatta (2014). Following van Eemeren and Grootendorst, 2004, they argue that speech acts or discourse units are relevant if they possibly and effectively help reaching the intended communicative effect of a dialogue. However, they do not focus on the use of metaphors in argumentative discourse, but rather on how relevant meaning of metaphorical utterances is reconstructed. Whether the reconstructed meaning should consequently be taken as relevant in view of the dialectical and rhetorical goals in argumentative discussion, is not addressed, nor are the different dimensions of metaphor. When using analytic relevance as proposed in the current study, the distinction between deliberate and non-deliberate metaphors comes into play: deliberate metaphors are metaphors intended to change the perspective of the interlocutor by inviting the recipient to view the target domain in terms of the source domain. The metaphorical comparison proposed through a deliberate metaphor could be functional, for instance in supporting a standpoint about the target domain. As such, deliberate metaphors may not only have a communicative function in that they introduce a new perspective, but also an argumentative function in the sense that they somehow contribute to resolving the difference of opinion. Non-deliberate metaphors have no such communicative function and can thus be considered as linguistic variation without direct contribution to the resolution process.

---

[7] In later works on rationality and reasons, Grice (2001) distinguishes two concepts of rationality, namely 'flat' and 'variable rationality'. Flat rationality refers to man's capability to reason, i.e., to apply inference rules. The other concept of rationality is variable: it implies that some people are more rational than others and are thus better at reasoning than others (Grice, 2001, p.20—22). The concept of variable rationality goes beyond interpretative relevance, as it implies certain goal-related norms for reasoning. However, there is no one-on-one relationship between these concepts and the different concepts of relevance discussed here. In addition, contrary to pragma-dialectics, Grice does not take socialization (i.e., considering argumentation as an activity aimed at some other party) as a theoretical starting point of his view on reasoning.

3.3. The analysis of metaphor versus the analysis of argumentation

An extra difficulty in analyzing metaphor in argumentative discourse is the fact that metaphor analysis departs from a different unit of analysis than argumentation analysis. In argumentation theory, the unit of analysis is the utterance, a speech act with a particular goal in a larger discourse, while metaphor analysis focuses on lexical units. As the MIPVU procedure shows, metaphors can be expressed in a single unit, even a preposition. For instance, in "He has no direction in life", both the units 'direction' and 'in' can be considered metaphor-related words, drawing on two difference metaphors: LIFE is a JOURNEY and BEING IN A STATE is BEING IN A CONTAINER. In argumentation analysis, single units are taken into account as well, but always as part of or as representing a speech act. A single lexical unit, such as 'no' can function as an independent utterance ('Do you like sports?' 'No') or a unit may represent a partly implicit utterance ('Why did you move to Amsterdam?' 'work'). So, although these utterances consist of only one lexical unit, they are interpreted in terms of speech acts with communicative goals, e.g. expressing disagreement or advancing argumentation. The relation between the lexical unit and the speech act that is performed by expressing a lexical unit is thus of more importance in argumentation analysis than in metaphor analysis. The distinction between direct and indirect metaphors may therefore be important: direct metaphors, and in particular explicit comparisons, can be uttered as complete propositions and can thus provide the content of an assertive speech act, while indirect metaphors may only be part of a speech act. When indirect metaphor is extended and may thereby be taken up as potentially deliberate, a speech act implying a cross-domain comparison may be inferred from the extended indirect metaphor. Both the extended indirect metaphor and the direct, flagged, metaphor are potentially deliberate and involve a direct invitation to consider the target domain in terms of the source domain. As such, they can constitute (part of) a speech act that, at least partly or indirectly, involves an assertion about the relation between two domains (see also Kwesi, 2019 on metaphors as assertive speech acts).

In the next section, we return to the example from the Introduction to illustrate this approach to metaphor in argumentation.

4. Deliberate and non-deliberate metaphors in argumentative discourse

The combination of deliberate metaphor theory and pragma-dialectics thus departs from the idea that the analyst needs to establish whether a metaphor is deliberate to decide on how to further analyze the argumentative discourse. The identification of deliberate metaphor is, however, rather complicated and subject to much discussion (e.g., Charteris-Black, 2012; Gibbs, 2015).

Reijnierse (2017) developed an identification procedure for deliberate metaphors. She takes a semiotic approach and can thus only detect potentially deliberate metaphors as the procedure does not allow for statements about the cognitive processing involved. She operationalizes deliberate metaphor as follows: "A metaphor is potentially deliberate when the source domain of the metaphor is part of the referential meaning of the utterance in which it is used" (Reijnierse, 2017: 27).

David Davis' comments on Jeremy Corbyn in excerpt (1) contain an example of metaphor use that is potentially deliberate. Based on MIPVU, the metaphor identification procedure Vrije Universiteit described by Steen et al. (2010: 25—42), the sentence "When buying a house or a car, would you state upfront that you are willing to agree to whatever the seller demanded?" can be marked as a direct metaphor. The sentence itself is not used metaphorically as there is no difference between the contextual meaning and a more basic meaning, but its content is incongruous with the preceding lines in which Davis talks about Corbyn's approach to the Brexit negotiations. The sentence can be integrated into the overall referential and topical framework by means of a comparison between the Brexit negotiations and negotiations about a house or a car (even though a marker for comparison is missing). This comparison is cross-domain: Davis uses the source domain of private negotiations to draw conclusions about what a good strategy is in politics. Several mappings between these domains are possible, such as that two parties are involved, there is an object or goal to be reached, both parties need to agree on a price, etcetera. In this case, a new perspective on the target domain is introduced by explicit reference to the source domain. The utterance can only by understood by including the reference to the source domain of private negotiations, and can therefore be considered a potentially deliberate metaphor.

In this particular case, the metaphor connects the source domain of the personal (negotiations) with the target domain of political (negotiations). As such, it functions as connection premise between the argument 'When buying a house or a car, you would not state upfront that you are willing to agree to whatever the seller demanded' and the substandpoint 'Accepting any deal handed down by the European Union is the worst possible approach to take'. The metaphor is thus used as an analogy argument, transferring the acceptability of the claim about deals on property to the claim about deals on Brexit. The argumentation structure is represented in the following overview[8]:

(1. Do not vote for Corbyn)

1.1 (Corbyn as prime minister) would mean the worst possible Brexit deal for Yorkshire and the UK as a whole.

1.1.1 Corbyn has already said he will accept any deal handed down by the EU.

1.1.1' Common sense tells us accepting any deal handed down by the European Union is the worst possible approach to take.

---

[8] In an argumentation structure, 1 represents the standpoint, 1.1 an argument for that standpoint and 1.1.1 an argument for the argument, and etcetera. The connecting premise, or major premise, which connects an argument (e.g. 1.1.1) to the substandpoint (e.g. 1.1) is represented as 1.1.1'. Elements that were implicit in the actual discourse are presented between brackets.

1.1.1'.1 When buying a house or a car, you would not state upfront that you are willing to agree to whatever the seller demanded.
1.1.1'.1' Accepting any deal with EU is like buying a house or a car and stating upfront that you are willing to agree to whatever the seller demanded.

Yet in the same fragment, an indirect metaphor is used as well, when Davis speaks of a deal "**handed down** by the European Union". Based on MIPVU (Steen et al., 2010), the verb can be identified as metaphorically used. The verb *hand down* in this fragment means something like *to officially announce*, which is one of the two sense descriptions in Longman online dictionary. The other sense is a more basic and concrete meaning than the contextual meaning: 'to give or leave something to people who will live after you'. There is no clue in the utterance that the more basic meaning of hand down from the domain of family life plays any role in the referential meaning. The verb *hand down* is thus likely to be non-deliberate.

The rest of the text contains many more examples of indirect metaphor, mostly non-deliberate. This happens, for instance, in the following excerpt (metaphors in bold):

(4) […] everyone in Yorkshire has a **stake** in Britain's **exit** from the European Union. And that is why I will ensure that Yorkshire's **voice is heard** as we **work towards** a Brexit deal that enables every **part** of the UK **to build on** what it has achieved and **embrace** the new opportunities that we know will **arise**.

The discussed excerpt shows that both direct and indirect as well as potentially deliberate and non-deliberate metaphors can occur in argumentative discourse. In fact, corpus studies show that many genres contain a large percentage (13.3% on average) of metaphors (Steen et al., 2010). Yet, most of these are used non-deliberately: Reijnierse (2017: 56) shows that only 4.36% of these metaphor-related words in her corpus were potentially deliberate.[9] This means that discourse may contain many metaphors, but they may not all have the same communicative function and thus are also likely to have different functions in argumentative discourse.

5. Conclusion and discussion

In this paper, I propose to combine insights from deliberate metaphor theory and the pragma-dialectical theory of argumentation to shed more light on the function of metaphor in argumentative discourse.

Analyzing metaphors in argumentative discourse amounts to deciding on whether they should be considered as relevant discourse elements that need to be taken up into the analytic overview or whether they should be replaced or deleted. Taking analytic relevance as a starting point for the analysis of metaphors, the analyst should determine whether a metaphor has a function in resolving the difference of opinion. The 3D-model and deliberate metaphor theory help to identify argumentatively relevant metaphors. Deliberate metaphors are metaphors intended to change the perspective of the interlocutor and thus may play a relevant role in the resolution process. Non-deliberate metaphors have no such function. So, whereas non-deliberate metaphors may be considered as strategic presentational device, deliberate metaphors may be regarded as relevant argumentative moves, either as a standpoint, argument or starting point.

Using analytic relevance instead of evaluative relevance as a starting point also solves the issue of whether metaphors should be considered relevant argumentative moves when they might be unreasonable. If metaphors are used as a means to change someone's perspective on the issue at hand, they are relevant moves in light of the aim to solve a difference of opinion, whether they positively contribute to that aim or not.

The proposed approach to metaphor in argumentative discourse does not solve all problems. For instance, the difficulty of distinguishing deliberate from non-deliberate metaphors remains. The analysis can also be complicated by mixed metaphors, combining several source domains, or by indirect metaphors, which mix references to source and target domain. In those cases, it becomes much more problematic to isolate propositions referring to source and target domain and to assign a particular argumentative function to them. However, similar problems may also arise in non-metaphoric language in practice, since such real-life language may also contain unclear references and implicitness. The proposed approach to analyze metaphors in argumentative discourse is nevertheless a crucial bridge between argumentation theory and deliberate metaphor theory, offering a framework to distinguish relevant from irrelevant metaphors in argumentation.

---

[9] Only 0.58% of all lexical units in the VUAMC corpus were used deliberately (Reijnierse, 2017: 56). Yet, this corpus consists of news, fiction, academic texts and face-to-face conversations, which are not (necessarily) argumentative genres.

References

Aristotle, 1926. On rhetoric. Loeb Classical Library 193. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA. Translated by J. H. Freese.

Bowdle, B.F., Gentner, D., 2005. The career of metaphor. Psychol. Rev. 112 (1), 193–216. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.112.1.193.

Charteris-Black, J., 2012. Forensic deliberations on purposeful metaphor. Metaphor Social World 2, 1–21.

Davis, D., 2017. David Davis: I'll Make Brexit Work for Yorkshire. The Yorkshire Post, May 20, 2017. https://www.yorkshirepost.co.uk/news/opinion/columnists/david-davis-i-ll-make-brexit-work-for-yorkshire-1-8552921. (Accessed 12 July 2019).

Dijk, T. A. van, Kintsch, W., 1983. Strategies of Discourse Comprehension. Academic Press, Orlando [etc.].

Dutch Government, 2020. Press Conference Prime Minister Rutte and Minister De Jonge after Crisis Deliberation (19 May 2020). https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/mediateksten/2020/05/19/letterlijke-tekst-persconferentie-minister-president-rutte-en-minister-de-jonge-na-afloop-van-crisisberaad-kabinet. (Accessed 10 July 2020).

Eemeren, F.H. van, 2010. Strategic Maneuvering in Argumentative Discourse: Extending the Pragma-Dialectical Theory of Argumentation. John Benjamins, Amsterdam.

Eemeren, F.H. van, Grootendorst, R., 1992. Relevance reviewed: the case of argumentum ad hominem. Argumentation 6 (2), 141–159.

Eemeren, F.H. van, Grootendorst, R., 2004. A Systematic Theory of Argumentation: the Pragma-Dialectical Approach. Cambridge UP, Cambridge.

Eemeren, F. H. van, Grootendorst, R., Jackson, S., Jacobs, S., 1993. Reconstructing Argumentative Discourse. The University of Alabama Press, Tuscaloosa.

Eemeren, F. H. van, Houtlosser, P., 2000. De retorische functie van stijlfiguren in een dialectisch proces: strategisch gebruikte metaforen in Edward Kennedy's Chappaquiddick Speech. In: Neutelings, R., Ummelen, N., Maes, A. (Eds.), Over de grenzen van de taalbeheersing. Bijdragen over taal, tekst en communicatie gepresenteerd op het VIOT- congres van december 1999 aan de Technische Universiteit Delft, Den Haag. SDU, pp. 151–162.

Garssen, B., 2009. Comparing the incomparable: figurative analogies in a dialectical testing procedure. In: van Eemeren, F.H., Garssen, B. (Eds.), Pondering on Problems of Argumentation. Twenty Essays on Theoretical Issues. Springer, Dordrecht, pp. 133–140. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-9165-0_10.

Garssen, B., Kienpointner, M., 2011. Figurative analogy in political argumentation. In: Feteris, E., Garssen, B., Snoeck Henkemans, A.F. (Eds.), Keeping in Touch with Pragma-Dialectics. Benjamins, Amsterdam, pp. 39–58.

Gibbs Jr., R.W. (Ed.), 2008. The Cambridge Handbook of Metaphor and Thought. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK.

Gibbs Jr., R.W., 2011. Evaluating conceptual metaphor theory. Discourse Process. 48 (8), 529–562. https://doi.org/10.1080/0163853X.2011.606103.

Gibbs Jr., R.W., 2015. Do pragmatic signals affect conventional metaphor understanding? A failed test of deliberate metaphor theory. J. Pragmat. 90, 77–87.

Glucksberg, S., Keysar, B., 1990. Understanding metaphorical comparisons: beyond similarity. Psychol. Rev. 97 (1), 3–18. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.97.1.3.

Grice, H.P., 1975. In: Cole, P., Morgan, J. (Eds.), Logic and Conversation, vol. 3. Academic Press. Syntax and Semantics.

Grice, H.P., 2001. Aspects of Reason. Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Kövecses, Z., 2010. Metaphor: A Practical Introduction, second ed. Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Kwesi, R., 2019. An inferential articulation of metaphorical assertions. Rivista Italiana di Filosofia del Linguaggio 13 (1), 116–132.

Lakoff, G., Johnson, M., 1980. Metaphors We Live by. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

Macagno, F., Zavatta, B., 2014. Reconstructing metaphorical meaning. Argumentation 28 (4), 453–488.

Musolff, A., 2004. Metaphor and Political Discourse. Analogical Reasoning in Debates about Europe. Palgrave Macmillan, London.

Oswald, S., Rihs, A., 2014. Metaphor as argument: rhetorical and epistemic advantages of extended metaphors. Argumentation 28 (2), 133–159.

Perelman, C., Olbrechts-Tyteca, L., 1969. The New Rhetoric. A treatise on argumentation. (Translation of La Nouvelle Rhétorique. Traité de l'argumentation. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1958. University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame/London.

Pielenz, Michael, 1993. Argumentation und Metapher. Gunter Narr Verlag, Tübingen.

van Poppel, L., 2018. Argumentative functions of metaphors: How can metaphors trigger resistance? In: Oswald, Steve, Maillat, Didier (Eds.), Argument and Inference. Proceedings of the 2nd European Conference on Argumentation volume II, Fribourg 2017.

van Poppel, L., 2020. The study of metaphor in argumentation theory. J. Argument. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10503-020-09523-1 published online 20 June 2020.

Pragglejaz Group, 2007. MIP: a method for identifying metaphorically used words in discourse. Metaphor Symbol 22 (1), 1–39. https://doi.org/10.1080/10926480709336752.

Reboul, O., 1989. The figure and the argument. In: Meyer, M. (Ed.), From Metaphysics to Rhetoric. Springer, Dordrecht, pp. 169–181.

Reijnierse, W.G., 2017. The Value of Deliberate Metaphor. Dissertation. University of Amsterdam.

Renardel de Lavalette, K.Y., Andone, C., Steen, G.J., 2019. I did not say that the government should be plundering anybody's savings. Resistance to metaphors expressing starting points in parliamentary debates. J. Lang. Polit. 1–21. https://doi.org/10.1075/jlp.18066.ren (Published online: 24 Jun 2019).

Santibáñez, C., 2010. Metaphors and argumentation: the case of Chilean Parliamentarian media participation. J. Pragmat. 42 (4), 973–989.

Steen, G.J., 2008. The paradox of metaphor: why we need a three-dimensional model of metaphor. Metaphor Symbol 23 (4), 213–241. https://doi.org/10.1080/10926480802426753.

Steen, G.J., 2011. From three dimensions to five steps: the value of deliberate metaphor. Metaphorik.de 21, 83–110.

Steen, G.J., 2015. Developing, testing and interpreting deliberate metaphor theory. J. Pragmat. 90, 67–72. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2015.03.013.

Steen, G.J., 2017. Deliberate Metaphor Theory: basic assumptions, main tenets, urgent issues. Intercult. Pragmat. 14 (1), 1–24.

Steen, G.J., Dorst, A.G., Herrmann, J.B., Kaal, A., Krennmayr, T., Pasma, T., 2010. A Method for Linguistic Metaphor Identification: from MIP to MIPVU. John Benjamins, Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

Thrower, M., 2017. Brexit Is Not a Poker Game: How Political Metaphors Mislead Us. Political news website Politics.co.uk, June 28, 2017. https://www.politics.co.uk/comment-analysis/2017/06/28/brexit-is-not-a-poker-game-how-political-metaphors-mislead-u. (Accessed 17 July 2019).

Wagemans, J.H.M., 2016. Analyzing metaphor in argumentative discourse. Riv. Ital. Filos. Linguaggio 10 (2), 79–94.

Xu, C., Wu, Y., 2014. Metaphors in the perspective of argumentation. J. Pragmat. 62, 68–76.

Lotte van Poppel is an Assistant Professor in the department of Communication and Information Studies at the University of Groningen, the Netherlands. She received her PhD in argumentation theory from the University of Amsterdam at the department of Speech Communication, Argumentation and Rhetoric at the University of Amsterdam. In her research, she focuses on argumentation, rhetoric, and resistance to persuasion in (health) communication.