Review of: "Crossing between Conceptual Metaphor Theory and Text World Theory"

Patrick Juola[1]

1 Duquesne University

This paper looks into the relationship between two cognitive frameworks in metaphor understanding, in an attempt to blend them to get a deeper understanding of the cognitive processing of terms. Unfortunately, I consider the author's stance to be overly dogmatic and the argument, although certainly possible, is ultimately unconvincing.

The paper starts with a discussion of Lakovian conceptual metaphor theory and its relation to cognition. Here is the first example of an overly dogmatic stance; the author claims, in discussing the ARGUMENT is WAR metaphor, that "nothing in the nature of an argument suggests hostility." However, this is simply untrue -- dictionary.com's first definition of "argument" is "an oral disagreement; verbal opposition; contention; altercation"; Oxford Languages' first definition is "an exchange of diverging or opposite view, typically a heated or angry one," and Mirriam-Webster's definition 1c) is "an angry quarrel or disagreement." A non-heated exchange of views is typically a discussion, a discourse, or even a debate. Furthermore, even when you take into account the adversarial nature of an argument, there are other metaphors available, such as ARGUMENT is GAME ("I had an argument with my boss, but I didn't score enough points and I lost.") So while metaphors, in the Lakovian sense, may be useful as tools to structure understanding and expression, there are typically a lot of metaphors available that structure understanding and expression differently (and relatively free variation among these alternatives).

Similarly, the author discusses how the metaphor GOAL ACHIEVEMENT is MOVEMENT might arise naturally from an infant crawling across the floor to get a desired toy. This seems like a plausible account until one considers that a crawling infant is pre-lingual, that metaphor is a linguistic phenomenon, and that the infant can't use movement metaphors to describe goal achievement because the infant can't describe anything at all.

In fact, this highlights a key factor that will underly the later argument---that there are different "worlds" involved. In this case, there is the physical world, with the infant, the toy, and the floor, and there is also a cognitive world involve in infant's sensory perceptions and cognitive planning to figure out how to move to get the toy. There is also an undiscussed neural world that constructs, supports, and processes the cognitive world. Finally, there is (in adults) a linguistic world that describes the cognitive world so that it can be shared with others, but the fact that the linguistic world is present in adults but not in infants shows that it is separate from the other three.

The most significant overstatement is in the the discussion of POLITICAL GOALS are DESTINATIONS. The author states that "POLITICAL GOALS will always be understood as DESTINATIONS," which is too strong a claim. First, it's very

common, especially for "conservative" positions, for a goal to be the current situation and to specifically prevent change (or prevent travel to a new destination, metaphorically). More importantly, there are many other metaphors, such as POLITICAL GOALS are CONSTRUCTIONS. (See President Biden's 2022 State of the Union Address, March 1, 2022 -- "We can do something we haven't done in a long time: build a better America."; see also Prime Minister Sunak's speech of January 4, 2023 -- "Five foundations, on which to build a better future for our children and grandchildren.") There is also a common metaphor of POLITICS is A GAME, where the political goals are simply to beat the other team. (See"THE REPUBLICANS JUST SCORED A SPECTACULAR OWN GOAL.", Esquire, May 23, 2017) with no objective other than victory.

In broad terms, then, the author is using a well-accepted theory but the individual claims need to be examined critically to see what alternatives are available and whether the alternatives invalidate the claims.

The third section discusses "mental worlds" using the framework of Werth and draws a different distinction than the one I have drawn above. The author (following Werth) distinguishes between "discourse worlds" (DW) and "text worlds." The paper then discusses how the metaphors inherent in political speech (as structured via slot-filling predicates) help create whole-text structures. As before, a critical examination of the assumptions inherent in this argument show it to be deeply problematics.

To start out with, it is not clear that Werth's DW and TW actually exist, nor that they are distinct if they do exist; the arguments presented are vague, difficult to follow, and ultimately unconvincing. Similarly, the slot-filling predicates the author postulates are too restrictive. The author proposes (without justification) that "the structure of a political speech tends to follow this pattern: INITIAL STATE (containing slots: leader, led, issue, time, and space) [...]" It is not clear that this is a tendency (more evidence would be needed), or that the listed slots are either necessary or sufficient to capture political speech. The author further proposes that the process of filling these slots is problematic (for example, "the use of we and us to explicate slots leader and led") as part of a whole-text structure. The simpler answer is that "we" is an ambiguous word that can sometimes refer to the speaker as part of one group and sometimes as part of another.

To see this more clearly, consider the sentence "We are creating policy to ensure that we all have clean water to drink." The first "we" is clearly on behalf of the leaders, since only leaders create policy. While statement could be an outright admission of an intention to stockpile bottled water for the government---"to ensure that [the current government] have"--it is much more likely to be intended and to be heard as a statement on behalf of the led, and specifically of the entire group, leaders plus led (by, for example, improving pollution standards). The question of interpreting pronouns is not and should not be a question of whole-text structure.

The conclusion of this paper is that "conceptual metaphorization on its own cannot account sufficiently for whole-text organization," which is not surprising since semantics does not typically account for discourse. The two theoretical systems DW and TW are not sufficiently justified, and little evidence is provided. It is unfortunate that more than half off the paper is taken up with defining the two theories to be merged without supporting why a merger is necessary or even appropriate. A longer treatment with greater justification and explanation of the key points would be a much stronger and more accessible paper.