

Toward the understanding of humorous metonymies: A corpus-based approach

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Cognitive Linguistics sees metonymy as a referential phenomenon, where the name of a referent is used to stand for another referent, i.e., one conceptual entity, the vehicle (or the source), provides mental access to another conceptual entity (the target), within the same cognitive model (cf. Radden and Kövecses 1999), as opposed to metaphor which is seen as a mapping between different domains (cf. Lakoff 1987). Langacker has developed the idea of the referential function of metonymy through the notion of 'reference-point construction', whose sole purpose is to provide access to the target meaning. The reference point phenomenon highlights the ability to invoke the conception of one entity for establishing a mental connection with another. In the present paper, we will use the concept of domain matrices and reference-point constructions, but also follow the prototype-theoretical model of categorization (cf. Feyaerts 2000, Peirsman and Geeraerts 2006) to account for the understanding of humorous metonymies. This model still sees metonymy as operating within only a single conceptual domain, but considers prototypicality to be the most salient element for defining the concept of metonymy. The paper presents a corpus-based study of metonymies in staged interactions of the American television series *House M.D.* and *The Big Bang Theory*. Although mapping and script-opposition (cf. Raskin 1985) play a central role for the understanding of humorous concepts such as hyper-understanding (cf. Veale et al.) or sarcasm, the corpus analysis reveals that prototypicality is one of the major elements to be discussed when talking about humorous metonymies. Thus, in many humorous instances, our ability to draw implicatures requires us to see how a speaker's utterance metonymically activates a whole scenario (cf. Gibbs 1999). These examples will be discussed using Lakoff's structured cognitive models, as well as Feyaerts' metonymic hierarchies, which describe culturally determined conceptual patterns as 'social stereotypes'. Under this view, the prototype effects of metonymy allow us to conceive of an entire person, object, or event, by simply understanding a salient part of a person, object, or event. We use the Gricean maxims and Relevance Theory to show that metonymic connections lie at the heart of pragmatic inferencing, and that these cognitive structures provide important clues concerning basic mental phenomena. We thus take both perspectives (i.e., metonymy as a referential phenomenon and metonymy as a prototypical category) into account for a better understanding of metonymies creating a humorous effect.

Keywords: *humor; sarcasm; metonymy; prototypicality; inferencing.*

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