



**2nd International Workshop on
Social Networks and English Sociohistorical
Linguistics**

**Palacio de Valdeparaíso, Almagro (Spain)
24 April 2008**

**How Social Network Analysis can contribute to Conceptual Metaphor
Theory: A preliminary exploration**

Fiona MacArthur Purdon

José Antonio Hoyas Solís

Universidad de Extremadura

A fundamental tenet of cognitive metaphor theory (CMT), as associated with Lakoff and Johnson (1980; 1999) or Gibbs (1994), is that metaphor is not –or at least not in any important sense– a matter of language, but rather a matter of thought. That is, ‘conceptual’ metaphors or metaphoric themes like *MAN IS A MACHINE* or *ARGUMENT IS WAR* structure not only the way people talk about themselves, others or their social relations, but –more importantly– how they reason about them. Metaphor, in this view, is fundamentally ideological, and linguistic metaphors are merely the external manifestation of speaker’ profoundly held beliefs (*cf* Goatly 2007).

If this is so, an important question is how and why a whole language-speaking community may begin to use the particular metaphorical expressions that realise these underlying ideological frames, a question that CMT scholars adopting the ‘experientialist’ perspective seem unable to answer satisfactorily in all cases. While it is certainly true that certain metaphorical themes reflect fundamental correlations between two different domains (such as *VERTICALITY* and *QUANTITY* or *INTIMACY* and *WARMTH*), many of the overarching metaphors that are realised in linguistic expressions in English draw on source domains that cannot possibly be said to pertain to speakers’ everyday experience, either now or in the past. Rather, many appear to arise from experiential correlations made, even in the past, by only a small number of English speakers (for example, Naval metaphors). Why the latter type should have become entrenched in the language (and hence reflect and constitute the commonsense understanding of contemporary speakers of English) is a matter, we will argue, that can best be answered by scholars adopting Milroy’s views on the ‘norm-enforcing capacities of groups built up mainly of strong ties’ (Milroy 1987). In order to demonstrate the potential of such an approach to metaphor, we shall briefly examine some linguistic instantiations of the metaphoric theme *CONTROL OF AN UNPREDICTABLE/UNDESIRABLE FORCE IS A RIDER’S CONTROL OF A HORSE* (MacArthur 2005), which, as can be seen in the linguistic evidence of the Helsinki Corpus, begin to appear in written records from the 800’s onwards, a time when the horse-riding aristocracy of the Middle Ages formed a socially cohesive although geographically dispersed group. The mobility of its members could account for the spread of the linguistic metaphors that realise the mapping. Likewise, robust linguistic evidence is available to show how the introduction and enforcement of novel

linguistic instantiations of the metaphoric theme MAN IS A MACHINE (figurative expressions such as *cranky* or *be on/off the rails*), which begin to appear in literary and non-literary texts around the middle of the 19th century, is the consequence of the existence of a socially cohesive urban proletariat. Both metaphors, we will attempt to show, have their origins in social groups with strong network ties and spread to other sections of the speech community by speakers with looser network ties or greater mobility.

References

Gibbs, R.W. 1994. *The Poetics of Mind: Figurative Thought, Language and Understanding*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Goatly, A. *Washing the Brain: Metaphor and Hidden Ideology*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Lakoff, G. And M. Johnson. 1980. *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Lakoff, G. And M. Johnson. 1999. *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought*. New York: Basic Books.

MacArthur, F. 2005. The Competent Horseman in a horseless world: Observations on a conventional metaphor in Spanish and English. *Metaphor and Symbol* 20 (1), 71-94.

Milroy, L. 1987. *Language and Social Networks*, 2nd Ed.. Oxford: Blackwell.

Session 2 (10:30-12:00)

Salón del Conde de Valdeparaíso (2nd floor)