The Use of Figurative Language in Psychotherapy*

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Abstract

It is often noted by psychotherapists that clients frequently express their feelings through metaphorical language. Moreover, it is noted that metaphor is of great value in terms of promoting insightful perspectives in this domain. I discuss various hypotheses which seek to explain the cognitive motivations governing production of such language, namely the inexpressibility hypothesis, the compactness hypothesis and the vividness hypothesis – all of which validate the observation that the psychotherapeutic exchange naturally gives rise to metaphorical utterances. I argue that the elaborated metaphorical utterances found in psychotherapy transcripts are processed in a manner altogether distinct from that outlined by the *ad hoc* concept account of metaphor, proposed within Relevance Theory (which I take to be applicable only to the comprehension of more accessible lexical and phrasal metaphors). In line with Carston (2010), and other philosophers, I claim that when interpreting these extended metaphors the literal meaning of the expression in question is entertained and metarepresented as descriptive of an imaginary world. This metarepresented literal meaning is ultimately subjected to additional reflective inferential processing.
Keywords: metaphor, psychotherapy, Relevance Theory, literal meaning

1 Introduction

Despite many psychotherapists' declarations of interest in figurative uses of language, therapy research has remained comparatively unengaged with developments in metaphor theory (whether in pragmatics, psychology or philosophy). That the use of metaphor in psychotherapy is significant is evident from therapists' observations on their interactions with clients and from the existence of practical guidelines recommending applications of the device in this setting (see Battino, 2005; Kopp, 1995; Lawley & Tompkins, 2000; Loue, 2008; Stott et al. 2010; Sullivan & Rees, 2008). However, the interesting questions are: What is it that motivates clients' use of metaphor, indeed what motivates any of us to use figurative language? And what's more, how are metaphors interpreted and processed? Lastly, can we, as pragmaticists, learn anything from the suggestions in the aforementioned practical guides? Following a fairly detailed exploration of the psychotherapeutic discourse situation, and a review of existing research on metaphor use in this context, I shall investigate pragmatic and philosophical theories of metaphor and present certain current controversies. Of particular interest is the recent proposal that there may be two types of metaphor processing. My aims in this paper are twofold: on the one hand, I shall endeavour to shed light on some debates on metaphor within pragmatic theory, through analysis of metaphor use in this special discourse situation. On the other hand, I hope to validate certain psychotherapeutic approaches to metaphor by grounding them in existing theory and empirical evidence.

2 Defining the Domains
2.1 Psychotherapy

2.1.1 What is psychotherapy? Before exploring the use of language and metaphor in psychotherapy, it is necessary to establish the basic principles of psychotherapeutic practice.

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Broadly speaking, psychotherapy 'includes forms of treatment for emotional and psychiatric disorders that rely on talking and the relationship with the therapist' (Bateman et al., 2010: 1). Through talking we are said to undergo mental exploration of the self which aids us in understanding our predicament, in theory enabling us to resolve said predicament.

This is a broad definition indeed. There are, in fact, numerous distinct forms of psychotherapy, each governed by specific systems of beliefs, and each employing particular techniques. A more detailed characterisation of the field would identify a rough distinction between psychodynamic and behavioural practices. Historically the former is based on the work of Freud and psychoanalysis. Generally speaking, it is concerned with the underlying nature of anxiety which is assumed to be rooted in clients' background – their upbringing and development. Behavioural psychotherapy is quite different, with a primary focus on a person's observable conduct, as opposed to their unconscious 'inner world'. Behavioural therapy is now heavily influenced by cognitive science, which has given rise to the well-known cognitive behavioural psychotherapy (henceforth CBT). According to CBT, psychological distress is battling with thoughts and/or behaviours which are maladaptive. These maladaptive behaviours and destructive views are the result of perceiving the world through a 'distorting lens'. Its aim therefore is to transform our thoughts about ourselves in order to achieve a more constructive and realistic view of the self and the world. Through encouraging us to identify our own 'self-talk' and 'how it colours our view of ourselves' (Stott et al., 2010: 61) we arrive at a powerful state of self-awareness through which to achieve our desired change.

While it is interesting to consider these varied schools of thought in psychotherapy, of which there are many more, they are not of central concern for the purposes of this paper. What's more, many of what were previously distinct schools of thought are becoming increasingly unified, with many experienced therapists drawing on ideas and techniques from various schools of thought:

> … the more experienced the therapist is, the more they are just interested in communicating with the person who is coming to the room.[1]

Therefore, I shall use an overarching characterisation of the term 'psychotherapy' to refer to the general domain of structured interactions between a therapist and a client where the goal is to bring about positive emotional change for the latter party.

2.1.2 How is the discourse unique? Before proceeding further, it is important to acknowledge that the communicative situation outlined above will undoubtedly give rise to a unique style of discourse. The relevance-theoretic comprehension procedure proposes that when faced with utterances hearers follow a path of least effort in accessing and testing interpretations until their current expectation of relevance is satisfied (see Sperber & Wilson, 1995). While this procedure is likely to be triggered in the usual way in the therapy situation, its outputs will often not be of central interest or import to either party engaged in the process – client or therapist.

For example, a therapist will often not outwardly engage with (not respond to) the recovered content of the client's communicative intention. Ignoring clients' communicative intentions entirely, therapists may instead choose to focus their efforts on uncovering clients' subconscious feelings; feelings which can be masked by the superficial disguise of their words. This is particularly evident in psychoanalysis which works with the belief that we

[1] Quote taken from an anonymous interview with a psychotherapist; carried out as part of this research project.

conceal certain sorts of meanings from ourselves. For example, consider a client noting that a person looking after a sick parakeet could get infected and die. In this instance, a therapist might interpret the utterance as a veiled expression of concern – the client fears that she will damage the therapist, that her problems are contagious (Aleksandrowicz, 1962, cited in Cirillo & Crider, 1995: 514). I call this expression of concern 'veiled', since it is not meaning which the client intends to communicate, directly or indirectly (in relevance-theoretic terms, what the therapist focuses on is neither an explicature nor an implicature of the client's utterance).

As has already been suggested, therapists may also interpret clients' utterances with particular psychoanalytic theories in mind, further leading them to infer meanings which are unintended by the speaker and may be unknown to her. For example, when talking to parents about a son's bed-wetting, a family therapist might believe that they are also 'discussing metaphorically the father's own kind of misbehaviour in bed' (Madanes, 1981, cited *idem*).[2] Nevertheless, as noted in the last section, fixation on specific theories is becoming less and less common amongst psychotherapists and for many therapists there is a growing consensus that the greater their level of experience the more they will be able to transcend the boundaries of their particular theoretical orientations.

Whilst the distinctive quality of therapeutic interactions is evidently important to characterise and bear in mind when researching communication in therapy, it will not be the focus of this paper. Though I employ an umbrella term for 'psychotherapy', generalising my thoughts to all schools of practice, I adopt a more restrictive view of communication than that implied by psychotherapists. Crucially, I take into account only ostensive inferential communication, which I hope will enable me to generalise observations on the use of non-literal language in psychotherapy to the use of such language in wider contexts.[3]

2.2 What is metaphor?

Having outlined the domain of psychotherapy and discussed some of the ways in which this communicative ground is unique, I want now to focus on the heart of this paper: the use of metaphor. Defining metaphor is, unfortunately, no easy task and, as used by psychotherapists, it seems to be understood very broadly. Roughly speaking, a metaphor 'represents one thing in terms of another' (Cirillo & Crider, 1995: 512). For psychotherapists, the form a metaphor takes is usually irrelevant, with no formally observed distinction between simile and metaphor. Following Conceptual Metaphor Theory (henceforth CM), psychotherapists are often interested in clients' underlying 'dead metaphors' and how these metaphors affect and even structure clients' thoughts (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). An example of such a metaphor might be evidenced by repeated utterances of so-called 'conventional' and seemingly literal language, for instance, extensive manifestations of military terminology and imagery to describe relationships (e.g. 'He always beats me into a corner; his strategy is to …'), signifying the existence of a conceptual metaphor RELATIONSHIPS ARE BATTLES.[4] Or when someone says 'my mind just isn't opening today', this may reflect a basic conceptual metaphor THE MIND IS A MACHINE (*ibid*: 27).

[2] The sense of the word 'metaphorical' as used here by the therapist is broad and intuitive, and does not mesh with pragmatic theories in which speakers who use language metaphorically intend a particular meaning. The parents in this context do not *intend* to discuss the father's behaviour.

[3] In considering ostensive inferential communication only, I do not take into account unintended meanings, which may be hidden or suppressed. My definition of communication is more circumscribed than that of many psychotherapists who 'infer' these (unintended) meanings and take them to be 'communicated' information in the intuitive sense of the word.

[4] Following common linguistic practice, small caps are used to represent concepts.

As a pragmaticist, however, and in using observations from psychotherapy to inform pragmatics, my definition of metaphor is naturally more selective. I take the following as my working definition of metaphor: a use of language which makes the speaker and/or hearer 'think of [or see] one thing *as* or in terms of something else' (Camp, 2009: 128). Theoretically a distinction is made between metaphor and simile (that is, between 'She is a red rose' and 'She is like a red rose') and this distinction has also been backed up by empirical research. According to Glucksberg and Haught (2006), the difference in form yields a difference in processing, and therefore also a difference in interpretive effects. While this seems right for the simple cases they tested, I question the details of this distinction on the basis of examples from psychotherapy; more precisely, the extent to which the disparate processing and effects of metaphor and simile are maintained when the two figures are extended and developed over a stretch of discourse (and often combined with each other). Regarding the degree of conventionality of metaphor (or simile), at this point, both novel and imaginative uses of metaphor will be considered alongside more conventional uses of the figure.

3 The Role of Metaphor in Psychotherapy

3.1 Motivations of Metaphor Use

3.1.1 Intuitive Proposals. Let us now turn to the question: what cognitive motivations govern the use of metaphor? In answering this question, one would hope to simultaneously expound what it is about psychotherapy that makes it such fertile ground for metaphor use. Ultimately, an answer to this question should validate certain practical approaches to metaphor exploitation in psychotherapy which at present contain little theoretical grounding.

Perhaps the most well-known suggestion regarding metaphor production is the 'inexpressibility thesis' (Ortony, 1975). This is the idea that literal language is intrinsically inadequate for the expression of certain thoughts and therefore, that metaphor is 'necessary and not just nice' (*ibid:* title). Consequently, metaphor is not, as Aristotle and the traditionalists would have it, merely a decorative use of language, nor is it a 'special privilege of a few gifted speakers' (Gibbs 1994: 124), but is rather 'an essential ingredient of communication' (Ortony, 1975: 45). That is not to say that things exist which are inherently ineffable, but rather that *our* language does not have a word for those things (obviously, it does not have a word for everything). Ortony proposes that this inadequacy of literalness will most likely be evident in our expression of emotional states and feelings, due to the complex nature of these experiences. Other domains which are confusing, or with which we are not well acquainted, are also hypothesised as being difficult to talk about in literal terms; for example, in science where 'phenomena… are not just poorly (or partially) understood, but also complex and often inaccessible to the senses' (Semino, 2008: 131). Semino notes that metaphor is 'pervasive and essential' (*idem*) in this context; to illustrate consider our understanding of the heart as a pump or of an atom as a miniature solar system (*idem*).[5]

An additional proposal pertaining to metaphorical use of language is that in many contexts it represents the most economical way of expressing something and this economy of expression also succeeds in conveying precise meanings; this idea is referred to as the 'compactness thesis' (Ortony, 1975: 47).[6] This thesis rests on a reconstructionist view, which suggests that language comprehension involves hearers 'reconstructing' described scenarios

[5] Interestingly, Ortony points out that dispute of this thesis (maintaining that there is nothing which cannot be expressed in literal terms) entails that whole translations between languages should be possible. However, this claim has been widely discredited (see Quine, 1960, cited in Ortony, 1975).

[6] It is not clear if Ortony is proposing the compactness thesis as a 'metaphoric drive' or merely, a consequence (and if you like, an advantage) of the figure.

using their existing knowledge of the world (*idem*). Imagine for example that I read about a woman jumping off Beachy Head cliff.[7] I build a representation which invokes what I know about women, the act of jumping off a cliff and what I know or believe about Beachy Head. As Ortony notes, what I invoke will be 'largely experiential, perceptual and cognitive' (*idem*) and, therefore, while my representation is likely to be similar to what others invoke, it will also be unique in its details. I may infer that the woman was probably of sombre disposition at the time, that the sea beneath was very cold, perhaps I imagine the wind to have been fierce and the sky to have been dark and dramatic. It's possible that I also invoke thoughts about her family's reaction of sadness to her death which, based on my knowledge of human feelings and responses to such events. Ortony suggests that the most efficient manner in which to construct such a representation would be 'to form a mental image' (*idem*). This process is labelled 'particularisation'.

As well as ensuring that language comprehension can take place without a speaker having to explicitly state this amount of detail, Ortony suggests that this process of particularisation serves as a listener's 'digital to analogue converter: it takes him nearer to the continuous mode of perceived experience by taking him further away from the discrete mode of linguistic symbols' (*idem*).[8] Essentially, metaphors constrain and guide this process. For example, with the aforementioned scenario in mind, imagine a quote in a newspaper: 'She leapt from the cliff edge like a *victorious Olympian*'. What we know about Olympians includes abstract characteristics such as strength, success, determination. The figurative expression (in this case, a simile) is said to focus our attention on a subset of these characteristics. This subset includes features which are conceivably compatible with the topic (the woman). The resulting interpretation is thus extremely rich, with 'victorious Olympian' conveying something like 'the woman leapt from the cliff proudly, after a long struggle, in a determined manner, with a sense of fulfilment and so on.' Again, support for this hypothesis can be expected to be found in attempts to articulate complex ideas and/or intense sensory-affective experiences. Exposition of such phenomena through literal language would no doubt necessitate lengthy description, which even then may not be sufficient to capture the full meaning of the experience.

Lastly, Ortony presents the 'vividness thesis' (*idem*) – a consequence of the previous two theses. Since metaphors evade 'discretization' and maintain a greater proximity to perceived experiences, they facilitate a richer, more detailed picture that cannot be easily, or perhaps ever, achieved with literal use of language (*ibid*: 50). The greater emotive force possessed by metaphorical uses of language fosters memorability and inspires insightful understanding. This hypothesis makes some interesting predictions and recommendations for purposeful deployment of metaphor as a learning tool. Indeed, as an instigator of memorable, vivid and deeply understood descriptions, metaphor represents a most valuable tool in the search to promote novel, adaptive insight and acquire new knowledge. Supporting its worth in such domains, the author notes the use of metaphor in educational textbooks (see Pavio, 1971, cited *ibid*: 51).

On the basis of these proposals made by Ortony, it seems reasonable to suppose that the use of metaphors will often be naturally motivated by the domain of psychotherapy – a situation which routinely demands exploration of complex and confusing experiences, topics

[7] Beachy Head is a famous cliff in Southern England which sits 162 metres above sea level; it is a notorious suicide location.

[8] At the same time, people have claimed that metaphorical language 'gives us distance from topics that would otherwise be too painful for self-examination' (Cirillo & Crider, 1995: 512). While this is perhaps an accurate depiction of metaphor in some contexts, there is a certain tension between this claim and that of Ortony. It is important to clarify the disparity between these two claims, but such an undertaking lies beyond the scope of this paper.

which are poorly understood or entirely novel. Furthermore, it is a setting in which precise description can be even more important than in everyday life, since successful communication and understanding is paramount to the outcomes of the process. Nevertheless, the question remains: how should these metaphors be interpreted? As well as frequent and instinctive use on the part of a client, it also seems natural to suggest that metaphor represents a profitable device for therapists to consciously employ, given their insightful nature. Empirical support, or evidence from transcripts, would strengthen the claim that the psychotherapeutic situation motivates production of metaphorical language. Similarly, demonstration of successful therapy in which a therapist makes constructive use of metaphorical language will strengthen the proposal that such languages make an effective tool in psychotherapy.

3.1.2 Empirical Support. Wanting to make a valid contribution to the small body of research on language production, Roberts and Kreuz (1994) set out to empirically test the motivations behind people's use of different forms of figurative language.[9] In their study, each participant received a definition of a specific figurative use of language and 10 examples of that figure. Subjects were then asked to give three examples for that figure, which was intended to ensure understanding of the device. Critically, they were then instructed to list the reasons why a person might use that particular figure of speech (encouraged to provide as many reasons as possible). Responses were classified according to 19 discourse goals, with the results for metaphor summarised below:

Table 1. Percentages of subject reporting discourse goals for metaphor[10]

Discourse Goal	Figure of Speech – Metaphor
To be eloquent	.35
To compare similarities	.35
To add interest	.71
To provoke thought	.35
To clarify	.82

The value seen in the last row demonstrates that for most subjects the function of metaphor is 'to clarify'. This can be seen as support for Ortony's compactness hypothesis, which states that metaphor allows us to be precise and to portray a multitude of meanings (using comparatively few words). The discourse goal, 'to provoke thought' is also evidence of metaphor's role as an initiator of insight. And finally, 'to add interest' appears to be indirect reinforcement of the idea that metaphor exhibits a certain vivid quality which might contribute to memorability. As the authors point out, this latter result is also consistent with Glucksberg and Keysar's (1990) proposal that metaphor represents a forceful comparison, more forceful than that of simile.[11]

[9] Roberts and Kreuz analyse the discourse goals of eight forms of non-literal language: hyperbole, idiom, indirect request, irony, understatement, metaphor, rhetorical question and simile. For the purposes of this paper, however, I will focus on their findings regarding the communicative function of metaphor.

[10] This table only includes the goals which were listed by at least one third of the subjects. Eight additional goals were identified for metaphor, with six remaining goals which no subject provided for the figure. (For full results see Roberts & Kreuz, 1994: 161).

[11] Since the comparison between metaphor and simile is not of central interest in this paper, I shall refrain from discussing the degree of overlap between these two figures at length. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that Roberts and Kreuz' paper provides interesting results on this topic. It demonstrates that of the eight forms of figurative language they investigated simile and metaphor exhibited the greatest overlap in discourse goals – a rating of 0.71 (where 1.0 is perfect overlap) (Roberts & Kreuz, 1994: 161).

Additional empirical support for the aforementioned proposals relating to figurative language production can be found in Fainsilber and Ortony's 1987 paper. Their study focused on addressing the inexpressibility thesis: the idea that an essential function of metaphor is to allow the expression of thoughts which cannot be easily expressed (or expressed at all) using literal language. As noted, it is predicted that description of emotional states will reveal evidence of such thoughts on the basis that they are complex and relatively elusive. Descriptions of actions that give rise to these states on the other hand, seem more amenable to literal description since they are freely observable. A final premise is that description of intense emotional states will elicit more metaphorical use of language than description of mild emotional states. This is supposed on the basis that metaphors possess a more vivid, detailed quality which is likely to be more appropriate for portraying an image of something that is more remarkable.

Working on these assumptions, Fainsilber and Ortony conducted interviews in which they asked participants to recall situations wherein they had experienced different emotions; for each emotion they were asked to recall a situation in which they experienced that emotion to a mild degree, and a situation in which they experienced that emotion to an intense degree. Eight different emotions were tested, four of positive valence (happiness, pride, gratitude and relief) and four of negative valence (sadness, fear, resentment and shame). In an attempt to ensure significant distinction between the intense and mild situations subjects were asked to silently compare each (before talking about them). In addition, situations for each emotion were chosen in advance, at the beginning of the interview, and were labelled so that the experimenter could prompt memory of each event one at a time. For each situation (16 in total), participants were told to 'bring the incident to mind as vividly as possible', to recall their whereabouts, their company, and their actions (Fainsilber & Ortony, 1987: 244). Subsequently, they were asked 'to describe the feelings that had experienced during the event [how they felt inside], and the actions they took in response to their feelings [what they did]' (*idem*). Half of the subjects responded to the feeling question first, and half to the action question first.

After detailed coding of the transcripts, a main effect was found for description type: significantly more metaphorical productions were used by participants for describing feelings, as opposed to actions. More specifically, results showed that metaphors were used to a greater extent when describing intense emotional states, an effect which was markedly greater in the description of positive emotions. While there are some inherent design flaws in this study, the overall findings provide encouraging support for the idea that metaphor represents the only route to some perspectives, and that literal language is often not a viable alternative for expression.[12]

Taken together these intuitive proposals and empirical studies give us a good basis for predicting aspects of figurative use of language in psychotherapy. Firstly, we have solid reason to assume that metaphor production will be prolific on the part of the client since the psychotherapeutic domain so often involves exploration of thoughts which are confusing and complex. We can also infer that it will represent something 'true', in a loose sense of this word, for the speaker, given that it has arisen out of the inadequacy of literal language and therefore, represents how the speaker has perceived the experience. In this sense, it is just as important for therapists to attend to clients' metaphors as it is for them to attend to clients' literal expressions (both types of expression give insight into the mind of a speaker). Secondly, we can infer that metaphors are a most worthwhile tool on the part of the therapist,

[12] For additional empirical support for these hypotheses see Fussell, 1992 and Williams-Whitney et al., 1992. For an overview of experimental literature see Fussell and Moss, 1998.

a useful device to employ when hoping to create memorability of ideas and potential insight for the client.

3.2 Clinical Observations and Approaches to Metaphor Use in Psychotherapy

In addition to considering theoretical suggestions and empirical findings related to the use of figurative language in psychotherapy, we may also analyse practical models of metaphor use in therapy and 'real life' examples, that is, metaphorical exchanges between a client and therapist gleaned from transcripts. Enriching our knowledge of metaphor use in this way might also inform certain debates within pragmatic theory, for example regarding the nature of the distinction between metaphor and simile.

Consider the following extract taken from Kopp (1995: 29-30). Kopp was a pioneer of 'Metaphor Therapy', his theory representing 'a major paradigm shift from the traditional ways of using metaphor' in psychotherapy (Battino, 2005: 154).

Client: Bipolar illness is like being a balloon. Sometimes the balloon is so full of air that it is about to burst, and sometimes there's no air in the balloon at all, it's limp and not pretty.
Therapist: What does it feel like to be the balloon?
Client: It's scary because when I wake up in the morning I don't know if my balloon is going to be inflated or not, and not being stable feels terrible.
Therapist: If you could change something about this balloon, how would you change it? Do you even want to change it?
Client: Yes, of course I do. I guess I could tie the knot on the bottom of the balloon tighter, to make sure nothing leaks out.
Therapist: So then you would be completely stable, with no movement of your thoughts in and out?
Client: Well...I guess that's not right, I should expect that my moods will be a little different everyday...like normal people, right?
Therapist: Do you feel that your thoughts should be able to roam freely in and out of the balloon?
Client: I'd like to have greater control over this process and not just let my thoughts run away with themselves, like they seem to be doing all the time!
Therapist: So how could you regulate that flow?
Client: Maybe I could hire a guard to stand at the foot of the balloon and watch to see that the air in the balloon is flowing freely.
Therapist: You said you would "hire" a guard?
Client: Well, there's always a price to pay.
Therapist: Can you afford that price?
Client: I can't afford not to!
Therapist: So what will the guard be doing?
Client: I guess she'd stand there and either hold open the end or shut it tight, depending on what was happening.
Therapist: So who is this guard anyway?
Client: Um... I don't know.
Therapist: You said "she". Is it a female?
Client: Well, right now it's the medication, but I guess when it comes down to it, the ultimate guard is really myself.

This extract demonstrates the attainment of therapeutic insight, arguably a result of the elaborated metaphor/simile. The client says 'the ultimate guard is really myself', illustrating a realisation that she, the speaker, is ultimately in charge of her depression. Only when the metaphor becomes sufficiently developed and explored does this insight seem to be revealed. As a creator of Metaphor Therapy, Kopp adopts a specific approach to clients' metaphorical uses of language. He does not advocate avoidance of such productions, as if they were disguises for some important truth; instead, he encourages their extension, developing the metaphorical scenario. The metaphor of the balloon becomes conceptually rich, enough to serve as a frame for thinking about the issue of depression. We can see the therapist acknowledging the validity of the metaphor by asking the client 'if you could change something about this balloon, how would you change it?' One can imagine reality being temporarily suspended, or perhaps a new reality is created, one in which medical conditions are objects which can be controlled. For Kopp 'the fact that a metaphor is false as a literal statement does not address or pertain to the way in which it is true as a correspondence of similar pattern or organisation' (Kopp, 1995: 99).

Various other approaches to figurative language in psychotherapy and learning have begun to appear; for example, the practice of Symbolic Modelling which utilises Clean Language (Lawley & Tompkins, 2000). Symbolic Modelling is designed to facilitate consciousness of one's personal 'symbolic domain of experience' (ibid: xiv) and help people develop their 'metaphor landscape' (ibid: 23). Using a simple questioning technique, this approach encourages clients to explore their internal metaphors, which (consistent with conceptual metaphor theory) are seen to govern behaviour.

The idea of 'Clean Language' was created in the 1980s by David Grove (Grove & Panzer, 1989). While many therapists had noted the 'rich and disturbingly imaginative metaphoric articulations' generated spontaneously by clients (Pollio et al., 1977: 104), it was Grove who came to realise the effect of using the client's *exact* words in continuing discussions. Grove found that this technique quickly led to change in the client's perception of their trauma. And so, he created Clean Language, a model which enabled therapists to question clients about their metaphors, without 'contaminating or distorting' them by trying to paraphrase them in literal language. Using *only* the clients' words ensures that any subconscious assumptions, presuppositions and inferences on the part of the therapist do not interfere with the clients' construction of their own metaphor landscape. The questions in Clean Language are furthermore specially devised to enhance metaphors the client has already produced, and to elicit novel ones. Metaphorical productions are thus taken literally and clients are encouraged to develop and extended them. By cleansing language, that is, not allowing interpretations to be verbalised, the possibility of unintentionally influencing a client through language is reduced to a minimum.

In mild contrast to Grove's Clean Language and Kopp's Metaphor Therapy is the approach adopted within Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT). Whilst CBT therapists concede the positive and powerful value of metaphor in terms of transforming thoughts about ourselves, their focus is on how to generate constructive metaphors *for* clients. This approach follows a tradition amongst psychotherapy instruction manuals which is to prescribe set metaphors; Loue's (2008) book recommending generic metaphors for therapists to utilise being a perfect example. For example, the metaphor of a bicycle as a way to move forward (*ibid:* 21), or of depression as a broken leg – that has to be allowed time to heal before it can recover (Stott et al.: 32).

3.3 Concluding Remarks on the Use of Metaphorical Language in Psychotherapy

So far we have explored multiple perspectives on the use of metaphorical language in psychotherapy: the motivations governing spontaneous use on the side of the client; the strategic, considered application on the part of the therapist; the therapist's reaction to and interpretation of clients' productions. Informing these investigations has been research from those working in psychotherapy, but what about those working in linguistics or philosophy of language? How can pragmatic and philosophical inquiry contribute to these discussions and can our established conclusions clarify current debate within pragmatic theory on metaphor?

4 Pragmatic and Philosophical Accounts of Metaphor

4.1 A Relevance-Theoretic Approach to Metaphor

In order to present the debate I am interested in within pragmatics concerning metaphor comprehension, it is necessary to begin with a brief outline of the relevance-theoretic approach. Relevance Theory (henceforth RT) essentially claims that we approach utterances with the expectation that they will satisfy a singular Principle of Relevance (Sperber & Wilson, 1995). This notion of relevance is defined in terms of cognitive effects and processing effort. The greater the cognitive effects, the greater the relevance and the greater the processing effort, the lower the relevance. A positive cognitive effect is defined as something that contributes a 'worthwhile difference to the individual's representation of the world' (Wilson & Sperber 2004: 608). Processing effort is defined as 'the effort which a cognitive system must expend in order to arrive at a satisfactory interpretation of incoming information' (Carston, 2002: 379). An ostensive stimulus is defined as being optimally relevant to an audience if and only if (Wilson & Sperber, 2004: 612):

(i) it is relevant enough to be worth the audience's processing effort;
(ii) it is the most relevant one compatible with the communicator's abilities and preferences.

Being qualitative as opposed to quantitative, the numerical values of effect and effort are immaterial; what is important for comprehension is the two in comparison - in this sense the procedure can be considered as a kind of cost-benefit analysis. Underlying the RT account of utterance interpretation is the Communicative Principle of Relevance which states that 'every act of ostensive communication communicates a presumption of its own optimal relevance' (Sperber & Wilson 1995: 158).

On the relevance-theoretic approach, comprehension of metaphorical utterances is considered within the branch of lexical pragmatics which seeks to explain how linguistically specified word meanings are modified in use (Wilson, 2004). Word meanings can be both broadened, 'to convey a more general sense' of the word (*ibid*: 344) and narrowed to 'convey a more specific sense than the encoded one' (Wilson & Carston 2007: 232).[13] Consider the following, taken from Wilson (2004: 344-346):

(1) All doctors *drink.*
(2) The water is *boiling.*

[13] As Carston (1996) notes, other terms for broadening and narrowing include *loosening* and *weakening* and *enrichment* and *strengthening*, respectively (Carston 1996: 61).

Example (1) is an instance of narrowing; the word *drink* is used to refer to a more specific sense of the word 'drink alcohol', and the encoded meaning 'consume liquid' is not necessary conveyed. Taken as a hyperbolic use of language the expression in (2), on the other hand, demonstrates broadening; the linguistically-specified denotation of the word *boiling* is extended and in this sense might be taken to indicate that the water was uncomfortably hot, with a range of further implicatures.

For Sperber and Wilson metaphor is a case of loose use of language, lying on a continuum which ranges from literal uses of language to approximations, hyperbole and metaphor. Consider the following quote from Sperber and Wilson (2008: 84):

> There is no mechanism specific to metaphors, no interesting generalisation that applies only to them... Linguistic metaphors are not a natural kind, and "metaphor" is not a theoretically important notion in the study of verbal communication.

Like other cases of loose use of language, metaphor meaning is constructed as an *ad hoc* concept which contributes to the proposition explicitly communicated, as well as communicating a range of implicatures. In the pragmatic construction of *ad hoc* concepts, encoded word meanings are broadened and narrowed. So take the metaphor 'my mother is an angel' as an example, the lexical meaning of the word 'angel' here is merely a clue to the speaker's intended meaning, which is constructed as an *ad hoc* concept ANGEL*, roughly paraphraseable as person who is kind in nature, beautiful, pure, innocent.[14]

As discussed, the RT approach to metaphor places the device on a continuum with other loose uses of language such as approximation and hyperbole. More recent research, however, has challenged this deflationary view of the trope. Carston and Wearing (2011) observe that, unlike hyperbole and approximation, metaphors involve both broadening *and* narrowing; a single word may thus express an *ad hoc* concept whose denotation is narrower than that of the lexically encoded concept in some respects and broader in others. Consider the example below:

(3) My thesis is a *marathon.*

The *ad hoc* concept MARATHON* is said to pick out certain activities with particular characteristics; 'roughly paraphraseable as 'long, psychologically demanding and emotionally exhausting'' (*ibid*: 293). The key point is that this will not only include instances of thesis-writing, but it will also include actual marathons, as well as other instances such as the process of psychodynamic therapy. While the *ad hoc* concept includes many actual marathons, it will not include marathons run effortlessly by extremely fit athletes. Therefore, the word 'marathon' is both narrowed and broadened.

While this approach accounts for a wide range of conversational uses of metaphorical language, it is less clear that it provides an adequate account of the use of figurative language in psychotherapy. Recall the example from Kopp's transcripts, in which one of his client's described depression as a balloon full of air. The figurative meanings in this extract became considerably developed over the course of the discussion. It seems unreasonable to maintain that the therapist constructed multiple *ad hoc* concepts one after the other throughout this exchange; for example FULL-OF-AIR*, ABOUT-TO-BURST*, LIMP*. In what follows I shall

[14] It is worth noting that this account of meaning and metaphor entails that metaphor is wholly distinct from simile; the *ad hoc* concept account applies only to the former. See Carston 2002 for a discussion.

explore various alternative approaches to metaphor comprehension, all of which maintain a deeper focus on the literal meaning of the language.

4.2 Literal Meaning (Imaginary Worlds) Approaches to Metaphor

4.2.1 Two Routes to Metaphor Comprehension: Carston (2010). Consider, as Carston does, this extract from Shakespeare's 'Macbeth' (Shakespeare: Macbeth V.v. 24-30. Cited in Carston, 2010: 308):

(4) Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more: it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.

The relevance-theoretic account of metaphor previously outlined posits that we replace each of the literal lexical meanings of 'walking-shadow', 'poor-player', 'struts', etc. with pragmatically constructed *ad hoc* concepts. However, this seems an extreme, and potentially unnecessary, expenditure of effort. The linguistically-encoded concepts are closely related to each other and psycholinguistic experiments have shown us that semantic priming of a mutually reinforcing sort will ensure high activation of the literal meaning. It is thus proposed that initially hearers 'entertain the internally consistent literal meaning as a whole' (Carston, 2011) and metarepresent it as descriptive of an imaginary world. This results in a literal interpretation of the entire passage, in this case of life being an indifferent theatre performance. This representation of literal meaning is framed or metarepresented (hence kept apart from factual belief representations) and is subjected as a whole to additional reflective inferential processing. At this point, implications about life which are relevant to Macbeth in this context are derived – for example, that life is lived in vain, that it is futile and transient – representations that can be integrated with our factual beliefs.

It is suggested that this second processing route will be resorted to whenever the effort required by *ad hoc* concept formation is too great, thus it will often be employed when interpreting poetic extended metaphors. It is noted, however, that other factors may trigger the shift to this style of processing, for example how conventional the metaphor is, versus how novel and creative it is. Consider this exchange, taken from Carston and Wearing (2011: 304):

(5) Bill: The seeds were sown when you had the affair with Ron.
Mary: And you've carefully watered them for the past decade making sure the ugly weeds kept growing.

While this example is not especially poetic or even extended to a great extent, it is quite novel and one can imagine its interpretation following the same course as that outlined above for the Shakespeare example; that is, the construction of a literal scenario, from which are derived implications that can be applied to the broken down state of Bill and Mary's relationship.

It is interesting that when psychologists Pollio and Barlow compared novel and what they call 'frozen', clichéd figurative language use in psychotherapy they found that extended bursts of novel figurative language were more often related to problem setting and problem solving than frozen figurative language (Pollio & Barlow, 1977: 97). If novel metaphors are to be associated with this second processing route, it thus follows that 'literal' processing has

great potential in helping clients achieve therapeutic insight. This logical argument is consistent with psychotherapists' approach of treating metaphorical utterances literally, encouraging their figurative extension and elaboration. For this reason, I shall explore a number of approaches to metaphor that focus on the literal meaning of expressions.

4.2.2 Metaphoric World Construction: Levin (1988). Another account of metaphor which places a great deal of importance on the literal meaning of the language used and appears equally suited to many aspects of the use of metaphor in psychotherapy is that of Samuel Levin. As well as providing an account of metaphor comprehension, Levin also makes suggestions relating to the motivations behind metaphor production.

According to Levin, metaphors arise at a time in which speakers are 'conceiving *of*' certain thoughts, thereby generating 'conceptions'; a process distinct from 'conceiving' something which gives rise to 'concepts'. In the former process, that is, in conceiving *of* something, say *x,* (an object or state of affairs), we need only prepare a mental space where *x* might be placed. Thus, rather than having a clear image of *x* as we would if it had been conceived, we simply allow for the possibility of producing an image. Nevertheless, Levin goes on to suggest that in focusing on the 'unfilled area' we project schemas, these schemas are taken to be an implicit or at least potential representation of the object or state of affairs in question. A conception is thus defined as 'the schema of a possible concept' (Levin, 1988: 67).

Speaking in greater depth about the sort of conceptions that give rise to metaphorical utterances, Levin mentions 'thoughts that… lie too deep for words' (*ibid*: 134):

> Intimations, promptings of the spirit which enter our consciousness even if they do not crystallise into conceptual constructions.

Levin directly acknowledges affective experiences as archetypal examples of these intimations. Due to the complex nature of these experiences, ordinary language is ill-suited to their expression and can at best 'approximate to such expression by means of deviant sentences' (*ibid*: xiii). He describes these conceptions as being of a profound and difficult nature, and interestingly, relates them to conceptions which come about in academic science. To compare, he notes how both sorts of conceptions involve conceiving of states of affairs previously un-thought of. In this sense, Levin says, metaphorical utterances not only involve conceptions which lie beyond the conventional notions of how the world is constituted, but perhaps as a result they also involve the creation of 'new knowledge' (*ibid*: 91).

Addressing the issue of how hearers, or readers, tackle and comprehend these metaphorical utterances Levin proposes an account similar to that of Carston (2010). He suggests that when faced with a metaphorical expression, instead of adjusting the meaning of the language used, thereby making it fit to our fixed conception of the world, we construe a metaphoric world – one in which the literal meaning of the expression pertains. He describes this world as being construed by conceiving of the state of affairs that the expression, in its literal sense, depicts. For example, in interpreting the sentence 'the trees are weeping', we do not imagine that the trees are shedding their leaves or exuding sap; rather, we imagine that they are experiencing emotion. Evidently, we cannot produce a definite understanding of trees literally weeping, despite the fact that the 'interpretive imperative impels or urges the process on to completion' (*ibid*: 21). Though our efforts are ultimately doomed, it is the effort, the process of conception construction, which constitutes comprehension. For Levin 'the crediting of possibility to the state of affairs represents the meaning of the sentence' (*ibid*: 59).

Levin's account of metaphor appears wholly compatible with our proposals regarding the figure's use in psychotherapy; the circumstances and manner in which it is used by clients, and the approach of literal entertainment adopted by therapists. Supporting the inexpressibility thesis, Levin suggests that metaphorical utterances arise since 'our language is not an ideally efficient mechanism' (*ibid*: 138). Said to represent a reality, a certain truth, for the speaker, Levin vehemently encourages literal interpretation of metaphorical expressions – the only way in which hearers stand to gain insight into the internal world of their interlocutor. This theoretical support of therapists' methodology is significant and stands in direct contrast to the interpretive process implied within the *ad hoc* concept account. Levin's account furthermore entails that engaging with the literal meaning of a metaphorically used expression will signal a hearer's acknowledgement of the speaker's struggle to express and 'concretise' their thoughts, thereby validating their experience. With psychotherapy in mind, this acknowledgement would no doubt strengthen the relationship between client and therapist which is vital to the therapeutic process.

4.2.3 Perspective Shifts: Camp (2008; 2009). Elisabeth Camp's account of metaphor maintains an equally compelling grip on the importance of retaining the literal meaning of expressions. Like Levin, she believes that in some contexts metaphorical use of expressions represents the only route to some perspectives (that is, to the understanding of some phenomena). In contrast to Levin, however, who uses this belief to explain spontaneous production of figurative language, Camp uses this idea to demonstrate the subtly persuasive force that metaphor can exert.

Imagine the following scenario (similar to one that Camp sets up in her 2008 paper): Francesca has spent five years dedicated to her PhD, agonising nights spent riddled with self-doubt, fives year of constant guilt whenever she allowed her thoughts to stray on to anything but her research. Then comes her celebratory dinner, to be held at St Andrews University after her PhD viva exam, an occasion which marks the completion of a lifetime achievement she never thought she could fulfil. It is this dinner that her husband, whom she lives with in London, tells her he cannot attend due to a clashing engagement. Focusing on the fact that attending the dinner will be expensive, especially considering that it will only last a few hours, he decides not to attend. Now imagine that a year later he decides to run a marathon, a goal he has had in mind to achieve just once in his lifetime. Naturally, he has undergone extensive, gruelling training and is looking forward to having all those who have supported him being there at the finishing line. However, due to a long-standing commitment, his wife tells him she will not be able to be there at the finishing line. When her husband tries to reason that she should cancel her plans, Francesca says: 'That post viva dinner was my finishing line.'

Camp argues that this metaphor (or rather her example of it) has the ability to change the hearer's thinking in a way that a literal statement could not. It elegantly, and persuasively, highlights elements of the dinner event that, while Francesca's husband may have known them, were not in the foreground for him in his decision process. For example, he would most likely come to realise that the PhD symbolised by the dinner was physically and mentally exhausting, and that, like the finishing line of his marathon, her dinner marked the most important celebration of her achievement. Such insight, Camp argues, could not be achieved with any corresponding literal remark.

With regard to the interpretation of metaphor, Camp's approach retains a somewhat looser grip on the literal meaning of the language compared to Levin. For Camp, the literal meaning of a metaphorical expression provides the perspective for generating the intended meaning, while for Levin, the intended meaning simply *is* the literal meaning of the metaphorical expression. Notice how this differs from the *ad hoc* concept account in which

the literal meaning serves simply as a platform for generating the speaker meaning. For example, consider an utterance of the sentence below:

(6) My mother is an angel.

Camp uses the logical entry of the encoded concept ANGEL, that is a celestial being, as a perspective (a frame), for thinking about 'my mother'. In Relevance Theory, on the other hand, this logical entry functions simply as a platform or gateway to the construction of the intended meaning (which meshes with our existing conception of the world), and so it does not contribute to our interpretation in the same way or to such a great extent.[15]

Elaborating her view on the extent to which literal meaning is used in the interpretation of metaphorical language, Camp explores the difference between the imaginative act of metaphor interpretation and the act of pretence. The difference, she claims, lies with 'the interpretive direction of fit' (Camp, 2009: 113), meaning the relative level of focus dedicated to each of the subject and predicate. While in pretence the subject is 'fitted' to the predicate (i.e. the predicate is the focus), in metaphor interpretation, the subject is the main focus, the predicate is 'fitted' to the subject. To illustrate, consider the example below:

(7) I am Christopher Columbus.

If I were to pretend that an utterance of (7) is true, I would need to imaginatively transform myself into Christopher Columbus. This transformation would involve erasing properties of myself that do not exist in Columbus and endowing myself with properties that he does possess, ones that perhaps I lack. For example, I would transform into a Roman Catholic male, of Genoese nationality. Metaphorical interpretation, on the other hand, does not entail entertaining any imaginative alteration of me. Instead, Camp proposes that it entails using Columbus as a 'lens' (*ibid*: 112) to reconfigure my existing understanding of myself. This reconfiguration involves matching important characteristics of him to those that I possess and that resemble his in some way. Thus, metaphorical interpretation of (7) could simply highlight my nature as an intrepid explorer, and a pioneer of discovery. The more features that are matched, between Columbus and myself, the greater the emotional valence of the metaphor; one could say, the more effective it is.

This distinction between metaphor and pretence can be summed up in simple terms: with pretence, an object or situation *X* serves as a prop for imagining something else *Y*, while in the case of metaphor construal, *Y* acts as a tool for understanding *X* as it really is. Pretence endows *X* with the *exact* properties that are possessed by *Y*, whereas metaphor highlights properties of *X* which are similar in some significant respect to *Y*'s important properties.

Like Levin (1988; 1976), Camp calls on literary works to illustrate and further elaborate her theory of metaphor interpretation. She notes that many poems make use of figurative language in a 'deeply meant' sense, and that complete understanding of this sense may push us towards pretence. These deeply meant cases are thus more likely to involve identifying and matching as many features as possible, as closely as possible, between the framing object and the subject. If we pretend that the subject possesses properties that we rejected and imagine these to be analogous to the framing then our interpretation remains

[15] It is interesting to compare Camp's view of metaphor as a 'frame' with Davidson's account of metaphor meaning, and his notions of 'seeing as' and 'seeing that' (Camp, 2006; Davidson, 1978; Reimer, 2001). While it might seem as though Camp and Davidson's views are analogous, they are in fact wholly distinct: like fellow non-cognitivist Rorty, Davidson maintains that metaphors 'do not (literally) tell us anything, but they do make us notice things… They do not have a cognitive content, but they are responsible for a lot of cognition' (Rorty, 1987: 290).

metaphorical. If we pretend that the features are truly possessed by the subject on the other hand then our interpretation becomes more fictive and literal. Camp notes that many great artworks, such as the works of the poet William Wordsworth, are often able to provoke this sort of imaginative activity. While we may at first begin to shift our perspectives in interpreting these works, as we continue to attend to them they may become 'metaphors for reality' (*ibid*: 123). When this happens it is not the general perspective that will frame our understanding of the world around us, nor the described content, but rather we will 'see our lives through that content as interpreted from that perspective' (*ibid*: 124).

Further comparison between Levin and Camp can be noted in the degree to which they advocate full suspension of 'literal reality' when interpreting metaphorical utterances. As mentioned, for Camp this occurs primarily in pretence, but what about for Levin? At times, he seems to be suggesting that metaphorical utterances are to be interpreted in a similar way to that outlined by Camp for pretence (that is, total obliviousness of the focal subject). On the other hand, Levin also notes that 'for us, not having accompanied the poet on his sojourn and thus not having experienced the direct vision of this other reality, the descriptions are metaphors' (Levin, 1976: 159) and that 'the effort to achieve interpretive consummation is doomed, ultimately, to failure' (Levin, 1988: 24).[16] The way in which metaphor construal efforts are doomed to failure, is presumably not something that applies to pretence. It thus appears that we do not literally pretend metaphorical expressions to be true on Levin's account, but rather, we retain a sense of reality whilst construing them as a metaphoric world. While a metaphorical utterance reflects the reality of the felt experience for the speaker, and is thus not metaphorical in their eyes, it will continue to be metaphorical for the receiver (presumably, the speaker is also aware that their utterance reflects a non-literal use of language). One would expect this awareness of metaphoricity to accompany a 'metaphorical' interpretive approach, as opposed to an engagement in pretence.[17]

It is interesting to further compare the extent to which literal meaning contributes to metaphor interpretation on each of the three accounts mentioned: Carston (2010), Levin (1988) and Camp (2008, 2009). Let us first consider the paradox concerning literal meaning that has presented itself in this paper. On the one hand, it is suggested that we employ language metaphorically since literal language is inadequate (Ortony, 1975). On the other hand, it is proposed that hearers take the metaphorically used language literally. In this sense, it seems that 'the metaphorical depends on the literal to the extent that a speaker must have some acquaintance with literal interpretation … of a term in order to have some idea of the term's standing meaning' (Wearing, 2006: 330). Nevertheless, this does not presuppose that literal language would be a sufficient mode of expression for the 'literal' interpretation. On Carston's account, taking the metaphorically used language literally takes place within a metarepresentational frame and is only a temporary stage in the comprehension process. Ultimately, implicatures that are literally applicable to the metaphor topic are inferred. Although the whole literal (imagined) scenario plays an important role in constructing the final interpretation, it is not a component of that interpretation. The accordance of this view with Camp's is implied on the basis of her distinction between pretence and metaphor, and her unwavering focus on metaphor as a device for understanding real-life scenarios (as opposed to truly non-sensical worlds). We can assume that Levin too is in some degree of

[16] To an extent, one would expect this idea to carry over to at least some instances of literal language use, since no-one can ever fully grasp the experience that another person has had. This reflection contributes to the difficulties we find in Levin's account of what defines an utterance as metaphoric.

[17] An additional point of comparison between Levin and Camp relates to their respective definitions of the word 'metaphor'. For Levin, they are 'semantically deviant expressions' whose claims are 'bizarre, absurd, ridiculous, false, outlandish, non- or contrasensical' (Levin, 1988: 1). For Camp they are expressions in which there is a gap between what is said and what is meant (Camp, 2008: 4).

agreement with Carston, on the basis of his notion of 'metaphoric worlds' as distinct from our mental representation of the actual world.

Returning to Camp's work and its relation to psychotherapy, we see that like that of Carston and Levin, Camp's claims also mesh well with our earlier observations of the figure's use in this context. Firstly, her claim that metaphor often represents the only route to certain perspectives on reality; it 'provide[s] hints of truth which we could not envision if we relied only on the machinery of formal inference' (Camp, 2009: 128). This appears to be in line with therapists' literal interpretation approach, demonstrating the worth of taking metaphors seriously so to speak. Her arguments are furthermore consistent with the observed strategic deployment of metaphors by therapists. Lastly, Camp effortlessly accounts for the insight releasing potential in figurative language, thereby indirectly recommending its use in psychotherapy. She writes of the manner in which metaphor is able to highlight certain aspects of a thought or a situation, while at the same time suppressing others.[18] Likewise, she notes the ability of metaphorical utterances to extend our expressive resources and 'suggest avenues for further investigation, by presenting important features of the framing characterization that are as yet unmatched by features in the focal topic' (*ibid*: 125). Such an effect is evident in the transcript detailed in section 3.2 of this paper, in which bipolar illness is imagined as being like a balloon which may be either full of air or totally deflated and limp. The balloon metaphor in this exchange facilitated understanding of moods needing to be not just stable, but also modulated between the 'full' and the 'empty' states.

I hope that this section has demonstrated how research into the use of metaphorical language in psychotherapy can contribute to current debate in pragmatics. Specifically, the idea that there may be two types of metaphor processing

5 Future Directions and Concluding Remarks

5.1 Empirical Investigation of the Metarepresentational 'Literal' Process

I would like to emphasise that I am not dismissing the *ad hoc* concept account of metaphor entirely. In many situations, this method of processing appears to be the most cost-effective. For creative developed examples of metaphor, however, it seems as though something different is taking place. Arguably, it is these metaphors which are of most value, and therefore interest, in psychotherapy. Intuitively, the literal meaning of these examples seems to play a greater role in the interpretation process and as such, the approaches suggested by Carston, Levin and Camp, which maintain a deeper focus on the literal meaning of metaphorical expressions, appear more akin to the approach taken in psychotherapy. Evidently, however, these intuitions need to be validated with empirical data. Are we as focused on the literal meaning of extended metaphors as Carston, Levin and Camp propose?

Evidence from experiments designed to tap online processing indicates that literal meaning is indeed always activated, even in heavily-biased metaphor contexts (Giora, 1999). Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that this literal meaning lingers beyond the point at which it is relevant, that is, after the metaphorical interpretation has been recovered; however, it is suppressed at around 1000 milliseconds (Rubio-Fernández, 2007). As proposed in Carston (2011), an interesting way of testing the second processing route she proposes would be to employ a similar cross-modal lexical priming experiment to that used in Rubio-Fernández' work. To briefly outline this paradigm, subjects are presented with contexts which bias towards a metaphorical interpretation of the key word, for example 'nobody

[18] This suppression element of metaphor could be seen as a warning against *careless* deployment of the figure on the part of psychotherapists. As philosopher Moran notes 'part of the dangerous power of a strong metaphor is its control over one's thinking at a level beneath that of deliberation or volition' (Moran, 1989: 90, cited in Camp, 2009: 127). Evidently, no therapist endeavours to operate on such a level.

wanted to run against John at school. John was a cheetah', priming of target words ('cat', as a metaphor inconsistent example and 'fast' as a consistent example) is then measured at various temporal intervals from the offset of the word 'cheetah'.

One would expect that the priming results for the target word in the case of an extended or creative, novel metaphor context will converge with results from a wholly literal passage and be distinguished from the same word used to communicate an *ad hoc* concept, where, as mentioned previously, the literal meaning is suppressed around 1000 milliseconds. Giving support to an initial sustained literal mode of metaphor processing, such findings could also be taken as empirical validation of the approach adopted by psychotherapists, that of entertaining the literal meaning of figurative expressions.

5.2 Conclusion

In surveying just a small proportion of the literature on the use of metaphor in psychotherapy, I hope to have shown that there is ample evidence relating to the motivations behind figurative language production; motivations which can be applied to everyday communication, as well as to psychotherapeutic exchanges. This evidence is not only intuitive, but is empirically supported and also validated within pragmatic theory. Primarily, it seems that metaphors arise out of an inherent inadequacy of literal language for the expression of certain subjective, complex thoughts and feelings, experiences that we struggle to grasp and express. In addition, a range of other factors contributing to both its spontaneous production and also its deliberate, perhaps stylistic, use have been identified. For example, metaphor enables a speaker to represent experiences in a concise manner, which is both vivid and memorable.

It has also been demonstrated that, across the spectrum of psychotherapies there exists a common practice of responding to metaphorical language in a manner which is indicative of literal processing. The insightful consequences of such literal entertainment appear sufficiently recognised and are suggestive of an alternative route of metaphor processing similar to that outlined by Carston (2010). Nevertheless, this literal processing route remains vastly under-described, and has yet to be sufficiently backed up with empirical support. Numerous questions remain: *when* is this route of processing chosen over the process of *ad hoc* concept construction and *why*? How do factors such as aptness, conventionality and creativity interact with and contribute to processing routes? And how does this mode of processing affect the distinction between simile and metaphor, more specifically does it impact upon the allegedly distinct interpretive effects of these figures? Evidently, if we are to unite pragmatic and practical (that is, psychotherapeutic) approaches to metaphor, there is a great deal more work to be done.

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