Inference to the Best Metaphor

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I propose that we produce some of the most important inferences in a deliberative context, when we reason metaphorically. Just as we select a particular hypothesis because it covers certain facts in the best way and then explains the events, we select a particular conceptual metaphor because it allows us to mediate the social or cultural differences between the interlocutors and in this way the framing of part of the future exchanges.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In this work the target is the speaker, the producer of a metaphor. It is not about the comprehension processes to understand metaphoric expressions. It is not about the place and role of a metaphor or a metaphoric expression in an argumentative chain (standpoint, or argument, or warrant).

The specific question of this piece is: why do we use, or need to use, a metaphoric expression in an argumentative activity? With the title of "Inference to the best metaphor", I take Harman's idea to propose an explanation why we use metaphoric expressions in argumentative contexts. Particularly, I propose that we produce some of the most important inferences in deliberative contexts (or practical reasoning), when we reason metaphorically.

In other words, we deliver inferences to the best metaphor. This would be the reason why we use metaphors. Just as we select a particular hypothesis because it covers certain facts in the best way and then explains the events, we select, consciously or unconsciously, a particular conceptual metaphor because it not only covers the facts in the best way, but also because it allows us to mediate, or construct common grounds for, the social or cultural differences between the interlocutors and in this way the frame of part of the future exchanges. More importantly, we produce inference to the best metaphor (IBM henceforth) because if the metaphoric frame is challenged, we look for specific correspondences as evidence. A challenged IBM favours the

argumentativeness. This work is about the benefits of arguing by means of metaphors.

2. METAPHORS AND REASONING

The topic on metaphors and reasoning only recently has attracted systematic attention (Thibodeau & Boroditsky, 2011, 2013; Steen, Reijnierse & Burgers, 2014). But the perspective is metaphoric understanding: how the audience reacts to (or processes) a metaphorical expression.

Thibodeau and Boroditsky's (2011) study, for example, emphasizes that metaphorical recognition systematically frames metaphorical production, this is, if we are exposed to a discourse that uses the conceptual metaphors "a virus infecting the city" or "a wild beast preying on a city", those who have heard or read the former ("virus infecting a city") produce expressions suggesting to investigatie the source of the virus and to implement prevention measures to decrease the spread of the virus.

According to the results of Thibodeau and Boroditsky, the power of metaphor is covert: when given the opportunity to identify the most influential aspect of a crime report, participants ignore the metaphors; people quote or refer to crime statistics. For Thibodeau and Boroditsky (2011) even fleeting and seemingly unnoticed metaphors in natural language can instantiate complex knowledge structures and influence people's reasoning in a way that is similar to the role that schemas and scripts have been argued to play in reasoning and memory. For these authors, metaphorical frames can play a powerful role in reasoning because they implicitly instantiate a representation of the problem in a way that steers us to a particular solution. In other words, metaphors relieve the cognitive costs of thinking social issues.

3. METAPHORS AND ARGUMENTATION

The relationship between metaphors (or properly conceptual metaphors) and argumentation (or properly argumentative dialogues) has also received little attention (Ervas & Ojha, 2019; Macagno & Zavatta, 2014; Oswald & Rihs, 2014; Santibáñez, 2010; Wagemans, 2016; Walton & Hyra, 2018).

Ervas and Ojha (2019) emphasize that the revitalization of conventional metaphors in the premises are guided by the need to confirm participants' belief in the conclusion. The authors conclude that in order to produce an argument with a novel metaphorical meaning without being misinterpreted, participants prefer to make the metaphorical meaning explicit. According to Ervas and Ojha results show that it is easier to produce believable fallacies with conventional

metaphors than with novel metaphors, where the implicitness of the metaphorical meaning is abandoned in favour of the clarity and understandability of the argument.

Some ideas of Oswald and Rihs' (2014) analysis of extended metaphors come close to my proposal. Particularly, their conclusion that extended metaphors induce a constant process by which the receiver perceives its relevance and takes it as a reliable piece of information (e.g. correspondences between conceptual domains through a text). For these authors, the continuous use of a metaphorical frame in a controversial dialogical context contributes to belief fixation. The idea would be that every occurrence of an additional aspect of the source domain, to the extent that it is mapped onto the target domain in a plausible manner, may serve as a confirmation of the overall relevance of the initial metaphorical construal. For these reasons, extended use of metaphors is the result of the cumulative nature of discourse.

Oswald and Rihs' (2014) approach is, nonetheless, an echo of Blackemore's (1992) idea: tthe speaker's metaphors encourage the addressee to further process utterances to discover additional implicit contents. These are contents that "justify the speaker's utterance as the best means of representing his thoughts, and it is these implicatures which explain why even rather standardized examples of metaphor cannot be paraphrased without loss."

4. INFERENCE TO THE BEST EXPLANATION

The literature on inference to the best explanation (henceforth IBE) is, simply, massive and the approaches to the topic range from the idea that IBE and abduction are somehow the same (Thagard, 1978, 1981, 1988; Lipton, 2004: 56; Walton, 2004: 10), to that IBE is a special form of abduction (Gabbay & Woods, 2005: 270), or even that abduction is a special form of IBE (Schurz, 2007).

Harman (1965) himself points out that the Inference to the best explanation corresponds approximately to what others have called abduction, that is, the method of hypothesis. The core idea is that IBE is the inferential practice by which human beings go from the recognition that a hypothesis could explain certain evidence, to the truth of that hypothesis. For example, "when a detective puts the evidence together and decides that it must have been the butler, he is reasoning that no other explanation which accounts for all the facts is plausible enough or simple enough to be accepted" (Harman, 1965: 89). We proceed in this way daily, just like the detective, because we consider, consciously or unconsciously, that we are best justified when the hypothesis is more plausible, simpler, or less ad hoc. One of Harman's points of departure for proposing this description is the existence of the robust human experiential habit of assuming regularities and/or correlations in order

to explain a past event or to predict a future situation, such as the case of going from "All observed As are Bs" to "The next observed A will be B".

5. IBE AND IBM

Just as we select a particular hypothesis because it covers certain facts in the best way and then explains the events, we select a particular conceptual metaphor because it not only covers the facts in the best way but also because it allows us to frame our future exchanges (Lakoff, 2006).

It is pointed out that IBE is fallible, when the inclusion of additional premises can transform the inference from correct to incorrect. As such IBM is fallible, when the inclusion of additional correspondences can weaken the metaphorical inference force from accurate to inaccurate. IBE as an inferential process is more natural, simple and consistent with the given data. IBM as an inferential process is more natural, simple and consistent with the understandability (given data?). The power of IBE is its quality in explaining. The power of IBM is its quality in defining how to conceive an issue.

6. SCHEMA-IMAGE

One of the points of departure of the cognitive view on metaphors (Johnson, 2017) is that there is a pragmatic principle of continuity between body and reason. The core idea is that we have not developed two separate logical and inferential systems. In this perspective, inferences are carried out via de corporeal logic of our sensorimotor capacities. Via the source–to-target domain mapping, the corresponding logical inferences are drawn in the target domain. According to Johnson (2017), there is a definite spatial or bodily logic of containment that arises in our experience with containers:

> A. An entity is either inside the container or outside it, but not both at once.
> B. If I place an object O within a physical container C and then put container C inside another container D, then O is in D.

For example, if we take the conceptual metaphor CATEGORIES ARE CONTAINERS, then the category "human" is contained in the category "animals", which is contained in the category "living things". So, the syllogism would be:

> A'. An entity either falls within a given category or falls outside it, but not both at once (e.g. Charles cannot be a man and not a

man at the same time, in the same place, and in the same manner).

B'. If an entity E is in one category C', and C' is in another category D', then that entity E is in the category D' (e.g. all men are mortal [C' is in D"] and Socrates is a man [E is in C'], therefore Socrates is mortal [E is in D']).

CONCLUSIONS

I agree with Thibodeau and Boroditsky (2011) that it is a kind of bias to deny the influence of metaphors in our reasoning and arguments. The bias would be that we would be less rational to admit it.

In my view, IBM is a robust mechanism to fix beliefs in a distributed cognition, where biological human resources are deposited in artifacts and symbols. More importantly, in a deliberative context (e.g. political discourse), IBM is an invitation to react. From the point of view of the speaker, if challenged, the speaker's metaphors encourage the speaker himself to further make explicit the relevant mapping or other metaphoric expressions.

Certainly, there are many points that need further consideration. For example, as Gibbs & Ferreira (2011: 225) emphasize "Speakers may only intend a small part of what a conceptual metaphor makes available". Speakers may only be aware of a part of the correspondences of a conceptual metaphor. So, a difficult problem would be determining the awareness of mapping vs. degree of automaticity in production. This problem can be approached by taking some ideas from Dual Process Theory: as DPT predicts (Evans, 2010), an intuitive and automatic (system 1) way of thinking will effortlessly produce a behavior for familiar tasks because this behavior produces beneficial results. Seemingly, we would emit the best conventional metaphorical expressions to frame common issues because we have experienced beneficial results by doing it. In principle, no need for awareness of mappings. If the topic, the context and the participants demand it, we will search (system 2) for the best metaphorical construal to frame an issue looking for the beneficial results. In principle, we are to some degree aware of some important mappings. In both cases or scenarios, IBM may affect the speaker to look for robust specific correspondences (as evidence) on demand.

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