

Introduction

Analogy and Linguistic Thought

Michaël Grégoire¹

Abstract

This introductory text highlights the fundamental role of analogies and metaphors in linguistic thought and human cognition, drawing on insights from cognitive linguistics and embodied cognition. It emphasizes that these mechanisms, far from being purely stylistic, are rooted in sensorimotor experience and structure conceptualization, learning, and creativity. The analysis of epistemological issues—particularly through the study of populations such as autistic individuals—leads to questioning the strict distinction between literal and metaphorical language and to favoring enactive approaches to meaning. The contributions to this issue illustrate these perspectives across a range of objects of study, while advancing the view that analogy constitutes a central principle in the formation, evolution, and stabilization of linguistic signs.

Keywords : Analogy ; conceptual metaphor ; linguistic thought ; embodied cognition ; enaction ; conceptualization ; body-related lexicon ; submorphology ; linguistic variation ; normativity.

Résumé

Ce texte introductif met en lumière le rôle fondamental des analogies et des métaphores dans la pensée linguistique et la cognition humaine, en s'appuyant sur les apports de la linguistique cognitive et de la cognition incarnée. Il souligne que ces mécanismes, loin d'être purement stylistiques, sont enracinés dans l'expérience sensorimotrice et structurent la conceptualisation, l'apprentissage et la créativité. L'analyse des enjeux épistémologiques, notamment à travers l'étude de populations comme les personnes autistes, conduit à remettre en question la distinction stricte entre langage littéral et métaphorique et à privilégier des approches énactives du sens. Les contributions du numéro illustrent ces perspectives à partir d'objets variés, tout en défendant l'idée que l'analogie constitue un principe central dans la formation, l'évolution et la stabilisation des signes linguistiques.

Mots-clés : Analogie ; métaphore conceptuelle ; pensée linguistique ; cognition incarnée ; énaction ; conceptualisation ; lexique du corps ; submorphologie ; variation linguistique ; normativité ; neurodiversité.

¹ Clermont Auvergne University, Research on Language Lab. (UR 999).

Reflection on analogy and linguistic thought raises fundamental questions about how language structures human cognition. Far from being mere rhetorical ornaments, metaphors play a central role in the way we understand and conceptualize the world: they make abstract domains intelligible by relating them to more concrete, bodily, and perceptual experiences. This idea forms the foundation of the theory of conceptual metaphors developed by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1980, 2002), which holds that our conceptual system is largely metaphorical and that thought relies on bodily experience to organize abstract conceptual domains. According to this view, metaphors such as TIME IS MONEY or ARGUMENT IS WAR are not simply linguistic expressions, but conceptual structures that shape how we reason and act in the world; this demonstrates that metaphors are deeply rooted in cognition, including everyday life, and not only in poetic or literary language.

This perspective is part of a broader conception of embodied cognition, according to which the body plays a constitutive role in the processing of concepts and language: our ability to think and conceptualize is not independent of our sensorimotor experience, but is profoundly linked to our interaction with the physical world. Embodied cognition posits that cognitive processes depend on the characteristics of the body, such that certain forms of thought would be difficult to access without the bodily structures that support them. Mark Johnson and George Lakoff themselves have emphasized that understanding language requires embracing an embodied realism: it is not sufficient to isolate metaphorical structures as abstractions; one must recognize that meaning is grounded in sensorimotor experience.

Beyond metaphor, other cognitive mechanisms related to analogy—processes by which one situation or domain is understood in terms of another—further enrich our understanding of linguistic thought. Analogies help build bridges between conceptual domains and play a central role in creativity, learning, and the structuring of knowledge, as suggested by related approaches such as image schema theory, according to which fundamental mental structures, formed through bodily interaction with the environment, serve as the basis for analogical and metaphorical reasoning.

Moreover, the study of metaphors and their processing raises epistemological challenges when examining specific populations. For instance, research in psycholinguistics has shown that autistic individuals may experience difficulties in metaphorical comprehension, raising questions about the relationships between linguistic competence, embodied cognition, and metaphor processing. Such findings invite us to move beyond a simple opposition between metaphor and literal meaning and to integrate enactive perspectives in which meaning emerges through the dynamic interaction between subject and environment (Maturana and Varela 1994; Varela et al. 1991).

This special issue therefore aims to bring together contributions that explore these various theoretical and empirical horizons, examining how metaphors and analogies operate as structuring cognitive mechanisms of language, how they are articulated with bodily experience, and how they can be approached through interdisciplinary perspectives combining linguistics, cognitive psychology, neuroscience, and philosophy of mind.

Léna Baïsset's article explores the presence of co-referential terms in the lexicon of the human body in Spanish, focusing more specifically on pairs of words used in everyday language without any obvious semantic distinction. The central case study concerns *mejilla* and *carrillo*, two Castilian nouns designating the cheek. The question addressed is whether these terms reflect a double conceptualization of this body part that is perceptible in contemporary Castilian usage. To answer this question, the study combines two complementary approaches: a semantic analysis of attested examples, identifying the specific contexts of use for each term, and a submorphological analysis of the signifiers (Fortineau-Brémond and Blestel eds. 2018; Grégoire 2022), which brings to light the distinct notional domains associated with each. The results reveal a correspondence between the distinct usage contexts of the two terms and the identified notional domains, showing how two signifiers can coexist to designate the same bodily reality while retaining nuances of use and meaning. The study thus contributes to a better understanding of the dynamics of co-referentiality and the phenomenon of double conceptualization in contemporary Castilian.

Michaël Grégoire's contribution, entitled "Reanalyses and Multiple Segmentations of a Complex Signifier: the Case of *cou-de-pied* in French," examines the processes of construction, segmentation, and reanalysis of the complex signifier *cou-de-pied* in French. Based on the various spellings attested diachronically (*cou-de-pied*, *coude-pied*, *coudepied*, *coup-de-pied*), the author shows that these formal variations reflect competing bodily and analogical conceptualizations rooted in speakers' perceptual-motor experience. Drawing on the frameworks of enactive grammar (Bottineau 2012a, 2012b) and chronosignificance (Poirier 2021), the study highlights the dynamic, embodied, and culturally embedded nature of meaning, as well as the central role of submorphological processes in the emergence and stabilization of linguistic forms. Grégoire thus emphasizes that graphic and morphological fluctuations are not marginal anomalies, but valuable indicators of the making of meaning in language. This case study more broadly illustrates how perception, action, and social norms interact in the history of linguistic signs.

Laura de la Blanca Salgado's article, "Cognitive Boundaries of Metaphorical and Literal Language: Insights from Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)," examines the boundaries between metaphorical and literal language in order to better understand what is actually meant by "metaphor." Starting from conceptual metaphor theory (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 2002; Lakoff 2009), the author reviews a key theory of embodiment—enaction theory—that accounts for metaphor processing, and explores the difficulties encountered by certain neurodivergent groups, particularly individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), in understanding metaphorical language. The results suggest that literal and metaphorical language are processed in similar ways, which may explain the lack of consensus regarding the very definition of metaphor, a recurring issue in linguistic research. The study highlights the possibility that metaphors may not possess sufficient intrinsic characteristics to be considered a distinct cognitive-linguistic category.

In his article "A Plea for Structural Monism," **Esa Itkonen** defends the thesis of structural monism, according to which all sciences share a common fundamental structure. This bipartite structure, analogous to that of human belief, articulates a conceptual and normative framework

together with a set of empirical phenomena. The author thus distinguishes two complementary components: component A, non-empirical and non-causal, which defines the categories and norms that render phenomena intelligible, and component B, which pertains to observation and causal explanation. A central claim of the article is the asymmetry between these two components: while A can be studied independently of B, the study of B always presupposes a prior A framework. To support this thesis, Itkonen adopts an interdisciplinary approach, examining domains such as linguistics, psychology, physics, biology, and philosophy. He shows that each of these disciplines manifests, in different forms, the same structural opposition between conceptual framework and empirical data. Linguistics occupies a central place in the argument, with the Saussurean distinction between *langue* and *parole* serving as a paradigmatic example of structural monism. Finally, the article engages in a critical dialogue with positivism, certain readings of the Kuhnian paradigm (Kuhn 1962), and relativist positions, in order to show that the recognition of a normative conceptual framework is a condition of possibility for scientific knowledge, rather than a rejection of empiricism.

The four contributions brought together in this issue thus demonstrate that metaphors and analogies are neither marginal objects nor mere figures of speech, but privileged sites where the deep articulations between language, cognition, body, and norms become visible. Whether through lexical co-referentiality in the designation of the body, morpho-graphic reanalyses revealing competing embodied conceptualizations, the uncertain boundaries between literalness and metaphoricity tested by neurodiversity, or epistemological reflection on the conceptual frameworks that make the language sciences possible, each article sheds light, in its own way, on the dynamics through which meaning emerges from the interaction between experience, linguistic structures, and theoretical frameworks. Taken together, these works invite us to rethink linguistic thought as a fundamentally embodied, situated, and normative process, in which analogies and metaphors function less as closed categories than as operators of meaning structuration. This issue thus aims to contribute to a renewed interdisciplinary dialogue, capable of moving beyond traditional divides—between body and mind, language and cognition, the empirical and the conceptual—in order to better grasp the complexity of the mechanisms through which language participates in the construction of our relationship to the world.

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