Creative metaphor is a birthday cake:
Metaphor as the source of humour

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Abstract

Der vorliegende Beitrag untersucht kreative Metaphern als Form des intentionalen sprachlichen Humors. Das Hauptanliegen besteht in der Darstellung wichtiger Faktoren, die zum einen das humoristische Potenzial von Metaphern in Metapherntheorien bestimmen und zum anderen dem ‚incongruity-resolution model' in der Humorkommunikation gerecht werden. Erklärungsansätze unterschiedlicher Reichweite wie z.B. die Diaphorizität, die Inkongruenz zwischen metaphorischen Konzepten/Domänen, die Verletzung der Angemessenheit, das Fehlen des Bezugsrahmens, die Vielzahl an Interpretations-möglichkeiten sowie die „falsche" Betonung von Eigenschaften, die eingehende Zuschreibung von Eigenschaften, die humoristische Unvereinbarkeit mit dem ‚vehicle' und „Bildbrüche" (Katachrese) werden miteinander verglichen und anhand konkreter Beispiele erörtert.

The article discusses creative metaphors as forms of intentionally produced verbal humour. The paramount objective is to present a number of factors which emerge as responsible for the humorous potential of metaphors in the light of relevant theories of metaphor, as well as the incongruity-resolution model proposed in humour studies. Several explanatory points, by no means mutually exclusive, are raised viz. diaphoricity, incongruity between the concepts/domains, aptness violation, unavailability of the ground, multiple interpretations and "wrong" prioritisation of features, exhaustive attribution of features, humorous incongruity within the vehicle, and catachresis.

1. Introduction

Metaphor is here deemed as a source of conversational humour, which does not appear to have been widely investigated in humour literature so far. Even if correspondences between humour and metaphor have been mentioned (Attardo 1994; Coulson 2000; Grady et al. 1999), few writings in linguistics account for the humorous capacity of metaphors. For instance, Veale (2003) and Veale et al. (2006) address metaphor as one of the cognitive construals exploited in the game of trumping. On the other hand, Mio and Graesser (1991) investigate disparagement metaphors, testifying that those are more humorous than uplifting ones. The perspective assumed here is closest to that of a few authors, such as Fónagy (1982) or Pollio (1996), who explain the humorousness of metaphors, referring to the semantic distance between the two concepts compared. Unfortunately, this model can easily be criticised on the grounds that all metaphors, even those non-humorous, operate on some

distance between the two juxtaposed concepts, and it is thus difficult, if not impossible, to determine when it is large enough to be considered humorous, which is why other provisions need to be added to render the approach more tenable. Also, it must be highlighted that the focus here is humorousness, but not necessarily funniness (see Carrell 1997) of metaphors. Accordingly, the article addresses metaphors which display humorous potential, but need not be considered genuinely funny, inasmuch as funniness is an individual's idiosyncratic evaluation of a humorous stimulus. Additionally, attention is paid to deliberately produced humorous verbalisations, rather than slips of the tongue or linguistic lapses, which may also lead to humorous unintentional metaphors.

The notion of resolvable incongruity is the most widely espoused explanation the workings of humour within linguistics and psychology (see Keith-Spiegel 1972; Ruch 1992, 2008; Forabosco 1992, 2008; Staley/Derks 1995; Ritchie 2004; Partington 2006; Martin 2007; Dynel 2009). There is no unanimous agreement on how incongruity should be conceptualised, which is because authors adjust their postulates to the forms of humour on which they concentrate. The most general, capture-all definition appears to be the one stating that incongruity is "a mismatch, disharmony or contrast between ideas or elements in the broadest possible sense" (Attardo 1994:48). However, each of the numerous humour manifestations (e.g. pictures, drawings, canned jokes, satirical stories, etc.) has its own subordinate incongruity-based mechanism. Therefore, there simply must exist various unequivocal conceptualisations of incongruity mechanisms if they are propounded in reference to diversified humour phenomena.

Additionally, although incongruity adequately captures mechanisms underlying humorous stimuli, it does not differentiate between humorous and non-humorous incongruity, the latter causing responses such as moral disapproval, fear, shock, puzzlement or anxiety (see Berlyne 1960, 1972; Rothbart 1976; Morreall 1989, Staley/Derks 1995). In his answer to this query, Suls (1972) highlights that humorous incongruity entails unexpectedness, illogicality and ultimate resolution. Other authors endorse different, albeit not contradictory, opinions on a sine qua non for humorous incongruity, e.g. a facilitating (pleasant, safe) context (Rothbart 1976), or a playful frame of mind (Apter 1982). Most importantly, the majority of authors concur on the

incongruity resolution requirement (see Ruch 1992; 2008; Forabosco 1992, 2008; Staley/Derks 1995; Martin 2007; Dynel 2009).

Broadly speaking, the incongruity-resolution model, credited primarily to Suls (1972, 1983), as well as to Shultz (1972, 1974, 1976), holds that incongruity is first observed and later resolved, i.e. made congruous, according to an adequate cognitive rule. Again, the resolution process will manifest itself differently for each humorous form and each incongruity. In addition, it can be argued that it always takes place, even if it coincides merely with the hearer's acknowledgement that there is a humorous incongruity capitalising on a given mechanism (Dynel 2009). As Forabosco (2008) rightly posits, the element of sense is always present in the background, and the perceiver always exerts mental control over the stimulus. Nevertheless, incongruity must never be removed entirely at the resolution stage (Suls 1983; Ruch and Hehl 1998; Forabosco 1992, 2008; Attardo/Raskin 1991). A complete removal of incongruity would disallow the appreciation of two competitive meanings, and hence of the whole humorous stimulus. Accordingly, having completed the incongruity and resolution stages, the interpreter re-appreciates the nature of the incongruity and its resolution, which is compatible with Koestler's (1964) bisociation[1] (for a detailed discussion, see Dynel 2009). The incongruity-resolution mechanism is realised in humorous metaphors in a number of ways, which will be presented in this article.

2. Metaphor in focus

Numerous conceptualisations of metaphor have been proposed in literature. In simple terms, metaphor expresses similarity between the semantic vehicle (base or source) and the semantic tenor (topic or target), viz. a less accessible notion to be defined. Metaphor is an inexplicit comparison of two seemingly unrelated concepts, one familiar and one unfamiliar, as a result of which features of the unknown one are revealed by analogy. In cognitive terms, metaphor is widely acknowledged to be the selective systematic mapping of conceptual structure from one conceptual domain onto another (e.g. Tourangeau/Sternberg 1981, 1982; Black 1962; Tversky 1977; Malgady/Johnson 1979; Glucksberg/Keysar 1990; Glucksberg/McGlone 1999;

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[1] The issue of bisociation is frequently raised in literature on humour and metaphor (e.g. Koestler 1964, MacCormac 1985, Coulson 2000).

Gentner 1983; Gentner/Wolff 1997; Shen 1999)[2]. Domains as cognitive entities comprised of mental experiences, representations and concepts, which are characterised along relevant dimensions (Langacker 1987). When recognising a given metaphor, an individual perceives a concept from one domain in terms of its similarity to a concept from the other domain (Tourangeau/Sternberg 1981, 1982), which may constitute only an ad hoc category (e.g. Glucksberg/Keysar 1990; Chiappe et al. 2003). Therefore, the source and the target manifest common features/attributes, which constitute the relational basis, i.e. ground/tertium comparationis of the metaphor (Black 1962, 1979; Tversky 1977; Ortony 1979; Tourangeau/Sternberg 1981), which is the foundation of the emergent meaning. However, besides the similarity evoked, there will always be residual dissimilarity between the tenor and the vehicle. This dissimilarity is dubbed "tension" (Tourangeau/Sternberg 1982).

Crucial to the present discussion is the dichotomy between dead and creative metaphors. Dead, stock or conventional metaphors come into being in the process of gradual conventionalisation and literalisation of initially semantically deviant expressions and start to function as lexicalised polysemous senses, often coinciding with idioms (see Traugott 1985[3]; Lakoff 1987; Gentner/Wolff 1997; MacCormac 1985, for a different view see Lakoff/Johnson 1980). In contrast, creative/novel metaphors, which are the focus of attention here, rely on active creation and comprehension processes. While speakers creatively produce novel metaphors, listeners must actively participate in the process of interpretation to infer the intended meanings (MacCormac 1985). Such metaphors are non-existent in semantic memory and are unlikely to fit any pre-established source-to-target mappings. In other words, two concepts are combined, producing both semantic anomaly and new conceptual insight (MacCormac 1985). Creative metaphors are unconventional verbalisations rooted in unprecedented ways of viewing the world (Black 1962; Miles 1967). Furthermore, such metaphors can be conceived of in terms of those that have to be elucidated, rather than those that elucidate

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[2] The models propounded by various authors offer diversified hypotheses on mapping mechanisms.

[3] The author also dichotomises *institutionalised* metaphors into *completely dead* and *conventional* ones. While the completely dead ones (e.g. "veiled") are entirely devoid of the original metaphorical force, conventional ones (e.g. "a snowball's chance in hell") still manifest some metaphorical value.

(see Mooij 1976). They are also not cognitively economic, since they entail conceptual effort on the part of the speaker and the hearer.

Finally, it should be mentioned that a number of taxonomies of metaphors depending on their surface structure have been proposed (e.g. Miller 1979; Brooke-Rose 1958). All the same, what ought to be emphasised is that the majority of cognitivists and pragmaticists concentrate on metaphor following the 'X is Y' linguistic formula for the sake of clarity of presentation. Almost all the examples presented here subscribe to this pattern. Irrespective of the stylistic formulation, the paradigm for understanding of metaphor is: X is LIKE Y in respect of Z, where X is the tenor, Y the vehicle, and Z the ground (Leech 1969). Contrary to the tenor and the vehicle, the ground does not normally appear in the surface structure and must be inferred.

3. Metaphors and humour

The global explanation for the humorousness of metaphors is their novelty and surprising form, coupled with the fact that they recruit unconventional vehicles, sometimes in the form of elaborate ad hoc concepts. Consequently, humorous metaphors produce incongruity at the level of the hearer's lexicon. Needless to say, the feature of novelty is not reserved to metaphors carrying humorous potential but it is their intrinsic feature, as long as the hearer is not familiar with a given verbalisation. This concurs with the well-grounded postulate that novelty and the element of surprise are the sine qua non for humour's occurrence.

The central humorous capacity resides, however, in the incongruity between the topic and the vehicle and their attributes, which are, nevertheless, somehow compatible (congruous), even if this may be difficult to observe initially. This phenomenon can be approached in a number of ways. Several postulates are propounded below with a view to describing (even if not necessarily unequivocally determining) the underpinnings of incongruity-based, humorous metaphors. It should also be mentioned that these linguistic phenomena can be observed both from the speaker's/producer's and the hearer's/listener's[4]/interpreter's perspective, for the latter is considered to be

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[4] Technically, the interpreter may also be a reader. However, given that conversational humour is most frequently (albeit not always) spoken the terms "hearer"/"listener" as used.

able to conduct the comprehension process, as intended by the former. The method of presentation assumed here conforms to the interpreter's purview.

3.1 Diaphoricity

The problem of the tenor-vehicle incongruity can be viewed from the perspective of the dichotomy between epiphors and diaphors championed by Wheelwright (1962) and MacCormac (1985). Epiphors, coinciding with the widely accepted view of metaphor, hinge on similarities between concepts. By contrast, diaphors convey new meanings by emphasising dissimilarities, i.e. the tension or incongruity, between concepts. However, there exist neither pure epiphors nor pure diaphors. Each metaphorical expression bears a varied number of features typical of both the types. In some metaphors, epiphoric elements, i.e. analogies, are so salient that any semantic anomaly instantly recedes to the background, whereas in others, it is diaphoric elements that abound and are the most salient, which is why finding similarities between the two concepts is difficult (MacCormac 1985). It emerges that most humorous metaphors subscribe to the diaphoric category, the tension between the tenor and the vehicle being more conspicuous than the ground, i.e. the tertium comparationis. Humorous metaphors centre on unusual and unprecedented correspondences between concepts.

(1) ***Billboards are warts on the landscape.***[5]
     attributes of the tenor: are placed on buildings or around a piece of land, used for advertising, etc.
     attributes of the vehicle: blemishes, appear on skin, have no purpose, etc.
     ground, i.e. similarity: something that mars something
     meaning: Billboards mar the landscape.

(2) ***This roll is a dune.***
     attributes of the tenor: made of dough, something to eat, etc.
     attributes of the vehicle: a hill of sand, something to walk on, etc.
     ground, i.e. similarity: something that crumbles easily
     meaning: This roll crumbles and is not very nice.

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[5] All the examples come form the author's private corpus of conversational humour garnered on the basis of media language (inclusive of random Internet resources) and real-life conversations held by the author with her friends and acquaintances.

A metaphor is humorous when the dissimilarities between the tenor and the vehicle loom large, while the points of convergence are covert. The perception of incongruous ideas with the simultaneous expectation of a metaphorical comparison forces the listener to seek similarities among the attributes of the concepts, and thereby to resolve the incongruity. When found, points of resemblance between the two concepts are all the more striking, granting the interpreter the pleasurable feeling of cognitive satisfaction consequent upon his/her arrival at a resolution and the resultant appreciation of humour. Closely related to this is the postulate of incongruity between the tenor and the vehicle, conceived of as two juxtaposed domains/concepts.

3.2 Incongruity between the concepts/domains

According to the comparison view, although the topic and the base should be as similar as possible, the similarity should not be transparent, and hence too easy to observe (see Malgady/Johnson 1976). On the other hand, advocates of the anomaly viewpoint attach importance to the greatest possible difference between the two juxtaposed elements (e.g. Campbell 1975). Similarly, Tourangeau and Sternberg (1981, 1982) propose that metaphor's aptness correlates positively with the dissimilarity between domains. Tourangeau and Sternberg postulate "the greater this dissimilarity, the better the metaphor" (1981:30). As signalled earlier, the distance between concepts and domains to which they belong may be regarded as a basis of humour (Fónagy 1982; Pollio 1996), notably resolvable humorous incongruity. Thus, one characteristic feature of humorous metaphor is resolvable incongruity between the domains/concepts compared. Two juxtaposed concepts stem from disparate ontological domains, e.g. concrete vs. abstract, inanimate vs. animate, non-human vs. human, with relevant attributes being transferred from one to the other. This process can give rise to sub-types of metaphors, e.g. personification or 'animalification', which appear to be particularly prolific mechanisms of humour.

(3)   *That guy is a dog wagging his tail, whimpering and salivating*.
        animalification
        a man vs. an animal
        ground: symptoms indicating a craving for something
        meaning: That guy wants something and can't wait to get it.

(4)   ***I'm a doormat in the world of boots.***
reification
a person vs. a thing
ground: being trodden on
meaning: I'm treated very badly by everybody.

(5)   ***This coffee is a killer with an Afro hairstyle.***
personification
a thing vs. a person
ground: causing death, with some special layer (as if hair) at the top
meaning: This coffee is very strong/much too strong and has a foamy layer of grounds at the top.

Although technically immeasurable, the strength of the dissimilarity between domains represented by the vehicle and the tenor purports to be an undeniable correlate of humour. Each incongruous juxtaposition of concepts produces a perceptual surprise engendering humour, perhaps even prior to the stage of resolution per se, on condition that the interpreter experiences cognitive control over a textual chunk (rather than anxiety, for instance). Full appreciation of the metaphor and its humorousness comes with the hearer's realisation that the incongruous concepts deriving from incongruous domains are in a way congruous. In other words, the incongruity between the tenor and the vehicle must be resolved so that the full humorous potential and the metaphorical meaning can be acknowledged. When the tertium comparationis has been found, the interpreter may go through bisociation processes, oscillating between the inter-domain incongruity and congruity.

(6)   ***Her laugh is an old Chevrolet starting up on a below-freezing morning****.*
human-related vs. inanimate
ground: a wheezing or grinding sound
meaning: Her laugh is very unpleasant, coarse and chortling.

(7)   ***This meat is fresh asphalt.***
food vs. something inedible
ground: gummy
meaning: This meat is very chewy.

(8)   ***Universities are compost heaps.***
prestigious places of education vs. putrefying organic waste
ground: causing growth and development
meaning: Universities proliferate knowledge and cause societal development.

Needless to say, the sole existence of incongruity between domains does not immanently determine the humorousness of a given diaphoric metaphor, which may be novel and perceptive, but not humorous. As earlier mentioned, it is difficult, if not impossible, to propose a hierarchy of domains which would explain why some metaphorical elements are more distant and thus produce a more humorous effect than others, especially given that many source concepts are constructed ad hoc and are very elaborate (ex. 5, 6, 7, 11, 12). It could be tentatively hypothesised that it may be not the degree of distance per se but the character of the domains involved that accounts for the humorous potential. Humorous metaphors may be pivoted on source domains which are perceived as being tabooed, or at least somehow inappropriate. As a result, the emergent meaning is also somewhat frivolous or carries disparagement, but never against the addressee who should find it humorous (and not derogatory, as the direct target of such a jibe does). By contrast, the seriousness of the meaning to be conveyed will, in all likelihood, impede any humorous effect that might otherwise arise due to the distance between the domains compared.

(9)   ***Her haircut is a prop for a horror movie.***
        a hairstyle vs. a scary horror prop
        ground: being scary
        meaning: Her haircut is so awful that it scares people.

(10)   ***Her voice is an ice cube dropped down one's back on a hot, sunny day.***
        a woman's voice vs. the shocking sensation caused by an ice cube sliding on a very warm body
        ground: something unpleasant and shocking
        meaning: Her voice is very shocking and unpleasant, sending shivers down the hearer's spine.

(11)   ***She was a madman trigger-happy with an Uzi, producing a stream of unintelligible words.***
        a talkative but unclear speaker vs. an insane, and thus uncontrollable, person using a weapon
        ground: uncontrollable production of copious numbers of something
        meaning: She blabbered on uncontrollably.

(12)   ***During the party, I was the only one in a nudist colony wearing a duffel coat.***
        a person at a party vs. the sole person wearing warm clothes among naked people

> ground: the feeling of anxiety-provoking difference
> meaning: During the party the speaker felt very awkward and alienated.

(13) ***A man without a wife is a statue without pigeons.***
> a single man vs. a statue not infested with pigeons
> ground: being overburdened with problems
> meaning: A single man is not overburdened with problems.

There have been attempts at verifying semantic distance of words and concepts on the basis of subjects' ratings (Godkewitsch 1974; Hillson/Martin 1994), which corroborate the incongruity-resolution theory of humour. However, the authors merely check the funniness of forged collocations (Godkewitsch 1974) or metaphors (Hillson/Martin 1994), when those operate on concepts from distant domains, on the belief that "greater distance = greater incongruity" (Martin 2007:94). Regrettably, no distance measurement techniques are elucidated (Nota bene, Hillson/Martin (1974) also testify that metaphors are funnier if they can be resolved, which the authors dub within-domain resolution, here conceptualised as the tertium comparationis/ground between the tenor and the vehicle.). In conclusion, a disparity, conceived also as incongruity, between domains seems to be a plausible parameter explicating the humorous force of metaphors. Unfortunately, the distance between the domains appears to evade mathematical computation or measurement. Therefore, whether a distance is humorous can be evaluated only intuitively. It is noteworthy that such immeasurability is also a point of critique raised against explanatory humour theories, be it incongruity or script opposition (Raskin 1985). Those obtain, practically without fail, on provision that the text (or a different stimulus) is taken for granted as being humorous.

The two points discussed above appear to be the two superordinate tenets, applicable practically to all instances of humorous metaphors. However, a number of subordinate and non-obligatory mechanisms accounting for humorousness of metaphors can also be found.

3.3 Aptness violation: less salient features and unprototypical vehicles

Another method of explaining humorous incongruity in metaphor is to observe that its aptness is violated (see Tversky 1977; Ortony 1979; Chiappe et al. 2003). Similarly, humorous metaphor can also be conceptualised in terms of the violation of Tourangeau and Sternberg's (1981, 1982) salience-dictated diagnosticity principle, or Gentner's (1983) connectivity and systematicity

principles. In essence, since the function of metaphor, as traditionally proposed, is to elucidate an unknown concept, an apt metaphor revolves around the salient feature(s) of the vehicle and, usually, non-salient feature(s) of the tenor to be captured. By contrast, humorous metaphors need not be formed to elucidate the meaning of an unknown or elusive concept, but are primarily oriented towards producing a humorous effect. This is why they tend to be hinged on a reverse mechanism. Consequently, an apt humorous metaphor may be formed by combining a (contextually) salient feature of the tenor, which is thus fully comprehensible, and, what is more significant, a far less salient (ex. 14) or non-salient (ex. 15) feature of the vehicle. In other words, the most salient feature of the vehicle evoked does not have to be the one which is chosen as the one attributed to the tenor.

(14) **This place is the bottom of the last man sitting on too short a toboggan.** *(said upon entering a mountain chalet in winter)*
attributes of the vehicle: hanging down, dragged on snow, very cold
meaning: This place is freezing cold!

(15) **I'm a Tarzan.** *This is an easy question!*
attributes of the vehicle: uncultivated and maladjusted man, surrounded by monkeys and apes
meaning: I'm surrounded by people who do not think.

By the same token, humorous metaphors are formed in defiance of the premise of aptness conceptualised by Glucksberg and Keysar (1990) and Glucksberg/McGlone (1999), according to whom the vehicle ought to be prototypical or emblematic of the attributive ad hoc category which it epitomises, being subject to the interpreter's nearly effortless understanding. If a metaphor is to elucidate a given concept, its comprehensibility should be the function of the prototypicality of a metaphorical vehicle for a particular category. Prototypicality coincides with what is perceived as conventional in a given culture, even if untrue or based on a stereotype. Moreover, as Glucksberg/Keysar (1990) observe, this phenomenon accounts for metaphorical systems of conventional, viz. systematic, metaphors proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980). All such tenets stand in opposition to humorous metaphoricity. Verbal humour is frequently correlated with novelty and unconventionality of expression, which may be governed by exclusive aptness of the metaphor at its heart. The creativity of humorous metaphors is anchored in the fact that the vehicles chosen are not conventional. Being less familiar, if

not unfamiliar, to hearers, they appear more problematic cognitively and are not subject to their automatic inferencing. This process of meaning construction may initially be hindered, especially when the vehicle is linearly (over)developed and conceptually complex, and hence difficult to conceive of.

(16)   ***Using a complex, sophisticated technique to attract a man is preparing a gourmet French meal for a Labrador retriever.***
        attributes of the vehicle: the meal is very expensive and effortful, while the breed is known for its gluttony (it devours a lot of food), which means that it will eat anything and the effort devoted to preparing the meal is superfluous
        meaning: Using an elaborate technique to attract a man is unnecessary, as it does not take a lot for a man to let himself be lured.

(17)   ***The new employee is a tortoise with arthritis.***
        attributes of the vehicle: the tortoise is commonly believed (even if wrongly) to be very slow, while one with arthritis will be even slower
        meaning: The new employee is very slow.

Conceptualised in either way, aptness violation contributes to the incongruity between the two concepts juxtaposed in a metaphorical comparison. Additionally, sometimes the complex vehicle may manifest a subordinate humorous incongruity, which must be resolved before the main incongruity is tackled, leading to the hearer's appreciation of the metaphor's meaning and humour. The next three sections aim to provide further consequences of aptness violation.

3.4 Unavailability of the ground

Although the features characteristic of the vehicle may be many, it is only some, usually the most salient, that must be given priority in the metaphor comprehension process (see Tversky 1977; Ortony 1979; Glucksberg/Keysar 1990). Nonetheless, it happens to be the speaker's intention to produce a metaphorical expression based on not only a less salient feature but also a most unlikely property of the source, which causes the hearer's difficulty in finding any tertium comparationis/ground. In such diaphoric metaphors only incongruities between the concepts are striking, while there is no (instantly) perceptible similitude, i.e. congruity between them. Searching for an adequate feature, the interpreter is likely to activate the most salient features, which emerge as hardly mappable onto the tenor. Being cognisant of the fact that the hearer will not appreciate or prioritise the relevant but covert attributes of the

vehicle (or the tenor) forming the ground of the metaphor, the speaker ultimately clarifies the meaning by explicating the tertium comparationis, thereby divulging the meaning of the metaphorical comparison.

(18) **This idea is a Christmas cracker**… *one massively disappointing bang and the novelty soon wears off.*
attributes of the vehicle: associated with Christmas joy, containing confetti and sweets, made of colourful paper and cardboard, etc.

(19) **My manager is a seagull**…. *she flies in, makes a lot of noise, s***s on everything and then leaves.*
attributes of the vehicle: a bird that lives at the seaside, eats mainly fish, bothers holidaymakers, etc.

(20) **Men buying lingerie for women are little kids buying cereal.** *They take the stuff they have no interest in just to get the prize inside.*
attributes of the vehicle: children are attracted to colourful packages, choose those with chocolate, cannot choose which brand they want, etc.

(21) **Life is a box of chocolates**[6]… *There is a variety but you always pick the worst one because the nicest ones have already been taken.*
attributes of the vehicle: there is a variety, you pick what you want, you never know what flavours there are, etc.

(22) **Marriage is an asparagus**… *It is always bland no matter what the spouses do with their relationship to make it more attractive.*
attributes of the vehicle: a vegetable that is long and green and has shoots at one end, can be regarded as a gourmet vegetable, can be prepared in a variety of ways, etc.

On the other hand, the speaker may deliberately fail to explicate the ground and leave room for the addressee's interpretation, which is a case discussed in the next section.

3.5 Multiple interpretations and "wrong" prioritisation of features

While the previous category embraces cases of metaphors hampering the hearer's perception of the tertium comparationis, which needs to be elucidated by the speaker, there can also be instances of the incongruous juxtaposition of elements open to multiple interpretations, as intended by the speaker. The humorous potential of metaphor can stem from the equal likelihood of mappability of a number of properties of the base onto the target. Because

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[6] This example was initially used by Forrest Gump, who intended the metaphor to be understood differently, i.e. you never know what you may get.

there is no salient feature that can be unequivocally transported onto the tenor, humorous metaphors are open to multiple interpretations. Nota bene, open-endedness and interpretation variability are immanent features of all creative metaphors (cf. Carston 2002). Those of a humorous nature may exploit features which do not emerge as the most easily mappable ones.

This multiplicity of meanings is the outcome not of the hearer's misinterpretation, but of the speaker's underlying objective to produce a metaphor leading to ambiguity of meanings, which is typical of many a humour form (see Raskin 1985). Admittedly, "the right" interpretation may be non-existent, for the speaker's aim is to have the hearer oscillate between alternative mappings. Therefore, the hearer is left with a number of competing inferences, which contributes to the humorous effect. The incongruity comes into being not only at the intersection of the tenor and the vehicle, which are rendered congruous in each alternative interpretation, but also at a higher level, namely between the competing inferences. This higher-level incongruity is resolved when the listener understands which of the mapping(s) is/are indeed meant by the producer of the metaphor or when the hearer realises that the latter intends this ambiguity to arise.

The phenomenon of multiple interpretations may be explained on the same grounds as the category discussed earlier. While in non-humorous metaphors, only some of the features of the vehicle are salient and only some are normally attributable to the topic, in humorous ones, any features can be prioritised and assumed as the tertium comparationis. In humorous metaphor, indiscriminate importation of features from the vehicle to the topic takes place, regardless of the degree of their salience and relevance to either the vehicle or the tenor. If priority is given to non-attributable, albeit salient, features of the vehicle, absurd humour comes into being.

(23) ***Her face is jelly.***
salient attributes of the vehicle not mappable onto the tenor: eaten for dessert, having a certain fruit flavour, made from gelatine and sugar, etc.
attributes of the vehicle mappable onto the source: artificial, translucent but coloured, set and still but shaky when touched, etc.
meanings:
Her face is artificial, due to the strong make-up she wears.Her facial complexion is very light, as if translucent, with foundation on it.

Her facial expression does not change, as she always keeps a stiff upper lip.
Her facial contours are saggy.
absurd meanings:
Her face can be eaten for dessert.
Her face has a fruit flavour.

(24) **Love is a runny nose.**
attributes of the vehicle: a common ailment almost everybody experiences, passes after a week or so even when one takes no medicines, everybody hates it, numbs the senses of smell and taste, makes one use a lot of handkerchiefs, etc.
meanings:
Love is a common ailment.
Love passes after a week or so.
Love always gets one sooner or later.
Love passes by itself.
Everybody hates experiencing love.
Love numbs the senses of smell and taste.
Love makes one use a lot of handkerchiefs.

To recapitulate, the multiplicity of meanings engenders ambiguity and, partly, the resultant humorous incongruity. The interpreter generates a number of meanings, being unable to distinguish only one (when the topic is indeed unknown and there are no contextual factors facilitating the choice of the right interpretation), and simultaneously enjoying the plausibility or absurdity of them all. Secondly, humour originates partly from the incongruity between the topic and each feature arbitrarily attributed to it from the vehicle. This incongruity is also resolved when the interpreter realises that the emergent meaning is plausible or absurd.

3.6 Exhaustive attribution of features

There is yet another potential explanation for humour in metaphor related to the issue of aptness and multiple feature attribution. Accordingly, it may be consequent upon exhaustive mapping of features of the source concept onto the target concept. This entails transferring many, and even all, features of the base onto the topic without any adjustments, which is a violation of Tourangeau/Sternberg's (1981, 1982) postulate that the vehicle's qualities attributed to the tenor must be appropriately transformed to suit the new domain. In humorous metaphors, the interpreter pays no heed to the matching

and alignment processes or to the verification of whether the features are salient for the vehicle or attributable to the topic. In consequence, all features are conveyed from the vehicle to the tenor. As a result of this indiscriminate feature importation, the hearer visualises the target precisely as the vehicle.

(25) ***Discotheque lights are glowing pimples.***

(26) ***My beauty is a retirement pensioner.***

Admittedly, this visualisation is dependent on the hearers' processing and their literal treatment of the statement. However, it is undeniably prompted by the metaphor's diaphoricity.

3.7 Humorous incongruity within the vignette of the vehicle

A different source of humour in metaphors is not only incongruity between the tenor and the vehicle but also incongruity inherent in the evocation of the vehicle alone. In other words, the conceptualisation of the source concept carries its own incongruity and humour, often bordering on the absurd. The interpreter first resolves this subordinate incongruity, and then tackles the higher-level one, i.e. between the vehicle and the tenor, finding the relevant attributes and the ground.

(27) *Without my glasses,* ***I'm a short-sighted mole which has lost its contact lenses.***
incongruity within the vehicle: a mole vs. wearing/losing one's contact lenses
topic-vehicle incongruity: a person without glasses vs. a blind animal which wears lenses
meaning: Without my glasses, I can't see almost anything.

(28) ***My hangover is elephants' ballet performance held on a ship in a heavy storm.***
incongruity within the vehicle: subtle ballet vs. clumsy elephants on a ship
topic-vehicle incongruity: the feeling of hangover vs. a ballet of elephants on a ship
meaning: My hangover makes me feel as if the room rocked, jumped and swirled.

(29) ***You're a lame snail on crutches.***
incongruity within the vehicle: a snail vs. being lame and using crutches
topic-vehicle incongruity: a person vs. a snail on crutches
meaning: You're incredibly slow.

(30)   ***I'm a nutty squirrel with advanced sclerosis.***
incongruity within the vehicle: a squirrel vs. suffering from sclerosis
topic-vehicle incongruity: a person vs. a sclerotic squirrel
meaning: I hide or put things away and then forget where.

Some might claim that if humour is couched in one chunk of the metaphorical text, this cannot be regarded as a case of a humorous metaphor per se. However, it is here argued that this may actually be considered germane to a metaphor, since the textual chunk does assume the form of this figure and there is also incongruity between the metaphor's two elements.

3.8 Catachresis

The final phenomenon explaining the humorousness of metaphor is the concept of catachresis, often used synonymously with the term of "mixed metaphor". The term derives from the Greek word "katachresis" meaning "extension" or "transgression" and is reported to have been introduced in antiquity in reference to transfer of meaning. Nowadays, catachresis is commonly understood as an abuse or perversion of metaphor by an inapt juxtaposition of words arising due to the latter's literal meanings or due to the violation of the traditional decorum principle. More relevant in the context of the present work is the use of two metaphors one after another in a single textual chunk, leading to a stylistic clash. Although mixed metaphor is normally considered to be a (humorous) mistake, it may also be applied consciously for the sake of generating humour. Moreover, it could be hypothesised that a jocular effect is all the greater if two juxtaposed vehicles belong to the same conceptual domain or very similar ones (e.g. animals, food, parts of the body), giving rise to the meta-level incongruity contingent upon the unexpected similarity, which is resolved once the meaning of the whole utterance is appreciated. Needless to say, either of the metaphors may be conducive to the humorous (resolvable) incongruity on the strength of factors presented earlier.

(32)   *She's got the little **eyes of an obese pig** that **bulge like frogspawn** when she's surprised.*

(33)   *On New Year's Day, **groups of winos and idlers are crawling onto the pavement like worms after rain** and **noble citizens, honey drunken bees,** bump into walls.*

4. Conclusion

The article aimed to account for the humorous potential of intentionally produced, novel metaphors. It can be safely concluded that the global mechanism underlying all humorous metaphors, as predicted, is resolvable incongruity, which can be explained on various grounds. None of the explanations is claimed to be a prescriptive rule which, when followed, will invariably lead the speaker to create a humorous metaphor. The hypotheses propounded in this article are only interpretative tools, facilitating the verification of humour in metaphors.

First and foremost, creative metaphor appears to be humorous if the juxtaposition of concepts is unprecedented and strikes the interpreter as surprising. This corresponds to the incongruity between the domains and the diaphoricity of the comparison, thanks to which incongruities between the tenor and the vehicle are transparent, while the few similarities are covert, at least initially, and entail considerable cognitive processing on the interpreter's part. Nevertheless, when the ground and common feature(s) of the two concepts are discovered, the incongruity is resolved. Additionally, the humorous type of metaphor tends to manifest peculiar aptness, as less salient features are foregrounded, while the vehicle need not be a prototypical member of an ad hoc category. Sometimes, relevant features of the vehicle, and thus the source, cannot be inferred at all, given the non-salience and/or unmappability of the focal feature(s). Accordingly, the hearer is not capable of making any inference, while the ground is duly explained by the speaker. On the other hand, the hearer may arrive at multiple interpretations, some of them far-fetched or absurd, leading to humorous ambiguity and higher-level incongruity. In extreme cases, the interpreter may conduct exhaustive attribution of features and, ultimately, visualise the target as the source. Yet another factor contributing to the humorous effect is resolvable incongruity within the conceptualisation of the vehicle alone. Finally, in the case of catachresis embracing two novel metaphors, an additional layer of resolvable incongruity emerges between two adjacent metaphors, especially if they exploit vehicles belonging to one domain.

It should also be emphasised that the article concentrated on aspects relevant exclusively to metaphors, while those may be combined with other humorous linguistic devices. Therefore, although verbalised as a metaphor, a textual

chunk may be humorous thanks to, for example, an internal pun. Also, no claim is ventured that the list of explanations provided is exhaustive. After all, **metaphor is a birthday cake**, i.e. it has many tiers, there is some for everybody interested, and everybody interested derives pleasure from digesting it.

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