

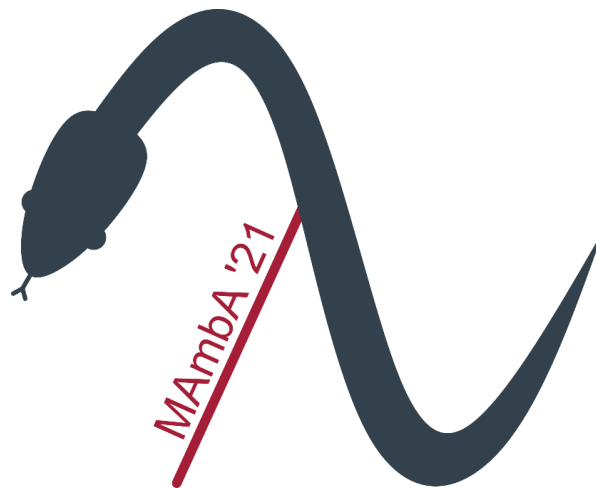


Interdisciplinary Workshop

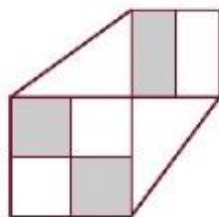
# Metaphor and Ambiguity Analysis

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Booklet of Abstracts



Organized by the RTG 1808: 'Ambiguity – Production and Perception' and the CRC 833: 'The Construction of Meaning' (Project A1)



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## Foreword

Dear workshop participants,

In 2019, we realised that there have not been many attempts to model metaphors from a semantic perspective, as formal semanticists tend to focus exclusively on literal meaning. Thus, we had the idea to create a new species of metaphor workshops with a rather unusual name, and our little “MAmbA” (“Metaphor and Ambiguity Analysis”) was born. The starting point for our workshop was the observation that many metaphors are ambiguous between a literal and a metaphorical reading (e.g. “I can’t breathe in here” means either “I literally cannot breathe” or “I feel confined”). By bringing together metaphor researchers from various disciplines, we aimed for a formal analysis that can account for both readings. However, the initial plan had to be cancelled, when in April 2020 the Corona virus spread all over the world and our MAmbA had to be quarantined. Now, we are happy that the workshop can finally take place in an online format. At this point, we want to stress that we are very thankful that none of our speakers had to cancel their participation despite the difficult times we are facing.

Although we are sad that we cannot welcome you in Tübingen in person, we are sure that we will nevertheless have an inspiring and enjoyable workshop together. We are looking forward to a productive exchange between various disciplines, which is already reflected in the interdisciplinary and methodological range of abstracts submitted. We enjoyed reading all of them, and we are now extremely curious about your talks.

Of course, the workshop would not have taken place without the support of the RTG 1808: “Ambiguity – Production and Perception” and the CRC 833: “The Construction of Meaning” (Project A1: Combinatory Meaning Adaptions at the Semantics/ Pragmatics Interface”), which are funded by the DFG (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft = German Research Foundation). We would like to thank all the people involved in organising the workshop, especially Inken Armbrust, Matthias Bauer and Claudia Maienborn.

We are looking forward to the workshop!

Natascha Elxnath & Sarah Metzger

## Cognitive selectivity and metaphor meaning processing

Mayowa Akinlotan  
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Matching a metaphorical form with its meaning and function requires that the context of use is shared by the speakers and audience. Following this line of thought, the present study shows (a) how negative metaphors are creatively constructed for a range of positive functions within a Nigerian-contextualised Christianity discourse, and (b) how the practice in (a) provides insights into metaphor-meaning ambiguity resolution. A principle of cognitive selectivity combined with frameworks of critical metaphor analysis shows that resolving ambiguity in metaphor-meaning processing should begin with the principle that speaker/user of a metaphor selects the specific form of metaphor from a pool of options, and that such selection is motivated by the understanding of the user that the intended audience will not only identify its form but also that its specific functional purpose within the temporal context is stored in the metaphorical cognition of both.

- (1) 'Let fire consume this place...'
- (2) 'Today we are here for war'

One domain that demonstrates this principle is the Nigerian Christianity language where mapping between form, meaning, and function of metaphor is restricted to a metaphor community operationalised by a two-way cognition system that selects form, meaning and interpretation. For instance, expressions (1-2) ride on negative metaphors (i.e. use of negative concepts such as 'war' and 'warring', 'fire' and 'fire consumption') which would produce positive meanings, given the actual and shared interpretations by the intended. The study therefore argues that resolving ambiguity in metaphors requires a contextual mapping provided by the cognitive workings of the speakers and the hearers.

## **Metaphor as problem causer and problem solver A rhetorical functional perspective in diplomatic interactions**

Selina Bernarding  
Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen

Diplomatic interactions in crisis situations gear towards complex political problem-solving tasks. When analyzing diplomatic texts they show a striking use of metaphor by diplomats at critical points of interaction. Metaphor as a stylistic and argumentative device thereby can play a crucial functional role in achieving these problem-solving tasks. The rhetorical potential of metaphor in use thereby largely results from the metaphor's potential for ambiguity.

Case analyses show that if this ambiguity potential is met uncooperatively, metaphor can cause problems, either when its understanding is not secured by the interlocutor and the metaphor remains ambiguous or if it is used unilaterally to make uncooperative communicative procedures (e.g. threats) under the guise of metaphor. Conversely, metaphor is able to function as a problem solver when both diplomatic communicators use it as a tool for reaching the global goal of diplomatic agreement. Extending metaphor mutually and in interaction with one another represents a model case of diplomatic metaphor use. It enables the interlocutors to create an external negotiation space which, if accepted, can help to solve the real problem through playfully working on the actual negotiation task.

The presentation will analyze cases of metaphor use from authentic diplomatic negotiations in situations of political crisis under a rhetorical functional perspective. The focus thereby lays on metaphors with a certain degree of creativity and innovation rather than on established metaphorical terms which have already found their way into political language. The analytical perspective will concentrate on the interactional aspect of the texts and take into account the individual goals as well as the shared goal of the interlocutors. For both, metaphor has the potential to become a powerful tool in diplomacy.

## Oscillations between metaphorical and non-metaphorical readings of genitive constructions in poetry

Laura Bon  
Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen

In this talk, genitive constructions and composites are compared theoretically and on the basis of a literary example (the 3rd poem of Marion Poschmann's cycle of poems *Kindergarten Lichtenberg, ein Lehrgedicht*). Both genitive constructions and N+N-composites combine two nouns A and B and establish a semantic relation between them. Theoretically, it has been shown that those two linguistic phenomena based on binary noun-combinations nonetheless differ with regard to the spectrum of possible semantic relations between their constituents A and B and metaphorization and lexicalization processes.

Poschmann's poem establishes an interesting and close connection between genitive constructions and composites by systematically using genitive constructions as substitutes or anaphoras for lexicalized composites.

In the analysis of the poem it is pointed out, for example, that the substitution of the expression *Leibnizkekse* by *die Kekse des Philosophen* reveals the differences between these two grammatical structures and uses them to produce aesthetic and interpretative effects. The genitive construction generally tends much more to a metaphorical interpretation and thus introduces a potential ambiguity between metaphorical and literal sense(s) here. The analysis and interpretation of the poem shows that this happens in even much more variable and surprising ways than expected. In addition, the expression *die weißen Streifen der Vernunft* (which substitutes *Zebrastreifen* in the poem) is examined for which, in the context of the aforementioned poem, the (simplified) structural principle of metaphor interpretation („In metaphors, the grammatical head is reinterpreted“, see Rapp 2020) persists latently despite massive co-textual counterpressure (towards a literal or metonymic reading). Thus, the „metaphorical head principle“ is not as strongly co-textually overwritten as in the example *die Gräten einer Harfe* analysed by Rapp & Engelberg 2018. Furthermore, the expression *die weißen Streifen der Vernunft* shows that the binarity of metaphorical or metonymic genitive constructions potentially allows the blending of different perceptual perspectives or voices.

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## Justification of metaphorical interpretation via contextual coherence with a heterogeneous context and its QUD

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Consider the following example taken from Bach's novel *Marsmädchen* (Hamburg: Friedrich Oetinger, sec. 5):

(1) *Ich muss raus, ich kann hier nicht atmen.*

[I need to get out of here, I can't breathe in here.]

Sentence (1), as many others, can be given a literal or a metaphorical interpretation. Now, should it be read literally (a) or metaphorically (b)?

(a) The speaker suffers from dyspnea.

(b) The speaker feels confined.

We see this case as a rather common situation in linguistic interpretation. The interpreter has to make a decision that she should be able to justify. This justification, we claim, crucially depends on **context**.

Among the elements of context that count in this sort of decision, we will focus on the interpreter's epistemic state and consider: *previous discourse*, *elements coming from the perceptual surroundings* of the utterance or inscription of the sentence (an illustration in a book, the objects surrounding the interlocutors in a conversation), and some *background information*. The decision also depends on what is perceived as the topic under discussion. We will consider that a discourse's topic under discussion is outlined by the context's Questions Under Discussion (QUD). We will claim that the questions in the QUD are explicitly introduced or otherwise inferred from *previous discourse*, *elements coming from the perceptual surroundings* and *background information*.

Which reading of (1) should one prefer? Our answer will be that one should prefer the one which secures **contextual coherence**. For an interpretation to be coherent, two conditions must be met. First, it must address the topic under discussion outlined by the QUD issued by the context. Second, it must be externally consistent, that is, the interpretation must tie in with the three different sources of information that make up, together with QUDs, the context. Our proposal will leave room for complex cases in which more than one interpretation is reasonable, but it will also help see how one can argue for preferring one over another.

## ***Kunstmantel vs. Stimmungskiller*** **What makes a good compound metaphor?**

Natascha Elxnath  
Universität Tübingen

Engelberg & Rapp (2018) show that compounds seem to be less suitable candidates for generating novel metaphors than other linguistic forms. For instance, while the genitive construction *Mantel der Kunst* ('coat of art') typically evokes a metaphorical reading (coat that is worn by art = the protection that art enjoys against critique), the respective compound *Kunstmantel* ('art\_coat') does not convey this metaphorical meaning so easily. The reason for this is the inherent ambiguity of compounds. *Kunstmantel* is, due to the underspecified relation between its constituents, far more flexible with regard to its interpretation possibilities than the genitive construction: the compound could also mean 'coat that is made out of artificial material', 'coat that people wear when producing art' or 'coat that is considered art', etc. Thus, establishing a metaphorical reading in this case would only work with massive contextual support.

However, my talk aims at showing that certain compounds are – despite their inherent ambiguity – very capable of enforcing metaphorical interpretations. Based on an explorative corpus study, I claim that compounds with relational heads are particularly suitable for creating metaphors. Compounds with the head *-killer* ('killer'), for instance, frequently come with metaphorical readings (e.g. *Stimmungskiller*, 'mood\_killer' = thing or person killing/worsening the mood). This is because the *kill*-relation (which triggers the metaphor) is already suggested through the semantics of the relational head, and is therefore more prominent than other possible relations that are only available via conceptual associations (e.g. 'someone who kills when being in a particular mood'). Thus, while the metaphorical interpretation of *Kunstmantel* is only one among many other conceptual readings, the *kill*-relation in *Stimmungskiller* stands out from the crowd of other possible relations as it is lexically provided by the head.

In my talk, I will elaborate on that by discussing further features of felicitous compound metaphors (e.g. semantic conflicts, analogical interpretation).

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## **On the metaphoric interpretation of compounds**

Stefan Engelberg  
Leibniz Institut für Deutsche Sprache, Mannheim

Irene Rapp  
Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen

The talk addresses the question how metaphoric interpretations of compounds come about. Empirically based on a large database of German compounds we will show that compound metaphors involve partly compositional and partly pattern-based processes.

We will firstly sketch some basic ideas of our approach: (i) Metaphoric interpretations are triggered by semantic or pragmatic conflicts. (ii) Local binary morphosyntactic structures (especially compounds and adnominal genitives) play a particular role in metaphor formation. (iii) Compound interpretation is based on semantic patterns that allow (to a certain degree) the context-free interpretation of compounds. (iv) Compounds fulfill lexicalization conditions better than other local binary structures.

In the second part of the talk we will show how different types of lexical representations (for simplex words, compounds, compound constituents) and representations of patterns (compound patterns, metaphor patterns) account for the different strategies of metaphor formation observable in our database.

## Is this metaphorical or not? Fact and fiction in the literary text

Monika Fludernik  
Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg

Starting out from some examples discussed in my *Metaphors of Confinement* (2019), I will focus on literary texts in which the line between literal and metaphorical (allegorical) readings is being intentionally obscured. I will discuss several types of this strategy (when it is a strategy) or of this problem for interpreters and try to outline a historical perspective on the ambiguity in question. Example texts will come from the Middle Ages, the early modern period all the way to postmodernist fiction. Ultimately, the aim of the presentation is to discuss the functions of such ambiguity in relation to readers' negotiations of the fact—fiction divide.

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## **The two-layered structure of metaphorical interpretations**

Jacob Hesse  
Ruhr-Universität Bochum

In contrast to literal interpretations metaphors possess a two-layered structure because even after the content of the metaphorical interpretation is grasped, the literal meaning of the respective expression remains active in a certain sense. As Donald Davidson, Richard Moran or Elisabeth Camp among others have pointed out, this is because metaphors do have a certain non-propositional, imagistic aspect, which makes us see something as something else. If the productive tension between the literal and the metaphorical meaning is lost, the metaphor has to be considered as dead. Its interpretation has in this case become a conventionalized/lexicalized meaning. A similar productive tension between lexicalized meaning and another contextually derived interpretation of an expression is not given in ordinary cases of the resolution of lexical ambiguities as well as of contextual enrichment or loosening. In fact, metaphorical interpretation are perpendicular to such ordinary cases of contextual adjustments. The metaphorical interpretation of “Peter is a bank” does for example have very different outcomes relative to which lexical meaning of “bank” is chosen as the basis for metaphorical interpretation. In my talk I will outline this two-layered imagistic aspect of metaphors and explicate it also on the basis of psycho- and neurolinguistic evidence concerning metaphor processing. Then, I will describe shortcomings concerning this aspect in some contemporary approaches towards metaphors. One main problem of many approaches lies in the fact that they focus primarily on truth-conditional contents speakers intend to convey with metaphors. I will argue that a plausible and convincing theory of metaphor will have to be able to incorporate and explain the described imagistic or non-propositional aspect and account for the fact that it's not a mere side effect but in some sense constitutive for metaphorical interpretations.

## **God as potter and man as pot** **Reflections on metaphor and mythos in the light of Rom 9:20b–23**

Joel Klenk  
Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen

Religious speech is sometimes interpreted in categories of myth and *logos*, literal and metaphorical speech (Jüngel, 1974). In the interpretation of speech about God, a clear distinction between actual and metaphorical speech, mythic-narrative from doctrinal-dogmatic, or factuality and fictionality is often attempted (cf. Zimmermann, 2003). In my presentation, such a clear distribution will be questioned with the help of an example from Paul. In the so-called 'Israel chapters' in the Letter to the Romans (Rom 9–11) numerous metaphors for attributing God occur (Gemünden & Theißen, 2009). Right at the beginning of the argument, Paul describes God as a molder and potter of man who in turn is described via the imagery of clay and vessels (cf. Rom 9:20f).

But what is the similarity-relation (cf. Koch, 1994) between god and craftsman, man and product? In older research it has already been questioned that man can simply be identified with a clay vessel. With one stroke, man is denied his personhood, his responsibility, and his right to counter. Dodd effectively called this metaphor the "weakest point in the whole epistle" (Dodd, 1949, p. 159). Even though this statement can be agreed with, this paper tries to go beyond this accusation and to understand better its meaning through a historical contextualization. In Paul's discourse traditions (cf. Koch, 1997) there are different readings and interpretations of God as a molder or potter: How can myth and metaphor be related here? What does a continuum between image domain and target domain mean for the semantic content of the speech of God as creator and potter? How is humanity understood in this extended metaphor (cf. Crisp, 2008)?

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## Figurative meaning and grammar

Louise McNally  
Universitat Pompeu Fabra

In this talk, I begin by briefly summarizing my ongoing work with Alexandra Spalek, in which we show that event referential components of meaning can be traced in figurative uses of verbs. I then contrast our observations with cases from the literature on idioms in which event reference is clearly not preserved from the literal source of the idiom, in light of the discussion in Gehrke & McNally (2019). I propose that the observed patterns in the data can be accounted for if we combine Bowdle & Gentner's (2005) Career of Metaphor theory with some specific assumptions about the morphosyntax/event reference interface that I have been developing in ongoing work. The overall program can be viewed as complementary to Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson 1980), offering what Gibbs (2009: 31) considers essential for that theory (and is arguably needed by most or all existing theories of figurative language), namely an element to help "better articulate what empirical hypotheses and experimental predictions arise from more linguistic analyses" of such language.

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## On the disambiguation of literal and non-literal readings

Sarah Metzger  
Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen

In recent years, more and more researchers have started integrating abstract, or even figurative uses of words into their lexical analyses (Spalek 2012,2014,2015; McNally & Spalek 2017; Lukassek & Spalek 2017; Fraser 2018, 2020). Yet, despite some attempts at disentangling the two readings (e.g., Pragglejaz 2007), the distinction between literal and non-literal readings has proven a difficult issue. Whereas some researchers have tried to solve this issue by mainly basing their judgements on the intuitions of annotators (Pragglejaz 2007; Cameron & Maslen 2010), others assume that lexical meaning is essentially underspecified (Börjesson 2014). Still others postulate that the distinction between literal and figurative readings should be abandoned altogether (Bartsch 1996; Arrighi & Ferrario 2002; Bazzanella & Morra 2010). In this talk, I will provide empirical evidence that the distinction between literal and non-literal readings is not only useful, but also necessary. Furthermore, I will argue that the markers *regelmäßig* ('regular') and *sozusagen* ('so to say') can be used as a diagnostics to disambiguate literal and non-literal readings. This claim was tested in a corpus study. In this study, the co-occurrence of candidates of metaphorical markers such as *sozusagen* and *regelmäßig* with literal and non-literal readings were analyzed. The so-called contradiction test was used as an independent annotation criterion. The rationale behind it is that the same meaning cannot be affirmed and negated at the same time: while it is possible to take up and negate the non-literal use of a predicate with *not really* without resulting in a contradiction, this is not possible for literal uses of the same predicate. As expected, a majority of sentences with *regelmäßig* and *sozusagen* received a non-literal reading. I conclude from this that *regelmäßig* and *sozusagen* can serve as a linguistic diagnostics to disambiguate literal and non-literal readings.

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## Is figurative interpretation a case of ambiguity?

Michele Prandi  
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My contribution aims at analysing the relation between ambiguity and metaphor, and, more generally, figurative interpretation.

Conventional metaphors are encapsulated in the complex meaning of consistent linguistic expressions: the meaning of Dante's lines *Midway in the journey of our life I found myself in a dark wood*, for example, instantiates the conventional metaphorical concept LIFE IS A JOURNEY within a specific expression. According to my hypothesis, living, creative metaphors are associated with conflictual complex meanings that challenge basic conceptual structures: for instance *The green woods laugh* (Blake). However, metaphors are not encapsulated within the meaning of the expression but are the outcome of a process of interpretation that takes place at text level. The proof is that one and the same complex expression is frequently compatible with both metonymy and metaphor. Blake's line *The green woods laugh*, for instance, behaves in this way. Metonymy attributes laugh to some people walking in woods. In the case of metaphor, two options are available: either some sounds to be heard in woods are seen as laughs, or woods, in that they laugh, are seen as human beings.

If my hypothesis is true, such a kind of ambivalence is not a form of ambiguity. Ambiguity is a property of the meaning of a complex expression, which, for lexical or syntactic reasons, happens to identify not one but two processes. When a complex meaning is open towards either metaphor or metonymy, by contrast, it is no way ambiguous, for one and only one conflictual process is framed; the ambivalence belongs to a specific level of figurative interpretation, and may only be resolved within the boundaries of a given text. Figurative interpretation is restricted to conflictual complex meanings, and is autonomous from both sentence meaning and the general, Gricean process of interpretation leading to a contingent message that involves any kind of linguistic expression.

## Albertus Magnus, alchemical ambiguity, and the Queen of Elves

Curtis Runstedler  
Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen

Trinity College, Cambridge MS R.14.44 contains an unlikely alchemical dialogue between the late medieval scientist Albertus Magnus and the Queen of Elves. The late medieval practice and reception of alchemy was ambiguous; praised for its possibilities to prolong human life, eliminate poverty, and potential allegories of Christ through transmutation, while simultaneously condemned for its alleged fraudulence, demonic agency, and chemical dangers. Indeed, the collaboration between medieval scientist and Elf Queen seems ambiguous, since “elvysse” behaviour usually results in ulterior motives, manipulation, or their unattainability due to their supernatural existence between worlds. Yet this alchemical dialogue presents a positive collaboration between the two figures, one that is seemingly benevolent and constructive. How can we interpret ambiguity in this dialogue as a reader? And how can we challenge such ambiguous readings to better understand it?

This paper argues that reading this poem as an exemplary narrative not only provide clarity to the previously mentioned ambiguities in the narrative, but also suggesting validity to their alchemical pursuits as well as their unlikely collaborations. In addition, the poem is explicitly exemplary, which provides conclusiveness and a sense of clarity to the alchemical direction and goals by means of achieving alchemical and spiritual success. By reading this seemingly ambiguous dialogue as a late medieval *exemplum*, both the reader and aspiring adept discovers the “right path” for alchemical transmutation and effective conciliation between the natural and supernatural.

The paper aims to illustrate possible approaches to understanding the ambiguity of not only the identity of late medieval “elvysse” depictions, but also the ambiguity of alchemy as a late medieval study and practice. The poem suggests a validation of this practice, presenting it as a legitimate scientific endeavour. Moreover, this exemplary approach to ambiguity suggests possible resolutions or understandings to the questions raised by alchemical ambiguity. Consequently, the characters in this poem promote metaphorical collaboration in order to achieve the “right path.”



# Annotating and modelling ambiguity and figurative language of German particle verbs

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German particle verbs (PVs) pose a specific challenge for computational tasks and applications, because the particles are highly ambiguous; e.g., the particle "an" has a partitive meaning in "anbeißen" (to take a bite), a cumulative meaning in "anhäufen" (to pile up), and a topological meaning in "anbinden" (to tie to) (Springorum, 2011). In addition, particles often trigger meaning shifts of the base verbs (BVs), cf. Springorum et al. (2013); e.g., the PV "abschminken" with the BV "schminken" (to put on make-up) has a literal meaning (to remove make-up) and a shifted, figurative meaning (to forget about something).

In the first part of the talk I will present and discuss a variety of data collections with human judgements on particle meaning components and particle verb meaning shifts: compositionality ratings (Bott et al., 2016), domain-specific sentence generation (Schulte im Walde et al., 2018) and analogies in meaning shifts (Köper and Schulte im Walde, 2018). In the second part of the talk I will present quantitative multimodal computational models and qualitative analyses of PV compositionality and figurative language (Bott & Schulte im Walde, 2018; Köper & Schulte im Walde, 2016; 2017).

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## Domain modifiers and metaphorical functions

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Formal semanticists have a tendency to see metaphor as a phenomenon that is locked inside the lexicon and that plays no role in the compositional system. One of the problems for such a view comes from the phenomenon of domain modification. In phrases like “a political storm” or “to damage emotionally” the modifiers (“political”, “emotionally”) play a crucial role in shifting the head (“storm”, “damage”) to a metaphorical interpretation (Sullivan 2013, among other). These metaphorical meanings can not come “pre-packaged” out of the lexicon, because they depend on what modifies them. An additional complication is that the domain specification need not even be local or explicit, but can be sentential (“Emotionally, the child is damaged”) or contextual (“The child is damaged”, in a discussion about emotional abuse).

My proposal is to model the metaphorical potential of words in an “intensional” way: as a function from domains (as “indices”) to denotations. The noun “storm”, for instance, can be assigned a function that yields a different kind of storm in the academic, emotional, financial, political, ... domain. Conceptually, these functions can be defined over conceptual spaces (Gärdenfors 2000), in terms of structure-preserving mappings. Compositionally, their arguments can be fixed contextually or through a modifier. And with the appropriate grammatical assumptions, these functions might also operate in idiomatic metaphors (like “kick the social bucket” Gehrke & McNally 2019).

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