

Bridging the gap between conceptual metaphor and embodied experience

One of the central tenets of conceptual metaphor theory (CMT) is that the system of conceptual metaphors is experientially based. The relationship between our embodied experiences of the world around us and the system of conventional conceptual metaphors, however, needs to be further explored. Johansson Falck and Gibbs (2012), show that metaphorical language including the terms *path* or *road* is structured not only by motion metaphors such as ACTION IS MOTION, LIFE/A PURPOSEFUL ACTIVITY IS A JOURNEY, and PURPOSES ARE DESTINATIONS, but also by people's embodied experiences of the specific artefacts referred to by these terms. Central properties of the artefacts and particularly their functions (cf. Gibson 1979) appear to shape metaphorical language and thought. Very little, however, is still known about the ways in which people's embodied experiences of specific source domain concepts are used, or not used, in metaphorical ways.

This paper is a corpus linguistic analysis of the collocational patterns of the English term *bridge* from the *Corpus of American English (COCA)*. My main aim is to investigate the patterns involving metaphorical and non-metaphorical language use in relation to our embodied experiences of real world bridges. Questions being asked are a) What words collocate with *bridge*? b) What types of collocations are used with metaphorical *bridge* instances and what types with non-metaphorical *bridge* instances? c) How can the tendencies for some bridge collocations to be metaphorical and others to be non-metaphorical be explained? and d) Are metaphorical *bridge* instances connected with certain aspects of our experiences of bridges, and non-metaphorical bridge instances with others, and if so which and why?

The results further supports studies suggesting that metaphorical language involving artefacts is connected with function (cf. Johansson Falck and Gibbs 2012). The metaphorical bridge primarily has a bridging function. It *bridges gaps, differences* and *divides*. Non-metaphorical bridges, on the other hand, are primarily connected with very specific traffic scenes involving *roads, rivers, traffic* and *spans* (i.e. with ones that may be too specific to serve as useful metaphorical source domain concepts). More generally, the study shows how corpus linguistic investigation may be used to inform theory.

Keywords: metaphor, extended embodiment, artefacts, collocations, cognitive salience

References:

Gibson, James. 1979. *The ecological approach to visual perception*. Boston: Houton Mifflan.

Johansson Falck, Marlene & Raymond W. Gibbs Jr. (2012) 'Embodied motivations for metaphorical meanings.' *Cognitive Linguistics* 23(2): 251-272.

Marlene Johansson Falck, FD, Docent
Universitetslektor i engelsk språkvetenskap
Institutionen för språkstudier
Umeå universitet
901 87 Umeå
090-786 60 04
090-786 60 23

[Mer info](#)

Marlene Johansson Falck, Ph.D
Associate Professor/Reader in English Linguistics
Department of Language Studies
Umeå University
SE-901 87 UMEÅ
+46-90-786 60 04
+46-90-786 60 23

[More info](#)
