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The never changing metaphors - introduction to thematic section *Metaphors in specialised language*

In this thematic section, we shall focus on metaphors in computer specialised language. The main purpose is to discuss, show and elaborate on how computer metaphors function. During the years I have worked with the linguistic topic of metaphors, and I have realised that it in fact is highly controversial. Metaphors in specialised language (Language for Special Purposes) can be seen as controversial too. Therefore, we will touch upon two subjects: metaphors in general and metaphors in LSP texts, which follow computer metaphors.

I was very grateful to Professor Henning Bergenholtz when he asked me to edit this thematic section, because it gives me the possibility of opening a debate on how metaphors function, not only in a LSP text, but also in texts in general. It gives me the possibility of showing how carefully substantiated demonstrations of how metaphors function in computer texts may help us reveal the status of metaphors. A carefully substantiated demonstration of how metaphors work can always be seen as a good argument in the discussion of the status of metaphors.

In the early twentieth century we learned from Frege and others that the literal language was the most appropriate tool for the objective characterisation of reality. We learned from Davidson that literal language is basic and fundamental for studying language, and therefore metaphors have, in addition to its literal sense, no other sense or meaning (according to Davidson 1980: 30). However, in the last two or three decades we learned that this was wrong. As Ortony writes in his “Metaphor and thought” we now live with the knowledge that the objective world is not directly accessible, but is **constructed** on the basis of the influ-

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ences of human knowledge and language (Ortony 1998: 2). Therefore, to characterise reality we do not delimit ourselves to talk in literal terms: we use metaphors. And as it appears from his book (Ortony (ed.) 1998) even the scientists who talk about so-called hard facts, e.g. the physicists, depend on, and use metaphors when they characterise their aspects of reality. Metaphors are necessary, and not just nice, as Ortony already claimed in 1975.

In the last years our ears have been filled with the idea-that metaphors are primary to everyday language. In the linguistic discussion on metaphors it is normally assumed that our everyday life is filled to the brim with metaphors: we have seen many examples of metaphors, but it has not been shown that people in fact use these metaphors. On the contrary some scholars have pointed out that the assumption that our everyday lives were filled with metaphors was not empirically substantiated. Strang wrote in 1982 in his review on G. Lakoff & M. Johnson: "Metaphors we live by" that he saw wide gaps between the authors' evidence and their conclusion, and he wrote that they were "drawing vast conclusions from casual evidence" (Strang 1982: 135). Furthermore, Smith wrote: "Lakoff and Johnson do present many examples from their three categories of metaphor, but even here the lack of concerns for prior research is evident" (1982: 131). When the same ideas were introduced to Danish men of letters in the early 1990s, Hauge contested Lakoff and Johnson's empirical basis: "As I see it the empirical evidence is not substantiated". And as I showed (Grevy 1999) in the latest issue of *Hermes*, many of Lakoff & Johnsons metaphors can not be found, even in very large text corpora. The question is: do metaphors only live in everyday language as ghosts?

Perhaps we must assume that metaphors are primary to specialised language; the absence of prior research and documentation of metaphors in everyday life seems to be connected with the misleading conclusion that metaphors are primary. Today we still can not talk about empirical evidence on the existence of metaphors in everyday life. The metaphors here have not been studied systematically. We can of course find examples of metaphors in everyday life, but the big question is: do they rise from the body experiences, as claimed in cognitive semantics, or are they reminiscences and repercussions from language usage in specialised language? Perhaps we were misled by scholars as Richards,

who claimed that metaphors are structured on our thoughts and are present everywhere.

Once we thought, inspired by formal semantics that we had to fear metaphors. That is not claimed today. If we have something to fear it is the naive takeover of broad assumptions, which have not been substantiated. We now have to take up this question: are metaphors primary to specialised language? Perhaps the survey of metaphors in the LSP text will lead to answers on metaphor and language that we would never find in everyday language. Now we do not have to **observe** reality like the formal semanticist, assuming that the world is literally capable. And we do not have to **construct** reality, to go to the opposite extreme as Nietzsche, as he says in a well-known passage: truths are “a mobile army of metaphors [...] illusion about which it has been forgotten that they *are* illusions, worn-out metaphors without sensory impact” (Nietzsche 1989: 250). I propose not a pure constructed way, but **empirical constructivism**, where we show how metaphors really work and then afterwards **construct** our thesis.

Today we have computers and we have them everywhere. We use these tools, not only to write letters, but also to get in touch with other people, to be informed, to buy and to sell. The computer is the new tool for communication. These facts influence the computer text. The computer text deals with new experience and new knowledge about technology. The very fast and rapidly evolving technical development requires language to signify new artefacts and their functions; this involves metaphors. The technical development also involves changes in the relationship between man and machine: modern man must use a language, which maintains demands on this user interface; this also involves metaphors: when we interact with the computer and when we use the Internet we use metaphors. Because the computer environment is behaving like a chaotic metamorphosis rapidly changing world, it might be easier to see the functions of the metaphors. Especially if we can see that the metaphors are not changing. Then they may have the function to maintain law and order in the computer world: they make it possible for us to talk about technology as something well-known and familiar even though it is changing very fast. Perhaps metaphors make us see the non-homogeneous as homogenous and therefore as understandable. And that could be proportional in every case, in every domain, where our

experience is thrown through new borderlines, and therefore in any LSP text which represents something new. If this is the case we have to demonstrate it through systematic empirical surveys. This could be a solution whether we want to study metaphors, LSP texts or language in general.

It is a well-known fact that metaphors are essential in specialised language (see e.g. Stålhammer 1997, Ickler 1993, Lundquist 1995 and 1996). The production, reception and translation of a LSP text therefore involve a lot of knowledge about metaphors. When we look at the appearance of the many metaphors in specialised language we must ask the question: in which way are these metaphors necessary? whose interests are protected in the specific metaphors? what are metaphors telling us? and generally: which functions do the myriad armies of metaphors in the LSP text have? Similarly we could ask how we must estimate the approaches, which see metaphors as solitary expressions reflecting creativity and intuitive thoughts. I believe that in the future we must look at metaphors in a way, which resembles the way we look at LSP terms, namely as systematically organised. The most appropriate way to study metaphors could very well be to study them as expressions in systematically organised scenarios.

When we focus on the questions above and look at metaphors in computer specialised language we can not, of course, give an absolute answer to these questions. But we can point out a direction and productive ways to reach some answers.

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