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CAN ANYTHING BE PUT INTO ANY CONTAINER? A FEW REMARKS ON POSSIBLE AND IMPOSSIBLE METAPHORS INVOLVING SYNTHETIC, ANALYTICAL AND UNIQUE CONCEPTS

Abstract

The article raises important and at the same time very interesting questions about the limits and constraints on metaphors in the light of the conceptions of cognitive linguistics and some well known works like Lakoff – Johnson (1980, 1999), Turner (1990) or Krzeszowski (1997, 2006). It investigates both theoretical and practical aspects of conceptual metaphor, aiming also at identifying the apparently weak points in the reasoning of the quoted authors, especially when it comes to distinguishing between "one-shot" and "conventional" or even between "possible" and "impossible" metaphors. The author of the article tries to prove that it is very difficult to impose limitations on metaphors and brings into question, among other things, the claim that metaphorization is impossible if synthetic concepts, such as mathematical figures, are involved. In his analysis, the author refers also to the Conduit Metaphor, as seen by Reddy (1979), which seems to be very helpful in understating the processes behind the forming of other metaphorical constructions, although is often criticized by linguists as allegedly being a faulty conception structuring human communication.

1. Introduction

A positive answer to the title question might have extremely vital consequences for the studies on metaphor and, then, for us perceiving our everyday communication. Such an answer would mean that we could use any word or phrase to convey any message. Put differently, as in Reddy's (1979) Conduit Metaphor, we could place any meaning into any word-container[1],

and this, consequently, would give us an unlimited number of possibilities of expressing our thoughts, ideas and meanings. The sender would be completely free to say anything he wants and how he wants to say it and, while expressing a particular meaning, he would only have to think whether the words and phrases he uses as containers for particular contents fully fit his needs in given circumstances. If they do, no one can prohibit him from saying, e.g., that *a skunk is a spaceship* or that *a rhombus is a prism*. There does not have to be any analogy between the two things[2]. This way of thinking seems to suggest that there are no impossible metaphors and that anything can really be anything.

It can be claimed that some 'timid' proofs for the accuracy of this thesis can be found, for example, in Lakoff – Johnson (1980, 1999) and Lakoff – Turner (1989), who, openly or only subconsciously, demonstrate that human reasoning and perception as well as the most important events and stages in the lives of people are structured and understood by and through various basic conceptual metaphors like THE MIND IS A CONTAINER FOR IDEAS, THINKING IS OBJECT MANIPULATION, IDEAS ARE MANIPULABLE OBJECTS, UNDERSTANDING IS GRASPING, A LIFETIME IS A DAY, LIFE IS A PLAY, LIFE IS A JOURNEY, PEOPLE ARE PLANTS, BIRTH IS ARRIVAL, LIFE IS BEING PRESENT HERE, DEATH IS DEPARTURE, DEATH IS GOING TO A FINAL DESTINA-TION and many others. It is easily noticeable that by means of such metaphors only the two concepts LIFE and DEATH can be perceived with the help of numerous other concepts: "journeys, plays, days, fluid, plants, sleep, and so on" (Lakoff – Turner 1989: 25). Lakoff and Turner also remark that, in addition to the above conventional metaphors (which are somehow fixed, to some extent at least), there can still be many other ways in which these two and, similarly, other concepts can be expressed. This, however, does not mean yet (in their opinion at least) that there is an indefinite number of such expressions. "Poets", Lakoff and Turner say, "...may compose or elaborate or express them [the very basic metaphors] in new ways, but they still use the same basic conceptual resources available to us all. If they did not, we would not understand them" (Lakoff – Turner 1989: 26).

2. Can "one-shot" metaphors be "conventional"?

It seems, however, that there are at least two reasons why the above opinion can be questioned. Firstly, poets (as well as all of us) do not have to use only "robust" conventional metaphors based on our common knowledge (and most often they do not), but may also apply "one-shot mappings", which are not "involved in daily reasoning", and we still understand them (cf. Lakoff –

Turner 1989: 91). Surprisingly, the linguists themselves give quite a few examples of such mappings, calling them "image metaphors", involving "not the mapping of concepts but rather the mapping of images". Instances of such metaphors can be *My wife's waist is an hourglass* or *My horse's mane is rainbows* (cf. Lakoff – Turner 1989: 89–96). Secondly, the fact that someone fails to understand something does not mean that what is not understood by one person cannot exist and still mean something to others. Finally, as Hartman (1967: 113) notices, "A metaphor is a set of predicates used as a variable. Hence it can, in principle, replace every other word of the language – and even itself as an ordinary word rather than that of a metaphor, as in 'a peach of a peach'". Referring to Hartman, Krzeszowski also agrees that there really are unlimited possibilities, although he confines this assumption only to the domain of unique, "nondenumerably infinite" sets of concepts (cf. Krzeszowski 2006: 37, 39, 45). We, however, suggest and try to prove this in what follows that it may also be applied in other sets of concepts, like analytical and synthetic ones.

Such an assumption opens for us the way to linguistic and cognitive experiments and to forming even very bizarre metaphoric constructions. The most vivid examples of this type of thinking worth recalling can be abundant creations of various artistic and literary styles, e.g., of the Dada movement in the 1920s or solutions used by Surrealism or Modernism. The fact that they were lacking in the conventional form which people had got used to made them uncommon metaphors, encapsulating the artist's message. Duchamp's "Fountain", which, to a vast majority of us, will be an ordinary urinal and not a work of art (this perception was supported by the fact that "Fountain" was rejected as an exhibit in 1917), is a very good example here (*A urinal is a fountain*). Reverting to the above mentioned artists' practices and the basic principles of their movements, we could, for example, produce phrases like *A urinal is protest*, *Absurdity is a urinal* ('protest' and 'absurdity' were the basic principles of Dadaism) or *Hallucination is Dali's Burning Giraffe*. Such metaphors are possible and justified as reflecting some basic principles of Dadaism and Surrealism, although to the majority of ordinary people they will seem unconventional and, as Lakoff and Turner see them, not "involved in daily reasoning". However, those who know what Dada and Surrealism are will also know what the metaphors are about.

Again, we can risk saying here that artistic creations of this kind to a certain degree negate Lakoff – Johnson's and Lakoff – Turner's repeated claims that one always depends on the same basic conceptual resources available to all, while producing conceptual metaphors. Instead, as the above examples show, it can be suspected that among *possible* metaphors there are ones that use concepts common not to all but still to bigger or smaller groups/ numbers of people. In such a case they will not be one-shot, but, again,

conceptual conventional metaphors, at least to some extent. Take the BIRTH IS COMING HERE/ARRIVAL metaphor (cf. Lakoff – Turner 1989: 1), which is treated as a basic conceptual metaphor known to all. For them *Birth is a war*, *Birth is a decent meal* or *Life is a wall* most probably cannot be such metaphors. Moreover, these metaphors, treated as one-shot, could be formed only if special circumstances and contexts were created and sustained, only then would they have sense. It is difficult to negate this, but it can also be claimed that in such circumstances these metaphors might become conventionalised conceptual metaphors.

Suppose there is a poor Cinderella who does the dirtiest work in the house and everyone can tease her whenever they want. Her saying *My life is the smoky wall of the kitchen* would be quite justified and true (so possible to be pronounced by her) every day of her life and of similar Cinderellas' lives, even if, e. g., their bad sisters and other residents would not share their view. For her and for other Cinderellas, also for other people knowing the circumstances this could be a basic conceptual metaphor. Similarly, we can imagine an evil dragon that eats every newborn child in a fairy-tale kingdom where the monster lives. Each birth means to him a decent meal, so the metaphor *Birth is a decent meal*, again, can be understood by a group of subjects, like the dragon himself, the inhabitants of the kingdom or the readers of the fairy-tale. At this moment the metaphor would be one-shot[3] only for those who do not know the fairy-tale, but a conceptual one for those who know it.

In this light we dare to make a suggestion that poets, authors of fairy-tales and, at last, ordinary people, every day, can create metaphors ad hoc and such metaphors will be placed somehow on the borderline between novel and conventional conceptual metaphors (that is, they are novel and conventional at the same time), as understood by Lakoff – Johnson above, and also that it may be quite difficult to delineate this borderline. Such metaphors give us unlimited possibilities of manipulating words and their meanings and, in fact, they demonstrate the way language is used by us day by day. We resort to such metaphors whenever we want to draw someone's attention to a meaning, a particular feature of an object or a situation, which we thus perceive through other objects and situations or their features. Noticing this particular feature of an object *we ourselves* decide which other particular objects will serve as our metaphors' vehicles. We ourselves choose just these, and not any other words, constructions or phrases to tell others what we mean. This is the practice of creating even the most improbable and, at first sight, most absurd metaphors. Referring to Reddy (1979) and looking at the phenomenon from another angle, we may venture to say that such actions are possible owing to the fact that human communication is organised according to the model of the *Conduit Metaphor*, and, in accordance with this

model, any content (thoughts, ideas, meanings) can be put into any word/ phrase-container (see also Backman 1991, Krzeszowski 1997, Nasiadka 2009a).

3. Definitions, expositions and descriptions in metaphors: removing constraints and the role of the Conduit Metaphor

Trying to answer the question about possible/impossible metaphors, Krzeszowski (2006: 38) notices: "Using metaphors, we do not always make their ontological reference precise. This is, besides, a situation equivalent to those in which we use any other linguistic forms." [Translation mine; M.N.] Krzeszowski (2006: 39) also claims that each linguistic form may refer to one of the three classes of concepts, corresponding to three types of object sets:

– definitions or synthetic concepts, that is constructions of the human mind, as understood by Leibniz, Kant [cf. 1988] or Newton ("finite" sets of objects), comprising, for example, geometrical figures in mathematics

– expositions or analytical concepts ("denumerably infinite" sets), "marked out on the basis of the common features" of the objects building them

– and descriptions or unique concepts ("nondenumerably infinite"), referring to unique, single things that do not belong to any more general categories

According to Krzeszowski, metaphorization in the class of analytical concepts (denumerably infinite sets of objects) is subject to some constraints, which results from the fact that while mapping elements of the source domain on the target domain we have to retain the structure of the target domain and its axiological load (cf. Brugman 1990, Lakoff 1990, Turner 1990), a condition which cannot be fully met when this class of concepts is involved. Synthetic concepts (finite sets of objects), in turn, cannot be subject to metaphorization at all, claims Krzeszowski (2006: 40, 45), because "this would contradict their synthetic character. Calling a circle a rhombus would pose a completely uninterpretable contradiction, as in the case of synthetic concepts none of the features defining a particular concept can be suppressed, and suppression takes place in all metaphors, because such a suppression immediately eliminates a given thing from a given category understood as an in-out category". [Translation mine; M.N.]

The conclusion here is, according to Krzeszowski, that Hartman's view of metaphor quoted above (according to which anything can be anything) is true only in relation to the last class of concepts, as only in the case of concepts referring to unique things anything can be anything. "This is possible simply because particular words refer not to whole classes of phenomena or things,

but to their single, unique representatives. In such cases, the agreed on language conventions are not binding any more but completely new ones can be created." [Translation mine; M.N.] That is why one can say, for example, that our house is a kennel, an ark, or even a stick (Krzeszowski 2006: 40).

However, it seems that this thesis can be slightly revised by proving, firstly, that metaphors in the set of analytical concepts can be created more easily than Krzeszowski claims. In this connection, it should be stressed that what we think about is not typical one-shot metaphors (cf. Lakoff – Turner 1989). Let us create, for example, the phrase *People's houses are burrows*, in which the word *houses* will not cover only a particular, strictly defined class/ model of houses, let alone a single particular house, but, instead, a general concept including all possible types of objects called *houses* (sharing at least one common feature, which is their ability to serve as shelter): buildings made of brick or wood, skyscrapers, tents, houseboats, blocks of flats, etc. All of them are perceived, through the metaphor, in terms of another general concept *burrows*, which, again, can be differentiated into types of objects having a similar feature. This fact is worth stressing: while generalizing, the metaphor retains the differentiation into possible separate types of objects (within *houses* or *burrows*). If, in particular circumstances (contexts), we find an analogy (or analogies) between our houses and burrows, for instance, that each house performs functions similar to the functions of all burrows inhabited by animals, our metaphor will have the right to exist. Moreover, it will function at a higher level of generalization (conventionalization) than the simple metaphor '*My house is a burrow*' (one single house and one single burrow), involving typical descriptions, that is "nondenumerably" infinite concepts (cf. Krzeszowski 2006: 40). In the same way numerous other metaphors can be produced, e.g., *Graves are places of rest*, *Graves are houses*, *Houses are places of forgetfulness*, *Houses are graves.* Such metaphors will be conceptual: different concepts, like *burrows*, *graves, places of rest*, *kennels, etc.* can be mapped (collectively) onto other concepts, like *houses* (the variables can, of course, change).

Undoubtedly, on both sides of such metaphors we have analytical concepts that, it can be concluded, have some features in common or their features can be compared. In the case of houses and burrows it is, for instance, their being capable of protecting the inhabitants against cold, in the case of graves and places of rest (understood quite conventionally) it is the fact that they allow their occupants, for example, to stay idle and inactive. By distinguishing other common features of these and plentiful other objects, more new metaphors of the same type can be created, even such bizarre, at first sight, as *Houses are kennels*, *Houses are buttons* or *Graves are notebooks*. This is due to the fact that one can always think of such (more or less permanent) conditions in which the use of the metaphors will be

logically justified, so, in other words, possible. Moreover, it is quite easy to imagine a situation where the phrase *Houses are burrows* can be conventionalized.

The above reasoning seems to suggest that the most important factor in deciding whether a metaphor is "possible" or "impossible" is not a set of formal criteria but, first of all, its author's communicative intention. The author decides to produce and use his metaphor, because it is him who chooses a given construction as the carrier of his meaning (cf. the assumptions of the Conduit Metaphor described by Reddy 1979). Krzeszowski (2006: 43) notices this too: "After all, independent of the fact who uses the metaphor and where, it *reflects* his views, and sometimes it suggests these views, but this has nothing in common with the essence of metaphor, which comes down to a similarity, established or being suggested at the very moment." [Translation mine; M.N.] This argument seems to be true both with reference to one-shot and conceptual metaphors, involving unique as well as analytical concepts.

In this light, the strength of the so called Invariance Hypothesis (cf. Brugman 1990, Lakoff 1990, Turner 1990) and also the importance of the axiological content of the target domain as factors imposing serious restrictions on metaphors seem to be at least weakened (cf. Krzeszowski 2006: 45), which can be noticed in the case of, e.g., the concept *houses* in the metaphor *Houses are burrows*. Interestingly, Turner himself, despite being of the opinion that mapping in a conceptual metaphor is not arbitrary, and that "metaphors are constrained against mapping two distinct components in the source onto one component in the target" (Turner 1990: 248), as this would certainly disturb the structure of the target domain, also allows for some exceptions to the rule: "The constraint [the retention of the target domain's schematic structure] is not inviolable; however, if it is violated, the violation is to be taken as a carrier of significance" (Turner 1990: 252). As an example of a violation of the schematic structure of the target domain, he quotes a fragment of the Fourth Gospel, from which it follows that Jesus is both the traveller and the way: "Metaphorically, his statement asks us to map two components in the source, namely both the traveller and the way, onto one component in the target, Jesus" (Turner 1990: 249–250, cf. John 13:36–14:6). Significantly, neither this nor any of the above metaphors is a one-shot mapping, like *My wife's waist is an hourglass* (Lakoff – Turner 1989: 90; cf. also Lakoff 1987), where what is considered is the "particular" waist of the particular wife (one cannot take it as a conceptual metaphor because it is not possible to perceive all wives' waists as hourglasses). In Christian culture, the metaphor JESUS IS BOTH THE TRAVELLER AND THE WAY at the same time (or variants of this metaphor) functions as a conceptual conventional metaphor.

All this again proves that it is much more difficult in practice than in theory to impose constraints on metaphors, much more than one would expect is possible and justified, even in the class of analytical concepts. Moreover, we can see that in the process of metaphorization even the structure of the target domain and, thus, its axiological load can be violated, contrary to what Krzeszowski (2006: 45) claims. This may happen in particular contexts, when the speaker, according to his goals, ascribes particular values to this domain. Such a possibility opens for us the way to creating diverse "impossible" metaphors within the set of analytical concepts, and each time we do this, the border of "impossibility" is moved further away.

Even if, in theory, we accept Krzeszowski's and others' views with no reservations, in practice it will be rather difficult to precisely demarcate "possible" metaphors from "impossible" ones. Let us support ourselves with Lakoff – Turner (1989: 199–201) again, who point to the conceptual metaphor *Death is a magician* and some particular readings of *The president is a spider* as impossible ones. (By the way, the latter is, as Krzeszowski notices, an instantiation of the conceptual metaphor MAN IS AN ANIMAL; cf. Krzeszowski 2006: 44). They claim that these metaphors contradict the common beliefs about their source and target domains. In short, according to Lakoff and Turner, the first metaphor is generally impossible (although it could be accepted as *possible* (!) under certain conditions) because we commonly believe that death is the end of everything, while a magician's actions do not lead to someone being dead and, thus, finished. The problem with the second metaphor may be, for instance, the one that we shall think that spiders are, before anything else, black and *black* stands for 'sin'. In this way, the metaphor *The president is a spider* would have to mean 'The president is black' and, consequently, 'The president is sin'. According to Lakoff – Turner, such an interpretation is impossible because we cannot assume that spiders are always black. We should remember, instead (allegedly in accordance with Grice's Maxim of Quantity and the Great Chain Metaphor; cf. Grice 1975: 45–46), that the most distinctive feature of spiders is their "instinctive behaviour" (Lakoff – Turner 1989: 200–201). This is quite a mind-bending reasoning, which, obviously, reveals some mistakes (cf. also Krzeszowski 2006: 42–45).

Firstly, Lakoff and Turner's reasons why we cannot perceive spiders as black are quite shallow and, secondly, it is quite difficult to understand why *black* should be associated with *sin* and not, for example, with the black cassocks of Christian priests, which, usually, are not linked with sin in the first place but rather with its opposite. It is neither a custom nor an obligation to associate *black* with sin. Associating *black* with *priest* we will get *The president is a priest* metaphor and, consequently, *The president is a pious man*, which contradicts what Lakoff and Johnson suggest. A black cassock here can be

a metaphor of a life full of sacrifice and prayer, and a lot of similar examples can be added to this one. For instance, someone who owns a black Mercedes will, most probably, not agree that he is an ultimate sinner or that he drives a car that is generally associated with sin. Lakoff and Turner are also wrong assuming that the Maxim of Quantity orders us to choose the "instinctive behaviour" of the spider and not any other of its distinctive features. As Krzeszowski (2006: 45) rightly notices, "The Maxim of Quantity cannot define which features will matter in the interpretation of this metaphor in any context." [Translation mine; M.N.]

However, in this light, it seems that also Krzeszowski's (2006: 45) statement about limitations on metaphors in the set of analytical concepts should be revised: "There is a limited number of possibilities but an unlimited number of their interpretations." [Translation mine – M.N.] Firstly, it is difficult to accept, according to the first part of the statement, the fact that there is only a limited number of, for instance, metaphors enhancing the features of the above mentioned president or, similarly, of any other subject or idea, such as the bad qualities of the human race (*Man is a barbarian*, *Man is a monster* or *Man is a demon* are certainly not all of them). Secondly, even if things really were like this, the second part of Krzeszowski's statement would still support the claim that actually it is really difficult to impose constraints on metaphors. This results from the simple fact that, like in the case of single words, as many meanings can be read into them as one needs (see the Conduit Metaphor). Consequently, the constraints, in large part, seem to be only theoretical and in practice they can be more or less easily flouted, like the above arguments concerning the non-violation of the target domain structure.

The quotation, however, can have another, secondary, application: it can be treated as an explanation of a phenomenon presented by Reddy (1979) as the "toolmakers paradigm" in his paper on the referred to Conduit Metaphor, and concerning the problem of ineffective communication between people closed in separated parts (compounds) of a large wheel. Taking Krzeszowski's statement into account, it can be claimed that these people, communicating with their neighbours by sending them special instructions explaining how to produce particular tools, misunderstood each other (and, as a result, wrong tools were produced by them on the basis of the instructions) because the "number of possibilities" they used (that is the instructions) had a "number of interpretations". The same instruction, in different conditions present in different parts (compounds) of the wheel, was interpreted differently by individual inhabitants of the compounds. In other words, a variety of meanings were found in the same single instruction by its addressees, which accords with what Krzeszowski notices.

We can try to find out why this was at all possible. One of the reasons can be that the addressees of the instructions had not expended enough effort to

properly unpack the "container" with the message to take out of it the right contents (also undistorted, that is free from damage; cf. Krzeszowski 1997), which, of course, they could have tried to do, for instance, by asking additional questions in connection with the instruction. The inhabitants mistakenly assumed that in a particular instruction there would be packed exactly the meaning they had expected, in accordance with their knowledge and experience. Such an approach, noticeable also in Lakoff – Turner's reasoning, inevitably leads to communicational misunderstanding. "Unpacking" a given metaphor, e.g., "*Death is a magician*", they a priori assume a particular message (content) to be in it on the basis of their own earlier beliefs. Such a conduct can be compared to guessing the contents of a parcel brought by a postman without looking inside it, just on the basis of one's own expectation. Krzeszowski's claim, in turn, correlates with the Conduit Metaphor schema, according to which different contents, often non-standard, can be put into the same carrier of meaning if there is such a need, and the recipient of the message has to expend some effort to interpret the message properly (find the right contents).

If the third class of concepts is considered, which Krzeszowski labels as "finite" sets of objects ("zbiory skończone"), "synthetic concepts" or "formal concepts", that is definitions, we can also try to carry out an experiment showing that even here, contrary to what Krzeszowski claims, metaphorization is less constrained than one would expect. Prima facie, it really looks as if "finite sets" are not subject to metaphorization at all. However, let us consider the concept CIRCLE. The *NODOE* definition says it is "a round plane figure whose boundary (the circumference) consists of points equidistant from a fixed point (the centre)". We also learn during mathematics lessons that a circle is a set of points whose distance from the centre equals the length or is shorter than the length of the radius, so it is "the circumference plus the inside", a figure with a surface area. It seems that nothing metaphorical can be done with figures defined by such rigorous mathematical formulas. But, surprisingly, under certain circumstances, even such figures may be used in metaphorization. Let us resort to the following reasoning. The picture below shows "a square inscribed" in another mathematical figure, "a circle":
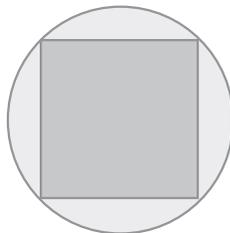

Fig. 1. A square inscribed in a circle

One can see that the set of points included in this inscribed square exactly conforms also to the definition of the circle, which can be repeated here totally unchanged: "a set of points whose distance from the centre equals or is shorter than the length of the radius." So, in this light, it could be admitted that "a square is a circle"! Moreover, the same operation can be repeated with other "finite" figures, for instance, a triangle:
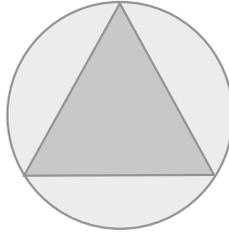
Fig. 2. A triangle inscribed in a circle

Under these new circumstances (the situation of being inscribed in a circle), both the square and the triangle become, in a sense, circles because all of the three figures conform to one definition of a circle. Applying the vocabulary used by cognitive linguists, we can say that what has just been done is a metaphoric mapping from the CIRCLE domain (source) to the SQUARE (or TRIANGLE) domain (target). What is more, we can even inscribe a circle into a square or into a triangle, exchanging the target and source domains:
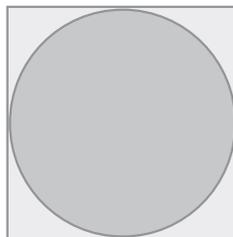
Fig. 3. A circle inscribed in a square

It can be concluded, from the above picture, that now *a circle is a square*, because the points forming the circle's area are, at the same time, the points forming the square. Going further, we can even have a triangle inscribed in a square. At first sight it also seems here that the Invariance Hypothesis or Grice's Maxim of Quantity is not violated: the highest level attributes (according to the definition, at least in the case of the metaphors *a square is a circle* and *a triangle is a circle*) of the circle are retained!

Of course, one can say that the whole reasoning is deceitful because, from a geometrical point of view, a triangle or a square can never be circles, just like a circle cannot be a square. However, as Krzeszowski (2006: 43) himself claims, the fact that a statement is true or false always depends on the context in which this statement is pronounced. Supplementing this opinion, we can add that metaphor, after all, is not geometry and the purpose of our experiment is to show that, thanks to certain mental operations, even synthetic concepts can be used in metaphorization, as both source and target domains for other synthetic concepts, contrary to what Krzeszowski (2006: 39, 40, 45) claims. Metaphorization, after all, consists in the suppression of some aspects of a concept with simultaneous highlighting of some other aspects of this concept (cf. Lakoff – Johnson 1980: 10). This, of course, does not necessarily mean that these and other synthetic concepts themselves are metaphorical. All the same, the above mappings took place just in the field of synthetic concepts.

Now, what if we want to use analytical concepts as source domains for synthetic concepts as target domains? Krzeszowski (2006: 40) claims that all synthetic concepts can only be used as source domains for analytical concepts, so the opposite, according to him, would be impossible. We claim here that even this type of metaphorization is possible. Such metaphors will look like the following: *A circle is something that resembles X to me* (and not the opposite *X resembles a circle*, as the only possible variant).

Let us imagine the following situation: a teacher in a mathematics lesson is trying to explain to his not so clever pupil the idea of the circle in the following way:

- Teacher: "A circle is a set of points whose distance from the centre equals or is shorter than the length of the radius".
- Pupil: "I don't understand".
- Teacher: "A circle is a knight's shield. Look: the circumference and the inside".
- Pupil: "Ah, the circumference and the inside. Now I see".

The metaphor dealt with here is *The circle is a knight's shield*, with the circle as the target domain and the shield as the source domain. It is not just an "ordinary", "one-shot" mapping as understood by Hartman, Krzeszowski, Lakoff, Turner or Johnson, since both a synthetic and an analytical concept are involved (and not some unique particular objects from the group of "nondenumerably infinite" concepts). Even if we recall that, from a mathematical point of view, a circle is not an analytical concept but a synthetic one, the same circle (its distinctive features) can be used in the process of metaphorization as the target domain. This is important and should be treated as a complement of the indisputable fact that synthetic concepts are used as metaphorical source domains. It is sufficient to mention such constructions as *the earth is a sphere*, *the sky is a sphere*, *a drawing*

instrument is a triangle, etc. (cf. also Krzeszowski 2006: 40). A lot of similar metaphors, from astronomy to poetry, can be met in different fields of our activity. It is also interesting that metaphors of this type, making use of synthetic concepts, seem to be built up to somehow impose geometrical order on the surrounding reality, e.g., different models of the Solar System.

4. Can non-metaphorical concepts be metaphorical?

To make the discussion more complete, we should go deeper and consider a question asked from another position: Can non-metaphorical concepts be metaphorical? A simple answer, given almost immediately by most of us, will probably be "no". Lakoff and Turner (1989: 58; cf. also Lakoff – Johnson 1980: 3–9) divide the world and even particular concepts into the metaphorical and non-metaphorical parts, "understood directly". This allows them to perceive, for example, a twofold dog's nature: "A given concept may be metaphorically understood and structured in some respects but not in others... . Thus, part of our conceptualisation of a dog is nonmetaphorical: the four legs, wagging tail, cold wet black nose, and so on" (Lakoff – Turner 1989: 57). On the other hand, various metaphors with such nonmetaphorical concepts as *tail* forming their target domains can be created, for example, "a dog's wagging tail is its flag, signalling to us". Another distinctive feature of a dog, "loyalty", is, according to Lakoff – Turner (1989: 57), totally metaphorical, so saying that *a dog is loyal* we are making a metaphoric construction, because we understand *dog* in terms of "a human personality trait" and not in terms of an animal.

In their reasoning, Lakoff and Turner (1989) often refer to conventional constructs, showing how they structure human day-to-day understanding of the world. This type of thinking can be represented, as we remember, by DEATH IS A DEVOURER, TIME IS A THIEF (OF YOUTH), PEOPLE ARE PLANTS, LIFE IS A BURDEN, TIME MOVES, LIFE IS A JOURNEY, etc. Conventional metaphor, Lakoff and Turner argue, is such a widespread metaphor that it is often used "unconsciously and automatically, with so little effort that we hardly notice it" (Lakoff – Turner 1989: xi). In this light, it is remarkable that a dog's tail can be perceived by them, also conventionally, as "just a tail" (1989: 57). One can similarly say that a dog's legs are "just legs" and its teeth are "just teeth", etc. However, "conventional", in fact, very often turns out to be "metaphorical", which is proved by the abundance of conventional metaphors, including the ones mentioned in this paragraph.

It can be said here that Lakoff and Turner are caught in the trap of conventionality, because a dog's legs or tail can equally be metaphorical

concepts, despite being conventional. First, it is only a matter of certain agreement that the four objects sticking out of the dog's main body are called *legs* and not, for example, *hands*, *eyes*, *sticks* or *apples*. Second, English uses also some other words to refer to these parts of an animal's body, e.g. *feet*. Consequently, the dog may be defined as a *four-footed animal*. Moreover, the name *four-footed animal* can refer to a *quadruped animal*. *Four-footed* or *quadruped* can also mean *four-hoofed*, as in the case of a horse. *Foot*, then, can have many applications: from a dog's and a horse's legs to human ones. Is *foot* used literally in all these contexts?

Referring to a dog's legs, for instance, the Polish language in numerous situations uses *łapy* (paws) rather than *nogi* (legs), but despite this, it has *czworo-nóg* (a *four-legged* animal) rather than *czworo-łap* (a *four-pawed* creature). Moreover, the same dog's legs can be referred to in two different ways even in one phrase: *Podaj łapę, czworonogu* (Give me a *paw*, you *four-legged*), rather than: *Podaj łapę, czworo-łapie* (Give me a *paw*, you *four-pawed*). Here it can be suspected that either *łapa* (paw) or *noga* (leg) are used metaphorically. Calling, for example, a mushroom's stalk or a car's wheels their *legs* raises even fewer doubts: here *leg* certainly **is** metaphorical, but with other objects, like a duck's legs, hen's legs or even wasp's legs, the decision: metaphorical – non-metaphorical, may be, again, not so easy. It is a fact that both English and Polish use the same word *leg* to refer to many objects that look quite different. There are many other things and names treated in the same way, *tail* serving only as an example. There is a *dog's tail* and a *peacock's tail*. Which of the uses of the word *tail* is literal?

All the above uses of *leg*, although quite different, have one feature in common: they support the main body which they are legs of. The common feature of tails, in turn, is, for example, their being the hindmost part of an animal. There are, however, objects that, at first sight, do not have any common features but which still are referred to by the same name. For instance, the word *palm* refers to both a particular part of a human limb and a tropical tree. Both of the uses are, of course, perceived as literal. Are they really literal?

In accordance with the commonly known cognitive definition of metaphor, assuming that metaphor "enables us to see one thing in terms of another" (cf. MacCormac 1985, Lakoff – Johnson 1980: 10, Lakoff – Turner 1989: 57), most of the above conventional names are... metaphorical. For instance, *paws* are perceived as *legs* and vice versa. The metaphorical uses of the names have been conventionalised to such a point that now their metaphoricity is hardly noticeable. To a certain extent the question resembles the phenomenon of the so called "dead" or "historical metaphors" (cf. Lakoff – Turner 1989: 129–131), that is phrases or words that once were used metaphorically but now are often perceived as literal utterances, for instance,

the well known *foot of the mountain* (Besides, why *foot* and not *feet?* Normally built creatures have more than just one foot, e.g., in Polish, mountains "have" two *feet*, so the correct Polish version of this phrase is *u **stóp** gory* 'at the **feet** of the mountain'. It is questionable if they really should be treated literally and not as still metaphorical utterances (after all, mountains do not have feet at all).

5. Conclusion

The conclusion emerging from the above discussion can be only one: it is very difficult, contrary to what some researchers claim, to impose constraints on metaphors and even to build frameworks within which metaphorization is allowed and outside which metaphors are impossible. The enormous number of metaphoric constructions, including the above mentioned Conduit Metaphor, present in human communication only prove the fact that such frameworks are often artificial. It has been shown in the preceding paragraphs that even concepts that themselves are not metaphorical can be involved in the process of building metaphors, as both source and target domains, if it is justified by our communicational needs. It appears that at the present stage of research on language and human communication one cannot delineate a clearly marked border beyond which metaphors are "impossible".

Moreover, it seems that any word or expression that can refer to more than one thing is metaphorical at least in some of the uses. To distinguish which of the uses are metaphorical may be difficult at first sight, due to the fact that all of them are commonly perceived as conventional names. These remarks apply also when we are to decide which part of a dog is metaphorical and which is literal (cf. *feet* vs. *legs*).

However, the case with a dog's legs, again, clearly shows another thing: people use words according to their purpose and need to convey their ideas. We often use quite different words as carriers for the same meaning (put the same content into different containers). This is especially well seen in the process of enciphering information for any special (e.g., military) purposes or in slang. Here the same things, activities, operations, etc. are granted numerous different names. Take the following words from American slang: *bean, noggin, conk, dome, gourd, skull, upstairs* (cf. Widawski 2000), which can be used as names for a man's head, *I'll blow your conk off*.

Similarly with the dog: if the parties involved agree on the matter, the dog may no longer be a dog but, for example, a cat or any other thing. Ciphers, codes and slang are not necessarily based on common conventional metaphors of the type DEATH IS A DEVOURER. Instead of saying that somebody has been *devoured* by death, one may say something similar to

SOMEBODY HAS KICKED THE BUCKET, but less commonly known (by the way, the quoted saying has also been conventionalised and *bucket* most probably used to have another meaning). Such a linguistic behaviour is purposeful: the less certain names can be associated with conventional metaphors, the better the cipher is, because the more difficult it is for a stranger to identify the information contained.

Another interesting thing here is the fact that in ciphers or codes the words are not necessarily metaphors at all in the cognitive sense: one thing is not perceived in terms of another one like, e.g., a dog in terms of a human, a paw in terms of a leg, etc. (there is not any precise mapping). Despite this, however, there still is one thing that cipher-, code-, slang- and all of the above quoted words have in common: they acquire new, unconventional meanings, even if it is for a while. And this, paradoxically, very well illustrates the possibility created by a conventional metaphor, e.g., the Conduit Metaphor referred to above: when we use words, we can put new meanings into them, because words are containers and ideas are things.

Taking all this into account, we can see that what we say or think is metaphorical to a much greater extent than Krzeszowski, Johnson, Lakoff or Turner think.

NOTES

[1] In 1979, Reddy described his Conduit Metaphor, which, it can be said, acts at two main levels. At the first level, in accordance with the conception of this metaphor, what we communicate (concepts, emotions, feelings, thoughts, that is meanings in general) is perceived as physical objects sent from us to recipients. At the second level, the meanings are seen as things that can be placed into containers-linguistic expressions (cf. Johnson – Lakoff 1982, Lakoff – Johnson 1980: 10–13, Krzeszowski 1997: 169–171, Nasiadka 2004, 2009ab). Communication, then, can be understood as a type of a conduit stretched between people through which thoughts and meanings are transported from one person to another.

[2] Krzeszowski (2006: 38) describes a similar possible way of composing metaphors: „We take, at random, words from a dictionary and we pair them according to our formula X is Y. For example, *itching is a formation*, *a monkey is a lawn*, *a stay-at-home person is a sign*, *love is a fence pole*, *life is a button*. We can play infinitely in this way, looking for analogies between these words. For example, *love is a pole in a fence* because it is stuck next to another pole". [Translation mine; M.N.]

[3] The same may also happen to Ortony's well-known "billboards are warts" (cf. Ortony 1979: 195–196).

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