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## ON MULTIPLE METONYMIES WITHIN INDIRECT SPEECH ACTS

### **Abstract:**

Indirect speech acts are frequently structured by more than a single metonymy. The metonymies are related not only to the illocutionary force of the utterances, but also function within the individual lexemes being their parts. An indirect speech act can thus involve not only multiple, but also multi-levelled operation of conceptual metonymy.

**Keywords:** conceptual distance, construal of salience, idealized cognitive model (ICM), indirect directive, indirect speech act, metonymic chain, metonymy, multiple metonymies, multi-levelled metonymies, zone activation.

### 1. Introduction

The present paper aims at discussing ways in which multiple metonymies function within different indirect speech acts. It adopts the standpoint of cognitive linguistics, which means that the concept of an idealized cognitive model or ICM (Lakoff 1987: 68–90) is taken for granted. It also assumes that human language is, to a large extent, non-literal and employs the mechanisms of conceptual metaphor and metonymy.

Of the two mechanisms, conceptual metonymy receives the exclusive attention. One reason for that is that, unlike conceptual metaphor, it frequently underlies indirect speech acts as far as the relation between the form of an utterance and its illocutionary force is concerned.

The intricacies of the very concept of metonymy are not discussed in any detail. For example, what is regarded by some authors as metonymy is viewed only as zone activation by other authors (cf. Paradis 2003). Diverse possibilities of interpretation are only pointed out in the analysis; otherwise, no attention is paid to them.

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## 2. Metonymy

Since the presence of metonymy in indirect speech acts is to be discussed, it is necessary to introduce the definition of this conceptual mechanism. The paper relies on the commonly used definition by Radden and Kövecses (1999: 21), which runs as follows:

Metonymy is a cognitive process in which one conceptual entity, the vehicle, provides mental access to another conceptual entity, the target, within the same idealized cognitive model.

Also the classification of individual metonymy types and ICMs introduced by the authors is largely accepted. For example, the expression

(1) *They went to the altar*

is metonymic in that a part of the scenario of getting married stands for the whole of it. The underlying metonymy can be called INITIAL SUBEVENT FOR WHOLE EVENT, and it functions within the Event ICM or, specifically, the Wedding ICM, as well as within the whole-part metonymic configuration (Radden and Kövecses 1999: 32–33).

As far as multiple metonymies are concerned, the paper does not draw on any of the well-known analyses of the problem, e.g. Reddy's (1979) and Fass's (1997) "metonymic chains", or Ruiz de Mendoza Ibáñez and Díez Velasco's (2003) "double metonymy". A more acceptable approach is the one of Barcelona (2002), who discusses the operation of metonymy on multiple levels, including the one of pragmatic inferencing and discourse.

## 3. Single Metonymies in Indirect Speech Acts

Gibbs (1994: 351–358) argues that the indirect directives such as

- (2) *Can you lend me ten dollars?*  
 (3) *Can you shut the door?*

involve metonymy. He accounts for that in the following way:

For example, understanding *Can you lend me ten dollars?* as request requires that listeners see the question about their ability as referring to a series of actions that ends with a transaction of goods. In this way, speaking and understanding indirect speech acts involves a kind of metonymic reasoning, where people infer wholes (a series of actions) from a part.

The metonymy is located in the modal verb *can*, but it functions on the level of the whole speech act. Person's ability to perform some action stands for the actuality which involves performing it (Panther and Thornburg 1999: 345–346). The metonymy can thus be formulated as POTENTIALITY FOR ACTUALITY. Within Radden and Kövecses's (1999: 32–34) framework, such metonymies function against the background of the Event ICM.

Other similar metonymies are possible, e.g. WILLINGNESS FOR ACTUALITY, which can be illustrated with the expression

- (4) *Will* you open the door?

Also in this case there is only a single metonymy operating on the level of the speech act, and it is located in the modal verb *will*.

#### 4. Multiple Metonymies in Indirect Speech Acts

Metonymy reaches deeper into the structure of indirect speech acts than in the above-discussed examples. Panther and Thornburg (2003: 6–7) argue that the conversational exchange

- (5) There's *a draft* in here.  
Close that window.

involves a metonymic chain 'P – NOT-DESIRABLE (P) – DESIRABLE (NOT – P) – CAUSE (Q, NOT – P) – DO (Q)'; P is the propositional content of the assertion, whereas Q represents the propositional content of the answer, which is a direct request. At the same time, the presence of the metonymic chain is directly related to the weakness of the metonymic connection between the two expressions or, in other words, to the extent of the conceptual distance between them.

In contrast, the expressions

- (6) I *would like* you to close that window

does not involve such conceptual distance and the metonymic link is much stronger and direct. In (6) there is thus a single metonymy of the type WILLINGNESS FOR ACTUALITY.

#### 4.1. Multiple Metonymies Related to the Illocutionary Force of the Utterance

The examples discussed in the previous section contain only multiple metonymies related to the illocutionary force of the utterance. Many other similar instances of metonymic chains could be quoted. For example, in a situation when someone does not close the door after walking into the room, the expression

(7) It's *cold* in here

could be produced by some other person, who in this way requires that the door should be closed (Gibbs 1994: 352). The imposed obligation is not expressed directly, but only by means of a statement of the speaker's condition. The first metonymy on the level of the speech act employs the principle of opposition (Vosshagen 1990: 290), which underlies different discourse situations (Barcelona 2002: 212). The metonymy can be generally formulated as CONCEPT FOR ITS OPPOSITE (Vosshagen 1999: 290), but in the present case it has the specific forms of PRESENT COLD FOR DESIRED WARMTH or, following Panther and Thornburg's (2003: 6–7) discussion of the relation in the exchange (5), as UNDESIRABLE FOR DESIRABLE. Since the statement expresses the speaker's condition, the next metonymy can be formulated as SPEAKER'S CONDITION FOR IMPOSED OBLIGATION. Once again, the statement imposes the obligation indirectly, and that is why it is classified as an indirect speech act.

The metonymy PRESENT COLD FOR DESIRED WARMTH or UNDESIRABLE FOR DESIRABLE functions within the Scale ICM (cf. Radden and Kövecses 1999: 31–32). Both properties represent the extreme ends of the respective scales. The other metonymy operates within the Event ICM.

It should be observed that the vehicle of the first metonymy is negative, whereas its target is positive. It would be possible to employ a positive adjective here, but it would have to be preceded by the negative particle 'not' if the same communicative effect was to be intended:

(8) It's not *very warm* in here.

Using only the positive adjective, i.e.

(9) It's *warm* in here,

would produce an indirect speech act whose illocutionary force would be to oblige someone to open the door or the window. The communicative effect would thus be entirely different, but a similar sequence of metonymies would operate also in this case.

Finally, expressions (7) and (8) could still be a locus of an additional metonymy. If we assume that producing a given utterance is, in a given context, conventionally regarded as an indication of the presence of a given person in some place, e.g. because they habitually require that the door should be closed, the additional metonymy could be formulated as EFFECT FOR CAUSE (cf. Barcelona 2002: 212). The third metonymy would, however, be possible only in the context of the whole discourse situation and, as such, it would remain outside the scope of the indirect speech act being a part of this situation.

A similar example of a metonymic chain within the indirect speech act can be found in the Polish question

(10) Czy to jest *dobry* mąż dla ciebie?<sup>1</sup>

which could be spoken by a mother to a daughter in order to make her break off the engagement or even call off the wedding. In addition to the metonymy CONCEPT FOR ITS OPPOSITE or, specifically, DESIRABLE FOR UNDESIRABLE, there is the metonymy SPEAKER'S MOTIVATION FOR IMPOSED OBLIGATION.

#### 4.2. Multi-Levelled Metonymies within Indirect Speech Acts

Multiple metonymies can function within indirect speech acts also in a different way. In such cases, some metonymies are related to the illocutionary force of the expression, while others operate only on the level of individual lexemes that make up the utterance. In the already discussed examples

(3) *Can you shut the door?*

(4) *Will you open the door?,*

metonymy functions within the lexeme 'the door' as well. That is because only a part of the entity denoted by it is perspectivized (cf. Taylor 1989: 122–126). The metonymy can be called WHOLE THING FOR A PART OF THE THING and it operates within the Thing-and-Part ICM (cf. Radden and Kövecses 1999: 31). The other metonymies are related to the illocutionary force of the questions and can be called POTENTIALITY FOR ACTUALITY and WILLINGNESS FOR ACTUALITY. They both function within the Event ICM.

It should be noted that for Paradis (2003), the use of the noun 'the door' to refer to its movable part would be a case of zone activation rather than

<sup>1</sup> The English equivalent of the question is 'Is he the *right* husband for you?'

metonymy. In such framework, the utterance would involve two different construals of salience, but only one of them would be a metonymy. That is because the author introduces a distinction between metonymy and zone activation and regards them as separate modes of conceptualisation.

A more complex case is the utterance

(11) *Can you pass the salt?*<sup>2</sup>

which is structured by three metonymies. One of them, i.e. POTENTIALITY FOR ACTUALITY, is linked to the illocutionary force of the utterance and functions within the Event ICM. The other two metonymies function on the level of the individual lexemes which make up the expression. ‘Passing’ an entity means handing it, but the verb highlights only the spatial aspect of the scenario, i.e. the movement of the object. Such metonymy can be called CENTRAL SUBEVENT FOR WHOLE EVENT and it also functions within the Event ICM. Finally, ‘the salt’ stands for the container that actually contains it, so the underlying metonymy can be formulated as CONTENTS FOR CONTAINER. It functions within the Containment ICM (cf. Radden and Kövecses 1999: 41).

## 5. Conclusion

The paper has only sketched some of the issues that must be given more attention in the study of metonymy within indirect speech acts. Whereas a lot of attention has already been paid to the illocutionary force metonymies, the presence of metonymy on different levels within indirect directives still requires more analysis. It could be regarded as an aspect of what Barcelona (2002) discusses as ‘the multiple-level operation of metonymy’.

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<sup>2</sup> This expression is, among others, discussed by Stefanowitsch (2003: 108).

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