

Reseñas / *Book reviews*

Visual Metaphor: Structure and process, ed. Steen, Gerard J. , Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing, 2018, VI + 196 with an index. ISBN 978-90-2720-151-5. 135€ *Reseñado por Lorena Bort-Mir, Universitat Jaume I.*

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“The goal of the book is to take our current state of knowledge with respect to the structure and processing of verbal metaphor as a starting point and to see how far we can get to analyse visual metaphor”
(Spooren, 2018:7)

The study of metaphor by other means of expression rather than language started raising interest among the scientific community about a decade ago (Forceville, 2009; Cienki & Müller, 2008; Forceville & Urios-Aparisi, 2009). The publication of *Metaphors We Live By* (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), where the authors propose their Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), assuming that metaphorical constructions are not just a matter of language anymore but rather a matter of thought (Ortony, 1979/1993; Gibbs, 2008), raised many critiques. One of these critical views emerged, precisely, from the observation that metaphorical conceptualizations may manifest themselves in distinct communicative modalities (gestures, images, etc.).

Visual Metaphor: Structure and process arises as a ground-breaking contribution to the study of the structure

and process of metaphors in static pictures. Deriving from rigorous research on linguistic metaphor, the volume expands to investigate not only the semiotics of figurative meaning in pictures but also the psychological processing that derives from the interpretation of the visual realm. The book wisely merges purely semantic and structural research with psycholinguistic experiments that make it a fundamental piece of work for both students and researchers interested in understanding the mechanisms by which visual metaphor works.

Visual Metaphor: Structure and process is structured into eight chapters. After the chapter devoted to the introduction of the book, the following three chapters comprise Part I, dealing with the structure of visual metaphor. The remaining four chapters are included in Part II regarding the process of visual metaphor.

According to Spooren in the introduction of the book (pp. 1–8), several challenges arise when analysing visual metaphor that are not present in the verbal mode. Spooren acknowledges that the interpretation of still images demands a complex process that may be influenced by several factors such as genre, incongruity and its resolution, source and target domain differentiation, background knowledge about the domains, word and image interplay, the rhetoric of the cartoon, and/or even cultural considerations.

Such a complexity in the understanding and interpretation of metaphors in still pictures demands research that deepens, precisely, into the structure and process of visual metaphors. That is precisely the *raison d'être* of the book.

Schilperoord (Chapter 2) assumes that visual metaphor works under the mechanisms of incongruity or “anomalousness” (p. 11), stating that metaphor in pictures is the result of constructing conceptual structures that allow for incongruity resolution, and not a property of the picture in itself. The author devotes the chapter to unveil how incongruities are resolved by means of metaphorical meaning, thus distinguishing between the structure of images on the one hand, and the metaphorical interpretation that may be motivated by those images on the other hand, delving into characterizing how, apparently, the structure triggers the process. The role that the topic of the picture plays in the metaphorical interpretation is also deeply explored in the chapter. However, the analysis of pictures remains limited to the genre of advertising. One may wonder, then, if Schilperoord’s assumptions might be valid also for other visual genres.

The Visual Metaphor Identification Procedure (VISMIP, Šorm and Steen) is developed in Chapter 3. The procedure, based and adapted from its linguistic counterpart (MIPVU, Steen et

al., 2010) organizes the identification of metaphorical units in pictures in seven steps. It not only introduces the description of VISMIP’s operational steps but also their theoretical justification. The method leads researchers to (i) understanding the general meaning of the picture by identifying its referential and abstract signification, its topic and also its message, (ii) structuring the referential description with Tam and Leung’s (2001) Structured Annotation tool, (iii) finding incongruous visual units, (iv) testing if those incongruities can be integrated by comparison within the topic, (v) testing if the comparison is cross-domain, (vi) testing indirect discourse, and (vii), annotating the picture for metaphoricality if steps 4, 5, and 6 give a positive result.

VISMIP represents a relevant advance to multimodal and metaphor studies, since the existence of a tool with structural steps that do not leave any decisions towards the identification of metaphorical units to the personal intuition of researchers might lead, consequently, to a high level of consistent results among independent analysts.

As the authors suggest (p. 82), however, VISMIP poses some limitations. On the one hand, the identification of the topic may be controversial (leading to multiple interpretations) if the method is applied to other genres rather than advertising such as works of art. On the other hand, inter-rater agreement tests are a must to prove the validity and reliability of the procedure.

It would be, again, significant to see how VISMIP is applied to other visual genres, which is precisely the driving force that leads this volume to the next chapter. Chapter 4 (Bolognesi, van den Heerik & van den Berg), entails the description and justification of how the first online corpus of 350 annotated metaphorical images was constructed (VisMet 1.0). Among the genres selected for the corpus we can find advertisements, political cartoons, works of art, social campaigns, etc. The authors cle-

arly detail the main problems they encountered when selecting and analyzing several images, and they describe the process of the website construction and their future view of the corpus as well.

VisMet 1.0 is seen as a valuable, online, and open-source tool, available to all kinds of public (researchers and non-experts, advertisers and artists, among many others), intended to become an open community adding constant insights to the workings of visual metaphor.

Visual Metaphor: Structure and process concludes its first part (Structure) with these first four chapters. Part II (pp. 117–196) comprises the last 4 chapters of the book that can be summarized as follows:

Chapter 5 deals with behavioral evidence for VISMIP (van den Heerik, Šorm & Steen). The chapter presents experimental evidence on “the different steps that may be involved in visual metaphor processing” (p. 117). The authors explain, thanks to the data obtained in the think-aloud experiment that Šorm and Steen carried out in 2013 for the development of a mental model of visual metaphor processing, how all these data contribute to the refinement of VISMIP. In this way, van den Heerik, Šorm & Steen validate the procedure “against processing behaviour for visual metaphor processing by the general public” (p. 117). The think-aloud data allow, in this way, to justify VISMIP’s procedural steps by relating them to the mental processes that people (experts and non-experts) undertake while processing visual metaphors.

All in all, a missing and very valuable issue that could have been investigated in Chapter 5 is to test whether the identified mental operations happen in the same order as the structured steps (from 1 to 7), that is, if the cognitive processes are linear or nonlinear in visual metaphor processing.

The next chapter of the book (Chapter 6, Van Weelden, Maes & Schilperoord) ex-

plores, through two studies, how shape resemblance between the source and the target domain boosts the viewer to find conceptual similarities between the objects illustrated in a given image. As the authors indicate, “shape similarity of juxtaposed objects can be seen as a visual template which facilitates the construction of metaphorical thought” (p. 158). A valuable concluding remark is added to the chapter, where the authors indicate some of the main differences between linguistic and visual metaphors, which are indeed very helpful to understand the functioning of metaphors in these two different communicative modalities.

Chapter 7 (Hodiamont, Hoeken & van Mulken) proceeds with a focus on how the processing of conventional metaphors in language is similar to their visual counterparts. As CMT (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) claims, it is expected that conventional metaphors in visual modalities are processed through categorization (as linguistic metaphors are), and visual novel metaphors are processed through comparison (as in language). In spite of some limitations and constraints, the results seem to show that the processing of metaphors in these two distinct modalities “indeed correlate substantially with regard to perceived conventionality” (p. 178). More research is needed, though, to make this claim a generalization.

In spite of making a fundamental contribution to the study of visual metaphor, it must be pointed out that no attention has been paid to the role that the different communicative modes (Forceville, 2009; Bort-Mir, 2019) play in the structure and processing of visual metaphors. It seems plausible that this focus on the cross-modal realization of metaphors in pictures would lead to a better understanding of multimodal artifacts such as visuals, thus implying a significant contribution to the multimodal theory of metaphor.

All in all, *Visual metaphor: Structure and process* poses new insights

into the mechanisms of visual metaphor not only at the level of expression but also at the level of cognition. How visual metaphors work and how they are understood and processed are the two key questions that this volume comprehensively addresses. The thorough experimental evidence of the chapters from Part II (Process) are the strong point by which the book highly contributes to a robust theory of visual metaphor. Thus, the volume presents results that develop the cognitive-scientific theory of metaphor one step further, while also expanding our understanding of visual metaphor in multimodal discourses.

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