POETIC COMPARISONS

HOW SIMILES ARE UNDERSTOOD

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Submitted with corrections in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, June 2014

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Acknowledgements

I would first like to thank my fellow PhD students in linguistics at the University of Salford, especially Fabrizio Gallai, Gerry Howley, Rebecca Jackson and Ioannis Kostopoulos for support, inspiration, and no little tolerance in the face of a torrent of examples. I must make particular mention of colleagues who supported my teaching at Salford as a Graduate Teaching Assistant in recent years, especially Alex Bellem, Richard Davey, James Dickins, Domenyk Eades, Iván García-Alvárez, Ahmed el Gindi, John Peate and Janet Watson. I also thank the University for providing funding through the GTA scheme. I would also like to thank the organisers of the Metaphor and Communication International Conference in Cagliari, 2011, for the opportunity to benefit from presenting some of my early findings to some important figures in the field. A number of friends kindly supported me in the final stages in producing the final manuscript of this thesis. They were Zachary Abraham, Tikva Blaukopf Schein, Mhorag Goff, and Nicholas Wyatt. You are wonderful people. I have also benefitted greatly from discussion of examples and theoretical concerns with dozens of people, but I must mention, in addition to the aforementioned, Uzma Ali, David Drennan, Matthew Duncombe, Ceri Harding, Wesley Jackson, Ralph Kruger, Ben Pritchett, and Mahmoud Shaltout. I owe the initial insight that simile had perhaps not received due attention in the literature to the training in close reading I received from two outstanding classicists, Peter Butler and Matthew Leigh. They also taught me the value of finding obscure examples, and of treating authors as human beings first. The person to whom I owe the greatest debt of gratitude in producing this thesis is my supervisor Diane Blakemore, whose criticisms, explanations, corrections and general guidance influenced every page of this thesis and without whom I could not have persevered. She saw the significance of what began life as a defence of simile against its detractors in metaphor studies, and helped to transform it into an explanation of why certain comparisons achieve poetic effects. I am very glad I was distracted from the pre-history of the Arabic language. Any mistakes and shortcomings remain my own. The following dedication is for my parents and teachers:

Optimis parentibus doctissimisque praeceptoribus

سُبْحَانَكَ رَبِّي لَا عِلْمَ لَنَا إِلَّا مَا عَلَّمْتَنَا

Abstract

In this thesis I develop a pragmatic account of how similes are understood within the framework of relevance theory (Sperber and Wilson, 1995). Similes, or 'poetic comparisons', (*Achilles is like a lion*) and non-poetic comparisons (*Wasabi is like mustard*) are understood in similar ways. While non-poetic comparisons communicate that *A* is like *B* in terms of a (relatively) determinate range of respects in which the comparison is taken to hold, poetic comparisons achieve relevance by virtue of weak implicatures which are evoked, in part, in pursuit of certain respects in which the comparison holds. However, the outcome of simile understanding does not necessarily involve deriving a determinate range of points of comparison as part of the content of the comparison. In these cases, the speaker/author simply communicates that the relevance of the comparison lies in the fact that two entities or activities are being compared and the hearer/reader has the responsibility for deciding where relevance lies.

This account explains: (i) why certain comparisons achieve relevance in this way (why certain comparisons are poetic); (ii) why metaphors and similes, nonetheless, can achieve similar effects; (iii) why competing accounts (which tend to conflate metaphor and simile) are vulnerable to counterexamples; (iv) why qualifying similes (*Achilles is a lot like a lion*) and supplying additional linguistically-specified content which relates to potential points of comparison (*Achilles is like a brave lion; Achilles is like a lion in the parched savannah*) does not make a comparison less 'poetic'; (v) why certain relationships between tenor and vehicle tend to obtain in similes but not in non-poetic comparisons; and (vi) how certain types of metaphor/simile interaction work.

Key words: simile, metaphor, relevance, poetic effects, literary meaning.

Terminology and conventions for presentation

I introduce the technical term *poetic comparison* for those comparisons which achieve relevance primarily through the communication of poetic effects (*Achilles is like a lion*). Poetic comparisons are largely coextensive with the pre-theoretic category of 'simile'. *Non-poetic comparisons* are those comparisons which clearly do not achieve poetic effects. Others have called these 'literal comparisons' or simply 'comparisons'.

I follow Richards (1936: 96) in using the term tenor for the *A* term in an *A is (like) B* metaphor/simile, and vehicle for the *B* term, although I use these terms strictly for parts of *utterances* (words or strings of words). I use the terms *point of comparison* and (later) *comparison-relevant content* for the respects in which a comparison is taken to hold. For *Achilles is like a lion*, a typical interpretation will include the property BRAVE as a point of comparison. *Extended* and *explained poetic comparisons* are described and explained in Chapter 5, §5.4.

Examples are typically numbered consecutively in each chapter, unless otherwise stated. Occasionally additional constructed examples of utterances and contextual/communicated assumptions are given in-text, where they appear in italics. In other cases italics are used for emphasis.

Discussion of constructed examples involves feminine pronouns and women's names for speaker/author/communicator and masculine pronouns and men's names for hearer/reader/audience (following Sperber and Wilson, 1995) unless otherwise stated.

I have modelled my citation method after that recommended to authors submitting to the Journal of Pragmatics (Elsevier)[1]. Later editions and republished articles are typically given with only the date of the version used except where it is likely that the reader will have access to the earlier version (e.g. the articles in Sperber and Wilson, 2012a, and Martinich (Ed.), 2010), with the exception of Davidson, 1978/1984, which is always cited as Davidson, 1984 (due to being reproduced multiple times). The only other exceptions to this rule are

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[1] The guidelines can be found at: http://www.elsevier.com/journals/journal-of-pragmatics/0378-2166/guide-for-authors#73001. Last accessed 7th January 2014.

articles by Grice in *Studies in the Way of Words*, all of which I cite as Grice, 1989 (occasionally distinguishing articles by section marks, e.g. §1).

Some constructed examples which are common in the secondary literature are repeated *ad lib.*, but I have attempted to credit the originator of the example where possible.

All page references in the index refer to the main text.

Many of the literary examples are cited from the fifth edition of *The Norton Anthology of Poetry* (Ferguson, *et al.*, 2005). I use the abbreviation *NA* followed by the page number for this edition.

Recorded works are cited as follows: Writer, Artist (if different), Title, Year, Title of Album (if relevant), Publisher (in the UK if multiple).

Examples taken from published works which are not clearly out of copyright will be redacted for the electronic version of this thesis. Those copyrighted works which are not mentioned separately in the list of references under the original author are identified in a section which appears after the conclusion.

Chapter 1: Why simile?

Simile is widely recognised as a rhetorical figure whereby an author uses a comparison which is literally, often uninformatively true to achieve effects which are usually classed as 'figurative' (see §1.2 for a discussion of 'figurativeness'). In terms of their effects, similes have much in common with metaphors (Whalley, 1988; Brogan, 1994; Corbett and Connors, 1999: 396f). As of April 2014, to the best of my knowledge, there has yet to be a monograph published in English on the topic of how similes are understood[2]. By contrast, the secondary literature on metaphor is vast. It has been said that:

> "The only reasonable response to the philosophical literature on metaphor is one of despair."
>
> (Guttenplan, 2005: 1)

Metaphor is widely studied in pragmatics, literary studies and philosophy of language. Many theories of metaphor understanding assume that similes are understood in a particular way (see especially Chapter 3), and even those approaches which dispute the claim that metaphors and similes are understood in the same way often rely upon intuitions about the similarities and differences between metaphors and similes. Therefore, simile is central to current accounts of metaphor understanding. Given this situation, the absence of a full-length treatment of simile is perplexing. How could such a situation, where simile is both central to and 'eclipsed by' metaphor, have come about?

There are a number of 'paradoxes' which have emerged from this situation in the field (see Sperber and Wilson, 1990/2012, for similar observations about the study of style and rhetorical theory more generally). Similes are typically taken as being one of the more central 'tropes' in rhetorical theory (e.g. Aristotle *Rhetoric* III.4; McCall, 1969 *passim*). Students are often taught to identify similes at school. But despite simile's importance in the history of rhetorical studies, and the apparent ease with which one is expected to be able to

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[2] Within relevance theory, there is, as of yet, no published monograph on metaphor either. Vega Moreno (2007) comes close, but is somewhat outdated (Cf. Carston, 2010a).

identify it, some researchers have made no distinction whatsoever between metaphors and similes in their theoretical work, while others have asserted that metaphors are somehow 'better than' similes (for more on this narrow question see Chapter 4, §4.7 of this thesis), often without justification.

1.1 Where to start investigating simile understanding?

There is some confusion in the field of figurative language studies over the definition of simile. Moreover, metaphor is often conflated with simile. I claim that these two factors have led to a situation which is not conducive to research on how similes are understood. The aim of this thesis is to return to the key question of the nature of the relationship between metaphor and simile, but with two aims: to clarify (i) what similes are; and (ii) how they achieve their effects. Instead of using simile to explain metaphor, or metaphor to explain simile, I aim to establish where metaphor research has gone wrong in its assumptions on the relationship between metaphor and simile. In doing so, a very different view of simile emerges, one which is consistent with the principle of Occam's modified razor (*Senses are not to be multiplied beyond necessity*) (Chapman, 2005: 104f; Grice, 1989: 47. Cf. Davis, 1998 §1.4), but which does not assume that they are manifestations of the same phenomenon. Rather, similes are a subset of constructions which share the same basic syntactic form: comparisons. This reorientation of the problem of defining simile can be said to be largely implicitly assumed in discussions of simile from a relevance theory perspective (e.g. Carston and Wearing, 2011; O'Donoghue, 2009), and raises the following important question which this thesis also addresses: how and to what extent does simile differ from what might pre-theoretically be called 'literal comparison'?

Philological approaches to figurative language use are concerned with the meaning of individual expressions: what did a particular author mean by, or what effect did they mean to achieve by, deploying a particular figurative expression? Such questions can be determined by reference to other instances of the same expression being deployed, or by appeal to an authoritative source, such as an encyclopaedia from the appropriate era, or the notes of a commentator, and so on. Let us call this the 'lexicographical' approach to figurative language use, as a putative ideal lexicon could offer a definitive solution to an interpretive problem. For instance, with a perfect lexicon, one could answer definitively

whether a communicated meaning we wish to attribute to an author of a particular period is attested at or before the date of composition. The task of an interpreter of the text is then to identify which senses are attested appropriately, and to disambiguate between them.

The lexicographical approach elicits claims about individual instances of language use which are fundamentally comparative, and, as such, question-begging: metaphor *A* means such and such because it means that elsewhere. They also constitute appeals to authority, another source of invalid argument. A lexicographical approach may be apposite for examination questions on literature, for instance, or as the basis for historical arguments about the content of a given work, as well as for the kind of critical conversations that lovers of literature may share. But one cannot make such incautious appeals to authority and value judgements in establishing the principles which lie behind the characteristic effects of figurative language use.

Furthermore, the lexicographical approach fails to explain how 'figurative' meanings arise in the first place. Compare the following two metaphors given in (1a) and (1b):

    (1a) Achilles is a lion.

    (1b) Achilles is a gazelle.

One could say with some justification that an utterance of (1a) is taken as communicating that Achilles is fearless, ruthless in battle, and so on. Some of those senses of *lion* may be stable over time, even across cultures. But (1b) will typically be understood in a slightly different way by native speakers of English. Perhaps Achilles is understood as being capable of leaping gracefully, running fast, and so on. As it happens, gazelles are seen as exemplars of extreme beauty and elegance in medieval Arabic literature. For a medieval Arabic-speaking audience, the Arabic equivalent of (1b) would have most likely been interpreted as (1a) is by most contemporary speakers of English: providing direct access to a (relatively) standardised set of properties (related to beauty) which can then be predicated of Achilles. For a modern English-speaking audience, the interpretation of (1b) will more likely incorporate properties such as speed, proficiency at jumping, and so on, which are more closely related to the general knowledge about gazelles that the audience might have. But

because 'gazelle' is far less conventionalised than 'lion' is as a metaphor, the likely interpretation is much more subjective.

A lexicographical approach, fascinating as it may be in elucidating cultural differences between speaker communities and perhaps even providing insights into language change, is entirely misleading in studying what makes a figurative use of an expression different from a non-figurative one. Let us call (1a) a (relatively) 'standardised' case and (1b) a 'creative' or 'novel' case of metaphor use. To say that the word *lion* is ambiguous between members of the species *panthera leo* and 'the class of lion-like things' does not explain how such meanings arose in the first place. Moreover, it is uncontroversial to claim that there is *obviously* some connection between the 'literal' lions, a set of entities which includes only certain big cats, and 'figurative' lions, which includes any entity one might want to ascribe certain properties to. It seems likely that such standardised interpretations of examples such as (1a) started life as novel cases like (1b), and even fairly 'standardised' metaphorical cases such as (1a) often do communicate *more than* an analysis of metaphorical meaning based on lexical ambiguity might suggest. One can profitably compare cases of genuine lexical ambiguity such as (1c):

(1c) The cat jumped on <u>the sleeper</u>.

The underlined expression can be used to denote either an animate agent who is sleeping or a particular type of train. A hearer of (1c) must identify which of two senses is intended in order to understand the utterance. But, if the analogy between metaphor and ambiguity is to hold, then disambiguating between people sleeping and sleeper-trains should evoke the same sort of effects as metaphor. An utterance such as (1c) is *not* interpreted as figurative.

The lexicographical approach to 'figurative' meaning fares even worse in cases of simile. Take the simile examples given in (2a) and (2b):

(2a) Achilles is like a lion.

(2b) Achilles is like a gazelle.

Firstly, it is not clear that (2a) and (2b) differ in how 'standardised' their interpretations are. Nor is it clear whether, and to what extent, interpretations of (1a) and (2a) and (1b) and (2b)

respectively are likely to differ. Chapter 5 addresses exactly this issue: what is the process by which similes such as (2a) and (2b) are understood, and how does this differ from the understanding of metaphors such as (1a) and (1b)? In order to do so, I must challenge the widespread assumption that a metaphor such as (1a) can be 'paraphrased' as a simile such as (2a) without causing a significant change in meaning. This will be tackled in Chapter 4, §4.2. However, the most important observation about simile at this juncture is that it is not a 'figurative sense' of *lion* or *gazelle* which Achilles is compared to in (2a) and (2b). The 'figurative' meaning arises somehow despite *lion* and *gazelle* being used in their primary, standardised, 'literal' sense.

Philological, lexicographical approaches to all figurative utterances will face similar explanatory problems. An additional problem is that the pre-theoretic notions of 'literal' and 'figurative' are not well-defined (for critiques and qualifications of 'literal' meaning from a variety of points of view within pragmatics see e.g. Gibbs, 1994; Searle, 1978; Sperber and Wilson, 1990/2012: 89; Recanati, 2004: 460f). The recognition that individual rhetorical figures, tropes and schemes are often poorly defined goes back as far as the Roman rhetorician Quintilian in the 1st century CE (Bahti, 1993: 409a). The use of a particular construction (comparisons) can elicit certain (figurative) effects. This is what requires explanation. These effects are similar to those of metaphors. Does this mean we should start investigating simile by *comparing* simile to metaphor?

1.2 Should metaphor and simile be investigated side by side?

Comparing metaphor and simile is not the only way to approach the question of how similes are understood. But if we do choose to compare them, it is not immediately obvious what the relevant similarities and differences are. One important difference which has been played down in the metaphor studies literature is that similes come in many different forms. But some who do look at simile as a phenomenon in itself posit that there is a default type of simile, epic simile for instance (e.g. suggested by Ben-Porat, 1992), which certain other similes are derivative of[3]. But *why* should there be such 'default' types? If there is a

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[3] For Ben-Porat there is a dominant norm of epic simile which Homer's similes largely depart from to varying degrees (1992: 148). If Ben-Porat's scheme does not apply to all simile, but only to 'epic' simile, then it will not help us in explaining how epic similes are

'standard' form of simile, what is it, and does this explain why certain comparisons are interpreted in a figurative way? I discuss the potential role of other 'default' assumptions in understanding similes in Chapter 5, §5.2.

The majority view appears to be that a typical simile is of the following form (example (2a) repeated here):

(2a) Achilles is like a lion.

The reason that examples such as (2a) are appealing to researchers in the field is that they appear to be the simplest possible type of example. Examples such as (2a) look very similar to metaphors, as in (1a) (repeated here):

(1a) Achilles is a lion.

An utterance of (2a) and an utterance of (1a) are likely to communicate a whole range of implications (technically, implicatures. See Chapter 2) which overlap. In fact, it is hard to discriminate between the effects of (1a) and (2a). For instance, both (1a) and (2a) could communicate, amongst other assumptions, the following, given in (3a-c):

(3a) Achilles is brave.

(3b) Achilles is resilient in battle.

(3c) Achilles' compatriots should be proud of his martial prowess.

etc.

Since metaphors and similes look ostensibly similar and can both convey the same sort of things, including assumptions like those suggested in (3a-c), it might be argued that they must both *be* the same thing. Indeed, we even have an authority such as Aristotle to endorse this view. In his *Rhetoric* he claims that similes are the same as metaphors. He explains that both metaphors and similes appear *smart* (*asteion*) if they are well expressed, but (i) similes

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comprehensible in the first place. I do not devote more detailed attention to Ben-Porat's views as (i) they assume that simile can be identified *a priori*, and (ii) they do not address the central question of why some comparisons are understood as similes in the first place.

are a type of metaphor differing only in how they are presented (their *prothesis*), (ii) similes are *less sweet* (*hêtton hêdu*) than metaphors because they are longer, and (iii) because simile does not say *like this that* (*hôs touto ekeino*) the mind does not seek *this* at all (Aristotle *Rhetoric* 3.10.3. For more on Aristotle's views on metaphor and simile see e.g. Kirby, 1997; McCall, 1969 §2). If the first claim means that metaphors and similes *are* the same (e.g. Cope and Sandys, 2010: 109), Aristotle was wrong. The second claim is open to challenge, and in Chapter 4 I explore this in more depth (§4.7). The last claim is particularly difficult to interpret, especially since he denies that similes say *like this that* using a word which is often used in similes: *hôs*.

Most take Aristotle to mean here that whereas metaphors say that one thing *is* another, similes do not. But then it is not clear why he would think that the mind would seek *this* (apparently the vehicle of the simile or metaphor) in metaphors but not in similes. I suspect that he may have had a different contrast in mind, and this explains why the text is so difficult to interpret. Nevertheless, not everybody agrees with the conflation of metaphor and simile, and even those who see the phenomena as manifestations of essentially the same process of meaning construal make subtle distinctions between the two (e.g. Glucksberg's view of similes as 'metaphors expressed as comparisons' changes subtly from *id.* 2001 to *id.* 2008: 75. This change in views has also been noted by Wałaszewska, 2013: 332 n1). Nevertheless, I challenge the assumptions that metaphors and similes must be (i) close in terms of their typical effects, (ii) close in terms of how they are understood, and that claims (i) and (ii) are relevant to investigating simile as a phenomenon in its own right.

A lot of theoretical argument has rested on the intersubstitutability of these two 'tropes', to use the ancient terminology, at least in cases such as (1a) and (2a) (I refute this is Chapter 4, §4.2). Arguments based on this assumption have run in several directions. One argument proceeds as follows: we have a full account of metaphor; similes are like metaphors; we need only to explain how the process of metaphorical understanding is modified in the understanding of similes. Both conceptual metaphor theorists like Lakoff and his colleagues (Lakoff and Johnson, 2003; Lakoff and Turner, 1989; Turner, 1996; Lakoff, 2008; Fauconnier and Turner, 2002) and Glucksberg and his colleagues (Glucksberg, 2001; 2008; Glucksberg and Haught, 2006; Glucksberg and McGlone, 1999; Glucksberg and Keysar, 1990) have at

different times endorsed such a view. The opposite argument has also been made, but in three slightly different ways. Either (i) we have a full account of simile; metaphors are like similes; we need only to explain how the process of simile understanding is modified in the understanding of metaphors. This appears to be the view of Gentner and colleagues, as evidenced in her earlier work, which takes metaphor to be a species of analogy (Gentner 1983. Cf. Gentner and Bowdle, 2008); or (ii) we have a full account of simile; metaphors do not achieve their characteristic effects directly; they do so (in at least some cases) by first implicitly communicating a simile, which generates those effects in the usual way. This is a view associated with a number of pragmaticists and philosophers of language, including Grice and Searle (Grice, 1989: 34; Searle, 1993; Martinich, 1984/1991); or (iii) we do not have, and have never needed, an account of how similes are understood as anything other than communicating what they say 'on the surface' (that *A* is like *B*). This is a view particularly associated with the philosopher of language Davidson (1978/1984).

There are still other views which might have implications for one's approach to simile research. One diverse group of thinkers in particular, whose work I do not engage with critically in this thesis, including Nietzsche (1873/2004), and, perhaps, the later Wittgenstein (1958), see all language use as being as flexible and elusive as metaphorical language use. However, one need not subscribe to scepticism about *any* notion of context-invariant linguistic meaning in order to see the same processes which underlie figurative language use at work in cases which we might assume to be unequivocally 'literal' (Lakoff and Turner similarly distance themselves from the 'everything is metaphor' camp. See *id.* 1989: 218). Relevance theory allows one to maintain a view of language which prioritises the study of linguistic (that is, grammatical) structure, and which holds that one's internal Grammar represents a narrow suite of innate, species-specific cognitive capacities (a view associated primarily with Chomsky), whilst recognising the 'Romantic' insight that the processes underlying figurative language use are ubiquitous (see Sperber and Wilson, 1990/2012). The benefits of such a compatibilist approach should be clear to theoretical linguists.

As we are primarily interested in what makes certain comparisons amenable to a figurative interpretation (see below), it is not necessarily the case that those which can be easily converted into metaphors, such as (2a), will provide most insight. For now, it need only be

pointed out that a lot of classicists who are familiar with the work of Homer will find it hard to see (2a) as a representative simile at all. Most of Homer's similes compare actions. Example (4a) is an utterance of a verbal simile:

(4a) Achilles leapt like a lion leaps.

But even (4a) is not representative of Homer's use of simile. Example (4b) is far closer to a typical Homeric simile:

(4b) Achilles leapt like a lion pouncing upon a careless hunter as he foolishly pursues the retreating lioness.

What kind of metaphor could stand in for (4a)? And what kind of metaphor needs to be explained in terms of (4b)? Why would anyone persist in the conflation of metaphor and simile in the face of such glaring counterexamples? Why are such examples either ignored, or dismissed as marginal or derivative phenomena[4]?

Part of the cause of the lack of clarity in this area must be that metaphor is a clear test case for one's views about the nature of language (see also below). If one *must* deal with metaphor as a 'canonical' topic in a theory of language or communication, one is less likely to treat simile in its own right. This has often proved to be the case even if it turns out that one's theory of metaphor understanding rests on an assumed, but unexplained, theory of how similes are understood (on metaphor's status within pragmatics see e.g. Ariel, 2010 §6.3; Levinson, 1983 §3.2.5). One is also likely to model one's account of the (subjectively) less central phenomenon (simile) on the basis of the more central phenomenon (metaphor) to which one may have dedicated years of taxing research and theorising. But another major problem which may have contributed to the relative paucity of simile research is that while

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[4] One also finds mistaken assumptions outside the Western academic tradition. Leezenberg's summary of al-Jurjānī's views (2001 §1.3) suggests that the medieval Arabic rhetorician held distinctions between metaphor and simile which neither overlap with the common assumptions in the Western tradition nor agree with my own.

metaphor wears its strangeness rather overtly, the problem with simile is that there often does not appear to be a problem at all[5].

Moreover, we need to be clear about what we mean by a figurative interpretation. It will not suffice to say that those comparisons whose interpretations are similar to those of (poetic, creative, novel) metaphors are figurative. Definitions of 'figurativeness' tend to be either theory-dependent, typically positing that figurative interpretations are those which make use of particular processes of conceptualisation in a particular way (e.g. Turner, 1998: 60f; Bredin, 1992: 70; see Chapter 3 *passim*), or beg the question, identifying figurative language in terms of the 'tropes' which are figuratively interpreted (e.g. Bethlehem, 1996: 205; Roberts and Kreuz, 1994: 159. See also Borberly, 2008: 416 for different ways of defining 'figurativity'). One such circular definition is given by Cuddon:

> **figurative language:** Language which uses figures of speech; for example, metaphor, simile, alliteration (*qq.v.*). Figurative language must be distinguished from literal (*q.v.*) language. 'He hared down the street' or 'He ran like a hare down the street' are figurative (metaphor and simile respectively). 'He ran very quickly down the street' is literal. *See* HYPERBOLE; METONYMY; SYNECDOCHE.
>
> (Cuddon, 1998: 320. Emboldening/italics in source)

Other theorists simply identify figurative language as some kind of 'creative' use of language which is easily identifiable as divergent from a literal norm (Nowottny, 1965: 52f; Cf. Katz, 1998: 19-21)[6].

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[5] As Diane Blakemore has put it (p. c.): the problem is there is no problem.

[6] Guttenplan seeks to draw a distinction between 'figurative claims' and predicative metaphors (2005: 231-247). I suggest that his distinction is not entirely successful, as I am not quite sure what he thinks distinguishes the two, although he relates the former to synaesthesia but not the latter. For Guttenplan, 'figurative' and 'metaphorical' are almost the same notion (*id., ib.*: 231f), and figurativeness involves some kind of 'emblematic' relationship (*id., ib.*: 238).

I follow the, admittedly impressionistic, conventional use of 'figurative' and 'figurativeness' with a number of qualifications. I propose that we stick to an intuitive notion of figurative uses of language as contrasting with literal uses of the same lexical items in the same order. For example, *Aslan is a lion* is a literal use, where *Aslan* is understood as being a big cat of the appropriate species (*panthera leo*), whereas *Achilles is a lion* is understood as figurative. Although the main interest in researching figurative uses of language is that such uses 'feel' intuitively different to literal uses, and an account of understanding in linguistic communication must concern itself with such issues (e.g. Sperber and Wilson, 1990/2012), we need to be more precise about *which* intuitions of language users in identifying figuratively-used expressions are relevant. I assume here that there are some uses of expressions which can be reliably identified by language users as: (i) involving a type of non-literal interpretation, communicating something different or in addition to the meaning which is given by the grammar (by virtue of the lexically-encoded meaning of the words used and syntactic rules of composition); and (ii) communicating a particular *type* of content, including: (a) precise meanings which the lexically-encoded meanings do not provide another language user with direct access to, and/or (b) certain content which cannot be lexically- and/or syntactically-encoded in principle (such as impressions, feelings, and so on). The penultimate clause of this provisional definition of figurative language will be more relevant to certain figurative uses (especially, metaphors) than others. The final clause distinguishes those uses which are novel, creative, or 'poetic' from those which are conventional, standardised, or 'mundane'. It also provides a window onto the negative definition of poetry attributed to Robert Frost as 'what gets lost in translation' when converted into prose (MacKenzie, 2002: 166).

Consider (1a) and (2a) again:

> (1a) Achilles is a lion.

> (2a) Achilles is like a lion.

An utterance of (1a) is, where Achilles is a man, strictly-speaking false. This is shown clearly in Mary's 'smart-guy' response to Peter in the constructed exchange given here in (5):

> (5) *Peter*: Becci is a lion.

Mary: She's coming over for dinner. We'd better get some zebra meat in.

The paradox of metaphor is how one can communicate any cognitive content at all (a thought, a proposition) by saying something false. And, if the apparent 'falseness' of metaphors has something to do with how they achieve their characteristic effects, why are all blatant falsehoods not characteristically 'figurative' (Cf. Chapter 3, §3.4)?

An utterance of (2a) on the other hand will be taken as expressing a true proposition in almost any circumstance. It is true that Achilles is like a lion if Achilles is a bear, or a partridge, or a figment of one's imagination, or a part of one's anatomy, or a supercomputer. In fact, an utterance such as (6), when Aslan is an animal of the species *panthera leo*, is quite possible, even if one may feel that it fails to be pragmatically felicitous:

(6) ?Aslan is like a lion. [In fact, he *is* a lion.]

While metaphors are ostensibly false, it is generally agreed that similes are ostensibly, obviously, uncontroversially *true*, in almost every case[7] (Carston, 2002a: 357. Cf. Fogelin, 1988).

The phenomenon of metaphorically-used language is crucial for some semanticists (e.g. Davidson, 1978/1984; Stern, 2000) because it threatens models of linguistic communication in terms of the fully-truth-conditional propositional content of (at least some) sentences. Explaining metaphor is a priority for pragmaticists because it poses a problem for the kinds of views of semantics which pragmaticists are often sceptical of (see e.g. Ariel, 2010: 4ff on how pragmatics as a field has developed since 1970), whether one prefers to explain metaphor understanding in terms of implicit communication (Grice, 1989; Sperber and Wilson, 1995 §4.10) or in terms of the inferential modification of the explicit content of utterances (e.g. Carston, 2002a §5). Metaphor is also central for cognitive linguists because it provides a model for the kind of cognitive flexibility and creativity which underlies a lot of human linguistic (and non-linguistic) capabilities, so researchers from that school of thought

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[7] But not *trivially* true. If they were trivially true then their negations would be trivially false, but the utterance in (fn1) is just as obviously true as (2a) *Achilles is like a lion*: (fn1) Achilles is not like a lion**.** I owe this clarification to Iván García-Álvarez (p. c.).

claim (see e.g. Turner, 1996; Gibbs, 2008: 5). For all these approaches, metaphor is going to loom large in any account of figurative language use. Irony, another 'trope' on the Classical/Medieval rhetorical view of figurative language, has also attracted a great deal of attention from theorists (e.g. Sperber and Wilson, 1995 §4.9; see Gibbs and Colston (Eds.), 2007; Wilson and Sperber, 2012b). However, irony is not usually seen as being in competition with metaphor, although Grice gives rather similar accounts of metaphor and irony (1989: 34). None of his followers, whether 'neo-' or 'post-Gricean', appear to have done so[8].

It may well be that, because metaphor is seen as so much more important than simile and so fundamental to the fields of pragmatics, cognitive linguistics and philosophy of language, the study of simile is more relevant to theorists as potentially illuminating metaphor than a subject worthy of study in its own right. Simile as an object of independent study has failed to become established, in anthropological terms, it has failed to become a 'meme' (Dawkins, 1989: 189ff) or 'cultural attractor' (Sperber, 1996 §3), amongst researchers on figurative language. As a competitor with metaphor studies, simile studies struggles because, whereas metaphor is clearly of relevance to the full range of theorists, the problem with simile, as I said earlier, is that there is no (semantic) problem: hence, for them, simile appears to be undeserving of further investigation.

In order to dismiss this canard once and for all, I engage in an ostensibly counterintuitive manoeuvre. I attempt to answer as definitively as is currently possible what can, and cannot, be inferred about simile understanding from metaphor understanding and vice versa. In other words, I engage in exactly what I have just argued has contributed to a dearth of progress in the field. The difference between my approach and the other approaches criticised here is that I do not privilege one form of simile over another, but subject a range of assumptions in the field to as full a range of data as possible. Moreover, I treat simile as a phenomenon within ostensive-inferential communication, and allow the theory I adopt to

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[8] Empson sees metaphor and irony as involving 'ambiguity', but his definition of ambiguity is extremely broad (1953).

explain this phenomenon to 'filter out' which aspects of simile use are relevant to theorising about how similes are understood, and which are not.

In order to achieve this objective I will also have to establish the utility of this theoretical framework. Establishing that relevance theory best explains this phenomenon provides circumstantial evidence for the explanatory utility of those aspects of relevance theory which are central to my explanation. This will provide further supporting evidence for the theory as an overarching theory of human cognition and communication by augmenting its empirical coverage. Moreover, in identifying often tacit assumptions in the field of figurative language research, and treating them as falsifiable hypotheses by challenging them with attested real-world data, I hope to refocus the study of figurative language away from metaphor (which, for reasons investigated in Chapter 3, appears to have reached an insurmountable theoretical obstacle in the form of 'emergent properties') onto investigation of simile in particular and a wider range of figurative 'tropes' in general in the hope of identifying avenues for further progress in our understanding of how one can use words which apparently mean one thing to mean something else[9].

1.3 Relevance theory and figurative language research: why so little attention to simile?

If the foregoing discussion suggests why there has been so little attention devoted to simile in and of itself, and so little development in the theoretical literature on how similes are understood, it does not explain why relevance theory in particular has not looked at simile in more depth. The *Postface* to the second edition of Sperber and Wilson's *Relevance* suggested that metaphor and related phenomena would be central to their subsequent work (1995: 279), but this is not what transpired (see Wilson and Sperber, 2012a for a collection of articles which cover important developments in relevance theory, especially since 1995).

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[9] Even before the problem of emergent properties had been extensively articulated and explored (see Chapter 3, §3.1), Blackburn wrote: "I think nobody would claim that the study of metaphor has been one of analytical philosophy's brighter achievements" (1984: 180 n5.6).

In *Relevance*, Sperber and Wilson proposed that metaphorical utterances can be viewed as a type of 'loose talk' or 'loose use' (1995: 231ff). Carston developed this account further, arguing that metaphorically used lexical items communicate concepts which are derived from, but different to, the concept lexically-encoded by the word used, that is to say, they communicate ad hoc concepts (2002a: §5). Both the 'loose use' and 'ad hoc concept' developments within the relevance theory account of metaphor understanding have significant theoretical consequences for linguistic pragmatics as a whole. The loose use account of metaphor understanding is incompatible with certain competing pragmatic theories (drawing from Grice, 1989) which assume that speakers and hearers are constrained by a presumption of truthfulness, so it marks a distinctive break from such theories. The ad hoc concept development to the account marks a radical divergence from other theories of linguistic meaning, in that it allows for the possibility that all words which lexically-encode concepts can be used to communicate a concept they do not lexically-encode (Sperber and Wilson, 1998/2012: 32). Therefore, current relevance theory recognises that there is linguistic underdeterminacy even at the level of individual lexical items (Carston, 2002a: 360). This makes relevance theory a radically contextualist approach to pragmatics (*id.* 2009; 2010b).

The above two developments helped to position relevance theory in relation to two important issues in linguistics and philosophy of language: the nature of linguistic meaning, and the distinction between semantics and pragmatics. A more recent development, again driven by the work of Carston and colleagues (e.g. 2010a; Carston and Wearing, 2011), proposes that certain difficulties within the relevance theory account of metaphor understanding, namely the problem of 'interaction' between metaphors (and between metaphors and similes) and the problem of 'emergent property metaphors', necessitates a rethinking of what is involved in utterance understanding. Carston proposes a 'second mode of metaphor processing', whereby the non-figurative (lexically-encoded) meaning of the metaphorically used words remains highly salient during processing of the utterance, and where certain mentally stored representations of the denotation of concepts (including analogue visual representations) may play a role (e.g. 2010a: 319).

If the second mode of metaphor processing can be shown to play a role in how metaphors are understood, then this would be an important development in pragmatic theory. Firstly, it would appear that somehow both the lexically-encoded and the ad hoc senses communicated by a word can remain active at the same time, and contribute simultaneously to the overall interpretation of the utterance. Secondly, it might provide a window onto the interface between the inferential processing of utterances and analogue representations (see also Pilkington, 2010: 164-170). I do not deal with Carston's second mode of metaphor processing directly, as my concern is with the understanding of simile. But I have found that no appeal is necessary to a 'second mode' of simile processing to explain even the complex examples I look at in Chapters 5 and 6. Moreover, it appears that there are no 'emergent property' similes (see Chapter 6, §6.2). If a fully inferential approach to simile understanding can be maintained, this may threaten the utility of appeals to the second mode of metaphor processing.

Because metaphor has been a productive topic for research in relevance theory on central issues such as the distinctions between semantics and pragmatics and between explicit and implicit content, it has attracted a great deal of attention. Apart from one working paper (O'Donoghue, 2009), and some work touching on the metaphor-simile relationship (e.g. Carston and Wearing, 2011), there is very little published work on simile from a relevance theoretic perspective[10]. Since the publication of *Relevance*, there has been only one

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[10] Since the examination of this thesis in March 2014, the work of Wałaszewska has been brought to my attention (e.g. *id.*, 2013). I do not in this thesis address her hypothesis which states that *like* in similes encodes a procedure which instructs the hearer to construct an ad hoc concept. However, I would make a number of observations. Firstly, she draws upon the view of Hernández Iglesias (2010), whose approach I critique in Chapter 4, §4.2. Secondly, it appears that she is using the notion of a procedure in a way which is incompatible with Blakemore's original formulation of the notion of a procedure as a semantic constraint on relevance (1987. Although see 2002 for cases of procedures affecting contributions to explicit content). Fourthly, Wałaszewska seems to take it for granted that "similes are more related to metaphors than to literal comparisons" (2013: 332), a view that I argue against in Chapter 4. Finally, if similes communicate a *single* ad hoc concept as part of the explicitly

monograph on poetic effects (Pilkington, 2000), which dedicates one chapter to metaphor. Poetic effects are central to my explanation of how similes are understood.

Apart from other stylistic-pragmatic work (including a special issue of *Language and Literature*, volume 5 issue 3) and one monograph-length work on relevance and post-structuralist literary theory (MacKenzie, 2002), other work which is less directly relevant to simile study from a relevance theoretic perspective has typically been concerned with the relationship between metaphors and lexical pragmatics (some ramifications of developments in relevance theoretic metaphor studies are explored in Chapter 3). It is not surprising, given the tendency in the wider field to neglect simile, that simile has not been a major focus for relevance theorists[11]. Professional researchers have to engage with the theoretical controversies of the day, and arguments in favour of pragmatic intrusion into explicit content are of greater theoretical impact than another phenomenon which metaphor can exemplify: poetic effects (Chapter 2, §2.10). But these are also a central prediction of relevance theory (Sperber and Wilson, 1995 §4.6). By clarifying the differences between *how* metaphors and similes achieve poetic effects, I hope to contribute to the literature on this central theoretical issue within relevance theory, as well as to the growing body of literature on metaphor from a relevance theory perspective (important summaries of recent developments in relevance theory pertinent to metaphor include: Vega Moreno, 2007; Soria and Romero (eds.), 2010; Sperber and Wilson, 2008/2012. See especially Carston's recent work, including 2010a; 2010b: 256ff; 2012).

The key distinction which sets relevance theory apart from the other approaches to metaphor research is how relevance theory distinguishes between the explicit and implicit content of utterances (e.g. Carston, 2004). While the literal/figurative distinction is of contested utility, the 'problem that is not a problem' of simile can be addressed more

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communicated content of the utterance, how would Wałaszewska's account proceed for cases of 'extended' and 'explained' simile (see especially Chapter 5, §5.4)?

[11] I have come across a tantalising footnote by Bredin: "I do not consider the cognitive and linguistic principles that govern the formulation and processing of comparisons. These are dealt with most effectively by relevance theory" (Bredin 1998: 68 n1).

productively once the explicit/implicit distinction is established. The claim that metaphors are 'literally false' and similes 'literally true' is misleading, and, in an important sense, incorrect. While metaphors involve the communication of an ad hoc concept, and the indeterminacy of the explicit content of the utterance can be traced to the responsibility that the hearer has in recovering the intended ad hoc concept, I propose in Chapter 5 that comparisons are inherently underdetermined at the level of explicit content, and that in the case of similes (or, better, 'poetic comparisons') the enrichment of the explicit content results in an explicitly communicated content of the utterance which is indeterminate. While the *implicit* indeterminacy of metaphors and similes can overlap, perhaps explaining why intuitions about their intersubstitutability have arisen (see §4.2), and both (novel, creative) metaphors and poetic comparisons *weakly* communicate explicit content, the way they achieve their effects is different.

1.4 The choice and presentation of data

As there was no formal procedure in place for identifying similes before I began this research, to impose a procedure without first establishing that we have 'picked out' a natural kind would be inappropriate. I claim that *there is no such procedure* which would pick out all and only those phenomena pre-theoretic intuitions would class as similes, because there is no agreement on the constitution of such a category. In Chapter 5 I introduce the term *poetic comparisons*, which is the title of this thesis. In Chapter 6 (§6.1) I use my definition of poetic comparisons to classify certain phenomena into those which are understood in this fashion and those which are not. This suggests my account of poetic comparisons can serve as a criterion for future empirical work on the use of similes. The lack of a sound basis for identifying similes threatens the validity of much of the empirical work on simile use (for corpus research on similes in English see e.g. Wikberg, 2008; Moon, 2008). Moreover, the centrality of metaphor studies in the field of figurative language research may have caused researchers to prioritize those issues which are pertinent to metaphor in their approach to simile. My thesis will help to clarify what the pertinent research questions for future work on simile ought to be. Furthermore, few have addressed the problem of distinguishing similes from non-figurative uses of the same comparison constructions.

For reasons of simplicity, I have limited myself to three sorts of construction:

(i) *A* is like *B*.

(ii) *A* VERBS like *B.*

(iii) *A* is as ADJECTIVE as *B*.

Those utterances which have one of the forms given in (i)-(iii), and which achieve affects that a typical reader/hearer would identify as 'figurative' or 'poetic', I have called 'simile'. When I introduce the notion of 'poetic comparison' in Chapter 5, I intend it to be a theoretically justified definition. This will be an improvement on the rough simile-identification heuristic I have described.

Even restricting our attention to constructions involving *like*, the class of comparisons[12] of this type is diverse. As a conjunction, *like* can introduce a manner adjunct (Quirk, *et al.*, 1985 §8.79) or serve as a type of conjunction joining two syntactically complete clauses, and as a conjunction its "functions [...] are difficult to classify in terms of traditional word classes" (*id.*, *ib.* §9.4). As Quirk *et al.* argue (*id.*, *ib.* §9.48), prepositional uses of *like* vary in their interpretation, as is evidenced by (7a) and (7b):

(7a) The missile darted across the sky like lightning.

(7b) Electricity is like lightning.

In (7a), with an intransitive verb, *like* is interpreted as something like 'in a manner resembling', whereas in (7b), with a copula construction, the meaning of *like* is "purely that of resemblance" (*id.*, *ib.* §9.48). Note that Quirk *et al.* make no mention of the *figurative* interpretations of examples such as (7a) and the possible figurative interpretation of many examples which have the same structure as (7b) (such as (2a)).

I do not claim to establish a typology of simile in this thesis, but I have adduced sufficient evidence to suggest that the focus in the experimental literature upon '*A* is *B*'-type metaphors and '*A* is like *B*'-type similes is likely to give a fundamentally flawed characterisation of how figurative predications and figurative comparisons (roughly, similes of the forms given in (i)-(iii) above) differ in their processing and their effects. However,

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[12] Not to be confused with comparative adjectives, such as *better*.

unlike those who have simply flagged up the issue of metaphor-simile interaction before moving on (e.g. Croft and Cruse, 2004. See Chapter 6, §6.3), I have begun to identify how a research programme might proceed based on the hypotheses that the theoretically sound category is not similes but poetic comparisons, and that such phenomena are worthy of further investigation in their own right. In particular, I aim to clarify the metaphor-simile relationship, as well as the less well researched issue of the relationship between similes and other comparisons of the same syntactic form (see Chapters 4 and 5 *passim*). Moreover, I do so within a framework of an inferential account of utterance understanding which is independently motivated (Chapter 2).

I make liberal use of constructed examples because (i) this is common practice in pragmatics, and (ii) it can be argued that constructed examples in pragmatic stylistics are legitimate by analogy with similar procedures in theoretical linguistics (Fabb, 1997: 17). Despite objections to the use of decontextualized examples, for instance by those in the conceptual metaphor theory tradition (including Semino and Steen, 2008: 237; Ritchie, 2013: 65; Gibbs and Colston, 2012: 343), using such examples is standard practice in the field of pragmatic stylistics, and is essential to foundational work in the pragmatics of communication (and was frequently used by pioneers within conceptual metaphor theory, including Lakoff and Johnson, 2003). My aim is to establish a sound methodology for the investigation of a particular type of linguistic expression in literature *and communication*. For this reason it is appropriate to adopt a current methodology in relevance theoretic pragmatics in treating such phenomena, and any justifications for constructed and isolated examples in the relevance theory literature apply to this thesis. Although I do not address the experimental literature systematically, several of my findings will have implications for experimental work on metaphor and simile. These implications include: (i) metaphor is not 'better than' simile (Chapter 4, §4.7); (ii) there are no formal differences between simile and 'literal' comparison (§4.9, Chapter §5.1); and (iii) there are no obligatory conceptual relationships between tenor and vehicle in similes (§§5.2.1-4). Any experimental work which relies upon assumptions contrary to these findings will require reinterpretation in the light of this thesis.

However, as speaker intuitions about weak effects are more difficult to determine than, for instance, grammaticality judgements in theoretical syntax, I rely heavily upon examples from

published poems and literary fiction where relevant. However, my choice of investigating extant similes should not be taken as a critique of the use of constructed examples. One might challenge my identification of a particular expression as being figurative and intuitively 'poetic' if I relied primarily upon constructed examples. It stands to reason that an expression deployed in a poem is quite likely to be deployed with a view to the generation of poetic effects in an audience (Chapter 2, §2.10). If the reader is uncomfortable with a theory which treats literary texts as part of the same natural kind as spoken utterances, I refer them to Chapter 2, §2.13

1.5 The structure of the thesis

In this section I summarise (i) the argument of the thesis, identifying those sections which address most directly questions of the secondary literature relevant to the topic, (ii) the methodology adopted in the thesis, and (iii) where the reader might find real-world data (actual utterances taken from published poetry, prose, literary fiction and song writing, primarily in English, but also occasionally in Arabic, Classical Greek and Latin) relevant to the particular theoretical issues.

In Chapter 2 I present the main elements of relevance theoretic pragmatics as a theory of ostensive-inferential communication. This theory will underpin the argument in the following chapters. I also explore the implications of relevance theory for the study of style, and defend my treatment of literary texts as utterances. Such an account is not only defensible, but superior to those accounts which might treat literary understanding as *sui generis*. In Chapter 3 I explore a number of accounts of metaphor understanding (or metaphorical meaning) whose assumptions may have consequences for an account of simile understanding. Some accounts argue that metaphor and simile are irrelevant to understanding linguistic meaning, and their typical interpretations require no explanation (Davidson, 1978/1984). If this were true, this would invalidate my account in Chapter 5. Other accounts try to capture the typical effects of metaphors and (by extension) similes in terms of their semantics (e.g. Stern, 2000; 2008). Still other accounts attempt to capture the typical content of metaphorical utterances in terms of psychological processes of conceptual manipulation: these can involve (i) mapping correspondences between concepts (e.g. Gentner and Bowdle, 2008); (ii) extending a conceptual category associated with the vehicle

to match that associated with the tenor (e.g. Glucksberg, 2001; 2008)[13]; and (iii) accessing existing conceptual associations which are organised in terms of *conceptual metaphors* (e.g. Lakoff and Johnson, 2003). All of these accounts are either incompatible with the evidence of how *similes* are understood, are inadequate to characterise the typical effects of metaphor, or both, and so must be dismissed as competing approaches to simile understanding. The major differences between these different approaches and relevance theoretic approaches to figurative language understanding are spelled out.

In light of the rather conflicted state of the field outlined in Chapter 3, I argue in Chapter 4 that we need to reconsider certain more or less widely-held assumptions about the relationship between metaphor and simile (§§4.1-3, 7-8), what might be the typical or 'default' form of similes (§§4.4-6), and whether similes can be distinguished from other comparisons of the same syntactic form (§4.9). I give my own theory of how similes are understood in Chapter 5 and defend it in light of the observations raised in Chapters 3 and 4, as well as certain other assumptions about tenor-vehicle conceptual relationships in ('successful') similes (§5.2).

My account of how similes are understood (see especially Chapter 5) is based on the claim that there is a use of particular types of comparison construction which overlaps with the intuitive definition of simile given at the start of this chapter. I call such uses *poetic comparisons*. I do not propose that utterances of metaphor and simile represent linguistic realisations of underlying conceptual mappings (Cf. Chapter 3, §3.5). I also adopt my own view of the role of 'points of comparison' in comparison and simile understanding (see Chapter 5, §5.3). In Chapter 6 I explore some of the implications of my account for the identification of similes in further empirical work, the status of the metaphor-simile relationship in figurative language studies in general and relevance theoretic stylistic approaches to figurative language in particular, and I look at how my account explains how

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[13] As Glucksberg's account of metaphor understanding shares limitations with that of relevance theory I devote little attention to the former (see also Chapter 3, page 109 footnote 32).

some more complex examples of metaphor-simile interaction and elaboration of the simile vehicle are understood. Chapters 4-6 draw upon a wide range of literary data.

Chapter 2: Relevance, communication and style

This chapter addresses the issue of why one ought to adopt a cognitive approach to style in general, and to the understanding of figurative utterances in particular. Such an approach allows for continuity in explaining utterance understanding: literary utterances (those which are clearly intended as texts to be read as literary works) and poetic utterances (those utterances, whether 'literary' or 'mundane', which achieve effects we would consider to be poetic) are just as conducive to investigation from a cognitive-inferential perspective as non-literary, non-figurative, non-poetic utterances. Continuity can be seen as one way of preserving theoretical parsimony. If our account of utterance understanding is insufficient for the understanding of literary utterances, then it is incomplete, and so would require domain-specific principles to explain literary understanding. This might invite all sorts of theoretical complications, including raising the question of how an audience acquires the ability to understand literary utterances.

One approach to communication, which is of broad scope and subsumes a variety of 'semiotic' approaches, is has been called 'the code model of communication'. Although it draws from a 'folk' understanding of communication (see e.g. Reddy, 1993), such an approach fails to account for how the correct context of utterance is arrived at by the hearer/reader (§2.3), or what counts as successful communication (§2.7), and does not acknowledge the role of inference in determining the explicit and implicit content of utterances (§2.8). The picture of ostensive-inferential communication which is defended here, namely that proposed by relevance theory (Sperber and Wilson, 1995), solves the above problems in a theory of communication. It also provides a framework for a cognitive investigation of style (§2.11), which includes an account of metaphor understanding (§2.9, §2.12) and can account for the effects achieved by a range of phenomena which have previously been argued to be fatal for a view of communication and/or literary understanding which sees communicative *intentions* as crucial to utterance understanding (§2.13).

2.1 Communication and context

The transfer of information between organisms takes place in such different ways, that there is no hope of an overarching theory of communication so defined (Wharton, 2009: 8f). We

cannot hope to produce a unified account for such variegated phenomena as a plant changing its growth pattern to emerge from the shade of another plant, an individual fish coordinating with others in a shoal, in addition to what might be called 'canonical' communication, namely a human speaker communicating via a verbal message with a human audience. To attempt such a thing would be like trying to come up with a general theory of locomotion (Sperber and Wilson, 1995: 2). However, the impossibility of a 'theory of everything' (Chomsky, 2000: 70) of this type does not mean that a certain domain of communication is not conducive to empirical investigation or productive theoretical speculation. The trick is to find what the appropriate domain for investigation consists in.

We need a fuller understanding of the way in which intentional communication by means of language takes place. We need to address both (i) *what* is communicated, and (ii) *how* communication is achieved (see e.g. Sperber and Wilson, 1995: 1, 54). It has usually been believed, and plausibly so, that speakers communicate meanings (Blakemore, 1992: 5), but the notion of 'meaning' then requires explanation. The problem can be reframed as an investigation of what it means to say that a speaker means something by uttering a given expression. Utterances, on this view, are public evidence for the private thoughts a speaker/author intends to communicate (Sperber and Wilson, 1995). So how does a hearer/reader determine what was intended to be communicated by a speaker/author?

One possible solution to the problem of defining communication is to take the meaning of an utterance to be a linguistically-encoded thought. De Saussure spoke of language as "a system of signs that express ideas" (2011: 16). According to this view communication involves the pairing of mental facts (conceptual representations; the *signifié* or *signified*) with representations made up of linguistic sounds (sound-images; the *signifiant* or *signifier*) that are used for their expression (*id.*, *ib.*: 67). If utterances are public representations of private thoughts, this model of communication would suppose that a speaker *encodes* the thought into a publicly-available symbol system (Cf. Sperber and Wilson, 1995: 5-8), and that the hearers' task in understanding the utterance as intended is merely to *decode* that representation. When a speaker encodes a thought which she transmits to the hearer in a public language, the hearer decodes this utterance to produce a thought identical to that of

a speaker. On this view, utterance understanding is a process of decoding, and what is communicated is a thought with a fixed, determinate content.

The only sources of information which can contribute to the duplicated thought the hearer/reader decodes are: (i) the encoded information of the utterance itself and (ii) the rules for decoding that encoded information. On this view, the grammar can be seen as a set of rules for decoding the information contained in the utterance into the communicated thought. The notion that the output of a mental grammar is a semantic representation is a plausible one, as "a generative grammar is a code which pairs phonetic and semantic representations of sentences" (Sperber and Wilson, 1995: 9). However, this approach cannot account for the way in which utterances are understood because of the role that the context plays in utterance interpretation.

The complete interpretation of an utterance can also involve the identification of assumptions/thoughts which are communicated by the utterance but which are not part of its explicit content (i.e. implicit content). For instance, we often communicate certain implications of utterances along with the grammatically-encoded information. Indirect answers to questions such as Carly's utterance in (1a) highlight how this takes place:

(1a) *Tom*: Do you like kashk bademjan?

Carly: I don't like Iranian food.

Clearly Tom understands Carly as communicating that she does not like kashk bademjan. But how is he justified in making this assumption? He has the expectation that her response is in answer to his question. But in order to validly infer that Carly does not like kashk bademjan, he must entertain certain contextual assumptions (such as (1b)) in addition to the assumption she communicates in (1a) which together license that inference (given in (1c)):

(1b) *Contextual premise*: Kashk bademjan is Iranian food.

(1c) *Inferred conclusion*: Carly does not like kashk bademjan.

Context also plays a role in determining the speaker's attitude towards the propositional content. Carly may also communicate in addition to the proposition expressed by her

utterance in (1a), the contextual assumption in (1b) and the assumption which actually responds to Tom's question, an assumption such as (1d):

(1d) Carly knows that kashk bademjan is Iranian food.

In fact, communicating an assumption such as (1d) might be the point of Carly giving an indirect answer to Tom's question in the first place. So clearly the content communicated by an utterance is not necessarily exhausted by the grammatically-encoded content of an utterance. Utterances can also communicate certain implications (technically, implicatures. See below) such as (1b) and (1c), as well as higher-level representations such as (1d) which convey attitudes to propositional content. One clear case of such a higher-level representation constituting the main point of an utterance is (2):

(2) You're the manager.

(see Carston, 2010b: 223)

An utterance of (2) is unlikely to be informative to the addressee if all it communicated were the proposition that the addressee is the manager: they are likely to be aware of that fact. Clearly the utterance means something more precise, such as (2a):

(2a) The speaker knows that the addressee is the manager.

Moreover, context also plays a role in determining the propositional content of an utterance. For example, an utterance of (3a) is lexically ambiguous:

(3a) He's riding a bike.

Clearly the propositional content of (3a) will have different truth-conditions whether it is taken to mean a pedal bicycle or a motorbike. What will be the correct interpretation of (3a)? That intended by the speaker. What will allow a hearer of (3a) to disambiguate between the (at least) two senses of *bike*? Contextual assumptions, and their relationship with the communicative intentions of the speaker.

The same sort of process is required in order to understand an utterance containing referring expressions, such as (3b) (referring expressions underlined):

(3b) <u>She</u>'s speaking <u>tomorrow</u>.

(see Sperber and Wilson, 1995: 12)

What is communicated by (3b) will vary from one occasion of utterance to another. There could be various candidate referents for the pronoun *she* in a particular physical context. The truth conditions of the proposition expressed by (3b) will also vary depending upon the time of utterance.

The role of disambiguation and assigning a referent to deictic expressions in determining the proposition expressed by an utterance is widely accepted. What is more controversial is the notion that context and inference can play a part in determining the contribution to the proposition expressed by the natural language equivalents of the logical operators and the contribution to the proposition expressed by certain 'loose uses' of lexical items. One example of the former phenomenon is (3c):

(3c) [Getting married and having children] is better than [having children and getting married].

(from Levinson, 1983: 35)

Clearly (3c) is understood as meaning that getting married *before* having children is the better outcome. But this is not the meaning of the logical operator, which merely guarantees that a conjunction of two propositions is true if and only if the individual propositions it conjoins are true. If that were what was communicated by the sequences in square brackets in (3c), then both of the bracketed sequences would mean the same thing, and (3c) as a whole would be infelicitous.

Many lexical items appear to have a clear definition, but when they are used in communication, they communicate a concept which does not fall under that definition, such as the word 'empty' in (3d):

(3d) The glass is empty.

(see Carston, 2002a: 41)

There is an easily available definition for the lexical item *empty*, namely, 'having no contents'. Unless (3d) is referring to glass in a perfect vacuum, then the apparent meaning of (3d), that the glass contains nothing at all, is false. But, importantly, the contextually-determined meaning of *empty* (something like, 'containing so little liquid it is not worth drinking') communicated by (3d) is *different to* the lexically-encoded meaning. This means that context and inference can *override* certain grammatically-determined meanings (for the philosophical implications of this see Carston, 2002a: 159).

So there are at least three factors at work in the understanding of utterances:

(i)   The (grammatical) decoding of a semantic representation.

(ii)   The integration of contextual information.

(iii) The determination of communicative intentions.

And there are at least three types of content of utterances:

(i)   That which is based upon the semantic representation provided by the grammar (the explicit content).

(ii)   Information about the attitude of the speaker to that content.

(iii) Implicit content.

The code model focusses on the first factor in utterance understanding, and the first type of utterance content, but ignores the role of context and intentions in understanding utterances. The question then becomes, how do hearers determine the intended content of an utterance? How do they select the appropriate context?

In light of examples such as (1)-(3d) we must reframe the question of how to account for human communication as follows: (i) how does the hearer determine the intended content of the utterance; (ii) how does the hearer determine the intended *context* of the utterance; (iii) what role do communicative intentions play in understanding utterances; and (iv) what is the nature of the content of utterances?

2.2 Towards an inferential model of communication: communicative intentions

Grice noted the importance of communicative intentions in determining speaker meaning (see e.g. *id.* 1989 §§5, 6, 14). We can see the role of the hearer/reader in understanding utterances such as (1)-(3d) as recovering the *intended* interpretation. Strawson (1964) reformulated Grice's notion of speaker meaning (Grice, 1989: 220) as follows:

> To mean something by *x*, an individual *S* must intend:
>
> (a) *S*'s utterance of *x* to produce a certain response *r* in a certain audience *A*;
>
> (b) *A* to recognise *S*'s intention (a);
>
> (c) *A*'s recognition of *S*'s intention (a) to function as at least part of *A*'s reason for *A*'s response *r*
>
> (cited in Sperber and Wilson, 1995: 21)

Imagine a speaker *S* has uttered (4) to an audience *A*:

> (4) There's a cup of tea in the kitchen.

In uttering (4), *S* wants *A* to believe the content of (4a):

> (4a) There's a cup of a tea in a kitchen contextually salient to *S* and *A*.

If *A* does come to believe (4a), then condition (a) is fulfilled. *A* is also likely to realise that *S* *wanted A* to believe (4a). Therefore condition (b) is likely to be fulfilled, as in (4b):

> (4b) *S* wants *A* to believe (4a).

The fulfilment of (4b) plays a role in fulfilling (4a), therefore condition (c) above is also fulfilled.

But are conditions (a-c) in Strawson's reformulation of Grice's account of meaning equally crucial to successful communication? As Sperber and Wilson point out, (i) communication can proceed without (a) being fulfilled at all; and (ii) (c) cannot be fulfilled if (a) is not (*id., ib.*: 28f). Therefore, only (b) can be considered to play a necessary role in human communication: namely, the communicator's intention to have her intention to communicate something recognised by the audience. Sperber and Wilson reformulate the essential component of communicative intentions (informally) as follows:

Informative intention: to inform the audience of something;

Communicative intention: to inform the audience of one's informative intention.

(Sperber and Wilson, 1995: 29).

Only the *communicative intention* (b) "the intention to have one's informative intention recognised" (*id.*, *ib.*) is required to cause (a) the *informative intention* to be fulfilled. As the structure of (4b) suggests, intention (b) suggests a second order intention (an intention about another intention).

2.3 The problem of context selection

One of the important roles which communicative intentions play in utterance understanding is in guiding how the hearer/reader selects the appropriate context of utterance. If context determines the content of an utterance to some degree, and communicative intentions play a role in determining the right context in which a hearer/reader interprets the utterance, then how does the hearer/reader select the *right* context? For any given utterance, the *potential* context in which it could be interpreted will be vast.

On the model of communication proposed by Sperber and Wilson, the context consists in the "set of premises used in interpreting an utterance (apart from the premise that the utterance in question has been produced)" (1995: 15f). This context is not conceived of as 'external' to the speaker and hearer, but forms a subset of the hearer's assumptions about the world (*id.*, *ib.*). The hearer's task of determining the *intended* context can now be approached in terms of how a hearer arrives at the intended set of contextual assumptions.

One way to explain successful communication is to limit the potential context to only those assumptions which are mutually known (Clark and Marshall, 1981). A proposition *P* is mutually known if the speaker knows that *P,* and the hearer knows that *P*, and the speaker knows that the hearer knows that *P*, and the hearer knows that the speaker knows that *P*, and so on. But, as Sperber and Wilson point out, this introduces an infinite regress (1995: 17). If the speaker and the hearer must have the same context, how do they distinguish those assumptions they share from those they do not? To confirm that any proposition is mutually known would require an infinite series of higher-order assumptions of the above type ('the speaker knows that the hearer knows that the speaker knows that the hearer

knows that *P*' and so on) because the proposition that 'both speaker and hearer know that *P*' needs to be known by both speaker and hearer, as does the fact that the other interlocutor knows that fact, for any proposition *P*.

One proposed solution to this regress in models of mutual knowledge, introduced by Clark and Marshall (1981), is that speakers and hearers have access to 'finite induction procedures' to establish that a proposition is mutually known. If these procedures are sufficiently simple, then they could solve the problem of the complexity and psychological plausibility of the context of utterance being limited to mutually known assumptions (in relation to definite reference, at least).

The heuristics proposed by Clark and Marshall depend upon the ability of speakers and hearers to infer the 'infinity of conditions' required for mutual knowledge relying upon assumptions about each other's rationality (*id., ib.*: 32). They argue for the existence of certain 'co-presence heuristics' built upon the 'simultaneity assumption' and the 'attention assumption', that speaker and hearer know that in that moment that they share attention on an action, and the 'rationality assumption', that the inferences of the interlocutors are predictable on a rational basis (*id., ib.*: 33). The 'co-presence heuristics' are justified by one or more 'bases' for mutual knowledge (incorporating the three assumptions mentioned in the previous sentence. See their Table 1 (*id., ib.*: 43)): (i) community membership; (ii) physical co-presence; (iii) linguistic co-presence; and (iv) indirect co-presence (*id., ib.*: 35-42). Physical co-presence provides the most direct evidence for mutual knowledge, as speakers need only assume rationality and shared attention on the part of hearers and vice versa; linguistic co-presence provides more indirect mutual knowledge on the basis that the code being used is itself mutually known; and community membership provides weaker evidence still of mutual knowledge, on the basis that members of the same community can (with a certain degree of confidence) be assumed to know a body of mutually known assumptions shared by that community (summed up by Blakemore, 1992: 19f). Indirect co-presence refers to cases where the information which must be mutually known can be inferred from the other bases of mutual knowledge.

These assumptions allow Clark and Marshall to argue that interlocutors establish the basis for the mutual knowledge that a proposition *p* obtains as follows:

Mutual knowledge induction schema: *A* and *B* mutually know that *p* if and only if some state of affairs *G* holds such that:

1. *A* and *B* have reason to believe that *G* holds.

2. *G* indicates to *A* and *B* that each has reason to believe that *G* holds.

3. *G* indicates to *A* and *B* that *p*.

(Clark and Marshall, 1981: 33. Some alterations are made here for consistency of presentation)

The point of this schema is that interlocutors do not need to confirm any of the conditions of mutual knowledge at all. Rather, the co-presence heuristics, given speakers' and hearers' confidence in their belief in *G* (for 'grounds') which satisfies the three conditions in the mutual knowledge induction schema, enable them to confirm "the infinity of conditions as far down the list as they wanted to go" (*id., ib.*: 34).

Clark and Marshall's heuristics suggest that assumptions are drawn primarily from general knowledge related to *a particular* discourse (environmental factors, discourse objectives and so on), rather than from memory. Moreover, even if mutual knowledge could be established in this fashion, for mutually known propositions to play a part in utterance understanding, they need to be mutually known under a particular description, rather than any of a myriad other possible descriptions, and this would require many further 'auxiliary descriptions' (Blakemore, 1992: 20). We could weaken the requirements of a mutual knowledge model of context selection by arguing that interlocutors try to establish it only to a certain degree (as suggested by the quote from Clark and Marshall in the previous paragraph): but to what degree? And, given the picture of auxiliary assumptions as bases for mutual knowledge given in Clark and Marshall (1981: 43, Table 1), must each of these assumptions be mutually known, and, if so, to what degree? Furthermore, misunderstandings do occur, and when they do occur, speakers and hearers do not typically account for their misunderstanding in terms of mutual knowledge or regret not devoting more attention to establishing mutual knowledge (Blakemore, 1992: 20).

Even if mutual knowledge could establish the potential context of an utterance, what evidence is there that it plays a role in the determination of the *actual* context (those assumptions such as (1b) above which play a role in determining the explicit or implicit content of an utterance)? Take the following simple example of assigning a referent to a referring expression in (5):

(5) The pen is on the desk.

A hearer of (5) will aim to select a context which gives a specific referent for the expression (definite description) *the pen*. But there will typically be a great number of possible, mutually known candidates: mutual knowledge is insufficient to establish even the relatively simple case of definite reference in (5) (*id., ib.*: 21). When we come to examples of communication between two people who clearly do not know each other, such as when most readers read a literary utterance, "mutual knowledge as a pre-requisite for communication makes no sense at all" (Pilkington, 2000: 62), especially if Clark and Marshall are right that co-presence plays a part in determining mutual knowledge.

Most worryingly, mutual knowledge is not a *necessary* condition for successful communication to take place. If we combine a code model of communication with the mutual knowledge 'solution' to the problem of context selection, we are presented with a model of communication in which the context of the utterance is selected in advance of utterance understanding, rather than one in which at least part of the context is generated in the process of utterance understanding (Blakemore, 1992: 22). The actual context of a given utterance is to a large degree dependent upon assumptions to which processing the utterance provides access. For instance, if we look at the following constructed exchange (6)-(6b), the context which Tom would have to search through in each instance in order to understand Carly's intended meaning (an *implicature*, given in (6c)) is different for (6a) and (6b):

(6) *Tom*: I'm bored.

(6a) *Carly*: If you're bored, we'll go and see the Happy Mondays.

(6b) *Carly*: The cinema has closed down. We'll go and see the Happy Mondays.

To understand (6a), Tom has to generate the implicature (implicated conclusion) in (6c):

(6c) Tom and Carly will go and see the Happy Mondays.

But to make sense of (6b), Tom would need a number of different implicated premises, including (6d-f):

(6d) Activities which are not boring include at least going to the cinema and seeing bands play.

(6e) The Happy Mondays are a band.

(6f) The Happy Mondays are playing tonight.

etc.

Importantly, Tom can entertain an assumption such as (6f) *even if he has never had such a thought before* on the basis of what Carly says. Contextual assumptions such as (6d-f) are not a prerequisite for Tom to understand Carly's utterance, but can be 'triggered by' her utterance (see below).

The definition of linguistic context as part of a 'common ground' of mutually known assumptions (e.g. Clark and Marshall, 1981; Clark, 1996; Schiffer, 1972: 30ff. Cf. Stalnaker, 2002) throws up particular obstacles to developing a robust theory of communication. Firstly, it is impossible for an infinite regress of mutually known assumptions (see previous paragraph) to fall under the communicative intentions of speakers, simply because human beings do not have infinite processing capabilities (Sperber and Wilson, 1995: 17ff). Secondly, it seems that knowledge (in the sense of 'justified, true belief') is too strong a criterion for the kind of mental representations that play a part in utterance understanding.

Sperber and Wilson approach the question of context selection in utterance understanding from a completely different perspective (1995). The question which they seek to address is: in what sense do communicators share information with addressees (Sperber and Wilson, 1995: 38)? They first establish that each individual has a *cognitive environment* made up of their assumptions about the world, then that these cognitive environments can be *shared* between individuals, and finally that communication can be seen as the enlargement of a

mutual cognitive environment, namely a shared cognitive environment which includes the assumption that a subset of the assumptions in an individual's cognitive environment is shared.

An individual's cognitive environment is made up of assumptions which are held to varying degrees of *manifestness*. Assumptions are, loosely speaking, 'thoughts', or 'sentences in the language of thought' (e.g. Pilkington, 2000: 91). More precisely, they are "structured sets of concepts" (Sperber and Wilson, 1995: 85) and can be represented in terms of propositions which are truth-conditional in nature.

'Manifestness' is a technical notion which captures the availability of a given assumption within a cognitive environment:

> A fact is *manifest* to an individual at a given time if and only if he is capable at that time of representing it mentally and accepting its representation as true or probably true.
>
> (Sperber and Wilson, 1995: 39. Their emphasis)[14]

Not all assumptions in a cognitive environment are manifest to the same degree. Because human cognitive organisation involves the selective direction of attention to certain stimuli, when a phenomenon is noticed:

> "[…] some assumptions about it are standardly more accessible than others. In an environment where a doorbell has just rung, it will normally be strongly manifest that there is someone at the door, less strongly so that whoever is at the door is tall enough to reach the bell, and less strongly still that the bell has not been stolen."
>
> (Sperber and Wilson, 1995: 40)

The *total* cognitive environment of an individual would consist of not just all the facts that are mentally represented by an individual, but all those which she is *capable* of being aware of (such as by inferring on the basis of other manifest assumptions). This makes the notion of

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[14] Sperber and Wilson explain that to be manifest means to be perceptible or inferable without being immediately invalidated (1995: 39; 283f n28).

manifestness akin to 'visibility': just as something is visible if it *could* be accessed by visual cognition, so manifest facts are manifest inasmuch as they can be perceived or inferred by a conceptual cognitive system (*id.*, *ib.*: 39). For instance, there has been a box of tissues sat on my desk beside my computer for weeks. It has the property of being visible. But the assumption that *There is a box of tissues on the desk* typically only comes to my attention when, for instance, I need to blow my nose. That assumption or related assumptions which would allow me to reason along similar lines must be manifest to me, as I am capable of representing them should the occasion demand that I reason about them. However, I am not necessarily actively entertaining any of those assumptions in a conscious fashion, if at all. Nor do I need to recall that assumption from a body of previously assumed facts: the box is visible to me. But whether I can recall that fact, or perceive it anew, or infer it when I notice that a tissue is protruding from behind a pile of books, the assumption *There is a box of tissues on the desk* is manifest to me.

Moreover, just as optical illusions are, in a sense, 'visible' (that is, they are responded to by the visual system to yield some information within the mind), an assumption need not be true for the environment to provide sufficient evidence for an individual to entertain that assumption (*id.*, *ib.*). For instance, when I overhear a conversation between you and your friend, it may be manifest to me that you are from the south of England, based on your accent. Whether this assumption turns out to be true or not does not affect my ability to reason on the basis of this assumption. Whether I am right or not that the protruding tissue belies the presence of a box of tissues is also not to the point: it is evidence enough for me to entertain that assumption. Moreover, just as there are degrees of visibility, so there are degrees of manifestness. Whether and to what degree an object is visible is a function of whether it can be perceived, but this depends on two factors: (i) the physical properties of an object, and (ii) the visual abilities of the individual. Similarly, to what degree an assumption about the world is manifest is a function of: (i) properties of the physical environment (including visibility of particular objects, audibility of certain sounds); and (ii) the cognitive abilities of the individual (whether information in support of that assumption can be accessed through perception, memory, or inference on the basis of other manifest assumptions).

One consequence of this picture of one aspect of human mental life is that an assumption can be manifest without being known, or even being assumed (in the sense of being currently entertained) (*id.*, *ib.*: 40). For example, it is likely to be manifest to you that Alexander the Great was not born in the year 2000 CE. I doubt you have ever entertained such an assumption, but you can easily infer it from other assumptions you have, such as that Alexander was a historical figure who lived over 2000 years ago. This fact was manifest to you all along, because you could have inferred it from your background knowledge at will. As well as 'currently inferable assumptions', there are also 'perceptible but unrepresented' assumptions (*id.*, *ib.*: 40f), namely those perceptible phenomena which you could attend to but do not because, for instance, they do not demand your attention (compare the background chatter of birds to the sudden squawking of a crow).

Because Sperber and Wilson define cognitive environments in terms of manifestness of assumptions (that is, the view from 'inside' an individual), individuals' cognitive environments will differ even in the same physical environment (*id.*, *ib.*: 38). So two individuals can be said to share a *visual* environment inasmuch as they are able to see the same facts. These individual environments can never be totally shared, and the shared visual environment is defined in terms of what two or more individuals *can see*, not what they *are seeing* at any given moment (*id.*, *ib.*: 40f). Similarly, cognitive environments can overlap, or intersect. This intersection of assumptions we call a *shared cognitive environment* (*id.*, *ib.*: 41). But, again, no two individuals' cognitive environments completely overlap (they are never totally shared), and they are defined not in terms of which assumptions the individuals are currently mentally representing or have previously done so, but whether they are capable (through perception or inference) of forming such an assumption (*id.*, *ib.*).

Sperber and Wilson give the following example of a particular type of shared cognitive environment *E* (7a-d) (from *ib.*: 41f). Peter and Mary hear a phone ringing, and the following assumptions are made manifest or more manifest to both Peter and Mary:

(7a) The phone is ringing.

(7b) It is manifest to Peter and Mary that the phone is ringing.

(7c) It is manifest to Peter and Mary that it is manifest to Peter and Mary that the phone is ringing.

(7d) It is manifest to Peter and Mary that it is manifest to Peter and Mary that it is manifest to Peter and Mary that the phone is ringing.

This kind of shared cognitive environment, a *mutual cognitive environment*, is crucial for the relevance theoretic notion of communicative success (*id., ib.*: 64). The shared cognitive environment in *E* includes assumptions (6b-d) which are assumptions about the lower level assumption (7a). So when Peter and Mary hear the phone ringing, this fact becomes manifest to them, as does the fact that it has become manifest to both of them. This allows them to infer (7c) and (7d) and still further higher-order metarepresentations (see §2.6 below) about that first level of information. We can see a similar phenomenon when any group of people requires certain assumptions to be known or believed in order to 'count' as a member of that group. For instance, members of the Freemasons both share certain secret knowledge and share the assumption that all other members share the same secret information, in other words, that they have a particular shared cognitive environment containing this information (*id., ib.*: 41).

The notion of manifestness also allows us to account for cases where contextual assumptions are not available to the hearer/reader in advance of understanding the utterance, but are triggered by the utterance. When Tom understands Carly's utterance in (6a) above, his expectation that Carly is giving a relevant response (such as one which supports the conclusion that they should go and see the Happy Mondays) guides his search for contextual assumptions which will play a role in his interpretation. The possible contextual assumptions are those which are made accessible by her utterance. When Carly produces her utterance in (1a) (repeated here), her utterance will make manifest or more manifest a range of contextual assumptions:

(1a) *Tom*: Do you like kashk bademjan?

Carly: I don't like Iranian food.

It is possible that Tom does not know that kashk bademjan is an Iranian dish. But as long as he knows that it is a type of dish, then assumptions about the different types of food will be more or less highly manifest in his cognitive environment when he hears Carly's utterance. By uttering the phrase *Iranian food*, Carly makes a range of assumptions about types of food manifest or more manifest to Tom. Crucially, it may include the implicated premise (1b) (repeated here) that 'kashk bademjan is Iranian food':

(1b) *Contextual premise*: Kashk bademjan is Iranian food.

Of course, Carly's utterance will make manifest or more manifest to Tom a range of assumptions which do not play a part in Tom's interpretation of her utterance. How the proper context is selected from this vast potential context will be explained in §2.6 below. But accounting for the context of utterance in terms of mutual manifestness rather than mutual knowledge has a number of immediate advantages.

The first advantage of accounting for context in terms of mutually manifest assumptions is that it avoids the false premise that Tom must know in advance of understanding Carly's utterance in (1a) that kashk bademjan is Iranian food. This cannot be the case. Moreover, it does not require that the assumptions which play a part in utterance understanding be *true*. If we are to take mutual knowledge seriously as a theoretical construct, then it must be a type of knowledge, and the truth of a proposition is generally regarded as a necessary condition of its being known. Clearly, whether the contextual premise in (1b) is true or not is beside the point. People can communicate false information, whether mistakenly or covertly (masquerading as communicating true information). It merely matters whether Tom takes it to be (likely to be) true, or that Carly believes it to be (likely to be) true. Moreover, to say that Carly and Tom mutually *assume* (1b) would also be too strong a condition for communicative success (*id.*, *ib.*: 42). For (1b) to be mutually assumed would require an infinite series of mutually assumed assumptions, just as for (1b) to be mutually *known* requires an infinity of higher-order mutually known assumptions (*id.*, *ib.*). What relevance theory claims is that an infinity of higher-order assumptions (higher-order metarepresentations of (1b)) are made more *manifest* by Carly's utterance in (1a). In other words, Tom is *capable* of inferring these assumptions should he need to. But there is no

problem of psychological plausibility here, as Tom is not required to assume those auxiliary assumptions for (1b) to be manifest to him.

Another significant advantage of the relevance theory account of context consisting of mutually manifest assumptions is that it avoids another false presumption which is implicit in the mutual knowledge account of context selection. On the mutual knowledge account, for *S* to successfully communicate with *H* two types of information must be mutually known by *S* and *H*: (i) the code itself (for example, that the word *Iranian* means 'Iranian' and *food* means 'food' in the code being used, and so on for every coded meaning); and (ii) the contextual assumptions which play a part in understanding the utterance. But once this condition is met, as it must be for an act of communication to be considered successful, the act of communication is essentially *symmetrical*: *S* and *H* must choose *the same* code and *the same* context in order to communicate (*id.*, *ib.*: 43f). But the assumption that communication is typically symmetrical is false.

By limiting context to mutual knowledge, the symmetrical choice of code and context can be guaranteed. But, as Sperber and Wilson make clear (*ib.*: 43f), we *can* communicate without making symmetrical choices of code and context as long as one interlocutor takes the bulk of the responsibility for successful communication. Sperber and Wilson give the following example. Peter and Mary are walking together when Mary notices a church and utters (8) (*id.*, *ib.*: 43f):

(8) *Mary*: I've been inside that church.

In order to be understood, Mary does not need Peter to know that the building she is referring to is a church, or that she knows that he knows it and so on. Her utterance itself could be justification enough for him to believe it to be a church (for instance, if he was short-sighted, or unfamiliar with church architecture, and so on). All that is required for Peter to understand Mary is that an assumption such as (8a) or (8b) is manifest to Peter which would allow him to understand her utterance in (8):

(8a) The building Mary identified is a church.

(8b) Mary believes that building she has identified is a church.

There could be still further contextual assumptions which could be manifest to Peter which would also allow him to understand (8) the way Mary intended it to be understood. The key to the relevance theoretic account of context selection is that the contextual assumptions which are taken to be communicated by Mary will be those which Peter understands her to be intending. How these intended meanings are recovered will be addressed from a number of angles in the following sections.

Although mutual manifestness is a dispositional notion[15] like 'knowledge' or 'belief', it is weaker than mutual knowledge as a requirement for successful communication in just the right way (Sperber and Wilson, 1995: 43; Wilson, 2000/2012: 241). We need some dispositional notion in an account of utterance understanding because the kind of information which plays a part in utterance understanding is: (i) mentally represented; and (ii) stands in a certain relation to other information. To be exact, the type of assumptions we are talking about are *intentional* in the technical sense. This means that, like beliefs, the assumptions which play a part in communication, whether they form part of the context of the utterance or part of the content, are *about* states of affairs, individuals, other assumptions, and so on. But, as we have seen, being mutually 'known' or 'assumed' is too strong a condition for contextual information, and it gives a misleading picture of what communicative success consists in. Relevance theory instead accounts for communicative success in terms of the mutual manifestness of assumptions, which has a number of advantages:

(i) Mutual manifestness is more psychologically plausible than mutual knowledge. It does not assume infinitely recursive computations. It does not even require that assumptions are actively entertained (that is, known or believed), as they can be (non-demonstratively) inferred (Wilson, 2000/2012: 241).

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[15] I am using the word 'dispositional' rather loosely here to denote any kind of relationship of 'aboutness' between a mental representation and some real or hypothetical state of affairs (including other representations) (Cf. e.g. Fodor, 2003: 140).

(ii) Mutual manifestness allows for the kind of asymmetry we actually see in communication (Sperber and Wilson, 1995: 43). This asymmetry helps avoid co-ordination problems. As in ballroom dancing the bulk of the responsibility for any lack of coordination by the dancers with the music or with each other falls on the 'leader', so in communication the speaker must take the lion's share of the responsibility for the selection of the appropriate contextual assumptions and any misunderstandings.

(iii) According to Sperber and Wilson, a special kind of mutually manifest assumption plays the defining role in the establishment of successful communication, that is, communicative intentions (1995).

According to this way of looking at the mental life of communicators, phenomena can be said to impinge upon one's cognitive environment inasmuch as they make certain assumptions manifest (whereas before they were not manifest) or more manifest (in that they are more easily accessible) (Sperber and Wilson, 1995: 151f). Communicative phenomena (utterances) make certain assumptions manifest or more manifest to an audience in a particular way. I will explore the third advantage of the notion of manifestness in the following sections.

Because inference plays a role in working out a speaker/author's communicative intentions, the hearer/reader has no guarantee that the interpretation they recover is identical to the one intended by the speaker. Communication can now be re-framed as the enlargement of mutual cognitive environments: that is, the extent to which assumptions are shared between interlocutors (Sperber and Wilson, 1995: 193; 2005/2012). When a speaker makes an utterance, they make manifest or more manifest to the hearer certain assumptions which may a play a role in understanding the utterance. An utterance is simply (public) evidence for a (private) thought of the speaker/author, and in understanding an utterance a hearer/reader makes an *interpretation* of that thought (*id., ib.*: 230f). The definition of communicative success on this model is very different from that suggested by the code model of communication outlined in §2.1 which supposes that successful communication consists in the duplication of thoughts. The kind of co-ordination which interlocutors achieve is, as Sperber and Wilson put it, "best compared to the co-ordination between people taking

a stroll together rather than marching in step" (Sperber and Wilson, 1998/2012: 46). But contextual assumptions are conceptual representations. The concepts which make up these representations will provide access to encyclopaedic information about the denotation of the concept (e.g. Carston, 2002a: 321). This encyclopaedic information will (typically) also be in the form of conceptual representations, accessing whose conceptual constituents will make more assumptions manifest and more manifest, and so on. So the potential context of any utterance is likely to be vast. How do interlocutors achieve any degree of reliability in communication? The answer to this question is due to the way in which utterances direct a hearer/reader in their search for an appropriate interpretation of the utterance: towards a *relevant* interpretation.

2.4 Relevance and ostension

I began this chapter with the observation that a theory of all possible types of information sharing would be too broad. Relevance theory limits its purview to a specific type of communication: *ostensive-inferential* communication. Because communicators have independent cognitive environments, they can convey assumptions to each other in different ways, including the following (based on Wilson and Sperber, 1993/2012: 151f):

(i)   Accidentally: trying to conceal evidence for an assumption but betraying oneself

(ii)   Covertly, masquerading as accidentally: trying to get the other agent to think you are engaged in (i), when in fact you have some other intention

(iii)   Covertly, masquerading as covertly masquerading as accidentally: trying to get the other agent to think you are engaged in (ii), when in fact you have some other intention.

These correspond to examples (9a-c) respectively:

(9a) Carly tries to conceal the fact that she finds Tom's new haircut amusing. She smiles inadvertently. Her expression gives away her true feeling *accidentally*.

(9b) Carly wants to let Tom know that she finds his new haircut amusing, without letting him know that she is doing so deliberately, so she mimics an inadvertent smile *covertly*.

(9c) Carly wants Tom to think that she wants him to think that she finds his new haircut amusing, even though she does not really. She lets him know she is mimicking an inadvertent smile *deliberately*.

All of (9a-c) are possible ways for Carly to elicit Tom's belief in (9d):

(9d) Carly finds Tom's haircut amusing.

Communication cannot just involve the conveying of assumptions, because Carly's behaviours in (9a-c) can all convey the assumption in (9d), but we are unlikely to call any of them communication proper. There is a fourth way of conveying an assumption, which happens to be typical. This is by producing an *ostensive* stimulus. Take the stimulus described in (10):

(10) Carly smiles overtly at Tom.

What is overt about Carly's smile? We can be more precise about this. The following assumptions in (10a-c) are all justified by (10):

(10a) Carly has produced a stimulus.

(10b) Carly is making a demand on Tom's attention.

(10c) Because of the fact of (10b), the stimulus must be worth Tom's effort in understanding what Carly meant in producing it.

If Carly intended to intentionally communicate (9d) by engaging in the kind of behaviour which is exemplified by (10), we can call that behaviour *ostensive*.

Ostensive stimuli are stimuli which: (i) attract an audience's attention; and (ii) focus it on a communicator's intentions (Sperber and Wilson, 1995: 53), by making manifest the intention to make something manifest (*id., ib.*: 49). In other words, they exhibit two layers of information: the first, basic layer of information can be about anything at all; the second layer states that the first layer has been intentionally made manifest (*id., ib.*: 50, 53). Ostensive behaviours can be very weak (such as sniffing the air 'ostensively', in order to communicate something thereby) or much more specific, such as linguistic assertions. But all ostensive stimuli must attract the audience's attention and focus it on the communicator's

intentions (Sperber and Wilson, 1995: 153), and even 'literal' utterances only provide evidence towards the recognition of the communicator's intentions (*id.* 1998/2012: 46).

There are a number of important consequences of looking at communication in terms of the assumptions which an act of ostension makes manifest or more manifest to a hearer/reader. Firstly, it allows us to account for both verbal and non-verbal communicative behaviours (see e.g. Wharton 2009). Secondly, it captures the idea that communicators aim for a 'loose' kind of co-ordination rather than the duplication of thoughts, while recognising that this process of co-ordination is somehow motivated by the fact that communication is taking place. Thirdly, it allows for the possibility that an utterance can be interpreted as ostensive, and, hence, can communicate something, even in the absence of a physically co-present, or even previously known, originator. This will be crucial to my discussion of intentional communication and literary utterances in §2.13. But it also allows for the communication of not just determinate content, but also weaker 'impressions'. The communication of weak effects will be elaborated more fully below (§2.10), and are central to relevance theoretic accounts of figurative language.

Sometimes the same communicative behaviour can communicate a range of impressions. Some can be more like the relatively determinate assumption in (1c) communicated by Carly's utterance in (1a) (namely, that *Carly doesn't like kashk bademjan*), but others can be much more indeterminate. In the descriptions of similar scenarios in (11a-c), we can see that the same (in this case, non-linguistic) behaviour can communicate different things (adapted from Sperber and Wilson, 1995: 55):

> (11a) Carly and Tom arrive home. She opens the door. She smells gas. She sniffs ostensively. Tom concludes that there has been a gas leak.

> (11b) Carly and Tom arrive in their hotel room on a seaside holiday. She opens the window and sniffs ostensively. Tom shares in Carly's impression of the atmosphere.

> (11c) Carly and Tom are dining with friends. They are presented with the main course. Carly sniffs ostensively at the food. Tom may conclude that Carly is appreciative of the food, or he may merely share part of the experience with Carly in focussing his attention on the food.

In the case of (11a), there is plausibly a single assumption which Carly intends to communicate, such as that given here as (11d):

(11d) There is a gas leak in the house.

In the case of (11b), it could be that there is a specific assumption Carly intends to communicate (such as *Carly is enjoying being at the seaside*), but it would typically not be the *only* assumption she wanted to share with Tom. There could be a whole range of others (*Carly enjoys the smell of the sea*, *Carly is satisfied with Tom's choice of destination*, etc.). In (11c), that openness of interpretation is greater still (Sperber and Wilson talk of 'implicit vagueness', 1995: 56), so much so that it is difficult for Tom to find a single assumption or set of assumptions she intended to communicate. But we would still want to say that she has communicated *something*.

But how does linguistic communication (including the production of literary utterances) ever succeed, that is, how do hearers/readers ever arrive at an interpretation of the speaker/author's communicative intentions in a predictable way if: (i) the potential context of any given utterance is so vast; and (ii) the range of assumptions and impressions which can be communicated by an utterance can be so diverse? Something must constrain the hearer/reader in their search for an interpretation. Sperber and Wilson argue that ostension provides the key to communicative success, because it implies a guarantee of *relevance*, and that this guarantee is implied because human cognition is itself relevance-hungry (Sperber and Wilson, 1995: 50).

2.5 The cognitive principle of relevance

It would not do for a cognitive agent to attend to all stimuli in the world equally. It would be far more adaptive for such an agent to attend primarily to those stimuli whose processing would lead to some improvement in their understanding of the world, that is, a cognitive gain (see e.g. Sperber and Wilson, 1995: 265). Cognitive efficiency is with respect to some goal or other (*id.*, *ib.*: 46). Some cognitive tasks have an absolute goal. In the case of facial recognition, this task can be described as identifying the owner of the perceived face, and, if failing to do so, concluding that the individual is unknown to the perceiver. Other cognitive tasks have relative goals, such as "improving on an existing state of affairs" (*id.*, *ib.*: 47). A

task such as this could be assessing the reliability of an interlocutor as a source of information.

The observation that cognition is aimed at improving an individual's knowledge of the world has non-trivial consequences. Cognitive agents want: (i) more information; (ii) more accurate information; (iii) more easily retrievable information; and (iv) information which is "more developed in areas of greater concern to the individual" (*id., ib.*). But cognitive agents are also constrained by certain limitations: finite processing power, finite memory, finite energy, and finite time in which to engage in computations or search for further information in the environment to facilitate processing. Therefore, they have to allocate, or ration, their cognitive resources in pursuit of the above types of information (*id., ib.*: 47f).

Relevance theory captures the relevance of an assumption in a given cognitive environment in terms of the impact that such an assumption has against the body of assumptions which are already held as part of that cognitive environment. Relevance theorists use the term *cognitive effects* for contextual modifications to the cognitive environment of an individual (e.g. Carston, 2002a: 376). Cognitive effects are a special case of *contextual effects* (*id., ib.*: 377), which are divided into three main types: (i) supporting or strengthening existing assumptions; (ii) contradicting and eliminating existing assumptions; (iii) combining with existing assumptions to generate new conclusions. *Positive cognitive effects* are those that contribute positively to the fulfilment of cognitive functions or goals (*id., ib.*: 378).

If you came home to find, to your surprise, the contents of your bedroom drawers scattered across the floor, this is likely to be relevant within your cognitive environment. In part, this is because it provides a new assumption which may not have been manifest to you before, such as the assumption that someone has searched your room. Moreover, it may make more manifest to you certain assumptions which will themselves be relevant, such as the assumption that it is desirable that you check to see if anything of value has been taken.

The cognitive principle of relevance is the hypothesis that human cognition is organised so as to maximise relevance (Sperber and Wilson, 1995: 262). Relevance is a property of inputs to cognitive processes which is crucial to cognitive economy, expressed in terms of costs

(processing effort) and benefits (positive cognitive effects) (Wilson and Sperber, 2002/2012: 63):

Relevance to an individual (*classificatory*):

An assumption is relevant to an individual at a given time if and only if it has some positive cognitive effect in one or more of the contexts accessible to him at that time.

Relevance to an individual (*comparative*):

Extent condition 1: An assumption is relevant to an individual to the extent that the positive cognitive effects achieved when it is optimally processed are large.

Extent condition 2: An assumption is relevant to an individual to the extent that the effort required to achieve these positive cognitive effects is small.

(Sperber and Wilson, 1995: 265f)

In the case of finding the contents of your bedroom drawers disturbed, the assumption that someone has searched your room will be relevant to the extent that it has positive cognitive effects in your cognitive environment. One assumption which is likely to be highly relevant to you is that there has been a thief in your room. This assumption will likely have many positive cognitive effects, as your material comfort (to which end people typically devote a great deal of cognitive effort) may be compromised by losing valuable property. An assumption such as *somebody knows how messy my sock drawer was* is less likely to be relevant.

But if relevance is evaluated in terms of how worthwhile a given assumption is in terms of processing, how does a cognitive system know in advance which stimuli are worth its while processing? The short answer is: it does not. We maintain cognitive efficiency by only testing hypotheses in order of accessibility (Sperber and Wilson, 1995: 66f). Because the cognitive system is relevance hungry, any other priority than accessibility would be inefficient, and therefore would privilege stimuli which were not relevant. As soon as an assumption is found to generate more positive cognitive effects than an alternative, the latter will no

longer be attended to, and is no longer considered relevant. One may be embarrassed by the disorganisation of ones sock drawer, and this fact may be relevant in a different context, but because one's cognition is geared towards *maximal* relevance, assumptions related to a thief being in your room are likely to be much more relevant and quickly replace assumptions which have fewer positive cognitive effects.

Whenever a new stimulus is processed, relevance dictates which assumptions are more highly manifest than others. The net result is that a snapshot of a cognitive environment yields a body of assumptions, held to differing degrees of strength (and so more likely to endure over time), some being more manifest than others. As new stimuli impinge upon that environment through perception or reactivation from memory, they are subject to the same processing constraint. But note that a cognitive environment is *structured* by virtue of the process which generated that environment in the first place. Some assumptions are there on the surface, as it were, to be tested in the initial stages of a search for relevant assumptions, because they have been accessed recently or are accessed regularly. The more often an assumption is found to be relevant, the more likely it is to bob up to the surface. *Every* impinging stimulus is subject to the same constraint, so, at any point, some assumptions will be more accessible than others, and cognitive agents can be assumed to access those assumptions, when needed, in order of accessibility.

But not all positive cognitive effects are communicated. If I assume that there has been a thief in my bedroom, even if I am correct in assuming this, is it true to say that the thief who ransacked my room *communicated* the assumption that he had been in my bedroom? His doing so did cause me to make this assumption. But he did not intend to inform me that this was the case, and he did not intend to inform me of his intention to inform me that this was the case (see §2.2, above). One important consequence of the cognitive principle of relevance is that, because the cognition of *all* speakers and hearers is geared towards relevance, it allows speakers/hearers to use certain assumptions as evidence of their interlocutor's cognitive environment, including:

(i)   Mutual assumptions about their respective cognitive abilities;

(ii)   Mutual assumptions about their mutual physical environment and coexistence;

50

(iii)   Mutual assumptions which have become part of their mutual cognitive environment during the course of communication

The previous section provided one important example of the third type of assumption: that an act of ostension has been made. Ostensive stimuli (i) carry a tacit *guarantee* that they are relevant in a particular way; (ii) this tacit guarantee makes manifest the intention behind the guarantee; and (iii) this intention is the primary evidence for the intended interpretation (Sperber and Wilson, 1995: 50). If there is additional coded information within the stimulus this can provide strong evidence for particular features of the communicative intention (as is typically the case with the semantic content of linguistic utterances), but the intention, as it were, 'comes first'.

2.6 The communicative principle of relevance

The central claim of the relevance theoretic view of communication is that the fact that humans are constrained by the cognitive principle of relevance makes the "cognitive behaviour of another human predictable enough to guide communication" (Sperber and Wilson, 1995: 263), at two important levels: (i) guiding the selection of the correct contextual assumptions; and (ii) justifying assumptions a hearer can make given the way the stimulus has been constructed. All utterances have a style. Moreover, all utterances communicate something simply by virtue of the fact that they are utterances (a type of ostensive stimulus): that they are optimally relevant (*id*, *ib.*: 156ff).

Because engaging in inferential processing comes at some psychological 'cost' (in terms of processing effort expended. Wilson and Sperber, 2002/2012: 63), it is not enough to justify a hearer's effort that they merely *hope* that an utterance will be relevant. They have to *expect* that an utterance will be relevant. From the perspective of the speaker, it is not rational to overtly demand someone's attention without providing a cognitive 'gain' (in terms of positive cognitive effects. *id., ib.*).

It follows that if a stimulus is ostensively communicated, then the communicator intends to make it manifest to that audience that the stimulus will be relevant enough to be worth their effort in attending to it. This is because it is mutually manifest to communicator and audience (and all other cognitively normal humans) that the audience (like any other

individual) will attend to a stimulus only if it is relevant enough to be worth their attention. So for every act of ostensive communication, if it is mutually manifest that the stimulus is being ostensively communicated, the communicator intends to make manifest to the audience that *this* stimulus is relevant enough to be worth *their* attention. But this corresponds with our definition of ostensive communication:

> "[Ostensive communication is] communication which involves a stimulus which makes it mutually manifest to communicator and audience that the communicator intends, by means of this stimulus, to make manifest or more manifest to the audience a set of assumptions."

> (Carston, 2002a: 378)

To put it another way, because the communicator provides a manifestly intentional stimulus which (a) attracts attention and (b) would be irrelevant unless treated as evidence of the communicator's intentions, it follows by necessity that the fact that the stimulus is ostensive is mutually manifest (Sperber and Wilson, 1995: 163). In short, every act of ostensive communication carries with it the *presumption of optimal relevance*. Sperber and Wilson do not claim that communicators should follow a particular principle, or that relevance is a goal that they ought to achieve. Rather, they claim that part of the content of a given act of ostensive communication is the following presumption (*id., ib.*: 270f; Wilson and Sperber, 2002/2012: 65):

> *Presumption of optimal relevance*:
>
> (a) The ostensive stimulus is relevant enough for it to be worth the addressee's effort in processing it.
> (b) The ostensive stimulus is the most relevant one compatible with the communicator's abilities and preferences.

The communicative principle of relevance states simply that for every act of ostensive communication, the presumption of optimal relevance is ostensively communicated (Sperber and Wilson, 1995: 271f). Grice also recognised that "the very act of communicating creates expectations which it then exploits" (*id.*, *ib.*: 37). As Sperber and Wilson put it:

> "The fact that ostensive inferential communication may be achieved simply by providing evidence about the communicator's intentions makes it possible to use symbolic behaviour as stimuli."
>
> (Sperber and Wilson, 2002/2012: 275)

In other words, without ostension, there could not be any communication.

The presumption of optimal relevance communicated by an act of ostension need not always be true. For instance, you may already be aware that there is an open manhole cover in front of you when I wave at you to warn you that there is an open manhole cover in front of you. This information will not lead to positive cognitive effects for you. But you are justified in assuming that I would not have attracted your attention at all unless I believed that that information would have positive cognitive effects in you (see also Wilson and Sperber, 2002/2012: 341 n4). The assumption *there is a manhole cover in front of you* is (in fact) irrelevant to you. But, crucially, I *thought* it would be relevant to you, and so my utterance is consistent with the presumption of optimal relevance communicated (Sperber and Wilson, 1987: 744).

To clarify, this is not a definition of communication, but rather a characterisation of factors involved in communication which make communication possible (*id.*, *ib.*: 32). In the case of verbal communication, even those who evidently fail to produce relevant utterances, such as bores, "manifestly intend their audience [sc. on that particular occasion etc.] to believe that they are worth listening to". Relevance is *always* aimed for even if it is not achieved (*id.*, *ib.*: 158-60). One interesting consequence of this view is that "pragmatic interpretation is ultimately an exercise in metapsychology" (*id.*, 2002/2012: 261)[16]. This means that a psychologically plausible account of communication must take as a primary object of explanation a speaker's/hearer's thoughts about their interlocutor's thoughts, including, crucially, the intention of a speaker that the hearer of utterance should metarepresent her communicative intention in a particular way. In other words, when I communicate by means

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[16] A feature of communication which Grice appears to have prefigured (Sperber and Wilson *op. cit.* cite Grice, 1989, Chapters §§14, 5, and 18).

of a linguistic utterance, part of what is communicated by that utterance (its content) is the assumption that I am communicating a message by means of producing that utterance. Understanding my utterance involves recovering my communicative intentions from the fact that I have produced an utterance. All accounts of communication in terms of communicative intentions must see metapsychological reasoning as crucial to understanding utterances (see §2.2).

Although not everything we might pre-theoretically call communication would fall under the relevance-theoretic definition of ostensive-inferential communication, we can use the presumption of optimal relevance to explain certain cases of covert communication. Let us assume that I am a spy, and I come home to find the contents of my bedroom drawers scattered on the floor. I also notice that my expensive laptop has not been taken. I infer that somebody, perhaps my handler in the secret service, wanted me to know that my secret identity had been compromised. When could we say that the assumption that *my cover has been blown* has been *communicated*? This would depend on my expectations about the kind of behaviour my handler was able to engage in. He could not send me a message directly because I am likely to be under surveillance by the people who now know my identity. But he could stage a break-in to my flat and disturb my effects. Whether the assumption has been communicated or not depends upon my uptake of an important auxiliary assumption: that somebody is communicating that a certain stimulus (the break in) will be optimally relevant to me. If my handler misjudged my inferential abilities or which assumptions would be highly manifest to me upon seeing my ransacked bedroom, then he would have failed to communicate the intended assumptions.

2.7 The relevance-theoretic comprehension procedure

Sperber and Wilson argue that the communicative principle of relevance and the definition of optimal relevance together suggest a practical procedure for an audience to construct a hypothesis about a communicator's meaning (Sperber and Wilson, 1998/2012: 39-42):

> "The hearer takes the conceptual structure constructed by linguistic decoding; following a path of least effort, he enriches this at the explicit level and complements it at the implicit level, until the resulting interpretation meets his expectations of relevance; at which point, he stops."

We can see how this comprehension procedure is used by hearers by looking at the following constructed exchange in (12), which we can imagine taking place at a cinema:

(12) *Yousef*: [outside the ticket office] What time does the film start?

Claire: I haven't got my glasses.

In order to understand Claire's utterance, Yousef must determine that Claire meant that she needed her *spectacles* in order to read the film times. But the word *glasses* is lexically ambiguous. It could also denote a type of drinking vessel. However, it is already mutually manifest that Yousef wants to know the film times because they have gone to the cinema in order to watch a film. It is also mutually manifest that one can determine film times by checking a schedule (either because they can see such a schedule, or they have seen one before). It is also mutually manifest that Claire needs reading glasses on certain occasions. Only if the content of Claire's utterance concerns the *spectacles* will Yousef be able to infer that Claire does not know what time the film starts. The effort involved in entertaining interpretive hypotheses concerning drinking vessels would not be offset by sufficient cognitive effects.

The process of utterance understanding does not take place in a linear fashion. There is *mutual parallel adjustment* of interpretive hypotheses, which may involve "backwards and forwards adjustments of content before an equilibrium is reached which meets the system's current 'expectation' of relevance" (Carston, 2002a: 143). Yousef's expectation of relevance will be satisfied only when he has disambiguated *glasses*. But any further consideration of alternative hypotheses would be gratuitous. Importantly, expectations of relevance determine both the context and the content of Claire's utterance. As we shall see in the following section, this differs radically from the Gricean model of utterance understanding.

Particular contextual assumptions can be made more or less strongly manifest by an utterance. One consequence of the relevance theoretic account of communication, involving the enlargement of mutual cognitive environments, is that weak impressions can also be communicated. This is crucial to how literary utterances often achieve their effects.

Implicatures can vary in 'strength' (*id.*, 1995: 297ff. Cf. Grice, 1989: 39f). Often it is the case that what is implicated by an utterance is a fully determinate assumption. But this is not true of every case of implicature. Some utterances achieve relevance by virtue of the weak implicatures they communicate (Sperber and Wilson, 1995: 197). In (13), Carly can be taken as communicating the implicature in (13a) as a contextual premise:

(13) *Tom*: Do you like the Happy Mondays?

Carly: I don't like dance music.

(13a) The Happy Mondays play dance music.

Tom might infer from (13a) the assumption in (13b):

(13b) Carly would not like to go to a Happy Mondays gig.

But Tom might also infer on the basis of an additional contextual premise in (13c) the assumption in (13d):

(13c) The Prodigy play dance music.

(13d) Carly would not like to go to a Prodigy gig.

Carly does not force Tom to infer the assumptions in (13c) and (13d). They are not fully determinate and specifically intended parts of the content of her utterance. But it is hard to claim that they are entirely unintended either (*id., ib.*: 198). Tom could make further inferences too, such as by accessing the contextual premise in (13e) in order to derive (13f):

(13e) People who don't like dance music don't like going to raves.

(13f) Carly would not like to go to a rave.

There is no "clear-cut distinction between wholly determinate, specifically-intended inferences and indeterminate, wholly unintended inferences" (*id., ib.*: 199). Rather, (13b) is a *stronger* implicature of (13) than (13d) or (13f). The optimally relevant interpretation of Carly's utterance which Tom derives may include a range of weak implicatures. When we get to cases of figurative language use, we find that some utterances achieve relevance *primarily* through the weak implicatures which they communicate. But if understanding verbal

communication is primarily a metapsychological, inferential process (*id.* 2002/2012: 265; see above), what is the relationship between the coded information carried by utterances and what is derived inferentially?

2.8 The role of inference in communication: explicit and implicit content

The distinction between explicit and implicit content is a subject of controversy (see e.g. Bach, 1994; Carston, 2002a; Recanati, 1989/1991). On Grice's model of communicative cooperation, the explicit content of an utterance – 'what is said' – consists of the conventional meaning of the words used, but inference is allowed to play a minimal role in determining the referents of indexical expressions and in disambiguation. But 'what is said' is still closely related to the (grammatically encoded) meaning of the sentence uttered (see for instance Grice, 1989: 87f; Sperber and Wilson, 2005/2012: 2f; Saul, 2002: 351; Neale, 1992: 520f). For Grice, because speakers and hearers assume that their interlocutor is being cooperative (the cooperative principle), this allows a hearer to infer certain assumptions which go beyond 'what is said':

> **The Cooperative Principle**: Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged.

> (Grice, 1989: 26)

Generally speaking, adhering to a number of maxims and sub-maxims (more or less general principles) will allow a speaker to provide a cooperative contribution to a talk exchange, that is, one consistent with the cooperative principle (Sampson, 1982: 210 n1). Grice gives the maxims (of quality, quantity, manner and relation) in his 'Logic and conversation' (1989: 22ff) although he did at times propose amendments to his list of maxims (e.g. *ib.*: 273). However, central to his theory of conversational cooperation are examples such as the first submaxim of quality, which states *Do not say that which is false*, and the maxim of relation, *Be relevant*.

It is not entirely clear whether Grice meant the maxims to be understood as prescriptive norms (e.g. Greenall, 2006: 546), or as principles of conduct which arise from the benevolence of speakers and hearers (e.g. Pratt, 1986; Sampson, 1982), or as part of a

"normative theory concerned with *proper* implicature" (Davis, 2007: 1671. Cf. Davis, 1998; Saul, 2001: 633). But Grice did imply that there was both a normative and an ethical dimension to adhering to the maxims in pursuit of conversational cooperation:

> "I would like to be able to think of the standard type of conversational practice not merely as something that all or most do *in fact* follow but as something that it is *reasonable* for us to follow, that we *should not* abandon."
>
> (Grice, 1989: 29. His emphasis)

Whatever the status of the maxims, Grice gave them a particular role in communication. Grice proposed the term *implicatum* for an implicitly communicated assumption and *implicature* (first used in Grice, 1989 §15) for the process of computing implicated meanings on the basis of 'what is said' and certain principles of cooperation in communication which he called 'maxims'. Following the practice in contemporary pragmatics, I use the term 'implicature' for what Grice would call an 'implicatum' (e.g. Sperber and Wilson, 1995; Clark, 1996: 141; Gazdar, 1979: 37).

For example, in (14), the cooperative principle allows Carly to infer, on the basis of what Tom says and the assumption that he is being cooperative, that *Tom wants to know where he might purchase some petrol*:

> (14) *Tom*: I am out of petrol.
>
> *Carly*: There is a garage round the corner.
>
> (adapted from Grice, 1989: 32)

According to Grice's view, 'what is said' in Tom's utterance is the proposition *Tom is out of petrol*. 'What is implicated' is the proposition *Tom wants to know where he might purchase some petrol*. This inference is rationally justified because Tom is assumed to be cooperative by (at least) adhering to a certain maxim, the maxim of relation (*Be relevant*). Because Carly assumes that Tom's utterance will be cooperative, and, hence, relevant, he must have meant to communicate more than the proposition *Tom is out of petrol*. Inference also plays a limited role in determining what Tom says: a referent (Tom) must be assigned to the

pronoun *I*, and (perhaps) the phrase *out of petrol* must be disambiguated to mean something like *possessing a car which does not have sufficient petrol* (Cf. *id.*, *ib.*: 25).

Sperber and Wilson drew heavily upon Grice's approach to meaning and conversational cooperation (1995 *passim*; 1987b: 745) but they and other researchers have pointed out a number of limitations of his account of the role the maxims were meant to play in utterance understanding, perhaps building upon Grice's own admission that his account was incomplete (e.g. there may be more maxims. *id. 1989*: 27; the account of the maxim of relation is not fully developed. *id., ib.*: 86f)[17]. However, the problem with Grice's account of conversational cooperation which is most relevant to this thesis concerns his distinction between 'what is said' and 'what is implicated'. As Sperber and Wilson have shown, Grice's claim that the maxims only play a role in the determination of what is implicated is open to challenge[18].

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[17] Many challenges have also been made to Grice's theory over the role and nature of the different maxims, particularly regarding the role of the maxim of relation (Sperber and Wilson, 1995: 36; Harnish, 1976/1991: 361 n50; Levinson, 2000; Grandy, 1989: 524; Greenall, 2006: 545f), and whether the maxims constitute inter-cultural universals (Keenan, 1976; Pratt, 1986: 66f. Cf. Leech, 1983: 80; Green, 1990).

[18] There are also problems with Grice's view of implicature. For Grice, there are three types of implicatures which can arise: those which are licensed by a particular linguistic expression and apply through convention (conventional implicatures), those which arise on the basis of the cooperative principle and the maxims unless explicitly cancelled (generalised conversational implicatures) (see Levinson, 1983: 104; Levinson, 2000 *passim*), and those which arise from observation or exploitation of the cooperative principle and the maxims (particularised conversational implicatures). Conventional implicatures are not widely accepted in the field (see e.g. Horn on the vanishing utility of conventional implicature. 2004: 6. Cf. e.g. Potts for an example of continued use of the concept, 2005), and generalised conversational implicatures (e.g. Levinson, 2000) are associated with a particular ('neo-Gricean') way of approaching pragmatics. For reasons which lie beyond the scope of this thesis, relevance theorists reject the notions of conventional implicature (e.g.

Apart from the limited role of inference in reference assignment and disambiguation, Grice does not allow inference to intrude upon 'what is said'. However, as examples (3a-d) (repeated here) show, contextual information *does* play a role in determining the explicit content of utterances, and this contextual information must be integrated on the part of the hearer by inference:

(3a) He's riding a bike.

(3b) She's speaking tomorrow.

(3c) [Getting married and having children] is better than [having children and getting married].

(3d) The glass is empty.

Although Grice does allow inference to play a role in disambiguation as in (3a) and determining reference as in (3b) (see his treatment of *He is in the grip of a vice*. 1989: 25), his treatment of the natural language equivalents of the logical operators would account for the interpretation of (15a) as taking place in a temporal sequence as being a kind of implicature[19]. An utterance of (15a) is not just taken as communicating the conjoined propositions that *the speaker wants to get married and the speaker wants to have children*, but also the implicature in (15d). This implicature is reasonable on the basis of the assumptions in (15b-c):

(15a) I want to get married and have children.

(15b) The speaker of (15a) is being cooperative.

(15c) Saying *A and B* usually implicates *A then B*.

Blakemore, 2002, especially §2.4) and generalised conversational implicature (e.g. Noveck and Sperber, 2007/2012).

[19] The details of Grice's account do not concern us here. He would have the temporally-sequential reading of *and* as a kind of default implicature, known as a generalised conversational implicature. See Carston (2002a §3) for arguments against this view.

(15d) *Implicature*: I want to get married and then have children.

But if 'what is said' is logically prior to 'what is implicated', how is it possible for an implicature to fall under the scope of a comparative adjective as in (3c) (repeated here)?

(3c) [Getting married and having children] is better than [having children and getting married].

According to first order propositional logic, conjoining two propositions with the operator '&' (equivalent to English *and*) ought to yield a proposition whose truth conditions are fully exhausted by the truth-conditions of the propositions it conjoins: the conjoined proposition is true if and only if both conjoined atomic propositions are true. On that account, *getting married and having children* and *having children and getting married* ought to mean the same thing. But (3c) is not infelicitous. So inference and the determination of 'what is said' cannot be autonomous (Levinson 1983: 35). Also, if what is said has to be *fully-propositional*, then phrasal utterances (*Here*; *Under the table*; *That man*) do not 'say' anything at all (see Clark, 1996: 145; Stainton, 2006: 222-230; Carston, 2002a: 152ff). Moreover, there is good reason to believe that inferential intrusion into 'what is said' is ubiquitous. One way in which this takes place will be explored more fully in the following section.

It is now widely agreed that inference plays a far greater role in the determination of what speakers 'say' than Grice envisaged (e.g. Blakemore, 1987; Carston, 2002a; 2004; Recanati, 1989/1991; 1993; 2001; Sperber and Wilson, 1995; Sperber and Wilson, 2005/2012; Travis, 1991; Levinson, 2000: 195; Ariel, 2010: 104-7 and *passim*; Neale, 1992: 530 n27), leaving 'what is said' something of "a grammar/pragmatics hybrid" (Ariel, 2010: 289 n10), as

listeners "have to calculate parts of what is said" (Clark, 1996: 144)[20]. The right distinction is not between a grammatically encoded 'what is said' and an inferential 'what is implicated', but between those assumptions which are communicated on the basis of what is grammatically encoded (a 'hybrid' of coding and inference) on the one hand and those assumptions which are communicated and fully inferentially-determined (implicatures) on the other (Sperber and Wilson, 1995: 182). Sperber and Wilson introduced the notion 'explicature' to refer to the former:

> "An explicature is a combination of linguistically encoded and contextually inferred conceptual features."

> (*id.*, *ib.*: 182)

Carston has developed this definition further:

> **Explicature**: An assumption (proposition) communicated by an utterance is an 'explicature' of the utterance if and only if it is a development of (a) a linguistically-encoded logical form of the utterance, or of (b) a sentential subpart of the logical form.

> (Carston, 2002a: 124)

The role of the semantic representations of sentences is much more skeletal on the relevance theory model of communication than on the code model, or for Grice. Semantic representations are delivered automatically by an individual's Grammar and serve as assumption schemas which require inferential supplementation into explicatures. While semantic representations delivered by the Grammar are 'skeletal', explicatures are

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[20] There is also a metatheoretical problem with the notion of 'what is said', which minimalist conceptions of 'what is said' are subject to. According to Ariel, defining linguistic meaning as "some truth-conditional representation of the proposition (of whatever degree of faithfulness to the speaker's intention)" commits such theorists to treat all conceptually-required interpretations as linguistic (purely semantic), and implies that speakers typically do not endorse what they explicitly communicate (2010: 109). This undermines the project of providing a definition of linguistic meaning as context-independent compositional meaning.

assumptions actually communicated by an utterance and so can be brought to consciousness (Sperber and Wilson, 1995: 193).

But explicatures cannot be limited to the equivalent of 'what is said' or even 'the proposition expressed'. Higher-level information about the explicature (see (1d)) also plays a significant role in utterance understanding. In the exchange in (16), taking place after a long argument, Katie's utterance communicates the explicature in (16a) (based on Blakemore, 1992: 95):

> (16) *Imran*: Who hid my plectrum?
>
> *Katie*: OK, it was me.
>
>
> (16a) *Explicature*: Katie hid Imran's plectrum.

Is the explicature in (16a) relevant to Imran? No. He already assumes that Katie hid his plectrum, so this information is unlikely to have positive effects in his cognitive environment. It is rather the higher-level explicature in (16b) which is relevant:

> (16b) *Higher-level Explicature*: Katie admits that she took Imran's plectrum.

Non-declarative utterances achieve relevance primarily through the construction of higher-level explicatures, as when Maureen says to Paul in (17):

> (17) *Maureen*: Make a pot of tea.

The utterance in (17) gives rise to the explicatures in (17a-c)

> (17a) Maureen is telling Paul to make a pot of tea.
>
> (17b) It is moderately desirable to Maureen (and achievable by Paul) that Paul make a pot of tea.
>
> (17c) Maureen is requesting that Paul make a pot of tea.

Note that higher-level explicatures fall under the relevance theory definition of ostensive communication (see above; also Carston, 2010b: 223f; Sperber and Wilson, 1995: 50-64).

Sometimes, a higher-level explicature is the main 'point' of an utterance, as is the case for Katie's utterance in (16) and Maureen's in (17).

Higher-level explicatures must be explicatures, not implicatures, because (i) this allows for a parallel treatment of declarative and non-declarative utterances, and (ii) higher-level explicatures can then play a parallel role with explicatures in the derivation of implicatures, as in (18) (following example from Carston, 2010b: 224ff):

(18) *Ann*: So have you changed your views about Jane?

Beth: She is basically a nice person.

Beth's utterance in (18) gives rise to the following explicature (18a) and implicature (18b):

(18a) *Explicature*: Jane is basically a nice person.

(18b) *Implicature*: Beth has changed her mind about Jane.

The implicature in (18b) cannot be derived from the (typical) explicature in (18a). It is rather a higher-level explicature in (18c) which serves as a premise in an inference which justifies the implicature (18b):

(18c) *Higher-level explicature*: Beth thinks that Jane is basically a nice person.

Because (18c) is developed from the semantic representation of Beth's utterance in (18), rather than constituting an inferentially-supplied assumption based on (18a) and other assumptions, it follows that higher-level explicatures are a type of explicature rather than implicatures.

Given this notion of explicature we can define implicature as follows:

"Any assumption communicated, but not explicitly so, is implicitly communicated: it is an *implicature*. By this definition, ostensive stimuli which do not encode logical forms will, of course, only have implicatures."

(Sperber and Wilson, 1995: 182. Their emphasis)

Whereas implicatures are entirely implicit, derived by inference on the basis of other assumptions, explicatures involve a mix of decoded and inferentially-derived information. Therefore, explicatures can vary in *explicitness*. An explicature is more or less explicit to the extent that linguistically encoded information contributes to the explicature as opposed to contextually inferred information (*id.*, *ib.*).

On this view, (19a) would be the most explicit and (19c-d) far less explicit:

(19a) Liam put the bundle of keys which contained his house key, his car key, and the key to his girlfriend's flat on the table in the hall.

(19b) He put the keys on the table.

(19c) He put it there.

(19d) On the table.

(examples based on Carston, 2002a: 117)

All of (19a-d) could on a particular occasion be used to communicate the same assumption. They differ in the degree to which they require inference in order to be understood to communicate that assumption (*id.*, *ib.*).

The assumptions which can be communicated by an utterance can be either explicatures (developed from coded information by inferentially supplied information) or implicatures, and explicatures can vary in explicitness. Implicatures, on the other hand, are entirely implicit (Sperber and Wilson, 1995: 182). But they do differ in *determinacy*.

Indirect requests exhibit some of this indeterminacy, as in (20) (due to Morgan, 1993: 127f):

(20) [Spoken on a crowded train] You're sitting on my hat.

Any of the following implicatures given in (20a-c) would serve the purpose for the situation above:

(20a) The speaker would prefer it if I moved.

(20b) The speaker is threatening me with certain repercussions if I don't move.

(20c) The speaker will be upset if I don't move.

Etc.

The ultimate effect of communicating any of (20a-c) would be the same: the hearer is aware that they ought to move. Moreover, there is a similarity between (20a-c): the speaker would be satisfied with the hearer taking *any* of those interpretations. As long as the hearer derives some set of implications of the utterance as being communicated (that is, as implicatures of the utterance) which would facilitate the desired outcome, this would count as a case of communicative success. Therefore (20a-c) *are* implicatures of the utterance. Whether they are actually entertained by the hearer is beside the point. The hearer is justified in taking the speaker as having communicated something like this set of implicatures.

The notion of indeterminacy of implicatures appears to have been prefigured by Grice:

> "Since, to calculate a conversational implicature is to calculate what has to be supposed in order to preserve the supposition that the Cooperative Principle is being observed, and since there may be various possible specific explanations, a list of which may be open, the conversational implicatum in such cases will be disjunction of such specific explanations; and if the list of these is open, the implicatum will have just the kind of indeterminacy that many actual implicata do in fact seem to possess."

(Grice, 1989: 39f; see also Ariel, 2010: 125; Clark, 1996: 141 n9; Levinson, 1983: 118).

One can compare in this regard indeterminacy in the interpretation of metaphors. An utterance of (21) is likely to give rise to implicatures such as (21a-e) (from Levinson 1983: 118. The Gricean model of metaphor understanding will be addressed in §3.2):

(21) John is a machine.

(21a) John is cold.

(21b) John is efficient.

(21c) John never stops working.

(21d) John puffs and blows.

(21e) John is not particularly intelligent.

But the 'indeterminacy of implicit import' is incompatible with the idea that an implicature is necessarily a *proposition* specifically intended by a speaker (Blakemore, 1987: 70; Greenall, 2006: 547; Saul, 2001: 634-637; Davis, 1998: 70-72). An utterance of (21) could implicate any or all of (21a-e). Grice correctly recognised that figurative meanings are not sentence meanings but contextually sensitive utterance meanings (Wilson and Sperber, 2002/2012: 52). However, his account is clearly incomplete (for other limitations of Grice's account of metaphor understanding, see §3.4). Moreover, it suggests that the indeterminacy of implicit import can be captured in terms of a set of disjunct implicatures (see quote above). But implicit communication cannot be accounted for entirely in these terms (see especially §2.10). In the following sections I describe how relevance theoretic pragmatics accounts for: (i) indeterminacy on the implicit side of communication (§§2.10-11); and (ii) still further underdetermination of the proposition expressed by an utterance than has been explored in this section (§2.9) .

2.9 Pragmatic interpretation of lexical content: ad hoc concepts

The previous section has demonstrated that inference plays a significant role in the recovery of the explicit content of an utterance. But this has thus far been at the level of the propositional content of the utterance. What if inference plays a role in determining lexical content, that is, the contribution of individual lexically-encoded concepts to the explicature? The work of Carston in particular (see especially Carston, 2002a) has argued for just such an analysis. This will have significant implications for relevance theoretic approaches to metaphor (see §2.12 and §3.6). But, as I will argue in §5.1, this contrasts with how similes are understood.

Monomorphemic conceptual expressions (i.e. content words) are treated in relevance theory as encoding atomic concepts (Carston, 2002a: 321. Due to Fodor, 1998. Cf. Fodor, 2008). These concepts consist of an address or node in memory which makes available three types of information: logical content, encyclopaedic or general knowledge, and lexical properties. For instance, the atomic concept LION has three 'entries' associated with it:

(i) Logical entry: including inference rules with outputs such as BIG CAT, ANIMAL OF A CERTAIN KIND, and so on.

(ii) Encyclopaedic entry: containing general knowledge about the denotation of the concept (i.e. actual lions), such as the appearance and behaviour of lions, perhaps visual images of lions, as well as (for some speakers) details of their physiology, cultural assumptions about their significance, and so on.

(iii) Lexical entry: For the English word 'lion', this means the phonemic structure /laɪən/, and grammatical properties of the word 'lion' (takes a plural in /-s/ etc.).

(See Sperber and Wilson, 1995: 86; Vega Moreno, 2007: 46)

It is clear that not all the encyclopaedic information which is made accessible by the concept LION is relevant in each case in (22a-c):

(22a) Edinburgh Zoo once bought a lion called Jayendra.

(22b) The hunter mounted a lion on his wall.

(22c) Achilles is a lion.

In (22a) most of the encyclopaedic information which is made highly manifest by the encoded concept LION *will* be relevant, but (22b) will not communicate that some of the stored logical properties of the concept LION (such as LIVING BEING) will be applicable to the (obviously) stuffed lion which the hunter mounts on his wall. An utterance of (22b) is therefore a 'loose' use of the word *lion* (Sperber and Wilson, 1995: 233ff), and the concept communicated by the word *lion* will be radically different to that of the lexically encoded concept. Metaphorical uses are more radical still: very few properties proper to LIONS are predicated of Achilles in (22c). I will have much more to say about how metaphors are understood in §2.12 and Chapter 3.

There are three main views of the relationship between words and concepts which one might hold:

(i) One-to-one. That is, for every monomorphemic word we have a concept. This view is associated primarily with Fodor (1998; 2008).

(ii) One-to-many. What we think of as the concepts evoked by words are 'composite' rather than 'atomic'. Concepts can typically be exhaustively defined in terms of semantic primitives expressed as features, for example ADULT, MALE, MARRIED; BACHELOR = [+ADULT][+MALE][-MARRIED] (Katz and Postal, 1964; Katz, 1972: 399-412. See also Pustejovksy, 1996; Wierzbicka, 1996).

(iii) Many concepts, with fewer lexicalised concepts (i.e. a 'partial' mapping Sperber and Wilson, 1998/2012: 33ff).

The one-one mapping account, also known as 'meaning atomism' (Murphy, 2010: 74f), has an interesting consequence. Because conceptual meanings are non-decompositional, they cannot be made up of other meaning components. One might propose, then, that all concepts are therefore innate (e.g. Fodor, 2008: 129ff)[21]. If all concepts are innate, then that would include concepts such as IPAD or CREDIT DEFAULT SWAP, concepts which have only recently entered my conceptual repertoire. Rather than claiming that all such concepts are 'in situ' from birth, Fodor, for instance, appears to argue instead that we have certain innate tendencies towards constructing concepts[22], and in this sense all concepts are innate: the human capacity for conceptualisation has an initial state from which all concepts which are acquired must be developed. If we accept an account along these lines for the acquisition of concepts, this still does not rule out the third way of understanding the relationship between words and concepts: that we have *many* concepts, far more than we have stable word-

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[21] Fodor does appear to suggest that concepts constitute innate tendencies to construct certain knowledge structures, rather than innate knowledge structures (1998; 2008: 132 n2; Cf. Sperber and Wilson, 1998/2012: 33ff). My argument here should not be understood as an attempt at refuting Fodor's views. Rather, a 'naive' reading of the conceptual atomist position leads to the kind of reductio I describe in the text.

[22] Fodor once advocated a view of concept acquisition based on 'phenomenally-specified stereotypes' (1998: 143), but he either abandoned it or thinks that it is seriously deficient. In more recent work he claimed: "I don't know how concepts are acquired. Nor do you. Nor does anybody else." (2008: 146).

concept relationships. Moreover, it does not explain what happens when we use a word to communicate a concept it does not lexically-encode.

For instance, a naive atomist approach to lexically-encoded meaning, whereby the conceptual contribution of a lexical item is uniform across all cases, would struggle to explain cases of polysemy. Concepts (including natural kind concepts such as FISH) which appear to be stable make different contributions to the explicit content of utterances on different occasions, as in (23a-e):

(23a) One by one, she prised the fish out of their shells.

(23b) The fish leapt above the waves alongside the boat.

(23c) He smashed the glass bowl and the fish wriggled on the floor.

(23d) The fish savagely attacked the young swimmer.

(23e) We had some delicious fish in a mornay sauce.

(examples taken from Carston, 2002a: 325)

We could account for the difference in the way the word *fish* is understood in these examples by supposing that *fish* is polysemous between, say, three senses of fish, exemplified in (23a), (23b-d) and (23e) respectively. However, that would require that senses even of natural kind terms like *fish* would have to be disambiguated to work out which sense is intended. It might be more plausible, in psychological terms, that there is a single concept encoded by *fish* which is indeterminate (vague) and is specified (the concept is enriched, or the extension is narrowed, depending on one's perspective) on each occasion of use (*id., ib.*).

The second view of the word-concept relationship cannot account for the fact that even those concepts which are prima facie well-defined make different contributions to the explicit content of utterances on different occasions, such as in (24) (adapted from Carston, 2002a: 27):

(24) My friend wants to meet a bachelor. She hasn't had a date in months.

Clearly my friend does not want to meet any adult, unmarried male human being. The second sentence of the utterance makes clear that she would not be satisfied with a gay man or the Pope as the result of her search, because they would not be appropriate candidates for a date with a woman. *Bachelor* here communicates something *more specific* than *adult*, *unmarried man*.

The third view of word-concept relationships is defended at length by Sperber and Wilson (1998/2012) for two main reasons. Firstly, we typically do seem to reason about the world by means of lasting mental structures for which we have no word, but which cannot be explained as reactivation of the same occasion-specific concept in all its particulars. Take the following exchange in (25) (adapted from Sperber and Wilson, 1998/2012: 39ff):

(25) *Peter*: Do you want to go to the cinema?

Mary: I'm tired.

Peter takes Mary to be providing evidence by her utterance which will be relevant to him, in this case, by providing an answer to his question. Mary does not want to go to the cinema. By communicating that she does not want to go to the cinema indirectly, Mary puts Peter through additional processing effort in understanding her utterance than she would have done by answering 'no'. This additional effort is justified by an additional effect, namely providing a reason for her not wanting to go to the cinema. What Mary communicates is as in (25a-c):

(25a) *Explicature*: Mary is tired.

(25b) *Implicated premise*: Mary's being tired is a sufficient reason for her not to want to go to the cinema.

(25c) *Implicated conclusion*: Mary doesn't want to go to the cinema because she is tired.

But notice that the transition from the explicitly communicated assumption (explicature) to the implicated premise cannot be direct. Only if Mary is 'tired' to a particular degree in a particular way, rather than 'tired' *simpliciter*, will the inference from (25a) to (25b) be

justified. In other words, Mary is communicating explicitly that that she is tired enough not to want to go to the cinema on that occasion (*id.*, *ib.*: 41).

Is there any evidence that such an occasion-specific sense of, for example, 'tiredness' might stabilise over time? If constructing a concept in an ad hoc fashion is more effortful than simply accessing a concept directly, it would certainly be cognitively efficient for humans to be capable of forming stable concepts in this way. And there is abundant evidence from introspection that we *do* reason about the world by means of stable, but unlexicalised, mental structures (Sperber and Wilson, 1998/2012: 44). One frequently finds that there is not quite the right word available in a public language (such as English) to express one's private thought with a high degree of fidelity. This is not a conclusive proof of the existence of such unlexicalised concepts, as Sperber and Wilson recognise (*id.*, *ib.*), but it is a far more reasonable hypothesis about human conceptual organisation than the alternative: that what Mary communicates by *tired* in (25) (an ad hoc concept, TIRED*. See below) is accessed every time that concept functions as a constituent of one of her thoughts, and that a process of disambiguation amongst a plethora of senses associated with the word *tired* is required to determine the content of her utterance.

A second argument in favour of the hypothesis that we have more concepts than words is that new lexical words (excluding proper names) are relatively rare. Clear examples of neologisms for previously unlexicalised concepts or concepts which did not exist previously are infrequent. Consider new technologies, such as the concept TABLET-COMPUTER, which many English-speakers did not have only a few years ago, and new uses of homonyms, such as the word *text*, which is now often used for typed messages communicated by mobile phone. These new coinages are relatively infrequent. It does not seem plausible that a new 'mental file' is opened only when a new word (or new homonym) is coined (for the epistemological significance of 'mental files' see Recanati, 2012). Rather, it would be far more efficient for an individual to restructure conceptual information so that it could be accessed at a new mental address. A related argument for such enduring mental structures is when a speaker from one speech community borrows an expression from the (public) lexicon of another speech community, such as the German word *Schadenfreude* borrowed into English. It is surely plausible that many English speakers already have a stable concept

for the malicious enjoyment of the suffering of others before they learn of the German word, or its antonym, from Sanskrit, *mudita* (taking vicarious pleasure in the good fortune of others).

The relevance theory account suggests more mental concepts than those that are lexically-encoded, and moreover that some words which do have conceptual content appear to encode not 'full concepts' but 'pro-concepts'. Like pronouns, whose semantic contribution must be specified for the assumption they are being used to communicate explicitly to have a truth value, there are certain words which have some conceptual content, but clearly not enough to yield a truth-evaluable proposition. For instance, the word *his* in *his present* could refer to the present he bought, or the present gifted to him (Sperber and Wilson, 1998/2012: 32). Whether such a category exists or not does not make much difference to the following argument, but a related claim by Sperber and Wilson does: that even if a word encodes a 'full' concept, in certain circumstances, it can behave as if it encoded a pro-concept. In these cases, a hearer contextually adjusts the lexically-encoded concept to grasp the ad hoc concept that it has been used to convey.

Some of the strongest evidence for the role that pragmatic interpretation plays in the determination of lexical content comes from certain rhetorical 'tropes' including metaphors (see §2.12) as well as ostensible tautologies which communicate something far more specific than their uninformative ostensible meaning might suggest. Utterances such as (26) are typically not interpreted as (uninformative) identity statements but rather as communicating something far more informative:

(26) Boys will be boys.

(adapted from Glucksberg and Keysar, 1993: 413)

An utterance of (26) is uninformative and unlikely to ever achieve relevance as an *identity* statement, but as a *class-inclusion* statement it can be understood as communicating the assumption in (26a):

(26a) BOYS will be BOYS*.

In the interpretation represented in (26a), the ad hoc concept BOYS* denotes a narrower set than the lexically-encoded concept BOYS does, with particular properties. For example, BOYS*are reckless, fun-loving, and so on, whereas BOYS may or may not be so.

In understanding *tired* or *boys will be boys* in (25) and (26), what sets off the process of exploring contextual assumptions is the search for a relevant overall interpretation. The direction such interpretation follows is along the path of least effort. The search through the context stops when relevance is achieved in the expected way. The fact that the denotation of TIRED* in (25a) is narrower in some respects and broader in others than that of TIRED, or that BOYS* in (26a) has a narrower denotation than BOYS is an outcome of the process of utterance understanding. 'Narrowing' and 'broadening' are simply by-products of this search for relevance (e.g. Wilson and Carston, 2007).

The 'banal' obvious truths given in Carston (2004: 830) and repeated here as (27a-d) can all be explained in terms of ad hoc concept construction, where the concept communicated has a 'narrower' extension/denotation than the lexically-encoded concept:

(27a) It'll take [SOME TIME]* to heal.

(27b) Ralph [DRINKS]*.

(27c) Emily has a [TEMPERATURE]*.

(27d) [SOMETHING]* has happened.

Example (27a) will be taken to mean not that it will take any amount of time to heal, as such would be completely uninformative (all processes take some amount of time), but that it will take a contextually significant amount of time. An utterance of (27b) is more likely to be interpreted as explicitly communicating the assumption that Ralph drinks alcohol, or (depending on context) that he drinks alcohol often, in a problematic way, rather than that he drinks liquids (informing someone of which would rarely be relevant). Similarly, an utterance of (27c) typically means a high temperature, rather than some unspecified temperature, and an utterance of (27d) would mean in almost every case that some relevant event of significance has happened.

The opposite kind of relation between encoded concept and ad hoc concept can also hold. In examples (28a-e), the outcome of the process of mutual parallel adjustment involves the construction of an ad hoc concept whose denotation is 'broader' than that of the encoded concept:

(28a) Holland is [FLAT]*.

(28b) The stones form a [CIRCLE]*.

(28c) (*On a picnic, pointing to a flattish rock*): That's a [TABLE]*!

(28d) (*Handing someone a tissue*): Here's a [KLEENEX]*

(28e) (*Handing someone a paper napkin*): Here's a [KLEENEX]*.

(examples from Sperber and Wilson, 2008/2012: 106)

Utterances of (28a-b) do not communicate the clearly-defined topographical or geometric senses of *flat* and *circle*, but something a concept whose denotation includes entities which lie outside those definitions. Such cases involve 'broadening' of the encoded concept. We might say that Holland is not literally flat, for instance. But note that we would not typically say (29):

(29) ?Holland is metaphorically flat.

This suggests that non-literal interpretations involve something more than just broadening of the denotation of a concept, and that the concept of a 'literal' use does not always contrast with a 'metaphorical' one. The utterance in (28c) contains an ad hoc concept TABLE* which denotes not just tables (which are typically manufactured) but also natural formations which serve the same purpose. Example (28d) involves the use of the name of a salient sub-category (a brand name) of tissues to denote the category itself. Example (28e) is broader still, as paper napkins are not strictly speaking 'tissues', but are members of a superordinate set of items which include tissues as well as other items which can be used for the same purposes.

There are other non-figurative uses which involve both narrowing and broadening of the lexically-encoded concept, as in (30):

(30) He's a person with a [BRAIN]*.

An utterance of (30) is taken as communicating that he has a relevant (non-negligible, perhaps above average) amount of intelligence. The communicated concept BRAIN* does not simply denote a narrower set of brains (those possessing a certain degree of intelligence) but rather communicates the specific degree of intelligence that is being attributed to him, not the brain itself. The fact that the outcome of the process of mutual parallel adjustment involves an ad hoc concept which involves both narrowing and broadening of the lexically encoded concept in (30) might explain why (30) 'feels like' a metaphor more than, for example, (28a) does. It is far less infelicitous to say (30a) than (29) above (I certainly find):

(30a) Metaphorically, he's a person with a brain.

This is despite the fact that traditional rhetorical theories would classify (30a) as a metonymy (one word standing in for, that is, replacing another) rather than a metaphor[23].

The class of non-literal uses is broader than what is usually called 'figurative' language. What distinguishes truly figurative cases (such as 'creative' metaphors) from the more mundane loose uses is whether the search for the appropriate ad hoc concept contributes to the communication of *poetic effects*. This will be explored §2.10 and §2.12. One real advantage of the relevance theoretic approach advocated here over other theories of metaphor understanding (particularly those that see metaphor as a deviation from literal language use) is that it allows for metaphor to be seen as lying on a continuum of 'loose' or 'approximate' uses, with 'literal' uses at one end of the continuum. An utterance of (31) could communicate the explicatures in (31a), (31b) or (31c) in the different linguistic contexts given in square brackets:

(31) The soup is boiling.

(31a) [Dinner will be ready soon.] The soup is BOILING.

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[23] I understand metonymies as a type of loose use, akin to metaphors, which happen to be used referentially. The distinction between metaphors and metonymies is not pertinent to the topic of this thesis.

(31b) [Don't go near the pot now.] The soup is BOILING*.

(31c) [You could eat dinner now but it would be best to let it cool down.] The soup is BOILING**.

(see Carston, 2010a: 301f; Wilson and Carston, 2006)

The explicature in (31a) includes the lexically encoded concept BOILING, which we can reasonably assume to denote, for instance, water at over 100°C. The soup is 'literally' boiling, and when it finishes boiling it will be ready to eat. That in (31b), which will likely be taken as a premise for the conclusion given in the brackets, includes the ad hoc concept BOILING*: just hot enough to justify the conclusion that *you shouldn't go near the pot*. This is an approximate use (not 'literally' *boiling*, but close enough to justify a conclusion that one would come to if the soup were 'literally' *boiling*). The utterance in (31c) also involves a degree of approximation, as in (31b), but whereas the situation in (31b) is a warning that you might get burned, (31c) could be a recommendation to avoid an unpleasant, rather than a harmful, situation. In other words, (31c) is more of an exaggeration than (31b). Hence, the use of *boiling* in (31) to communicate the explicature in (31c) would be interpreted as a hyperbole, and BOILING** is broader still than BOILING*.

Traditionally, hyperbole (defined as rhetorical overstatement) was seen as a trope or figure of speech. However, it is hard to identify any particular 'rhetorical effect' in the interpretation in (31c). The 'dead metaphor' problem notwithstanding (which on this model would simply involve the mapping of a stable concept to a lexical item, just as with any other lexically-encoded concept. See Chapter 3 *passim*), it seems that many metaphors, including mundane but still 'live' ones, do involve some kind of stylistic effect:

(32) [Look out the window.] The sea is boiling.

(32a) The sea is BOILING***.

An utterance of (32) is unlikely to be interpreted as literal, approximate or hyperbolic. It is taken as explicitly communicating that the sea is BOILING***, a concept both broader (in some respects) and narrower (in others) than either BOILING, BOILING* or BOILING**. It might mean something like the following paraphrase in (33):

(33) The sea is seething, throwing up spray like steam, dangerous to approach, and so on.

The process by which the ad hoc concept in (32a) is recovered is essentially the same as that in (31a-c): the identification of the *intended* (and communicated) concept by exploring the encyclopaedic assumptions attached to the lexically-encoded concept in order to determine the explicature. But there are two interesting differences between the approximate and hyperbolic cases and the metaphorical ones. Firstly, the way in which the context is explored is different. Secondly, paraphrases of metaphors are far less satisfying than those of approximate and hyperbolic uses ((34a) and (34b) respectively):

(34a) The soup is so hot that touching the pot will hurt you. [=(31b)]

(34b) The soup is so hot that eating it will burn your mouth. [=(31c)]

What makes (31) either literal (31a), approximate (31b), or hyperbolic (31c), is the particular set of encyclopaedic assumptions actually used in making the utterance relevant in the expected way (Wilson and Carston, 2006). Encyclopaedic assumptions which play a part in constructing the ad hoc concept communicated might include those in (a)-(d) which are assumptions which are accessed via the concept BOILING:

BOILING (LIQUID): Encyclopaedic assumptions

(a)   Seethes and bubbles, emits vapour, etc.

(b)   Too hot to consume, too hot to be poured into a plastic cup, etc.

(c)   Dangerous to touch, etc.

(d)   Inhospitable to pathogens, hygienic, etc.

(adapted from Wilson and Carston, 2007: 249)

An assumption such as (d) contributes to the relevance of a literal understanding as in (31a). An approximate interpretation would require access to (b) and (c), but not (d). Hyperbolic understanding (31c) depends on an assumption such as (b).

An utterance of (32) is likely to communicate not just the explicature in (32a) but a whole range of weak implicatures (see §2.10), and a greater degree of responsibility for successful communication lies with the hearer in the case of (32) than in any of the interpretations of (31a-c). It is not just the implicatures which are weakly communicated: the explicature is also weaker in the case of metaphor than in the literal, approximate and hyperbolic cases (Sperber and Wilson, 2005/2012: 13). This is what makes metaphors typically resistant to paraphrase, not their having no explicit content at all (contra Davidson. See section §3.2). Some metaphors are extremely 'weak' indeed, and the responsibility for an interpretation lies with the hearer almost exclusively.

This (potential or actual) ubiquity of inferentially-determined lexical content has led Carston to propose that lexically-encoded concepts need to be thought of as conceptual schemas which are interpreted in specific ways to meet the expectations of relevance raised on particular occasions of utterance. Perhaps words like *kind* or *happy* do not encode concepts at all, but rather 'point' to conceptual regions:

> "This pointing or mapping provides access to certain bundles of information from which the relevance-constrained processes of pragmatic inference extract or construct the conceptual unit which features in the speaker's thought."[24]

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[24] There are alternative views of conceptual adjustment (see Vega Moreno, 2007: 49). These include treating narrowing as involving the application of default rules (Blutner, 1998; 2004; Levinson, 2000: 185f), and treating broadening (or 'approximation') as a type of vagueness, governed by contextually-determined standards of precision (Lasersohn, 1999; Lewis, 1979: 352). Carston's account of narrowing-broadening is more persuasive as it suggests why there is an apparent continuum of cases, as in (31a-c). But my account of simile understanding requires inferential 'enrichment' in a different way to that involved in metaphor understanding: (i) similes always involve conceptual *narrowing*, as anything can be like anything else in some respect or other (Goodman, 1976: 77); (ii) it is not a single concept which is narrowed, but the interpretation of the string (such as) *is like B* as a whole. The process of free enrichment which supplements the explicit content often involves more than

(Carston, 2002a: 360f)

To be absolutely clear: elements of the 'code' (delivered by the strictly 'linguistic' system of syntax and lexical semantics) can be overridden by the inferential pragmatic system (*id.*, *ib.*: 159). Both (i) decoded 'semantic' representations (the logical form) of utterances and (ii) individual lexical contributions to such representations are abstract and schematic:

> "While sentences encode thought/proposition templates, words encode concept templates; it's linguistic underdeterminacy all the way down."

> (*id., ib.*: 360)

2.10 Poetic effects and non-propositional effects

The previous section has demonstrated that concepts cannot be thought of as internalisations of the words used to communicate them (Sperber and Wilson, 1998/2012). The fact that there is no lexical item for the occasion-specific sense which is communicated proves no obstacle to successful communication. An unlexicalised concept can still be communicated. But, by using a word which lexically-encodes a concept different from the one communicated, a speaker shifts the responsibility for successful communication onto the hearer. They are put to additional effort in recovering the concept intended as part of the explicature, and the effort involved in the search for the communicated concept is offset by an expectation on the part of the hearer for a wide range of positive cognitive effects. This expectation is then 'cashed in' in terms of the weak implicatures of the utterance. To put it another way: poetic effects arise when a hearer takes a large number of contextual implications to fall under the communicative intentions of the speaker, but this means that there is no clear cut-off between weak implicatures and 'mere implications' (Pilkington, 2000: 81).

It has plausibly been argued that certain uses of language, including but not limited to figurative utterances, do not just communicate either (i) relatively determinate implicit content, or (ii) a wide range of weakly communicated implicatures (poetic effects), but can

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one conceptual element, something which is impossible for metaphor according to the account given above.

also communicate (iii) non-propositional effects. For example, the metaphor *Achilles is a lion* can be taken communicate the feeling of fear one might feel in Achilles' presence, and the simile *Our relationship is receding like a train disappearing into a tunnel* could be said to communicate an image, namely the image of the disappearing train which is mentioned in the vehicle. One important question I will address at the end of this section is whether what we need from a theory of simile understanding is an account of the poetic effects similes communicate, or whether we need to go beyond the account of the communicated content of figurative utterances which Sperber and Wilson's *Relevance* (1995) provides and incorporate a theory of the evocation of non-propositional effects.

In relevance theory, acts of ostensive communication are public events which provide evidence for private thoughts (e.g. Sperber and Wilson, 1995: 230). But as the hearer shares responsibility with the speaker for successful communication, and does so to varying degrees, how does a hearer know if the representation recovered in interpreting the utterance is a representation of the thought the speaker intended to communicate? If by this we mean an *identical* representation of the thought the speaker intended to communicate, then the speaker has no such guarantee that the communicated assumptions will match (that is, be identical to) those intended to be communicated by the speaker. Sperber and Wilson call representations which are used to represent some state of affairs by being true of that state of affairs *descriptions*. But utterances are not descriptively identical to the thoughts they are used to communicate. Rather, every utterance is an *interpretation* of a private thought of a speaker. Interpretations are representations which resemble another representation to the extent that they share analytic and contextual implications (*id.*, *ib.*: 227; Carston, 2002a: 158). Successful communication can then be seen as involving a hearer making an interpretive assumption about the speaker's informative intention, and the proposition expressed by an utterance is an interpretation of a thought of the speaker (Sperber and Wilson, 1995: 230f).

Literal uses can be seen as limiting cases of resemblance: when an interpretation shares *all* analytic and contextual implications with the representation it interprets, they are logically identical and the interpretation is a *literal* interpretation of the other representation (Carston, 2002a: 332). Relevance theorists originally saw metaphor as primarily about the

relationship between thoughts and the utterances which are used to communicate those thoughts *simpliciter* (see Sperber and Wilson, 1995 §4.7-8; also Carston, 2002a; 2002b; Wilson, 2000/2012; Wilson and Sperber, 2002/2012). On this account, metaphorical utterances are *loose* interpretations of thoughts (Sperber and Wilson, 1995: 231-7). An interpretation is 'loose' when it is not logically identical to the thought communicated:

> "In some (perhaps many) instances, a speaker chooses to produce an utterance which is a less-than-literal (that is, a loose) interpretation of the thought she intends to communicate. This will arise when she judges that the communication of her thought is facilitated by such a non-literal utterance, in that it makes the thought more accessible to the hearer than a literal one would, or when there is not an utterance available to provide a literal means of expression of the thought [...] [In many cases] it is just not possible to find a literal utterance to express the thought one has and a loose/metaphorical use is not just the best, but the only, way to communicate it."

> (Carston, 2002a: 331)

Not only does the 'loose use' account of metaphor capture the difference in content between the thought communicated and the interpretation of that thought (which underlies the intuition that metaphors are ostensibly false), it also predicts that such loose uses will often be more relevant than any possible literal interpretation in the public language which is available to speaker and hearer.

In a literal use such as (35a), the contextual implications of the thought communicated and the interpretation of that thought (the proposition expressed by the utterance) are the same:

(35a) Aslan is a lion.

An utterance of (35a) communicates that the fictional character Aslan is a member of the species panthera leo, which is exactly the thought intended to be communicated. The utterance achieves relevance as a literal interpretation of the thought communicated. However, in an utterance of (35b), the proposition expressed and the thought communicated come apart:

(35b) Achilles is a lion.

Achilles is a (human) soldier, and so cannot be a member of the species *panthera leo*. The speaker communicates that her utterance is optimally relevant, but the proposition expressed does not provide the hearer with the right contextual implications (such as the implicature that *Achilles is brave*, and others).

If an interpretation shares logical and contextual implications with the representation of which it is an interpretation, how do we know if what the hearer recovers shares logical and contextual implications with the thought the speaker intended to communicate? Utterances are external interpretations of internal thoughts. Thoughts have constituents, and so do utterances which contain linguistic constituents (including literary utterances). One solution to the above problem would be to assume that constituents of utterances should correspond to constituents of thoughts. But this is not always the case.

A clear case of the deliberately creative trade-off between cognitive effort and effects is epizeuxis. Epizeuxis is traditionally identified as a figure of speech whereby a speaker/author uses repetition of a lexical item to elicit a stylistic effect. As Sperber and Wilson show (1995: 219ff), the utterances in (36a-e) all use repetition of a single lexical item, but the effects are different:

(36a) We went for a long, long walk.

(36b) There were houses, houses everywhere.

(36c) I shall never, never smoke again.

(36d) There's a fox, a fox in the garden.

(36e) My childhood days are gone, gone.

(Sperber and Wilson, 1995: 219)

The example in (36a) conveys that the speaker went for a very long walk; (36b) that there were a lot of houses; (36c) that the speaker is determined never to smoke again; (36d) that the speaker was excited about there being a fox in the garden; and (36e) that the speaker has been emotionally affected by the passing of her childhood days. The contributions that

the repetitions make can be at the level of the explicit content of the utterance (the explicature, as in (36a-b)), or the degree of commitment to the explicit content of the utterance (a higher level explicature, in (36c)) or in some other expression of the speaker's attitude (*id.*, *ib.*).

In (36a-b), the speaker can communicate something other than the equivalent utterances without repetition would have communicated, and she does so by exploiting the fact that utterances communicate a presumption of their own optimal relevance. In other words, utterances communicate the fact that they are in the optimal form possible (given their current purposes in communication and expectations about each other's abilities and preferences) which would provide the hearer with the most positive cognitive effects for the least possible effort. What happens if an utterance is in such a form that provides evidence to the hearer that he is being put through additional effort than would otherwise be the case? For utterances involving epizeuxis, this additional effort is due to processing a longer utterance with no increase in linguistically supplied content commensurate with the additional effort required to process the utterance.

The result of understanding such utterances as (36d-e) is that a wide range of contextual implications fall under the communicative intentions of the speaker because of the presumption of optimal relevance communicated on this occasion. Therefore these effects, although they are less determinate than strongly communicated implicatures, are still *communicated*. Moreover, the implicit content of the utterance (understood in terms of a range of weak implicatures) provides a more or less *faithful* interpretation of the communicator's feelings and so on (conveying a "sense of apparently affective rather than cognitive mutuality." Sperber and Wilson, 1995: 224). In strong communication speakers "have fairly precise expectations about some of the thoughts the audience will actually entertain" (*id.*, *ib.*: 60). With indirect answers such as in (1a), where only a small and largely determinate set of contextual implications can be said to be *intended* to be recovered by the hearer, these are *strong* implicatures.

However, there are often also *weak* implicatures due to the degree of the hearer's responsibility in finding the optimally relevant interpretation. Communicators can exploit the 'gulf' between the proposition expressed and the thought communicated, and the cognitive

effort that this forces the hearer to go through, in order to include under the communicative intentions of the speaker a wider range of contextual implications of the explicature of the utterance and contextual assumptions which are made more manifest by elements of the explicature. In relevance theory, this phenomenon is known as the communication of *poetic effects*:

> "Let us give the name poetic effects to the peculiar effect of an utterance which achieves most of its relevance through a wide array of weak implicatures […] [Poetic effects] do not add entirely new assumptions which are strongly manifest in the environment. Instead, they marginally increase the manifestness of a great many weakly manifest assumptions. In other words, poetic effects create common impressions rather than common knowledge."
>
> (Sperber and Wilson, 1995: 222-224)

Creative metaphors are taken to achieve just such effects (*id.*, *ib.*: 237), as in (37):

> (37) The night is a veil.

An utterance of (37) will not be taken to have communicated that the night is made of cloth, but rather, that it is dark, it hides something one might otherwise see, it provides cover for otherwise embarrassing or nefarious activities, and so on. The speaker has chosen to communicate something by means of a word which does not directly encode that meaning. This incurs otherwise gratuitous processing effort in determining what the speaker has conveyed. In order to do so, the hearer has to expand the context in which the utterance is interpreted, accessing less and less manifest contextual assumptions, including encyclopaedic assumptions attached to concepts contained in other encyclopaedic assumptions, until the first interpretation which does satisfy the presumption of relevance is achieved. Developments within relevance theory maintained the explanation of metaphors as 'loose uses', but subsumed metaphorical understanding under the view of lexical-pragmatic inferential adjustment of conceptual elements introduced in §2.4 (see Carston, 2002a §5). Sperber and Wilson propose a similar explanation for example (36e) (1995: 219-222).

The outcome of comprehension of loose uses looks quite different from the communication of a single message which can be captured in propositional terms, as with strong implicatures. A much wider space in the topography of the hearer's cognitive environment has been subtly altered. Note that the kind of 'exploitation' involved here is not a deviation from a standard use, as with the proposed 'floutings' of Gricean maxims (see section §3.2). Speakers are 'exploiting', that is 'making full use of', the fact that their utterances will always be considered to be geared towards achieving relevance: a perfectly general, exceptionless occurrence.

Similes can also achieve poetic effects, but, crucially, relevance theory would predict that they will do so in a slightly different way to metaphor:

(38) The night is like a veil.

There is some debate about what an utterance of a simile such as (38) communicates explicitly (see Chapter 3 and §4.2). However, the assumption here will be the simplest one: that an utterance of a simile communicates what they appear to communicate, namely a comparison. An utterance of (38) communicates many of the same poetic effects as (37). But the explicit content of metaphors is also open to debate (see Chapter 3). The pressing question for an analysis of the pragmatics of similes is why does a certain type of linguistic string correlate with the communication of poetic effects? As I explored in §2.6, there is a clear theoretical reason why metaphors are amenable to evoking poetic effects: due to the lexical pragmatic processes which are required in understanding them. So why do (37) and (38) overlap in terms of their weaker effects (part of the implicit content of these utterances) at all? How certain comparisons achieve poetic effects is the central question of this thesis and this question will be addressed in Chapter 5.

For Fodor, thoughts are 'representations' in two senses (1998). The first is that thoughts are 'represented' in the mind (in the same way that Chomsky uses the notion of 'representation'. 2000: 158-160). The other is that "their content is at least partly determined by their relationship with the external world" (Blakemore, 2002: 29). In fact, natural language sentences cannot have truth conditions, but *thoughts* can (see e.g. Carston, 2002a: 58). Does that mean that all thoughts are propositional? What are the kinds of

thoughts which poets communicate? Are these fully-propositional? There are many reasons to believe that communicated thoughts are not limited to fully-propositional representations.

Importantly, for our purposes, poets seem to understand poetry as a deficient means of communication, in at least two senses. The first is that poets often see poetic 'inspiration' as coming from 'outside' themselves. For instance, the first line of Homer's *Iliad* evokes the muse (*aëide theā*: 'sing, goddess, [...]'), and notions of preternatural poetic inspiration are quite common in the world's cultures. It is unclear how (metaphorically) 'external' sources of poetic inspiration might be integrated into an ostensive-inferential account of communication[25].

Figurative utterances, including the more poetic cases of epizeuxis such as (36d-e) and poetic metaphors and similes like (37) and (38), have certain affective effects. By this I mean the sense one feels in hearing or reading them that they communicate emotions whose content is unparaphraseable and (perhaps) ineffable. Relevance theorists have taken the view that at least certain affective effects of figurative utterances may be explicable in fully inferential (cognitive, conceptual) terms (Carston, 2002a: 356; Sperber and Wilson, 1995; *id.*, 1990/2012; Pilkington, 2000, Chapters 6-7). By communicating poetic effects utterances can produce a sense of mutuality between speaker and hearer which includes the (merely apparent) impression that part of their mutual cognitive environment involves affective mutuality: the sharing of an emotion (Sperber and Wilson, 1995: 224. Cf. Pilkington, 2000: 165ff). I do not address how far such an account of the communication of emotion through devices such as metaphor and simile can go in this thesis. However, it must be acknowledged that an important part of what (at the very least) poets claim to be communicating must involve non-propositional, affective content[26].

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[25] It is possible that the introspective phenomenon which underlies such notions is that poets are aware that a certain form of utterance will produce weak effects in their audience, but are unaware of *why* this form will evoke those effects and not others.

[26] It must be noted that Pilkington takes the view that poetic effects cannot be entirely propositional (2000: xi; 2010).

Authors sometimes describe the act of writing poetry or literary composition in general as involving some kind of negotiation between comprehensibility on the one hand and fidelity to one's message on the other. This second way in which poets are conscious of the 'deficiency' of poetic utterances as a means of communication is that poems are seen as poor imitations of some 'original', as in the following quote from Shelley:

> "When composition begins, inspiration is already on the decline, and the most glorious poetry that has ever been communicated to the world is probably a feeble shadow of the original conceptions of the poet."

> (Shelley, quoted in Redpath, 1976: 15)

The poet Seamus Heaney spoke of poets mediating between 'accuracy' (that is, fidelity to the thought communicated) and 'decency' (comprehensibility) (Pilkington, 2000: 12). As relevance theory already claims that utterances are interpretations of thoughts, Shelley's doubt about the possibility of *identity* between 'composition' and 'inspiration' is a specific case of the non-identity of thoughts and utterances. But relevance theory also predicts that the relationship between thoughts and public interpretations of those thoughts is crucial to a cognitive understanding of style.

There is also another sense in which metaphors and similes have been understood as communicating non-propositional content. For instance, both (37) and (38) could evoke in the hearer some kind of mental representation of what *the night* and *a veil* look like. As I will briefly explore in Chapter 5, §5.4, Carston has proposed that images may also play a role in *how* metaphors are processed, not just in what they communicate (that is, as part of the utterance's content). My priority in this thesis is to give as full an account of simile understanding as is currently feasible on the relevance-theoretic model of ostensive-inferential communication. Consequently, I will have far more to say about the propositional content of utterances (both explicit and implicit) than any non-propositional effects they may have as the former are currently better understood than the latter and any *inferential* account of the non-propositional effects of an utterance must start with a model of the communication of conceptual content because it is very unclear what inference over a non-propositional object might involve (Sperber and Wilson, 1995: 164). However, the notion

that images play a role in how metaphors are understood will be a recurrent theme in Chapter 3, as several accounts of metaphor understanding assume that what needs explaining in an account of metaphor understanding is how metaphors encourage the reader or hearer to 'see' one thing 'as' another. My critique of these approaches will suggest that such an account would confuse the phenomenology of readers' experiences with what in fact demands theoretical explanation in metaphor understanding (why saying something which is, on the face of it, false communicates something else instead) and simile understanding (why uttering a banal, obvious truth can communicate effects we also associate with metaphors).

2.11 Relevance theory and style

One aspect of communication which is pertinent to theorists is how to account for intuitions of 'style'. The way in which an utterance has been constructed can communicate all manner of things. We can, on the other hand, make certain information more manifest to an interlocutor *accidentally* (Wilson and Sperber, 1993/2012: 151f. Cf. the nature of 'belief transfer' in the spreading of panic amongst a crowd, Sperber and Wilson, 1987: 736). For instance, if a telemarketer calls my house, and I engage in conversation with them, I could make it manifest to them that I am a native speaker of English, that I come from the northwest of England, that I am male, that I belong to a particular socio-economic group and so on. But which of these assumptions are *communicated*? Relevance theory would predict that only those assumptions which it is manifest that I am making (more) manifest to the hearer will be those which are communicated. This will, in part, depend on certain linguistic or non-linguistic features of the utterance. For instance, I could emphasise the pronunciation of certain words in my regional accent which would help the hearer to distinguish my accent from others in the expectation that this will make it more manifest to the hearer that I am from a particular region. The fact that some mere implications of an utterance can fall under my communicative intentions also allows for the communication of information which is made only marginally more manifest by my utterance. Relevance theory captures this phenomenon in terms of *weak implicature*.

The relevance theoretic account of style does not claim to be all-encompassing. But one 'side-effect' of the characterisation of communication as the promotion of the mutuality of

cognitive environments between speaker and hearer, in conjunction with the characterisation of utterances as carrying with them a presumption of optimal relevance, is that utterances can achieve optimal relevance not just by adding a new assumption to a hearer's cognitive environment, but by incrementally affecting the degree of manifestness of a wide range of contextual assumptions called upon in reaching the optimally relevant interpretation of an utterance. This allows for an account of non-propositional effects of utterances (of the type we get in reading poetry, for instance) in terms of minute cognitive (pragmatic, inferential) effects (Sperber and Wilson, 1995: 224; Pilkington, 2000).

As outlined above, because the presumption of relevance communicated by an utterance guarantees to the hearer/reader that the utterance is optimally relevant, this justifies the hearer/reader in performing certain tasks, including determining the explicit and implicit content of the utterance. One advantage of the relevance theoretic approach to communication is that it can capture the notion of 'style' in these terms. All utterances have 'style' if we understand style as being the way in which an utterance achieves relevance (Sperber and Wilson, 1995: 219).

If we had a model of communication in which the duplication of thoughts were possible (such as the naive code model refuted in §2.1) then we could not achieve an account of style in these terms. But the communicative principle of relevance allows us to make predictions about how style affects understanding:

> "From the style of a communication it is possible to infer such things as what the speaker takes to be the hearer's cognitive capacities and level of attention, how much help or guidance she is prepared to give him in processing her utterance, the degree of complicity between them, their emotional closeness or distance. In other words, a speaker not only aims to enlarge the mutual cognitive environment she shares with the hearer; she also assumes a certain degree of mutuality, which is indicated, and sometimes communicated, by her style."

> (*id.*, *ib.*: 217f)

The relevance theoretic account predicts that no speaker can avoid style (*id.*, *ib.*: 218). It also provides a solution to objections to 'intentionalist' accounts of literary understanding (see e.g. Molina (Ed.), 1976). One such objection is the following by Maynard:

> "[W]e know intention, a thing supposed to be in the mind, only from its outward evidence."
>
> (Maynard, 2009: 30)

It should be noted that this objection applies to 'ordinary' utterances as well as literary texts. But, as we have seen above, intentions *do* play a role in determining the content of utterances. Nevertheless, intentions might conceivably play a role in everyday conversation, but either play a different role in literary understanding, or play no role at all. One such view is that of Austin, who argues that language used on the stage or in poems is not used seriously, but in a way parasitic upon the normal use of language. Such uses are 'etiolations' of language (1962: 22. Cited in Hough, 1976: 225). But seeing literary language as somehow 'deviant' would invite an acquisition problem: how can language users understand literary language at all if such understanding requires special mechanisms? On what basis could such a capacity have arisen in the species? Furthermore, how could they understand 'ordinary' language use in communication if there is always the possibility that a speaker is engaging in a 'parasitic' use? Appeals to secondary mechanisms of literary understanding would therefore be unparsimonious. Relevance theory does not require the view that literary utterances are 'exceptional'. I explore a range of objections to the current account of the understanding of literary utterances in §2.13. But Maynard's objection above can be countered immediately. We do not necessarily 'know' intentions in face-to-face communication either. But the hearer/reader's assumption that the stimulus is ostensive is enough to warrant the process of understanding the stimulus.

The relevance theoretic approach to style is not a view based on 'rhetorical devices' (as a classical approach might have it) but *communication*, where 'tropes' are not treated as unique. We are not accounting for them in terms of deviations from norms of communication, but as types of expression which contribute to relevant interpretations at least in part by the poetic effects they evoke (Sperber and Wilson, 1990/2012).

A relevance theoretic account of simile understanding must be in terms of how readers/hearers recover the interpretations of similes they typically recover on the evidence of the formal properties of utterances of similes. There will be factors external to the utterance, in particular, the presumption of optimal relevance communicated and contextual assumptions, which play a key role in how these interpretations are derived. But context and the presumption of relevance play a role in how *all* utterances are understood. A relevance-theoretic treatment of classical 'tropes', including metaphor and simile ought to explain *why* the interpretations of certain syntactic representations tend to correlate with poetic effects under certain circumstances. What are the typical effects of metaphors and similes? And why do they achieve these effects?

What is it about (39a) (a metaphor) and (39b) (a simile) which makes them amenable to the evocation of poetic effects? Utterances of (39a-b) will typically communicate a wide range of weak implicatures:

(39a) His words are honey.

(39b) His words are like honey.

Why does (39a) evoke poetic effects? The most recent relevance theoretic account of metaphor understanding (explained in the following section) argues that predications such as (39a) can achieve relevance in large part due to the poetic effects they evoke because the concept communicated by *honey* in (39a) is different to the concept lexically-encoded by *honey*. This is an effortful process on the part of the hearer/reader, and the presumption of optimal relevance justifies the hearer/reader in pursuing a wider range of weak implicatures than would otherwise be the case (such as, *His words are seductive*). I address how utterances such as (39a) achieve relevance in more depth in the following section. But what is it about the *form* of (39b) that justifies the pursuit of poetic effects on the part of the hearer/reader? I answer this question in Chapter 5.

If all utterances can be reduced to how an utterance achieves relevance, do all utterances have 'style'[27]? If, as Sperber and Wilson claim, "style is the relationship [sc. between speaker

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[27] I am indebted to the examiners for this question.

and hearer]" (1995: 217), then the outcome of all utterance understanding will involve certain assumptions about that relationship being made mutually manifest to speaker and hearer. On this view, the real question about style and utterances is what factors affect whether the choice of style is merely 'indicated' or is in fact communicated by the speaker or author (*ib*.: 218). This does not mean that all issues concerning pre-theoretic notions of 'style' can be subsumed under the account outlined above. But the technical relevance theoretic notion of style captures two important generalisations about how the style of utterances can affect how they are understood: firstly, that for any utterance, how the utterance has been formed *can* play a large role in determining the (implicit) content of the utterance; and secondly, that one important factor in communication which can be *communicated* by the style of an utterance is that certain assumptions are part of the mutual cognitive environment of speaker and hearer. In other words, communicators can enlarge a mutual cognitive environment with an audience not just by providing additional communicative 'content' (explicatures, implicatures, and higher-level explicatures) but also by allowing the interlocutor to derive further cognitive effects from the fact that the communicator is indicating the degree of mutuality of their cognitive environments.

Sperber and Wilson emphasise that style is not just a matter of literary utterances but arises even in everyday communication. In relevance theoretic terms, example (40a) is less explicit than (40b) or (40c) (based on *id.* 1995: 218):

> (40a) Sperber and Wilson are the originators of relevance theory.
>
> (40b) The academics Sperber and Wilson are the originators of relevance theory.
>
> (40c) Sperber and Wilson, who conduct and publish original academic research, are the originators of the ostensive-inferential theory of communication and cognition known as relevance theory.

While (40a-c) each have a different style, they share much the same general 'import' (what I called 'content' above). What differs between them is the degree to which each example relies upon the hearer's ability to recover the implicit part of that content. The resulting effect will depend upon how the hearer responds to the speaker's choice of style. If the speaker chooses (40a), then there may be a stylistic effect involving the hearer recognising

the degree of mutuality between the speaker's and hearer's cognitive environments. But even if the hearer does not recognise this, assumptions such as (40d) are mutually manifest to speaker and hearer:

> (40d) It is mutually manifest to speaker and hearer that relevance theory is an ostensive-inferential theory of communication and cognition.

When a speaker produces, for example, (40c), then they make the assumption in (40e) mutually manifest:

> (40e) It is not mutually manifest to speaker and hearer that relevance theory is an ostensive-inferential theory of communication and cognition.

The technical notion of style can be captured in these terms, as the way in which utterances can make manifest or more manifest the degree of manifestness that a communicator is assuming with their audience. Assumptions such as (40d) are not always communicated by utterances like (40a) and (40b). But when a speaker misjudges their audience's degree of mutuality with them, and, for instance, produces an utterance such as (40c) in a context where it ought to be known who Sperber and Wilson are and what relevance theory is, this misjudgement can even cause offence. The reason it does so is that the speaker has 'let slip' that they assume that (40e) is true or probably true[28].

Because relevance theory defines communication as the enlargement of mutual cognitive environments, we are not limited in explaining effects such as those discussed above in terms of utterance content (or import), but also in terms of the further effects of utterances which hearers may choose to pursue. There is no clear cut-off point in many cases between what is communicated and what is merely suggested by the style of an utterance, and so communicators produce not just shared knowledge, but 'common impressions' (Sperber and Wilson, 1995: 222-224). In the following section I will look at certain cases where inferential intrusion into the explicature can also generate poetic effects.

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[28] Of course this might not be the case in, for example, examinations, where the hearer is expected to know many assumptions which the speaker is expected to explain.

2.12 Metaphor: lexical pragmatics and style

The relevance theoretic account of metaphor outlined in §2.9 is the most developed account of a rhetorical 'trope' within relevance theory, with the possible exception of irony (e.g. Wilson and Sperber, 2012b). Exploring how metaphors are understood is relevant to this thesis, firstly, because so much of the secondary literature either treats metaphor and simile in parallel or sees simile as the 'poor relation' of metaphor (see Chapter 4 for clarification of the relationship between metaphor and simile). Secondly, my account of how similes are understood differs radically from how relevance theorists argue metaphors are understood. Outlining the differences between the understanding of metaphors and similes will help to explain (i) why metaphors and similes appear to 'interact' in the ways they do (§6.3) and (ii) why certain intuitions about the relationship between metaphors and similes (Chapter 4) may have arisen (see Chapter 5 §5.2, and Chapter 6).

The difference between a 'literal' predication and a metaphorical use of a predication can be spelled out by comparing the exchanges in (41) and (42):

(41) *Gareth*: Which new animals have Edinburgh zoo acquired?

Wendy: Jayendra is a lion.

Explicature: Jayendra is a LION.

As part of the explicature of Wendy's utterance there is a lexically-encoded conceptual constituent LION. Some encyclopaedic assumptions of the concept LION are likely to be as in (41a-e) below:

LION: Encyclopaedic assumptions

(41a) A LION lives in a zoo.

(41b) A LION is an aggressive predator, etc.

(41c) A LION eats meat, etc.

(41d) A LION sleeps most of the day, etc.

(41e) A LION is brave, etc.

In (41), Wendy communicates explicitly that Jayendra is a lion, and her utterance achieves relevance by virtue of the encyclopaedic assumption (41a), that lions live in zoos, because this allows Gareth to recognise the relevance of the proposition expressed by her utterance.

In the exchange in (42), where 'lion' is used metaphorically, there is some conceptual adjustment of the lexically-encoded sense of 'lion':

(42) *Gareth*: I need a stud for my bitch.

Wendy: Don't let her anywhere near my dog. <u>Buster is a lion</u>.

Explicature: Buster is a LION*.

In order to for the underlined sequence of Wendy's utterance in (42) to achieve relevance, Gareth must construct an ad hoc concept he takes Wendy as having communicated as part of the explicature of her utterance. This concept, LION*, is 'narrower' than LION. Table 2.1 below spells out how Wendy's utterance achieves relevance:

Assumptions	Explanation
(a) **Assumption**: Wendy has said to Gareth *Buster is a lion*.	Decoding of Wendy's utterance generates a higher-level representation which can play a part in inference.
(b) **Presumption of relevance**: Wendy's utterance is optimally relevant to Peter.	Expectation raised by the recognition of Wendy's utterance as a communicative act.
(c) **Presumption communicated on this occasion**: Wendy's utterance will achieve relevance by responding to Gareth's expressed need for a male dog as a mate for her female dog.	Expectation raised by (b), given that Wendy is responding to Gareth's expressed need for a mate for his dog.
(d) **Contextual assumption**: Lions are aggressive predators.	Assumption (d) activated by the use of the word 'lion' (a contextual assumption associated with the concept LION).
(e) **Contextual assumption**: Aggressive predators are prone to hurt those around	Assumption (e) is a contextual assumption made more manifest by the recovery of (d).

them.	As (e) might be relevant to (c), it is tentatively accepted as an implicit premise of Wendy's utterance.
(f) **Implicatures** (premises and conclusion): Buster, being a male dog but prone to hurt those around him, would be an unsuitable mate for Mary's dog.	Implicit conclusion derivable from (d) and (e), together with an appropriate interpretation of Wendy's utterance, which would make her utterance relevant-as-expected. Tentatively accepted as an implicit conclusion of the utterance.
(g) **Explicature**: Buster is a LION* (where LION* is a meaning suggested by the use of the word 'lion' and enabling the derivation of (d) and (e)).	Interpretation of the explicit content of Wendy's utterance as decoded in (a), which, together with (d) and (e), would imply (f). Interpretation accepted as Wendy's explicit meaning.
(h) **Explicature and implicated conclusion**: Buster is a LION* and so would not be an appropriate mate for Wendy's dog	First overall interpretation of Mary's utterance (explicit content plus implicatures) to occur to Gareth which would satisfy the expectation of relevance in (b). Accepted as Mary's meaning.

Table 2.1 Mutual parallel adjustment in interpreting *Buster is a lion*. (modelled after Sperber and Wilson, 2008/2012: 113, Table 5.2)

The table involves one significant simplification. There is a degree of indeterminacy in the ad hoc concept communicated, LION*. For Wendy's utterance to achieve relevance, it has to communicate that a LION* is aggressive, but she did not say *Buster is aggressive*. Because (i) her utterance guarantees its own optimal relevance, and because (ii) in order to reach the optimally relevant conclusion (given under (h) in Table 2.1) Gareth had to access certain assumptions in the process of constructing the ad hoc concept LION*, Wendy's utterance has also guaranteed that accessing any suitable contextual assumptions in pursuit of that goal is also relevant. Therefore, as part of the promotion of the mutuality of their contextual environments, her utterance has promoted in manifestness certain assumptions (or prompted the creation of some or all of them) which were not part of the explicit content of

her utterance. These are the implicatures of her utterance which she has made only weakly manifest or more manifest, and so are poetic effects. Examples such as this demonstrate that 'poetic effects' are a term of art in relevance theory, and so do not always coincide with an utterance being 'poetic' in the usual sense of the word. Wendy's metaphor in (42) is quite 'dull' in contrast with (39a) *His words are honey*, for example, but is still likely to communicate poetic effects.

Poetic effects are not directly 'caused by' creative metaphors or any other 'tropes' (see Sperber and Wilson, 1990/2012). However, song lyrics, poems and some literary prose fiction are all typically associated with these kinds of effects, and all make recourse to creative metaphors and similes (and likely more often than in everyday speech). The reason for the correlation between tropes and poetic effects is that they can communicate poetic effects on a small scale. For instance, a single word, used metaphorically, can weakly communicate a wide range of weakly implicated assumptions. Poetic effects could be achieved by other means than the canonical tropes (see e.g. Davidson, 1978/1984: 256f, on the symbolism of a 'hippopotamus' representing the Church in several stanzas of Eliot's *The Hippopotamus*), but tropes are an effective means of communicating such effects. However, any attempt to account for the understanding of literary utterances in ostensive-inferential terms will fall down if it can be established that literary understanding *cannot* be thought of as a species of ostensive-inferential utterance understanding.

2.13 Intentional communication and literary utterances

Grice recognised that human communication involves the recognition of intentions, and also suggested that recognition of communicative intentions is sufficient for successful communication (Sperber and Wilson, 1995: 25). But there have been objections to such a characterisation of speaker meaning, both from the perspective of pragmatics and from literary theory.

There are two main types of counterexamples to the idea that meaning can be accounted for in terms of intentions from the viewpoint of pragmatic theory (Avramides, 1998: 76ff). The first are 'audienceless' examples, such as diary entries, rehearsing a speech, soliloquies, and writing notes to help organise one's thoughts (*id.*, *ib.*). One solution, due to Grice, is to have a broader notion of what constitutes an audience (Grice, 1989: 112-116). The relevance

theory account of literary understanding I give here makes a very different case: it follows from the definition of ostensive-inferential communication that a communicator need not be in direct contact with an audience, merely that the stimulus the communicator has produced makes certain assumptions more manifest to an audience.

Signs can serve as examples of utterances whose audience is not determined in advance of the production of the utterance:

(43) Gentlemen. [a sign on a toilet door]

The claim from relevance theory is that (44) *does* communicate a presumption of its own optimal relevance. It achieves relevance by providing access to assumptions such as (45a-b):

(43a) The gentlemen's toilets are here.

(43b) Only men are allowed to enter this door.

The assumptions in (43a-b) are likely to be strongly implicated by (43). That no 'intentional source' can be identified proves no obstacle to understanding (43). But the relevance theoretic comprehension procedure is justified by the communication of the presumption of relevance. If nobody is 'making' this intention at this point, what justification does the reader of (43) have in proceeding with the comprehension procedure? Because it is a *linguistic* utterance, this justifies the assumption that there is an intentional 'source' behind the erection of the sign, and, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, that the sign was put up deliberately. Why would it be put up deliberately? In order to communicate assumptions such as (43a-b).

But what about examples which are genuinely audienceless? Sperber and Wilson give an account of how the name labels on plants in a botanical gardens can communicate that a plant is named whatever is on the label, even if the potential audience does not actually take up the presumption of optimal relevance which is being 'shown':

"[A]ll the labels which modify the cognitive environment of visitors by making them *capable* of recognizing that the curators of the garden intended to inform them that this or that plant is called so-and-so are cases of communicative success."

(Sperber and Wilson, 1987: 740. Their emphasis.)

An explanation such as this would not be possible were it not for the definition of manifestness given above (§2.3). The labels on the plants make certain assumptions more manifest: that is, if someone were to notice the labels, this would make certain assumptions available to them. One of these assumptions is the presumption of optimal relevance. Clearly there is something in common here between this sort of example and cases of publication or performance of literary utterances. Moreover, even if an utterance were *intended* to have no audience (such as a poet writing for her own pleasure, and hiding her poems in a drawer), it would still count as an interpretive representation of a private thought.

The second set of counterexamples involves some complication in terms of the communicative intention (Cf. Avramides, 1998: 77f, discussing objections raised by Schiffer, 1972, and Grice, 1989 §5)*. For example, giving the correct answer in a viva may not involve the speaker 'telling' the hearer anything they do not already know. So the speaker cannot be intending to produce only effects which cause new beliefs in the hearer. Reminders, confessions (when the hearer knows full well what the speaker is confessing to) and lectures (where the speaker does not necessarily want the hearer to think that she believes the content of her utterances) elicit similar objections to this account. Examination answers, such as (44), will not achieve relevance by providing an examiner with a positive cognitive effect in the form of an assumption which they had previously never entertained:

(44) World War I lasted from 1914 to 1918.

A (written) utterance of (44) will achieve relevance through the higher-level explicature (44a), which *is* a new belief on the part of the hearer:

(44a) *Higher-level explicature:* The examinee knows that World War I lasted from 1914 to 1918.

More complex putative counterexamples to the centrality of intentions to utterance understanding (involving literary utterances) will be addressed below. For Searle (1969: 55) and Avramides (1998: 78), our analysis of meaning need only be 'good enough', akin to

Grice's notion of an 'optimal state' (1989: 301f). But objections such as those above have prompted relevance theorists to propose an alternative notion of what the aim of communication is, and, hence, how speakers 'mean' by their utterances.

There are also objections to characterising *literary* utterances in terms of the recognition of communicative intentions at all. There are two ways in which the study of communication and the analysis of style in literature can interact, both of which share the same assumption. The first, and most typical, is for researchers to apply insights in pragmatic theory to the analysis of literary style (e.g. Black, 2006; Fabb, 1997). The second is for researchers to test claims in communication theory against one particular subset of utterances: literary utterances[29]. The assumption shared by both approaches is that claims about how utterances are understood are applicable to literary language use. This thesis adopts the second approach. The use of similes in everyday utterances, in poetry, literary prose and in song lyrics challenges certain assumptions in the figurative language research literature (which are spelled out in depth in Chapter 4). By clarifying the relationship between metaphor and simile on the one hand and simile and what is usually called 'literal' comparison on the other, we can lend support to an account of figurative language understanding which is grounded in a cognitive theory of communication *tout court*. However, (i) if literary understanding turns out to be *sui generis* (that is, involving discrete capacities which are not required for communication), or (ii) if communication can be accounted for exhaustively in terms of the coding and decoding of messages, such attempts must fail.

Some make the invalid inference that because intentions are impractical to ascertain *with certainty* they can play no role in understanding literary utterances at all (Maynard, 2009: 154. Cf. Hirsch, 1976a: 98). Moreover, situating meaning 'inside' texts, no matter how plausible this may seem at the outset, leads to a *reductio ad absurdum*. For instance, Beardsley, in discussing a poem (Akenside, *The Pleasures of Imagination,* 1744) argues that even though the original author would have never heard the word *plastic* being used of polymers, when the poet says *he raised his plastic arm*, the 'polymer' interpretation of

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[29] I follow Fabb in considering 'literature' to be coextensive with 'verbal art' (1997: 14).

plastic, rather than the older sense of *flexible*, *gracile* and so on, constitutes part of the 'meaning' of the poem (Beardsley, 1992: 26). Even though other literary theorists recognise that texts, strictly speaking, do not *have* meanings at all (e.g. Hirsch, 1976b: 195), Wimsatt and Beardsley, for instance, are led to claim that word meanings which 'evolved' after a poem was written can be part of what a poem 'means' (1976: 257 n7). Many would disagree with such a characterisation of literary 'meaning'.

The first group of putative counterexamples to characterising literary meaning in the way I have here involve 'accidental' utterances. If a linguistic string is not created *deliberately*, then what justification does a hearer have in proceeding with the comprehension procedure? Knapp and Michaels give a famous thought experiment of a verse from a poem being left behind on the shore by a retreating wave. Rather than demonstrating that accounting for meaning in terms of intentions is necessary but incoherent (*id.*, 1982: 724), what this in fact demonstrates is that the *linguistic* nature of an utterance is enough to justify an audience in taking a particular external stimulus as guaranteeing its own optimal relevance. A more complex example is (45), due to Fish:

(45)   Jacobs-Rosenbaum

    Levin

    Thorne

    Hayes

    Ohman (?) [sic]

    (Fish, 1980: 323)

Fish asked his students to interpret the poem given in (45), and they were able to give an interpretation of it. The problem for an intentionalist account of literary utterances is that (45) was not intended as a poem at all by its originator, but had been left behind on the board by a previous lecturer, and, moreover, it is not recognisably English. Does (45) provide enough of a justification for a reader to begin assigning an interpretation to it according to the comprehension procedure? Perhaps so. It appears to be close enough to a linguistic utterance for a reader to attempt to comprehend it. But Fish's 'experiment' is misleading. He *asked* his students to interpret (45). In a sense, Fish was 'vouching for' the optimal relevance

of (45). Moreover, he had taught them previously how to interpret certain religious poems which may have made it far easier for them to come to a relevant interpretation of (45) (as Fish himself recognises. See *id.*, *ib.*: 328).

Another group of problematic literary utterances are those where there is evidence of more than one 'intentional source' (threatening a "palimpsest of intentions", a phrase due to Maynard, 2009: 50). Some stochastic literature involves modification of existing poems by some (partly) randomised procedure to produce a different text (see e.g. Mathews, 1998: 130). There are lots of different types of 'reworked' utterances, such as song-lyrics composed by a 'cut-up' technique (associated with, for instance, David Bowie), or 'centos', such as Etienne de Pleure's reworking of lines from Virgil's Classical Roman epic the *Aeneid* into a Christian religious poem about the Nativity (Chambers (Ed.), 1728: 180). Do such 'mosaic' utterances refute accounting for the meaning of literary utterances in terms of intentions?

If they did, then multiple authorship would pose the same problem. If meaning is a matter of intentions, when I read *Relevance* (Sperber and Wilson, 1995), whose intentions are at issue, Sperber's or Wilson's (for more on the issue of intentional communication and joint authorship see Maynard, 2009: 200 n56)? We can solve the above objections at a stroke: utterances are not directly meaningful. Peckham takes a similar view:

> "When we interpret poetry, we go through the same behavioral [sic] [sc. cognitive] process that we go through when we interpret any utterance. Whether or not we use the word 'intention' in going through that process is not of the slightest importance."
>
> (Peckham, 1976: 157)

The utterance is what provides evidence towards the intention to communicate something by that utterance. The only relevant intention is the specific communicative intention, that the intention to communicate something by the utterance be recognised. Authors may have

other intentions. They may even have rather 'vague' intentions (Maynard, 2009: 62)[30]. But those intentions cannot be communicated directly by the utterance, which can only provide direct evidence for the intention to communicate by means of that utterance. This intention does not really 'belong to' anybody. It 'belongs to' the utterance.

For the thought experiment given by Knapp and Michaels above, the grammaticality of the words found on the shore is a *sufficient* condition for interpreting a phenomenon as an utterance, but, as non-linguistic communication demonstrates, linguistic grammaticality is not a *necessary* condition for communication. The necessary condition is that the phenomenon be interpreted as providing evidence for a communicative intention: that it constitutes an ostensive stimulus. The question, then, is how the automatic ascription of meaning to linguistic utterances takes place and on what basis. Relevance provides just such an explanation.

Some literary theorists take the view that literary texts involve an 'implied' author, or that interpreters of texts must 'construct' an author or a narrator for all fictional narratives (Culler, 1997: 86; Booth, 1993). One way of putting this clearly is to say that the implied author is "the creator [of the utterance the author] chooses to project" (*id.*, 2005: 82), as opposed to the real creator of the utterance, the author. For the notion of a 'constructed/implied author' to be explanatory, it needs to perform a function in the understanding of a particular subset of utterances (literary texts) which cannot be accounted for in terms of the understanding of utterances in general. But it follows from the relevance theoretic view of communication that hearers/readers have expectations about their interlocutors which play a role in understanding utterances. How different is the 'constructed author' of a fictional narrative, for instance, from the (only possibly true) assumptions any hearer entertains about the expectations, abilities and preferences of real speakers? If physical co-presence were a prerequisite of ostensive-inferential communication, then this would pose a particular problem for explaining literary

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[30] I am not arguing that authorial intentions are irrelevant to literary *evaluation*, rather that they are irrelevant to *understanding* an utterance. This account is neutral as to whether authorial intentions are relevant to criticism or not.

understanding. But relevance theory does not require this. In the case of finding my bedroom ransacked by a thief on the orders of my secret service handler, could my handler have communicated to me that my cover was blown *even if I had no idea who my handler was*? Of course. As long as it was manifest to me that someone (a 'creator', or, better, 'ostender') was making it manifest that they had a particular communicative intention, then this would license the relevance-theoretic comprehension heuristic and the act of ostension could be understood. However, in the scenario outlined here the communicator runs the real risk of failing to communicate anything at all[31]. This contrasts with a scenario where, for instance, my handler arranges for my scattered underwear on the floor to be rearranged to spell out the message *Cover blown*. This *would* be recognised instantly as an act of ostension because it is sufficiently overt. What this brief discussion makes clear is that there is no clear cut-off point between acts of communication 'proper' (spelling out the message) and merely exhibiting a stimulus (my ransacked room) which may make certain assumptions more manifest to the audience (for more on the 'showing-telling' continuum see Wharton, 2009).

The outcome of understanding ostensive acts will likely involve certain assumptions about the 'source' of this act of ostension being made manifest or more manifest. But these will be more or less determinate. In some cases, implicatures or higher-level explicatures about the 'ostender' will contribute to overall relevance, in others they will not. More problematic for the notion of a 'constructed author' is how individuals acquire the putative, domain-specific ability to understand certain texts in a certain way. I see no evidence for a domain-specific ability for the understanding of fictional narratives. Some theorists have characterised literary understanding as a matter of finding a '*best hypothesis* about authorial intent' (Jerrold Levinson, 2010: 149. His emphasis), but that does not necessarily mean that this is relevant to literary appreciation. Relevance theory explains *why* literary utterances are understood in terms of such a hypothesis: because *all* utterances communicate a presumption of their own optimal relevance.

We are innately 'attuned' as a species to picking out a particular set of (auditory) stimuli from the "blooming, buzzing confusion" of our sensory environment (e.g. Chomsky, 2011:

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[31] I am indebted to the examiners for this observation.

269). We are justified in treating certain stimuli, namely those which have certain grammatical (phonological and syntactic) properties, as linguistic utterances. Although not all communicative stimuli are linguistic (gestures, paralinguistic auditory stimuli like clicks and whistles used by English speakers), only the minds of conspecifics (other humans) have the same *linguistic* capabilities as our own. Therefore, we cannot help but (initially) interpret linguistic stimuli as originating in the mind of a conspecific, another human being. This justifies the use of the metacognitive abilities (reasoning about other people's reasoning abilities) which are required in communication to interpret stimuli whose origin is more obscure than is the case for utterances in face-to-face communication.

A broader problem with existing literary critical approaches to the understanding of literary utterances is that they appear to deny that texts can communicate meanings *without* the assumptions that certain critical frameworks require. But this is patently false, as Pilkington makes clear:

> "The idea that meanings are locked up in literary works, until structuralism (or some other theory or method) finds the key to unlock them, implies that all those readers who have read or enjoyed literary works prior to the invention of structuralism (or whatever theory), and all those benighted present day readers who have not taken courses in structuralism, were, or are, at a distinct disadvantage when it comes to interpreting literary works."

> (Pilkington, 2000: 49)

As the above demonstrated, relevance theory hypothesises that all utterances *communicate* a presumption (that is, it is not a mere 'conviction' on the part of the hearer/reader, but a justified assumption) that the speaker/author has produced the optimally relevant representation of the thought she wishes to communicate. This relationship is not just true of speakers and utterances on the one hand and poets and poems on the other, it proves to be crucially important to *how* literary utterances can achieve their characteristic effects. Relevance offers an explanation for *why* certain effects may be associated with certain types of utterance, and hence an explanation for why certain utterances communicate the kinds of effects we associate with literary texts.

2.14 Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that relevance theory is sufficient as an account of communication. But why approach figurative meaning from the perspective of communication at all? Surely what is most interesting about metaphors and similes is that understanding them involves seeing something *as* something else? In the following chapter I address a number of competing accounts of metaphor and (to a lesser extent) simile understanding. I evaluate them according to the insights into simile understanding they provide on their own terms. But I also want to highlight the very different approach that relevance theorists have to how metaphors and similes are understood from most of these accounts. They often see elucidating the psychological, or epistemological, nature of metaphor understanding as the primary aim of theories of figurative language understanding. I do not, for a number of reasons.

Firstly, it is not entirely clear what 'seeing as' means, or what an account based on experiencing one thing as another might explain. I could say (46) (due to Lakoff and Johnson, 2003) in order to communicate the assumption in (46a):

(46) We've come to the end of the road.

(46a) Our relationship is about to end.

Does this mean that I am in some sense 'seeing' our relationship as a journey? And does my interlocutor have to 'see' the two phenomena in the same way in order to understand my utterance in (46)? This is a tempting analysis. It places the explanation for a phenomenon in communication in the domain of a psychological account of conceptualisation. There are many advantages that such a manoeuvre away from communication and into psychology might provide. In Chapter 3 I critically review several attempts to account for metaphor understanding along these lines, some identifying 'seeing as' as primarily an issue of comparison, others as primarily an issue of conceptual 'mappings' – that is, enduring mental structures which provide direct access from one domain of mental life to another.

Secondly, it is not entirely clear in any of these accounts what the relationship is between the process of 'seeing one thing as another' and the characteristic effects of certain types of figurative language (one of which is the topic of this thesis). If we begin the process of

'seeing as' whenever we hear certain lexical items, then why do dead metaphors (*Those are bitter words*) seem to differ in quality from novel or creative metaphors (*Those are honey-coated words*; *It was a bitter birth*)? Thirdly, might it not be better to account for the characteristic effects of figurative language in terms of aspects of experience which arise in the process of utterance understanding (much like the mutuality effects discussed in §2.11 above) rather than as an 'inheritance' of the experience of one thing (journeys) in thinking about another (relationships)?

Although there is significant disagreement in the secondary literature about what type of conceptualization (category membership, different types of conceptual alignment or mapping, and so on) is involved in metaphor understanding, theorists who adopt the 'seeing as' approach to figurative language understanding use very similar examples in their theoretical arguments and similar experimental stimuli. Moreover, the theoretical and experimental literature make extensive use of examples of similes. If we want ultimately to explain how metaphor understanding relates to human creativity, then I suggest that we first need to 'weed out' irrelevant desiderata. I will make the *prima facie* case in Chapter 4 for a strong distinction between how metaphors and similes are understood, before outlining how I think relevance theory would predict that some comparisons would be interpreted (as similes). But what if the content and effects of simile can be fully accounted for in ostensive-inferential terms? Where would this leave those who use similes as experimental stimuli? Investigating linguistic utterances may not provide the direct insight into (non-inferential) cognition that many suppose.

Chapter 3: How relevant is metaphor in an account of simile understanding?

I have two objectives in this chapter. The first is to evaluate certain accounts of metaphor understanding which make predictions about how similes are understood. If any of these accounts make the correct predictions about how similes are understood, then the validity of my account of simile understanding will be open to challenge. The second is to challenge the validity of the accounts discussed as complete accounts of *metaphor* understanding. If I can demonstrate that these accounts fail to explain their primary desideratum, then this will undermine one widespread assumption in the field: that metaphor theory is directly relevant to how similes are understood. In contrast, my account claims that: (i) similes are a particular use of comparisons; (ii) they evoke poetic effects for particular reasons; and (iii) these are not the same reasons as metaphors typically evoke poetic effects. I will claim that the field of metaphor studies is in a state of disarray. Researchers appear to have reached an impasse over: (a) the nature of the data relevant to investigation of figurative meaning; (b) metatheoretical commitments in terms of *how* to explain figurative meaning; and (c) how to account for certain phenomena in metaphor understanding (see below). Given this state of research in the field of metaphor studies, one might think that assuming that similes are understood *as* metaphors would be unparsimonious by default. Yet this is exactly what many of the accounts adduced here assume.

There are several initially plausible explanations for how figurative meaning should be explained. We could argue that figurative utterances trigger inherently creative modes of figurative construal, such as finding correspondences between concepts (§3.6; e.g. Gentner and Bowdle, 2008) or through creating new conceptual categories (e.g. Glucksberg and Keysar, 1993)[32]. We could take a slightly different, but still psychological, approach and account for figurative meaning in terms of systematic correspondences between concepts

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[32] I do not address in this thesis the significant psycholinguistic research into metaphor understanding proposed by Sam Glucksberg and colleagues (e.g. Glucksberg and Keysar, 1993; Glucksberg, McGlone and Manfredi, 1997; Glucksberg, 2001; Glucksberg, 2008). This approach shares a great deal with the relevance theoretic ad hoc concept approach to metaphor understanding (see Carston, 2002a: 373f n14; Ritchie, 2013 §3) and will face similar obstacles in attempting to account for emergent properties (see also §4.3).

which interlocutors already possess (§3.7; e.g. Lakoff and Johnson, 2003), and account for the typical effects of creative uses of figurative language in terms of the combination and elaboration of such existing associations. We could also attempt to capture the figurative meaning of metaphors and similes in terms of a semantic operator which licenses the contextually supplied meanings that are typically found in figurative utterances (§3.3; e.g. Stern, 2000). We could also account for the typical meaning of one figurative phenomenon by reducing it to another: so metaphors can communicate figurative meanings because they elliptically or implicitly communicate comparisons (§§3.4-5; Fogelin, 1988; Grice, 1989). Or we could simply deny that the figurative meaning of either metaphors or similes is relevant to the study of language at all (§3.2; e.g. Davidson, 1978/1984). If any of these accounts could also account for the effects of similes, this will threaten my hypothesis about how similes are understood.

In this chapter I look at each of the above approaches to metaphor understanding and evaluate how well they hang together with the theory of communication defended in Chapter 2, as well as with respect to a number of phenomena which have proven problematic for a number of accounts of metaphor understanding to explain:

(i) Dead metaphors: *He's a dog* meaning (amongst other things) *He's a promiscuous male*.

(ii) The characteristic effects of novel metaphors: e.g. *She's a gazelle* will communicate a whole range of impressions, some of which are relatively determinate, others far less so.

(iii) The metaphor-simile relationship: how applicable are these accounts of metaphor understanding to how similes are understood, if at all?

(iv) Emergent property metaphors: *Sharon is a bulldozer* communicates that Sharon is likely to override all opposition, will be difficult to dissuade, and so on. But these are not properties associated either with the lexically-encoded concept BULLDOZER or concepts associated with Sharon (PERSON, WOMAN, etc.). So where do they come from?

Here I give a quick summary of how the relevance theoretic account of metaphor understanding would tackle issues (i)-(iii), leaving the discussion of emergent properties (iv)

for section §3.1 below. For relevance theorists, dead metaphors will occur when connections between words and the (initially) ad hoc concepts they are used to communicate stabilise (e.g. Wilson and Carston, 2007). Someone who has not acquired the sense of *dog* we are discussing will likely interpret an utterance of (1) as communicating an explicature such as that given in (1a):

(1) He's a dog.

(1a) He's a DOG*. [i.e. an ad hoc concept related to concept DOG]

On certain occasions, the concept DOG* might be constructed in such a way as to denote men who are promiscuous. It seems plausible that with repeated use of the word *dog* to communicate similar ad hoc concepts, certain properties of DOG* could become 'stabilised', that is, they are likely to be evoke consistently over time. This may result in a new conceptual address (DOG$_2$) being associated with *dog*, so *dog* becomes ambiguous between these non-overlapping senses.

For many modern speakers of English, the word *dog* can communicate (roughly speaking) either CANINE or PROMISCUOUS HUMAN MALE. Therefore, (1) will communicate either (1b) or (1c):

(1b) He's a DOG. [i.e. canine]

(1c) He's a DOG$_2$. [i.e. sexually promiscuous human male]

What differs in (1a) and (1c) is the degree to which the hearer has responsibility for the construction of the appropriate explicature, and whether a range of weak implicatures will be communicated. 'Dead metaphors' are therefore far less likely to communicate poetic effects than novel, or creative, metaphors. Can the metaphor accounts explored below account for this crucial issue in the way the mental lexicon functions? What will be the theoretical consequences of adopting their solutions?

The same sort of questions can be raised in relation to how to account for how novel, creative metaphors are typically understood. More creative metaphors such as (2) are more likely to evoke poetic effects than (1) (which can be seen as somewhat mundane):

(2) His words are honey.

According to the ad hoc concept account of metaphor understanding given in Chapter 2, §2.12, an utterance of (2) will communicate an explicature such as (2a):

(2a) His words are HONEY*.

But (2) will also communicate a wide range of weak implicatures (see §2.10). Do the theories of metaphor understanding below say anything significant about: (i) the difference between 'dead' (no poetic effects traceable to ad hoc concept construction), 'mundane' (few poetic effects) and 'creative' (many poetic effects) metaphors; (ii) what exactly is communicated in the case of novel metaphors that makes them especially 'figurative'; and (iii) how such effects are generated? To address all these questions satisfactorily would require further study. But in this chapter I show that there ought to be sufficient doubt about how metaphors are understood to call into question the utility of equating metaphor and simile.

There are only three possible approaches one might take to the metaphor-simile relationship:

1. Metaphor and simile are manifestations of the same phenomenon. They are only formally distinguishable. One variant of this view is that at least metaphors and similes of the form *A is (like) B* are underlyingly 'the same'. What this 'sameness' resides in will vary from theory to theory.

2. Metaphor and simile are situated on a figurative 'continuum', with one (almost always metaphor) situated at the most figurative end. Where exactly simile sits in relation to metaphor will vary from theory to theory. But in order to claim this, one must have a clear view of what exactly makes one interpretation 'more figurative' ('more powerful', 'more evocative', 'better', and so on. See Chapter 4, §4.7) than another.

3. Metaphor and simile are distinct phenomena. They may share certain effects, but these are not unique to metaphor and simile. Therefore they cannot be treated as manifestations of the same phenomenon in terms of how they are processed or the effects they achieve.

The predictions of theories discussed below about the metaphor-simile relationship will be addressed on a case-by-case basis, as they are so different. However, a certain pattern will emerge: few researchers make as strong a distinction as I will between how metaphors and similes are processed. Perhaps metaphor studies has failed to reach even a broad consensus over how metaphors are understood because intuitions about the metaphor-simile relationship have been used in radically divergent ways. I will call into question the intuitions which lie behind the conflation of metaphor and simile in Chapter 4.

3.1 Emergent property metaphors

One of the major research aims of the relevance theoretic metaphor studies in recent years has been to explain the phenomenon of 'emergent properties' in metaphor interpretations (Wilson and Carston, 2006; Carston and Wearing, 2011). The following utterances are all examples of metaphors involving emergent properties[33] and are widely discussed in the literature (with the exception of (3d), due to Leezenberg, 2001: 48, apparently based on al-Jurjānī):

(3a) Robert is a bulldozer.

(3b) Sally is a block of ice.

(3c) That surgeon is a butcher.

(3d) His words are honey.

According to the lexical-pragmatic account of metaphor understanding outlined in Chapter 2, §2.10, the understanding of (3a-d) will involve the construction of ad hoc concepts as part of the explicature:

(4a) Robert is a [BULLDOZER]*.

(4b) Sally is a [BLOCK-OF-ICE]*.

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[33] As far as I am aware, (3b) is due originally to Searle (1993). Examples involving *bulldozer* may be due to Fogelin (1988: 88). Examples (3a-c) are widely repeated in the secondary literature, and are apparently rarely attributed to the author of their first occurrence. I apologise for any inadvertent oversight on my part.

(4c) That surgeon is a [BUTCHER]*.

(4d) His words are [HONEY]*.

The ad hoc concepts communicated in (4a-d) differ from the encoded concepts in a number of ways, which are suggested by the encyclopaedic assumptions given in Table 3.1.

BULLDOZER:	[BULLDOZER]*:
Encyclopaedic assumptions: (a) A BULLDOZER is a machine. (b) A BULLDOZER moves earth. (c) A BULLDOZER is made of metal. (d) A BULLDOZER is dangerous to be around. Etc.	Encyclopaedic assumptions: (a) A [BULLDOZER]* refuses to listen. (b) A [BULLDOZER]* will ignore one's decisions. (c) A [BULLDOZER]* will not respect your autonomy. (d) A [BULLDOZER]* may threaten one. Etc.
[BLOCK-OF-ICE]:	[BLOCK-OF-ICE]*:
Encyclopaedic assumptions: (a) A [BLOCK-OF-ICE] is COLD. (b) A [BLOCK-OF-ICE] is made of water. (c) A [BLOCK-OF-ICE] can break easily. (d) A [BLOCK-OF-ICE] can be used to cool drinks. Etc.	Encyclopaedic assumptions: (a) A [BLOCK-OF-ICE]* is [COLD]* [i.e. metaphorically]. (b) A [BLOCK-OF-ICE]* doesn't care about one's feelings. (c) A [BLOCK-OF-ICE]* is unsupportive. (d) A [BLOCK-OF-ICE]* is stubborn. Etc.
BUTCHER:	[BUTCHER]*:
Encyclopaedic assumptions: (a) A BUTCHER cuts meat. (b) A BUTCHER uses a cleaver. (c) A BUTCHER is strong. (d) A BUTCHER wears an apron. Etc.	Encyclopaedic assumptions: (a) A [BUTCHER]* is incompetent. (b) A [BUTCHER]* is unskilled. (c) A [BUTCHER]* is dangerous. (d) A [BUTCHER]* should not be allowed to practise surgery. Etc.

HONEY:	[HONEY]*:
Encyclopaedic assumptions:	Encyclopaedic assumptions:
(a) HONEY is SWEET.	(a) [HONEY]* is [SWEET]*. [i.e. metaphorically]
(b) HONEY is made by bees.	(b) [HONEY]* is persuasive.
(c) HONEY might aggravate one's allergies.	(c) [HONEY]* is seductive.
(d) HONEY is not eaten by vegans.	(d) [HONEY]* is not boring.
Etc.	Etc.

Table 3.1 Encyclopaedic assumptions of lexically-encoded concepts versus ad hoc concepts in understanding emergent property metaphors (3a-d)

Uttering (3a) typically communicates that Robert has properties which are not typically associated with bulldozers. Similarly, whereas Sally in (3b) is understood as being 'metaphorically' cold, a block of ice is not cold in that sense; it is 'literally' cold. Also, one might not consider butchers to be stereotypically incompetent, but even if you have a high regard for the craft of butchery, the interpretation of (3c) would still be that the surgeon is incompetent. In the case of (3d), we can see a similar type of 'emergence' as in (3b) (HONEY is not persuasive, and so on), but we also see a high degree of indeterminacy of interpretation, as evidenced by (3e-f):

> (3e) I don't trust him. His words are honey.

> (3f) He makes me feel good about myself. His words are honey.

An utterance such as (3e) might suggest that his words are inappropriately persuasive, (3f) that they are soothing, comforting, kind, and so on.

The kinds of emergent properties exemplified by the *A is B* type metaphors in (3a-d) are not peripheral to metaphor understanding. The interpretations experimental subjects provide for metaphors often involve emergent properties (see below). Some have taken 'emergent properties' to be a key difference in the interpretation of metaphors and similes, because similes refer to the basic-level (lexicalised) concept, while metaphors refer to an *ad hoc* (occasion-specific) concept and so tend to evoke emergent properties (e.g. Glucksberg and Haught, 2006: 364; Glucksberg, 2008: 74ff). It is not clear to me that the properties recovered in understanding similes and metaphors are comparable. I will explain this fully in

Chapter 5. But for our current purposes I should make clear that although there are no 'emergent property similes' (see Chapter 6, §6.2), this is not because hearers do not recover similar interpretations for *Robert is like a bulldozer*, *Sally is like a block of ice*, and so on as for (3a-d), because introspection suggests that they can (Cf. Fogelin, 1988: 88). Rather the way in which similes and metaphors are understood differs. How similes are understood will be explain in Chapter 5, and the question of whether there are any emergent property similes will be addressed directly in Chapter 6, §6.2.

Exploring 'emergent properties' highlights an important difference between metaphors and similes, and will serve as a barometer for the state of current metaphor research: despite claims to the contrary, some of which I will evaluate, there are no extant accounts which solve the problem of emergent properties. It is strange, therefore, given the failure of all these accounts to explain where emergent properties come from, that in discussing the potential sources of emergent properties, elements of two of these accounts (structure-mapping and conceptual metaphors) have been proposed as just such a source (Carston, 2002a: 355f). Relevance theoretic accounts of how we should explain emergent property metaphors are, at the time of writing, speculative. However, I argue that there are inherent problems in structure-mapping theory and conceptual metaphor theory. In the case of conceptual metaphor theory, there is little evidence that conceptual metaphors play any *explanatory* role in an account of metaphor understanding (if they can be said to exist at all) and the methodology of conceptual metaphor theorists suggests that they are more concerned with lexical typological variation than the capacity for humans to communicate by linguistic utterances a message which is not co-extensive with the grammatically-encoded meaning of the utterance (the view from pragmatic theory).

Nevertheless, several attempts to combine relevance theory and conceptual metaphor theory have been made by researchers in the latter tradition (see especially Kövecses, 2011). But the theoretical underpinnings of conceptual metaphor theory are not just open to objections on their own terms; they are inherently incompatible with the aims of relevance theory. I evaluate one such 'hybrid' account, that of Tendahl (2009; Gibbs and Tendahl, 2006; Tendahl and Gibbs, 2008), and argue that it too fails to account for emergent property metaphors. All that remains of conceptual metaphor theory as a plausible contributor to

utterance understanding is that strengthened associations between particular concepts might contribute 'on the effort side' to the understanding of metaphorical utterances (Wilson, 2011; Wilson and Carston, 2006).

One way of attempting to solve the problem of emergent properties within relevance theory is to assume that encyclopaedic assumptions attached to the lexically-encoded concepts can allow for adjustments of the concepts which comprise their sub-parts. In understanding (5), assumption (5a), attached to the concept [BLOCK-OF-ICE], could be accessed in the form (5b), where COLD* is an ad hoc concept which denotes both cold temperatures and cold emotions:

> (5) Sally is a block of ice.

> (5a) A [BLOCK-OF-ICE] is COLD.

> (5b) A [BLOCK-OF-ICE] is COLD*.

Vega Moreno suggests something like this as a solution to the emergent property problem (2004: 315f). The assumption that "Sally is a [BLOCK OF ICE]*" might implicate, for instance, that she is not a good person to talk about your problems to, because being a [BLOCK OF ICE]* entails being HARD*, COLD*, RIGID* and therefore emotionally reserved and so on.

There are two major problems with this solution. Firstly, where does COLD* in encyclopaedic assumption (5b) come from? For example (5), it is quite plausible that there are at least two concepts which are encoded by the lexical item *cold*, one for physical COLDNESS, the other for emotional COLDNESS. But there are cases of emergence where no such appeal to distinct, stable concepts can be made, as in (3c) and (3d) (repeated here):

> (3c) That surgeon is a butcher.

> (3d) His words are honey.

Nor is it clear that COLD as a component of a conceptual representation (such as an encyclopaedic assumption) can properly be treated as analogous to the use of the word *cold* in an utterance, because it is the *lexical* properties which the two concepts attached to the polysemous term share (the fact that they are attached to the word *cold*), not (necessarily) their logical properties or encyclopaedic assumptions. In other words, ad hoc concepts are

not directly associated with lexically-encoded concepts in the same way as the word *cold* lexically-encodes cold. Moreover, if we allow appeal to unlimited homonymy (one-word-to-multiple-concept mappings) in our account of metaphor understanding, whether at the level of the word-concept relationship or at the level of encyclopaedic assumptions containing stable, distinct but related concepts, this will have no explanatory value. We can always claim that such a word-to-concept mapping exists in advance of utterance understanding. On such an account, the ad hoc concepts communicated by metaphors will not, strictly speaking, be 'ad hoc' at all: they must all be there in some sense in advance of utterance understanding.

One argument in favour of (limited) homonymy playing a role in explaining emergent properties is given by Wilson and Carston (2006). They discuss an example like the following:

(6) *Andrej*: Should I talk to Sally about my problems?

Britney: Sally is as cold as a block of ice.

The response of Britney in (6) does not appear to trade on an equivocation on *cold*. Communicators appear to be able to access a superordinate concept COLD* whose denotation/extension includes both physical and psychological COLDNESS (Wilson and Carston, 2006: 425-7; Tendahl, 2009: 145f). But there is a problem here. This could be argued to be a case of metaphor-simile interaction (see section §5.3). What if processing the comparison provides the relevant property? I explore this option, which is also predicted, perhaps counterintuitively, by the relevance theory account, in Chapter 5, §5.2.

I agree with Vega Moreno that emergent properties pose a problem for all theories of metaphor understanding where metaphors are argued to attribute properties to the tenor concept on the basis of pre-existing properties associated with the vehicle concept (2007: 99). The advantages of a relevance theory account are that it is fully inferential and located within a more general theory of utterance understanding (Wilson and Carston, 2006). There are a number of experimental predictions which are compatible with the account given in Chapter 2, §2.12. For example, because relevance is goal-directed, this might explain the experimental data about salience in emergent properties (e.g. Glucksberg and Estes, 2000). So abandoning mutual parallel adjustment and the ad hoc concept account of metaphor

understanding is not a viable option. But emergent properties still remain unexplained, and this has been used as a counterargument to the relevance theory approach to ad hoc concept construction in general. For example, Ruiz de Mendoza Ibáñez cites emergent properties in claiming that relevance theory does not have an account of how conceptual adjustment takes place "in terms of the way our minds handle concepts" (2009: 194f). But *communicated* concepts have emergent properties. This *may* be due to the way concept formation and integration functions. But why is it assumed that the explanation *has to be* in these terms?

We could, instead, appeal to conceptual associations, which mandatorily provide access to the assumptions associated with, for example, coldness and emotional distance. This approach is associated with conceptual metaphor theory, and I dismiss this possibility in section §3.7 below as unexplanatory. The second major problem is that it would require an equivocation between premises and conclusions. This should invalidate an inference. But for mutual parallel adjustment to be operative at all, we require a fully-inferential account of utterance interpretation. So how are emergent properties to be reconciled with a fully-inferential account (Wilson and Carston, 2006)[34]?

There is much experimental evidence that emergent properties play a role in communicators' understanding of metaphors. For instance, experiments have suggested that over 60% of properties generated during processing of poetic metaphors emerge during interpretation according to participant reports (Gineste, *et al.*, 2000). Participants list more emergent features than those belonging to tenor or vehicle alone (Becker, 1997). Also, participants systematically preferred interpretations of a metaphor presented to them which are based on emergent properties than those which are based on common features of tenor and vehicle (Tourangeau and Rips, 1991). However, demonstrating that emergent properties

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[34] This contrasts with Recanati's view (1995; 2002; 2004: 459f) which would put the 'move' from decoded meaning to explicature (containing e.g. COLD*) as a 'primary', non-inferential process, and that from explicature to implicatures (including the conclusion that Mary meant that Caroline was spoiled, indulged, etc.) as secondary. Relevance theorists reject such an account for a number of reasons (see Carston, 2002b: 142).

both exist and are typical of linguistic metaphors does not help us determine how they are derived (Vega Moreno, 2007: 77). Moreover, 'emergence' is sometimes understood as conceptual context-dependence in general (e.g. Barsalou, 1982; 1983). Tourangeau and Rips tested for only those properties which arise during metaphor understanding and are not attributable to the overlap between the tenor and the vehicle concept (1991). But the only genuinely 'emergent' properties in the sense I have discussed are those which cannot be attributed to encyclopaedic assumptions attached to *either* the vehicle concept *or* the tenor concept. There is a lot more work to be done on this issue, and lack of clarity on some basic issues may be impeding progress, not least whether similes and metaphors are the same and what the characteristic effects of metaphors and similes and similes are. In short, research currently does not know how to even formulate the appropriate questions regarding the metaphor-simile relationship.

3.2 Is figurative language relevant to the study of meaning?

Davidson is famously sceptical of the view that metaphors have any 'meaning' beyond what they 'literally' mean (1978/1984). Metaphors might otherwise be a problem for the project which Davidson was undertaking to give a compositional account of semantic meaning, where interpreting a sentence yields a fully truth-evaluable proposition for that sentence which can be captured in terms of 'truth theories' (e.g. Davidson, 1967/2006. For a two volume defence of Davidson's programme see Lepore and Ludwig, 2005; 2007. Cf. Soames, 2010: 33-42). Davidson prefers the term 'first meaning' to 'literal meaning' (1986/2006: 252), but they amount to much the same notion: the meaning taken to be encoded by the words used. If the first meaning of a sentence involves not a shared meaning but a genuine 'content' which differs from the shared meaning, this runs counter to the second of Davidson's three "plausible principles concerning first meaning in language" that first meanings are shared (*id.*, *ib.*: 254). Quite a lot was at stake for Davidson if metaphors turned out to have the kind of content that many argue they do have.

Davidson advocates a model of semantics in which "[l]iteral meaning and literal truth conditions can be assigned to words and sentences apart from particular contexts of use" (1978/1984: 247). As Chapter 2 demonstrated, there are very strong reasons to doubt such a model, where utterances (even 'literal' ones) are taken to communicate fully truth-evaluable

propositional contents based solely on their compositional, semantic meaning. So Davidson's account of language is not a theory of linguistic communication at all. But he does have something to say about metaphors and similes.

Davidson's 'no content' view of metaphor contrasts squarely with the view of, for instance, Sperber and Wilson, for whom metaphors *do* have genuine cognitive content (1990/2012: 92). For Davidson, the reason that metaphors prove difficult to paraphrase is that there is nothing there to paraphrase (1978/1984: 246). What metaphors 'do', is to make us 'attend to' a 'likeness' (*ib.*: 247). As Leddy puts it, they "tease the reader into creative perception of the world" (1983: 65). A simile, on the other hand, "tells us, in part, what a metaphor merely nudges us into noting" (Davidson, 1978/1984: 253). By "in part" Davidson appears to mean that similes, like metaphors, do not tell us the respects in which a similarity holds any more than metaphor does. Although 'noticing' a particular similarity is an important feature of both metaphor and simile understanding, this is a difficult task, as "everything is like everything, and in endless ways" (*ib.*: 254. Cf. Goodman, 1976: 77; Israel, *et al.*, 2004: 126). But this is not an issue for the semantics of simile, which is (for Davidson) provided by the literal meaning of the words used independent of context of use. Therefore, similes do not have a figurative meaning at all. If we do not posit a 'special' meaning for simile, why should we do so for metaphor? The widely-held view that similes are all true and metaphors are all either false (*Juliet is the sun*) or patently true (e.g. Cohen's example *No man is an island*. 1975: 671) is of no theoretical consequence. The fact that most metaphors are patently 'false', 'contradictory' or 'absurd' merely helps to explain why we interpret some sentences metaphorically (Davidson, 1978/1984: 258). If metaphors did have a 'special cognitive content', why do we have difficulty in paraphrasing a metaphor's putative content (a view which goes back at least as far as Brooks, who argues that poetry is resistant to paraphrase. Cf. *id.*, 1947: 185 on 'the heresy of paraphrase' and metaphor)? Surely a paraphrase should be available for genuine content?

There are a number of idiosyncrasies to Davidson's approach. Firstly, he proposes no connection between the (unexceptional) semantics of figurative utterances and 'what we are caused to notice' by their use. From the perspective of a theory of communication, this is an unsatisfactory outcome. Secondly, there is strong evidence that occasion-specific

meanings *do* contribute to the content of utterances, and that metaphors appear to lie on a continuum with such uses (see e.g. Carston, 2002a; Sperber and Wilson, 2008/2012). Moreover, the content of utterances is not limited to their (truth-conditional) semantics, but can include implicatures (see Chapter 2).

He also provides no way of accounting for the evolution of creative metaphors into 'dead' metaphors, where the content supplied is as clear and as independent of context of use as many instances we would consider literal:

(7a) I told my boss what happened and he blew his top.

(7b) I told my boss what happened and he was extremely angry.

The idiomatic expression *to blow one's top* is very likely to be conventionalised amongst many speakers of English. This 'dead metaphor' presumably started life as a 'live' metaphor before gradually becoming conventionally associated with a particular concept (see the start of this chapter). Hence, (7a) can be paraphrased as in (7b) without a significant loss of meaning. If utterances such as (7a) never had any content when they were still 'live', how did they suddenly acquire it later on (Cf. Crosthwaite, 1985: 325ff)?

Furthermore, Davidson does not address emergent property metaphors. He makes no mention of them in his published work on metaphor (1978/1984), but since his view is that metaphors have no content at all, there is no problem in accounting for the content which appears not to come from the concepts encoded by the words used. Utterances of (8a-b) would then communicate propositions with similar truth-conditions:

(8a) Robert is a bulldozer.

(8b) The latest Caterpillar model is a bulldozer.

Whatever properties we happen to attribute to Robert are not part of the content of the utterance. It is just a matter of 'seeing' the similarity. So for Davidson, metaphors are like a joke, a dream, a picture, or a bump on the head (1978/1984: 262). He is not obligated to find an explanation for the gulf between the content of utterances and the (skeletal) semantic representations which are used to communicate them. So the emergent property problem, and the dead metaphor problem are both moot for Davidson. But in order to go along with

this line of argument, one would have to find unproblematic the claim that the truth-conditions of (8a) and (8b) are similar, and be comfortable with an account of metaphor understanding which does not explain why some metaphors are 'alive' and others are not.

Furthermore, if what is communicated by a metaphor or a simile on a given occasion is not a particular 'cognitive content' (by which I take him to mean a component of an explicitly communicated assumption), that does not exclude the possibility that much else is *implicitly* communicated. Davidson himself seems to recognise that there is a pragmatic component to these issues in charging other theorists with confusing 'content' and 'effects' (1978/1984: 261), although it is unlikely he would have advocated an inferential account of the latter. Davidson also states that "in fact there is no limit to what a metaphor calls to our attention, and much of what we are caused to notice is not propositional in character" (1978/1984: 263). This is an important insight which some of the other accounts of metaphor understanding described in this chapter do not acknowledge. However, relevance theory offers the prospect of providing an integrated account of how weak implicatures and non-propositional effects are communicated within a fully-inferential theory of utterance understanding (Chapter 2, §2.10).

There are a couple of objections which could be made to Davidson's treatment of simile in particular. Davidson argues that there is nothing to be explained when it comes to the characteristic effects of similes (1978/1984: 255). Crosthwaite claims, rightly, that just because metaphor and simile have similar communicative effects, and that we typically do not posit a special meaning for simile, this does not mean that there is no such meaning for metaphor (1985: 323ff). She says that "[t]his is not a particularly strong argument" (*id.*, *ib.*: 324): it may be clear that similes mean that something is like something else, because they are formally comparison statements, but there is no clear way in which metaphors 'say' that something is *like* something else. Although I agree with Crosthwaite that Davidson has missed some important insights into simile, I think she has overlooked a more significant problem. Davidson has no account whatsoever for how similes are taken to mean 'more than' the ostensibly otiose meaning they typically encode. In fact, his entire argument rests on the claim that because nobody would claim such content for similes, nobody should claim it for metaphors.

The only example Crosthwaite gives for a simile being understood in a figurative way is *cold as ice* (*id. ib.*: 324). I will come back to the difficulty of treating '*A* is as ADJECTIVE as *B*'-type examples in Chapter 5 (section §5.4). Moreover, although Davidson's 'radical interpretation' project (see Davidson, 1973/2006; Lepore and Ludwig, 2005: 147ff) does take into account variation in the way in which sentences are interpreted (e.g. Davidson, 1986/2006), it does not emphasise the crucial role that *inference* plays in communication. As we shall see in sections §§3.6-7 below, Davidson was not the last theorist of metaphor to argue that figurative meaning is primarily an issue of non-inferential mental processing: of seeing *A as B*. Davidson's only article dedicated to metaphor opens with "[m]etaphor is the dreamwork of language" (1978/1984: 245), which is not only a metaphor itself, but constitutes a (perhaps unwitting) allusion to Freud[35]. But he never characterises the psychological processes involved, nor why this process 'kicks in' in some cases but not in others.

3.3 Metaphor and simile as indexical items: the operator mthat

Stern has proposed a formal semantic account of figurative meaning which, if correct, would undermine the approach of this thesis (1985; 2000; 2006; 2008). Whereas Davidson denies that there can be an account of metaphor in terms of a "finite number of simple meanings and a finite number of rules of composition" (Stern, 2008: 266), placing the characteristic interpretations of metaphor and (by analogy) other tropes outside of theories of language use, Stern argues that one can maintain a semantic account of metaphor if one treats the context-sensitivity of metaphor as analogous to that of indexical items. This contrasts with contextualist approaches, such as those advocated by relevance theorists, because the contextual-contribution to the meaning of the metaphor is semantically constrained (*id.* 2008: 269). He aims to achieve this by adopting a semantic approach to metaphorical meaning based on Kaplan's solutions to certain puzzles in the philosophy of language relating to indexicals and uses of definite descriptions (Kaplan, 1978/2010; 1989. Cf. Wearing, 2006; Leezenberg, 2001). Stern proposes that the contextual dependence of metaphorical interpretation can be traced to the presence of a semantic operator 'mthat', analogous to Kaplan's 'dthat' for demonstrative items and rigid definite descriptions (Kaplan,

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[35] Kittay makes this connection (1987: 117ff). My attention was drawn to this allusion by Ben Pritchett (p. c.).

1978/2010. Cf. *id.* 1989; Braun, 2010), which features in the logical form of a sentence containing a metaphorical expression. Stern also proposes (almost in passing) that similes will be conducive to a similar account (2000: 232).

Indexical items (including pronouns) are a paradigm case of contextual information playing a part in determining the content of an utterance (see e.g. Levinson, 2004). If assigning a referent to an indexical were all that were involved here, then utterances of (9a-c) would all communicate the same thing:

> (9a) I am Adam Gargani.

> (9b) ?Adam Gargani is Adam Gargani.

> (9c) The speaker of this utterance is Adam Gargani.

The word *I* in (9a) cannot be paraphrased simply by inserting another description (such as a proper name) of the referent, so (9b) is infelicitous. The utterance in (9c) is closer to what an utterance of (9a) is taken to mean, but there is still something missing, as the word *this* is itself indexical (discussion based on Levinson, 2004: 104)[36]. For Kaplan (1978/2010), the meaning of the 'pure indexical' *I* is its *character*, namely a function or rule which variably assigns an individual concept (in this case, the speaker) in each context. Certain uses of definite descriptions appear to show a similar kind of context sensitivity, which Kaplan captures in terms of an operator, 'dthat'. We can use definite descriptions either 'attributively' as in (10a) or 'referentially' as in (10b) (a distinction due to Donnellan):

> (10a) [*at a crime scene*] Smith's murderer [sc. whoever he is] is insane.

> (10b) [*in court*] Smith's murderer [sc. e.g. 'Jones'] is insane.

> (from Donnellan, 1966/2010: 267)

To distinguish cases such as these, Kaplan proposes that there must be an 'operator' (dthat) at the level of the semantic representation of the sentence which has certain properties:

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[36] Note that this is a separate issue (involving the assignment of a referent to a referring expression) from the uninformativeness of an utterance such as (9a). See §2.1 example (2).

(Dthat) For every context *c* and every definite description *Φ*, an occurrence of 'Dthat[*Φ*]' in *c* directly refers to the unique individual (if there is one) denoted by *Φ* in the circumstance of *c*, and to no one otherwise.

(from Stern, 2000: 100)

This operator, which is a formal 'surrogate' for the English demonstrative *that* (Braun, 2010: 171), effectively 'converts' a definite description into a rigid designator (a notion due to Kripke, 1980. See Sosa, 2001: 467f) that picks out a particular individual as the content of that description. This can be used to explain the difference between (10a) and (10b). The semantic representation of (10b) must then include an instance of the operator as in (10c):

(10c) dthat['Smith's murderer'] is insane.

Now the description *Smith's murderer* would pick out a particular individual in much the same way that the demonstrative *that* (or *that man*, or a gesture such as pointing) would.

Metaphorical interpretations are similarly context-dependent. For instance, in examples (3e) and (3f) (repeated here), *His words are honey* communicates something different in each case:

(3e) I don't trust him. His words are honey.

(3f) He makes me feel good about myself. His words are honey.

One objection to Stern's account is that some indexical items, such as temporal and locational adverbs, exhibit a much greater degree of indeterminacy than the simple case of the pronoun *I* above (e.g. Stern, 2000: 256). But while on this model indexicals and demonstratives change their content, and context plays a role in determining the content, there is a degree of uniformity about how that content is determined across uses (Wearing, 2006: 314). Clearly, if one wants to preserve a view of semantics as providing fully-truth evaluable propositions from the lexically-encoded meanings plus syntactic rules of composition, then one might also want to explain the context-sensitivity of metaphorical interpretations in terms of a 'covert' indexicality of this type.

Stern proposes that a sentence such as that in (11) has a set of 'possible characters' (11a-e) (Stern, 2000: 134):

(11) Juliet is the sun.

(11a) <<{Juliet}, {is the sun}>>

(11b) <<{Juliet, {mthat}['is the sun']}>>

(11c) <<{mthat['Juliet']}, {is the sun}>>

(11d) <<{mthat['Juliet']}, {mthat['is the sun']}>>

(11e) <<{mthat['Juliet is the sun']}>>

(case of *mthat* altered for consistency of presentation)

The representations in (11a-e) form the 'character set' for (11). The character described in (11a) would be of a sentence in which both the subject *Juliet* and the predicate *is the sun* are interpreted literally. The character in (11e) would be the one selected when the whole sentence *Juliet is the sun* is taken to 'stand for' something else. The characters in (11b-d) would describe where the predicate *is the sun*, or the subject *Juliet* or both the subject and the predicate are interpreted metaphorically. Stern clearly states that these possible metaphorical interpretations are "generate[d]" by the grammar (Stern, 2000: 134). The right structural representation from this character set is then assigned by a process of disambiguation (Wearing, 2006: 315).

The operator mthat in the member of the character set (typically, for (11), (11b)) would then supply semantic content to the predicate from a set of presuppositions which constitute the context for the interpretation of that expression. Mthat['is the sun'] is a non-constant function which delivers for each context a property or set of properties as the content of that expression:

(Mthat) "For every context *c* and for every expression *Φ*, an occurrence of 'Mthat[*Φ*]' in a sentence *S* (=...Mthat[*Φ*]...) in *c* (directly) expresses a set of properties *P*

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presupposed to be m-associated with Φ in c such that the presupposition $\langle...P...\rangle$ is either true or false in the circumstance of c."

(Stern, 2000: 115)

These properties are the contextual parameter for metaphors, in the same way that the identification of a referent supplies the contextual parameter for an indexical (see *id.* 2006: 177f). Such properties have to be presupposed, argues Stern, because they pass certain tests for presupposition, such as survival under negation (2000: 114). Some of the relevant presuppositions for *Juliet mthat['is the sun']* would include facts about Juliet, Romeo, their relationship, the sun, and the kind of features of the sun which might have something to do with Juliet.

For Stern, the variability in interpretation of the same metaphorical expression in different contexts can be traced to different presuppositions in those contexts (e.g. Stern, 2000: 221), not to different conceptual contributions of individual lexical items. Stern claims that pragmatics plays a role in understanding metaphorical utterances and that distinguishing the relative contributions of semantics and pragmatics to the meaning of metaphors may be difficult to disentangle (see e.g. *id.*, 1985: 706-8), but he seeks to characterize what is a part of a hearer's linguistic competence which allows them to understand metaphorical utterances (*id.* 2000 §1). That is, his account is strictly semantic, but allows a wide range of beliefs to play a part in determining the content of a metaphor, as well as allowing for a wide range of relations (not just similarity) to hold between *A* and *B* in *A is B*-type metaphors (Wearing, 2006: 316).

Also, the diverse character set his analysis provides does seem to capture the way in which different parts of a sentence can be interpreted metaphorically, as in (12):

(12) The flowers are smiling in the light.

Stern gives example (12) as a demonstration that there can be at least two possible, equally metaphorical, interpretations of certain sentences (2000: 134f). In this case, either (i) the flowers are (metaphorically) *smiling* (that is, the operator attaches to the predicate: *mthat['are smiling']*), meaning they look beautiful, are bright, open, make one feel happy to

look at them, and so on, or (ii) the expression *the flowers* does not refer to literal flowers but to individuals who can metaphorically be referred to as *flowers* (that is, the operator attaches to the determiner phrase containing the subject: *mthat['the flowers']*). These two possible characters would be structurally analogous to (11b) and (11c) above, respectively.

But Stern's mthat, unlike Kaplan's dthat, is not really a fully *semantic* constraint. Whereas the dthat operator used the denotation of the description to provide the content, Stern wants 'metaphor-associated' (m-associated) properties of the denotation of the term controlled by mthat to supply the content of the metaphor. Whereas Kaplan's dthat cannot be attached to just any expression, mthat can be attached to a range of expressions[37]. The notion of 'm-associated properties' is also extremely vague (Guttenplan, 2005: 255ff). This is far from Kaplan's characterisation of dthat as an operator or 'rigidifier' (1989: 580), which assigns a simple, determinate content. Kaplan was also quite reticent about his account of dthat: it does not explain how 'character' is created, nor how meanings are 'assigned' (1989: 613f). But it is precisely how certain 'meanings' are typically 'assigned' to metaphorically interpreted elements that a pragmatic account of metaphor of the type advocated by relevance theorists seeks to provide. Kaplan's characterisation of dthat as an operator does not sound like the kind of theoretical project which *could* be modified to provide an account of how metaphorically used items contribute to what is *explicitly* communicated.

Stern conceives of 'dead' metaphor in a slightly different sense than I am using it here (2000: 309). But one type of 'dead' metaphor he addresses is the same as the cases discussed here (e.g. *He's a dog*). For Stern, a metaphor is 'dead' inasmuch as its "interpretation ceases to be dependent on presuppositions specific to its *actual* context of utterance" (*ib*.: 316. His emphasis), because in certain cases the same presuppositions of a metaphor start to be routinely assigned to the linguistic string (e.g. *dog*) in every context. This might work well for metaphors which are more 'dead' than *dog*, where the original 'literal' sense is no longer available to language users. But there is no single 'routinized' content of *dog*: there are two

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[37] Stern is not entirely clear what that range of expressions is. Guttenplan (2005: 158) is a good place to start when looking at the range of word classes which can be interpreted metaphorically.

stable senses for many users of English. How should Stern account for this kind of acquired ambiguity?

One piece of evidence Stern gives for his account is the apparent availability of linguistically realised correlates of his metaphor operator, such as in (13a-c):

> (13a) In a sense, my hands are tied.

> (13b) Figuratively speaking, my hands are tied.

> (13c) Metaphorically speaking, my hands are tied.

> (examples modified from Leezenberg, 2001: 193)

If the adverbial expressions in (13a-c) were linguistic realisations of an underlying operator, then we ought to expect that they should be able to appear in the places where mthat appears in the character set, helping us to disambiguate between those different structural representations. To illustrate, the characters containing instances of mthat in (11b-e) should yield linguistically-realised equivalents of mthat in the examples (14a-d) respectively, and the explicit realisation of mthat should make it clear that these different structures are interpreted differently:

> (14a) Juliet, in a sense, is the sun.   [=(11b)]

> (14b) In a sense, Juliet is the sun.   [=(11c)]

> (14c) ?In a sense, Juliet, in a sense, is the sun.   [=(11d)]

> (14d) In a sense, Juliet is the sun.   [=(11e)]

Examples (14b) and (14d) are formally identical, and (14a), (14b) and (14d) appear to mean the same thing. An utterance of (14c) is very infelicitous. Sentence adverbials such as those in (14a-c) can much more plausibly be taken as directing the way in which *my hands are tied* is to be understood, rather than disambiguating between structurally distinct interpretations provided by the grammar. Moreover, we do not find equivalent dthat-related 'realisations', such as *?In a reference*, *?Indexically-speaking* and so on. Even if we were to grant that expressions such as those in (14a-c) are realisations of a (typically unexpressed) operator,

how does interpretation proceed in the absence of such explicit realisations of the operator (*id.*, *ib.*: 193f n3)?

Stern proposes that the operator mthat is available for every case in which we could find metaphorically interpreted elements (Stern, 2000: 239). But, if the operator mthat is traceable to logical form, then each member of the character set in, for instance, (11a-e), is also traceable to logical form. This would entail massive structural ambiguity for a great many sentences of a given language, and would, according to Wearing, be incompatible with, at least, current theories in generative syntax (Wearing, 2006: 315 n7, 317f). Even so, the interpretations of each member of the character set are very difficult to distinguish. For instance, Romeo would not be concerned if someone took him to mean that Juliet is a sun-like thing, or has sun-like properties, or that in saying she is like the sun he has made a related claim, if they understood him to communicate in saying *Juliet is the sun* the same broad set of implications, such as that she was central to his existence, a source of (metaphorical) warmth, bright, and so on. How different then are these putatively distinct structural representations? And how can they be distinguished even in cases of *literal* language use (Wearing, 2006: 317)?

Stern's account also has unwelcome implications for how novel metaphors are understood. One such consequence is that metaphors ought to be paraphraseable (so long as we have a rich enough vocabulary to do so) because, in a given context the presupposition set is determinate (2000: 250; 268f). That metaphors are amenable to paraphrase is not widely-held in the field (for a dissenting view see Hills, 2008. Cf. Wearing, 2012), but Stern lends support to his view by criticising the hypothesis that metaphors can communicate an indeterminate range of properties:

> "Are these authors claiming that if we actually try to state the content of a particular metaphor, we in fact find ourselves going on and on, mentioning feature after feature, proposition after proposition, literally never coming to an end? As a matter of practice, I know of no evidence (fortunately) that this is ever true."
>
> (Stern 2000: 270)

Not only does Stern deny that the interpretation of metaphors is indeterminate, he makes a false prediction: that no speaker or community of speakers would ever consider a metaphorical utterance to be open to a truly endless range of interpretations. Paradigm cases of such 'limitless' re-interpretation of metaphors can be found in religious mystical and exegetical traditions (Stern himself does seem to be aware of at least the latter in his other writings, e.g. Stern, 2009). Can anyone familiar with, for example, religious exegetical traditions of medieval Judaism and Islam really claim that interpretive communities *do not in practice* keep adding features with no end? It can certainly be done, and the reader is invited to explore a good many of the examples in this thesis along those lines. One clear case of potentially endless reinterpretation has been based on the following:

> (15) God is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The likeness of His light is as a niche, in which is a lamp. The lamp is in a glass. The glass is as though it were a pearly star lit from a blessed tree, neither of the east nor the west. […]

> (Quran 24: 35. My translation)

The literature on this one verse alone is vast (see de Boer, 1995: 122b-123b; Elias, 2001: 186f. See especially al-Ghazālī, 1998: 25-43). Is it really *not true* that commentators on the verse in (15) are interpreting the metaphors therein in just the 'endless' fashion that Stern denies? Moreover, even if we agree with Stern that the content which is understood by the hearer to be communicated by a particular metaphor can be and in many cases is relatively determinate, we do not have to agree that all metaphors communicate equally determinate content. Unlike dead metaphors, an example such as (15) is likely to be interpreted very subjectively.

Where Stern does address simile directly, it raises a number of further problems[38]. Firstly, he sees simile as a 'one-place' relation (2000: 230). The logical (propositional) form of a simile is

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[38] Stern's distinction between m-figures and i-figures is also inadequate (2000: 237). He proposes separate analyses of at least metonymy and synecdoche, so even within the category of m-figures he must endorse *different* operators at the level of logical form, and so still greater ambiguity (*ib.*: 323-8. Cf. Wearing, 2006: 316f).

not a relationship between two nouns or noun phrases, but a property ascribed to just one element in the form of a predicate:

(16a) Achilles is like a lion.

(16b) LIKE-A-LION(Achilles).

This would suggest that, on Stern's account, simile is very much like metaphor, except with only one position in which mthat could occur (outside the predicate). He accepts Goodman's proposal that simile is essentially a metaphor (or that the difference between them is 'negligible'. 1976: 77f), and explains the fact that one can deny a simile but assert a metaphor without contradiction (as in (17)) in the following terms:

(17) Juliet is not like the sun, she is the sun.

"'[L]ike' functions as a hedge, or qualifier on the content [...] What is denied in the first clause is the qualification, not the content simpliciter, which in turn is affirmed with emphasis in the second clause. Both clauses, however, are interpreted metaphorically."

(Stern, 2000: 232).

The near 'interchangeability' (not to be confused with identity) of metaphor and simile, with simile functioning as a 'hedged' metaphor, is a widespread assumption. Some similar claims will be discussed in Chapter 4, §§4.2-3 and I will propose my own explanation for examples such as (17) in Chapter 5, §5.1 (see discussion of example (13)).

Interestingly, it may be possible to solve the emergent property problem on Stern's account. Because the operator 'fetches' information from the context, this can presumably include assumptions which are not directly associated with the tenor or vehicle concepts, but are part of the potential context of the utterance for some other reason than processing those concepts. However, Stern does not appear to address the problem directly, perhaps seeing it as only posing a challenge to accounts like that of relevance theory (Cf. *id.*, 2006: 248ff).

3.4 Metaphor as elliptical simile

The view that metaphors are figurative comparisons is supposedly the 'traditional view' (Miller, 1993: 357; Ricoeur, 2003: 239), yet few claim to support it. Fogelin gives the most sustained defence of this view (1988), which boils down to the claim that metaphor is an 'elliptical' or 'abbreviated' simile. Fogelin takes pains to argue that critics of the comparativist view have falsely accused comparativists of arguing that the figurative meaning of a metaphor can be explained by the literal meaning of a simile (Leech appears to take this view. 1969: 156). But unless we can find a satisfactory account of *how* any similes are interpreted figuratively, then explaining metaphor as simply 'being' simile will be circular (Searle, 1993: 95).

Fogelin rightly argues that one must justify the claim that anything can be like anything else in some respect or other by means of a deductive argument (which I paraphrase here. 1988: 60f):

> *Premise 1*: A is similar to B if there is at least one thing which is true of both.
>
> *Premise 2*: <u>For any A and any B there is at least one thing which is true of both.</u>
>
> *Conclusion*: For any A and any B, A is similar to B.

Because both premises are necessarily true, we ought to expect that the conclusion is also necessarily true: so anything is like anything else. Every comparison is true in some respect or other, that is, for any *A* and any *B*, *A* and *B* share some property Φ for which *A is Φ* and *B is Φ* are both true.

Fogelin claims that, because similarity claims are interpreted in a 'directional' fashion, this means that the above argument is invalid, for example:

> "[B]each chairs look like clothespins, but not the other way round."
>
> (*id., ib.*: 83)

Because *Beach chairs look like clothespins* means something different to *Clothespins look like beach chairs*, then similarity statements cannot be universal (*id., ib.*: 62ff). Fogelin has here confused utterance meaning with sentence meaning, and he has not given an account of

what the sentence meaning of these utterances is. It would be interesting to see what contribution *like* makes to the semantic representation of a sentence, but the way in which comparisons are interpreted makes this very difficult to determine (see Chapter 5). But just because an utterance is *interpreted* as directional does not mean that 'likeness' itself has a direction, whatever that would mean. Fogelin has conflated *being* similar with *saying that something is* similar. Therefore the intuition that anything can be like anything else, something can be like nothing, something can be like itself, and so on (see §3.2 above), is robust.

Let us assume, with Fogelin, that metaphors simply *are* (figurative) similes (*id., ib.*: 34). So (18a) and (18b) are semantically identical:

    (18a) Achilles is a lion.

    (18b) Achilles is like a lion.

Let us also assume that we already have an account of how similes are understood, which explains why they have their characteristic effects. If we can only explain the 'metaphoricity' of certain predications like (18a) in the same way as the 'figurativeness' of (18b), then what about cases of metaphor use where there are no simile paraphrases available, or where the simile appears not to capture the metaphor (Levinson, 1983: 156)? This is a problem which will be inherited by implicated simile accounts of metaphor understanding.

For Fogelin, a simile is a comparison between two unlike things (1988: 35. Cf. Corbett and Connors, 1999: 396). As I will explain in Chapter 5 (§5.2.2) it seems much more likely that 'conceptual distance' between tenor and vehicle in poetic similes is epiphenomenal. But if we take this characterisation as a definition, we ought to predict that (i) comparing things which are alike should not produce the characteristic effects of similes, and (ii) comparing *any* unlike things should produce such effects. However, example (19a) does not appear to be any less poetic than (19b), even though *Achilles* and *Romeo* are conceptually rather close (protagonists from literature):

    (19a) Achilles is like Romeo.

    (19b) Achilles is like a lion.

One might immediately object that *Achilles* and *Romeo* are not alike: by comparing Achilles to Romeo we suggest that he has properties which are more suited to romantic protagonists than mythical warriors. It might seem plausible that this is how utterances such as (19a) are ultimately interpreted, but 'conceptual distance' is here being proposed as an *explanation* of how certain comparisons achieve their effects. If similes with conceptually 'close' tenors and vehicles can yield the same effects as similes with conceptually 'distant' ones then conceptual 'distance' cannot be what causes these effects. I will explain in Chapter 5, §5.2 how the typical conceptual relationships between tenor and vehicles in similes are in fact epiphenomenal of how comparisons are understood. The 'directionality' of *A is B*-type metaphors is explained on the relevance theoretic account by the fact that only *B* communicates something radically different to the lexically-encoded concept.

On this view, we ought to get the characteristic effects of a simile whenever we compare any two unlike things, but this is not the case, as the difference between (20a) and (20b) shows:

(20a) His words are like radiators.

(20b) His words are like honey.

If conceptual distance were all that is at issue in explaining why certain comparisons are interpreted figuratively, we ought to expect that (20a) and (20b) will both be very poetic, as the concept WORDS is clearly just as different from RADIATORS as it is from HONEY. It cannot be 'conceptual distance' alone which explains why similes are interpreted the way they are. Fogelin also does not explain why comparing things which are *alike* can also yield a (figurative or poetic) simile:

(20c) This food is like honey.

Whether (20c) is interpreted as literal or figurative depends on what *this food* is. If it is a dessert, for instance, then it is more likely that (20c) is communicating that the food is sweet like honey. That's a slightly more determinate interpretation than would be available if *this food* denoted a savoury dish. One could say, as Fogelin might, that this proves that conceptual distance is central to why certain comparisons are interpreted figuratively: *honey* and *desserts* are conceptually closer because they are more likely to share the property

SWEET. But everything is like everything else in some respect or other. So *honey* and *savouries* would have to be 'conceptually close' from the perspective of those shared properties (FOODSTUFF, HEALTHY, etc.). Thinking about the figurativeness of similes in terms of the relatedness or otherwise of the denotations of the tenor and the vehicle is a dead end. What matters is what is *communicated* by the utterance of a comparison.

Fogelin explains dead metaphors briefly in terms of metaphorical meaning which has 'turned into' literal meaning, but provides no further discussion (1988: 44). But there is a bigger problem in his account: if, as he claims, metaphors *are* elliptical similes, then predications are elliptical comparisons too (1988: 70):

"'Harold is a pig' literally means the same as 'Harold is like a pig'."

(*id.*, *ib.*, 1988: 55)

For Fogelin dead metaphors will not be metaphors unless they are elliptical similes: where a conceptual element corresponding to the word *like* forms some part of the semantic representation recovered in understanding the utterance. But the above quote expresses a rather controversial position. It appears to be a much stronger claim than the initially plausible one that metaphors and similes are so easily interchangeable that their semantic equivalence ought to be the null hypothesis (*id.*, *ib.*: 42). But if simile paraphrases are not available for every metaphor, this cannot be true. I give further evidence against such a hypothesis in Chapter 4.

As Leezenberg has pointed out (2001: 77, 77n1), Fogelin has a somewhat confused relationship with Grice: he acknowledges his debt to Grice (1988: 4) and sometimes writes that *A is B* "conversationally implies" that *A* and *B* share salient features (*id.*, *ib.*: 79). But, unlike Grice, he gives no explanation of "the conditions under which we give a sentence a reading as an ellipsis" (*id.*, *ib.*: 29f n3). This is most unsatisfactory. But Grice's account also has serious limitations of its own.

3.5 Metaphor as implicated simile

One account of metaphor understanding which involves principles of inferential pragmatics, and also makes predictions about the metaphor-simile relationship is that of Grice (1989: §2.

Cf. Searle, 1993; Morgan, 1993). As I explored in Chapter 2, there are a number of general objections which relevance theorists make to the Gricean account of conversational cooperation. I focus here on the specific failings of Grice's account of how metaphors are understood, but Grice's account suffers from many of the limitations of the view of metaphor as elliptical simile which I addressed in the previous section.

For Grice there are two types of particularised conversational implicature: those which occur due to observation of a particular maxim (a subset of what Levinson calls 'standard implicatures'. 1983: 104), and those which arise due to the speaker making it overt that they have violated a maxim, and so must be presumed to be communicating something else in order to preserve the spirit of the cooperative principle. Because the cooperative principle is 'robust', even blatant deviation from individual maxims will not override the presumption that an interlocutor is being cooperative (*id., ib.*: 109). Grice explains metaphor in terms of a flouting of the first submaxim of quality (*Do not say that which is false*):

> "*Metaphor*: Examples like *You are the cream in my coffee* characteristically involve categorial falsity, so the contradictory of what the speaker has made as if to say will, strictly speaking, be a truism; so it cannot be *that* that such a speaker is trying to get across. The most likely supposition is that the speaker is attributing to his audience some feature or features in respect of which the audience resembles (more or less fancifully) the mentioned substance."

> (Grice, 1989: 34. His italics. Cf. Searle, 1993: 103)

The above quote from Grice remains somewhat open to interpretation (the word simile does not appear in Grice, 1989). Authors of a Gricean persuasion like Searle and Martinich are careful not to state that their views entail that metaphors implicate similes in every case (Searle, 1993; Martinich, 1984/1991). But, if they do not do so, then Gricean theorists' explanations will have to rely upon a theory of conceptualization which lies outside Grice's theory of communication to supply the appropriate content of the metaphor for those cases which are not based on implicated similes (see following sections).

On my, admittedly exaggerated, account of Grice's approach to metaphor, when (21a) is uttered, the hearer recognises that 'what is said' is 'literally' false:

(21a) *Utterance:* Terence is a dachshund.

Specifically, the supermaxim of quality remains in force, so *some* true proposition is taken as being communicated (*id., ib.* 2002/2012: 49). This will be something like the implicature in (21b)[39]:

(21b) *Implicature*: Terence is like a dachshund.

For most of the cases Grice discusses, implicatures provide communicated information *in addition to* 'what is said'. In Grice's account of metaphor and the other tropes which appear to violate the maxim of truthfulness, the implicature given in (21a) provides a meaning which is communicated *instead of* 'what is said' (Wilson and Sperber, 2002/2012: 52f).

Grice argued that calculability was one of the defining features of implicature (for which see Huang, 2007: 32-35; Levinson, 1983: 118-122; Ariel, 2010: 124-6). Nevertheless, Grice expressed doubt about the possibility of providing a working out procedure for every instance of implicature (Grice, 1989: 42f. Cf. Harnish, 1976/1991: 333f). But if we want to explain *how* (21a) is understood on the model suggested by Grice then we will need to employ a 'working-out procedure' such as follows:

(i)   The speaker *S* has said that *Terence is a dachshund*

(ii)   There is no reason to think that *S* is not observing the maxims

(iii)   *S* could not be doing this unless he thought that *Terence is like a dachshund*

(iv)   *S* knows (and knows that the hearer H knows that he knows) that *H* can see that he thinks that the supposition that he thinks that *Terence is like a dachshund* is required

(v)   *S* has done nothing to stop *H* from thinking that *Terence is like a dachshund*

(vi)   *S* intends *H* to think, or is at least willing to allow *H* to think, that *Terence is like a dachshund*

(vii)   And so, *S* has implicated that *Terence is like a dachshund*

---

[39] It must be emphasised that at no point in *Studies in the Way of Words* does Grice claim that *all* metaphors communicate similes (1989).

(Cf. Blakemore, 1987: 35; Grice, 1989: 31)

Grice's working out schema is "not recognizable as a standard logical argument", and it is not clear (a) which steps are premises and which are conclusions, and (b) how the content of *q* in step (iii) can be derived from (i), (ii), or both (i) and (ii), if it can be so derived at all (Blakemore 1987: 35).

On this account, dead metaphors will not be of particular interest. There is an easily available explanation: only 'live' metaphors will be expressive, or poetic, because they violate the first submaxim of quality. Dead metaphors, on the other hand, are 'literally' true, and so cannot implicate a simile as in the explanation of (21a):

> "[S]tored metaphors are different from fresh metaphors in that they are *not* processed by first trying to make sense of the literal meaning, then, failing, trying to construe it as a figure of speech."

> (Morgan, 1993: 129) (his italics)

But there is a glaring omission for any Gricean account of metaphor understanding. Once the implicated simile has been computed, *how* is the simile understood? Is the implicated simile really a literal comparison (as Searle allows for some types of metaphor, e.g. at 1993: 105 on *Sam is a pig*), or is it still 'figurative'? If the latter, then we have a circular explanation. If the former, then we still need to explain how (non-poetic) comparisons are understood.

The Gricean view that the literal meaning of an utterance must be computed before its figurative meaning is not borne out by psycholinguistic research (e.g. Glucksberg, 2008; Gibbs, 1994; Gibbs and Colston, 2012). According to Glucksberg, literal meaning is not processed 'first' and found wanting, then replaced by a figurative interpretation. Rather, metaphor comprehension is automatic and mandatory (2008: 80). Moreover, metaphors and similes are not always interchangeable (*id., ib.*; see also Chapter 4, §4.2).

Grice's account also fails to explain why tropes which are generated on the basis of the flouting of the same submaxim can generate such different interpretations. Grice gives examples of irony (22a), metaphor (22b), meiosis (22c) and hyperbole (22d) as tropes which

come about by virtue of violation of the first submaxim of quality (*Do not say that which is false*):

> (22a) He is a fine friend. [irony]
>
> *Implicates*: He is not a fine friend.
>
> (22b) You are the cream in my coffee. [metaphor]
>
> *Implicates*: I think very highly of you.
>
> (22c) He was a little intoxicated. [meiosis]
>
> *Implicates*: He was very intoxicated.
>
> (22d) Every nice girl loves a sailor. [hyperbole]
>
> *Implicates*: Nice girls typically love sailors.
>
> (Based on Grice, 1989: 34)

But comparison of these supposedly related tropes suggest they differ greatly in terms of what they communicate. Not only do the interpretations of (23a-c) differ from each other, they also differ from more poetic cases of each of the 'tropes' which are meant to be explained by the same violation of a submaxim (I omit an example of poetic irony for simplicity of explanation):

> (23a) You are a sphinx. [poetic metaphor]
>
> (23b) You won't lack tears. [poetic meiosis]
>
> (after Virgil, *Aeneid* 5.172)
>
> (23c) […]**EXAMPLE REDACTED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS**
>
> [poetic hyperbole]
>
> (Elliott Smith, *The Biggest Lie*. Album: Elliot Smith. 1995. Kill Rock Stars)

How could it be that *the same violation* produces such radically different interpretations as metaphor and irony? Also, how can this account of implicature go through in the case of non-declarative utterances (questions, requests, and so on), where nothing false has been asserted or even said? Furthermore, all of these tropes would *also* be in violation of the supermaxim of manner (*Be perspicuous*) (Sperber and Wilson, 2005/2012: 19).

To return to metaphor in particular, if metaphors communicate similes, then we ought to be able to identify the simile that each metaphor communicates in every case. But simile 'paraphrases' (such as (24a)) often do not appear to capture the thrust of the metaphor at all. Levinson gives example (24):

(24) The interviewer hammered the senator.

(24a) What the interviewer did to the senator was like someone hammering a nail.

An utterance of (24a) would not usually be recognized by native speakers of English as expressing the same as (24). It is scarcely comprehensible at all (Levinson, 1983: 155f).

Moreover, do we want such a hard dividing line between literal and figurative instances of predications as the one suggested by Grice, where metaphors do not 'say' anything? Take Levinson's example given here as (25) (1983: 151):

(25) Your defence is an impregnable castle.

There is no kind of semantic anomaly (let alone the *overt* kind of untruthfulness that a 'flouting'-based account requires) whether we take (25) as literal, metaphorical, or involving a pun on both ways of interpreting the utterance. Also, if we imagine that Freud's old home had been converted into an analyst's office, an utterance of (26) could be both literal and figurative at the same time:

(26) Freud lived here.

(*id.*, *ib.*: 157; Pilkington, 2000: 86)

An utterance of (26) can, in certain circumstances, implicate (26a):

(26a) Freud's legacy lived on in the practices of the people who work in this place.

Although it might seem that a Gricean account is a step in the right direction, in that it allows for metaphors to have *implicit* content, there are two major problems with the implicatures which metaphors actually evoke. Firstly, whereas other types of 'flouting' which Grice gives appear to involve largely *determinate* implicatures (e.g. 1989: 32ff), poetic metaphors do not. Secondly, Grice claims that, in the case of metaphor, the implicature is communicated *instead of* 'what is said'. This introduces a major theoretical problem for Grice. With metaphors and other tropes, the speaker merely 'makes as if to say' that, for instance, *Terence is a dachshund* (*id., ib.*: 34). Wilson and Sperber (2002/2012: 52) draw attention to Grice's claim that implicatures are generated, in a sense, to preserve the "spirit, though perhaps not the letter, of the maxim" which is flouted (1989: 370; Neale, 1992: 526). The recovery of implicatures is meant to restore the assumption that the maxims have been observed, or their violation was justified in the circumstances. But with irony, metaphor, meiosis and hyperbole, the implicature generated does not provide the requisite justification:

> "[W]hat justification could there be for implicitly conveying something true by saying something blatantly false, when one could have spoken truthfully in the first place?"
>
> (Sperber and Wilson, 2005/2012: 18)

In the case of floutings of the first submaxim of quality, this would mean preserving the truthfulness of what the speaker *said* (*Do not **say** that which you believe to be false*. Emboldening for emphasis). Even if we were to loosen our notion of what a speaker *says*, it is not the case that speakers of a metaphor are typically taken as having *said* the simile a Gricean account would claim is implicated by their utterance[40]. Furthermore, if speakers only 'make as if to say' the ostensibly false sentences of metaphors, then what maxim has been violated (Clark, 1996: 143)?

---

[40] Wilson and Sperber introduce another set of problems if we take the maxim of truthfulness as meaning: *Do not **assert** propositions you believe to be false* (2002/2012: 52. My emboldening). They suggest that assertion entails speaker commitment to the truth of the proposition asserted, and this would make the maxim redundant in the analysis of tropes.

But the biggest problem for a Gricean account of metaphor understanding is that communicators are not constrained by a presumption that their utterances will (standardly) be *true*. It is not truth, but relevance, which communicators aim for (see Chapter 2). For example, an utterance of the question in (27) is likely to elicit a response such as (27a) for a casual acquaintance, but (27b) for a tax inspector:

(27) How much do you earn in a year?

(27a) £19,000

(27b) £18,534

(examples due to Blakemore, 1992: 109; based on Sperber and Wilson, 1995: 233)

If truth were at issue, then it would be odd that people typically give approximate amounts rather than precise ones in answer to questions such as (27).

Moreover, Grice admits that it is *relevance* which plays a role in determining 'what is said' in cases of disambiguation, as in (28) (repeated from Chapter 2, example (12)):

(28) *Yousef*: [outside the ticket office] What time does the film start?

Claire: I haven't got my glasses.

Yousef understands Claire as meaning that she does not have her spectacles because if she had been talking about drinking vessels her utterance would be irrelevant, even though it would probably be true.

For Grice, the maxim of quality (*Be truthful*) was the most important of the principles which underlie conversational cooperation:

"False information is not an inferior kind of information; it just is not information."

(Grice, 1989: 371)

However, it could be argued that it is relevance, not truthfulness, which seems "to spell out the difference between something's being and (strictly speaking) failing to be, any kind of

contribution at all" (wording by Grice *ib.*; see Wilson and Sperber, 2002/2012; Sperber and Wilson, 1995):

> "If verbal communication were guided by a presumption of literalness, every second utterance would have to be seen as an exception."
>
> (Sperber and Wilson, 1990/2012: 89)

Moreover, one can make the argument that a tendency towards prioritising truthful information may be derivative of considerations of relevance:

> "Relevant information is information worth having. False information is generally not worth having; it detracts from cognitive efficiency."
>
> (Sperber and Wilson, 1995: 264)

Although one can easily think of cases where speakers are untruthful, "it is hard to construct responses that *must* be interpreted as irrelevant" (Levinson, 1983: 111. His emphasis). Relevance theory explains why utterances are assumed to be relevant as well the role relevance plays in understanding utterances, including utterances containing metaphors.

3.6 Conceptual structure-mapping and metaphor understanding

The work of Gentner and colleagues in metaphor studies has had two main strands. The first is accounting for the figurative meaning of metaphor in terms of a psychological process of conceptual alignment and elaboration known as 'structure-mapping' (Gentner and Bowdle, 2008). The second is a theory of lexical change known as 'the career-of-metaphor hypothesis' (*id., ib.*: 115ff). The first strand is relevant to simile studies because it accounts for metaphorical meaning in terms of a process of analogical reasoning, that is, one based on *similarity*, which generalises to simile understanding (Gentner and Bowdle, 2008: 119f). Moreover, the career-of-metaphor hypothesis claims that novel figurative utterances are understood most readily in the form of similes, while the more conventionalized a 'mapping' becomes, the more likely it is to be expressed in the form of a metaphor. Gentner and

Bowdle appear to treat metaphor and simile as lying on a continuum, and as being part of the same category: 'figuratives' (e.g. *id., ib.*: 115)[41].

Gentner and colleagues have proposed a two-stage comprehension procedure for metaphors which relies upon a psychological process of comparison. This comparison process involves forming a 'mapping' between concepts based on their shared properties followed by the 'projection' of candidate inferences (discussion and examples below from Ritchie, 2013: 30f. Figures 2.2 and 2.3).

Although some metaphors appear to reflect quite clearly an analogical relationship between tenor and vehicle, in particular those which appear to specify certain respects in which two concepts are similar (e.g. *Achilles is a brave lion*), structure-mapping theorists recognise that not all metaphors can be easily paraphrased into the form of an analogy(Gentner, 1982; Gentner and Bowdle, 2008: 110). But Bowdle, Gentner and Wolff have proposed that novel metaphors are interpreted as 'comparisons' (Bowdle and Gentner, 1999; 2005; Gentner and Bowdle, 2001; Wolff and Gentner, 2000. See Gentner and Bowdle, 2008: 115-119 for a summary). By being 'interpreted as comparisons' they mean that both metaphors and similes necessitate the same process of *conceptual* comparison. This involves first aligning the concepts being compared, then selecting appropriate overlapping properties shared by the concepts, and extrapolating further information on the basis of this initial alignment and selection[42]. For example, an utterance of (29) forces a hearer to set up a certain analogical relationship, as given in (29a):

(29) Men are wolves.

(29a) Wolves:animals::men: women

In the underlying analogy in (29a), *wolves* are to the *animals* they prey upon as *men* are to *women*. This analogy is required as a prerequisite for understanding (29) because it allows

---

[41] Only Gentner and Bowdle use *figurative* as a noun in Gibbs (Ed.), 2008.

[42] This is of course different from my claim that (linguistically realised) similes are a type of (linguistically realised) comparisons.

the concepts men, wolves, animals and women to be aligned as in Figure 3.1, and for further 'candidate inferences' to be derived on the basis of this structural mapping, as in Figure 3.2.

FIGURES REDACTED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS

Figure 3.1 Structural alignment of WOLVES and MEN in Men are wolves. (based on Ritchie, 2013: 30 Figure 2.2)

Figure 3.2 Projecting candidate inferences in understanding *Men are wolves*. (based on Ritchie, 2013: 31 Figure 2.3)

For instance, the fact that men are motivated by instinct, as are wolves, allows the inference that MEN can be motivated in a similar way to WOLVES, even though the aims of their motivation are different. This suggests a way in which *Men are wolves* is comprehensible.

How are the many possible alignments selected in cases of novel metaphor? With *Achilles is a lion*, it could be the lion's swiftness, or determination, or savageness which are at issue, or all at once. Are different competing alignments entertained at the same time? The way Gentner and Bowdle describe this process is one of automatic, bottom-up selection of properties (2008). Gentner and colleagues have proposed that a 'Structure Mapping Engine' (Falkenhainer, Forbus and Gentner, 1989; Forbus, Ferguson and Gentner, 1994; Gentner and Bowdle, 2008: 111ff) automatically aligns concepts in an initially 'symmetric' fashion, with directionality emerging later in processing (*id.*, *ib.*: 116) (for more on the problem of 'directionality' in simile, see Chapter 5, §5.2.1).

However, when we find creative, novel metaphors, even simple ones such as (30a), the *overlap* of properties shared by tenor and vehicle does not appear to play a necessary role in how they are understood:

(30a) Achilles is a lion.

Shared properties: ANIMAL, KILLER, POWERFUL, BRAVE, FEARLESS, etc.

Properties communicated by *lion*: BRAVE, FEARLESS, etc.

In (30a), although all the shared properties given above *may* be communicated, only a few of them are likely to be essential to understanding (30a). Therefore, only a subset of the shared properties is communicated. In (30b), many of the shared properties are hardly likely to be communicated at all:

(30b) His words are honey.

Shared properties: ENTITIES, OF-ANIMAL-ORIGIN, PLEASANT, etc.

Properties communicated by *honey*: PERSUASIVE, SEDUCTIVE, PLEASANT, etc.

It appears that, contrary to the structure-mapping hypothesis, the more creative the metaphor, the less the shared properties between the lexically-encoded concepts are relevant.

One might assume that similes would be extremely important to the advocates of the structure-mapping theory of metaphor interpretation. Since they claim that metaphors are understood by analogical processes, and there are certain constructions which are akin to analogy when interpreted literally (non-poetic comparisons) and akin to metaphors when interpreted figuratively (similes), poetic similes ought to be the key desideratum for such a theory. Nevertheless, Gentner and colleagues pay little attention to the kind of poetic similes I am concerned with. If they had looked at such examples, they may have found that when we understand the most creative similes, it is often difficult to give *any* respects in which the comparison is taken to hold. This observation will form an important part of my hypothesis about how similes are understood (see Chapter 5).

But clearly the selection of properties which are ultimately predicated of the tenor in metaphors (a lion's BRAVERY of Achilles in *Achilles is a lion*, for instance) is constrained by certain assumptions about what the speaker means by saying *Achilles is a lion*. Discourse objectives, previously processed utterances, and so on, will all have an effect. But there appears to be no role for these factors in the structure-mapping model of metaphor understanding. Some other process must be involved in selecting which is the appropriate set of candidate inferences. There is a problem here akin to the context selection problem described in Chapter 2.

It is sometimes said that all comparison theories of metaphor understanding assume that some kind of mapping of shared properties has to happen first (Gibbs and Colston, 2012: 132). This is indeed a problem for Fogelin, Grice and Gentner: many metaphors are not understood this way. Beardsley gives the nice example of *My sweetheart is my Schopenhauer*: we are likely to be unaware to whom *my sweetheart* refers, and understanding the metaphor plays a role in understanding who that person is and what they are like. There can be no prior 'structural alignment' in such cases (1962: 296). But if we unhitch simile understanding from conceptualisation, and think about what it means to *communicate* a comparison, a completely different approach to simile arises, one I develop

in Chapter 5. I am not committed to the view that some (or all) metaphors are conducive to such an analysis, because relevance theoretic views of metaphor understanding are grounded in the continuity of loose uses described in Chapter 2, §§2.9f.

As Ritchie points out (2013: 33), the model Gentner and colleagues proposes seems to be more suited to scientific analogy than to metaphor understanding (Cf. Gentner and Jeziorski, 1993), and Gentner and colleagues appear to have similar reservations about the application of the model to literary cases. Gentner and Bowdle say that 'surface matches' are particularly common in literature (2008: 110). But why should this be the case? Is not the point of accounting for the 'force' of metaphors in terms of analogical reasoning to explain their *creative* dimension? To suddenly dismiss the most creative cases as peripheral would be a significant reversal. Moreover, the example Gentner and Bowdle give of 'surface match' (*Hair is like spaghetti*) is not particularly poetic (*id.*, *ib.*).

It is only when certain 'abstractions' have become conventionalised by repeated access that a new category (such as that supposed by Glucksberg and colleagues, and analogous to an ad hoc concept) emerges. This is known as the 'career of metaphor hypothesis', the predictive value of which has been challenged (Gentner and Bowdle, 2008. Cf. Glucksberg, 2008: 75ff). I do not discuss the merits or otherwise of the career of metaphor hypothesis here, but even if the career-of-metaphor hypothesis can account for 'dead' metaphors in terms of a *different* type of conceptualisation process, this will not tell us how *creative* figurative language is understood. But it makes a particular prediction about general patterns of metaphor and simile use: we ought to expect that the most creative cases of figurative language use will be similes. Although I believe that creative similes have not received the attention they deserve, they are not particularly common, even in comparison with creative, novel metaphors. If metaphors are universal and similes are not, then this poses problems for any theory which requires similes and 'equivalent' metaphors to mean the same thing (Glucksberg, 2008: 75. See Chapter 4, §4.1).

Moreover, structure mapping does not appear to work in the emergent property metaphor cases raised above, such as examples (3a-d) repeated here as (31a-d):

(31a) Robert is a bulldozer.

(31b) Sally is a block of ice.

(31c) That surgeon is a butcher.

(31d) His words are honey.

As analogy is a four-place relation, where do the properties which are aligned come from? A plausible attempt at analogy paraphrases for (31a-d) might be as in (32a-d):

(32a) Robert treats people as bulldozers treat physical structures.

(32b) Sally is cold the way ice is cold.

(32c) That surgeon treats patients the way a butcher treats meat.

(32d) His words are sweet the way honey is sweet.

However, (31a-d) and (32a-d) do not appear to have equivalent effects. Moreover, only (32c) appears to provide a justification for the emergent property (in the interpretation that the surgeon is incompetent). The analogies given in (32a), (32b) and (32d) are misleading precisely because they direct the hearer away from relevant points of comparison: Sally is cold, and ice is cold, but not in the same way; Robert does not 'literally' bulldoze people; and his words are only metaphorically sweet. Also, which analogy should we choose? As none of the grounds for comparison are linguistically specified in (32a-d), one could appeal to any number of comparisons to facilitate processing (31a-d), such as those in (33a-d):

(33a) Robert is hard to motivate the way bulldozers are difficult to drive.

(33b) Sally is losing weight the way ice melts.

(33c) That surgeon earns the same amount as a butcher.

(33d) His words irritate me the way honey makes my allergies worse.

Structure-mapping alone cannot address the problem of why we typically do not find interpretations consonant with (33a-d). Relevance theorists would claim that such assumptions as (33a-d) would rarely (if ever) contribute to a relevant interpretation.

3.7 Conceptual metaphor theory

Conceptual metaphor theory has had an incomparable impact on metaphor studies since the first publication of Lakoff and Johnson, 2003 in 1980. Most researchers of all theoretical persuasions allow (or at least hint at allowing) the central mechanism of conceptual metaphor theory – pre-existing associations or 'mappings' between concepts known as *conceptual metaphors* – to play some role in the understanding of metaphors, or in how we ought to explain how metaphors are understood (e.g. Glucksberg and Keysar, 1993: 419f; Wilson, 2011; Fogelin, 1988: 83-86; Stern, 2000: 176ff)[43]. Although the experimental literature is vast (see Gibbs and Colston, 2012 for a readable and thorough survey of most of the issues), McGlone (2011) refers to research which suggests that many such experiments are subject to hindsight bias. However, I maintain that conceptual metaphor theory is founded on a perspective on metaphor use which is ostensibly appealing but fundamentally flawed. Moreover, it is of least use as a theoretical framework when we come to cases of *novel* figurative language use.

Gibbs is representative of the conceptual metaphor theory approach in seeing the key question of metaphor research to be the 'paradox' that metaphors can be both creative on the one hand and 'rooted' in bodily experience on the other (2008: 5). Lakoff and Johnson see metaphor as a matter of "experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another" (2003: 5. Emphasis removed). Metaphor is primarily a matter of conceptualization, and only derivatively of linguistic expressions.

For instance, we conceptualize LOVE in terms of JOURNEYS, ARGUMENTS in terms of WAR. Table 3.2 gives a range of examples which Lakoff and Johnson take as justifying the conceptual 'mappings' LOVE IS A JOURNEY and ARGUMENT IS WAR.

LOVE IS A JOURNEY	ARGUMENT IS WAR
Look how far we've come.	Your claims are indefensible.

---

[43] I find the widespread acceptance of conceptual metaphor theory disappointing for reasons that will become clear in this section and the following (§3.8). See also McGlone's contribution to Glucksberg (2001: 90-107).

We're at a crossroads.	He attacked every weak point in my argument.
We'll just have to go our separate ways.	His criticisms were right on target.
We can't turn back now.	
Etc.	Etc.

Table 3.2 Examples of linguistic realisations of conceptual metaphors LOVE IS A JOURNEY and ARGUMENT IS WAR (examples from Lakoff and Johnson, 2003: 4, 44f)

Note that there need be no occurrence in the utterances of the 'Source' (JOURNEYS, WARS) or the 'Target' (LOVE, ARGUMENTS). Arguments against individual cases as evidence for conceptual metaphors notwithstanding (and one can think of many), because there are so many examples which appear to follow each of the patterns, it seems difficult to argue that conventional associations between LOVE and JOURNEYS play no role in why we produce and how we understand apparently related utterances. Conceptual metaphors are not the underlying form of an *A is B*-type metaphor, despite the labels being of the form LOVE IS A JOURNEY and so on, and despite the term 'conceptual metaphor'. Rather, they simply *are* the association between concepts, instantiated as real neural links at least for 'primary metaphors' (e.g. Lakoff and Johnson, 1999: 54; Lakoff, 2008). The details of how these associations are formed do not concern us here (For overviews see Lakoff and Johnson, 1993: 254ff; Lakoff, 2008: 26ff. For evidence that the mappings are partial, see Lakoff and Johnson, 2003: 12f; Croft and Cruse, 2004: 202).

Clearly conceptual metaphor theory lays emphasis on the shared thought processes which are said to underlie a given community's use of metaphor. Therefore, *convention* is crucial to how conceptual metaphor theory works. But there are limitations to conceptual metaphor theory's treatment of even mundane and 'dead' metaphors. A major problem arises when we try to make generalisation about conceptualization on the direct basis of expressions like those in Table 3.3. Although conceptual analysis like this 'uncovers' conceptual metaphors, their explanatory value resides in the hypothesis that they are directly meaningful because they arise from 'embodiment', that is, physical experience (e.g. Lakoff, 2008). A 'complex' metaphor such as LOVE IS A JOURNEY is actually connected to a network of other conceptual metaphors which ultimately 'ground' the metaphor in physical experience (see Table 3.3).

Metaphor: LOVE IS A JOURNEY	
Source Domain: JOURNEY	
Target Domain: LOVE	

Mapping:

Travellers	→ Lovers
Vehicle	→ Relationship
Destinations	→ LifeGoals
ImpedimentsToMotion	→ Difficulties

Evokes:

PURPOSES ARE DESTINATIONS Metaphor, with DESTINATIONS =
Self.Source.Destinations PURPOSES = Self.Target.LifeGoals

DIFFICULTIES ARE IMPEDIMENTS TO MOTION Metaphor, with IMPEDIMENTS TO MOTION =
Self.Source.ImpedimentsToMotion DIFFICULTIES = Self.Target.Difficulties

INTIMACY IS CLOSENESS Metaphor, With CLOSENESS = Self.Source.
ClosenessOfTravelersInVehicle

      INTIMACY = Self.Target.IntimacyOfLovers

A RELATIONSHIP IS A CONTAINER Metaphor, With CONTAINER = Self.Source.Vehicle

      RELATIONSHIP=Self.Target.Relationship

Table 3.3 Example conceptual analysis for LOVE IS JOURNEY (adapted from Lakoff, 2008: 36f)

The arrows in the diagram correspond to "linking circuits" which are specific neural bindings; this allows primary metaphors to "ground" the system of conceptual metaphors in experience (Lakoff, 2008: 37). Conceptual metaphors are meant to explain not just why people *produce* metaphors (because they think of LOVE in terms of JOURNEYS, for instance) but how they *understand* them. For the purposes of this thesis, we are concerned entirely with the issue of how certain phenomena are *understood*. If we take the utterance *We're at a crossroads*, are Lakoff and Johnson claiming that we cannot understand what that means

without the metaphorical mapping LOVE IS JOURNEY? Most instances of such an utterance probably have nothing to with LOVE, and they certainly do not have to. More worryingly, conceptual metaphor theory is a theory of conceptual organisation, *not* metaphor understanding. Conceptual metaphor theorists do in fact think that the way concepts are organised and integrated determines how *metaphorical utterances* are understood (Lakoff, 2008). But it is entirely possible to find Lakoff's evidence of enduring conceptual associations convincing, whilst advocating a completely different theory of utterance understanding (such as the one defended in Chapter 2).

A further problem with Lakoff and colleagues' account of how mundane (or even 'dead') examples of metaphor are understood is that many of the proposed conceptual metaphors overlap, as indicated in Table 3.4. How then does one pick the 'correct' conceptual metaphor? If the 'neural theory' of metaphor is correct, then it is difficult to see how metaphors which share a 'target' but differ in the 'aspects of the concept' which are shared are chosen between (Lakoff and Johnson, 2003: 98f).

AN ARGUMENT IS A JOURNEY	AN ARGUMENT IS A CONTAINER	AN ARGUMENT IS A BUILDING
content	content	content
progress	progress	progress
directness	basicness	basicness
obviousness	strength	strength
	clarity	structure

Table 3.4 Shared aspects of concepts in conceptual metaphors: AN ARGUMENT IS A JOURNEY; AN ARGUMENT IS A CONTAINER; and AN ARGUMENT IS A BUILDING. Based on Lakoff and Johnson (2003: 98f)

Lakoff and Johnson want to demonstrate that the mappings between source and target are partial and differ from each other. But the degree of overlap between the mapped elements in these three conceptual metaphors is unclear, especially if they are all mandatorily activated as Lakoff's neural theory suggests. The problem of clashing conceptual metaphors is made even more difficult by the level of abstraction of some of the mappings and the presence of their exact opposite (such as GENERIC FOR SPECIFIC and SPECIFIC FOR GENERIC) (see

Jackendoff and Aaron, 1991)[44]. Psycholinguistic evidence of the 'directionality' of metaphor interpretation is explicable in other terms than that the target is "conceptually scaffolded" on the source (McGlone, 2011: 569; Cf. e.g. Miller, 1993: 368ff).

Lakoff and Johnson's original work makes use of circular arguments (McGlone, 2011: 567, 572; Pilkington, 2000: 111): we say *X*, *Y* and *Z* because we think *A is B*, and we know we think *A is B* because we say *X*, *Y* and *Z*. If taken at face value, such arguments involve the fallacy of affirming the consequent: If *P*, then *Q*; *Q*; therefore, *P*. To make a valid argument out of this inference, then the first premise must be replaced by a biconditional: if and only if *P*, then *Q*. But the claim that we can say *We've come to the end of the road* **if and only if** we have a conceptual metaphor like LOVE IS A JOURNEY is patently false (we could say the same thing literally when we reach a traffic junction).

The notion of 'embodiment' can be seen as a way out of this bind. If the conceptual metaphor itself can be justified on the basis of non-linguistic evidence, then the circular arguments of metaphor use in Lakoff and Johnson (2003) constitute circumstantial evidence for mappings which can be established independently. For instance, Johnson argues that the primary conceptual metaphor AFFECTION IS WARMTH explains why the emergent property metaphor *Sally is a block of ice* is not understood in terms of similarity between tenor and vehicle concepts: it is understood in terms of AFFECTION IS WARMTH instead (2008: 46). The existence of the primary metaphor AFFECTION IS WARMTH can be argued for independently, either by other attested verbal realisations of the metaphor (the primary methodology of Lakoff and Johnson, 2003), through experiments which demonstrate that people (or a particular linguistic group) reason about the world in terms of that metaphor (one claim for

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[44] One proposal to avoid conceptual metaphor clashes is the so-called 'invariance hypothesis' (Lakoff, 1993: 215), which dictates that the interpretation of metaphors must be consistent with an individual's perceptual experience of the source domain (e.g. with JOURNEYS in LOVE IS A JOURNEY), but this invites the problem of why certain schematic attributes are typically mapped from source to target and why others are typically not (e.g. not all JOURNEYS are difficult, but this is often the aspect of journeys which is most relevant to utterances such as *We've come to the end of the road*) (McGlone, 2011: 566f)**.**

such evidence regarding AFFECTION IS WARMTH is made in Williams and Bargh, 2008), but most often through appeals to correlations in experience (such as receiving affection whilst being embraced[45]. See e.g. Kövecses, 2005: 2f). But, as shown in Table 3.3, a conceptual metaphor is not *determined by* the primary metaphors (those grounded in direct experience) it is linked to. Therefore, appeals to embodiment fail to be explanatory at least in such cases.

Conceptual metaphor theorists are not always entirely clear about whether conceptual metaphors pre-exist utterance understanding or emerge during the process of understanding utterances. But if these mappings *motivate* what we say, then they must be logically prior to the creation of utterances. This invites an acquisition problem which is not raised by the other approaches to metaphor understanding mentioned in this thesis. Moreover, it necessitates the existence of unutterable metaphors: that is, nonsensical strings which cannot be ascribed a metaphorical interpretation because no hearer will have the appropriate conceptual metaphor to do so. There must be 'failed' metaphors (e.g. Lakoff 2008). The problem here is that it is hard to think of a single grammatical string containing, for instance, a noun which could *never* be interpreted metaphorically. Is it really the case, as the conceptual metaphor theory theorist Ruiz de Mendoza Ibáñez suggested (2009: 194f), that there are 'adjustments' which are not possible, or is the impossibility of interpreting certain metaphors simply a dogma?

The case of what I here call 'perverse' metaphors, such as (33) suggests that metaphor 'failure' is a dogma:

(34) **EXAMPLE REDACTED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS**

(Linkous (Sparklehorse), *Saturday.* 1995. Album: Vivadixiesubmarinetransmissionplot. Plain.)[46]

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[45] These explanations are, of course, open to challenge.

[46] Intuitions vary about the felicity of utterances of 'perverse metaphors'. But I am confident in claiming that (34) *is* comprehensible, and that many accounts of metaphor understanding would have difficulty in explaining why any interpretation is available at all.

Perverse cases like these can *only* be tackled by an extremely flexible notion of what metaphorical utterances are used to communicate. There is little room here for conceptual metaphors such as (34a-d) to assist in ad hoc concept construction:

(34a) PEOPLE ARE MACHINES.

(34b) PEOPLE ARE CARS.

(34c) PEOPLE ARE BUILDINGS.

(34d) PEOPLE ARE HOSPITALS.

The proposed conceptual metaphors in (34a)-(34d) do not get us far along the way to understanding what the singer of (34) might have meant, even as part of a post-hoc rationalisation of the interpretation of (34). Most cases of poetic metaphor seem to lie somewhere on a continuum between the extremely challenging ('perverse') examples such as (34) and more mundane metaphors, and relevance theory predicts that this additional effort will correlate with the weaker effects typically associated with poetic metaphors (§§2.6-2.7).

Lakoff himself gives an example of 'metaphor failure'. It seems from the neural theory advanced by Lakoff that a 'failed' (linguistic) metaphor cannot be a metaphor (that is, a kind of conceptual connection). Presumably, if such an example is interpretable at all then it is either (i) not a metaphor, interpreted some other way, or (ii) it is a 'one shot' novel case (more on which below), which for some reason does not work. Lakoff's example of a 'failed' metaphor is given here as (35) (2008: 27):

(35) My job is an aardvark.

Lakoff claims that this can work as a metonymy, such as a zookeeper saying (35) to mean that his job is taking care of an aardvark. But it 'fails' as a metaphor (*id., ib.*). But the conceptual metaphor theory prediction here is wrong. It predicts only one way in which the concept communicated by *aardvark* can be relevant. Which contextual assumptions are made available (by accessing encyclopaedic assumptions attached to the lexically encoded concepts in the utterance as an initial step) will determine how the metaphor will be

interpreted. I propose that *My job is an aardvark* in longer exchanges such as (35a-c) *can* be understood as a metaphor:

(35a) I may look friendly, but all I do is prey upon real workers. My job is an aardvark.

Required contextual assumptions: Aardvarks eat ants. Ants can be workers. etc.

(35b) I am invisible within the corporation. Nobody even notices my role unless they go through the roster alphabetically. My job is an aardvark.

Required contextual assumption: 'Aardvark' is one of the first words in the dictionary.

(35c) My job is an aardvark. Nobody knows what I do.

Required contextual assumption: Aardvarks are very unfamiliar animals.

Although there is not scope in this thesis to treat all the different ways in which conceptual metaphor theorists have attempted to integrate more novel, creative cases of metaphor into their theories (although see §3.8 below for one approach which integrates aspects of Fauconnier's blending theory: Fauconnier, 1997; Fauconnier and Turner, 2002; 2008), the limitations of such approaches tend to inherit the emphasis of, for instance, Lakoff and Turner (1989) on *conventional* conceptual associations and their combination.

The three types of creative metaphor use which are mentioned in Lakoff and Johnson (2003) involve either 'extensions of the 'used part' of a metaphor' (36), unused parts of a 'literal' metaphor [sic] (37), or 'novel' metaphors (38):

(36) These facts are the bricks and mortar of my theory

(37) His theory has thousands of little rooms and long, winding corridors.

(38) Classical theories are patriarchs, who father many children, most of whom fight incessantly.

(examples from *id., ib.*: 53)

An utterance of (36) exploits the BRICKS element of the putative THEORIES ARE BUILDINGS conceptual metaphor which is usually involved in the interpretation of other examples, but

in a novel way. An utterance of (37) exploits other features of BUILDINGS from THEORIES ARE BUILDINGS which are usually not involved in the interpretation of other examples. No explanation is given for 'novel' metaphors such as (38) in Lakoff and Johnson (2003), other than that they add a new way of thinking about something, are 'marginal' and 'relatively uninteresting' for the authors' purposes (*id.*, *ib.*: 54). In Lakoff and Turner (1989) such novel metaphors were treated as 'one shot', image metaphors (*id*, *ib.*: 91f). Conceptual metaphor theory research into poetic cases in general seems geared towards explaining why poetic metaphors appear to be "built up out of simpler metaphors" (Lakoff, 2008: 17), but it has been recognised by reviewers that the authors fail to demonstrate that poetic metaphors are compositional in this way (Jackendoff and Aaron, 1991: 333ff). Worse than that, many of the examples given in that work are similes, not metaphors, a distinction that many conceptual metaphor theorists have not observed consistently (compare Steen, 2004, an article which concerns a song with at least two similes in it but contains no mention of simile, with Steen, 1999).

However, the biggest problem with conceptual metaphor theory-based accounts of novel, creative metaphors is that they emphasize what is least interesting about them, namely, the aspects of their meaning which are *conventional*. Gibbs and Colston see this as a virtue, as it can explain why figurative language use appears to be deep and meaningful: it can "allude to enduring allegorical themes" (2012: 153). But to justify the conceptual metaphor theory approach, we need more than 'allusion'. Such symbolic relationships need to be pre-requisites of utterance understanding.

Moreover, although conceptual metaphor theorists' descriptions of how metaphors are understood are cognitive-linguistic in nature, many of the analyses they want to give of what metaphorical meaning is seem to locate meaning in *public* symbols which have meaning by virtue of their relationship to each other. 'We' say *We've come to the end of the road* because 'we' have the conceptual metaphor LOVE IS A JOURNEY which structures 'our' actions and thoughts (e.g. Lakoff and Johnson, 2003: 55). But who is 'we'? Lakoff and Johnson want to claim that (i) meaning is always meaning 'to' someone, and that (ii) we can make generalisations about the 'meanings' of "a real person or a hypothetical or typical member of a speech community" (*ib.*: 184). But projecting public meanings (and relationships

between ostensibly related public meanings) of a speech community onto mental organisation *of an idealised individual from within that speech community* does not change the nature of the explanation. It is still akin to a *structuralist* explanation[47] and, as Sperber has argued, it is hard to reconcile symbolic cultural explanations with the commitments of cognitive science (e.g. 1996: 43-47; 1975).

Given the three different types of metaphors alluded to above, the most creative ones, the ones which evoke most poetic effects, are the ones which receive least attention: 'novel' or 'one-shot' metaphors. What do these consist of? I will leave aside questions of cognitive architecture, which may pose their own problems given Lakoff's view of how conceptual metaphors relate to one another (see Table 3.5). One possibility is that novel *A is B*-type metaphors are understood via the creation of a connection between the tenor and vehicle concepts, producing a metaphor which has a similar form to the utterance. Let us assume that one must have acquired or created one of the conceptual metaphors in (39a-d) in order to understand an utterance of (39) in a situation where one has never heard similar utterances to (39):

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[47] Many conceptual metaphor theorists' explanations are subject to further objections which also apply to structuralist explanations of meaning. This is because: (i) they see symbolic relationships (metaphorical mappings) in public symbols, non-communicative human behaviours, and thought in general, and so are eclectic in the type of data they see as evidence of conceptual relationships (which constitute the meaning of these symbols); (ii) they emphasise standardised meanings, and (even if we allow for 'blending' and so on) they account for linguistic meaning evidenced by language use in terms of these standardised meanings independent of language use (Cf. Sperber, 1975: 5; 8), e.g. we talk about LOVE in terms of LOVE IS A JOURNEY because LOVE 'inherits' some of the meaning of JOURNEYS; (iii) they do not make sufficient distinction between mere 'pairing' (correlated concepts and emotions, for instance) and 'encoding' (Cf. *id.*, *ib.*: 14f); (iv) they see all knowledge (or all linguistically-relevant knowledge) as structured by mappings, missing the insight that the 'symbolic' value of even a monomorphemic natural-kind term like *fox* depends upon encyclopaedic knowledge about foxes (*id.*, *ib.*: 108).

(39) Achilles is a lion.

(39a) *Conceptual metaphor*: ACHILLES IS A LION.

(39b) *Conceptual metaphor*: SOLDIERS ARE LIONS.

(39c) *Conceptual metaphor*: PEOPLE ARE LIONS.

(39d) *Conceptual metaphor*: PEOPLE ARE ANIMALS.

Which of the conceptual metaphors is the appropriate one? The potential multiplicity of conceptual metaphors will pose a direct problem for any account of metaphor understanding. Lakoff seems to think that the automatic activation of concepts through a network of interconnected, and hierarchically organised, conceptual metaphors, will mean that there is only one interpretation of metaphors like (39) available (2008). In order to test such a hypothesis, we should at least be able to say *which* metaphors are activated, and I am not sure conceptual metaphor theory is fine-grained enough to say.

If we assume a kind of 'brute-force' association, that understanding (39) means that one *has to* construct a conceptual metaphor of the form in (39a), then this would call into question the necessity of much of the theory as presented in this chapter. That Lakoff thinks that this is not an acceptable approach is clear from his prediction that there are 'impossible' metaphors (see above). But conceptual metaphor theorists *do* propose that there are one-off conceptual metaphors which are available for only one or a very narrow range of expressions. For example, in her monograph on compounding in English, Benczes appeals to the conceptual metaphors given in Table 3.5 (2006: 206):

Compound utterance	Conceptual metaphor
Chicken hawk.	A COWARDLY PERSON IS A CHICKEN. (Benczes, 2006: 102f)
Information highway.	THE INTERNET IS A HIGHWAY. (*id.*, *ib.* 76)
Meadow mayonnaise. [=cowpat]	A MEADOW WITH A COWPAT IS A DISH WITH MAYONNAISE TOPPING. (*id.*, *ib.* 99f)

Table 3.5 Proposed conceptual metaphors in English compounds. Data from Benczes, 2006.

Although the first example might be argued to involve a stable conceptual metaphor, as we can use the word *chicken* on its own to describe a coward, the second is less plausible. It seems to be available (to this speaker at least) only in the conventional expression *information superhighway*, and then only as an alternative for *the internet*. The problem is not that the argument is circular here, rather, there appears to be nothing to explain: this is a very 'dead' metaphor, and attempts to 'resurrect' it sound trite and comical: *The e-mail sped down the information superhighway*, *Google overtook Microsoft on the information superhighway*, and so on. I have never heard the phrase *meadow mayonnaise* before, but I would not interpret it along the lines of the conceptual metaphor that Benczes proposes. The mapping Benczes proposes is entirely in terms of shared physical properties. But calling a cowpat *meadow mayonnaise* is clearly meant to evoke disgust, in part through the unpleasantness of describing faeces by a foodstuff, in part through clashes which one might feel between the elaborate encyclopaedic information (including memories of sensory representations) one has about interacting with the denotations of the concepts. There is no role in conceptual metaphor theory for the kind of weak effects which form a part of the interpretation of utterances containing *meadow mayonnaise.* Moreover, it seems implausible that such conceptual metaphors serve as enduring or conventional conceptual association. Whatever the correct analysis of English compounds, the fact that conceptual metaphor theory allows for patently ad hoc mappings like A MEADOW WITH A COWPAT IS A DISH WITH MAYONNAISE TOPPING can be seen as a *reductio ad absurdum* of such simplistic conceptual metaphor theory-based approaches to figurative language understanding.

3.8 Conceptual metaphor, hybrid theories and emergent properties

Recent developments within conceptual metaphor theory have led to a gradual rapprochement between conceptual metaphor theory and relevance theory. Important theorists such as Gibbs (Gibbs and Tendahl, 2006; 2008; Gibbs and Colston, 2012) and Kövecses (2011) seem particularly optimistic about the results of such collaboration. Researchers within several competing frameworks, including relevance theory, have advocated making use of the conceptual 'mappings' of conceptual metaphor theory (see start of previous section). Wilson (2011), Carston (2002a: 355f) and Wilson and Carston

(2006) have suggested that conceptual metaphor theory and relevance theory might be mutually compatible in this sort of way.

Let us assume that enduring conceptual mappings exist which (i) are consistent with the broad outlines of Lakoff and colleague's presentation of conceptual metaphors, and (ii) which contribute to utterance understanding by causing assumptions associated with the Source (vehicle) term to be made more manifest automatically when the Target (tenor) term is processed. In understanding (40), the conceptual metaphor in (40a) is automatically activated:

(40) Sally is a block of ice

(40a) *Conceptual metaphor*: EMOTIONAL WARMTH IS PHYSICAL WARMTH.

Because two concepts, let us call them [PHYSICAL-WARMTH] and [EMOTIONAL-WARMTH], are directly linked to one another by the conceptual metaphor in (40a), properties associated with EMOTIONAL-WARMTH are made available by accessing PHYSICAL-WARMTH. Processing the words *block of ice* will provide access to the latter. Tendahl and Gibbs (2008) see conceptual mappings as explaining these sorts of cases (also Tendahl, 2009: 146). And this does seem like a relatively parsimonious explanation.

One might think that an analysis such as this will simply generalise to the other cases of emergent properties raised above (§3.1). But it is not easy to see which conceptual metaphor is supposed to do the trick for example (41) (repeated from above, example (3c)):

(41) That surgeon is a bulldozer.

We can see the problem here quite clearly if we look at Lakoff's own proposal for the interpretation of (41). We should note that not only does it rely upon the kind of circular argumentation which was used in Lakoff and Johnson (2003), it also does not match certain other accounts of emergent property metaphors from the same theoretical perspective (see Kövecses, 2011). According to Lakoff, we understand (41) as meaning *That surgeon is incompetent* because we have stereotypes about surgeons and butchers as evidenced by expressions such as those in (42a-b) and (43a-b) (from Lakoff, 2008: 32f):

(42a) My lawyer presented the case with surgical skill.

(42b) Ichiro slices singles through the infield like a surgeon.

(43a) My lawyer butchered my case.

(43b) Frank Thomas hacks at the ball like a butcher.

The typical interpretation of (41) is possible, claims Lakoff, because there is a conceptual metaphor A PERSON WHO PERFORMS ACTIONS WITH CERTAIN CHARACTERISTICS IS A MEMBER OF A PROFESSION KNOWN FOR THOSE CHARACTERISTICS (*id., ib.*: 32f). Lakoff's proposed conceptual metaphor does not really look like a 'mapping' between two concepts to me. It looks like the formulation of some kind of rule, perhaps a default rule. But the reason I focus upon this analysis is that it demonstrates two tendencies which the conceptual metaphor theory approach promotes: (i) the conflation of metaphor and simile ((42b) and (43b) are both similes); and (ii) the preference for explanation in terms of conventions rather than processes.

Tendahl has proposed a hybrid model of metaphor understanding which sees conceptual metaphor theory and relevance theory as both providing insights into how metaphors are understood (2009. Tendahl and Gibbs, 2008; Gibbs and Tendahl, 2006)[48]. He uses blending theory (Fauconnier and Turner, 2002; 2008; Grady, Oakley and Coulson, 1999) within a relevance theoretic framework to explain examples such as *That surgeon is a butcher* (Tendahl, 2009: 132). Note that Lakoff himself sees 'blends' as resulting from "neural bindings, mental spaces, and [conceptual] metaphors", not as a separate process (2008: 33). But for Tendahl, when an utterance of (41) is heard, this activates a conceptual mapping process which can be depicted as in Figure 3.3 (Cf. Kövecses, 2011: 19, for a still more elaborate variant).

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[48] Other 'hybrid' proposals include Ruiz de Mendoza Ibáñez and Pérez Hernández, who argue that explicatures and implicatures are derived on the basis of salient conceptual metaphors in specific cognitive environments (2003).

By constructing a 'blended space' on the basis of what the source and target have in common (the 'generic space') and the importing of features from the source and the target, the interpretation of incompetence arises from a clash of features:

> "[Considering Figure 3.3] it becomes obvious that the blend is characterized by an incompatibility of the means-to-end relation. More particularly, we see that with the means of butchery (e.g. using a cleaver) the goal of surgery (i.e. to heal a patient) is pursued. This is a relation that calls up the notion of incompetence, because a surgeon who works with butchers' tools certainly is incompetent at what he is doing."

> (Tendahl, 2009: 132)

However, the content of the blended space is surely compatible with a non-figurative interpretation of (41), where a real surgeon moonlights as a butcher, for instance (Vega Moreno, 2007: 80f). Tendahl is vague in asserting that a certain contrast will 'call up the notion of incompetence'[49]. Moreover, a lot of other contrasts would serve the same purpose, treating an operating room as an abattoir, for instance. Also, the blended space will presumably be uniform across different examples, but reversing *surgeon* and *butcher* in (41) does not produce the same interpretation[50]. It would require *some other theory* of how such information is made use of in understanding such utterances.

Despite the popularity of a détente between relevance theory and conceptual metaphor theory in recent years (in addition to the above Stöver, 2010 ms; 2011), I would argue that they are fundamentally incompatible, for a number of reasons: (i) conceptual metaphor theory denies a modular view of the mind, in particular, in relation to the language faculty

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[49] Similar charges can be levelled at all the accounts surveyed in Kövecses (2011), including that of Sperber and Wilson (2008/2012).

[50] I suspect that such theorists would argue that the mappings *are* unidirectional. The question then becomes: is this not a new source of circularity for conceptual metaphor theory-based accounts? Metaphors are directional because mappings are directional, and mappings are directional because metaphors are directional.

(Lakoff and Johnson, 1999: 480, 495), relevance theory affirms it (e.g. Sperber, 2002/2012); (ii) conceptual metaphor theory denies conceptual atomism (concepts do not have boundaries, merely degrees of 'connectedness' to other concepts), relevance theory requires it for ad hoc concept construction to be motivated in the first place (see Chapter 2); and (iii) conceptual metaphor theory endorses relativist explanations of linguistic variation (e.g. Lakoff, 1987), relevance theory is a theory of ostensive-inferential communication which is based on a *universal* principle of cognitive organisation (Sperber and Wilson, 1995). It seems to me that combining relevance theory and conceptual metaphor theory would introduce many unwelcome theoretical complications, and few advantages.

FIGURE REDACTED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS

Figure 3.3 Conceptual integration network for *That surgeon is a butcher* (adapted from Tendahl, 2009: 133).

3.9 Conclusion

In the light of the competing accounts of metaphor understanding I have discussed in this chapter, the relevance theoretic-account of how metaphors are understood remains convincing, explaining how dead metaphors evolve, why novel or creative metaphors have the characteristic effects they do, and has clarified an important (still unresolved) issue in the theory, namely the question of where emergent properties in certain metaphors 'come from' (see also Chapter 6, §6.3). But the relevance-theoretic account of metaphor understanding cannot be generalised to incorporate similes. Most theoretical approaches to the metaphor-simile relationship are heavily weighted towards explaining metaphor and do not systematically evaluate which are the relevant desiderata for an account of simile. There is little agreement on what the metaphor-simile relationship is, other than that it must be close. I believe that the metaphor-simile relationship is not as close as all the theories outlined above (with the exception of relevance theory) suggest. Accounting for simile understanding entirely in terms of metaphor understanding is unsatisfactory because: (i) it has not been demonstrated that they are the same; and (ii) all the theories I have explored remain incomplete with respect to their primary desideratum, metaphors. Because my proposals run counter to the prevailing pre-theoretic assumptions in the field, and because the conflation of metaphor and simile is perhaps one of the most widely agreed upon assumptions in the field (although cf. Tirrell, 1991; Sperber and Wilson, 2008/2012; Carston, 2002a; Carston and Wearing, 2011; O'Donoghue, 2009; Israel, *et al.*, 2004; Glucksberg and Haught, 2006; Roncero, *et al.*, 2012), I return to first principles in the following chapter. What are the appropriate intuitions, observations and generalisations which are pertinent to an account of simile understanding?

Chapter 4: Evaluating claims on the metaphor/simile relationship

In the previous chapter I rebutted attempts to capture the characteristic effects of simile in terms of indexicality (§3.3), conceptual structure-mapping (§3.6), and conceptual metaphors (§3.7). I also outlined some of the limitations of current relevance theory accounts of metaphor understanding (§3.1). The inadequacy of current accounts of metaphor understanding suggests that claims similes are to be understood in the same way are, at best, premature. Claims that metaphors simply 'are' (elliptically, or by implicature) similes (§3.2) or that metaphor and simile are equally irrelevant to understanding language use are also misleading. I suggest a different tack altogether: to treat similes as a species of comparison, and to explain what it is about how certain linguistic comparisons are understood that makes them amenable to the communication of poetic effects.

The deployment of similes can achieve a wide range of different cognitive effects in an audience. It would be impossible to conduct a complete survey of every such type of cognitive effect. Some have argued that this is even more challenging a prospect than investigating metaphor in this regard:

> "Just because simile is not so peculiar in form as metaphor is, it leaves open a much wider range of ways of comparing one thing to another. It is hardly to be imagined that one could make a survey of the various things simile can do."

> (Nowottny, 1965: 67)

Chapters 1-3 have established a framework for investigating the weak effects of certain types of expressions which is grounded in a theory of cognition and communication. However, one cannot simply extrapolate from theory alone which questions are of theoretical interest. We also need to compare apparently related phenomena in order to make the right distinctions. For instance, much of the theoretical literature on simile from the perspectives of linguistics, communication and philosophy of language has focussed on simile's relationship to metaphor. As Chapter 3 in particular demonstrates, such accounts of metaphor understanding are still hotly debated. The incompleteness of metaphor theory is not in itself a problem for explaining simile understanding. However, when such accounts of metaphor either explicitly or implicitly assume that there is an existing account for simile, it

should be of particular concern for researchers in this area that no such account of simile as an independent phenomenon has been forthcoming.

A secondary issue, often raised in previous research but rarely fleshed out, is the interaction between metaphor and simile. I address this topic in §6.3 using the theory of simile understanding that I advance in §6.1. I propose we abandon the pre-theoretic category of 'simile' and instead focus upon a more theoretically-sound notion of *poetic comparisons*. It should come as no surprise to those familiar with relevance theoretic research on figurative language that the classical categorisation of tropes fails to stand up to sustained scrutiny (see e.g. Sperber and Wilson, 1990/2012; Sperber and Wilson, 2008/2012), as Sperber and Wilson make clear:

> "Rhetoric has no proprietary subject matter to study because the phenomena and issues it claims as its own amount to a disparate set of items rather than an autonomous category. The set should be dismantled and the individual items studied within a broader framework of a cognitive approach to human communication."

> (*id.* 1990/2012: 96)

By clarifying the relevant issues further, this chapter seeks to establish that the null hypothesis should be that similes simply are a type of comparison. Assumptions (1)-(9) below, some of which lie behind the theories outlined in Chapter 3, are addressed directly: are these assumptions valid (are there no immediate objections which could be raised to them)? Are they relevant? And, if they are both accurate and relevant, do such assumptions suggest *how* similes are understood (as claimed by some of the theorists whose views were explored in Chapter 3), or might these observations be accounted for in other terms? I answer the final question in Chapter 5 (§5.2).

However, there is a secondary strand to my argument here. I wish to establish that (i) similes are not well understood by researchers in the field, and that (ii) they *do* deserve further attention. In this chapter I focus upon a number of assumptions which appear explicitly or implicitly both in much of the work on metaphor which makes predictions about how similes are understood, and in certain literary studies of particular authors or genres. No individual theorist holds all of them, but many hold several. Most researchers on figurative language

have focussed upon only those issues which relate to the metaphor-simile distinction. However, consideration of this wider range of assumptions throws up a variety of observations which have been ignored in the theoretical literature in particular. I claim that any account of simile which aims to be comprehensive must address these particular aspects of simile use. They are discussed at length in §§4.1-9. Despite their varied provenance, *none* of the following claims stands up to extensive scrutiny:

(1) Both metaphors and similes are universal:

(2) Metaphors and similes are intersubstitutable in terms of (i) content and/or (ii) effects.

(3) Similes are hedged metaphors.

(4) Similes (typically or elliptically) come with explanations.

(5) Similes tend towards extension.

(6) Similes are miniature narratives.

(7) Metaphor is 'better' than simile.

(8) Similes 'succeed' and 'fail' for different reasons to metaphor.

(9) Similes can be easily distinguished from literal comparisons.

An example of a poetic simile such as (1) will help to establish both what can be said immediately about how similes are understood and the difficulties involved in investigating poetic simile:

(1) Her voice is like the ev'ning thrush,

That sings on Cessnock's banks unseen,

While his mate sits nestling in the bush;

An' she has <u>twa</u> sparkling, roguish <u>een</u>!   [two, eyes]

(paraphrases of dialect words given in square brackets)

(Burns, *The Lass of Cessnock Banks.* Stanza 12. Lines 45-8. Low (Ed.), 1993. 77)

Before addressing the generalisations which I think are either incorrect or irrelevant to theorising about how similes are understood, I outline here a few observations about the simile given in (1), some immediately obvious, some less so. Firstly, enumerating 'points of

comparison' is not at issue in the understanding of (1). The simile in (1) is formally (that is, syntactically) identifiable as a comparison. But a paraphrase such as (1a) would not be all that (1) is typically taken as having communicated. The 'point' of (1) is *not* (1a) (the explicit content), but rather something more like (1b):

(1a) Her voice is like that particular thrush's voice.

(1b) Her voice is beautiful in a particular, (at least partly) thrush-like way.

Moreover, even a paraphrase such as (1b) is not *exhaustive* of the content taken to be communicated by the simile in (1). The fact that (1) communicates poetic effects (see §2.10) needs to be explained. As Bredin put it, comparison does not exhaust the meaning of simile, even though there is clearly "a sort of special relationship between comparing and likening" (1998: 68). But in order to be more precise about this, we would need to specify how similes differ from 'literal' comparisons. Is it a matter of the 'degree of overlap' between the properties belonging properly to the tenor and the vehicle separately? Or is it a matter of how 'poetic effects' (see §2.6) are achieved? I make a case for the latter view.

One major problem with similes such as (1) is that the tenor (*her voice*) is, in many respects, not thrush-like at all. In how many respects is her voice 'thrush-like'? Because anything can be 'like' anything else (e.g. Carston, 2002a: 357; Goodman, 1976; Davidson, 1978/1984), it follows that her voice is thrush-like and sparrow-like and robin-like and tractor-like and planet-like, and one could go on in this fashion indefinitely. Take the following potential objections one could make to (1) by uttering (1c) and (1d):

(1c) Her voice isn't like a thrush, it's like a sparrow.

(1d) Her voice isn't like a thrush, it's like honey.

By producing utterances of (1c) and (1d), one is not expected to be able to specify the respects in which one is objecting to the comparison. However, the alternative comparisons given suggest a different way of perceiving her voice. Moreover, it is striking how different the objections in (1c) and (1d) are. An utterance of (1c) is taken as objecting to the comparison of her voice to that of a thrush, in that her voice is *not* beautiful at all: the songs of sparrows are typically taken to be less beautiful than those of thrushes. However (1d) is

taken as objecting not to her voice being beautiful but as communicating that her voice is not beautiful in such a way as could be expressed by comparing her voice to a thrush. An alternative comparison (*like honey*) is offered which the speaker considers will more reliably give access to the right interpretation. In other words, (1c) involves objecting to the implicit content of the comparison in (1), whereas (1d) objects to the way in which that content is derived.

Let us assume that (1) can only achieve relevance by at least communicating one of the implicatures (2a) and (2b):

(2a) Her voice is beautiful to hear.

(2b) Her voice is unpleasant to hear.

If a hearer/reader does not recover (2a) or (2b) they cannot be said to have understood (1) at all. But none of the encyclopaedic assumptions associated with THRUSH are required for the reader/hearer to recover (2a), as they typically would. This is not to say that encyclopaedic knowledge about thrushes is irrelevant to the interpretation of (1). But one may not *have* assumptions such as (3) associated with a stable concept THRUSH in order to get to (2a):

(3) A thrush's voice is beautiful to hear.

Rather, if one does not have a concept THRUSH prior to the utterance, one can still infer from (1) assumptions such as (3a):

(3a) A thrush is a songbird.

Once one has an assumption such as (3a) attached to a concept THRUSH, as long as assumptions in (3) and (3a) are correctly identified as part of the intended context of utterance, that will suffice to license an implicated conclusion such as (2a). This is because (1) communicates a presumption of its own optimal relevance, and (1) is likely to achieve relevance as providing evidence of why the poet holds the woman referred to by *her* in high esteem.

Crucially, even if the hearer/reader does have a stable concept THRUSH, communication of which makes more manifest assumptions such as (3) and (3a), there is still a degree of indeterminacy in what is communicated by (1). This legitimates the exploration on the part of the speaker/hearer of a wide range of weak implicatures. Furthermore, the elaboration upon the simile in (1) does not significantly mitigate this indeterminacy. The 'additional' description in (1) does not 'narrow down' the way in which, for example, the subject in (1) is 'thrush-like' in a helpful fashion, namely, in a way which would facilitate establishing an overlap between the properties of the tenor and the vehicle. In this case, *her voice* could be like that of a thrush in that it is high-pitched, or sounds sweet, or makes the poet feel a particular way. But the details given in (1) are mostly *physical* details of the thrush's environment. They elaborate upon a description which achieves relevance as a description of the thrush, not as a description of the girl at all. Yet the description still plays a role in allowing the hearer to get access to those effects. Relevance theory can explain how this happens and why such 'indirectness' gives rise to the effects typically elicited by poetic comparisons. Exploring how such 'explained' similes might be understood will be dealt with in Chapters 4 (§4.4, §4.6) and 5 (§5.4).

One methodological consideration, in addition to those raised in the introduction, is what significance one ought to place on more 'standardised' comparisons such as (4a-d) (Cf. Wikberg, 2008; Moon, 2008):

(4a) **EXAMPLE REDACTED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS** (Plath, *The Bell Jar*. 1966: 8)

(4b) [...]**EXAMPLE REDACTED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS** (Plath, *The Bell Jar*. 1966: 5)

(4c) like a coiled spring.

(4d) like opening an oven door.

Standardised comparisons such as (4a-d) tend to contribute a largely uniform conceptual content on each occasion of use. For example, (4a) means *silent*, (4b) means *very attractive* or *attracting very strongly*, (4c) is a cliché expression meaning *very excitable*, just as (4d) almost always means *very hot*. It is likely that the conceptual contribution such comparisons make to the explicit content of utterances is as uniform as the contribution of an encoded

concept to an explicature. The novel, creative comparisons we deal with in this thesis are not like this at all, although standardized examples such as (4a-d) can be made to generate weak effects (for a wider range of similar examples which *do* generate poetic effects see Chapter 5, §5.2).

To overemphasise examples such as (4a-d) would be misleading in that it is precisely the *weak* effects of simile which distinguish them from what is normally considered to be 'literal' comparison (the notion of 'literal' language being itself problematic. Gibbs, 1994 §2; Sperber and Wilson, 1995; 2005/2012: 10-16; Wilson and Sperber, 2002/2012: 82). These standardised cases are not going to help us to understand that. If they achieve poetic effects at all, it is at least possible that they do so by a process of conceptual adjustment of coded conceptual material, much like metaphors:

(5) I was [DUMB-AS-A-POST]*.

If (5) suggests the correct analysis for such examples, it will be because there is a conceptual address for the conventionalised phrase 'dumb as a post' ([DUMB-AS-A-POST]) which would provide access to the assumptions required for the process of ad hoc concept construction. Whether such examples are appropriate or not requires some awareness of what effects similes are used to achieve and I maintain that we can only explain the conventional cases if we have an account of how more creative and (especially) novel cases are interpreted. My approach contrasts with that of Lakoff for whom novel metaphors are (typically) parasitic on standardised ones, and, by analogy, so are similes (e.g. Lakoff, 2008). In addition, overemphasis on standardised cases can lead to a problem in explaining how the standardised cases came to have meant what they now mean. In Chapter 5 (§5.4) I outline how poetic similes of this form are understood.

Carston gives four possible metaphor-simile relations which have been argued for extensively in the theoretical literature (Carston, 2010a: 297 n3):

(i)   Metaphors are elliptical similes

(ii)   Similes are hedged metaphors

(iii)   Metaphors and similes are distinct tropes with very similar effects

(iv)   Metaphors and similes are distinct tropes with very different effects

Carston claims that the fourth possibility is the most likely. However, the evidence given in support of such a position by Carston and her colleagues (e.g. Carston, 2010a; Carston and Wearing, 2011; O'Donoghue, 2009) do not suffice to establish the *nature* of the difference in effects between metaphors and similes. This whole chapter, indeed this thesis, can be seen as an attempt to clarify whether the two claims, that metaphor and simile are distinct, and that they have very different effects, are valid, and what this ought to mean for research into simile and other aspects of the relation between lexical choice and style (usually thought of in classical rhetorical terms as the study of 'tropes').

The usual approach hitherto on the relationship between metaphor and simile has focussed upon the following sort of example:

(6a) Her eyes are stars.

(6b) Her eyes are like stars.

In addition, utterances such as (6c) have been taken to be indicative of the relative 'strength' of metaphors vis-à-vis similes:

(6c) Her eyes are not *like* stars, they *are* stars.

For many researchers in metaphor studies, comparison of examples such as (6a) and (6b) generates intuitions about the relative 'strength' of metaphors and similes, their typical effects, and so on. In defence of such an approach, experimental testing of speaker evaluations of the relative 'strength' of metaphor and simile suggests that such evaluations are both inter-rater reliable and repeatable (for a summary of findings on this issue see Glucksberg, 2008: 76-9). Sections §4.2 and §4.3 below challenge the thesis that simple comparison between metaphors like (6a) and similes like (6b) can provide direct insight into how metaphors and similes achieve their effects. I explain in Chapter 5 (especially §5.1) that (6c) is problematic for other reasons.

If we can establish that metaphor is not akin to simile in how it achieves its effects, then there is another problem on the horizon: if similes are instead a species of comparison, then we cannot simply identify similes as those comparisons which achieve poetic effects. Comparisons which we would not readily identify as similes (just like a whole range of non-

figurative, non-tropic language) can be shown to achieve poetic effects for reasons other than their being comparisons (Cf. Sperber and Wilson, 2008/2012: 118f on haiku).

The discussion in this chapter (especially §4.2) suggests that we cannot use 'equivalent' metaphors as a diagnostic for similes. It is wrong to assume that a comparison equivalent such as (6b), derived from a metaphorical utterance such as (6a) by the addition of *like*, is a figurative comparison just because the metaphorical equivalent is figurative. 'Figurativeness' is as much a pre-theoretic notion as 'literalness' (Wilson and Sperber, 2002/2012). Relevance theorists argue that the role of ad hoc concept construction in eliciting poetic effects is a sounder notion for investigating metaphor than is 'figurativeness' (Sperber and Wilson, 1990/2012; 2008/2012). Is there an equivalent principle on which to ground a framework for simile research? In order to give a fair assessment of whether a given comparison is figurative or not, we would do better to look at such comparisons against other types of comparison which achieve poetic effects than to compare them with different phenomena (such as metaphors) whose relatedness is at issue.

The hypothesis which I develop in Chapter 5 is that the 'weakness' of poetic comparisons can be compared to that of the 'weakness' of the explicit content of metaphors, with important differences. While (creative, novel) metaphors communicate an ad hoc concept which is a significant departure from a lexically-encoded concept, developed on the responsibility of the hearer, similes involve the free enrichment of the explicature in a different sense (for the superiority of free enrichment as a notion over 'hidden indexical' accounts see Carston, 2002a: 197-206). What is 'different from' the lexically-encoded sense of the words used is not a single conceptual element but a range of conceptual material which contributes to the relevance of an otherwise uninformative comparison: the comparison-relevant content. The 'surface' meaning of similes is always uninformatively (although not trivially) true[51]. To say that *A is like B*, for any *A* and for any *B*, will always be, strictly-speaking, true (see Chapter 3, §3.4). In the poetic examples which make the investigation of similes so interesting, a comparison achieves relevance as evidence towards

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[51] If similes were trivially true, their negations would be trivially false. This is not the case. I owe this observation to Iván García-Alvárez (p.c.).

the development of both an indeterminate range of comparison-relevant content and a wide array of weak implicatures.

Developments in lexical pragmatics (particularly the account of metaphor understanding in e.g. Carston, 2002a; Sperber and Wilson, 2008/2012; Pilkington, 2000 §4; Wearing, 2006; Carston and Wearing, 2011; Vega Moreno, 2007) allow us to draw an important distinction between the contribution of lexical choice to style which involves weakness at the explicit level in one way (underdetermination of explicit content at the level of an individual lexical item, such as metaphor, metonymy, certain uses of hyperbole, and so on) and those which involve weakness at the explicit level in a different way (poetic comparisons and potentially a wide range of other phenomena). Such a perspective provides the potential for an account of rhetorical 'tropes' which manages to overcome the 'dilemma' of rhetorical theory: accounting for the ubiquity and comprehensibility of figurative meaning without succumbing to the temptation to give up on any notion of context invariant contributions to meaning (Sperber and Wilson, 1990/2012: 86). Relevance theory allows us to develop a theory of the linguistic devices traditionally called 'tropes', which reside in the repertoire of not just specialists (poets, novelists, songwriters) but also 'ordinary' language users, which can: (i) provide optimal empirical coverage; (ii) remain explanatory; and (iii) not obscure the key feature of the phenomenon in question, namely their ability to communicate far more than the concepts linguistically encoded by the words used and their syntactic combination provides (Chapter 2, §§2.9-12). In the case of simile, this must involve distinguishing similes from non-poetic comparisons (§4.9).

4.1 Both metaphors and similes are universal

Metaphor is widely accepted to be found in all languages. Stern claims in passing that the processes underlying metaphor understanding are "presumably universal" (2000: 30). Researchers from the very different conceptual metaphor theory tradition propose that certain conceptual metaphors are themselves universal (see e.g. Kövecses 2010 §13). It is also usually assumed that metaphor is present in all registers of language use and in all eras of literary history.

As the discussion in Chapter 3 showed, we need to be quite precise about what we mean by *metaphor*. Relevance theorists see metaphor and simile as primarily issues of linguistic

communication. Others, particularly those sympathetic to conceptual metaphor theory, see metaphor in maths, the visual arts, music, and many other phenomena (see e.g. Gibbs (Ed.), 2008 Part V; Ritchie, 2013: 16f). Because there are fewer words than communicable concepts (Sperber and Wilson, 1998/2012), it stands to reason that all speaker communities would use lexical items in this way (as loose uses) at least for the purpose of communicating unlexicalised concepts. Some such uses will also communicate poetic effects. Although ad hoc concept construction is not limited to cases of figurative language use, it does seem reasonable to assume that because language users (i) *can* use a word which lexically-encodes one concept to communicate a related, but unlexicalised concept, and (ii) this process can involve the communication of poetic effects, that (creative, novel) metaphors are likely to be found in all speaker communities. It is an empirical question whether metaphors are universal, but there is no *prima facie* reason to doubt this.

There are so many different ways of explicitly communicating a comparison in English that it seems, *prima facie*, extremely likely that comparison is also a phenomenon which is used by all speaker groups in all languages. This would be another empirical question. However, when it comes to a specific subset of comparisons which do not just achieve poetic effects but do so *by virtue of being a comparison* (my notion of *poetic comparisons*), then there is some evidence to suggest that this is *not* a universal phenomenon in literature, and hence not likely to be a universal phenomenon in linguistic communication (otherwise poets might be expected to have exploited it). A relevance theoretic account such as the one proposed here makes no prediction about whether comparisons which achieve relevance primarily by means of poetic effects are universal or not. But if relative judgements of metaphor and simile in English are central desiderata in theorising about both phenomena, and if poetic comparisons are not found in certain genres or eras of world literature, then the absence of simile in certain literary traditions (despite the presence of metaphor) would require explanation.

Steen and colleagues (e.g. Steen, Dorst *et al.*, 2010: 57ff; 2011) argue that similes are a type of 'direct metaphor' (Steen appears not to have used the term as late as his survey of metaphor in discourse in *id.*, 2007). The details of their theoretical proposals and statistical findings are not discussed here, as they rely heavily upon conceptual metaphor theory as the

basis for a corpus-based analysis of metaphor in discourse (see §3.4). However, their metaphor identification methodology suggests that 'at most' 1% of all metaphors in discourse (as understood in Steen's take on conceptual metaphor theory) are 'direct metaphors' (2011: 51), of which similes constitute a large part. Although it is debatable whether conceptual metaphors (understood as conventional, embodied associations between conceptual domains) are really the appropriate object of linguistic investigation, or whether they even exist, one might suspect that similes would be far easier to identify by a coding procedure than metaphors. Even if one were to follow Steen in discounting all the standardised senses of similes, as Steen does in attributing most metaphor understanding to a process of lexical disambiguation between conventionalized senses (2011: 54, 59), this figure is particularly low. It seems that simile is, as far as we can tell, rare in English (see also Moon, 2008; Wikberg, 2008).

However, the focus of this thesis is on *poetic* uses of comparisons. The important question for an ostensive-inferential theory of communication is what such linguistic phenomena can tell us about how weak effects are exploited by poets. In relation to this question, it is irrelevant that simile is infrequent. Moreover, emergent property metaphors are also rare. It is ad hoc concept construction in general which is widespread, sometimes resulting in metaphors, sometimes hyperboles, sometimes approximations, and so on. Even in the case of emergent property metaphors, their importance lies not in their ubiquity, but in what they can tell us about ostensive-inferential communication. Nevertheless, when we narrow our focus to extant poetry, poetic similes, according to the theoretical and critical literature, are *not* found in every literary tradition.

The first problem with claims about the universality of metaphor and simile is that scholars have made a countervailing claim, that the relative frequency of metaphors and similes has changed over time, at least in the literary history of English, as illustrated by the following quote:

> "Considering the deep-rooted involvement of metaphor in the [sc. historical] development of language and its presence in almost every kind of expression, it is somewhat surprising to find how small a part it plays in [English] literature before Shakespeare. In the earlier periods simile predominates."

(Ousby (Ed.), 1992: 915b)

Similar claims have been made about the historical development of Greek literature, emphasising the relative rarity of metaphor in early authors such as Homer (although see Moulton, 1979). There are a number of objections one could make to such claims. For instance, without an awareness of the distinction between stable, encoded concepts and ad hoc applications of lexical items usually associated with those concepts (as could be provided by, for instance, a native speaker) how can we be sure that a given expression is *not* metaphorical? But similes face no such obstacle, as the sense of the vehicle explicitly communicated is close to the lexically-encoded concept. Similes are easy to spot, and many of those who have explored their use have observed both changing tendencies in simile use in certain speech communities, and, bringing us to the next problem, their complete absence in others.

For instance, it has been claimed that simile is non-existent in Old Icelandic and Old Norse (Brogan, 1994: 273). With regards to Old English, Tolman even claimed that "simile and allegory are too conscious and elaborate for the Anglo-Saxon mind" (1887: 28). Such groundless speculations aside, all three traditions include *kenningar* (singular: *kenning*), which are poetic metonymies usually based on perceived similarities (examples in (7a) and (7b) are cited selectively from a list of Old English kenningar given in Gardner, 1969). Poets can deploy examples such as those in (7a) and (7b) as alternative expressions to denote the same thing as the words given in square brackets:

(7a) *merehengest* 'sea-horse'; *yþhof* 'wave-house'   [=ship]

(Gardner, 1969: 112)

(7b) *eorþærn* 'earth-place', *eorþgrap* 'earth-grasp', *foldærn* 'earth-place', *gærsbedd* 'grass-bed', *hellsceaþa* 'hell-foe', *moldærn* 'earth-house'   [=grave]

(Gardner, 1969: 112)

However, the extent to which these figurative expressions rely upon perceived similarities varies. Some (those in (7a), standing in for *ship*) appear to be more based on, in this case, *perceptual* resemblance than others (such as those in (7b), meaning *grave*). Moreover, there

is no evidence that they are to be treated as comparisons. They are far more like metonymies[52] as in (8):

    (8) The Crown [meaning the representatives of the legal authority of the Queen] rests its case.

The concept communicated by *merehengest* in (7a) is not the same as that of *ship* would be. Nevertheless, it does share a denotation with the concept SHIP, namely, ships. The fact that 'sea-horse' can, in this literary tradition, be used as an alternative label for anything which can be denoted by the word *ship* means that the poet can use the alternative for metrical reasons, or to make more manifest certain assumptions which would not be made more manifest by the use of *ship*. Certain noun-adjective compounds seem to exhibit similar properties (my emphasis):

(9a) **EXAMPLE REDACTED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS**

(Dylan Thomas, *Under Milk Wood.* Thomas, 1954: 1)[53]

(9b) **EXAMPLE REDACTED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS**

(Scott (The Waterboys). *The Whole of the Moon*. 1985. Album: This is the Sea. Island Records.)

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[52] Fabb identifies kenningar as metaphors (1997: 268). The question of whether metonymies ought to be identified simply as referentially used metaphors or should be seen as *sui generis* is not at issue here. In any case, there is certainly no easily identifiable paraphrase for e.g. example (8).

[53] Carston and Wearing attribute this example to my supervisor, Diane Blakemore (Carston and Wearing, 2011: 297 n11). The discussion here calls into question the idea that such examples can "be thought of as truly elliptical simile" (*id. ib.*), although this was my original view.

Goatly gives a range of similar constructions (1997, especially Table 8.3 pp238f). As I will argue in Chapter 5, there are syntactically-identifiable comparisons which achieve relevance in a particular way, through the evocation of poetic effects, and these comparisons appear to comprise most of the poetic cases of simile we would want to account for in a theory of simile understanding. Are (7a)-(9b) similes on this account? Their formation by morphological composition, and the fact that they contain no clear marker of comparison such as *like* or *as*, suggests that they do not form a class with similes such as *Achilles is like a lion*. Whether (7a)-(9b) count as similes are not requires a much fuller account of how similes are understood (Cf. Chapter 6, §6.1).

There are also cases involving compounds with the adjectival suffix *-like* such as in (9c), which appear to be more like cases of ad hoc concept construction than poetic comparisons:

(9c) **EXAMPLE REDACTED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS**

(Larkin, *Toads.* Line 25f. Larkin, 1988: 89)

The relationship between poetic comparisons proper and kenningar on the one hand and novel noun-adjective compounds on the other is a matter for further investigation. However, it is clear that none of the examples in this section involve syntactically identifiable comparisons. This would preclude their inclusion in the category of poetic comparisons which I introduce in Chapter 5.

It seems quite likely that similes are *not* universal. Why might this be problematic for those who would have metaphors and similes manifestations of the same phenomenon? Firstly, on the relevance theoretic account, metaphors are simply more marked examples of a rather general process: ad hoc concept construction (§2.7). As such, they will be available in any language. Therefore, they will be able to be exploited by poets in pursuit of generating the kind of effects which are characteristic of poetic metaphors in any language. Conceptual adjustment, on this view, is a 'trigger' for poetic effects in the case of metaphor and other types of conceptual adjustment. But the way in which similes achieve their characteristic effects has, until now, been inadequately explored. If, as my account of simile understanding

in Chapter 5 will claim, similes achieve their characteristic effects by means of a speaker/author putting comparison to a particular use, there are *ex hypothesi* many other phenomena which might be used in that way. Unlike in the case of poetic metaphor, which is akin to poetic hyperbole and poetic metonymy in both the effects it can achieve and the way in which those effects are achieved, the class of utterances which can achieve poetic effects in ways other than conceptual adjustment will be large and heterogeneous. There is no reason to suppose that simile is a privileged member of that set, and so no reason to suppose that all or even most cultures will exhibit evidence of using comparisons in order to achieve those effects.

4.2 Metaphors and similes are intersubstitutable in terms of (i) content and/or (ii) effects

Any theorist who proposes that metaphors are elliptical similes, or that metaphorical effects can be explained in terms of implicated similes, must be committed to the claim that they are intersubstitutable in terms of their content or their effects or both (Cf. Chapter 3, §§3.4-5). This appears to be a very widely-held view in the field of metaphor studies. As Glucksberg puts it:

> "A basic assumption underlying virtually all theories of metaphor is that metaphors and similes are, fundamentally, equivalent: they mean the same thing."

> (Glucksberg, 2008: 74)

Stern claims that metaphors and similes express the same (semantic) content, but differ "rhetorically or pragmatically" (2000: 232). Researchers rarely spell out what the 'rhetorical' difference between metaphors and similes is supposed to be (see below, §§4.3, 4.7). The idea that a metaphor (in English) can be paraphrased by an 'equivalent' simile by addition of *like* has been thoroughly refuted in the theoretical literature. There are no metaphor 'equivalents' available for extended similes (Cf. Steen, 2007: 333ff) and no simile 'equivalents' for many verbal metaphors (O'Donoghue, 2009: 128). A more cautious 'equivalence' view is given in the following subsection.

From the perspective of relevance theory, one could argue that the processes involved in metaphor understanding (see e.g. §2.12, §3.1) generalise to cases of simile. For instance, Hernández Iglesias (2010: 175f) has argued that an account of simile understanding

consistent with the spirit of the relevance theory approach to metaphor would involve a process of modifying the conceptual contribution of a simile to the explicature analogous to ad hoc concept construction in metaphor[54]. On this view, (10a) would be an explicature of (10):

(10) Mary is like a bulldozer.

(10a) Mary is [like a bulldozer]*.

However, there are a number of objections which might be made to such an approach. Firstly, this would require that similes have similar content and equivalent effects to metaphors. This is an empirical question which has not yet been answered. Although I am sceptical of the reliability of pre-theoretic intuitions about the relative 'strength' of metaphors and similes to theorising about simile (see §4.7), the fact that there are any such intuitions challenges the claim that they are identical in terms of both content and effects. Secondly, the more complex examples adduced in this chapter would be very difficult to explain in terms of the creation of a single conceptual element in the way Hernández Iglesias proposes (see also Carston, 2010b: 255f).

Similar approaches from different theoretical perspectives, such as Stern's 'indexical operator' account of metaphor understanding (§3.3), or a similarly 'semantic' account involving the 'loosening' of a predication rather than the linguistically-encoded concept[55], would likely suffer in the light of the same counterexamples. For instance, on one formal semantic approach, at least some adjectives can be treated as one-place predicates (see e.g. Bhat, 1994: 245). This is not uncontroversial. Chomsky warned in 1995 that "we still have no good phrase structure theory for such simple matters as attributive adjectives[...]" (1995: 382 n22). But on this model, adjectival metaphors could be subsumed under an account

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[54] Hernández Iglesias claims that [LIKE A BULLDOZER]* actually *is* an ad hoc concept (2010: 176). He introduces the approach explored in the text as an alternative relevance theory account of simile understanding. It is not clear that he endorses this approach.

[55] This proposal was suggested by Iván García-Alvárez in a question posed to Robyn Carston. Master-class on 'Lexical pragmatics and metaphor', University of Salford, April 2011.

involving the 'loosening' of a predication. Therefore, the predicative adjective in (11a) COLD(x) could be 'loosened' at the level of the semantics to give another predication COLD*(x). A similar account can be argued for cases of attributive adjectives as in (11b) (the relevant aspects of the semantics of the utterances are suggested by the paraphrases in square brackets):

(11a) Her heart was cold.

[BE-COLD*(heart)]

(11b) Her cold heart stopped.

[STOPPED(heart) & BE-COLD*(heart)]

However, this approach fails when we turn to metaphorical transitive verbs, such as (11c):

(11c) He froze her heart.

There is no place in the proposed formal semantics for the 'loosening' to take place. Part of the appeal of the conceptual metaphor approach is that it allows examples such as (11a) and (11c) to be unified: they both reflect an underlying putative conceptual metaphor such as EMOTION IS HEAT (see e.g. Kövecses, 2010: 371). One could also propose a lexical-decompositional approach, where an element of the lexical semantics of the verb is subject to the appropriate contextual adjustment (e.g. FREEZE = CAUSE TO BE COLD, and it is the COLD element which is interpreted metaphorically) (see e.g. Murphy, 2010 §4). But to argue either solution would be to commit oneself to a view of lexical semantics which is not compatible with that of relevance theorists, who adopt Fodor's conceptual atomism (1998; Carston, 2002a: 141, 214 n31; Sperber and Wilson, 1998/2012). Any semantic 'loose predication' approach (which would be rejected by the conceptual metaphor theorists in any case. See Lakoff and Johnson, 2003: 195-209) will still not explain the generation of the weaker effects which we are concerned with in this thesis, nor are there any comparison 'equivalents' to examples such as (11a-c). It would be bizarre to suppose without further justification that such an account is capable of being generalised to the comparison cases. Moreover, such an account would struggle to provide an explanation for lexical semantic change, as against, for instance, the relevance theoretic account of metaphor (see e.g. Falkum, 2011 ms §4.3.2).

A different relevance theoretic approach to simile is that of O'Donoghue (2009). She rightly identifies that 'paraphrase' and 'equivalence' are not coextensive notions (*id.*, *ib.*: 129), but illustrates this point with the following examples (12a-b):

(12a) My mind is a computer.

(12b) My mind is like a computer.

According to O'Donoghue, an utterance of (12a) communicates that my mind is very good at processing information, but (12b) communicates that my mind is like a computer in certain respects. The problem we have here is that (12a) *also* communicates that my mind is like a computer in at least one respect, namely in processing information. However, relevance theory would predict that (12a) explicitly communicates (12c), while (if my hypothesis that similes *are* comparisons is correct) (12b) explicitly communicates *at least* the content described in (12d) (my view on the explicit content of comparisons is further developed in Chapter 5). Both (12a) and (12b) typically will also strongly implicate (12e), and (12e) is likely to be the main point of the utterance for both (12a) and (12b):

(12c) My mind is a COMPUTER*.

[where a COMPUTER* is very good at processing information, the ad hoc concept denoting both COMPUTERS and some MINDS]

(12d) My mind is like a COMPUTER.

(12e) My mind is very good at processing information.

It is not necessarily the case that *A is like B*-similes communicate that *A* and *B* are alike in *particular* respects, that is, there may be cases where the hearer does not have to recover the precise respects in which a comparison holds (points of comparison) (§4.4). My view of what comparisons communicate about the respects in which a comparison holds is developed in Chapter 5. But a more pressing objection can be given against O'Donoghue's examples: What weak effects does an utterance of (12b) typically communicate? Probably not many. I would argue that examples such as (12b) can hardly be seen as typical of the more poetic examples of simile I have found. O'Donoghue does not explain why (12b) should be interpreted as a (what I call) non-poetic comparison rather than a simile.

To summarise, the content of metaphor- and simile-utterances overlaps in certain respects, but is clearly distinct in others. While metaphorical utterances communicate ad hoc concepts as part of their explicature, and one can typically clearly identify the word which is used to communicate that concept, there is no such method available to identify what is communicated explicitly by a simile. Much of the same implicit content can be communicated by both a metaphor and an 'equivalent' simile. I will argue in Chapter 5 that a distinction in how the two phenomena are processed is why accounts which conflate metaphor and simile all fail to account for the data. But there is a further problem. If we are trying to account for the 'overlap' in effects, then our definition of what is an 'equivalent' metaphor and simile ought to change. We should not expect that metaphors and similes generate their characteristic effects in the same way, nor should we expect that formally similar metaphors and similes (such as *A is B/A is like B*) are equivalent in their effects. If this is the case, ought we to expect that there are *any* 'equivalent' metaphors and similes which we can treat as minimal pairs?

There are, of course, researchers who take the view that metaphors and similes are not intersubstitutable (e.g. Aisenman, 1999. See also the works cited in §3.9). But such accounts tend to assume that the difference between how metaphors and similes are understood can be attributed to the difference between two types of conceptual processing (in Aisenman's case, structure-mapping for similes and class-inclusion for metaphors. 1999: 46). The account of comparison understanding I will develop in Chapter 5 will not make such an appeal to independent processes of concept manipulation.

4.3 Similes are hedged metaphors

One slightly more specific variant of the previous claim is that metaphors and similes have the same content and generate the same type of effects in a similar way, but that a metaphor will be interpreted as more 'forceful' than an equivalent simile ('stronger and deeper' in Zharikov and Gentner's terminology, 2002. Cf. Kennedy and Chiappe, 1999). Chiappe and Kennedy cite Max Black (1979), Glucksberg and Keysar (1990; 1993), Morgan (1993) and Roberts and Kreuz (1994) to the effect that metaphors makes stronger claims than similes (Chiappe and Kennedy, 2000: 372). Lakoff and Turner say that similes are the same as conceptual metaphors, they just make a "weaker claim" (1989: 133).

Many seek to account for this felt difference between metaphors and similes by 'hedging' (see below). The account I give of simile understanding in Chapter 5 is incompatible with such a view. But there is a more general problem. How reliable are intuitions with respect to what is communicated by a particular metaphor or simile? Novel, creative metaphors are typically very context sensitive. Any 'felt difference' between *A is B*-metaphors and *A is like B*-similes *in the same context* might tell us very little about how either phenomenon is understood. Furthermore, even if intuitions about the relative 'strength' of metaphors as opposed to similes are inter-subjectively consistent, what does this mean (see particularly §4.7 below)? Moreover, a more detailed investigation of such claims from a conceptual metaphor theory perspective (that of Croft and Cruse, 2004) suggests that all 'hedging' accounts will fail to account for how similes are understood[56].

In order to claim that similes function as 'hedged' metaphors, the word *like* must make a similar sort of contribution to an utterance as less controversial hedges such as *as it were*, and *so as to say* (e.g. Leezenberg, 2001: 226; Veale and Hao, 2007: 683. Note that Goatly does not give *like* as a hedge for metaphor. 1997: 176ff). I focus here on one particular approach to similes as 'hedged' metaphors which highlights some of the problems that all such accounts are likely to face. For most in the cognitive linguistics tradition, metaphors are understood according to conceptual metaphor theory or its variants (such as blending theory, or hybrid metaphor theory. See §3.7). For Croft and Cruse in particular, the 'felt' difference between metaphor and simile can be accounted for in terms of 'profiling':

> "In Langackerian terms, *A is like B* profiles the resemblance, while *A is B* profiles the properties predicated."

> (Croft and Cruse, 2004: 212f)

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[56] Guttenplan also calls *like* a hedge (2005: 170-3), but he makes clear that even literal comparisons should be treated according to his 'semantic descent' account of metaphors (*id.*, *ib.*: 203ff).

'Profiling' (see Langacker, 2008: 66ff) is a notion from cognitive linguistics. Essentially, profiling allows cognitive linguists to explain the different 'construals' of, for instance, active sentences and their passive equivalents in terms of conceptual salience:

(13a) The boy hit the ball.   [active sentence]

(13b) The ball was hit by the boy.   [passive sentence]

Utterances of (13a) and (13b) are taken as expressing the same conceptual content: an agent (A) acted upon a patient (B). But the roles that A and B play are 'profiled' differently. In (13a), A is the 'trajector' (the focal, or most prominent participant), and B the 'landmark'. The event described by (13a) is in terms of something that the boy did. In (13b), that situation is reversed. The event described by (13b) is in terms of something that happened to the ball (discussion due to Evans and Green, 2006: 541f). 'Profiling' is therefore an issue of the relative conceptual salience of members of a given conceptual relationship.

However, Croft and Cruse are not explicit about how such a process of profiling would apply to similes. Take the metaphor (14a) and the 'equivalent' simile (14b):

(14a) His words are honey.

(14b) His words are like honey.

Firstly, the difference between (14a) and (14b) is far less pronounced in terms of its weak effects than many of the other examples given in this thesis. If (14b) profiles the conceptual relationship between WORDS and HONEY, which bit of the mapping is profiled? Those which involve 'resemblance'? It is not clear what this would entail. It should also be noted that nobody appears to have claimed that there is a WORDS ARE HONEY or WORDS ARE SWEETENERS conceptual metaphor, although WORDS ARE FOOD is attested in the theoretical literature (See Jing-Schmidt who thinks this conceptual metaphor is "likely to be universal". *id.* 2008: 259)). One could attempt a solution based on 'blending theory' (see §3.8, especially Figure §3.3). But why would profiling 'resemblance' pick out only one part of 'blended space' and not another? Moreover, it is hard to see what the significance of the claim that 'similes profile resemblance' could be on any definition of 'resemblance'. The claim that the use of *like* makes *likeness* more salient is of little epistemic value; little follows from it, not least an

explanation of the perceived difference between metaphor and simile, rather than a reformulation of the question at hand. 'Hedging' accounts of metaphors and similes appear to be a dead end.

For Glucksberg the effect of 'hedges' on metaphor interpretation is "highly systematic" (2000: 46f). He claims that the following examples demonstrate that the most 'categorical' expressions, including counterintuitive examples such as (15a), are judged as being most metaphorical, the least 'categorical', such as (15g), as being the least metaphorical:

(15a) Cigarettes are literally time bombs.

(15b) Cigarettes are time bombs.

(15c) Cigarettes are virtual time bombs.

(15d) Cigarettes are like time bombs.

(15e) In certain respects, cigarettes are like time bombs.

(15f) Cigarettes are deadly, like time bombs.

(15g) Cigarettes are as deadly as time bombs.

It would be quite odd if such variegated constructions reliably produced the kind of graded judgements that Glucksberg suggests. The problem is exacerbated by comparison with other constructions which appear to achieve similar effects to the 'hedges' Glucksberg gives. For instance, (15h-i) is certainly a type of utterance one hears:

(15h) Cigarettes are metaphorical time bombs.

(15i) Metaphorically speaking, cigarettes are time bombs.

Where in the scale of (15a-g) do (15h-i) belong? Moreover, Glucksberg seems to be overlooking the central importance of higher-level explicatures in how such constructions achieve their effects. The following example (16) is from a song:

(16) **EXAMPLE REDACTED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS**

(James, *et al.* (James). *Sometimes (Lester Piggott).* (1993) Album: Laid. Mercury.)

Here the connection between the higher-level explicature and the effects achieved is clear. One central higher-level explicature of (16) is something like (16a):

(16a) The speaker swears that sometimes when he looks in another person's eyes he can see their soul.

The 'strength' of the metaphorical interpretation of (16) is connected to the degree of commitment of the speaker to the proposition expressed. One could say that the 'figurativeness' of the interpretation does not vary between (16) and (17) below, but rather the presence of (16a) as a higher-level explicature for (16) accounts for the felt difference between the interpretations. Both (16) and (17) will share a higher-level explicature such as (17a), but only (16) will communicate (16a):

(17) Sometimes when I look in your eyes I can see your soul.

(17a) The speaker says that when he looks in another person's eyes he can see their soul.

Moreover, as the following sections will make clear, the way that the specification of respects in which a comparison holds (see (15e)) affects understanding of similes is poorly understood. Example (15g) is also problematic for other reasons (see §5.3).

It is not clear that the subjective participant judgements Glucksberg relies on are reliable. For instance, Chiappe and Kennedy (2000) present experimental evidence that respondents' judgements about metaphors and 'equivalent' similes disappear when they are presented as stimuli in isolation from each other. Moreover, what would a 'very metaphorical' interpretation be like? From a relevance theoretic perspective, metaphors and similes, as with a wide range of utterances, can vary as to how much they achieve relevance by means of poetic effects. Is (15a) more poetic than (15g)? How is (15e) *less* categorical than (15d)? Moreover, ought we not to expect that poets exploit the putatively systematic differences to make their language more 'metaphorical'? One does not find many examples like (15a) even in modern English poetry, but Glucksberg appears to be claiming that this is the most 'metaphorical' way of using a metaphor.

4.4 Similes (typically, or elliptically) come with explanations

There are two ways in which this claim has manifested itself in the literature. The first is that similes have an obligatory 'third component' beside the tenor and the vehicle: a point or points of comparison (this is called the 'ground' by Max Black, 1962. Cf. Fishelov, 1993: 5). It would then be the task of the hearer to either decode the point of comparison when it is explicitly communicated (enriching it as necessary) or to supply a point of comparison inferentially in order for the simile to be comprehensible. The second is that similes 'tend to' have additional linguistically-specified material by comparison with metaphors or 'literal' comparisons (e.g. Fishelov, 1993: 6 on 'length' of similes as opposed to literal comparisons).

I argue that the best explanation of the data is not that similes *require* that a hearer supply a point of comparison, or that a speaker supply additional linguistically-encoded material to aid the hearer in constructing a point of comparison. Instead, similes simply *are* comparisons. Some of them involve one or more linguistically specified points of comparison, some do not. Some are surrounded by additional linguistically-specified material which contributes to a hearer's understanding of a simile, and others are not. The absence of linguistically-specified 'clues' to the respects in which a comparison holds does not necessarily prevent a simile from being understood. But, more tellingly, when such clues are present, they appear to subtly 'redirect' how the comparison contributes to relevance.

One piece of evidence for my approach is the way 'explained' similes are typically understood. What appears to have evaded the notice of researchers is that when linguistically-specified points of comparison are given by poets, the interpretation of a simile is not 'narrowed' (see the discussion of example (1) above), as one might expect. If this were the case, most of the poetic examples I give in this thesis involving what looks like a point of comparison are narrowed in precisely the 'wrong' way (see §5.4). In example (1), the relevance of the simile lies not in the specific way in which the poet's beloved's voice is thrush-like. Undue focus on thrush-like respects would ruin the intended effects of the simile, which are developed on the basis of additional linguistically-encoded material which does not directly relate to the voice of either the beloved or the thrush described in the vehicle of the simile. Therefore the 'specification' of points of comparison, when it does occur, appears to be a device which allows poets to guide a hearer's search for relevance

towards a particular range of *weak* effects, not merely to supply them with a set of common features between tenor and vehicle.

Roncero, Kennedy and Smyth (2006) found that similes on the internet were more likely to be accompanied by explanations than their 'equivalent' metaphors. The above discussion should alert the reader to the question-begging nature of such formulations: the degree of equivalence between metaphors and similes is precisely what is at issue in such research, but Roncero and colleagues simply assume that metaphors *have* simile equivalents. Nevertheless, it may be true, and of some theoretical interest, that comparisons in discourse typically come with explanations. This is an empirical question, but would require a definition of simile which distinguishes it from non-figurative comparison, something Roncero and colleagues fail to accomplish adequately:

> "A figurative relation usually can be expressed as either a metaphor or a simile using the same word pairs. *Crime is like a disease*, without the word *like*, has the same sense as *crime is a disease*. Literal comparisons cannot drop or add *like* with impunity. *Fords are like cars* is incorrect."
>
> (Roncero, *et al.*, 2006: 74. Their italics)

Roncero and colleagues do not explain what "has the same sense" means, nor how *Fords are like cars* is "incorrect". The sentence is not ungrammatical, but rather is anomalous for some semantic or pragmatic reason. The kind of example they have in mind are those such as the following, which they provide:

> (18) Time is like money – only retired executives have a lot.
>
> (*id., ib.*: 76)[57]

Example (18) is clearly a kind of joke. The explanation *only retired executives have a lot* subverts the usual way in which TIME would be understood to be like MONEY (it is a precious resource, and so on). There are lots of such verbal jokes which take the form of similes like

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[57] No source cited. Despite searching using several popular search engines I did not find a single attested case of this example outside of the article cited.

(18) (they are a favoured rhetorical device in freestyle rap battles). But we are concerned here with providing an account of how certain comparisons achieve poetic effects. What if (18) achieves poetic effects *because* it is a joke? This seems plausible, and, if so, such examples are not really relevant to theorising about the metaphor-simile relationship. By explaining the comparison in (18), a speaker communicates that (18) will achieve relevance in a particular way: by specifying (some of) the respects in which the comparison should be taken to hold. What is humorous about (18) is not the assumption that the concept TIME shares certain properties with MONEY, but rather the surprising respects in which the speaker claims the comparison holds. The comparison form is crucial to how (18) is understood. But does it produce similar effects to uncontroversial cases of simile, such as *Achilles is a lion*? My intuitions suggest not.

If we focus more narrowly on the kind of 'explanation' known as a *tertium comparationis*, or point of comparison, we find that such a specification of the respects in which tenor and vehicle are meant to be similar is neither obligatorily provided by the speaker/author, nor is it clear that such respects are required to be recovered by the hearer in order to understand the simile. The point of comparison as a desideratum in rhetorical theory has a long history (for further discussion see Gargani, 2009 ms: 20ff) and there are many variants of the assumption that similes require the recovery of an implicit point of comparison in order to be understood (e.g. Ortony, 1975: 52). One more sophisticated version of the assumption that similes typically come with explanations is Croft and Cruse's notion of a 'restricted mapping':

> "Most of the discussion one encounters in the literature on the relation between metaphor and simile centers [sic] around examples of simile that are not prototypical. In fact, examples of the simile of the form *X is like Y* are comparatively rare: **in the vast majority of similes, there is a specification of the respect in which the resemblance holds**, without which a proper interpretation is not possible."

> (Croft and Cruse, 2004: 213) (my emboldening, their italics)

Croft and Cruse claim that this contrasts with prototypical metaphors where the correspondence between source and target domains does not form a closed set (*id., ib.*). If

one looks at all the ways in which poetic comparisons are deployed, then *A is like B*–type similes are indeed rare. However, that is not because the *tertium comparationis* is in fact required, and when such points of comparison are signalled, they often serve to alter the way in which the simile is interpreted by changing the context in which the simile is understood (see §6.3). Literary theorists tend not to take the view of Croft and Cruse, perhaps as it is hard to defend in light of the data from poetry. One example of a contrary view is that of Nowottny:

> "Simile (when simple) does not indicate the respect in which one thing is like another thing. It says the things are alike: it is up to us to see why; the things may be alike in a large number of ways."

> (Nowottny, 1965: 66)

Croft and Cruse also undermine their position by introducing similes which involve 'open mapping' and metaphors which involve 'restricted mapping':

> (19) She was gone in a flash of red, like a vengeful queen on her way to order armies to march in on us.

> (examples (19)-(21) cited by Croft and Cruse, 2004: 213f, from Cornwell, 2000)

Croft and Cruse say that example (19) is more 'metaphor-like' than other similes, but do not explain why. Other examples of metaphors they claim are like similes are those in (20) and (21):

> (20) ...her breath smoking out [= came out like smoke, because it was a cold day, and it condensed].

> (21) Grass was a thick, stiff carpet [because it was frozen]

How is (20) 'simile-like'? It would seem that it is simply a metaphor, involving ad hoc modification of the concept encoded by the adjective 'smoking' (SMOKING*), which is the concept communicated as part of the explicature. It is interesting that, for this ad hoc concept to be constructed, some kind of visual simulation of the typical motion and appearance of smoke appears to be necessary. But whether an assumption of the form *A is*

like B is communicated is (i) a question which has not yet been resolved and (ii) independent of whether a given utterance contains a simile or not. Considerations of effort might preclude such an analysis in any case. Worst of all, Croft and Cruse have already proposed conversion of simile into metaphor as a diagnostic for whether a simile is figurative or literal (see below). For metaphor to be capable of paraphrase into simile in this way threatens that explanation.

The 'explicit *tertium*' hypothesis (see e.g. Ben-Porat, 1992: 745ff) fares worst of all in the following (admittedly extremely rare) case (discussed in Addison, 1993: 412):

> (22) [...] And in their own dimensions like themselves
>
> The great seraphic lords and cherubim
>
> In close recess and secret conclave sat[…]
>
> (Milton, *Paradise Lost* I.793-5. In Baldwin (Ed.), 1998: 24.)

In example (22) Milton compares the size of the angels to themselves, the implication being that there is nothing which could be compared to them in size. But note that the poet does not say simply *like themselves*, but gives linguistically-specified point of comparison (roughly paraphrased as *in terms of their size*). One ought to expect that this point of comparison 'narrows' the interpretation, in Croft and Cruse's terminology, 'restricting' the mapping further than would otherwise be the case (in alternative terminology, making it less 'open'. See Ben-Porat, 1992: 746). However, both tenor and vehicle are conceptually identical, as the paraphrase in (22a) shows:

> (22a) The ANGELS were like the [same] ANGELS in terms of size.

What is compared in (22) is *the same set to itself*. How can the points of comparison be further specified when there is complete, exhaustive overlap? Similes therefore appear not to be interpreted solely in terms of the overlap of properties between two concepts. Moreover, in precisely those cases we are interested in, poetic similes, points of comparison contribute far less to relevance.

But if 'explanations' are not present to facilitate comprehension by explicating a point of comparison between tenor and vehicle, what function do they serve? In example (18), the 'explanation' assists the hearer in finding humour in the comparison. But this is not the typical case (see §5.4). Nevertheless, the presence of additional linguistically encoded content in an utterance *does* provide evidence that this content contributes to the relevance of the utterance. There is more than one way in which it can do so. For example, poets can, and often do, incorporate contextual 'clues' to the interpretation of metaphors. These can include similes:

(23) **EXAMPLE REDACTED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS**

(Hughes, *Wind*. Lines 16-18. *NA*: 1811)

Note that, for example (23), it is far easier to see how the metaphor SHATTER* (a house being impossible to SHATTER in the lexically-encoded sense) is relevant in the vicinity of the simile *like some fine green goblet* than would otherwise be the case. But the poet does not say that the HOUSE was a GOBLET (or GOBLET*), nor that the house was *like a goblet*. What is being compared is the RINGING* of the house to the RINGING of a goblet. In processing the simile, the reader has to access certain contextual assumptions which are (as a result of processing) made manifest or more manifest. That means that the most relevant interpretation of *shatter* (SHATTER*) will typically be one based upon assumptions which were made more manifest in understanding *like some fine green goblet in the note*. It is in light of such analyses that points of comparison appear not as 'restrictions' on properties to be mapped, but clues to the direction in which relevance is to be sought, which, perhaps more often than not, do not involve *limiting* the ways in which tenor is like vehicle but provide evidence for the fuller exploration of poetic effects.

4.5 Similes tend towards extension

Because extended similes are found in some genres of world literature (especially the Classical epic poetic tradition, and also in later epic poets, including Dante, Milton, and Walcott), some have assumed that length is a defining feature of simile, particularly in comparison to metaphor. This assumption appears to be related to assumption (4): because similes (allegedly) require *more* linguistically-specified material than metaphors do, a poet can achieve their aims by extending tenor and vehicle in a simile in a way which is impossible with metaphor. I claim, on the basis of the RT theory of metaphor understanding, that, while it is true that metaphor cannot be so extended (metaphor being essentially a lexical pragmatic phenomenon), there is an important theoretical reason *why* this is so, which only a fuller account of simile can elucidate. However, extended similes are of a variety of types. Some involve the communication of extremely weak impressions (often by virtue of 'interaction' with metaphor). Producing a 'neater' or 'fuller' analogy between tenor and vehicle does not preclude a simile from achieving relevance primarily by means of the poetic effects it evokes. Other similes are far more like 'literal' comparisons than the theoretical literature has perhaps recognised (see §4.7)[58].

It is not entirely clear what is meant by the claim that similes, unlike metaphors, 'tend' towards extension (Whalley 1988: 252). A charitable interpretation would be that what is being claimed is that similes are at their best when they are 'longer'. But most of the poetic similes I have found are not extended. Moreover, neither length of vehicle nor the number of 'correspondences' between tenor and vehicle can explain why certain extended comparisons are felt to be more poetic than others. I propose that we instead focus on what effect extending a simile has on how a simile is understood, and that we do that in terms of an account of how the additional linguistically-specified content affects the implicit content (the poetic effects).

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[58] This fact may lie behind the use of similes which are both didactic and poetic in function. Interesting observations have been made regarding the degree of 'correspondence' in Lucretius' use of didactic similes by Sedley (2007: 60ff. Cf. e.g. Marković, 2008: 96; Garani, 2007).

Steen compares an extended simile (Homer *Iliad* 17.722-734. Citing Ben-Porat, 1992) with an extended analogy from scientific prose comparing radio waves to sound waves (I paraphrase this in (24a)) (Steen, 2007). He observes that whereas the epic simile has multiple points of correspondence between the content of the tenor and the vehicle, the analogy from scientific discourse has a narrow range of linguistically-specified points of comparison which are only mentioned in relation to the tenor (from Mayer, 1993: 570, which I paraphrase in (24a) and summarise in (24b)):

> (24a) *Paraphrase*: The echoes of radio waves are like acoustic echoes.
>
> Sound waves echo off structures and are heard shortly after.
>
> For short sharp sounds, if the speed of sound is known, the interval between making the sound and hearing its echo is a measure of its distance.
>
> Radar exploits the same principle.
>
>
> (24b) *Structure*: A is like B.
>
> A does a certain thing.
>
> B does the same.

In (24a), and in the original, what is explicitly communicated is that *A is like B*, and then *B* is further described in order to inform us about *A*. In relevance theoretic terms, this comparison is relevant as providing evidence for an understanding of the similarity between the two phenomena which allows one to draw inferences about one of the phenomena (radio wave echoes) on the basis of what one can infer about another (acoustic echoes). But the way in which the similarity obtains, namely which properties are shared by the two phenomena, is not spelled out (Steen, 2007: 336). This contrasts with many cases of extended epic simile such as (25):

> (25) […] Her beauty was increased by flight. But since the youthful god   530
>
> Could stand no longer to waste his blandishments, and as love

Itself was moving him, he pursues her footsteps at top speed.

Just as when a Gallic hound has spotted a hare in an empty field,

And the one heads for [its] prey on foot, the other safety:

One of them seems to be about to latch on the other and now, even now,   535

Hopes to hold [it] and grazes [its] footsteps with his muzzle outstretched;

The other is in doubt whether she has been caught and

Is snatched out of his very teeth [lit. bites] and leaves behind the encroaching jaws;

Thus [were] the god and the maiden, he swift in hope, she in fear.

[the narrative continues to describe the closeness of Apollo's pursuit of Daphne]

(Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 1.530-539. Latin text from Miller, 1921: 38, 40)

(My translation. Line numbers given for reader's convenience)

There are a number of points of comparison in (25) which the linguistically-specified content of the simile makes available, for example, the fact that the pursuit happened at speed, and the emotions (hope and fear) of the greyhound and the hare and Apollo and Daphne respectively. These are good candidates for linguistically-specified points of comparison. The key point of the simile is to bring out how the pursuit of the hare happened in fits and starts and the reader is left with the impression that this is how Apollo's pursuit of Daphne took place. When the poet writes that the greyhound *hopes* (line 536), this suggests that Apollo had similar beliefs. These are possibly implicit points of comparison. Yet elucidating these points of comparison, interesting as it is as a post hoc exercise, is not equivalent to enumerating the effects of the simile. There is a much more weakly communicated impression that one gets. This may involve visualising the stages of the god's pursuit of the nymph alongside that of the hare by the dog, or the representation of the states of mind of Daphne and Apollo as a whole, which are far less easy to paraphrase. It is weak effects such as these which form the basis of the rhetorical impact of the simile, not its 'didactic' role in

justifying the recovery of further inferences about the pursuit of the nymph on the basis of the comparison with the pursuit of the hare.

A different kind of didactic analogy to (24a), this time from Sperber and Wilson's *Relevance*, demonstrates how comparisons do not become 'poetic' by virtue of their length. Example (26) compares the (possible) development of conventional meanings from spontaneous inference in communication:

> (26) This [sc. the development of coded meanings in communication] is reminiscent of the story of how Rockefeller became a millionaire. One day, when he was young and very poor, Rockefeller found a one-cent coin in the street. He bought an apple, polished it, sold it for two cents, bought two apples, polished them, sold them for four cents... After one month he bought a cart, after two years he was about to buy a grocery store, when he inherited the fortune of his millionaire uncle. We will never know how far hominid inference might have gone towards establishing a full-fledged human language. The fact is that the development of human language was made possible by specialised biological endowment.

> (Sperber and Wilson, 1995: 53)

This is another didactic analogy inasmuch as it presents the (possible) evolution of linguistic communication as similar to the story of Rockefeller's financial situation (his wealth growing incrementally before an unexpected fortuitous event made him extremely rich). Some of the points of comparison are specified (gradual progression followed by a sudden 'leap forward'), others are implicit: for instance, the skills Rockefeller developed during his period of gradual success are likely to have proved beneficial after he inherited a large amount of money, just as, in Sperber and Wilson's presentation of how linguistic communication could have evolved, the growth of metacognitive and inferential abilities in hominids could have found a new, powerful application when a separate mental module dedicated to linguistic (grammatical) abilities emerged for independent (biological) reasons.

The comparison in (26) achieves relevance primarily by strongly communicating the fact that gradual processes of change and sudden changes or 'saltations' can work together to produce a particular outcome (what appears to be a sudden, 'explosive' change in mental

abilities). However, there are further, weaker effects of the comparison. These weaker effects *can* contribute to the didactic function of the comparison. For instance, Sperber and Wilson's comparison weakly communicates that apparent sudden changes can have complex underpinnings, and that overlooking potential distinctions in underlying causes can lead us to oversimplify phenomena. It warns against both seeing Rockefeller's success as either entirely due to his own hard work or entirely due to good fortune, and seeing the development of communication as uniformly incremental (see e.g. Wharton, 2009: 176-193). The cognitive effects of this didactic analogy are varied. There are some strong effects and a wide range of weaker ones. Therefore there is no inherent conflict between the 'cognitive value' of a didactic comparison or analogy and the poetic effects that may be elicited (for a different view see Garani, 2007: 99ff).

Many examples of similes from poetry exhibit this 'borderline' status between full analogies which strongly communicate a comparison for a didactic purpose and those which achieve relevance primarily through the communication of weak effects. Examples (26a) and (28) demonstrate that this is not unique to examples from poetry. The above discussion suggests that it is useful to view comparison as varying along two continua: (i) the strength of the implicatures communicated, on the one hand; and (ii) the degree of linguistically-specified content which contributes to understanding the simile, on the other. Although my account in Chapter 5 may prove useful in such an endeavour, the following observations serve only to clarify that denying a constitutive role for linguistically-specified points of comparison, whilst emphasising that they subtly affect how comparisons are understood, is the best way to proceed.

Poetic analogies (or 'conceits', e.g. §4.9 example (39)) are particularly associated in English poetry with the metaphysical poets, and are also rather frequent in Shakespeare's sonnets. Overall, my experience in finding data suggests that they are relatively rare (compared with, for example, the kind of examples given in §5.2). But metaphysical conceits often involve linguistically-specified points of comparison of this type.

Some poetic analogies involve the strong communication of *degree*:

> (27) With instantaneous joy I recognised

That pride of nature and of lowly life,

The venerable Armytage, a friend

As dear to me as is the setting sun.

(Wordsworth, *The Ruined Cottage*. Lines 36-39. *NA*: 769)

In (27), Wordsworth strongly communicates an analogy which can be summarised in a paraphrase given in (27a) (the notation adopted here is modelled after e.g. Gentner and Jeziorski, 1993: 449):

(27a) DEAR(Armytage, me)::DEAR(setting sun, me)

It is strongly communicated that Armytage is dear to the poet *as much as* the setting sun is dear to him. However, this is not where the main point of the utterance lies. The poet communicates that he loves or is as 'close' (metaphorically) to Armytage as he is to the setting sun, not so that the degree of 'dearness' can be precisely understood by the hearer/reader, but rather in order to communicate poetic effects.

Similarly, in (28), Tennyson communicates the analogy given in (28a):

(28) Sweet Hesper-Phosphor, double name

For what is one, the first, the last,

Thou, like my present and my past,

Thy place is changed; thou art the same.

(Tennyson. *In Memoriam*. Stanza 121. Lines 17-20. *NA*: 1004)

(28a) STAY-THE-SAME(Hesperus, Phosphorus)::STAY-THE-SAME(my present, my past)]

Here, even more so than in (27), the *degree* interpretation is extremely uninformative, and so for (28) to achieve relevance it must be interpreted as weakly communicating far more than the analogy. The key point communicated appears to me to be how the poet *feels*

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about the permanence of the heavenly body, but there are other implicatures, such as that the poet is aware that the evening star and the morning star are the same heavenly body despite being referred to by different names, that he is intelligent enough to know that fact, and so on. What is crucial here is that the poetic effects generated are not by virtue of the comparison being weakly communicated, but by the 'gulf' between the uninformativeness of the strongly communicated comparison and the reader's expectations of relevance.

I have identified at least two other phenomena which appear to be related to 'poetic analogies' like (27) and (28). The first are genuinely elliptical analogies in poetry, such as those in (29a-c). In these cases the hearer/reader must supply the elliptical material specified in brackets in order to have understood the utterance:

(29a) **EXAMPLE REDACTED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS**

(Plath, *Lady Lazarus.* Stanza 28. Line 84. *NA*: 1845)

(29b) But often on this cottage do I muse/ As [sc. I muse] on a picture [.]

(Wordsworth, *The Ruined Cottage*. Lines 117f. *NA*: 771)

(29c) As [sc. one might open] a shut bud that holds a bee,/ I warily oped her lids [.]

(Browning. *Porphyria's Lover*. Lines 43f. *NA*: 1010)

These are cases of syntactic ellipsis. It is true that the ellipsed material must be supplied for the comparison to hold in any respect. However, resolving the ellipsed material does not 'supply' the properties in respect of which the comparison holds.

The second type of phenomena which are reminiscent of poetic analogies are those involving the interaction of metaphors with similes (this phenomenon will be explored at in more depth in §6.3). One such example is (30), where the poet appears to be equivocating between descriptions relevant to the tenor (your mind) and the vehicle (wedding cake):

(30) **EXAMPLE REDACTED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS**

(Rich, *Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law*. Stanza 1. Lines 77-11. *NA*: 1791)

Here the comparison *your mind [is] MOLDERING* like wedding cake* provides access to a range of contextual assumptions which assist in the construction of several ad hoc concepts (HEAVY*, RICH*, CRUMBLING*, etc.). The effects are particularly weak here in large part because of the effort involved in the equivocation between one set of linguistically-encoded and ad hoc concepts (which *are* relevant to the vehicle WEDDING CAKE: HEAVY**, RICH**, CRUMBLING** etc.) and the ad hoc concepts which are relevant to the tenor. Wedding cake is $HEAVY_1$ in one sense, but your mind is $HEAVY_2$ in another, and so on. The hearer has to keep assumptions associated with *both* the 'cake'-concepts and the 'mind'-concepts in mind throughout.

One side-effect of the approach defended here is that some cases of simile, including classic examples from the theoretical literature, have more in common with non-figurative comparisons than with poetic comparisons. For example, example (31), despite communicating a range of weak effects (including affectual responses, such as pity, to the content), does so on the basis of a *strongly* communicated comparison[59]:

(31) These things the famous singer sang. But Odysseus   521

Melted, and a tear wetted his cheeks beneath his eyelids.

As a woman might wail, throwing herself around her dear husband

Who has fallen in front of his own city and people,   524

---

[59] Observation due to a question raised by Robyn Carston at a paper I delivered at Metaphor and Cognition, Cagliari, 12th-14th May 2011. Faculty of Education Sciences, University of Cagliari, Cagliari, Italy.

Whilst warding off the pitiless day [sc. of death] from the town and [his] children,

She, seeing that he is dying and gasping,

Having thrown herself around him shrieks loudly; but they [sc. the enemy]

Strike from behind with [their] spears her back and shoulders

Take her off to slavery, to endure toil and suffering;

And her cheeks waste away in most pitiful grief.   530

So did Odysseus shed a pitiful tear from beneath his brows.

(Homer, *Odyssey* 8.521-31. Greek text from Murray, 1919a: 296)

(My translation. Line numbers given for reader's convenience)

Example (31) has much in common with non-poetic comparisons. The poet says that Odysseus cried as a woman cried, and points of comparison are suggested. But despite relatively determinate respects in which the comparison is understood to hold, and despite the vehicle contributing to relevance as a description, there are still poetic effects evoked by (31).

In summary, elaborating upon points of comparison does not always 'narrow' interpretations. Points of comparison are not constitutive of simile, nor do they need to be obligatorily recovered in every case. What matters is the contribution the 'additional', linguistically-specified content makes to overall relevance (see §5.4). A further observation from this section is that it is entirely plausible that some comparisons could achieve relevance to different hearers/readers as either 'didactic' analogies or poetic comparisons. Moreover, there is no 'default' length of similes.

4.6 Similes are miniature narratives

The claim that similes are miniature narratives can really only apply to extended epic similes (such as in the poetry of Homer). Although there are cases where one could argue that the vehicle of a simile provides a narrative description, these are not common outside of the epic tradition, or those derivative of it, such as the mock-heroic poems of Alexander Pope

(perhaps, for formal reasons: there is less 'space' for a writer to experiment with more extended similes in shorter utterances). On the one hand, the more 'separable' a vehicle is from its surrounding narrative as a narrative episode in itself, the more 'literal' its interpretation tends to be (see example (31) above).

Some scholars of literature have noted that extended similes can function as miniature narratives. As such, they can offer 'pause' in moments of narrative excitement (e.g. Grandsen, 1984: 118; Hainsworth, 1991: 28), or 'variation' in an otherwise monotonous narrative (e.g. Kirk, 1962: 346f). These are not the kinds of function we are concerned with in this thesis. But what ought to be noted is that in all such cases where the vehicle offers description of a 'separable' scenario that I have found, these involve either exemplifications (such as (32)) or 'historically specific' scenarios (my terminology) as in (33a-b) (my emphasis):

> (32) But now, like one who rows,
>
> Proud of his skill, to reach a chosen point
>
> With an unswerving line, I fixed my view
>
> Upon the summit of a craggy ridge,
>
> The horizon's utmost boundary; far above
>
> Was nothing but the stars and the gray sky.
>
> (Wordsworth. *The Prelude*. Book I. Lines 367ff. *NA*: 783)

> (33a) **EXAMPLE REDACTED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS**

(Walcott, *Omeros* 3.31.1. Lines 30-33. 1990: 162)

(33b) **EXAMPLE REDACTED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS**

(Walcott, *Omeros* 1.5.1. Lines 62-70. 1990: 26f)

It is striking that the 'specificity' of the episode in, for example, the second underlined comparison in (33b) does not in any sense limit the range of weaker effects which are generated. Even though there is a great deal of 'additional' linguistically-specified material, which suggests a highly specific comparison, this can yield a range of weak implicatures. As I will argue in §5.4, the 'additional' material plays an important role in how weak effects are evoked: similes such as those in (32)-(33b) give the hearer/reader access to a wider range of concepts, each of which is associated with encyclopaedic assumptions, thus encouraging the reader to derive a wider range of cognitive effects. But extended, 'narrative' vehicles are not

the default form of similes. Nor do they require any special type of processing which distinguishes them from other similes.

4.7 Metaphor is better than simile

This assumption manifests itself in two ways in the theoretical literature. Firstly, many have assumed that there is a preference for metaphor *in all contexts* which must be explained by theory. As Glucksberg admits, the 'general agreement' that metaphors are 'richer and more striking than similes' is based mainly on intuition (2011: 12. See also Barnden, 2012: 275). Glucksberg and Keysar say that while similes can be 'intensified' by putting them in the form of metaphors, the reverse is not true (Glucksberg and Keysar, 1993: 406). Miller seems to think that metaphors require more work from the reader, which makes them more "interesting" than similes (Miller, 1993: 375). While metaphors are 'pregnant' with meaning (a phrase due to Empson), for Cavell "[s]imiles are just a little bit pregnant" (1969: 79).

I argued above (§4.3) that the 'felt' difference between the two phenomena is not strong evidence for how either metaphors or similes are understood. Given my account of simile understanding in Chapter 5, experimental participants will often favour metaphors over equivalent similes not because of an inherent ability of metaphors to achieve certain effects which similes cannot, but rather because similes do not achieve their effects in the same way as metaphors do. Therefore the experimental stimuli used ('equivalent' metaphors and similes) do not constitute minimal pairs. The second way in which such a claim has been made is that metaphor is somehow more 'poetic' than simile. As O'Donoghue has argued (2009), and as many examples in this thesis exemplify, this view can hardly be maintained.

On my account, poets use similes to achieve some effects which could otherwise be achieved by the deployment of metaphors, but often to achieve effects which could *not* be achieved by equivalent metaphors. Metaphors and similes are like apples and oranges. Poetic comparisons often achieve their weaker cognitive effects in a more 'incremental' way than metaphors do. The idea that metaphor is 'better' than simile is not one which is endorsed by the practice of English poets at least since the 16th century, nor was it in the Republican and Augustan eras of Roman literature, nor in the pre-Classical Greek epic tradition, nor in classical Arabic, nor in amongst the metaphysical and Romantic poets in English (see also §4.1). According to Bradley, similes are the most common figure of speech

in rap music (2009: 93). This suggests that we are dealing with some kind of prejudice against simile.

Zharikov and Gentner reported on experiments by which they investigated why metaphors "seem stronger and deeper" (2002: 976) than similes. The first problem with such a pursuit is that not everyone would agree with the assumption that *all* metaphors exhibit these properties more than *all* similes, and the examples I have found suggest that such formulations are reductive, unhelpful and not always true. Zharikov and Gentner give no justification for such a judgment other than that 'people report' such a distinction and are more 'conservative' in using metaphors than similes (*id.*, *ib.*), although they attribute a similar judgement to Glucksberg and Keysar (1990). Metaphors and similes are, to Zharikov and Gentner, different 'forms' of the same thing, and, hence, the issue of which is the more 'basic' form is of prime importance. They appear to want the distinction between categorisation and comparison to carry the weight of an explanation:

> "[T]he grammatical form of figurative statements has psychological force, with metaphor being the stronger, more categorical form."

> (Zharikov and Gentner, 2002: 976).

It would be uncharitable to assume that Zharikov and Gentner are equivocating between the claims 'metaphor is a form of categorization' and 'metaphor is itself categorical'. But unless they *do* mean this, there is no explanation for why they think it would suggest that metaphors are 'stronger than' similes. More worryingly, their methodology in the experiments they report is open to criticism (see *id.*, *ib.*: 978). A context was given to the participants in the form of a paragraph of text and then they were asked to choose either the metaphor or its simile equivalent. At best, all this could establish is that the *A is B*-form is preferred to the similar *A is like B*-form under certain circumstances, but not that metaphors are 'better than' similes. Their concluding discussion (especially *id.*, *ib.*: 980, Table 3) suggests that they are more concerned with etymology (figurative expressions being conventionalised, first appearing as novel similes, then metaphors, then as stable encoded senses of a lexeme) than with creative examples.

The idea that metaphors and similes differ in 'quality' somehow has long been criticised. Ortony cites the following from a poem by Longfellow (cited in Ortony, 1975: 51), repeated here in example (34):

> (34)...Her hair
>
> Is like the summer tresses of the trees,
>
> When twilight makes them brown, and on her cheek
>
> Blushes the richness of an autumn sky,
>
> With ever-shifting beauty. Then her breath,
>
> It is so like the gentle air of Spring,
>
> As, front the morning's dewy flowers, it comes
>
> Full of their fragrance, that it is a joy
>
> To have it round us, and her silver voice
>
> Is the rich music of a summer bird,
>
> Heard in the still night, with its passionate cadence.
>
> (Longfellow, *The Spirit of Poetry*. Reproduced in Ortony, 1975: 51)

According to Ortony, Longfellow "fail[s] to see any important cognitive differences between [metaphor and simile]" (*id., ib.*: 52). Even if this is too strong a claim (that the metaphors and similes here have commensurate effects), surely it is possible that metaphors and similes are 'better' at doing different things (see O'Donoghue, 2009 for a similar view)? Until we are clearer about what metaphors and similes are used for, and how these effects are generated, judgements about their relative merit are irrelevant to our theoretical considerations. Moreover, as §4.5 demonstrated, similes can be didactic and poetic at the same time (especially on a model of inferential communication which attributes genuine cognitive content to even weaker effects).

A related claim which has been advanced is that similes are preferred over metaphors *only* when the 'mapping' between tenor and vehicle is novel. In other words, whether metaphor or simile is 'better' depends upon the conceptual relationship between tenor and vehicle. This is an assumption endorsed by the comparison theorists such as Gentner and her colleagues who have advocated the 'career of metaphor' hypothesis. Some shortcomings of this approach have been addressed in the previous chapter (§3.6). I will not return to the hypothesis here. However, in order to assess the validity of such a claim we would require a definition of novel simile in advance, and this definition would have to allow for comparison between examples of metaphor and examples of simile. If the two phenomena achieve their effects in such radically different ways as I claim in this thesis, then assessing metaphor-simile 'preference' will not be possible by the experimental methodology adopted by Gentner and colleagues, as well as many others, because simile and metaphor are sensitive to context *in different ways*. In any case, such questions are of primary interest to etymologists and historical linguists, as their relevance to the issue of how metaphors and similes are processed is undermined by the data adduced here.

Moreover, one can make the exact *opposite* argument:

> "The difference between simile and metaphor is not merely technical. After all, there has to be some reason why similes so outnumber [sc. novel, or creative] metaphors in rap. […] Similes shine the spotlight on their subject more directly than do metaphors. They announce their artifice from the beginning, leaving little room for confusion. On a more practical note, similes are more immediately comprehensible to listeners, a virtue in rap's rapid-fire lyricism."

> (Bradley, 2009: 94)

I do not think that the relative 'comprehensibility' of similes over metaphors (whatever the fact of the matter turns out to be) is central to the difference in use of similes and metaphors. To use an example from Bradley, *I'm like new money* is scarcely more comprehensible than *I'm new money* (*id.*, *ib.*). However, Bradley's argument is based on the same vague intuitions about the 'directness' of metaphor as opposed to simile as many in the field of metaphor studies, yet he argues that this is a positive factor in fast

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comprehension of a form of oral poetry. This demonstrates how unhelpful such assumptions are in theoretical work on figurative language understanding.

I leave aside arguments about the 'vividness' of metaphor being directly related to the way in which metaphors are processed. For instance, Ortony argues that metaphors, unlike similes, do not require specification of the characteristics which the speaker wishes to "transfer" as a "coherent chunk" from the vehicle to the tenor. Hence metaphors "avoid discretizing the perceived continuity of experience and are thus closer to experience and consequently more vivid and memorable" (1975: 53). One of the assumptions of conceptual metaphor theory appears to be that metaphor 'is' how we understand the world, so linguistic realisations of underlying conceptual metaphors will inherit much of the vividness of experiences from which they are derived (see e.g. Lakoff, 2008; Ritchie, 2013 §5). What is missing from such analyses is a focus on metaphor as a feature of *language use*, rather than cognition *tout court*. And if metaphorical vividness is a property of cognition, then why shouldn't simile inherit the same 'vividness'? I believe that the views I critiqued in §4.3 above and those of this section are co-dependent: simile *has to be* a hedged metaphor to preserve the 'insight' that metaphor processing involves a privileged form of cognitive creativity.

4.8 Similes succeed and fail for different reasons to metaphor

I argue that claims such as (8), that the ways in which metaphors 'fail' differ radically from the ways in which similes 'fail', require extensive reformulation in the light of the full range of data. As everything is like everything else 'in endless ways' (Davidson, 1978/1984: 254), strictly speaking, similes can never 'fail'. Because the first interpretation consistent with the presumption of relevance communicated is the one that is accepted as the intended meaning of the utterance, similes can only really be said to 'fail' when the presumption of relevance they communicate turns out to be false, that is, where the hearer is not able to find *any* optimally relevant interpretation. As similes can achieve relevance by means of weak implicatures, we find that there are many cases where similes communicate *indeterminate* content which is relevant to establishing the respects in which the comparison holds.

Whereas, with metaphors, a certain kind of 'failure' can be interpreted in terms of the construction of the 'wrong' ad hoc concept, one which contributes to an overall interpretation which does *not* resemble the thought communicated by the speaker/author closely enough, there is no analogous way in which poetic comparisons can be said to 'fail'. This is because their contribution to the explicature does not undergo conceptual adjustment in the same way. There is a different kind of 'indeterminacy' involved (see §5.1).

This claim is the most difficult one to justify. It is quite unclear what researchers mean by 'success' and 'failure' in either simile or metaphor. For instance, (35a) might be far easier to understand than (35b):

(35a) Death is a tax-collector.

(35b) Death is a postman.

In interpreting (35a), there are a number of contextual assumptions which might facilitate the construction of the appropriate ad hoc concept TAX-COLLECTOR*, such as the proverbial inevitability of 'death and taxes'. The fact that I find (35b) more effortful to interpret makes (35b) *potentially* weaker than (35a). But is (35b) uninterpretable? Some may find (35b) far easier to construe, as 'postmen' come to your door to deliver the post, and such an assumption might give more direct access to the interpretation that death is inevitable. If an interpretation can be assigned, then how is it a 'failure'? Similar problems arise with claims of simile 'failure':

(35c) Death is like a tax-collector.

(35d) Death is like a postman.

The interpretation of (35c) is similar to that of (35a), and it comes about on the basis of similar contextual assumptions. Pilkington claims that some similes, such as (36), do fail:

(36) Black as the inside of a wolf's throat.

(Pilkington, 2000: 119. Originally from Coombes, 1963.)

However, (36) is still interpretable, and one can imagine a context in which it achieves a wide range of weak effects. I think that Pilkington's intuition that it is extremely *difficult* to

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interpret (36) is sound. However, one can (and this reader does) find an optimally relevant interpretation when we take into account the poetic effects which such an utterance evokes.

An utterance of (36) may fail to achieve relevance, but so could any other utterance. The burden in the case of (36) falls upon the hearer/reader to find the optimally relevant interpretation of the utterance, and some readers (such as Pilkington) will find that (36) does not justify the (subjectively) gratuitous effort that the presumption of relevance puts them through in order to come to a relevant interpretation, while others (such as myself) find that the effort is not gratuitous. Because I can find an interpretation of (36) which is consistent with the presumption of relevance (involving a degree of 'ominousness' which would not typically be communicated by, for example, *Black as night*), the utterance guarantees that this interpretation, which is partially paraphraseable and partially not, which is characterised by emotional effects, is the one communicated. Two important points emerge from discussion of such examples as (36). Firstly, 'failure' is a subjective judgement. Secondly, the 'failure' of (36) identified by Pilkington is a kind of 'utterance failure': failure of an utterance as a whole to achieve relevance, not failure of a linguistic expression to contribute anything to the explicature.

There is another sense in which comparisons can 'fail'. Poets often lament their inability to describe something fully by means of a comparison, as in (37a-c):

(37a) Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?

Thou art more lovely and more temperate.

(Shakespeare, *Sonnets.* 18.1f. Bevington (Ed.), 2004: 1716)

(37b) In all eternal grace you have some part,

But you like none, none you, for constant heart.

(Shakespeare, *Sonnets.* 53.13f. Bevington (Ed.), 2004: 1723)

(37c) What thou art we know not;

What is most like thee?

From rainbow clouds there flow not

Drops so bright to see

As from thy presence showers a rain of melody.

(Shelley, *To a Skylark*. Stanza 7. Lines 31-35. *NA*: 877)

The point of (37a-c) appears to be the same: not that the implied comparisons are uninterpretable, but that their interpretations will fall short of capturing the nature of the object (the beloved, the skylark) which the poet is attempting to describe. But note the subtle distinction Shelley makes between *what thou art* and *what is most like thee*: the poet does not know what the skylark *is*, but attempts to describe the object by comparisons which are *necessarily* insufficient. But most utterances fall short of communicating the thought they represent (Chapter 2). It is interesting that poets often see meditation of the achievements (and failings) of similes as a way of communicating the fact of, and their feelings towards, this 'gulf' between public and private representations.

4.9 Similes can be easily distinguished from literal comparisons

The claim that similes can be easily distinguished from literal comparisons is often associated with the claim that metaphors are easily distinguishable from literal predications. Levinson argues that comparisons are literally true, but similes are ("arguably") literally false (1983: 154f). However, metaphors are not always easily distinguishable from literal predications (hence the 'continuity view' of metaphor, hyperbole, approximation and literal uses given in §2.7) (see also *id.*, *ib.*: 151, example (182)). I argue not only that similes and non-poetic comparisons are often difficult to distinguish (and hence do not constitute a natural kind), but also that this fuzzy boundary between the ostensibly distinct phenomena is due to the fact that 'comparisons', the real natural kind, can vary in the type of contribution they make to relevance along two dimensions: (i) whether and to what extent they contribute to the generation of poetic effects; and (ii) to what extent those poetic effects are generated by virtue of the comparison instead of on the basis of contextual assumptions which are not

relevant to the comparison but to some other factors, such as the expected discourse goals of the speaker/author.

Croft and Cruse proposed a diagnostic to determine whether a formal comparison is a 'metaphorical simile', by which they appear to mean what I call here a simile (2004: 211). They claim that 'metaphorical similes' transform readily into metaphors by deletion of *like*, and 'statements of similarity' (non-poetic comparisons) do not. However, this produces false positives for some typical (non-poetic) comparisons which are rendered patently false by deletion of *like*, as in (38a-b):

(38a) You are like your father.

(38b) You are your father.

An utterance of (38b), if it is comprehensible at all, must be understood *as a metaphor*[60]. I explore other 'diagnostics' for simile in Chapter 5, §5.2.

There are a range of cases where 'literal' (strongly communicated) comparisons achieve poetic effects. These include 'borderline' cases (such as, perhaps, (25)-(27), section §4.5) as well as, less controversially, clearly non-figurative comparisons which nonetheless achieve poetic effects (such as (39)):

(39) Our two souls therefore, which are one,

Though I must go, endure not yet

A breach, but an expansion,

Like gold to airy thinness beat.

---

[60] Croft and Cruse give as examples of this *like*-deletion diagnostic *My house is (like) yours* and *Nectarines are (like) peaches* (2004: 211). These are not similes because *like*-deletion does not yield a metaphor. Despite their use of a symbol for anomalous utterances, the former, without *like*, is comprehensible. I have heard exactly this utterance. In Spanish it has become proverbial. It is not clear that the latter *cannot* be understood as a certain type of loose use either (a kind of approximation).

If they be two, they are two so

As stiff twin compasses are two;

Thy soul the fixed foot, makes no show

To move, but doth, if th'other do.

And though it in the center [sic] sit,

Yet when the other far doth roam,

It leans, and hearkens after it,

And grows erect, as that comes home.

Such wilt thou be to me, who must

Like th' other foot, obliquely run;

Thy firmness makes my circle just,

And makes me end, where I begun.

(Donne, *A Valediction Forbidding Mourning*. Stanzas 6-9. Lines 21-36. *NA*: 306f)

Even though (39) has been widely discussed in the theoretical literature as a *simile* (Addison, 1993; Fogelin, 1988: 102; Carston, 2010a: 296 and others) this does not mean that (39) is a prototypical simile. The poet communicates a large amount of linguistically-specified content as evidence towards the respects in which a comparison holds. Crucially, (39) achieves relevance (at least in part) by the determination of the respects in which the comparison holds, and the poet provides evidence for those respects. Although (39) does appear to achieve poetic effects, it is not necessarily the linguistically-specified content relevant to those respects which contributes primarily to the weak effects. And weak effects are what

we are primarily concerned with here. If examples such as (39) *do* have a great deal in common with non-poetic comparisons, this could well be why 'metaphysical conceits' such as (39) have been seen by some critics as poor examples of simile (see e.g. Mazzeo, 1952).

A more clear-cut case of a comparison which is not likely to be classed as a simile, but which nevertheless achieves poetic effects is the following from Sophocles' *Ajax* (my translation):

(40) O child! Be more fortunate than [your] father,

But in every other respect alike.[61]

(Sophocles, *Ajax*. Lines 550-1. Greek text from Jebb, 1897: 185)

There are a range of weak effects which are generated by Ajax's utterance. These may include a range of implicatures about his state of mind. This is a particularly poignant moment in the play, as the audience is well aware by this point that Ajax has suffered numerous indignities despite his bravery and fame, and that Ajax has already resigned himself to the inevitability of his suicide. But such poetic effects are *secondary* to the comparison itself. It is not the fact that a comparison is being made which gives rise to poetic effects, but the interaction of the strongly communicated comparison and a range of contextual assumptions which have been communicated elsewhere in the play (which will therefore be more manifest to the audience than would otherwise be the case). In short, the fact that a comparison generates poetic effects is not a sufficient condition for simile. *How* those effects are generated is important.

Another diagnostic which has been proposed for the purpose of distinguishing similes and non-poetic comparisons is that the latter are symmetrical while the former are not: tenor and vehicle can be reversed in a literal comparison "without there being any consequential change in meaning" (Bredin, 1998: 73; Ortony, 1993) (see also Chapter 5, §5.2.1). For instance, while utterances of (41a) and (41b) intuitively express the same comparison, and, hence, have much the same meaning, (42a) and (42b) do not:

(41a) Lions are like tigers.

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[61] My discussion also applies if we translate *be like him* for *alike* (line 551: *homoios)*.

(41b) Tigers are like lions.

(42a) Soldiers are like lions.

(42b) Lions are like soldiers.

Bredin explains the difference between the symmetrical and 'predicative' comparisons by comparison with identity statements such as (43a) and predications such as (43b):

(43a) Elton John is Reginald Dwight.

(43b) Elton John is a songwriter.

'Symmetrical comparisons' like (41a-b) are akin to (43a) because "each identifies the other", but 'predicative comparisons' like (42a-b) are like (43b) because "one of them describes the other" (*id. ib.*: 74). Hence, non-poetic comparisons involve a 'statement of a relation' and similes involve 'a statement of the character of the subject (*id.*, *ib.*: 75). Plausible as these assumptions may be, I will explain 'directionality' in simile interpretation as *emerging from* simile understanding, rather than *causing* a comparison to be interpreted figuratively (§5.2.1). We often find non-symmetrical comparisons whose meaning would be intuitively classed as 'literal'. An utterance of (44a) is likely to communicate a 'literal' comparison which holds in different respects to that in (44b):

(44a) Be more like your father.

(44b) May your father be more like you.

For Ortony, 'ordinary' comparisons ('similarity statements') communicate that the tenor and the vehicle share certain predicates, whereas similes do not:

"The interpretation of ordinary similarity statements can therefore be regarded as involving the determination of shared high-salient predicates [...]. The point about similes is that this procedure will produce *no* such shared predicates at all, unless those predicates are themselves interpreted metaphorically."

(Ortony, 1993: 348. His emphasis)

However, there are certain problems with taking such a strong distinction between similes and other comparisons. Firstly, it seems to suggest that similes are the same as metaphorical predications. Secondly, it suggests that similes cannot be both cognitive (in the sense of communicating *any* truth-evaluable content beyond the truism *A is like B*) and poetic. But, as example (26) in §4.5 demonstrates, even didactic analogies can evoke poetic effects by virtue of communicating a comparison which sets up a high degree of correspondence between tenor and vehicle. The distinction Ortony wants here is far too strong.

4.10 Desiderata in a theory of simile understanding

Most of my findings in this chapter have been negative, but my discussion points to a number of positive conclusions:

(i) Similes are different to metaphors in how they are understood, but sometimes have similar effects.

(ii) Points of comparison are not always directly relevant to how similes achieve poetic effects.

(iii) Something about how similes are understood means that, perhaps unlike metaphors, they can never 'fail'.

(iv) Similes are not always easily distinguishable from (non-figurative) comparisons.

Some of these claims will be more controversial than others. Many metaphor theorists will be happy with the first two claims, but less so with the other two. But the above four desiderata, which I claim any theory of simile understanding must confront, are compatible with the following hypothesis: *Similes are comparisons deployed to communicate poetic effects*. This forms the core of my account of how similes are understood in the following chapter.

Chapter 5: How similes are understood

This thesis addresses how similes are understood from the perspective of an ostensive-inferential theory of utterance understanding. I am not advocating a theory of how concepts are judged to be similar or not (see e.g. Tversky, 1977. Cf. the articles in Vosniadou and Ortony (eds.), 1989 Part I). What matters for theorists of communication is why communicating that *A is like B* can generate poetic effects by virtue of the communication of a comparison in some cases and not in others. Another departure from most previous work on simile is that I do not conflate metaphor and simile (see Chapters 3 and 4. Exceptions to this trend include Tirrell, 1991; Sperber and Wilson, 2008/2012; Carston, 2002a; Carston and Wearing, 2011; O'Donoghue, 2009; Israel, *et al.*, 2004; Glucksberg and Haught, 2006; Roncero, *et al.*, 2012). In fact, the account I give here of simile is also radically different from the account of metaphor understanding current in relevance theory (e.g. Carston, 2002a; Sperber and Wilson, 2008/2012; Carston, 2010a; see §2.7 and §3.1). As Chapter 4 of this thesis makes clear, there are a range of competing intuitions about the relationship between metaphor and simile, and it is an open question which intuitions are relevant to theorising about how similes are understood. When I talk of 'my account of comparison understanding', what I mean is the account of those expressions (comparisons) which may be interpreted as either non-poetic comparisons (which some describe as 'literal' comparisons) or poetic comparisons (that is, similes). For reasons of simplicity, I focus only on cases which have a particular syntactic form. Many similes are of one of the following forms:

(i) *A is like B*.

(ii) *A* VERBS like *B.*

(iii) *A is as Φ as B.*

My account of how comparisons are understood generalises across these cases. I discuss examples like (i) and (ii) in §5.1 and (iii) in §5.4.

Unlike certain theorists (e.g. Glucksberg, 2001; Fogelin, 1988; Lakoff and Johnson, 2003. See Chapter 3) I do not see metaphor and simile as being understood in the essentially the same way. Metaphors are not a type of (elliptical, or implicit) simile, nor are similes a type of

('hedged') metaphor. If this is the case, then we need a different hypothesis about how similes are understood. My account begins with a simple hypothesis: that similes are comparisons. More precisely, similes are a particular use of certain types of comparison (such as those of the forms given in (i)-(iii)). The question which then needs to be addressed is: if similes are understood as comparisons, then does the fact that they are comparisons explain *why* they have the effects they typically do (poetic effects)? I answer in the affirmative.

In Chapter 4 I argued that there is little evidence that metaphors and similes are understood in a similar way, even though this is a widespread assumption. But even if we accept that they are understood in a similar way, there is no general agreement on what the relevant similarities between metaphor and simile are. Moreover, if we are concerned with how utterances are understood, the important question is not whether metaphors and similes are similar in terms of their syntax (even though similes are far more similar to comparisons than they are to metaphors), or whether they are even similar in terms of their effects. We need to explain how the form of the utterance in each case causes the effects such utterances typically cause.

As Sperber and Wilson put it, "[s]tylistic differences are just differences in the way relevance is achieved" (1995: 224). Because utterances communicate a presumption of their own optimal relevance, the form of the utterance is understood to be the optimally relevant one. In the case of the relevance theoretic account of metaphor understanding defended in Chapter 2 (§2.7), the fact that a particular lexical item is used to communicate a concept which it does not encode, and whose construction will require an (effortful) expansion of the context of utterance on the part of the hearer, justifies the hearer in assuming that a wide range of assumptions which are made marginally more manifest during that process form part of the intended, optimally relevant content of the utterance. There is a *causal* link between (a) the relationship of the lexically-encoded concept to the concept communicated, and (b) the poetic effects that are generated. What is it about certain comparisons which *causes* the communication of poetic effects? Why do these comparisons evoke poetic effects and not others, which are also of the forms given above in (i)-(iii)?

In §5.1 I define simile as a particular *use* of comparison. Although my view cuts against the consensus, there are researchers who pay attention to the formal identity between similes and certain comparison constructions (e.g. Wikberg, 2008: 141; Barnden, 2012: 265). Certain comparisons achieve relevance by virtue of the fact that communicating that *A* is like *B* in certain respects is relevant. These are *non-poetic comparisons* (*Tigers are like lions*, *His jacket is as blue as his jeans*, and so on). But because determining the respects in which a comparison holds is the responsibility of the hearer/reader, a speaker/author can communicate that *A* is like *B* in the expectation that her utterance will achieve overall relevance primarily *not* by virtue of determination of the respects in which the comparison holds, but by virtue of the weak implicatures that the utterance communicates. It is these comparisons which I call *poetic comparisons* (*The soldiers are like lions*, *His jacket is as blue as the clear Saharan sky*, and so on). In the poetic cases, the determination of points of comparison is less important to the achievement of overall relevance than the communication of poetic effects. The result of mutual parallel adjustment in the interpretation of a poetic comparison will often involve a wide array of weak implicatures (poetic effects). This weakly communicated implicit content constitutes the bulk of the relevant overall interpretation of the utterance. But an extremely *indeterminate* set of points of comparison may or may not be communicated as part of what I call the *comparison-relevant content*. The term 'poetic comparison' picks out a class of phenomena which overlaps significantly with the types of poetic simile we wish to explain. The question at this point becomes: does the determination of the comparison-relevant content constitute part of the implicit or the explicit content of the utterance? This is discussed in the following section.

Because the pre-theoretic category of simile is not necessarily commensurate with the phenomena my account explains, when I talk about 'simile' what I mean is 'poetic comparison'. I use the terms interchangeably from now on (unless otherwise specified). One consequence of my reformulation of the definition of simile (as poetic comparison) is that it suggests that previous attempts at distinguishing simile from 'literal' (what I call 'non-poetic') comparison by means of diagnostics based upon conceptual relationships between tenor and vehicle are flawed. None of the proposed diagnostics pick out just similes from the class of comparison constructions. Moreover, my account helps to explain why such

generalisations about the conceptual relationships between tenor and vehicle tend to hold (§5.2). A further prediction which my hypothesis about simile understanding makes is that qualifying simile (*A is very like B*, *A is quite like B*, and so on) should not significantly affect how 'poetic' a simile is judged to be (§5.3). In addition, I have observed in the literary data that when points of comparison (explained in §5.1) are linguistically specified in similes (*A is like B in terms of C*, *A is as ADJECTIVE as B*, and so on), they affect the poetic effects generated by a simile in a particular way (§5.4). How 'explained' and 'extended' similes (see §4.4, §4.5) are understood can be captured in these terms.

5.1 When is a comparison a simile?

The key to how similes are understood lies in the relationship between similes and other comparisons, not between similes and metaphors (see also e.g. Ortony, 1993; Israel, *et al.*, 2004: 124). I focus upon those sorts of comparison which can be interpreted in a 'poetic' and a 'non-poetic' way. The simplest examples are of the form *A is like B*, *A VERBS like B* or *A is as ADJECTIVE as B*, with variations upon each pattern. In order to capture the difference between what is communicated by poetic and non-poetic comparisons, I use the following notation as exemplified in (1)-(1a):

(1) *Utterance*: *A* is like *B*.

(1a) *Comparison-relevant content [in square brackets]*: *A* is like *B* [in terms of $\{PROPERTY_1, PROPERTY_2, ...\}$]

A speaker of (1) commits themselves at least to the content of the utterance as specified in (1a). What I mean by the 'comparison-relevant content' of the comparison is that content of the utterance (whether it is explicit or implicit) which *must* be recovered by the hearer in order for the utterance to be optimally relevant and which can be captured in terms of the respects in which the comparison holds (points of comparison). As the following will make clear, there is conflicting evidence over whether this contributes to *explicit* content of the utterance or not. But, as I will explain, the key feature of my account is that (i) the recovery of such content constitutes one way in which comparisons can achieve relevance, and (ii) even when such content is not determinate, the fact that a comparison is being communicated plays a role in the hearer's optimally relevant interpretation.

Because anything can be 'like' anything else (see Goodman, 1976: 77), an utterance of (2) cannot communicate only the explicature in (2a):

(2) Pies are like chocolate.

(2a) *Explicature*: ?Pies are like chocolate.

If (2a) simply constituted the relevant interpretation of (2) then it would fail to be informative. No positive cognitive effects could be inferred from (2a) alone. In other words, (2a) would never be relevant to an individual without either: (i) further specification of the respects in which the comparison holds; or (ii) providing access to assumptions which *could* contribute to an optimally relevant interpretation as implicatures of the utterance.

Therefore, the speaker of a comparison (as in (1) or (2)) is understood as claiming that a similarity between *A* and *B* obtains in terms of certain properties (which I give in (1a) in SMALL CAPS in {braces}). These properties are constructed on the responsibility of the hearer because the guarantee of optimal relevance communicated by the comparison necessitates the determination of such respects *in a particular context*. I call these properties *points of comparison*. The set of points of comparison is potentially open-ended because it is determined on the responsibility of the hearer in order to develop an overall interpretation of the speaker's utterance which is optimally relevant.

What is the nature of these properties? The communicative principle of relevance justifies certain hypotheses about the nature of the properties communicated as part of the set of points of comparison. An uncontroversially non-poetic comparison is given in (3):

(3) *Utterance*: Soldiers are like sailors.

An utterance of (3) will likely communicate at least the comparison-relevant content as given in (3a):

(3a) Soldiers are like sailors [in terms of being {BRAVE, MILITARY-PERSONNEL, etc.}]

It cannot be the case that (3) communicates that *Soldiers are like sailors* in any respects at all. In order for any assumption about the comparability of soldiers and sailors to enter into valid inferences, it must be determinate to some degree. We can capture that determinacy

in terms of the points of comparison which are communicated on a particular occasion of utterance. Given these observations, (2a) is insufficient as a characterisation of the content of (2) *in any context*.

Is the comparison-relevant content part of the explicature of the utterance? The way non-poetic comparisons are understood may be taken as evidence that the set of points of comparison communicated by a comparison do form part of the explicit content. For instance, comparisons can be used as indirect answers to questions as in (4) and (5):

> (4) *Adrian*: Terry's a xenophobe.   [Where Terry is a soldier.]
>
> *Beatrice*: Soldiers are like sailors.

Beatrice's utterance in (4) guarantees its own optimal relevance. In order to have relevant contextual effects in Adrian's cognitive environment it is likely to make more manifest assumptions which either reinforce or contradict the assumption communicated by Adrian that *Terry is a xenophobe*. In order to license the appropriate inferences, Beatrice's utterance has comparison-relevant content such as that in (4a), which allows Adrian to infer the implicature in (4b):

> (4a) *Comparison-relevant content*: SOLDIERS are like SAILORS [in being {TRAVELLING-A-LOT, ADVENTUROUS, PROFESSIONAL-MILITARY, BRAVE, etc.}]
>
> (4b) *(Strongly) implicated conclusion*: Terry is not (likely to be) a xenophobe.

Because Terry is a soldier, and Beatrice's utterance communicates (in part) that soldiers travel a lot and are adventurous, then this legitimates the implicated conclusion that Terry is not (or is not likely to be) a xenophobe. The comparison-relevant content of Beatrice's utterance depends upon contextual assumptions which are: (i) made more manifest by access to the concepts SOLDIER and SAILOR; but (ii) are not limited to the overlap of encyclopaedic assumptions between the two concepts. Moreover, it is not just assumptions about the vehicle concept SAILORS which play a part in the determination of the comparison-relevant content of her utterance in (4). Expectations of the way in which her utterance will achieve relevance, and assumptions made more manifest by the tenor concept SOLDIERS also play a role in: (i) determining which properties are communicated as points of comparison;

and (ii) determining the *centrality* of the points of comparison communicated. The potential point of comparison, made manifest by both tenor and vehicle concept, that soldiers and sailors are stereotypically BRAVE, is not necessarily communicated. Whether Beatrice's utterance communicates that point of comparison (amongst others) depends upon the context. Those properties which are most likely to be communicated as part of the comparison-relevant content I list first (from left to right) in the braces. It should be noted that my account raises no theoretical objection to the set of points of comparison being *open* (hence my use of ellipses in (3a) and (4a)).

The interpretation of (4) contrasts radically with the identical, non-poetic comparison uttered by Betty in (5):

(5) *Alan*: Tim's a bigamist. [Where Tim is a soldier]

Betty: Soldiers are like sailors.

(5a) *Explicature*: SOLDIERS are like SAILORS [in being {HAVING-MULTIPLE-RELATIONSHIPS, TRAVELLING-A-LOT, ADVENTUROUS, PROFESSIONAL-MILITARY, BRAVE, etc.}]

Here, the expectation that Betty's utterance will be relevant to Alan determines a *differently structured set* of points of comparison as part of the explicit content of her utterance. If Alan already has an assumption associated with the concept SAILOR that (for instance) *Sailors can have multiple families in different ports* he need merely access such an assumption as part of the context of utterance. But, Alan need not *have* that stereotypical assumption about sailors in order to understand Betty: he merely needs to construct a property such as HAVING-MULTIPLE-RELATIONSHIPS as part of the set of points of comparison. And the presumption of optimal relevance communicated by Betty guarantees that he will have to entertain (whether he already does so or not) an assumption such as that. This assumption provides the appropriate property which licenses inferences such as (5b):

(5b) *(Strongly) implicated conclusion*: Tim is (or is likely to be, or could be) a bigamist.

We can be sure that the points of comparison have to be supplied by either (i) encyclopaedic assumptions made manifest by either the tenor or the vehicle, or (ii) other contextual

assumptions which are manifest for reasons other than the use of particular lexical items (such as discourse objectives, recently processed utterances, and so on).

At this stage, the evidence that (i) points of comparison are central to the comparison-relevant content of a comparison to different degrees and (ii) that the comparison-relevant content plays a role in determining certain implicatures of an utterance of a comparison, is compatible with the view that the comparison-relevant content forms part of the explicit content of the utterance. Moreover, speaker intuitions about the truth or falsity of a (non-poetic) comparison suggest that utterances of comparisons *say* that something is like something else in certain respects. For example, one can disagree with (6) and (7):

(6) This chair is like a Chippendale.

(7) Wasabi is like mustard.

What does disagreeing with (6) and (7) consist in? The exchange in (6a) suggests that the comparison-relevant content of (6) must be understood by Bella as something like that indicated in (6b):

(6a) *Alex*: This chair is like a Chippendale

Bella: No it's not. [i.e. It's cheap and flimsy.]

(6b) This chair is like a Chippendale [in being {HIGH-QUALITY, EXPENSIVE, BEAUTIFULLY-CONSTRUCTED, etc.}]

Similarly, in (7a), the content which is understood as communicated by the comparison must include properties such as those indicated as part of the set of points of comparison in (7b):

(7a) *Alex*: Wasabi is like mustard.

Bella: No it's not. It's like horseradish.

(7b) Wasabi is like mustard [in being {CONDIMENT, HOT, SAVOURY, etc.}].

Moreover, Bella could have replied to Alex's comparison in (7a) with (7c):

(7c) *Bella*: No it's not. It's more like horseradish.

The fact that one can deny that *A* is like *B* as Bella does in (6a) suggests that the explicit content of the comparison includes specific respects in which the comparison is taken as holding. Also, the content of the comparison indicated in (7b), for instance, suggests that the comparison-relevant content in a given context does not include irrelevant properties (such as that wasabi and mustard are both VEGETABLE-IN-ORIGIN, and so on). Bella is not denying that wasabi is like mustard *in any respects whatsoever*, rather that the comparison-relevant content which *Wasabi is like mustard* makes available in that context is not optimally relevant. Moreover, Bella's response in (7c) suggests that the content communicated by two different comparisons can be compared. But what exactly is being compared? It cannot be the case that Bella is expecting Alex to recover all the respects in which wasabi is like mustard and all the respects in which wasabi is like horseradish, because these sets of shared properties will be vast. Rather, it is far more plausible that she is claiming that it is more relevant to say *Wasabi is like horseradish* in this particular context. Why would that be the case? Because, from Bella's point of view, the properties which *Wasabi is like horseradish* make available in the context as part of the comparison-relevant content of the utterance are more relevant in terms of the ease with which they are accessed and in terms of the assumptions which they make available as part of the implicit content of the utterance (implicated assumptions such as *if you don't like horseradish, you won't like wasabi*, and so on).

Are the properties which are accessed as points of comparison conceptual? Because they play a part in inferential processing, they must form proper constituents of conceptual representations, and, hence, they must be concepts. But, as the discussion in Chapter 2, §2.9 outlines, concepts are addresses or nodes in memory, not definitions. Moreover, there are many non-lexicalised concepts (including perhaps the concept HAVING-MULTIPLE-RELATIONSHIPS which I have suggested as a point of comparison in (4a)). As current relevance theoretic lexical pragmatics sees content words as typically encoding conceptual schemas rather than well-defined concepts (Sperber and Wilson, 1998/2012; Carston, 2002a: 359ff), and these conceptual schemas need to be inferentially enriched in order to contribute to an explicature, it is reasonable to generalise about a large proportion of stable concepts which might serve as points of comparison. These, too, could be conceptually schematic, and the

context-specific conceptual content they contribute to the set of points of comparison is likely to be ad hoc.

But does the evidence that the comparison-relevant content (i) can contribute to implicatures, (ii) can be denied, and (iii) can be evaluated in contrast with the comparison-relevant content of other comparisons, guarantee that the comparison-relevant content constitutes part of the explicature of a comparison? This is not necessarily the case even for non-poetic comparisons. It follows from the relevance-theoretic view of communicated concepts that when confronted with an utterance such as (7), a hearer must find the appropriate concept communicated by the vehicle *mustard* on the basis of the concept lexically-encoded by that word, as in (7d):

(7d) Wasabi is like MUSTARD*.

Although I have used an asterisk to mark that the concept communicated is non-identical with the lexically-encoded concept mustard, we should remember that the communicated concept MUSTARD* is not likely to be as radical a departure from the lexically-encoded concept as in the metaphorical cases (e.g. *Achilles is a lion* communicates *Achilles is a LION*). The concept MUSTARD* is *narrower* in terms of its denotation as opposed to the lexically-encoded concept MUSTARD (see Chapter 2, §2.9). But the communicated concept does not provide access to irrelevant properties that the lexically-encoded concept MUSTARD provides access to.

On this view, points of comparison are merely properties which feature in contextual assumptions which are made accessible by processing the vehicle. These assumptions will play a role in deriving implicatures, as in examples (4) and (5). Whether these properties form part of the explicit content of the utterance or not remains an open question. In the following I will defend the view that the comparison-relevant content of comparisons constitutes part of the explicit content of an utterance[62]. But one important issue in

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[62] In an earlier stage of this research I was agnostic over whether comparison-relevant content counted as explicit or implicit content, but suggested that comparison-relevant content is more likely to be part of the implicit content of an utterance. As a result of a number of discussions with my supervisor Diane Blakemore and the responses of the

developing an account of comparisons is that it is sometimes difficult to tell if we are dealing with a poetic or a non-poetic comparison. An utterance of (8a) is likely to be interpreted as a non-poetic comparison, and (8b) a poetic comparison, but intuitions about (8c) may vary:

(8a) Bagheera [my pet panther] is like a lion [in being {FELINE, CARNIVOROUS, etc.}].

(8b) Achilles [a Greek leader] is like a lighthouse [in being {PROVIDING-GUIDANCE, etc.}].

(8c) Achilles [a Greek warrior] is like a lion [in being {BRAVE, etc.}].

Even though I have already used examples such as (8c) to illustrate my argument, one could argue that an utterance of (8c) would communicate few, if any, poetic effects, and that the comparison-relevant content of (8c) is likely to be determinate (as in (8d)), consisting of a single point of comparison which is standardly accessed by the hearer in understanding the string *like a lion*:

(8d) Achilles [a Greek warrior] is like a lion [in being {BRAVE}].

So far, it might seem parsimonious to argue for an account where utterances of non-poetic comparisons such as (8a) communicate comparison-relevant content as part of the explicature (as does the 'standardised' example in (8d)), whereas poetic comparisons like (8b) communicate implicit comparison-relevant content. This is because we are trying to explain why (8b) tends to correlate with weak effects whereas (8a) does not. I raise a number of objections to this approach below.

If we concede the possibility that there are standardised simile vehicles, even if (8c)/(8d) constitutes a borderline case, and that similes containing such vehicles are interpreted in a similar way to dead metaphors (see Chapter 3, *passim*), then this raises the question of where such standardised interpretations come from. My claim is that it is far easier to argue that novel uses of comparisons, interpreted as in (8c), stabilise over time into standardised expressions which communicate a very narrow, determinate and *explicit* comparison-

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examiners for this thesis, Robyn Carston and Domenyk Eades, I decided that it simply could not be the case that comparison-relevant content is implicit.

relevant content and few poetic effects, than an account which claims that the comparison-relevant content in (8c) is implicit but that in (8d) is explicit.

Further circumstantial evidence for the explicitness of comparison-relevant content can be found in comparing poetic comparisons to certain other constructions which involve the concepts related to similarity. Utterances of (9a-b) do not appear to evoke the same sorts of poetic effects as the poetic comparisons examined above, even though they clearly encourage the hearer to compare the tenor and the vehicle in order to understand the utterance:

(9a) Achilles resembles a lion.

(9b) Achilles is similar to a lion.

Why might *Achilles is like a lion* evoke poetic effects while *Achilles resembles a lion* does not[63]? A further piece of evidence in this regard is that it appears from the secondary literature that not every era of poetry exhibits similes (see §4.1). If this constitutes evidence that not every linguistic community has comparison constructions which are amenable to the evocation of poetic effects, and if examples such as (9a-b) suggest that not every comparison construction can be used to evoke poetic effects in the way poetic comparisons do, then one might ask whether certain comparisons *require* contextual elaboration of

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[63] I here am in disagreement with Israel, Harding and Tobin, who claim that "any construction which can express a literal comparison should in principle be available to form a simile" (2004: 125. See also Chapter 4, §4.1. They give examples involving *is the equivalent of*, *the character of*, *to think of* A *as* B, and *to view* A *as* B, but do not explain them at length. They do not address cases like A *resembles* B. The quote above contrasts with what they write on the same page: "Broadly speaking, any construction which prompts the conceptualization of two distinct figures [sc. Concepts, or entities] and an assessment of the similarities and differences between them will count as a comparison" (*id., ib.*). This seems to be even further from my view, and might encompass any sort of conceptual mapping (see Chapter 3, §§3.6-7). It would also make utterances such as *Look! Achilles! Look! A Lion!* similes.

comparison-relevant content and others do not, and hence can achieve relevance primarily through the communication of poetic effects. One way of capturing this difference might be that (9a) communicates that Achilles is like a lion in certain respects, and that those points of comparison form part of the explicature of the utterance, whereas in poetic comparisons the comparison-relevant content forms part of the implicit content (implicatures which are derived on the basis of the explicit content).

Carston has given the following definition of explicature (also cited in Chapter 2, §2.8, *q.v.*):

> **Explicature**: An assumption (proposition) communicated by an utterance is an 'explicature' of the utterance if and only if it is a development of (a) a linguistically-encoded logical form of the utterance, or of (b) a sentential subpart of the logical form.
>
> (Carston, 2002a: 124)

Although my proposal for how similes are understood allows a great degree of freedom in how the hearer goes about the process of enriching the explicature, perhaps even more so than in cases where a single (ad hoc) conceptual element is supplied as part of the explicature, as in the relevance theoretic account of metaphor outlined in Chapter 2, §2.12, it is clear that the comparison-relevant content of (4a), (5a), (6b) and (7b) above counts as a 'development' of a sentential subpart of a linguistically-encoded logical form: namely, the string *like B* in the comparison itself.

The role of determining sets of points of comparison raises a particular possibility on a relevance theoretic framework. The presumption of relevance communicated by a comparison guarantees that the comparison is relevant. It does not guarantee that determining the set to a high degree of determinacy will be relevant. The *implicit* content of a comparison can also contribute to the relevance of the utterance, and this implicit content can include weak implicatures. It is those comparisons which achieve relevance primarily through a wide array of weak implicatures (poetic effects) which we can properly call poetic comparisons. This category of poetic comparisons overlaps to a significant degree with the pre-theoretic notion of 'simile' with which I began this thesis. In short, my account, whether comparison-relevant content turns out to be part of explicit content or not, predicts that some comparisons will achieve relevance in this way. The two conditions which must be met

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for a comparison to achieve relevance as a poetic comparison are: (i) that the comparison construction does not require that a determinate set of points of comparison be recovered in understanding the utterance (ruling out cases such as (9a) and (9b)); and (ii) that such a determinate set of points of comparison is not easily recoverable (as in (8a), understood as a typical non-poetic comparison, or (8d), as a 'standardised' comparison).

At this point, it may seem that I am arguing that every comparison (including poetic comparisons) communicates a set of determinate properties for the utterance to be understood. But comparison-relevant content is not always determinate. An utterance of (10) is comprehensible whether: (i) one understands it as communicating that *Achilles leapt like a lion leaps* (that is, with resolution of syntactic ellipsis); or (ii) one understands the comparison as obtaining more loosely, as suggested by the following paraphrase: *Achilles leapt in such a way as would remind one of a lion*:

> (10) Achilles leapt like a lion.

The second way of interpreting the comparison in (10) might not hold in terms of the lion's LEAPING, but rather in terms of Achilles' BRAVERY in so conducting himself, his APPEARANCE, his INTENT, or indefinitely many other respects (or structured sets of respects). It is precisely this second 'reading' of the simile in (10) which is of most interest in terms of the understanding of poetic simile. Focussing on determinate points of comparison would be misleading. Moreover, even with the first 'reading' there is room for a poetic interpretation[64].

Nevertheless, in many cases of poetic comparison, certain properties *can* be inferred to be properly applicable to the tenor on the basis of the vehicle. This explains why non-poetic comparisons are often taken as communicating *primarily* that *A* and *B* share certain properties, but allows for poetic comparisons to communicate merely that comparing *A* and *B* will be relevant. For many (but not all) of the poetic examples, there is no *determinate* set of properties, whether stable concepts or ad hoc concepts, which can be taken as being

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[64] I have raised the possibility that *is a lion* is to some extent standardised in the foregoing text. However, it seems likely that example (10) *Achilles leapt like a lion* will be interpreted as a poetic comparison in most contexts.

communicated by the utterance. For example, the following constructed exchange in (11) can help to illustrate what makes a comparison a simile:

(11) *Odysseus*: The odds are against him. Is he going to survive the battle?

Ajax: Achilles is like a lion.

Odysseus has to identify what Ajax meant in uttering *Achilles is like a lion*. Because Ajax's utterance communicates a presumption of its own optimal relevance, Odysseus is justified in interpreting his utterance as communicating implicatures such as the following:

(11a) Achilles is brave.

(11b) Achilles is going to survive the battle.

A communicated assumption such as (11b) is crucial to Ajax's utterance achieving relevance. But, in order for Odysseus to validly infer the implicated conclusion in (11b), Ajax's utterance in (11) has to make manifest certain contextual premises such as (11c)-(11d):

(11c) Lions are brave.

(11d) If someone is brave they will survive the battle.

But, importantly, the following inference is *not* valid:

Premise 1: Achilles is like a lion.	[Developed from utterance (11)]
<u>*Premise 2*: Lions are brave.</u>	<u>[(11c)]</u>
Conclusion: Achilles is brave.	[(11a)]

Ajax must be expecting his utterance to achieve relevance as contributing to an implicature like (11b) by means of a contextual assumption such as (11a). Comparisons such as Ajax's utterance in (11) must therefore communicate explicatures which are informationally richer than propositions such as premise 1 above. So premise 1 must be more specific, as in the following inference

Premise 1: Achilles is like a lion [in being {BRAVE, etc.}]

> *Premise 2*: Lions are brave.   [(11c)]

> *Conclusion*: Achilles is brave.   [(11a)]

But Ajax's utterance in (11) also provides access to wide range of weak implicatures. So is (11) a poetic comparison or a non-poetic comparison? This will depend on how it is interpreted by the hearer: whether it provides access to a relatively determinate comparison-relevant content, and few poetic effects, or whether it will achieve relevance primarily through the evocation of poetic effects.

The indeterminacy of the explicit content of certain comparisons becomes clearer still where the set of points of comparisons is itself more indeterminate. In (12), there is no highly manifest property (such as BRAVE) which can be said to be a necessary member of the set of points of comparison:

> (12) *Odysseus*: Who do you love most of the men in our army?

> *Ajax*: Achilles is like a lion.

Here Ajax's utterance has the same linguistic form as that in (11). But he is clearly using the comparison in (12) to communicate something different to that of his utterance in (12). So what is he communicating? A wide range of weak implicatures which contribute to an impression of Achilles as being a certain way, and which justify a stronger implicature such as (12a), which is understood to be strongly communicated:

> (12a) Ajax loves Achilles most of the men in [his and Odysseus'] army.

But, importantly, the weaker impression about Achilles is also communicated. Why? Because Ajax's utterance is indeterminate on at least two levels: (i) he is providing indirect evidence for an implicated conclusion such as (12a), not a representation of that assumption (such as *I love Achilles most*); (ii) he is doing so by means of an expression which is itself indeterminate at the level of explicit content. This explicit indeterminacy justifies the pursuit of weaker effects on the part of the hearer/reader (here, Odysseus).

Ajax's utterance in (11) communicates not only the explicit content required to license the appropriate *strong* implicatures, but also a range of weak implicatures. How do we know? If

Ajax had intended to provide access to the assumption that Achilles is brave, he could have simply said so. His utterance guarantees its own optimal relevance, and so other assumptions which are made more manifest by the utterance fall under Ajax's communicative intentions as part of the intended context, and provide a guarantee to Odysseus that a wider range of contextual effects are part of the implicit content of the utterance. In (12), it is far harder to see what the explicit content of Ajax's utterance might be, other than that Achilles is like a lion in some respect or other. Does Ajax fail to communicate anything? Absolutely not. He communicates many of the same weak implicatures as he does in (11). But it is clear that (12) is *weaker* than (11), even though the utterance is identical. Can the self-same utterance vary in explicitness? It depends what the thought communicated might be. But the set of points of comparison and the range of weak implicatures are arrived at by a process of mutual parallel adjustment.

It seems that (11e) is a far better approximation of the explicit content of Ajax's utterance in (11) than (11a) or (11b):

(11e) Achilles is like a lion in being {BRAVE*, WILD*, FIERCE*, HUNGRY*, HANDSOME*, etc.}

The properties given in (11e) in braces are all ad hoc (hence the asterisks). They represent particularly lion-like ways of being *brave*, *wild* and so on. The set is likely to include properties which are not just ad hoc concepts derived from stable lexically-encoded concepts, but perhaps also unlexicalised but communicable concepts (see e.g. Sperber and Wilson, 1998/2012: 45).

The difference in interpretation of the utterances of similes in (11) and (12) lies in which properties are required for the comparison between Achilles and a lion to hold. So which properties are required? We can make some generalisations. Example (11) will communicate a more determinate set of points of comparison than (12). It is also likely to have fewer poetic effects. Ajax's utterance in (11) will often communicate an assumption which is very similar to (11d). But Ajax has greater confidence in (11) that his utterance will be understood in a particular way than he does in (12) because the comparison-relevant content of his utterance is more determinate. What does it mean for the set of points of comparison to be indeterminate? Because the overall relevance of the utterance relies more upon the weak

implicatures which are derived on the basis of the utterance than on the explicit content of the utterance, the hearer will have greater freedom in how he arrives at those weak implicatures. A wide range of differently constituted sets of points of comparison could help him arrive at the weak implicatures which form the optimally relevant interpretation (the first one he arrives at consistent with the presumption of relevance). Odysseus' understanding of Ajax's utterance in (12) is far 'riskier' than that of (11) because Odysseus needs to explore less and less manifest contextual assumptions in order to find the relevant weak implicatures. The process of mutual parallel adjustment is therefore far likelier to stop sooner in (11) than in (12) *mutatis mutandis*, because the hearer, here Odysseus, is (to some extent) constrained by the expectation that the explicit content will support the implicated conclusion that *Achilles is brave*, and the process of mutual parallel adjustment affects *simultaneously* the explicit and the implicit content of the utterance. Whether the comparison-relevant content is part of the explicature or is constituted by implicatures would not change the prediction.

By spelling out the differences in the comparison-relevant content of *the same utterance on different occasions of use*, we can see how complex the relationship between an explicitly communicated comparison and weak effects can be. A narrow set of points of comparison can give access to weak implicatures, as can a more indeterminate range. The indeterminacy of the comparison-relevant content of Ajax's utterance in (12) correlates with a wider range of weak implicatures, and hence the same utterance in (12) seems more 'poetic' than in (11). But they *do not* communicate *the same* explicature, or even the same comparison-relevant content. Moreover, they are 'poetic' inasmuch as they provide access to a wide array of weak implicatures.

The above view of how poetic (and non-poetic) comparisons are understood is compatible with the comparison-relevant content contributing to either the explicit or (solely) the implicit content of the utterance. But one particular desideratum does not help us to determine what the correct analysis is. One assumption which is found in the theoretical literature (e.g. Stern, 2000: 232) is that utterances such as (13) suggest that the content of metaphors and similes is different in quality:

(13) The general is not *like* a lion, he *is* a lion.

(italics used to represent stress)[65]

The argument boils down to the observation that utterances such as (13) are interpreted as communicating that the general has *more* lion-like properties that would be communicated by *The general is like a lion*. On this view, (13a-c) communicate that Achilles shares a different range of properties with LIONS:

(13a) The general is not a lion.

[i.e. he has no properties in common with the concept LION]

(13b) The general is like a lion.

[i.e. he has some properties in common with the concept LION]

(13c) The general is a lion.

[i.e. he has more properties in common with the concept LION]

My first objection to this kind of reasoning is that it is not clear how having *more* properties in common would correlate with achieving the characteristic effects of metaphors and similes. It is not the explicature of a metaphor which makes it poetic: there are many 'mundane' metaphors which involve ad hoc concept construction. But only those metaphors which communicate poetic effects by virtue of being metaphors are of interest to us here.

A more significant problem with this argument is that all we are able to infer from (13) is that the metaphor is interpreted as 'better than' the simile *in the same context*. This follows from the presumption of optimal relevance. That is, the *form* of (13), is relevant as well as the conceptual content. The fact that two clauses are being contrasted (one negated, the other not) communicates that their contrast is optimally relevant in a context which is

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[65] For ease of explanation I have avoided the obvious example *Achilles is like a lion.* However, a similar explanation will follow if either (a) interpreting *Achilles* involves accessing a set of concepts (HUMAN, WARRIOR, GREEK, etc.) which could contribute to finding the comparison relevant content, or (b) *Achilles* corresponds with a single conceptual element or mental file (although see Recanati, 2012: 234 n10).

relevant *for the utterance as a whole*. Whatever felt difference there is between the comparison and the metaphor in the same context is not necessarily relevant to the difference in 'strength', 'richness' and so on of the interpretations of metaphors and similes in *any* context (see §4.7). Moreover, as Carston has explored, it is entirely possible for the use of a negation to negate content which forms part of a higher level explicature (2002a §4). On this view, an assumption such as (13d) is communicated by (13):

> (13d) One cannot say *The general is like a lion* truthfully, but one can say *The general is a lion* [=LION*].

The negation of the comparison in (13) does not mean that the speaker is denying that the comparison would be optimally relevant *in any context*, and so is irrelevant as a desideratum for investigating how metaphors and similes are understood. But it is also irrelevant for the issue of whether the comparison-relevant content of comparisons forms part of the explicature or not.

Because this is such a widespread assumption, and the reader might not yet be convinced that utterances such as (13) are irrelevant to investigating the metaphor-simile relationship, I adduce here a further argument. If (13) were relevant, then we ought to expect that metaphors and similes communicate different degrees of overlap of shared properties between tenor and vehicle even in utterances such as (13e-f):

> (13e) Achilles is not a lion, he's like a lion.

> (13f) ?Achilles is not a lion, he is a lion.

An utterance of (13e) communicates that the general does not share all relevant properties with LIONS but does share some. This is compatible with my account of comparison understanding, and would also be accepted by the advocates of arguments based on utterances like (13). But why does (13f) not communicate the same thing? For (13f) it is obvious that the felt infelicity is due to both clauses being interpreted *in the same context*, as either clause on its own is perfectly felicitous (the first as a denial, the second as a metaphor). I am merely pointing out that we should look at (13) in the same way.

One advantage of my account is that it predicts that negated comparisons are far less likely to achieve relevance as poetic comparisons. For example, (13g) is unlikely to communicate many poetic effects:

(13g) The general is not like a lion.

Because a comparison can achieve relevance either as a non-poetic comparison or a poetic comparison, and because the optimally relevant interpretation will be the first one which generates sufficient cognitive effects, then, unless there is some other reason for the hearer/reader to discount the least effortful interpretation that (13g) is denying that there are *any* relevant points of comparison, that will be the optimally relevant interpretation. If this analysis is right, then the use of examples like (13) to argue that metaphors are 'better than' similes (see §4.7) is open to challenge.[66]

The hearer's task in interpreting a non-poetic comparison or a simile (a poetic comparison) is the same: (i) the speaker guarantees that the comparison communicated is optimally relevant; and (ii) this comparison can achieve relevance either (a) by the contextual saturation of a determinate set of points of comparison, or (b) by the comparison achieving relevance by virtue of the fact that comparing the two things (from the point of view of the hearer/reader: seeking the points of comparison which are relevant) will generate a wide range of weak implicatures which themselves contribute to an overall interpretation which is optimally relevant.

Whether a comparison is poetic or not is an *outcome* of the process of comparison interpretation through mutual parallel adjustment. Communicating that a comparison is optimally relevant does not necessarily specify *how* the comparison will contribute to

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[66] We do get negated comparisons which achieve poetic effects: (fn2) **EXAMPLE REDACTED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS** (Marr and Morrissey (The Smiths), *Hand in Glove*. Album: The Smiths. 1984. Rhino.). But the assumption that *our love* and *other loves* are *not* similar is what plays a role in the derivation of poetic effects. The search for respects in which tenor and vehicle may be similar is crucial to how poetic comparisons achieve their effects.

relevance. Some will achieve relevance primarily through allowing the hearer/reader to determine relevant points of comparison (non-poetic comparisons), others will do so primarily by providing access to relevant weak implicatures. But the hearer/reader does not necessarily know in advance which route to relevance (enrichment of the explicature, or evocation of poetic effects) will turn out to provide the optimally relevant overall interpretation until the first interpretation which is consistent with the presumption of optimal relevance is found.

My account entails that whether comparisons are poetic or otherwise is a matter of degree: some will be more poetic than others. However, there is a subset of comparisons which do form a natural kind: those comparisons which achieve relevance through the generation of a wide range of weak implicatures *rather than* the determination of a set of points of comparison. In the poetic cases, the set of points of comparison which the hearer seeks in pursuit of a relevant interpretation will remain *indeterminate*. Why? The optimally relevant interpretation depends upon the poetic effects generated, and these effects, although the hearer/reader gains access to them by exploring potential points of comparison, could be generated in pursuit of any number of points of comparison. These are poetic comparisons. Poetic comparisons include most of the cases we would pre-theoretically call simile.

5.2 Simile and comparison diagnostics

As far as I am aware, this thesis has addressed a fuller range of types of simile than has ever been attempted within the field of pragmatics. Yet the simplest hypothesis, so I claim, remains that similes are poetic comparisons. I am not alone in arguing that similes are a species of comparison. However, as far as I know, no other researcher has attempted to explain in any depth *why* certain patterns of comparison use (poetic comparisons with additional content, different types of metaphor and comparison interaction) tend to correlate with poetic effects.

There is a further set of advantages to my account of simile understanding, beyond theoretical parsimony, empirical coverage and relevance to pragmatic stylistics. It also provides explanations for certain patterns which have been discerned in how similes are understood. Unfortunately, these assumptions have sometimes been argued as either

necessary or prototypical of similes in contrast to non-poetic comparisons. If this were the case, then my account of simile understanding would be open to challenge.

If comparisons can be definitely distinguished from similes, by means of exhibiting particular tenor-vehicle relationships, then it is possible that similes are understood in a radically different way to (non-poetic) comparisons. I argue that as putative necessary conditions of simile understanding these assumptions do not make the right predictions. But the general tendency of poetic comparisons to be non-reversible as opposed to reversible non-poetic comparisons, or for the one to exhibit a more specific relationship between the tenor and the vehicle than the other, does require explanation if such generalisations are legitimate. One of the advantages of my account is that it explains why similes tend to but do not always exhibit such tenor-vehicle relationships. Moreover, appeals to default tenor-vehicle relationships will threaten theoretical parsimony on a relevance theoretic approach to comparison understanding. If these relationships provide hearers/readers with interpretive heuristics (such as, if one of these hypotheses does apply, then what would otherwise be a comparison is interpreted as a simile) then similes would require determination of this relationship prior to utterance understanding.

The conceptual relationships I investigate in this section are: (i) 'directionality' (that is, 'non-reversibility'), of the tenor-vehicle relationship (see also §§3.4, 6f; §4.9); (ii) 'tension' between tenor and vehicle; (iii) 'abstractness' of the tenor versus 'concreteness' of the vehicle; and (iv) 'unfamiliarity' of the tenor versus 'familiarity' of the vehicle[67]. Examples (14a-b) demonstrate the 'reversibility' and 'tension' hypotheses:

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[67] Fishelov gives eight different dimensions along which 'successful' poetic similes can differ from literal comparisons. I here give my own labels for these dimensions and paraphrases of the relationship which, according to Fishelov, typifies literal comparisons in brackets: (1) order (tenor-vehicle); (2) length (tenor and vehicle are commensurate); (3) explicitness (tenor, vehicle, ground or comparison marker are close to the encoded meaning); (4) interpretation of ground with respect to tenor (comparison-relevant content is salient for the tenor); (5) interpretation of ground with respect to vehicle (comparison-relevant content is salient for the vehicle); (6) familiarity of tenor and vehicle (vehicle more familiar than

(14a) Achilles is like Odysseus.

(14b) Achilles is like a lion.

In terms of the tenor-vehicle tension hypothesis, in (14a), *Achilles* and *Odysseus* are conceptually close (they are both human beings, Greek warriors, etc.). In (14b), *Achilles* is human, but *a lion* is not. Therefore, there is conceptual 'tension' or 'distance' between tenor and vehicle in (14b). Example (14a) is a non-poetic comparison, and (14b) is a simile. Accordingly, it is argued that 'tension' between tenor and vehicle is a diagnostic for simile. The other two types are discussed in §§5.2.3-4.

5.2.1 The non-reversibility of similes

The reversibility hypothesis predicts that an utterance of (15a) does not mean the same as (15b), but (16a) and (16b) are equivalent:

(15a) Soldiers are like lions. [in being {BRAVE*, WILD*, etc.}]

(15b) Lions are like soldiers. [in being {BRAVE*, VIOLENT*, etc.}]

(16a) Soldiers are like sailors. [in being {ARMED*, DISCIPLINED*, etc.}]

(16b) Sailors are like soldiers. [in being {ARMED*, DISCIPLINED*, etc.}]

Bredin contrasts 'symmetrical comparisons' like (16a-b) with 'predicative comparisons' like (15a-b). Just as the copula verb can be used to express a symmetrical identity statement (*Elton John is Reginald Dwight*) or an asymmetrical predication (*Elton John is a songwriter*) (Bredin, 1998). While in identity statements and symmetrical comparisons the vehicle is

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tenor); (7) connotation (connotations of vehicle and tenor are not contradictory); (8) conceptual 'distance' (tenor and vehicle are taken from distinct categories) (1993: 6-14). All of these 'dimensions' can be equated to the types of tenor-vehicle relationship I discuss below or (with respect to (2)) can be better explained by my account of comparison understanding.

identified with the tenor, and so they are interchangeable, with predications and predicative comparisons "one of them describes the other" (*id., ib.*: 74)

But my account predicts *why* the interpretations of (15a) and (15b) are different: because the respects in which the similarity holds is different. The 'comparison' itself is not asymmetrical, whatever that might mean. A proposition of the form *A is like B* would mean the same thing as *B is like A* in the same context. But to *say* that *A is like B* means to commit oneself to the similarity obtaining in a particular way, that is, in terms of the relevant points of comparison. What makes some comparisons asymmetrical is that the properties which are provided by the vehicle will simply be 'ranked' differently.

Accessing the concept LION makes a set of encyclopaedic assumptions more manifest. But some assumptions will be more manifest than others. Even though the determination of points of comparison (whether it ultimately contributes to the relevance of the utterance or not) will provide a set of properties which overlap to a certain degree for both (15a) and (15b), it follows that: (i) some of the 'overlapping' assumptions will be entertained to a different degree of manifestness in each case, and (ii) there will be some assumptions which are not made sufficiently manifest to the hearer to provide the properties in which he will consider the communicated comparison to hold. Moreover, as a prediction of how even non-poetic comparisons are understood, the reversibility hypothesis is clearly false.

An utterance of (16a) is likely to have similar comparison-relevant content to (16b), but it does not necessarily have the same *implicit* content, nor will it have the same comparison-relevant content in every case. Assumptions such as (17a) and (17b) can support implicatures such as (18a) and (18b) (for the interpretation of (16a-b) respectively), but not vice versa:

> (17a) *Contextual assumption*: Sailors are disreputable.

> (17b) *Contextual assumption*: Soldiers are reputable.

> (18a) *Implicature*: Soldiers are disreputable. [i.e. because they are like sailors]

> (18b) *Implicature*: Sailors are not disreputable. [i.e. because they are like soldiers]

Even 'literal' (i.e. non-poetic) comparisons like (16a-b) (*Soldiers/sailors are like sailors/soldiers*) are not reversible *salvo sensu*. They can differ as to their implicit content because of the contextual assumptions which the vehicle makes available, and this difference in implicit content can occur even when the explicit content is extremely similar. In any case, my account predicts that the explicit content of (16a-b) is not likely to be identical, because the properties which form part of the set of points of comparison are not likely to be made *equally* more manifest by accessing the concepts SOLDIERS and SAILORS. Rather, the outcome of mutual parallel adjustment is likely to be very similar, but not identical, sets of points of comparison for the comparison-relevant content of (16a-b).

The pertinent question is not why similes are not reversible (Cf. Glucksberg, 2001: 44f), but why any comparisons *are*. My prediction is that utterances of comparisons will only be reversible in terms of their explicit and their implicit content when both tenor and vehicle make highly manifest a very similar range of encyclopaedic assumptions. We can compare to (16a-b) above the straightforward literal comparison in (19):

(19) My computer is like your computer [in being {SLOW, OLD, UGLY, etc.}]

An utterance of (19) is more 'reversible' than (16a-b), that is, it is understood as communicating the same comparison-relevant content as (19a), because both the tenor and the vehicle make more manifest the same sorts of properties:

(19a) Your computer is like my computer [in being {SLOW, OLD, UGLY, etc.}]

In other words, the non-reversibility of similes is epiphenomenal. It does not *cause* a figurative interpretation of a comparison, but can often be identified *post hoc* because of the way utterances like (15a-b) achieve relevance.

Example (19a) is a straightforwardly reversible non-poetic comparison, and whether (18a-b) are equivalents (that is, reversible) depends upon how they are interpreted by the hearer. Therefore some (non-poetic) comparisons are reversible, and some are not. However, the other side of the reversibility hypothesis, that poetic comparisons are always 'directional' (that is, non-reversible) is also open to challenge. For example, in (20) it is unclear whether the comparison is a non-poetic comparison (communicating that *honey* and *vinegar* share

relatively determinate points of comparison), a poetic comparison, or even a 'failed' comparison (see also Chapter 4, §4.8):

(20) Honey is like vinegar.

I will return to the issue of simile failure in Chapter 6, §6.4. But one must acknowledge that there is at least the possibility that the distinction between poetic and non-poetic comparisons is (at least in some cases) unmarked. Because it is extremely difficult to determine what the explicit content of (20) is, it is just as difficult to claim that (20a), where tenor and vehicle are reversed, has a radically different interpretation to (20):

(20a) Vinegar is like honey.

In sections §§5.2.3-4 below I will look at whether there is a 'privileged order' of tenor and vehicle concepts which might provide an alternative to reversibility as a diagnostic for poetic and non-poetic comparisons. The basic idea can be illustrated by contrasting the following two examples:

(21a) His words are like honey.

(21b) Honey is like his words.

Tenor and vehicle cannot be reversed in (21a) *salvo sensu*, as evidenced by (21b). Moreover, WORDS and HONEY are conceptually more different than, for instance, SOLDIERS and SAILORS, that is, they share fewer highly-salient properties. HONEY, which describes something which can be experienced by direct perception, is a more concrete concept than WORDS, which are more abstract. Example (21a) (so it might be argued) achieves relevance at least in part by providing the hearer with access to highly-salient properties of HONEY which are only of low-salience for WORDS. In this sense, what is meant by *honey* is more 'familiar' than *his words*. Before I look at the three additional dimensions of the tenor-vehicle relationship which have been proposed as diagnostics for simile as opposed to comparison (conceptual tension, concreteness, and familiarity. See below) it should be recognised that (21b) is not entirely incomprehensible. Like (20) and (20a), it is very unclear how (21b) ought to achieve relevance. But if it does achieve relevance, the comparison-relevant content of (21b) is far *more* indeterminate than (21a) (see e.g. Fishelov, 1993, where he proposes that violation of

the typical order of a comparison can make a comparison *more* poetic). The problem with analysing such comparisons is that while the indeterminacy of their comparison-relevant content makes them potentially suitable for the communication of a wide range of poetic effects, the author takes a risk in making the search for comparison-relevant content so difficult for the reader: it is possible that *no* sufficiently relevant interpretation is found. An utterance of (21b) could be very poetic, but it could also easily 'fail' (see also §5.2.5).

5.2.2 Conceptual tension between tenor and vehicle in similes

My account predicts that some poetic comparisons will be 'striking' (that is, will evoke a wide range of poetic effects) because increasing the cognitive effort involved in ascertaining the way in which a comparison is relevant can contribute to the widening of the context of the utterance, and hence to a wider array of weak effects. One way in which the exploration of a wider context can be elicited is by a speaker/author communicating a comparison between two things which are conceptually 'distant', that is, by saying *A is like B* where the concepts lexically-encoded by *A* and *B* do not have many properties in common. Relevance theory predicts that concepts can share properties inasmuch as they share features of their logical entry (that is they can enter into the same sort of inference rules. e.g. DOG and CAT are similar in that they both allow inferences to be drawn on the basis of belonging to the superordinate category of ANIMAL) or the degree to which they provide access to similar encyclopaedic assumptions (those which contain similar conceptual content. e.g. *Stroking DOGS is relaxing* and *stroking CATS is relaxing*).

The process of understanding a comparison exhibiting tenor-vehicle tension would then be more effortful than would otherwise be the case, and would correlate with a wider range of weaker effects as opposed to one which did not, analogous to the way in which the cognitive effort required by the hearer in constructing an ad hoc concept in metaphor understanding can correlate with weaker effects (Sperber and Wilson, 2008/2012: 118-122). This can be related to the tenor-vehicle-tension hypothesis that semantic (strictly speaking, conceptual) distance between the tenor and vehicle concepts 'precipitates the simile into a figurative mode' (to borrow the terminology of Bethlehem, 1996: 215). So (14a) is a non-poetic comparison, and (14b) is a poetic comparison (examples repeated here):

(14a) Achilles is like Odysseus.

(14b) Achilles is like a lion.

One variant of the hypothesis is exemplified by Wikberg:

"A simile can be defined as a figurative expression used to make an explicit comparison **of two unlike things** by means of the prepositions *like*, *(as) ... as* or the conjunctions *as*, *as if*, *as though*."

(Wikberg, 2008: 128) (her italics, my emboldening)

Carston comments briefly on claims that metaphors require the hearer to conceive of two unlike things *being* the same, whereas similes invite comparison of unlike things, but is rightly cautious about such a diagnostic (2002a: 357). Others claim that "the paradox of unlike things compared" explains 'successful metaphor' (Glucksberg, 2008: 72; Lanham, 1991: 140. Richards, 1936: 125). Others argue that comparing *A* to *B* where *A* and *B* are unlike each other causes a figurative interpretation (e.g. Semino, 2008: 230; Miller, 1993: 373; Martindale, 1981: 224; Ben-Porat, 1992: 738; Whalley, 1988; Israel, *et al.*, 2004: 124).

According to the latter definition of simile, example (22b) would be more like a simile than (22a) because in (22a) the tenor and the vehicle both belong to the same superordinate category (of a particular type of electronic device), whereas in (22b), there is some 'category crossing':

(22a) This tablet PC works like a smartphone.

(22b) This tablet PC works like a donkey.

However, while there must be some gap between the concept encoded by the word and the concept communicated in the case of *metaphor* understanding, the gap is not really between the encoded tenor concept and the encoded vehicle concept, but between the encoded vehicle concept and the communicated vehicle concept. Even if the conceptual distance between tenor and vehicle in metaphor were relevant to their understanding, we cannot simply extrapolate to simile without justification. Moreover, we get identity simile, and one cannot get less conceptually distant than that (see §4.4, example (22)). Example (22b) does involve such tension, but it does not generate a particularly wide range of weak effects on that basis. Rather, (22b) achieves its effects as evidence of an attitude towards

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this tablet PC, whereas whether (22a) provides such evidence is far more dependent upon context. In other words, (22b) implicitly communicates the speaker's attitude in most circumstances. But implicitness alone does not a simile make.

Moreover, if anything can be like anything else in some respect or other, everything will be 'unlike' a particular thing in certain respects. In (22a) my computer is like a smartphone in being an electronic device which can perform certain functions, but differs in size and in a wide range of functions that it can perform but the smartphone cannot, and vice versa. If understanding a simile requires identifying the degree to which the tenor and the vehicle are conceptually distant, this is at least as effortful a task as identifying the degree to which they are similar. When would this process stop? There is no reason why (22a) should not be interpreted as a simile if there are so many ways in which smartphones and tablet PCs can be different.

As a hypothesis for *why* certain comparisons are interpreted figuratively and others are not, the tenor-vehicle-tension hypothesis fails. The null hypothesis that similes simply *are* comparisons remains intact. However, it is true that many similes exhibit just the kind of 'tension' the tenor-vehicle-tension hypothesis predicts. For instance, Achilles is not a LION or any other BIG-CAT in (23a), words are not 'literally' made of HONEY in (23b), and so on:

> (23a) Achilles is like a lion.

> (23b) His words are like honey.

So why is there any correlation at all between whether a certain comparison can be used as a simile and whether the tenor and the vehicle are from the same category or not? I predict that certain comparisons are more amenable to the communication of poetic effects precisely because the respects in which a comparison might hold are difficult for the hearer/reader to determine. Sometimes this is because of the relationship between the tenor and the vehicle, but we must understand this relationship in terms of the very different encyclopaedic assumptions which the vehicle and tenor make available, or at least that the tenor concept makes certain encyclopaedic assumptions highly manifest which the vehicle only makes weakly manifest and vice versa.

In understanding (23a), for instance, the encyclopaedic assumptions about Achilles (related to concepts whose denotation he falls under, such as MAN, SOLDIER, HERO, and so on) are very different than those made accessible by accessing the concept LION. In the case of metaphor understanding (such as (23c)), some of the assumptions which LION makes manifest are predicated of the tenor:

(23c) Achilles is a lion. [=LION*]

The tenor and the vehicle in (23c) make very different encyclopaedic assumptions more manifest, and, because (23c) is relevant as a predication, it is clear that some properties, which are either part of the hearer's encyclopaedic knowledge about lions or are derived on the basis of assumptions which LION makes manifest or more manifest, are to be predicated of Achilles. The 'tension' is here between the set of assumptions made manifest by LION and the properties which must be predicated of Achilles on the hearer's responsibility.

In understanding the simile in (23a), determining a set of shared properties *may* be relevant, or the fact that the speaker/author is communicating that some shared properties exist may be sufficient to justify the hearer in taking certain contextual implications as weak implicatures of an utterance of (23a). The process of mutual parallel adjustment in understanding an utterance of (23a) is justified by the presumption of relevance, not a more specific process whereby determining the comparison-relevant content is of greater importance than accessing the relevant weak implicatures. Because the tenor and vehicle concepts are likely to provide access to largely non-overlapping encyclopaedic assumptions, the comparison in (23a) is more likely to achieve relevance as a poetic comparison, that is, as a simile. But, crucially, the 'tension' in metaphor between the lexically-encoded concept and the concept communicated is a necessary feature of metaphor understanding, whereas, on my account, what makes a poetic comparison poetic is whether the comparison achieves relevance primarily on the implicit side of communication or not. It is not a matter of conceptual relationships, either between the lexically-encoded tenor and vehicle concepts, or between the concept lexically-encoded by the vehicle and the ad hoc concept that the vehicle is used to communicate.

5.2.3 Concrete-to-abstract conceptual mapping in similes

Examples (24a-b) demonstrate the concrete-to-abstract-mapping hypothesis:

> (24a) A roundabout is like a rollercoaster.

> (24b) Love is like a rollercoaster.

In (24a), ROUNDABOUTS and ROLLERCOASTERS are equally concrete concepts, which we are capable of experiencing as objects through sense perception. In (24b), LOVE is more abstract than a ROLLERCOASTER. Example (24a) is a 'literal' (non-poetic) comparison and (24b) is a simile. Therefore, on this view, a mapping between a concrete vehicle and an abstract tenor is a diagnostic for simile.

For example, in (25) the vehicle (a DUNGEON) is understood as a more concrete entity than the tenor (your HEART):

> (25) Your heart is like a dungeon.

According to the concrete-to-abstract-mapping hypothesis, the fact that a certain relationship obtains between the tenor and the vehicle is taken as *causing* a figurative interpretation, with all the characteristic effects that such an interpretation might entail. If this were a sound hypothesis, then it would provide both an explanation for why some comparisons are poetic and some are not, and suggest why poetic comparisons are so interpreted.

Within the conceptual metaphor theory literature on metaphors, some researchers have investigated the hypothesis that the default 'mapping' from vehicle concept to tenor concept is between a more concrete vehicle entity and a more abstract tenor for both metaphors and similes. This is related to the general methodological commitment in conceptual metaphor theory to finding 'embodied' explanations (that is, in terms of more concrete concepts) for how humans can reason about more abstract concepts (see e.g. Lakoff, 2008. Gibbs calls it the 'cognitive wager'. Gibbs, 1998: 88). Some have also argued that similes are sometimes preferred over metaphors if they express this relationship between tenor and vehicle. For instance, Gibb and Wales reported on two experiments indicating that similes were preferred for concrete vehicles over 'equivalent' metaphors

(which were preferred for abstract vehicles) (1990: 199). I have elsewhere raised doubts about the validity of such a notion as 'equivalence' between metaphor and simile paraphrases of metaphor by the addition of 'like' (e.g. Chapter 4, §4.2), but, if such experiments are reliable, they are likely to reflect some genuine difference between how the experimental stimuli are understood. Gibb and Wales give as an example of the two tropes utterances which are repeated here as (26a) and (26b) (*id.*, *ib.*):

(26a) His devotion was a burr on my back.

(26b) His devotion was like a burr on my back.

One concern which might be raised about examples such as these is that in (26a) what is communicated by the metaphor *burr on my back* is not so much 'abstract' as 'divergent from the encoded concepts', or, in relevance theoretic terms, ad hoc. As ad hoc concept construction in metaphor crucially involves broadening of the lexically encoded concept in at least some respects (see Carston, 2002a: 365 for the theoretical importance of a unified conception of conceptual narrowing and broadening), does that mean that all ad hoc concepts in metaphor are 'abstract'? If so, then 'abstractness' as a diagnostic is not much use. All metaphors will by necessity be more abstract than the tenors of the 'equivalent' similes, and so a 'concrete metaphor' will be very hard to find. Gibb and Wales try to argue that (26b) would be preferred to (26a) because *a burr on my back* is more concrete and similes privilege concrete tenors. In the discussion of their results (*id.*, *ib.*: 208), Gibb and Wales argue that their results support Perrin's view that a metaphor vehicle involves an 'abstract' idea (1987), much as in Glucksberg's category inclusion account of metaphor (e.g. 2000; 2008) or the relevance theory account of metaphor as ad hoc concept construction (Carston, 2002a; Sperber and Wilson, 2008/2012. See Chapter 2, §2.7).

One immediate obstacle to postulating a concrete-abstract (default) mapping for poetic comparisons is that we do not *always* get concrete vehicles and abstract tenors in poetic comparisons. We get abstract vehicles even in Homer (a battle over a wall is compared to a boundary dispute between landowners at *Iliad* 12.421ff. See Kirk, 1962: 346). We also get lots of concrete-to-concrete mappings, such as Lucan's similes comparing battle to other types of conflict (in particular, gladiatorial combat) in his civil war epic *Bellum Civile* (see e.g.

Ahl, 1976: 82-115; Leigh, 1997). One example of violence compared to violence in Lucan is the simile in (27):

(27) Then, when no chance was given of engaging in killing,

Gradually the furious anger falls away and their minds cool;

Just as wounded breasts [sc. of some sort of fighter] endure greater spirits   285

While there is grief and a recent wound, and warm blood

Supplies a motive impetus to the sinews, and the bones have not yet

Brought the skin back together: if the winner, knowing that his sword has been driven in

Stands still and has held back his hand, then a cold numbness binds

His limbs and his spirit when force has been withdrawn,   290

After the congealing blood has bound together his dry wounds.

(Lucan, *de Bello Civili* 4.283-291. Latin text in Duff, 1928: 194, 196)

(My translation. Line numbers are given for the reader's convenience)

In (27) it is not even clear that the vehicle comes from a non-martial context. It could well be the experience of one soldier being compared to another (hypothetical, remembered, or stereotypical) soldier. Nevertheless, (27) is a poetic comparison, generating poetic effects by virtue of the communication of a comparison between angry participants in battle and angry participants in fighting (perhaps gladiatorial combat, or martial combat, or something else).

The generalisation that simile tenors are often abstract and simile vehicles are often concrete can be explained by my account of simile understanding. Because a comparison communicates that comparing *A* with *B* will be relevant in one of two ways, both of which rely upon the encyclopaedic assumptions which the vehicle concepts in particular make more manifest, a speaker is unlikely to rely upon the hearer recovering assumptions which are made only *weakly* manifest by the vehicle. The reason that the concrete-to-abstract

mapping hypothesis does not account for *all* similes is that poets often *do* take this risk, making a wide range of weak implicatures marginally more manifest by deploying an abstract vehicle, as I explore below.

More often, the impression communicated by poetic similes is determinate in some respects and indeterminate in others. For this impression to be at all determinate would require that the vehicle of the simile make *highly* manifest some encyclopaedic assumptions. 'Concrete' concepts, that is, those whose denotation will include natural kind terms and other entities about which we are likely to have a great deal of general knowledge, including assumptions about how we relate to such entities, are bound to make more encyclopaedic assumptions more highly manifest than 'abstract' concepts will. And the assumptions one can have about concrete natural kind terms such as CATS, for instance, will also differ in *kind* from the assumptions one has about an abstract concept such as LOGIC. Assumptions relating to one's perception of and interaction with natural kind terms will be more amenable to making the kind of assumptions required in simile understanding to either (i) determine points of comparison, or (ii) evoke poetic effects, or (iii) a combination of both. But the conceptual relationship between tenors and vehicles in similes is not uniform, and my account respects the diversity of conceptual tenor-vehicle relationships which actually obtains in similes.

5.2.4 Familiar-to-unfamiliar conceptual mapping in similes

The familiar-to-unfamiliar-mapping hypothesis is slightly different from the above three hypotheses. It does not claim that similes can be identified by mapping properties associated with a familiar vehicle concept onto a less familiar vehicle concept, as many 'literal' comparisons, such as (28a) are of this form:

(28a) Wasabi is like mustard.

The concept MUSTARD is likely to be more familiar to a Western hearer/reader than WASABI. As was discussed above, examples like (28a) have been claimed to be reversible *salvo sensu*, so the 'direction' of the mapping would be irrelevant[68]. Rather, what advocates of this

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[68] I argued against this above. But I am currently evaluating these assumptions about tenor-vehicle relationships on their own merits.

approach to poetic simile appear to mean is that poetic similes will be *successful* only if they conform to this pattern. So (28b) would be more successful as a poetic simile than (28c):

(28b) Achilles is like a lion.

(28c) Achilles is like a civet.

In (28c), one is less likely to have stereotypical assumptions which could properly be shared by a human like Achilles which are associated with the concept CIVET than those associated with LION.

In the constructed example (29), the vehicle (*a seamstress threading a needle*) is a kind of activity which is likely to be more immediately familiar to most people than the particular way in which a bird feeds her offspring:

(29) The mother bird fed her chicks like a seamstress threading a needle.

This hypothesis is particularly associated with the study of epic simile. In Homer for instance, Ford claims that the majority of the poet's similes come from the 'quotidian' (1992: 31). But Homer's simile vehicles describe a whole range of entities and activities, from the sounds of birds to earthquakes (Gargani, 2009 ms: 30f; see especially Mueller, 1984: 108-124). Are all those vehicles more 'familiar' than, for instance, the soldiers in battle they are compared to for a given audience? What about Homer's 'original' audience (most likely in Ionia at some point in the 8th century BCE or earlier, if Homer actually existed)? Such claims are not limited to the discussion of Homer (Nowottny hints at a similar observation in relation to Shakespeare. 1965: 63). However, if we look at a wider range of vehicles in poetic comparisons, we can see that neither 'familiarity' nor 'concreteness' are of primary concern to poets in their choice of vehicles.

Firstly, we get poetic comparisons whose vehicles are certainly not 'familiar', such as those lifted from mythology as in (30):

(30) […] there are spread

On the blue surface of thine aëry surge

Like the bright hair uplifted from the head

259

Of some fierce Maenad, even from the dim verge

Of the horizon to the zenith's height,

The locks of the approaching storm.

(Shelley. *Ode to the West Wind*. Section 2. Stanzas 7f. Lines 18-23. *NA*: 872f)

When Shelley compares the wind to the hairs on a Maenad's head, one cannot seriously claim that the vehicle is more 'familiar' than the tenor. One type of poetic comparison which is extremely common involves a tenor drawn from the personal experience *of the speaker*, such as (31a-b):

(31a) **EXAMPLE REDACTED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS**

(Plath. *The Bell Jar*. 1966: 1)

(31b) **EXAMPLE REDACTED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS**

(Plath, *The Bell Jar.* 1966: 17)

It is impossible for the experience of the narrator of *The Bell Jar* to be more 'familiar' to the reader than the tenor which is described in the narrative.

In (31c), the deictic expression 'yonder' suggests a specific light which the speaker can see at the point of utterance, but, as in (31a-b), this is within the *speaker's* experience, not the hearer's:

(31c) To dream and dream, like yonder amber light,

Which will not leave the myrrh-bush on the height[.]

(Tennyson, *The Lotos-Eaters*. Stanza 5. Lines 102f. *NA*: 990)

Similar 'experiential' vehicles can often be quite vague, possibly attributable to the speaker or author, but possibly not, such as in (31d):

(31d) **EXAMPLE REDACTED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS**

(Rich, *Snapshots of a Daughter-In-Law*. Stanza 8. Lines 81-5. *NA*: 1794)

The concrete-to-abstract- and familiar-to-unfamiliar-mapping generalisations might be thought to provide insight, in that, if they hold as generalisations, then we might suppose that, when confronted with a comparison exhibiting this 'default' relationship, a hearer or reader can assume that the comparison is to be interpreted figuratively. However, as empirical claims, the concrete-abstract and familiar-to-unfamiliar generalisations do not stand up in the light of a wide range of examples. If we look again at examples (25) and (29) (repeated here) we can see two immediate problems:

(25) Your heart is like a dungeon.

(29) The mother bird fed her chicks like a seamstress threading a needle.

Firstly, it is not uncontroversial that *your heart* is more abstract than *a dungeon*. *Your heart* is likely to stand in a metonymic relationship to some concept which denotes a person's emotional core. It is quite plausible that this concept is stable over different contexts. Circumstantial evidence for the stability of such a concept might be found by looking at conceptually-related public expressions in a given language, such as the English idiom *warm-hearted* (relating to this same concept). Likewise, it is not uncontroversial that *a seamstress* is *more* familiar than a mother bird feeding her chicks. Nevertheless, both (25) and (29) are the kind of poetic simile we would want a theory of simile understanding to explain.

Secondly, if 'rating' a tenor and vehicle for concreteness or familiarity were a necessary part of the processing of such comparisons, then, as the previous problem highlighted, identifying even a tenor or vehicle for instance as *either* abstract *or* concrete would likewise involve a high degree of cognitive effort, whichever way the tenor or vehicle was rated. If such a process of prior evaluation of tenor-vehicle relationships were necessary, then we would expect *all* comparisons to communicate a wide range of weak implicatures (see Chapter 2, §2.6 on the relationship between cognitive effort and poetic effects). It seems far more likely that a general impression that one may have that vehicles are typically more concrete and more familiar is due to general issues of informativeness in utterance understanding.

If even such broad generalisations as the concrete-to-abstract-mapping and the familiar-to-unfamiliar-mapping hypotheses are unable to account for the understanding of poetic comparisons, this suggests that *no* account which requires a particular relationship to obtain between the tenor and the vehicle will be successful in accounting for how the full range of poetic comparisons are understood. Furthermore, neither generalisation provides an explanation for how the characteristic effects of similes (poetic effects) are generated.

5.2.5 Difficult similes

One particular advantage of my account of simile understanding is that it can explain why certain similes, whose vehicles are effortful to understand, still manage to communicate something. They do not 'fail' (see Chapter 4, §4.8). Looking at such examples alongside each other highlights the flexibility which an account of simile understanding must incorporate. Moreover, it is clear that these examples provide counterexamples to the generalisations explored in this section, if such generalisations are taken to be constitutive of simile.

I have identified two main types of such 'unlikely' vehicles: those for which the hearer's previous experience is unlikely to provide a precedent for understanding the situation described in the vehicle; and those which are impossible to imagine as real scenarios. For instance, in (32a), Coleridge compares a sound to that of *Elfins* in particular circumstances:

> (32a) Such a soft floating witchery of sound
>
> As twilight Elfins make, when they at eve

Voyage on gentle gales from Fairy-Land,

Where Melodies round honey-dripping flowers,

Footless and wild, like birds of Paradise,

Nor pause, nor perch, hovering on untamed wing!

(Coleridge *The Aeolian Harp.* Lines 20-25. *NA*: 805f)

Nobody has the experience of little elves doing this, nor, in the second comparison, has anybody experienced birds of paradise never failing to settle because they have no feet (a false assumption which was prevalent in Coleridge's day. See *NA*: 806 n3). Yet this does not preclude (32a) from being understood.

Another type of 'unlikely' vehicle is given by Plath in (32b):

(32b) **EXAMPLE REDACTED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS**

(Plath*, The Bell Jar.* 1966: 10)

Here the author compares a feeling to a (visual) image which is entirely imaginary. The 'speaker' (the narrator of the novel) has never actually seen it before. But by describing it in the way she does, she gives the reader access to the kind of assumptions required to imagine the precise way she felt that she was (figuratively) 'disappearing'.

The second comparison in (32c) is 'unlikely', not in the sense of 'not experienced' but rather 'not possible to experience':

(32c)   Like many a voice of one delight,

    The winds, the birds, the ocean floods,

The City's voice itself is soft like Solitude's.

[...] I see the waves upon the shore

    Like light dissolved in star-showers, thrown[.]

(Shelley, *Stanzas Written in Dejection, Near Naples*. Stanzas 1f. Lines 7-9; 12f. *NA*: 870)

Solitude does not have a *voice*, except metaphorically, and it is unclear how *light* might *dissolve*. Similarly, in (32d), *silence* cannot *flow*:

(32d) **EXAMPLE REDACTED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS**

(Hollander, *Variations on a Fragment of Trumbull Stickney*. Stanza 2. Line 4. *NA* 1777)

In (32e), the moon cannot be *as large as logic* because LOGIC is about as abstract a concept as one can get:

(32e) **EXAMPLE REDACTED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS**

(Porter, *An Exequy*. Lines 88-92. *NA*: 1790)

One should note here that the fact that LOGIC does not have physical properties does not preclude the audience from coming to an interpretation, nor does it preclude the poet from conjoining it with another vehicle (*the stars*) which does have physical extension. In (32e), the interpretation than the moon is very large is easy to derive. But such 'impossible' vehicles are often associated with a very weak kind of impression which is much harder to narrow down, even in part. One such example is (32f):

(32f) **EXAMPLE REDACTED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS**

(Gunn, *My Sad Captains.* Stanza 2. Lines 7f. *NA*: 1771)

The tenor *a cloak of chaos* is very hard to imagine. What might such an entity be? The fact that a speaker cannot predict what kind of entity will be imagined by the hearer exemplifies

one of the ways in which poetic comparisons can achieve weaker effects[69]. But it is not the cognitive effort required in understanding a vehicle alone which *makes* a comparison poetic. Examples (32a-f) are *not* the only type of simile to achieve poetic effects. In fact, they are rare.

To summarise, the tenor-vehicle relationships exhibited by many (but not all) similes explored in this section can be explained by my account of the understanding of poetic comparisons:

1. The non-reversibility of similes is irrelevant. The comparison-relevant content of even non-poetic comparisons (*Soldiers are like sailors*) is likely to be different in terms of content and/or structure when reversed (*Sailors are like soldiers*).

2. Conceptual 'tension' between tenor and vehicle is likely to be found in similes because the less easily a hearer/reader can arrive at a determinate comparison-relevant content for a comparison, the more likely the comparison will be optimally relevant as a means of communicating poetic effects.

3. The concrete-abstract-mapping hypothesis and the familiar-unfamiliar-mapping hypothesis do not account for many clear cases of poetic simile. There may be a tendency for vehicles to be more concrete and familiar than tenors in similes, due to how easily a hearer/reader can arrive at an optimally relevant interpretation of the comparison communicated, but this is of little theoretical interest.

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[69] Although this is of less theoretical interest, we do also get 'impossible' tenors, such as in the following: (fn3) **EXAMPLE REDACTED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS**

(Ramanujan. *Snakes*. Lines 13-16. *NA:* 1801). However, from a relevance theory perspective, the tenor *the twirls of their hisses rise* is interpreted metaphorically in any case.

5.3 How qualified similes affect interpretation

If there are two ways in which comparisons can achieve relevance, through an interpretation which includes a determinate comparison-relevant content or through the communication of poetic effects, what should my account predict about how 'qualified similes' such as (33a-d) are understood[70]?

> (33a) Achilles is exactly like a lion.

> (33b) Achilles is very like a lion.

> (33c) Achilles is somewhat like a lion.

> (33d) Achilles is not very like a lion at all.

One (largely implicit) account of simile understanding which can be compared in this regard is that of Stern. If we modify his account to fit with certain principles of relevance theory then we can see what such an account would predict about 'qualified' similes. If comparisons communicated an explicature which was an ad hoc modification of a one-place predicate such as in (34) (see §3.1 and Stern, 2000: 230), we should expect that (33a) should communicate the unmodified predicate, and (33b-d) should communicate more radical departures from the encoded conceptual content of BE-LIKE-A-LION ([BE-LIKE-A-LION]** etc.):

> (34) [BE-LIKE-A-LION]*(Achilles)

So (33a) should be the most non-poetic comparison, and (33d) should be the most poetic comparison. There should be a straightforward relationship between the 'qualification' of the comparison and the weak effects evoked. Similar generalisations could be made for accounts which see similes as linguistic realisations of conceptual metaphors (see §6.3 below for a different conceptual metaphor-based account), or as realisations of category statements (Glucksberg claims that certain similes are so understood, 2008: 80).

Do we see such gradability in the weak effects (if any) generated by (33a-d)? My intuitions suggest not. Moreover, it appears, in light of the real examples explored below, that

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[70] The argument which follows also provides evidence against Wałaszewska's view of *like* in similes as a procedural item (2013. See also Chapter 1, §1.3, footnote 10).

linguistically specified qualifications of comparisons do not change how poetic a simile appears to be. But a theory of simile understanding which predicted such gradability would not account for how (33a-d) are typically interpreted either. Where does the paradigm case (*Achilles is like a lion*) fit into such a scheme? Do (33a-d) differ significantly in interpretation *when they are used as poetic comparisons*? Such qualifications of similes are rare in literature, and when we do find them the interpretations do not appear to differ significantly from unqualified similes (see below).

My account of comparison understanding could be used to make two (contradictory) predictions about how such 'qualified' similes are understood: (i) a signalled 'strengthening' of a comparison ought to encourage the hearer/reader to interpret the comparison as communicating a more determinate comparison-relevant content, and, hence, should produce fewer poetic effects *mutatis mutandis*; (ii) a signalled strengthening of a comparison ought to encourage the hearer/reader to expend greater effort in determining the comparison-relevant content by expanding the context of the utterance, but the comparison-relevant content *may or may not* ultimately contribute to the optimally relevant interpretation. The second prediction would be compatible with a situation where (i) qualifying non-poetic comparisons makes the comparison-relevant content more determinate than would otherwise be the case, but (ii) qualifying poetic comparisons makes very little difference to how the comparison achieves overall relevance. This might explain why we find so few qualified similes in poetry, and why they are largely indistinguishable from unqualified similes in terms of their weak effects when they do occur.

An utterance of (35) is likely to achieve relevance as a poetic comparison. It is likely to evoke poetic effects:

> (35) His words are like vinegar.

However, (35a-d) which are 'strengthened' poetic comparisons, are likely to evoke a similar range of poetic effects:

> (35a) His words are rather like vinegar.

> (35b) His words are a lot like vinegar.

(35c) His words are so like vinegar as makes no difference.

(35d) His words are exactly like vinegar.

Utterances of weakened poetic comparisons such as (35e-f) also evoke a similar range of poetic effects:

(35e) His words are quite like vinegar.

(35f) His words are a little bit like vinegar.

My claim is not that qualified poetic comparisons communicate *the same thing* as unqualified poetic comparisons. This would be far too strong a conclusion. All utterances convey a presumption of their own optimal relevance. The length of an utterance is an issue which is pertinent to the style of an utterance because the more conceptual content which must be processed by the hearer/reader *mutatis mutandis*, the greater the cognitive effort he has to expend in order to understand the utterance, and hence the more cognitive effects he is justified in expecting for his efforts (see Chapter 2, §2.10). Therefore a wide range of weak implicatures would fall under the speaker's communicative intention as part of the content of the utterance. But, if my account is correct, then qualifying poetic comparisons will not provide precise enough evidence to direct a hearer/reader in determining the weaker effects of the utterance. Specifying the degree to which *his words* are like *vinegar* neither helps nor hinders the hearer/reader in arriving at the relevant overall interpretation because qualifying the degree of similarity communicated would only facilitate a hearer/reader if he were engaging in a task of identifying the points in which the comparison holds. But this task is required by the hearer/reader only in the case of *non-poetic* comparisons, where a more determinate comparison-relevant content is communicated. Therefore we should predict that qualifying comparisons should only affect how non-poetic comparisons are understood significantly enough for speaker and hearer intuitions to differ regarding the meaning of qualified and non-qualified comparisons.

My account predicts that the range of points of comparison which are communicated by non-poetic comparisons will differ when a comparison is qualified. To say that *A* is a lot like *B*

is likely to communicate that a wider range of points of comparison will be relevant than *A is like B*, and so on. So the interpretation of (36) and (36a-f) will vary:

(36) My car is like a Chevrolet.

(36a) My car is rather like a Chevrolet.

(36b) My car is a lot like a Chevrolet.

(36c) My car is so like a Chevrolet as makes no difference.

(36d) My car is exactly like a Chevrolet.

(36e) My car is quite like a Chevrolet.

(36f) My car is a little bit like a Chevrolet.

The set of points of comparison is likely to be widest for (36d), and narrowest for (36f). But this does not affect whether and to what extent the comparison is poetic: the availability of *any* highly manifest points of comparison makes a poetic interpretation of (36) very unlikely, and it is hard to think of a context where (36) would be interpreted as a poetic comparison.

When we do find 'strengthened' poetic comparisons in literature, it is extremely difficult to see how they might differ from their unqualified equivalents, such as in (37):

(37)[Church bells] falling on mine ear

Most like articulate sounds of things to come!

(Coleridge, *Frost at Midnight*. Lines 32f. *NA*: 811)

How does the interpretation of *most like articulate sounds of things to come* in (37) differ from that of *like articulate sounds of things to come*? Are the church bells in (37) more like premonitions or prophecies than they would have been had the poet described them merely with an unqualified comparison? The strengthened comparison is exactly what the poet is communicating, but what this might mean at the explicit level is extremely unclear. It is certainly possible that the comparison-relevant content of *most like articulate sounds of*

things to come is more determinate than that of an utterance containing *like articulate sounds of things to come*. But both versions would still achieve poetic effects. My view is that this is because the comparison-relevant content is indeterminate enough in both cases for the utterance to achieve overall relevance primarily through the evocation of poetic effects. By communicating that the tenor is *most like* the vehicle, the poet merely suggests that there will ultimately be many points of comparison, not that the set of points of comparison will be determinate (making the comparison 'more non-poetic'). In fact, the two versions are so difficult to distinguish in terms of their effects that they appear to be essentially variants of each other which could be deployed at will for metrical convenience.

A further complication for any analysis of qualified similes is that a poet can explicitly communicate a strict correspondence by means of a comparison, and this communicated strict correspondence can be used to generate poetic effects, such as in (38):

(38) **EXAMPLE REDACTED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS**

(Paulin, *Mount Stewart.* 1987: 38)

In (38) the poet explicitly communicates a comparison which involves the equivalence of a precise degree. In short, the poet communicates, amongst other things, that *it* is not his idea. In this sense, we are dealing not with a poetic comparison, but with a kind of 'reverse' exemplification (see §6.5), as the putative paraphrase I give in (38a) suggests:

(38a) It is not my idea, just as [=to the same extent as] sucked sugar-cane or falling stars and figs were not my idea.

Examples such as (38) ought to communicate points of comparison most strongly. Example (38) is not amongst the examples I have found which evoke the weakest effects, so it is inconsistent with the hypothesis that strengthening a poetic comparison evokes more poetic effects.

When we look at the types of weakened similes which are actually found in English poetry, examples such as (39a-c) evoke a similar range of weak effects to non-qualified equivalents (qualification indicated by underlining):

(39a) […] steps

<u>Almost as</u> silent as the turf they trod.

(Wordsworth, *The Prelude*. Lines 324f. *NA*: 782)

(39b) **EXAMPLE REDACTED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS**

(Paulin, *Where's This Big River Come From?* 1987: 28)

(39c) **EXAMPLE REDACTED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS**

(Paulin, *Mount Stewart*. 1987: 39)

If there is little difference in terms of the poetic effects generated by qualified and unqualified poetic comparisons, why would poets use qualified poetic comparisons at all? Perhaps, for instance, saying *I felt like a bishop* (instead of *I felt a bit like a bishop* in (39b)) is felt to be too *easily* comprehensible, and hence not to generate enough poetic effects. That may explain *some* cases of qualified poetic comparisons, but perhaps not all. It should be noted that although *A is a bit like B* seems to convey that *A* is like *B* in fewer respects than *A*

is like B for non-poetic cases, the qualification in no way specifies the ways in which *A* is like *B*. So what *do* such qualifications achieve in the poetic cases? The situation here is very unclear. One avenue for further investigation might be to conduct a corpus-study of non-qualified poetic comparisons and their qualified equivalents which share a vehicle. Another might be to see if there is any felt difference between a single author's use of qualified and unqualified poetic comparisons, either from the perspective of the reader or from that of the poet herself. But my prediction is clear enough: that most cases of qualified poetic comparisons will not differ from their non-qualified equivalents in terms of their weak effects. I have as yet found no counterexamples to this prediction.

5.4 Additional conceptual content as a means of broadening context

If poetic and non-poetic comparisons form a continuum, and hearers/readers pursue a set of points of comparison as part of the comparison-relevant content of the utterance of a comparison, what effect should linguistically-specifying parts of that content have on how poetic comparisons are understood? What effect should linguistically-specified additional content which is *not* directly relevant to the respects in which the comparison holds have on how poetic comparisons are understood? Answering these questions will help us to understand why we find 'explained' and 'extended' similes in poetry (see §§4.4-5).

There are a number of ways in which similes actually found in poetry can differ from the forms of simile which I outlined at the start of this chapter (see also (40a-c) below). I have also had little to say thus far about the third type (*A is as ADJECTIVE as B*). This seems to differ from the other two in that the adjective seems to provide not just *a* point of comparison, but often *the main* respect in which the comparison is taken to hold. Similarly, a speaker/author can modify the vehicle of the *A is like B-* and *A VERBS like B*-type similes in such a way as to suggest points of comparison. Therefore, (40a-c) suggest particular respects in which Achilles is like a lion, or like a particular lion:

> (40a) Achilles is like a brave lion. [i.e. in terms of bravery]

> (40b) Achilles leaps like a lion pouncing on its prey. [i.e. in terms of the particular way in which a lion pounces on its prey]

> (40c) Achilles is as brave as a lion. [i.e. in terms of bravery]

As (40a-c) are all usually understood to be similes (hence, poetic comparisons) this may suggest that my claim that poetic comparisons do not achieve relevance primarily through the hearer/reader deriving determinate points of comparison as part of the comparison-relevant content is incorrect. However, there are also clear cases of poetic simile where description of the vehicle does not provide the hearer with linguistically-specified clues to points of comparison (examples (41a-c)). Rather, this 'additional content' is not relevant to the comparison:

(41a) Achilles is like a lion on the savannah.

(41b) Achilles leaps like a lion on the savannah.

(41c) Achilles is as brave as a lion on the savannah.

We find lots of similes which have such comparison-irrelevant, additional content in poetry, and I discuss some examples below. If such examples can be subsumed under my account of simile understanding, then all extended similes can be so explained. Moreover, the explained similes I looked at in Chapter 4, §4.4 pose the same theoretical problem as examples (40a-c). For reasons of simplicity, I call examples such as (40a-c) *explained similes* and (41a-c) *extended similes*.

Explained similes involve the linguistically-specified communication of comparison-relevant content, and extended similes involve the linguistically-specified communication of content which is not directly relevant to the derivation of points of comparison. One of the strengths of my hypothesis regarding simile understanding is that, far from (40a-c) and (41a-c) providing counterexamples to my account, my account would predict that additional content would often make a comparison *more* poetic, whether that content was comparison-relevant or not (Cf. Ortony, 1993: 350). This is because the more linguistically-specified content is communicated by the speaker/hearer, the broader the potential context of the utterance based upon the concepts communicated, and hence the wider the array of weak implicatures (poetic effects) which are evoked.

At this point I need to make clear that my explanation of these types of similes applies whether the comparison-relevant content of (poetic and non-poetic) comparisons

contributes to the explicature of the utterance or constitutes part of the implicit content. In (40a) the concept BRAVE is lexically-encoded by *brave* and also forms part of the comparison-relevant content. This suggests that a concept related to BRAVE is communicated as part of the explicature of the utterance. But this does not mean that, in every case, part of the explicature corresponds to part of the comparison-relevant content. The explicature of (41a), for instance, will involve conceptual elements corresponding to the additional content *on the savannah*. But this is not necessarily relevant to the points of comparison between *Achilles* and *a lion*. So what role does this additional content play in how (41a) is understood?

For the poetic cases of both explained and extended comparisons, the comparison-relevant content ultimately contributes to relevance far less than the weak implicatures communicated. Therefore, we should expect that specifying what forms part of the comparison-relevant content should not contribute directly to the relevance of the comparison (as it might in explained, non-poetic comparisons, such as *He's like my brother in that I can trust him*). Specifying elements of comparison-relevant content should affect overall understanding in the same way as linguistically-specified content which does not contribute to the comparison-relevant content. That is, 'extended' and 'explained' similes should work the same way: through providing evidence for how the hearer/reader should expand the context in order to come to the optimally relevant interpretation.

Examples such as (42a-b) are often considered to be typical of simile:

(42a) She is as happy[*] as the day is long[*].

(42b) She is as happy[*] as the grass is green[*].

I have indicated by the use of asterisks [*] where the concept lexically-encoded by the word used requires some significant adjustment at the level of the explicature. Utterances of (42a-b) communicate not that she is HAPPY *tout court*, but rather that she is happy in a particular way and to a particular degree (HAPPY*). Both (42a-b) communicate that *she is very happy*. The reason that this is how they are understood appears to be that DAYS are understood as being prototypically LONG* (even though they are short compared to weeks, years, aeons and so on. See Searle, 1993: 92, for similar observations regarding stereotypical properties in

metaphor understanding) and GRASS as prototypically GREEN* (the particular shade of green that grass can be said to typify). But if the understanding of (42a-b) were merely a matter of determining the degree of correspondence between her amount of happiness and the typicality of a particular property for some other entity (that is, if the only content were the comparison-relevant content), then we should predict that (42a-b) could be paraphrased without loss as (42c):

(42c) She is very happy.

Clearly the linguistically specified content of the vehicles of the similes in (42a-b) provides access to other assumptions, which may or may not form part of what is communicated as part of the comparison-relevant content of (42a-b). Similarly, what is communicated by the comparison vehicle in an utterance of (43) cannot be limited to the communication of the degree of NEED the speaker is feeling:

(43) I need that like I need a hole in the head.

For (42a-b), the ad hoc concept construction mandated by the contextual adjustment of the concepts lexically-encoded by the adjectives does not elicit weak effects on its own. In many cases, (42a-b) will *not* communicate a wide range of weak effects at all. This provides further evidence that the weak effects of similes cannot be traced to ad hoc concept construction, as they can with metaphor (see Chapter 2, §2.12). In (43), if there are any weak effects, these are also not evoked by the determination of a set of points of comparison between the speaker needing something and the speaker needing a hole in the head: this set will contain only the determination of the *degree* to which the speak NEEDS *that*. We can contrast here (44), which is likely to communicate poetic effects:

(44) I need you like I need the sun.

The open-endedness of the set of points of comparison communicated by (44) invites the hearer to explore a wider and wider context, in particular that made available by the vehicle of the simile, in pursuit of contextual effects which justify that effort.

One of the strongest pieces of evidence that explained and extended poetic comparisons are understood in similar ways is that it is often difficult to tell whether the additional content

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contributes to the comparison-relevant content or not. Utterances of (45a-b) will likely communicate at least that comparison-relevant content suggested in square brackets in (45a-b) respectively:

(45a) Life is like a fairy-tale with a beginning, a middle and an end.

(45b) Life is like a fairy-tale with a twist at the end.

Clearly the additional content in (45a-b) suggests that the structure of life and fairy-tales constitutes a point of comparison, as suggested by the contents of the square brackets in (46a-b):

(46a) Life is like a fairy-tale [in being {STRUCTURED*, etc.}] with a beginning, a middle and an end.

(46b) Life is like a fairy-tale [in being {STRUCTURED**, etc.}] with a twist at the end.

Although the STRUCTURE of LIFE and FAIRY-TALES is being compared in both cases, it is certainly not *the same* property which is being compared in (45a-b). What the additional content does is to make more manifest to the hearer/reader particular properties which the tenor and vehicle have in common, and the outcome of that process will be very different properties as part of the comparison-relevant content (STRUCTURED* and STRUCTURED**). But this does not necessarily exhaust the comparison-relevant content which may be communicated. It is unlikely that the ad hoc concept STRUCTURED* simply denotes those things which have a beginning, a middle and an end, and STRUCTURED** those which have a twist at the end because (45a-b) will achieve relevance at least in part by the poetic effects they evoke. This will have an effect *which* comparison-relevant content is communicated, as well as how *strongly* communicated it is.

The difficulty one has in determining whether the additional content in (45a-b) counts as explanation or extension is precisely because the comparison-relevant content is indeterminate. And why would (45a-b) achieve relevance as poetic comparisons in the first place? Because the additional content provides access to contextual assumptions about stories which in many contexts are likely to be more relevant to the hearer/reader than the assumption that LIFE and FAIRY-TALES share a certain structure. These weak implicatures of the

utterance could include all kinds of assumptions, such as that fairy-tales have a cast of characters, that fairy-tales are a kind of diversionary pastime, and so on, as well as weaker impressions, perhaps including some kind of representation of the emotions one might feel when listening to or reading a fairy-tale. It is hard to imagine a context where the comparison-relevant content of (45a-b) would be more relevant to a hearer/reader than the poetic effects evoked because the context which the vehicle makes available (especially in light of the context made available by the additional content) is so broad.

O'Donoghue argued from a relevance theoretic perspective that "the intrinsic focus of the simile form on precise points of similarity between two concepts" or on the "certain respects" in which a comparison holds is one of the main reasons for simile having distinct effects to metaphor (O'Donoghue, 2009: 125; 131). I have already challenged the idea that similes and metaphors do have distinct effects (see Chapter 4, §4.7). Rather, they are processed differently (§5.1), and the overall interpretation of both metaphors and similes can be, but need not be, similar. If the 'intrinsic focus' of similes on the comparison-relevant content meant that similes are more explicit than metaphors, this contrasts with O'Donoghue's claim that "similes are no more explicit in the clues they give to *how utterances are ultimately intended to be interpreted* than metaphor" (*id., ib.*: 143, my italics). I would go further than O'Donoghue on this point. If we limit our focus to the distinction between poetic and non-poetic comparisons, then 'how utterances are ultimately (understood by the hearer/reader to be) intended to be interpreted' determines whether the comparison-relevant content contributes to the optimally relevant overall interpretation or not.

If determining points of comparison were essential to how *poetic* comparisons are understood, then we ought to expect that providing linguistically-specified evidence towards the construction of those properties ought to facilitate understanding, reducing the cognitive effort required in identifying the relevant points of comparison and, hence, leading to a narrowing of the range of poetic effects generated than would otherwise be the case. But explained and extended similes can be just as 'poetic' as those which are not. Moreover, when we look at extended similes in particular, we can see that as the amount of additional

content of a comparison increases (as the vehicle gets elaborated), the more likely it is to be interpreted poetically[71].

A typical example of a simile with additional content is (47a):

(47a) **EXAMPLE REDACTED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS**

(Gunn. "*All Do Not All Things Well*." Lines 20-23. *NA*: 1773)

In (47a), the additional content suggests a more precise way in which the engine part shines than would be the case if the poet had just written *shining like tar*. The reader is likely to find the comparison evocative or not on the basis of whether imagining fishing tar out of water, and the sunlight reflecting on its surface, and so on, contributes to the relevance of the comparison as a whole. But relevance is achieved primarily in terms of the weak effects which are weakly communicated by the comparison.

The additional linguistically-specified material in (47a) (*fished out into the sun*) does not contribute primarily to finding a narrow set of points of comparison. All we can say for sure that a hearer/reader *must* recover in order to have understood (47a) is that a car part shines in a certain way, that is, the way wet tar shines. But the way (47a) is understood is not the same as (47b) or (47c):

(47b) The car part shone like tar.

(47c) The car part shone like wet tar.

What is the difference between how (47a) and (47b-c) are understood? An utterance of (47a) does not communicate merely that the car part SHONE* like tar (as in (47b)), or SHONE**

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[71] For reasons of length I limit myself to relatively short examples. But my account generalises to so-called 'epic' similes, no matter how long.

like wet tar in the sun (as in (47c)), or even that it SHONE*** like wet tar freshly removed from water into the particular kind of sunlight one might expect when fishing for tar. Rather, the additional content in (47a) makes manifest or more manifest a range of encyclopaedic assumptions associated with the lexically-encoded concepts which may contribute to *both* the determination of the comparison-relevant content *and* the poetic effects which (47a) evokes. The process of mutual parallel adjustment will also affect which particular ad hoc concept is communicated by the word *shone* as part of the explicature of the utterance.

When (47a) is understood, certain assumptions are made more manifest by the lexically encoded concepts in the additional content. These can include assumptions such as (47d-f) which contribute to relevance as weak implicatures of the utterance (as well as weaker impressions). But these assumptions are not limited to those about the activities being compared:

> (47d) Removing a car part is an effortful activity. [i.e. like fishing for tar]

> (47e) It was a beautiful day when the car part was removed. [strictly speaking, only true of the description of fishing for tar on a sunny day]

> (47f) Removing the transplant was a dirty but enjoyable activity.

> etc.

Utterances of (47b) and (47c) are also likely to be poetic. But whereas (47b) and (47c) are likely to achieve poetic effects because certain comparisons have indeterminate comparison-relevant content in a certain context (inviting the construction of a set of shared properties which is the responsibility of the hearer/reader), in (47a) the poet has, by explicitly communicating concepts which add further to the context by means of the encyclopaedic assumptions they make more manifest, guaranteed that the comparison is relevant in a context which contains some of those assumptions. A comparison can achieve relevance in two different ways, as a poetic or non-poetic comparison, so the optimally relevant overall interpretation will require whichever route to relevance involves least effort. By gerrymandering the context, as it were, by communicating certain concepts which add to the potential context, and thereby making a determinate comparison-relevant content more

effortful to derive, authors/speakers are able to subtly redirect how readers/hearers interpret comparisons.

Examples such as (48a) are not rare in English poetry. In (48a) the second poetic comparison exhibits what some have referred to as 'simile within metaphor' (see §6.3 for a fuller exposition of this type of simile):

> (48a)   Thou wert as a lone star whose light did shine
>
>   On some frail bark in winter's midnight roar;
>
> Thou hast <u>like to a rock-built</u> refuge stood
>
>   Above the blind and battling multitude.
>
> (Shelley, *To Wordsworth*. Lines 7ff. *NA*: 863)
>
> (simile underlined)

Wordsworth only metaphorically *stood above* the masses and the poetic comparison contributes not so much to the specification of the way in which he excels, but rather to a range of other impressions, such as, perhaps, the permanence of his excellence, and many far weaker effects.

If we were to focus strictly upon the points of comparison between buildings and Wordsworth's attitude (the two things being compared) we would miss the fact that the *implicit* content of (48a) is what makes it poetic. My account emphasises the role that (i) the linguistically-specified additional conceptual content as well as (ii) the search for relevant points of comparison which communication of any comparison elicits play in *how* similes achieve their weak effects. In the case of (48a), one might comment that the points of comparison which apply to both Wordsworth's 'standing' and the 'standing' of a *rock-built refuge* are ad hoc, or *metaphorical*. This is only part of the explanation. In order to get to the bottom of why comparisons are amenable to the type of effects they are deployed to evoke we need to explain the relationship between the role of points of comparison in simile understanding and poetic effects. Crucial to this relationship is not just that the properties

which form the set of points of comparison can be ad hoc, but also that the set itself can be indeterminate.

Further examples from poetry can help clarify this point. In (48b), *highways* and *new loves* can be *built up* in very different ways (loosely speaking, 'literally' and 'metaphorically' respectively). The concept encoded by the word *raw* is far closer to being appropriate as a description of *new loves* than it is as a description of *highways*, but *speedy* exhibits the opposite relationship:

(48b) **EXAMPLE REDACTED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS**

(Sexton. *And One for My Dame*. Stanza 16. Lines 46ff. *NA*: 1765)

(additional content underlined)

If determining the points of comparison communicated by a simile were the primary task of the hearer/reader, and if the additional content in (48b) served merely to provide appropriate properties as members of that set, then the set of points of comparison communicated by the simile in (48b) would be radically heterogeneous. However, (48b) does not seem particularly difficult to interpret. Rather, the additional content provides access to further contextual assumptions attached to the lexically-encoded concepts which may contribute to the determination of the set of points of comparison, but are most important for the kinds of weak implicatures that poetic comparisons typically communicate.

Examples like (48b) are extremely common in English poetry. I give (48c-e) as further examples, and (48f) provides a still more complex example:

(48c) This City now doth, <u>like a garment</u>, wear

The beauty of the morning[.]

(Wordsworth, *Composed upon Westminster Bridge*, 3rd *September 1802*. Lines 4f. *NA*: 795)

(48d) **EXAMPLE REDACTED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS**

(Snyder, *Four Poems for Robin. An autumn morning in Shokoku-ji.* Lines 29f. *NA*: 1818)

(48e) **EXAMPLE REDACTED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS**

(Wright, *As Our Bodies Rip, Our Names Turn into Light*. Lines 1f. *NA*: 1867)

(48f) **EXAMPLE REDACTED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS**

(R. S. Thomas, *January*. Lines 2ff. Alvarez (Ed.), 1966: 80)

A city can WEAR* beauty, but not in the way one does a garment; a memory can CHOKE* one's throat, but not the way that vomit can; and the sky can UNROLL*, but not the way a rug does, and so on. In (48f), the lexically-encoded concept SOFT is more appropriate as a description of EXCREMENT than the EXPLOSION which it modifies, but the reverse is true of BOLD: it is easier to see how an EXPLOSION might be properly described as *bold* than a ROSE. But do these comparisons achieve relevance primarily as poetic comparisons or by means of the weak implicatures necessitated by construction of the ad hoc concept construction required to interpret *wear*, *choke* and *unroll*?

When we compare these examples to extended and explained similes, we can see that the same explanation suffices: what matters is the optimally relevant interpretation. The search for comparison-relevant content is one way comparisons can be understood, and, because

this is a possible route to relevance, a hearer is likely to explore this during the process of utterance understanding. However, in part because examples like (48a-f) involve the communication of ad hoc concepts, and in part because comparisons can be understood as poetic comparisons, the utterance achieves relevance primarily through the communication of poetic effects. In §6.3 below I argue that this is a better way of addressing the issue of metaphor-simile interaction than competing accounts, and explore the possibility that Carston's 'second mode of metaphor processing' might be investigated in these terms (Carston, 2010a; 2010b; Carston and Wearing, 2011).

Another advantage of my account is that although the determination of points of comparison *can* contribute to the relevance of a comparison, it allows for even large, partly determinate sets of points of comparison to remain open in certain poetic cases. For instance, there are many poetic comparisons which, in terms of the points of comparison they communicate, appear to be very determinate. In (49a), the interpretation of the underlined (conjoined) comparison must be related primarily to the degree of 'wildness' and 'variety' which the poet wishes to communicate:

> (49a) And many idle flitting phantasies,
>
> Traverse my indolent and passive brain,
>
> <u>As wild and various as</u> the random gales
>
> That swell and flutter on this subject Lute!
>
> (Coleridge, *The Aeolian Harp*. Lines 40-43. *NA*: 806)
>
> (comparison underlined)

The interpretation of (49a) is likely to communicate that the poet's thoughts were very *wild* and *various*. Similarly, in (49b), the poet communicates that the *savage place* was very *holy and enchanted*:

> (49b) A savage place! <u>As holy and enchanted</u>
>
> <u>As </u>e'er beneath a waning moon was haunted

By woman wailing for her demon lover!

(Coleridge, *Kubla Khan*. Lines 14-16. *NA*: 809)

(comparison underlined)

However, these poetic comparisons achieve relevance not merely as descriptions of very *wild and various* mental impressions in (49a) or a very *holy and enchanted* place in (49b), but rather through a range of weakly communicated impressions involving phenomena of affect, such as the poet's attitude to the descriptions.

My account of simile understanding recognises that the set of points of comparison remains open in poetic comparisons. So even if the comparison-relevant content appears to be determinate to some extent, this does not mean that obvious points of comparison exhaust the content of the comparison. This is why comparing something to itself can still communicate poetic effects, as in the identity simile introduced in §4.4 (example (22), repeated here as (50)):

(50) [...] And in their own dimensions like themselves

The great seraphic lords and cherubim

In close recess and secret conclave sat[…]

(Milton, *Paradise Lost* I.793-5. In Baldwin (Ed.), 1998: 24)

What is odd about (50) is that the simile (i) compares something to itself (suggesting a complete overlap of properties) and (ii) even provides a clue as to the properties which are likely to be more central in the set of points of comparison (*in their own dimensions* suggests that the set of points of comparison is structured as follows: [in being {LARGE, etc.}]). So how can the simile in (50) still evoke poetic effects just like other, 'non-identity' similes? My view is that such a comparison can be poetic in this context because readers have certain expectations which will not be fulfilled if the comparison achieved relevance as a non-poetic comparison (in terms of a determinate set of points of comparison). For this reason, the reader must expand the context in pursuit of weak implicatures which will allow the utterance to achieve relevance, considering less central properties as part of the set of

points of comparison, and adjusting the concepts which are communicated as part of that set. In the case of (50), it is very likely that the concept LARGE is not specific enough to license a sufficient range of weak implicatures, so something more specific, the *extreme* size of the angels, for instance, must be communicated as part of the comparison-relevant content. It is unclear to me how competing accounts would explain identity similes such as (50), unless one treated them as *sui generis*.

At this point I make an empirical prediction: (i) because poets can deliberately broaden the context in which a comparison is interpreted by extending it; and (ii) because the broader the context is the more likely a comparison is to communicate weak implicatures; then (iii) extending a comparison which would otherwise be interpreted as a non-poetic comparison without the extension ought to precipitate a poetic interpretation (i.e. as achieving relevance primarily through the evocation of poetic effects). For instance, an utterance of (51) communicates that Odysseus and a (prototypical) FOX share the property CUNNING to the same degree:

(51) Odysseus is as cunning as a fox.

An utterance of (51) is likely to be interpreted as a non-poetic comparison. But (51a) *is* a poetic comparison:

(51a) Odysseus is as cunning as an arctic fox which disappears suddenly from the polar bear's gaze, only to leap out from behind the beast and dart off into the distance.

The additional content of (51a), which is not directly comparison-relevant, makes the context in which the comparison is interpreted very broad. In understanding (51a), as in (51), the hearer/reader has to determine an ad hoc concept CUNNING* which will be consistent with the description of the arctic fox in the vehicle of the comparison. This is likely to involve a significant departure from the lexically-encoded concept CUNNING through a process of mutual parallel adjustment: it has to be the right concept to justify the weak implicatures which arise from (51a), meaning that it has to be consistent with the weak implicatures which are suggested by the (extended) content of the vehicle of the comparison. Why shouldn't we consider the poetic effects evoked by (51a) to be caused by the effort entailed

by ad hoc concept construction? My claim is that (51b) will communicate much the same implicit content as (51a):

(51b) Odysseus is like an arctic fox which disappears suddenly from the polar bear's gaze, only to **cunningly** leap out from behind the beast and dart off into the distance.

(change to the vehicle of the comparison in bold type)

Not only does (51b) share the same weak implicatures as (51a), an utterance of (51b) is likely to communicate that Odysseus shares much the same properties with the arctic fox as (51a) does. Why? Because the comparison-relevant content has to come from a similar context, made available by the same or similar lexically-encoded concepts.

5.5 Conclusion

I maintain that similes are not metaphors and that similes are not processed in the same way as metaphors: they are processed as comparisons. They nevertheless communicate certain effects that metaphors also communicate: that is, poetic effects. Because 'equivalent' metaphors and similes (such as *Achilles is a lion* and *Achilles is like a lion*) require the hearer to access the same sorts of concepts and their associated encyclopaedic assumptions in understanding the utterance, the weak implicatures they communicate will have much in common. The fact that they can communicate similar effects follows from these considerations: one cannot infer from such examples that metaphors and similes are understood in the same way. My account in particular explains not only that metaphors and similes can have similar effects, but also *why* any comparisons (similes being a species of comparison) can produce such effects at all.

I claim that similes are a type of comparison (poetic comparisons), but they are different from non-poetic comparisons in that they do not achieve relevance primarily through the determination of a set of points of comparison, but rather through the weak effects that communicating a comparison can achieve (§5.1). I am not alone in emphasising that the correspondence between tenors and vehicles has little to do with how similes achieve their effects (see e.g. Mueller, 1984: 115f on a particular simile in Homer's *Iliad*). Moreover, my account explains why certain relationships between tenor and vehicle concepts often obtain in poetic comparisons (§5.2). My account accurately predicts that qualifying similes makes

little difference to how they are interpreted (§5.3). It also predicts that when poets provide additional conceptual content to a comparison (whether within the vehicle or as an ostensible point of comparison) this will likely make the comparison *more* poetic by making a wide range of contextual assumptions more manifest which will simultaneously make certain properties more manifest which can serve as points of comparison: hence explanation or extension of similes makes the set of points of comparison more indeterminate, and, hence, the comparison more poetic (§5.4). This is why similes are often 'extended' in a way metaphors are not (Cf. Chapter 4, §§4.4-6).

Chapter 6: Implications: the scope and utility of *poetic comparisons*

In Chapter 4 I outlined certain assumptions which are prevalent in the theoretical literature about similes (and, in particular, their relationship with metaphor on the one hand and 'literal', that is, non-poetic, comparison on the other) and I rebutted them. Given my account of how similes (poetic comparisons) are understood, I am now in a position to explain from a theoretical perspective *why* these assumptions turn out to be mistaken:

1. It is not the case that metaphors and similes are universal. My account would not predict that every type of comparison construction is amenable to poetic effects, only those which invite the construction of a set of points of comparison, but do not demand that this set be saturated. Hence, we should not necessarily predict that a certain class of comparisons which is amenable to the communication of poetic effects is available in every language. Moreover, only some types of comparison in English appear to be able to communicate poetic effects the way poetic comparisons do.

2. Similes are not the same in terms of content and effects as metaphors. But they can be used to achieve similar effects, and, in certain circumstances, they can communicate that the tenor shares certain properties with the vehicle. The explicit content of a particular simile on a particular occasion of use can be *similar to* that of a metaphor. The properties which are predicated of Achilles in *Achilles is a lion* may be similar to those properties which form the set of points of comparison in *Achilles is like a lion*. Certain properties are predicated of Achilles in the metaphor case (those captured by the ad hoc concept LION*) in order for the hearer/reader to come to an optimally relevant interpretation (typically in terms of the wide array of weak implicatures which constructing the ad hoc concept allows the hearer/reader to access). In understanding the simile, the optimally relevant interpretation does not *depend upon* there being a particular (strongly communicated) set of properties communicated as part of the explicature.

3. Because similes are not understood in the way that metaphors are, similes are not hedged metaphors. Moreover, qualifying similes (see §6.3) does not reduce the poetic effects they communicate either.

4. Similes do not typically or elliptically come with explanations. The reason that poets add 'explanation' to similes is that this allows them to subtly redirect the way in which these comparisons achieve relevance (§6.4).

5. Similes can be extended (in terms of additional explicit content in the tenor) but this changes how the simile is interpreted (§6.4). There is not a default type of simile (extended simile) which other similes are derivative of. Similes are simply a use of comparisons.

6. Similes are not 'miniature narratives'. Similes simply *are* a particular use of comparisons. Two scenarios can be compared to each other, and one such scenario can be particularly elaborate. That is, in itself, of little theoretical interest. However, as I explain below, there are certain cases of simile where the vehicle is elaborated as if it were part of the narrative. This is compatible with my account. It is difficult to see how any account which conflates metaphor and simile could explain such cases.

7. Similes can be used to achieve effects which cannot be achieved by metaphors. This is perhaps one reason *why* poets deploy similes. If similes were always indistinguishable from metaphors in terms of their effects, why would similes remain in use?

8. Similes rarely, if ever, 'fail'. Because comparisons can so readily be deployed to elicit poetic effects, they can often be understood even when there are no points of comparison strongly communicated, that is, when the set of points of comparison is indeterminate. In fact, it is precisely these comparisons (poetic comparisons) we would want to call 'similes'. This is why it is so difficult to think of a case of a 'failed' simile.

9. Similes cannot always be easily distinguished from non-poetic comparisons. This is because similes *are* comparisons.

Another consequence of my account is that one important source of intuitions about the felt difference between metaphors and similes (see Chapter 4, §§4.3, 7) turns out to be relevant to theorising about simile understanding in a way which the. Utterances such as (1) have been used to argue that similes are less effective than metaphors (see also §5.1):

> (1) Achilles isn't *like* a lion, he *is* a lion.
>
> (appropriate intonation suggested by italics)

However, according to my account, the comparison *Achilles isn't like a lion* will be interpreted in a particular way. Unless the comparison-relevant content is determinate, then negating a comparison will not have positive contextual effects in a hearer's cognitive

environment. If *Achilles isn't like a lion* communicated that there are *no* possible points of comparison between Achilles and a LION, then it would be communicating a false assumption. So (1) must be communicating that Achilles does not share certain properties with LIONS, but he does have other properties which can be communicated by LION*. It is not the case that the denial of the comparison in (1) is interpreted in a null context *before* the metaphor is understood. The intonation indicated by italics suggests that speakers are aware of the need to highlight this contrast in order for utterances such as (1) to be understood as they are intended, that is, with both the comparison and the metaphor interpreted in the same context. What is the typical interpretation of an utterance like (1)? It has something to do with the prototypicality of assumptions which LION* makes available (such as that Achilles is exceptionally BRAVE). It is unlikely that a truly novel metaphor will elicit the same sort of interpretation. For instance, *Achilles is not like an alabaster slab he is an alabaster slab*, seems less felicitous than (1).

Moreover, a comparison in isolation (*Achilles is like a lion*) is also likely to communicate that Achilles is BRAVE*. What differs in (1) is that uttering *is like a lion* does not provide access to the contextual assumptions which provide the appropriate ad hoc concept as readily as uttering *is a lion* does in the same context of utterance. The reason for this is that the ad hoc concept construction necessitated by the communication of a metaphor is far more effortful than the determination of points of comparison would be *in a given context*. There are likely to be many points of comparison between the tenor and the vehicle in almost any context. But predicative metaphors by their very nature involve the predication of properties which are *not* central to the lexically-encoded concept of the word used in the tenor: they involve radical departures from the lexically-encoded concept. Because comparisons can be either determinate or indeterminate in terms of the set of points of comparison they communicate, in understanding (1) a hearer's priority will be to settle on an appropriate ad hoc concept for the metaphor: this is a task which is *necessary*, while the determination of the points of comparison will only be sought if relevance cannot be achieved some other way (such as through weak implicatures). Given the difference in interpretation between the comparison and the metaphor which the contrastive intonation communicates, an utterance such as (1) communicates that *this* comparison will have different points of comparison to the properties which LION* makes available. It is simply untrue that examples such as (1)

demonstrate that comparisons and metaphors always communicate a different relationship between the tenor and vehicle.

Furthermore, if we are concerned with the poetic effects of similes (poetic comparisons), then it does not make sense to focus upon negations of comparisons. Similes achieve their effects on the implicit side of communication, through the weak communication of a wide array of weak implicatures. But implicatures do not fall under the scope of the natural language equivalents of the logical operators. This is true of both strong implicatures and weak implicatures. If one denies a comparison, then that utterance can achieve poetic effects. But to deny a comparison does not mean that one is negating the poetic effects which would be achieved by the comparison without the negation operator: negated comparisons are not necessarily relevant desiderata for the issue of how non-negated comparisons (including poetic comparisons) are understood.

In the rest of this chapter I explore certain other ramifications of my account. Firstly, which phenomena count as poetic comparisons and which do not? Secondly, are there any emergent property poetic comparisons (Cf. §3.6)? Thirdly, what should an account of metaphor-simile interaction which is grounded in my account of simile understanding look like? This may have particular ramifications for the development of Carston's 'second mode of metaphor processing'. Fourthly, given that it is true that anything can be *like* anything else (§3.4), what would it mean for a simile to 'fail'? Finally, I look at a particular type of simile which has to my knowledge not been identified as worthy of further investigation, namely similes whose vehicles intrude into the narrative. My account can handle such cases adequately.

6.1 Simile-related phenomena

Now that I have a definition of simile (as poetic comparison) which captures how certain comparisons achieve poetic effects, which phenomena fall under this definition? I here look at a couple of types of comparison which appear to work the way poetic comparisons do and a couple which do not. The first type we might call 'poetic exemplifications':

(2) He went like one that hath been stunned,

And is of sense forlorn [.]

(Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner. Part VII.* Lines 622f. *NA*: 828)

The linguistic form of the utterance in (2) is the same as with the types of simile I have addressed above. But such examples (which are not uncommon, at least in certain periods of English poetry[72]) appear to differ from the other types of simile I have looked at in that the vehicle is merely an exemplification. However, many similes, even *Achilles is like a lion*, involve an indefinite vehicle. Why should these be processed any differently? In cases such as (2), the comparison-relevant content will include properties shared between the tenor and the 'exemplification' (simply an indefinite description) of the vehicle. The explanation of how they achieve poetic effects remains the same.

Another group of examples (again, not uncommon in English poetry[73]) one could call 'poetic counterfactual comparisons', such as (3):

(3) […] the Maiden sang

As if her song could have no ending [.]

(Wordsworth, *The Solitary Reaper.* Lines 25f. *NA*: 803)

Here the maiden's singing is being compared to a counterfactual scenario involving the maiden herself singing under conditions which do not obtain in the situation described in the narrative. My account of simile understanding can easily account for how these comparisons are understood. Just as comparing one thing to itself can still evoke poetic effects (see (54) in §5.5) as long as this will contribute to an optimally relevant interpretation, so comparing something to itself in a different scenario can achieve the same things as the similes looked at in §5.1. The search for comparison-relevant content in terms of points of comparison

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[72] Other examples I have found are: Keats, *To Homer.* Lines 1-4 (*NA:* 906); Tennyson, *The Lady of Shalott.* Lines 127-131 (*NA:* 987); Keats, *On First Looking into Chapman's Homer.* Lines 9-14 (*NA:* 905); Dante, *Inferno* 24.25-8 (Cf. Addison, 1993: 412).

[73] Other examples I have found are: Wordsworth, *The Solitary Reaper.* Lines 25f (*NA:* 803); Poe, *The Raven.* Lines 55f (*NA:* 978); Coleridge, *Kubla Khan.* Lines 17f (*NA:* 809); Coleridge, *Dejection: An Ode.* Lines 35f (*NA:* 829); Tennyson, *Ulysses.* Lines 22-24 (*NA:* 993).

between the vehicle (a counterfactual description) and the tenor is crucial to how poetic effects are evoked, even if the comparison-relevant content is not determinate and strongly communicated.

There are many sorts of construction which appear to be understood at least in part by a hearer/reader comparing one thing to another, and those which share the syntactic form of comparisons I have treated in this thesis (*A is like B*, *A VERBS like B*, *A is as ADJECTIVE as B*). Ought we to treat *every* such construction as a poetic comparison if the utterance containing this construction achieves relevance through the communication of poetic effects? It is less clear whether such uses can be subsumed under my account. For instance, there are cases of what could be called 'genitive poetic comparison' which we find in poetry, such as (4):

(4) And his eyes have all the seeming of a demon's that is dreaming

(Poe, *The Raven.* Line 105. Stanza 18. *NA*: 980)

The pertinent question related to such examples is whether, like comparisons, there is an element of the content which can be communicated by such comparisons which makes them particularly amenable to the communication of poetic effects. When I compared poetic with non-poetic comparisons in §6.1, it became clear that non-poetic comparisons communicate as part of the explicature a set of points of comparison. If we compare (4) with a similar construction whose interpretation does not involve weakly communicated poetic effects, such as (4a), there is no similar feature of the content which we can point to which plays a role in the evocation of poetic effects in (4):

(4a) The aircraft travels at the speed of sound.

Rather, it seems more plausible that the contextually mandated adjustment of the explicit content of (4) takes place at the level of the individual conceptual elements which correspond to words in the utterance. In other words, (4) is far more like a metaphor: what is communicated by *the seeming of a demon's that is dreaming* includes a conceptual element SEEMING* (that is, corresponding to a very particular type of appearance, or visage). Whether this account accurately accounts for the full range of such constructions is beyond the scope of this thesis. But my account of poetic comparisons allows us to formulate such

questions in such a way as to generate falsifiable hypotheses. My hypothesis is that (4) communicates poetic effects in a way similar to metaphors.

Another type of poetic utterance which appears to involve psychological comparison we can call 'morphological poetic comparisons', such as (5) (relevant lexical item underlined):

(5) Rulers who neither see, nor feel, nor know,

But <u>leechlike</u> to their fainting country cling [.]

(Shelley, *England in 1819*. Lines 4f. *NA*: 871)

What is communicated by *leechlike* is a certain conceptual content which is related to the lexically-encoded concept LEECH, and, at least if this item is met for the first time, may require a hearer/reader conceptualising what properties leeches and rulers could have in common. Moreover, the conceptual content communicated by *leechlike* appears to change according to context, as evidenced by (5a-b):

(5a) I've got a leechlike girlfriend.

(5b) I've got a leechlike scab on my feet.

One can felicitously compare the suffix *-like* to other adjectival endings such as *-ish* or *-y*, for which a comparison analysis would be difficult to argue. Goatly gives a range of what he calls 'metaphorical' suffixes (*-like*, *-y*, *-ish*, *-oid*, *-ous*, etc.) which vary in their productivity (1997: 95f). His account is based on conceptual metaphor theory (see §3.8), and he does not appear to address prefixes such as *quasi-* (*op. cit.*). For Goatly, at least, while –*like* merely signals that the affixed element is to be interpreted metaphorically, suffixes such as –*oid* ('of the shape/substance') and –*ous* ('having plenty of') are more specific in how the meaning of the whole departs from the encoded meaning of the noun to which the suffix is composed. From a relevance theoretic perspective, the way in which the meaning of the free morpheme (e.g. *leech*, *bridge*) is modified will be by *lexical pragmatic* processes, perhaps constrained in how the properties of the concept attached to the free morpheme are modified according to each suffix (although Goatly's paraphrases given in brackets above for –*oid* and –*ous* are not entirely plausible). Moreover, (5a-b) do not appear to be poetic. Because the contribution of these expressions to the explicature takes the form of a

modification of a lexically-encoded concept I would be inclined to group them with metaphors, but it appears that these sorts of example can be profitably investigated in comparison with poetic comparisons.

6.2 Are there any emergent property similes?

One of the main research questions in metaphor studies is how to account for the problem of emergent properties (see §3.1). The typical interpretation of emergent property predicative metaphors such as (6a-b) is difficult to account for because the properties taken to be predicated of the tenor do not come from encyclopaedic assumptions associated with the vehicle alone:

(6a) Sally is a block of ice.

(6b) Stephen is a bulldozer.

An utterance of (6a) communicates that Sally is a BLOCK-OF-ICE*, where BLOCK-OF-ICE* includes properties such as being NON-EMPATHETIC, CRUEL and so on, which are not properties associated with the concept lexically-encoded by *block of ice*. Similarly, (6b) communicates that Stephen is INCONSIDERATE, and so on. Real BLOCKS-OF-ICE and BULLDOZERS do not have these properties because they are inanimate. I explained in §3.1 that emergent property metaphors pose a problem even for the ad hoc concept account of metaphor understanding in relevance theory because the relevance theory account appears to entail that properties of ad hoc concepts are derived from the exploration of encyclopaedic assumptions attached to lexically-encoded concepts, as well as the exploration of assumptions associated with concepts within those encyclopaedic assumptions, and so on. If one does not have psychology-related assumptions attached to the concepts BLOCK-OF-ICE and BULLDOZER, how do they end up being communicated by the words which encode those concepts?

If we compare the similes (7a-b), which use the same tenor and vehicle as the emergent property metaphors (6a-b), we might predict that there will be a similar problem:

(7a) Sally is like a block of ice.

(7b) Stephen is like a bulldozer.

Utterances of (7a-b) are taken as typically communicating that similar properties obtain for the tenors *Sally* and *Stephen* as (6a-b) do. But one consequence of my account of simile understanding is that comparisons can be understood in two different ways. The emergent property problem can be understood in my model as applying only to non-poetic comparisons. The difficulty of finding appropriate points of comparison would preclude this route to relevance for (7a) and (7b): they cannot be understood merely by exploring the contextual assumptions the vehicle concepts make available in search of points of comparison. But there is another way in which they might achieve relevance. Therefore, I predict that all potentially emergent property comparisons will be understood as *similes* (poetic comparisons). There are, strictly speaking, no emergent property similes because 'emergent property comparisons' can only achieve relevance by virtue of the poetic effects they communicate, not in terms of the comparison-relevant content they communicate.

So where do the 'pseudo-emergent' properties in (7a-b) come from? The overall interpretation of (7a-b) is likely to include such implicatures as *Sally is not empathetic* and *Stephen is inconsiderate*, but it is not a theoretical obstacle that the emergent properties (as elements of implicatures) do not come from the context made available by the vehicle concept alone. It is clear where they come from. Utterances of (7a-b) are likely to achieve relevance as evidence towards such implicated assumptions. Why do utterances of (7a-b) then communicate that similar properties obtain of the tenor in each case if they achieve relevance primarily through an indeterminate range of weak implicatures? All kinds of conceptual and non-conceptual mental associations might contribute to this (including the kind of stable conceptual associations Wilson suggests conceptual metaphors might reflect. Wilson, 2011). Moreover, the inter-subjective stability of the interpretations of (6a-b) and (7a-b) might be extremely rare. I have come across metaphors such as those in (8) in song-writing and poetry, which clearly require the construction of emergent properties (repeated from Chapter 3, §3.7 example (34)):

(8) **EXAMPLE REDACTED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS**

(Linkous (Sparklehorse), *Saturday.* 1995. Album: Vivadixiesubmarinetransmissionplot. Plain.)

(communicated ad hoc concepts suggested by asterisks [*])

But the interpretation of the metaphors in (8) is radically indeterminate, far more so than the metaphors in (6a-b). But they still communicate poetic effects. If one attempts to construct emergent-property metaphors, they have more in common with the examples in (8) than in (6a-b). Might difficult metaphors such as (8) be the theoretically pertinent (and more typical) case and the emergent property metaphors of the theoretical literature more marginal phenomena? I suspect that investigating how young children interpret examples such as (6a-b) and (8) might help us to identify whether emergent property metaphors are more a matter of the conventionality of certain conceptual associations than the processes which underlie utterance understanding.

'Pseudo-emergent-property' similes like (7a-b) might provide a way of tackling the emergent property *metaphor* problem. Why should (6a-b) not also communicate a kind of comparison-relevant content? There is no reason not to suppose that non-comparison constructions (such as metaphors) such as (6a-b) can communicate something like the comparison-relevant content suggested in (9a-b) respectively:

> (9a) Sally is a block of ice [in being {NON-EMPATHETIC, CRUEL, etc.}].

> (9b) Stephen is a bulldozer [in being {INCONSIDERATE, etc.}].

The properties communicated as part of the comparison-relevant content of (9a-b) is explained in the same way as that of (7a-b). On the current view all predicative metaphors would also have two 'routes to relevance': (i) as ad hoc concept predications, or (ii) in the same way poetic comparisons achieve relevance, namely the communication of comparison-relevant content[74].

I am reluctant to allow my explanation of 'pseudo-emergent property' comparisons to generalise in this way because it threatens theoretical parsimony. I introduced the notion of comparison-relevant content (in §5) in order to capture the continuity of non-poetic and poetic comparisons, with a view to explaining why any comparisons might achieve poetic

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[74] My definition of poetic comparisons requires that there be a linguistically-specified comparison (with *like* or *as*). Therefore, even if metaphors can achieve relevance in the way described, they cannot strictly-speaking 'be' poetic comparisons.

effects in the way they do. If metaphors can be understood in this way, even though such an explanation would avoid the objections to the *conflation* of metaphor and simile (see e.g. §4.2), this would run counter to the important continuity that relevance theorists have identified between metaphor, hyperbole and 'literal' uses (see §2.9). Moreover, the presence of verbal and adjectival metaphors as well as nominal metaphorical vehicles as in (6a-b) would suggest that all utterances of concepts could communicate comparison-relevant content if such an interpretation could contribute to overall relevance. How could such a prediction be tested? The cure might be worse than the disease in this case. In the following section I outline a much more productive line of inquiry which could be based on my account of poetic-comparisons.

6.3 How are cases of extended metaphor and metaphor-simile interaction understood?

One area of research which has been highlighted but rarely explored in depth has been that of metaphor-simile interaction. For instance, Davidson makes reference to the phenomenon in passing (1978/1984: 257f), as does Leech (1969: 157). Recently, Ritchie gives as an example of 'metaphor development' the interaction (although he does not use the word) of a 'personification metaphor' and a 'rather odd simile' in the opening two lines of a poem by Stephen Spender (2013: 192-195). Fogelin also addresses 'the interaction of metaphors' (1988: 106-112). Interestingly, for our purposes, Fogelin claims that competing views of how metaphors are understood fail in dealing with specific instances of the 'genuine article', that is, with "rich poetic metaphors" drawn from literature (*id.*, *ib.*: 106f). Although Fogelin endorses a view of metaphor as elliptical simile which has been discredited (see §3.4), I see some merit in his view that the distinction between metaphors and similes seems least pronounced in the dense configurations of figurative language we often get in poetry. Croft and Cruse introduce the terminology of 'simile within metaphor' and 'metaphor within simile' in order to approach the relationship of local interaction between the two tropes from a cognitive linguistics (conceptual metaphor theory-based) perspective (2004: 215). What can my account of how similes are understood offer to this topic? Towards the end of this section I tackle Croft and Cruse's proposals in some detail. But for now I outline how I think metaphor-simile interaction, as well as 'extended metaphor', might be explained in terms of the poet's manipulation of the context in which a metaphor (or metaphors and similes) are understood by the hearer/reader.

As we have seen in Chapter 5 (§5.4), when concepts are communicated in close proximity to a simile, whether these concepts are ad hoc or not, this can alter the context in which the rest of the utterance is understood. This is because certain encyclopaedic assumptions will be made more manifest by the communication of a concept. The cumulative effect of this may be to make the optimally relevant interpretation of a dense configuration of metaphors (or metaphors and similes): (i) more likely to be one that achieves relevance by means of weak implicatures; and/or (ii) different to the interpretation that an individual metaphor or simile would have in isolation. The way *howls* is interpreted in different ways in example (10) has a lot in common with the examples discussed in §5.4:

> (10) […] his heart within him <u>howled</u>   13
>
> As a dog, having gone to its soft pups,
>
> [and] not recognising a man, <u>howls</u> and is minded to make battle,   15
>
> Thus did [sc. the heart] within him <u>howl</u> in his indignation at [their] evil deeds.
>
> (Homer, *Odyssey* 20.13-16. Greek text from Murray, 1919b: 274)
>
> (My translation and my emphasis. Line numbers given for convenience)

Clearly the senses of *howl* (*hylaktein*) which are communicated in lines 13 and 16 of the extract are different from that of *howl* within the vehicle of the simile in line 15. While hearts can only *howl* in a metaphorical sense (HOWL*), the sense of 'howling' communicated within the simile is 'literal', that is, far closer to the encoded sense of the word (HOWL). Leidl gives a translated comment by the Ancient philosopher Porphyry about example (10) that after the "rather bold" metaphor, Homer "adds a simile which is consistent with it, confirming it, as though he considered its boldness well-taken" (2003: 38. Translation by Schlunk, 1993). Unfortunately, all metaphors involve a significant departure from the encoded sense of the concept lexically-encoded by the word used, so it is not clear how this metaphor is 'bolder' than others. Moreover, the simile does not 'confirm' the ad hoc sense of *howl* (HOWL*), but rather communicates a concept closer to the lexically-encoded sense (HOWL).

One way of explaining how (10) is understood is to propose that the comparison-relevant content of the comparison (which is potentially non-poetic: comparing a 'howling man' to a

'howling dog' is likely to make a number of shared properties highly manifest because the concepts are so closely-related. See §5.2.2) and the two different ad hoc concepts communicated by the metaphors interact with each other directly. The process of understanding each metaphor and the poetic comparison is influenced by the fact that the others are being processed. But *how* this influence takes place remains unexplained. If metaphorical understanding involved a process of mapping between concepts, then there is no interaction here: the same conceptual metaphor (perhaps PEOPLE ARE ANIMALS) would be required to understand all the instances of *howl* in (10). It is unclear to me what conceptual metaphor theory ought to predict from a hearer repeatedly accessing the same conceptual metaphor. Moreover, the sense in which the dog *howls* in line 15 is *not* a radical departure from the lexically-encoded sense of *howl*, hence, not a metaphor from a relevance theory perspective. Croft and Cruse (whose relevant views are discussed below) do have a proposal regarding certain metaphor-simile interactions which describes just such reciprocal direct influence on the processes of understanding metaphors and similes. But my account of simile understanding proposes a much simpler one.

On each occasion that the word *howl* is used, certain contextual assumptions, some associated with HOWL, some associated with derived senses (HOWL*, HOWL**) are made manifest or more manifest. The overall relevant interpretation of (10) will therefore be based on a heterogeneous context, one in which the ad hoc concepts actually communicated by the metaphors and the comparison-relevant content of the simile, as well as the poetic effects which constitute the main 'point' of the utterance, mutually affect one another. The only interpretation which can be consciously reflected upon, the optimally relevant interpretation, will give the impression of 'direct influence' between metaphors and similes because the interpretation of each is different than would otherwise be the case (e.g. his heart did not simply *howl like a dog*). But this is not because these metaphors and this simile are somehow different than other cases. It is because the interpretation of both requires contextual assumptions, and the poet has constrained how the process of utterance understanding takes place by: (i) making the reader/hearer search for relevant ad hoc concepts and the comparison-relevant content of the comparison; and (ii) communicating that (10) is optimally relevant *given a particular context*.

Davidson gives as an example where he claims "simile and metaphor interact strangely" the extract in (11) (1978/1984: 257):

(11) The barge she sat in, like a burnished throne,

Burnt on the water.

(Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra* II.2.201f. Bevington (Ed.), 2004: 1347.)

An example such as (11) does not involve the same kind of 'interaction' as in (10). In (10), the tenor *his heart* HOWLED* and the dog HOWLING in the vehicle involve different concepts (ad hoc and lexically-encoded) which are communicated by related lexical items. But in (11) *burnished* and *burnt* are two different words, and so ex hypothesi, are attached to two different lexically-encoded concepts (see Fodor, 2008 §2).

Example (11) compares the (metaphorical) BURNING* of Cleopatra's barge to the implied 'burning' of *a burnished throne*, as clarified by the paraphrase in (12a):

(12a) The barge burns (BURNS*) like a burnished throne [sc. burns (BURNS**)[75]]

While barges can *burn* in one way metaphorically (they can also *burn* in the lexically-encoded sense, but the context of (11) makes clear that the barge is not on fire) and thrones can *burn* in another way metaphorically, there are *two* senses of *burn* which are relevant here. What is interesting from a theoretical point of view is that the concept BURN and the concept BURNISH share certain contextual assumptions. For instance, both concepts are likely to make more manifest certain assumptions such as (12b-d):

(12b) BURNING/BURNISHING involves fire.

(12c) BURNING/BURNISHING involves heat.

(12d) BURNING/BURNISHING involve a visible change of state of a material.

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[75] I am not claiming that BURNS** is communicated here, merely that, if it were, it would have to be a different ad hoc concept to BURNS*.

While (12b-d) are likely to be shared by BURNISH and BURN, they would *not* all be shared by BURNISH and BURN* (the concept communicated by the metaphor) if the utterance had stopped there (before the simile). However, BURN* and BURNISH will share something like (12d), given here as (12e):

(12e) BURNING*/BURNISHING involve a visible change of state of a material.

In understanding (11) an encyclopaedic assumption which is highly manifest for thoughts about *burnishing* is made highly manifest for thoughts about *burning* because the whole utterance is optimally relevant. As all utterances will make manifest or more manifest certain contextual assumptions *automatically*, with only some of those assumptions forming part of the context of utterance (that is those which contribute to relevance), when a speaker utters a metaphor they make more manifest some assumptions which are not necessarily conducive to the construction of the relevant ad hoc concept as well as some which facilitate this process. In this case, an assumption such as (12e) is unlikely to play a large role in determining the ad hoc concept BURNING* in the absence of further clues, such as are provided by the linguistically-specified content of the simile. But an utterance of *burnt* in (12) *will* have made (12e) manifest, and its manifestness will be increased by the utterance of *burnished* in the vehicle of the simile. It is in this sense that there is 'interaction' between metaphor and simile in (12).

A similar process is involved in understanding (13):

(13) Why, man, he [sc. Caesar] doth bestride the narrow world

Like <u>a Colossus</u>.

(Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*. I.2.135f. Bevington (Ed.), 2004: 1058.)

When the ad hoc concept BESTRIDE* is constructed, it will have to involve conceptual broadening to include in its denotation not a mundane sense of 'straddling' an object or a short expanse, but something as large as the world. It is from this perspective that world can be seen as *narrow*, so the concept communicated by *narrow* is also a departure from the lexically-encoded concept. Three elements interact here: (i) the metaphor *bestride*; (ii)the less radical departure from the lexically-encoded sense of *narrow;* and (iii) the contextual

assumptions made manifest or more manifest by comparing what (13) says Caesar is doing to what a Colossus does. It is not a phenomenon unique to a co-occurrence of metaphor and simile. But the way *like a Colossus* affects what is communicated by *bestride* and the 'interaction' between NARROW* and BESTRIDE* are similar. They interact, inasmuch as they do, through the subtle way in which the context required for the interpretation of one element affects how another element is understood. However, the processes underlying such interaction are not unique to metaphor and simile. What we see here are conceptual elements making manifest or more manifest contextual assumptions which subtly affect the contribution other lexically-encoded concepts make to the explicit content. This is to be expected to varying degrees in all manner of utterances, not just ones we might want to class as figurative. But this is the kind of 'interaction' which theorists usually have in mind.

My account of metaphor-simile 'interaction' differs radically from the conceptual metaphor theory-based account of Croft and Cruse. For Croft and Cruse, *simile within metaphor* is ("usually") where a (figurative) comparison "serves to clarify the source domain, often because the key word in the metaphorical vehicle is one with a wide range of construals" (Croft and Cruse, 2004: 215). They give (14a)-(14d) as examples:

(14a) Bizarre, angry thoughts flew through my mind like a thousand starlings.

(14b) She was standing there, her eyes fastened on me like steel rivets.

(14c) Grief tumbled out of her like a waterfall.

(14d) This is really twisting my brain like a dishrag.

(Examples (14a-d) and (15a-d) cited by Croft and Cruse from Cornwell, 2000).

In examples (14d) and (14c), "[t]here are many different sorts of 'twisting' and 'tumbling,' but the similes function to narrow them down" (Croft and Cruse, 2004: 215). The problem with this claim, as I outlined in §4.4 in relation to explicit points of comparison, is that it is unclear how a poetic comparison is 'narrower' than a metaphor. Moreover, the outcome of ad hoc concept construction (TUMBLED*, TWISTING*) is a specific concept, but the properties required for this concept are in precisely the 'wrong' area of the 'blended domain' (see §3.8, Figure 3.3) that is pointed to. Dishrags are not TWISTED the way minds are TWISTED*.

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The other type of metaphor-simile interaction which Croft and Cruse highlight is 'metaphor within a simile', where "the second term of the simile is itself a metaphor" (Croft and Cruse, 2004: 215), for which they give the examples repeated here in (15a)-(15d):

(15a) He looked tired, as if life has pushed him too far.

(15b) Rose looked dejected and somewhat embarrassed, as if afraid that her being so upset had sent her spinning threads of truth into conviction.

(15c) Talley made love as if he were starving.

(15d) Bray's tone had the effect of a metal box slamming shut.

However, (15a-c) are all what Croft and Cruse call 'speculations' (2004: 211) (which I call 'counterfactual comparisons' in §6.1). Moreover, (15d) has no linguistically specified marker of comparison (*like* or *as*), so what grounds do we have for taking it as a simile or any kind of comparison? Also, it is unclear what Croft and Cruse think (15a-d) demonstrate, other than that metaphors and similes *can* interact, and do so in different ways. I explore below why investigating metaphors in the vehicles of similes poses particular difficulties for researchers.

My account of how similes and metaphors can 'interact' through the sharing of contextual assumptions also generalises to cases of *extended metaphor*. Steen's definition of an extended metaphor can be used to highlight a particular problem from the perspective of relevance theory:

"When two linguistic units of usage are involved, for instance in the form of independent clauses, the linguistic expression of a metaphor may be said to be extended [.]"

(Steen, 2007: 238)[76]

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[76] This is not the type of metaphor extension which is discussed by, amongst others, Kövecses, whereby a 'new' (that is, non-conventionalized) conceptual element is introduced into the source domain of a conceptual metaphor (2010: 53).

Steen is a conceptual metaphor theorist. But the relevance theory definition of metaphor as a type of loose use concerns the relationship between one representation, or elements thereof, and another (e.g. Carston, 2002a: 378). Moreover, when we want to talk about multiple metaphors in a given utterance (even related ones, such as in (10)), the relationship between each metaphorically-used word and the concept it is used to communicate is a separate case of loose use. The relationship between each word and the concept it communicates can be different in each case.

In cases of extended metaphor, as understood by Steen, what exactly is 'extended'? It appears that what is meant by extended metaphor is the sharing of underlying conceptual associations between individual cases of what relevance theorists would call simply metaphors: that is, the use of a word which lexically-encodes one concept to communicate a different (but related) concept. In (16) there are a number of conceptually-related metaphors:

> (16)　　Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
>
> That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
>
> And then it is no more. It is a tale
>
> Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
>
> Signifying nothing.
>
> (Shakespeare. *Macbeth* 5.5.24-28. Bevington (Ed.), 2004: 1290.)

The lexically-encoded concepts PLAYER, STAGE, TALE and even TELL ('told') are conceptually related to each other. Does this mean that the words associated with these concepts are used here as realisations of the same conceptual metaphor (such as LIFE IS A TALE)? Looking at the passage from this perspective is very misleading. Firstly, it excludes the first metaphor (*life's but a walking shadow*) altogether. But the interaction of the *walking shadow* metaphor with the other metaphors is something we would want to explain. Moreover, it would downplay the difference between seeing life as *a tale told by an idiot* and so on and seeing life as just a *tale*. Furthermore, although one could argue that 'plays' are a type of *tale*, assuming that readers/hearers understand (16) in terms of the conceptual mapping LIFE IS A TALE would seriously downplay precisely those elements which make (16) so vivid. The

passage in (16) conveys the *futility* of life, which would not be implied by an assumption such as LIFE IS A TALE, by encouraging readers/hearers to reflect upon life as if it were a *walking shadow*, or an ephemeral performance, or the meaningless ramblings of a fool. Uttering (16) achieves these effects because these metaphor vehicles can make accessible assumptions about futility. But certain assumptions (such as *life is ultimately futile*) will be made much more manifest because they are reaffirmed by more than one metaphor.

But this process is not linear. In (16) there are multiple metaphors, but they share contextual assumptions. All utterances communicate the presumption of their own optimal relevance. So (16), or, at the very least, the utterances of the two sentences which form (16), must convey a presumption of their own optimal relevance. Relevance will therefore be achieved in a particular context. It is simply not the case that hearers/readers compute ad hoc concepts in a linear fashion. So when the explicature of the utterance *potentially* necessitates multiple departures from the lexically-encoded concepts ('multiple metaphors') the hearer will be justified in expending a large amount of cognitive effort in pursuit of cognitive effects. This will likely give rise to a wide range of weak implicatures (poetic effects). Are the ad hoc concepts WALKING-SHADOW* and POOR-PLAYER* communicated as part of the explicature of (16)? It does not matter. Readers/hearers may differ in this regard. What matters is that the hearer/reader arrives at the optimally relevant interpretation. It makes little difference whether the utterance achieves relevance in precisely this way, so long as the weak implicatures of the utterance *do* contribute to an optimally relevant interpretation. The account I give here of examples like (16) differs from that of Carston (2010a) and Carston and Wearing (See *id.* 2011: 305ff for discussion of the same example) where a 'second mode' of metaphor processing is appealed to. I discuss this below.

We can compare (16) with extended similes such as (17), where the comparison between tenor and vehicle does genuinely span more than one linguistic unit:

> (17) Thus Satan talking to his nearest mate   192
>
> With head up-lift above the wave, and eyes
>
> That sparkling blazed, his other parts besides
>
> Prone on the flood extended long and large   195

Lay floating many a rood, in bulk as huge

As whom the fables name of monstrous size [...]   197

[follow various classical giants and monsters]

[...], or that sea-beast   200

Leviathan, which God of all his works

Created hugest that swim th'ocean stream:

Him haply slumbering on the Norway foam

The pilot of some small right-foundered skiff,

Deeming some island, oft, as sea-men tell,   205

With fixèd anchor in his scaly rind

Moors by his side under the lea, while night

Invests the sea, and wishèd morn, delays:

So stretched out huge in length the arch-fiend lay

Chained on the burning Lake [...]   210

(Milton, *Paradise Lost* I.192-197, 200-210. In Baldwin (Ed.), 1998: 6f.)

(line numbers given for reader's convenience)

My account of how similes are understood can easily subsume examples such as (17). What might be called 'literary extended similes' are simply examples of the poetic comparisons with additional content I addressed in §5.4. The linguistically specified content is significant in (17), with many lexically-encoded concepts providing potential points of comparison and specifying the vehicle in many ways. But neither (i) making the vehicle conceptually richer nor (ii) providing access to properties which might serve as points of comparison limits the poetic effects of the comparison. Rather, the richness of the context communicated by virtue of extension and explanation of the comparison contributes to how it achieves poetic effects.

Steen's account of extended metaphors would have far less in common with genuine extended similes such as (17) than with multiple similes which are conceptually similar, as those in (18):

(18) For April sobs while these are so glad;

April weeps while these are so gay,-

Weeps like a tired child who had,

Playing with flowers, lost its way.

(Hunt Jackson, *April*. In Kleiser (Ed.), 1925: 268)

In understanding (18), an assumption such as (18a) or (18b) is likely to be made manifest, and the understanding of the repeated use of closely-related lexically-encoded concepts to communicate the metaphors SOBS* and WEEPS* (18) can be accounted for rather straight-forwardly by claiming that assumptions such as (18a) or (18b) play a role in assisting the hearer/reader to construct the right ad hoc concept:

(18a) A season can WEEP*.

(18b) April can do something which is like WEEPING in certain respects.

My account of how figuratively used expressions can affect each other's interpretation also raises some important questions about the nature of the *second mode of metaphor processing* proposed by Carston (2010a). Carston and colleagues have proposed that certain poetic cases of metaphor use involve the metarepresentation of extended representations of the literal meaning of an utterance. While many cases of metaphor, even those which achieve relevance primarily through the communication of poetic effects, are understood by means of ad hoc concept construction (see §2.7, §3.2), certain cases appear to require that the lexically-encoded concepts remain highly manifest to the hearer/reader throughout. Carston (2010a: 309f) and Sperber and Wilson (2008/2012: 121f) treat the same poem as an example, given here as (19):

(19) **EXAMPLE REDACTED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS**

(Sandburg, *Fog*. Sandburg, 1916: 71.)

For Sperber and Wilson, the effects of this extract rest primarily in the way the adjustment of conceptual content contributes to the generation of poetic effects:

> "[W]hat is part of the explicit content is that the fog comes ON-LITTLE-CAT-FEET*. And what is this concept? It is the concept of a property that is difficult or impossible to define, a property possessed in particular by some typical movement of cats […] and, according to the poem, by the movement of fog. How is this ad hoc concept ON-LITTLE-CAT-FEET* arrived at? By taking the poet to be attributing to the coming of the fog that property which contextually implies the very ideas suggested by the phrase 'little cat feet'."

> (Sperber and Wilson, 2008/2012: 122)

Carston, on the other hand, proposes that it is likely, at least for some readers, that:

> "[T]he literal meaning takes over and is metarepresented as a whole, along with the mental image of a large, soft, lightly padding but purposefully moving cat, and from these together are derived implications about the way the fog looks and feels."

> (Carston, 2010a: 310)

But surely relevance theory would predict that the literal meaning of the words used in (19) would affect how the whole is understood without appeal to a 'second mode of metaphor processing'? Carston has rightly identified that contextual assumptions associated with the literal meaning of the words used plays a significant role in the optimally relevant interpretation, but it is not necessarily the case that the literal meaning is metarepresented as a whole. Relevance theory would predict that the overall optimally relevant interpretation would be that which communicates poetic effects on the basis of the communicated context. This can include assumptions associated with ad hoc concepts, but could also

include those associated with the lexically-encoded concepts so long as these contributed to the relevant weak implicatures.

Carston's elaboration of the earlier relevance theoretic account (which she played a significant role in developing. E.g. *id.*, 2002a) to include a 'second mode' of metaphor processing is motivated by a number of apparent limitations of the earlier account. The earlier account (see especially Chapter 2, §2.12): (i) suggested that new ad hoc concepts must be constructed even for related metaphors where there is more than one metaphor in a given utterance; (ii) seemed to offer no account of extended metaphor; and (iii) allowed no role for the phenomenological evidence from introspection which does suggest that we can think, at least in part, in 'images' when we understand metaphors such as (19) (Carston, 2010a). It seems plausible to me that assumptions which are activated not by ad hoc concepts but by lexically-encoded concepts can play an enduring and significant role in how extended metaphors and cases of metaphor-metaphor and metaphor-simile interaction are understood. My only hesitation with Carston's proposal is that it is unclear to me how we might distinguish cases where "the literal meaning is inferentially insulated from the addressee's beliefs about the world" through metarepresentation (Carston, p. c.) and cases where the literal meaning is seen to contribute to the understanding of the utterance as a whole not directly (that is, with the literal meaning being actively entertained) but through the fact that certain encyclopaedic assumptions associated with the lexically-encoded concepts will be remain more manifest than would otherwise be the case simply because the utterance made them more manifest.

Relevance theory already predicts that an utterance will make certain higher-level assumptions about the utterance manifest to the hearer. In some cases these will be communicated as higher-level explicatures of the utterance (see Chapter 2, §2.8). But even if they are not taken to be endorsed by the speaker, it seems reasonable to assume that the fact that a higher-level explicature is more manifest in turn increases the manifestness of assumptions associated with the lexically-encoded meaning of the utterance. For instance, Simon's utterance of a metaphor in (20) commits him to the content of (20a). A higher-level explicature such as (20b) may also play a role in how his utterance in (20) achieves relevance:

(20) *Simon*: Zayd is a rhino.

(20a) *Explicature*: Zayd is a RHINO*.

(20b) *Higher-level explicature*: Simon said, 'Zayd is a rhino'.

What should be emphasised here is that whereas there is an ad hoc concept as part of the explicature in (20a), there is no such ad hoc concept as part of the higher-level explicature in (20b): the lexically-encoded concept RHINO forms part of the representation. My question at this point is: what justification can we have for Carston's notion of 'metarepresenting the literal meaning as a whole' in cases of, for instance, extended metaphor, when higher-level explicatures are more manifest, and therefore capable of being actively represented, in any case? The fact that higher-level explicatures will be made more manifest by the utterance will be explanatory enough. In the cases Carston discusses in support of the second mode (*ib.*), we see evidence of assumptions associated with certain lexically-encoded concepts playing an enduring role in how metaphors are processed, not evidence of *all* the concepts lexically-encoded by the utterance being metarepresented as a whole. At this stage, Carston's second mode, based on metarepresentation of literal meaning, appears to make similar predictions to my 'processing history' account, based on the manifestness of assumptions associated with the literal meaning, for extended metaphors and cases of metaphor interaction. It may turn out that there will be definitive evidence one way or the other but I am still unclear as to what that might be.

My account of how similes are understood also challenges the possibility of there being any genuine cases of *metaphor within simile*. For conceptual metaphor theorists, any linguistic realisation of an underlying conceptual metaphor will count as a metaphor. But for relevance theorists, the pertinent question will be: are there any ad hoc concept vehicles in similes which achieve relevance by means of poetic effects, and whose interpretation cannot be accounted for in terms of how the comparison is understood? If we could find any clear examples of this phenomenon, then one could argue that at least some poetic comparisons are poetic not by virtue of communicating a comparison but by virtue of ad hoc concept construction (much like 'poetic' metaphors, metonymies and hyperboles). But it is extremely

difficult to find clear cases of such a phenomenon. One of the reasons for this might be that, as in the cases of metaphor-simile interaction given above, the optimally relevant interpretation may include implicatures which are derived on the basis of the concepts lexically-encoded by the words used. Researchers are then likely to notice that the lexically-encoded concepts remain salient, because the assumptions associated with the lexically-encoded concepts are at least as highly manifest as those which are not (that is, associated with the ad hoc concept communicated alone).

There are obviously cases where *some* ad hoc concept is communicated as part of the vehicle:

(21) It was Autumn, and incessant

Piped the quails from shocks and sheaves,

And, <u>like living coals</u>, the apples

Burned among the withering leaves.

(Longfellow, *Pegasus in Pound*. Longfellow, 1882: 27)

The relevant part of the utterance can be taken as communicating an explicature such as (21a):

(21a) THE APPLES BURNED LIKE LIVING* COALS.

But the 'metaphorical' element of (21) is only *part* of the vehicle. An utterance like (21) will achieve relevance as a comparison between APPLES and COALS, the latter under a certain description, the identification of which involves the adjustment of the adjective 'living' (LIVING*).

It may be relevant in this regard to examine cases where we might expect there to be ad hoc concept construction within the vehicle for independent reasons. I look at two types of example. The first are similes where the vehicles do not, strictly speaking, exist, and so the concepts communicated by the vehicle are likely to involve a degree of imagination on the part of the hearer/reader, as in (22a-e):

(22a) James looks <u>like evil personified</u>

(constructed example)

(22b) **EXAMPLE REDACTED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS**

(Paulin, *Mythologies*. 1987: 27)

(22c) **EXAMPLE REDACTED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS**

(Enright, *The Proper Due*. Stanza 2. Lines 6f. Alvarez (Ed.), 1966: 87)

(22d) **EXAMPLE REDACTED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS**

(Hughes, *Pibroch.* Hughes, 1995: 83)

(22e) **EXAMPLE REDACTED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS**

(Paulin, *Defenester.* 1987: 18)

One might be inclined to interpret these as 'metaphorical' vehicles. But there are problems with such an analysis. Firstly, it is hard to say in what sense the putative ad hoc concept communicated differs from the lexically-encoded concept. Example (22a), for instance, does *not* include a radical departure from an encoded concept, although it appears some contextual adjustment must take place. *Evil personified* provides access to a range of contextual assumptions (from the encyclopaedic assumptions attached to EVIL) which are relevant to how the speaker is taken as presenting the appearance of James. A similar analysis presents itself for (22b).

Examples (22c)-(22d) are difficult for a different reason. Although (22b) is likely to involve a significant degree of ad hoc concept construction (a new concept ALMOST-LOVE has to be constructed on the basis of LOVE), (22c)-(22d) appear not to involve any at all. The vehicles in these examples concern NOTHING or NOTHINGNESS. If all that were relevant to the discussion of how these examples achieve poetic effects were the denotation of the concepts communicated in the vehicles, then these comparisons would be equivalent. However, it is the contextual assumptions which these vehicles provide access to which contribute to more 'global' modification of the cognitive environment of the hearer. In pre-theoretic terms, it is through the connotative (rather than denotative) meaning of these expressions that relevance is achieved: the utterance is relevant as a means to generate a wide array of weak implicatures, resulting in a communicated impression which is derived on the basis of that explicit content. This impression is similar in at least (22c)-(22d): one of unfamiliarity. However, not all comparisons involving vehicles denoting NOTHING and related concepts are weak: (22e) is a non-poetic comparison, which lends itself to a complete analogical paraphrase (paraphrase: *It didn't exist, just as the void does not exist*).

Another way in which we can attempt to identify genuinely ad hoc vehicles is through reformulation. Ad hoc concept construction can be elicited by other phenomena than *A is B*-type metaphor (i.e. a predication forcing the vehicle to be interpreted in an ad hoc fashion). One such way is by eliciting a hybrid representation (Blakemore, 2008). Although (23a-c) communicate a similar message, and all three evoke poetic effects, they are understood in slightly different ways:

> (23a) My childhood days are gone, gone.

> [based on Sperber and Wilson, 1995: 221. Example (81)]

> (23b) My childhood days are gone, vanished.

> (23c) My childhood days have gone into exile, taken a one-way ticket to Mars.

An utterance of (23a) (a form of epizeuxis) is understood as was explained in Chapter 2, §2.10. The form of the utterance, involving repetition of a particular element, communicates that the hearer will be justified in expending additional cognitive effort in exploring

contextual assumptions which the concept GONE provides access to. The hearer's additional expenditure is offset by additional cognitive effects, namely, weak implicatures. An utterance of (23b) works slightly differently. While being *vanished* entails being *gone*, the reverse is not the case. Therefore, the concept lexically encoded by *vanished* is informationally stronger than that encoded by *gone*. But the speaker did not simply say *my childhood days are vanished*. Rather the relevance of her utterance lies (in part) in comparing the properties distinguishing having 'vanished' from merely 'being gone'. Blakemore calls this *intensification* (2008), and she distinguishes it from cases such as (21c), which achieves relevance in a different way. The hearer must interpret the first sequence *have gone into exile* by a process of ad hoc concept construction according the account given in §2.7 (yielding EXILE*), but so must the second sequence *taken a one-way ticket to Mars*. Part of the process of understanding the first sequence will involve accessing concepts such as MOVED, TRAVELLED, DISAPPEARED, STRANDED and so on. The second sequence communicates that the reader is expected to extend the context of the utterance in a particular way, which will achieve relevance by virtue of implicatures which could not have been generated by either sequence alone. Blakemore argues that such examples involve a process of *hybrid representation*. As part of the process of understanding the second sequence, other ad hoc concepts may be recovered.

Because hybrid representations such as those elicited by (23c) involve ad hoc concept construction which is not motivated by, for instance, a predication which is not taken to share the form of the thought communicated by the utterance (e.g. the speaker cannot mean by *Achilles is a lion* that Achilles is a type of cat), we might expect that similes which involve similar processes must also have ad hoc concepts as part of the explicature. The kind of *reformulated similes* we actually find in literature are quite varied. What we are looking for are, first, cases which are clearly 'hybrid' in the way in which (21c) is, and, second, any of those cases which can be seen to achieve poetic effects by virtue of this process of hybridisation, not by virtue of a comparison being communicated.

One clear-cut case of asyndetically presented multiple vehicles of a simile is example (24):

> (24) Oh! Why should the spirit of mortal be proud?

Like a swift-fleeting meteor, a fast-flying cloud,

A flash of the lightning, a break of the wave,

Man passes from life to his rest in the grave.

(Knox, *Oh! Why Should the Spirit of Mortal Be Proud?* In Kleiser (Ed.), 1925: 279)

Far more frequent are multiple vehicles presented by disjunction (introduced by 'or') as in (25a-d) (my underlining):

(25a) **EXAMPLE REDACTED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS**

(Paulin, *The Caravans on Lüneberg Heath*. 1987: 58)

(25b) The captive raised her face, it was <u>as soft and mild</u>

<u>As sculptured marbled saint, or slumbering unwean'd child</u>.

(Brontë, *The Prisoner, A Fragment*. Stanza 4. Lines 13f. *NA*: 1048)

(25c) Thy light alone – <u>like mist o'er mountains driven</u>,

    <u>Or music by the night wind sent</u>

    <u>Through strings of some still instrument</u>,

    <u>Or moonlight on a midnight stream</u>,

Gives grace and truth to life's unquiet dream.

(Shelley, *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty*. Stanza 3. Lines 32-35. *NA*: 865)

(25d) **EXAMPLE REDACTED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS**

(Paulin, *The Maiden that is Makeless*. 1987: 12. Poet's italics)

In (25a) *cucumber leaves* are compared to *glasspaper* or *emery skins*[77], both means of smoothing wood-work and the like. The question is what difference providing an alternative vehicle makes to how the comparison achieves relevance. Similar questions arise with (25b)-(25d). In light of the variety of these 'disjunct vehicles' the simplest explanation appears to be, as with all the other examples, that what is explicitly communicated is simply that the tenor is 'like' the vehicles in certain respects. These vehicles contribute to relevance not by providing a set of shared properties formed by an overlap of the denotations of the vehicle concepts and the tenor concept, but rather through the generation of a wider range of poetic effects which are made accessible by the conceptual material in the vehicles. The multiple vehicles do not constitute a single hybrid representation, but they do 'interact' with each other in the same way as the 'multiple' metaphors in example (16) above: through the sharing of contextual assumptions.

A similar explanation can be offered for similes involving multiple comparison vehicles, either conjoined by *and* (as with the first two comparisons in (26a)) or by syntactically parallel constructions (as in (26b)):

(26a) Ah! Thel is like a watry bow, and like a parting cloud,

---

[77] I assume this means the same as *emery cloth* or *emery paper*.

Like a reflection in glass, like shadows in the water,

Like dreams of infants, like a smile upon an infant's face,

Like the dove's voice, like transient day, like music in the air.

(Blake, *The Book of Thel*. Section 1, stanza 2. Lines 12-15. *NA*: 737)

(26b) O my luve's like a red, red rose,

     That's newly sprung in June;

O my luve's like the melodie

     That's sweetly played in tune.

(Burns, *A Red Red Rose.* Lines 1ff. *NA*: 759)

It is not clear to me that there is any significant difference between conjunct or parallel comparisons in (26a) and (26b) and the disjunct examples in (25a-d). However, the more options are given by conjoining more vehicles, the *weaker* each individual comparison appears to be. My account offers an explanation for this: the broader the set of potential points of comparison becomes, the wider the range of weak effects which may be generated, and so the less likely that a determinate comparison-relevant content is communicated.

One extreme case of this proliferation of comparisons is Stevie Wonder's song *As*, the first verse of which is given here as (27):

(27) **EXAMPLE REDACTED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS**

(Wonder, *As.* 1976. Album: Songs in the Key of Life. Universal.)

The song contains at least eleven vehicles given for poetic comparisons, all of which share the same (postponed) tenor[78]. If points of comparison were crucial to the interpretation of poetic comparisons, then the repetition of vehicles adjoined to the same tenor (*[I'll be loving you] always*) would be redundant, and would contribute to poetic effects only inasmuch as they involve repetition (epizeuxis) (see Chapter 2, §2.10 and example (22a) above). Yet the content of the vehicles is relevant to the weaker effects of these comparisons. I have one additional caveat. Each comparison, taken individually, *strongly* communicates that the speaker will love the addressee 'always'. The songwriter merely gives examples of permanent phenomena. The poetic effects are not generated by virtue of the weakness of any individual comparison, as in the simple case of epizeuxis given in (22a) (*My childhood days are gone*, *gone*), but through encouraging the hearer to revisit contextual assumptions multiple times and over a longer period of time. In what sense this counts as 'repetition' remains to be seen.

Although the examples in (24)-(27) do achieve weak effects, and *ex hypothesi* may involve ad hoc concept construction within the simile vehicle, are their characteristic effects determined by ad hoc concept construction? If they do involve a kind of 'reformulation' or 'hybridisation', is this *why* they are poetic? Another type of poetic comparison, some of which have been partly addressed before in relation to the question of 'extending' and 'explaining' poetic comparisons (see §5.4) involve additional linguistically-specified content communicated in addition to the vehicle, as a kind of apposed coda, such as (28a-c):

(28a) **EXAMPLE REDACTED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS**

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[78] Whether these constitute poetic exemplifications, or poetic comparisons proper, is unclear. My account does not propose a strong distinction between the two phenomena in any case.

(Paulin, *Now for the Orange Card.* 1987: 10)

(28b) **EXAMPLE REDACTED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS**

(Plath, *The Arrival of the Bee Box*. Stanza 4. Lines 19f. Alvarez (Ed.), 1966: 68)

(28c) Dust as we are, the immortal spirit grows

Like harmony in music; there is a dark

Inscrutable workmanship that reconciles

Discordant elements, makes them cling together

In one society.

(Wordsworth, *The Prelude*. Lines 340-344. *NA*: 782)

Examples (28a-c) do not appear to be explicable in terms of an account of apposition of elements which are close in meaning, producing a hybrid representation. If they do involve this type of reformulation, then the hybrid representations would appear to fall under the scope of the comparison: they are used as vehicles of the similes. It seems to me more likely that the 'codas', which can also involve devices deployed to generate of poetic effects (such as the use of an expressive ejaculation *my god* in (28b)), provide additional linguistically-specified material which allows access to contextual assumptions which facilitate a reinterpretation of the initial comparison. Complex examples such as these recommend more focussed investigation of the use of poetic comparisons by individual authors and of those deployed in particular poems or oeuvres. But my account of simile understanding remains capable of explaining them. It seems that there are no genuinely ad hoc concept

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vehicles, and, if there are, they do not significantly challenge the explanatory value of my hypothesis about how similes are understood.

6.4 Simile failure

Another type of data which are explained by my account are so-called 'failed' similes (see §4.8, especially example (36), repeated here as (29)):

(29) Black as the inside of a wolf's throat.

Pilkington claims that (29) is a failed simile (2000: 119f). But in §4.8 I argued that this example is comprehensible. What appears to have confused Pilkington is that the set of points of comparison for a simile such as (29) is very difficult to construct. But, on my account, poetic similes are characterised by *indeterminacy* of their comparison-relevant content. Once the optimally overall interpretation of (29) is reached, it is true that the set of points of comparison is indeterminate, and, hence, it is very unlikely for hearers/readers to be able to account for which properties are members of that set, even though the form of (29) (in particular the presence of the adjective *black*) indicates that properties associated with BLACKNESS are to be found within that set. My account entails that comparisons can always be used as poetic comparisons as long as that comparison can communicate relevant weak implicatures. When a non-poetic interpretation is not available, a poetic one will often be available. Therefore, I am justified in making the empirical claim that although there may be failed non-poetic comparisons in a given context (one where the relevant properties are not available to the hearer/reader), there are no failed poetic comparisons because the hearer/reader will continue to expend effort in interpreting a comparison even if a non-poetic interpretation is not available. Moreover, this account explains *why* a type of linguistic expression which does not always communicate weak effects (certain forms of comparison) can be used poetically.

6.5 Narrative intrusion

One type of simile not explained by other accounts, but which can be accommodated here, involve what I call *narrative intrusion*[79]. In §5.4 I outlined how 'additional' linguistically-

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[79] Lyne calls this phenomenon, where words appropriate to the vehicle appear in the narrative or the other way round, 'trespass' (e.g. 1998: 73ff, 92ff) , but he elsewhere

specified content can direct a hearer/reader's search for relevance in simile understanding. Some (admittedly rare) examples of simile in poetry involve a poet elaborating upon the additional content in such a way that this content describes an independent narrative episode. In other words, what starts as an explanation or extension of a simile vehicle 'becomes' a part of the narrative (see Gargani, 2009 ms: 50f for pre-theoretic discussion of a range of such examples).

In examples (30a-d) alternative explanations are available. In (30a) one could argue that the use of *dusty axis* is metaphorical:

> (30a) **EXAMPLE REDACTED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS**

> (Hamburger, *Instead of a Journey*. Line 1. Alvarez (Ed.), 1966: 119)

But this would miss the consistency between the simile and the (putative) metaphor. Similarly in (30b) the author is presented as both *like* a tree and *being* a tree:

> (30b) **EXAMPLE REDACTED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS**

> (R S Thomas, *Here*. Stanza 2. Lines 4-6. Alvarez (Ed.), 1966: 82)

In (30c) a person's face is compared to a lighthouse (*a pharos*) and the descriptions which follow appear to apply to either faces or rocky outcrops when literally interpreted, but could not do so at the same time:

> (30c) **EXAMPLE REDACTED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS**

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includes metaphors 'foreshadowing' the content of simile vehicles, the effects of which phenomenon I would attribute to the sharing of contextual assumptions (e.g. *ib.*: 41 n7). Example (31b) in particular is far more striking than any of the examples Lyne covers (Cf. also Hardie, 1986: 232).

(Walcott, *Omeros* 5.38.1. Lines 4-6. Walcott 1990: 193)

Similarly in (30d) the description *burrowed deeper into their holes* applies literally only to the vehicle of the simile *like moles*, not to the tenor:

(30d) **EXAMPLE REDACTED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS**

(Walcott, *Omeros* 3.31.2. Lines 49-51. Walcott 1990: 164)

Are these cases of metaphor-simile interaction (§6.3)? This is certainly possible. But it is not necessarily the most parsimonious explanation. Moreover, we get much clearer examples where the explanation of the simile involves the lexically-encoded sense of the words. In (31a) it is not true that *hissing* and *heard* are metaphorical:

 (31a) **EXAMPLE REDACTED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS**

(Walcott, *Omeros* 2.18.2. Line 1. Walcott 1990: 96)

Should we simply say that (31a) is a lie? That cannot be the case, because (31a) achieves poetic effects just as a metaphor would. My claim is that it does not do so in the same way. The hearer/reader is not 'forced' to find a concept which would make the explicit assumption communicated by *he heard it hissing* consistent with the simile. Rather the description which the poet appends to the simile achieves relevance by encouraging the hearer/reader to entertain properties as part of the set of points of comparison (and contextual assumptions which can supply such properties) which he might not otherwise have entertained. *He heard it hissing* is not a metaphor. It is not a simile either. What the relevance theoretic account of style allows us to do is to identify certain expressions which can achieve poetic effects even though they cannot be easily classified as tropes. If these narrative intrusions could be classed as anything, they would probably count as non-sequiturs. But they contribute to relevance in a particular way, which my account of simile understanding can encompass.

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The most extreme such example I have found is (31b):

(31b) **EXAMPLE REDACTED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS**

(Walcott, *Omeros* 2.14.2. Lines 25-31. Walcott 1990: 81)

The description quickly stops being 'about' the moon at all, and the tenor becomes a part of the narrative in the next sentence. It is almost like a non-sequitur: a complete change of topic whose contribution to the relevance of the utterance as a whole is not explicitly signalled, nor is it immediately evident. But the narrative intrusion still 'resonates' with the simile in a particular way. But once the tenor 'pops' into the narrative, we are no longer dealing with an explicit comparison. Hence, example (31b) ceases to be a simile (if similes are comparisons) after the first line. But the detailed description of the behaviour of the hare in the narrative bequeaths a number of impressions to the moon, and vice versa. How can a poet expect something like (31b) to be comprehensible? Because the use of a comparison can achieve relevance by means of weak implicatures, and the poet can provide additional evidence as to how the comparison will be relevant. But the hearer's/reader's expectation of how a comparison will achieve relevance is so open that apparent non-sequiturs like (31b) can affect the overall impression and hence contribute to relevance. Only certain poets (for example, Walcott) seem comfortable in deploying this kind of poetic

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comparison. Such examples are certainly not common in English poetry. But they do exist, and so researchers into figurative language need to explain how they achieve their effects.

Conclusion

The central question in this thesis has been how to explain the characteristic effects of poetic similes. These effects are, in relevance theoretic terms, poetic effects, and the question is one which can be approached from the perspective of a pragmatic approach to style: treating figurative utterances as utterances first, and reframing questions of figurative meaning in terms of why certain utterances achieve certain effects. However, this is not how the bulk of studies into figurative language have been conducted thus far. The competing approaches to the study of figurative language outlined in Chapter 3 cover a range of theoretical frameworks, which all share a certain assumption: similes are not worth investigating in their own right. Whether metaphors simply *are* similes, or metaphors and similes are understood via the same psychological processes of comparison or conceptualization, or metaphors and similes are equally irrelevant to the study of linguistic meaning, similes are of interest primarily for other reasons than accounting for the central question as it emerges in Chapters 3 and 4, and is spelled out in Chapter 5: why do certain comparisons achieve relevance by virtue of the poetic effects they communicate?

Chapters 1-4 may have seemed like a rather circuitous route to a reformulation of the research question. However, as Chapter 3 in particular demonstrates, the current state of metaphor research is rather conflicted, both over the theoretical commitments of various approaches, and over which intuitions and experimental data are relevant. The most prominent subfield in figurative language studies is metaphor studies: in fact, one is more likely to find reference to the latter than the former in research departments, publications, funding applications and so on. But the status of simile, and how similes are understood, is part of that contested territory. My approach, which treats similes as a *use* of comparison, may seem to circumvent much of that debate. But, if I am right about how similes are understood, then this will have significant ramifications for how metaphor research ought to proceed, particularly in relation to the choice of relevant data and experimental stimuli.

I gave are a number of more detailed consequences of my account for metaphor research, in particular my approach to metaphor-simile interaction which I put into practice in Chapter 6 §6.3, as well as my proposals for how to tackle the emergent property metaphor problem in

§6.2, a problem which besets all the theoretical approaches to metaphor understanding explored in Chapter 3.

The most important contributions to the literature made by this thesis are in Chapters 4-6. As well as bringing to the attention of the reader a range of data which pose a challenge to competing accounts of figurative language understanding, these chapters also propose an application of relevance theory which could easily be extended to a wide range of figurative language use. Most relevance theoretic research into figurative language has until now focussed primarily on issues pertinent to the semantics-pragmatics distinction. Although such research focusses on issues central to pragmatic theory, it does not get to the heart of what makes figurative language so interesting: that it communicates far more than the words used seem to warrant. My approach has been to apply the claims of relevance theory about how ostensive-inferential communication works to explain why any comparisons would communicate poetic effects. It makes no appeals to processes of conceptualization, perception or imagination which are not directly part of the process of mutual parallel adjustment which is motivated by the presumption of optimal relevance communicated. My account of simile understanding is a fully-inferential account.

Although figurative language use clearly has *something* to do with mental creativity, in order to use the former to illuminate the latter we will have to explain how figurative language 'works'. If we do not have a theory of how figurative utterances are understood then using them as data in order to investigate mental creativity is a flawed approach. The temptation to do things the other way round is great, and even prominent relevance theorists have moved towards a rapprochement between relevance theory and processes of conceptual association (such as conceptual metaphors in Wilson, 2011) or have proposed that there is some kind of secondary process which is genuinely 'creative' which affects figurative language understanding (a 'second mode' of metaphor understanding. See e.g. Carston, 2010a). My account of simile understanding demonstrates the strength of the early proposals in relevance theory for accounting for certain stylistic effects in terms of weak implicature (Sperber and Wilson, 1995). I have also proposed that generalising this approach to some of the data which Carston has used to advocate a second mode of metaphor

processing suggests that earlier relevance theoretic approaches to figurative language use were more robust than has been acknowledged.

Moreover, the simplicity of my account provides a number of advantages, which are further supported by justifying my approach from first principles (Chapters 1 and 2), and by challenging widely-held, albeit largely tacit, assumptions in the field directly (Chapter 4). But the most important implication for the wider field is, as several of the theorists mentioned in Chapter 3 appear to have noticed, that if we have an account of how similes 'get' their figurative meaning, this might illuminate the rest of the phenomena that figurative language research is interested in. But, so I claim, this will only be true if the account of simile is itself sound: half a theory of simile will not suffice, nor will introducing notions of 'metaphorical meaning' into how similes are understood. Furthermore, there is a particular contextual implication of my thesis which I do intend to communicate, in part by virtue of the breadth of scope and content of this thesis: similes are not the 'poor relation' of metaphors and are worth studying in their own right (see also Bredin, 1998). Similes may provide further theoretical insights in figurative language studies and pragmatics, but also exhibit an astonishing range of ways in which they can evoke poetic effects. There is much more to be said about simile.

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