

4 Of Anoraks and Oysters: Metaphors of Social Communication in the Historical Thesaurus

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Introduction

It is now common to state that metaphor pervades language and communication. The tremendous work that has gone on over the last thirty years or so has shown this repeatedly, and we now have a very significant bank of evidence for the importance of metaphor in language and thought (cf. for example Lakoff and Johnson 2003 [1980], Lakoff 1987, Sweetser 1990). Work on the so-called ‘conduit metaphor’, for example, has shown that we use this metaphor conventionally in English to conceptualise and talk about communication and language, as in the following examples from Michael Reddy’s well-known work which first identified this metaphor:

- (i) Try to *get your thoughts across* better
 - (ii) You still haven’t *given me any idea* of what you mean
 - (iii) Try to *pack more thoughts into fewer words*
 - (iv) Whenever you have a good *idea* practice *capturing it in words*
- (Reddy 1979, pp. 286-287, highlighting in original)

Such examples as (i) and (ii) above show that we conceptualise communication as taking a parcel of thoughts from one container, the mind, and transmitting it from a sender to a receiver, as if along a conduit. In keeping with this, we conceptualise linguistic expressions as containers for meaning objects: consider examples (iii) and (iv) above and also the expressions *hollow words* and *heavily loaded words*.

Inspired by the conference theme, ‘Opening New Lines of Communication in Applied Linguistics’, we took a closer look at metaphors of communication, specifically metaphors in the area of *social* communication.

Mapping Metaphor

This work is part of a project currently being undertaken at the University of Glasgow, entitled ‘Mapping Metaphor with the *Historical Thesaurus*’, and funded by the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council.² The principal aim of Mapping Metaphor is to provide an overview of the foundations and nature of metaphor over the history of English. This is made possible by the nature of our source data, and will take the form of an online ‘Metaphor Map’ for English which will show all of the metaphorical connections between semantic domains. Alongside this broad overview, we are also carrying out case studies of metaphor in selected semantic domains, and reconsidering a number of theoretical questions in metaphor studies from this new, heavily data-driven perspective. These questions include the nature and identification of semantic domains, the productivity of new metaphorical connections at particular times in the history of English, and the direction of metaphorical transfer.

The Mapping Metaphor project is one example of the research which has been made possible by the completion of the *Historical Thesaurus* (HT) database at Glasgow a few years ago. The HT was initiated by Professor Michael Samuels in the 1960s, and the final entry in the database of almost 800,000 word senses was put in place some forty-odd years later. Its source data is the second edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED2), supplemented by *A Thesaurus of Old English* (TOE, Roberts and Kay 2000) for data for the period before 1150. The HT is available online and also in print form (Kay, Roberts, Samuels and Wotherspoon, eds, 2009).³

The HT offers ideal data for an examination of metaphor for several reasons. First, it is large and therefore allows for a more comprehensive empirical study of metaphor than has previously been possible. Second, it has a hierarchical semantic structure which can be exploited in a semi-automated ‘mapping’ of lexical items between semantic categories covering the entirety of semantic space. Third, as its name indicates, the HT is historical, giving sense information for all periods of English and recording attestation dates from OED2.

² The project website can be found at www.glasgow.ac.uk/metaphor. Information about the AHRC is here: www.ahrc.ac.uk.

³ The online version of the *Historical Thesaurus of English* is available at: <http://historicalthesaurus.arts.gla.ac.uk/>.

Methods

Our starting point in identifying metaphor is lexical overlap. Target domains are metaphorically expressed through lexis from source domains: it follows that we find words from the domain of War in the domain of Arguments, because we conceptualise arguments in terms of war, as in expressions like *fight your corner*, *take sides*, *he attacked my argument*, *she shot down my case*, and so on.

In other words, lexical items can be identified in the HT which are used in more than one semantic domain. Sometimes this is motivated by metaphor. We applied this approach to the entire HT database. First, we grouped the data into a total of 411 semantically-coherent categories. Most of these categories have an Old English (OE) and a post-OE section: OE data include all of the lexical items that are attested up to 1150, and post-OE sections contain the lexis attested in later varieties of English, which includes the vocabulary which has its origins in OE but survived into later stages of the language. A few categories, notably those representing science and technology, do not have OE content.

We then ran queries on the database to extract all of the lexical overlap in categories. That is, we automatically compared the set of lexical items in every category with the set of lexical items in every other category in turn. The resulting data sheets were then manually analysed to identify the metaphorical connections contained in the lexical overlap. This was a labour-intensive process, which involved systematically working through sets of data for around 800 (OE and post-OE) categories, many of which contained tens of thousands of word senses. Only a small proportion of the lexical overlap is due to metaphor: the majority is a result of polysemy motivated by processes other than metaphor (such as widening, narrowing and metonymy), and ‘accidental’ connections such as homonymy. For the purposes of the project, we coded this as ‘noise’. A proportion of the overlap data also resulted from the semantic similarity of some categories. For example, it was not a surprise that much of the lexis in our categories of Killing, The Body, and Disposal of Corpses should be shared.

Our analysis of these data has brought to light metaphorical connections of varying degrees of strength. At one end of the scale, we have ample evidence of strong, systematic links instantiated by large numbers of lexical items, such as the established connection between the concepts of intelligence and light (cf. *brilliant*, *bright*, *brightness*, *elucidate*, *enlighten*). At the other end of the scale, the process has also uncovered weaker connections, where

concepts do still appear to be linked through metaphor but where there is only limited evidence from the shared lexis. Some of these weak connections may prove to be an artefact of the categorisation system and actually part of stronger connections once all of the data have been analysed; others may simply represent connections that are not yet well established, or which were fleeting and perhaps tied to a particular social context. At the present stage, our analysis does not distinguish between domains which are used as Source and those which are Target (and indeed those which are both Source and Target): however, we intend to incorporate this information into the final resource.

The Categories of Social Communication

Here we focus on two of the Mapping Metaphor categories: P06 Society and Social Communication, and P07 Lack of Social Communication.⁴ The two are naturally semantically close, and both fall within the superordinate category of ‘Society/the community’ (a *Historical Thesaurus* level 2 category). The scope of P06 takes in: the study of society; civilization; social relations; social communication; fellowship and companionship; co-operation; holding meetings; societies, associations and factions. P07 encompasses: lack of social communication and relations; unsociability; solitude; retirement and seclusion; exclusion from society. While we concentrate here on the post-OE sections of these categories, we incorporate analysis of the OE sections where this allows us to present a fuller picture. In this way, we investigate which semantic areas speakers of English have drawn on and continue to draw on to express complex and abstract ideas when talking and writing about social communication itself.

In the first round of category coding which provided the data for the present research, we identified metaphorical connections as follows. For category P06, there are metaphorical connections with 63 other categories; 255 category connections coded as ‘noise’; and 36 categories in which the lexical overlap can be attributed to semantic similarity (e.g. categories such as Politics, Social Event, and Speech). For category P07, metaphorical connections are identified with 78 other categories; there are 172 connections where the lexical overlap is simply ‘noise’; and 13 categories which have been coded as semantically similar. Given the close semantic connection between the two categories, namely the strong degree of antonymy that we might anticipate, naturally many of the metaphorical connections are shared.

⁴ Category names may be slightly amended by the time the finished Metaphor Map appears online.

The discussion below therefore considers patterns of metaphorical connections in the two categories taken together.

Metaphors of Social Communication

Figure 1 is a close-up of a network diagram produced in Gephi which shows the metaphorical connections identified between category P06 Society and Social Communication and other Mapping Metaphor categories.⁵ The inner circle of category names, linked by solid lines to the central category, are those which have been coded as having a strong, systematic metaphorical connection; the categories positioned further from the centre and linked by paler, dotted lines have weaker metaphorical connections.

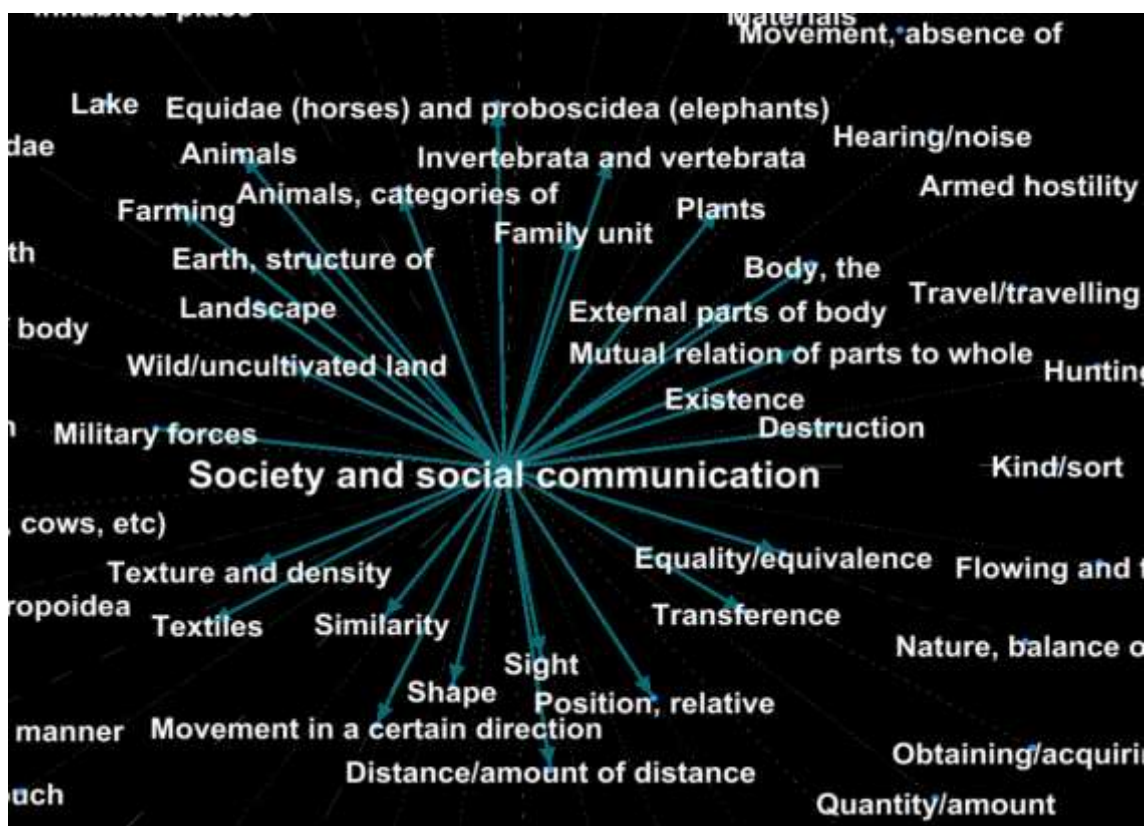


Figure 1: Gephi visualisation of metaphorical connections involving category P06 Society and Social Communication

As can be seen from Figure 1, there are clusters of related categories which share metaphorical connections with the central category: we might expect, for example, to find similar types of metaphorical connections in the various ‘animal’ categories. Similar connections and clusters emerge for P07 Lack of Social Communication. The discussion below concentrates on a number

⁵ Gephi is a free open source interactive visualisation platform, available at <http://gephi.org/>.

of the main clusters, selected to highlight categories of different degrees of concreteness/abstractness.

Land and Plants

The semantic areas of land and plants are connected by the concept of wildness, and this forms one of the main metaphorical connections between the categories of Social Communication and other Mapping Metaphor categories. A04 Land, for example, contains several lexical items shared with P07 Lack of Social Communication, such as *island* (with the sense ‘one who is isolated’ attested from 1652), *backwater* (vb, ‘to seclude’, dated 1885-1920 in OED2), *nook* (‘secluded place’, attested with a sense in the social domain in 1555), *insulate* (‘separated/isolated’, attested in 1803) and *enisle* (‘to separate/isolate’, recorded from 1848 with no end date recorded). A05 Landscape adds to the metaphorical picture, with *mountainous* (‘uncivilised’, 1613-1703) and *savage* (‘uncivilised person’, from 1588). A07 Wild/uncultivated land brings *wildness* (in the sense of ‘lack of civilisation’, attested in 1680), and *jungle*, the latter also meaning ‘uncivilised’ and attested in 1908, demonstrating the continuing availability of this conceptual metaphor to speakers and writers of English over a period of several centuries at least. Finally, A15 Structure of Earth overlaps lexically with Social Communication through *underground* (as a type of society from 1959 to the present), and *uncivil* (meaning ‘infertile’, attested in 1675 and 1733). The latter is especially interesting as here the category of Social Communication provides the source concept rather than the target: that is, an aspect of physical land is conceptualised in terms drawn from the domain of social communication. The connection between Land, broadly considered, and Social Communication is therefore bidirectional, albeit stronger in one direction than in the other.

Generally, therefore, society is conceptualised as land with various ‘topographical’ features, and uncivilised society is conceptualised as wild land. The detail of this well-established metaphorical connection is further filled in when we consider the various categories falling within the domain of Plants. This connection too turns out to be bidirectional. While the connection normally has its source in Plants – there is lexical evidence of the well-known conceptual metaphors ORGANISATIONS ARE PLANTS (*branch*), UNCIVILISED SOCIETY IS WILD LAND/PLANTS (*jungle, wild, state of nature*) – there is also evidence of a weaker metaphor with its source in Society (cf. the botanical terms *social* and *gregarious* in the sense of plants ‘growing in groups’, attested from 1834 and 1829, respectively).

Animals

Another systematic link with the physical categories is that with Animals. This is evidenced in lexical overlap with the general Mapping Metaphor categories B44 Animals, B45 Categories of Animals, B46 Animals in Groups, and also with categories of specific species or classes, such as B48 Invertebrates and B58 Horses and Elephants. Unsurprisingly, the connection also comes to light with B75 Farming, which overlaps semantically with both Land and Animals, and gives evidence of the major link represented by the two main senses of *culture*.

A lack of civilisation in people is seen in animal terms (cf. *bestial*, attested in the sense of ‘uncivilised’ from c.1400 to 1816, and *brutish*, with a single attestation in OED2 in 1647 but clearly part of a more systematic metaphorical link). However, it is not only the negative connotations of animals that are transferred. Associations of people are also conceptualised as groupings of animals (*stud*, attested from 1804 in the sense of ‘company/body of persons’; *yoke*, ‘to associate together/with’, recorded from 1500 to 1607; and *herd*, with the same sense, from c.1400). Moreover, these connections are visible in the Old English sections of the Mapping Metaphor categories: *flock* (from OE *flocc*) is attested from OE-1822 with the sense of ‘company/body of persons’.⁶ So here we have empirical evidence of the long-standing, high-level connection between People and Animals, and a more specific metaphor through which lack of civilisation in people is conceptualised in terms of the wild qualities of animals. Indeed, there are arguably more specific metaphors still. A connection with Invertebrates is visible from lexical items such as *soft-shell* (in the sense of ‘advocating a moderate course’), *barnacle* (in Social Communication, a type of companion, which is rare, but attested in 1607 and 1858), and *oyster-like* (‘retiring, withdrawn’, attested in 1784). Similarly, the category of Horses and Elephants emerges as particularly relevant, with *stable-mate*, *stable companion*, *stud*, and *coach-fellow* occurring both here and in Social Communication.

Texture and Density

Though society relates to people and their means of existing in the world, then, it really describes the relationships between people which are altogether a more abstract matter. In general, it is very difficult to talk about things which are intangible without describing them in terms of the physical. We would expect therefore that the Mapping Metaphor results would show

⁶ On metaphors in Old English, see also Kay (2000).

links between the categories of Social Communication and categories encompassing more concrete entities. The links with categories of Land, Plants and Animals discussed above have already demonstrated this to some extent and the results from categories of Texture and Density emphasise it further.

Social ties, metaphorically speaking, have density and substance, and are talked about in terms of solidity. In academic literature on sociology or sociolinguistics, for example, they are often *dense* or *loose*. D04 Texture and Density is the physical source for the following word senses in P06 Society and Social Communication: *solidify* ('bring to unity of interest', attested twice in 1885), *cohere* (i.e. 'associate with', from 1651) and *indissolubleness* ('specific quality of cooperation', recorded in 1699 and 1863). The pervasiveness of this link is supported by analysis of P07 Lack of Social Communication, where category D05 Lack of Density provides *dissolute* (disunited/separated, from 1651) and *unconsolidated* (1874). In sum, a substantial amount of lexical evidence points to the fact that social ties are conceptualised and talked of on a continuum from solid to dissolute.

Textiles

The use of the term 'ties' to describe these relationships is itself metaphorical and the Mapping Metaphor data open this link up further. B77 Textiles is another major source category for Social Communication. Social relations are described as a *network*, and, with the recent rise of social media, social networks are now often discussed in public discourse as well as in academic literature. The notion of a network now seems almost basic to any discussion of people in society and how they interact, but it is attested in OED2 from as late as 1947 as an interconnected group of people, and from 1560 in its original sense of threads being arranged in the form of a net. Work on social networks also often discusses how 'close-knit' a society or individuals are: *knit* ('associate with', 1541) too is found in our data. Social ties are being conceptualised as threads or wool, that is, part of the make-up of a piece of cloth rather than an entire garment. Finally, *anorak*, from the category of Clothing, is found in P07 Lack of Social Communication in the sense of a person who is boring or socially inept (recorded from 1984 and characterised as 'slang/derogatory'): however, this appears to be an isolated metaphor rather than an indication of a systematic link represented by the more basic textile words.

Physical Objects

Social ties are only one aspect of the ways in which we talk about society. Society itself is also conceptualised in a metaphorical way, most significantly as a physical object or a combination of physical objects. The Mapping Metaphor data reveal how society is described in this way: it can be broken down and has parts which stand in relation to the whole.

As physical objects, elements of society can be shaped, as shown by E43 Shape which lends terms such as *straight*, *round* and *fashion* or *fashionable*. Society is also seen as specific objects, such as *body*, *corporation* and *incorporate* (all from B27 Body). This systematic metaphor breaks down further, with parts of the body used: B29 External Parts of the Body lends *arm*, *foot* and *two-handed*, with the latter referring to co-operation between two people (recorded from 1657 onwards). On a more abstract level, this type of relationship between society as object and elements of society as parts of that object is shown in the metaphorical overlap with the category F37 Mutual Relation of Parts to Whole. Here, the data show how members of society can *associate*, *combine* and *cohere* in the same way as physical objects. Some of these relationships are difficult to unpick. For example, the primary sense of *associate* in English seems to be in relation to people, so the more general signification could be metaphorically derived from the social sense. An OED2 quotation from 1658 seems to support this: “a way to make wood perpetuall and a fit associat for metal” (OED2, *associate*, ppl. a. and n. B6). Importantly though, the mass of evidence allows us to see that the category link as a whole is systematic. Indeed, this relationship is long-standing, holding at least from Anglo-Saxon times. In the Old English data, lexical overlap from category F37 includes *gesamnian* which could mean both ‘joint (as in physically together)’ and ‘associate for common purpose’, and *onsundran* meaning both ‘apart/separately (physically)’ and ‘apart from the crowd (socially)’.

Physical Space

As well as being a physical object, it is clear from our data that speakers of English conceptualise society as existing within a physical realm. The evidence for this includes links showing that concepts of distance, position and sight are all represented in the social categories.

Social distance is conceptualised as physical distance. Links with E41 Distance include *close* between people on an emotional, rather than solely physical, level. Other links which show social communication described in terms of distance include *join*, in relation to social closeness, and *out of the*

way, meaning socially distant or isolated. Physical/social distance originating from people specifically is productive in lexemes such as *shoulder to shoulder* and *neighbour*. In *shoulder to shoulder*, physical alignment is transferred to social alignment. *Neighbour* has its source in the domain of society (from 1300 onwards) and is being used to express physical distance between objects (from 1567 onwards).

Position is similar to distance, as position in space is generally seen as close or far from a particular perspective. This relationship emerges especially clearly when we look at the metaphorical overlap between E45 Relative Position and P07 Lack of Social Communication, though there is also a great deal of lexical overlap with P06 Society and Social Communication. The overlap with P07 includes lexemes such as *seclude*, *marginal* and *separation*, which are all commonly used in present-day English to discuss people's position in relation to society as a whole. Movement and direction within a space are also shown by our data across several categories, with examples including *introverted* and *outcast*.

To summarise, aspects of society which are conceptualised as objects exist in a space and take up a particular position. Further, they are at a distance from other parts, can be seen from a particular perspective, and can move in different directions within that space. As part of the wider picture, these objects are also *visible*. Lexical links with C12 Sight include *show* and *see*. Naturally, of course, objects cannot be seen in the dark: this explains the conceptual relationship between P07 Lack of Social Communication and D33 Darkness, which leads to lexemes such as *shadow* and *shade* being used in the context of social obscurity.

Conclusion

This paper offers only a glimpse into the Mapping Metaphor data, with a particular focus on metaphors of social communication throughout the history of English. Such metaphors help to explain how people make sense of the world, and are therefore valuable for Applied Linguistics. Some clear metaphorical links emerge, alongside evidence for weaker or less long-standing connections. These links, among thousands of others, will be available for fuller exploration in the Metaphor Map resource soon. In addition to presenting detailed data on the lexical overlap instantiating specific links, the Map will allow for the first time a near-complete overview of the metaphorical transfer between semantic domains of English. General tendencies, such as the dominant pattern of transfer from concrete Source categories to abstract Targets, which has emerged from decades of work on

conceptual metaphor, will be able to be explored on the basis of data covering many centuries of English and the entirety of semantic space. Alongside the evidence of smaller-scale or newer patterns and connections, this will contribute to a complex picture of one of the major mechanisms of semantic change in English and a fuller understanding of how we talk about and conceptualise the world.

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