Book Review:

Understanding Metaphor Through Corpora: A Case Study of Metaphors in Nineteenth Century Writing

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ABSTRACT

The significance of Patterson's work Understanding Metaphor Through Corpora: A Case Study of Metaphors in Nineteenth Century Writing is that only through corpus linguistics have we been able to apply real empirical evidence to our arguments of what metaphor is. By demonstrating that metaphor is supposed to be approached from a linguistic perspective along with a psycholinguistic one, Patterson succeeds in drawing readers' attention to the efficacy and the benefits of combining corpus linguistic methodology with the theory of lexical priming. Thus, the volume is an essential reader for students and researchers in corpus linguistics, metaphor studies, lexicography, semantics, and pragmatics.

KEYWORDS

1. INTRODUCTION

For many years, metaphor research has mostly followed the traditional literal-metaphorical dichotomy to identify metaphors. However, the research on metaphor in the past ten years has shown that there exists no clear-cut boundary between metaphorical language and literal language since both operate along a cline or continuum, that metaphorical language is more common than literal language in terms of linguistic manifestations and functions. Recently, corpus-based researches on metaphor, in most cases, rely on quantitative methods and empirical evidence, focusing on frequencies, forms and functions of metaphorical language (Deignan, 2005; Steen et al., 2010; Davies, 2012; Skorczynska, 2010; Semino et al., 2017). In particular, Deignan (2005) proposes that every metaphor has a life of its own and emphasizes the importance of semantic analysis through corpus methods. Semino et al. (2017) stands out for combining cognitive linguistics and quantitative analysis of conceptual domains with a corpus-assisted, quantitative methodology, incorporating lexical analysis at the level of the text. In fact, corpus linguistics is now a well-established methodology in the field of metaphor studies. How to integrate quantitative and qualitative methods to make a systematic exploration on the lexical, grammatical, semantic and pragmatic features of metaphorical language instances in a corpus-based metaphor research? Katie J. Patterson' work, *Understanding metaphor through corpora:*

A case study of metaphors in nineteenth century writing, one of the latest additions to the *Routledge Advances in Corpus Linguistics* series, provides an innovative solution to this problem.

In the monograph under review, Patterson introduces an original approach to studying metaphor by describing its lexical behaviors within nineteenth century writing, in an attempt to "show how far the theory of Lexical Priming is applicable to metaphoric language" and "determine the extent to which corpus linguistic methods and lexical priming enrich our understanding of metaphor" (p. 5). Hoey's (2005) theory of Lexical Priming provides an explanation for the pervasiveness of the concepts *collocation* and *colligation* (Sinclair, 1991), and accounts for our motivation to conform to expectations or primings, which are dependent upon a community, genre and time, and have the ability to change. Hoey (2005) claims that every time we encounter a word we subconsciously note the patterns it tends to form with other words in certain contexts, eventually, owing to the cumulative effects of our encounters with this word, it becomes "part of our knowledge of a lexical item that it is used in certain combinations in certain kinds of text" (p. 10). These patterns, manifest in grammar and lexis as well as semantic association and pragmatic association, are encountered psychologically and created through repetition. When we reuse a lexical item, it is likely that we reproduce these combinations in their respective contexts in our own language production. Thus what makes this work engaging and pertinent is its holistic approach to the study of metaphor, focusing on both quantitative and qualitative methods, while integrating a corpus linguistic approach to explore the lexical, grammatical, semantic and pragmatic characteristics of metaphoric instances of language.

2. MAIN CONTENTS OF THE BOOK

Patterson' book is organized into eight chapters. The introductory Chapter 1 elucidates relevant theoretical issues by outlining the crucial developments in the philosophy of language during the twentieth century, inspired by Wittgenstein and Firth among others: (i) the shift away from Aristotelian theories of meaning leading to more flexibility in linguists' descriptions of language; (ii) the claim for "family resemblances" allowing us to view metaphor as something less static but more dynamic; (iii) the propulsion toward a social description of language, which is changing our perception of metaphor as less a deviation for literary styles but more a pervasive part of our language. Then Patterson justifies the adoption of Hoey's theory of Lexical Priming as a theoretical tool to analyze metaphoric language. The rationale behind theory adoption, then, highlights the ultimate goal of this book, which endeavors to demonstrate whether the theory of Lexical Priming can account for what drives language users to identify and understand metaphoric language and what corpus linguistic methods and Hoey's theory of Lexical Priming add to our understanding of metaphor from a linguistic perspective. At the end, the aims and the structure of the book are presented.

Focusing on relevant theories concerning the categorization and the identification of metaphoric language, Chapter 2 provides a framework for metaphor, while outlining the shift from the traditional view of metaphor as a dichotomy, to the now widely accepted cline theory. More specific, departing from a lexical perspective, the work adopts a corpus linguistic method to identify and study metaphor in context.

Albeit metaphor as a linguistic phenomenon often based on deviation or creativity, Chapter 3 proposes the theory of lexical priming—a specific usage-based theory, to explore how the manifestations of metaphoric meaning in lexis help to shape and develop our thoughts, both consciously and unconsciously, thus providing an explanation for the choices we make at the level of the lexis when using a metaphor.

Now that metaphoricity is pervasive in language and manifest itself in a range of ways at the level of the lexis and beyond, the researching of variation in metaphoric behaviors poses a challenge for corpus linguistics. Thus Chapter 4 specifies the methodological process for the research, presenting a more thorough account of how collocation, colligation, pragmatic and textual association go some way to analyze metaphoric language. In view of the nineteenth century's advance in science and

technology which generally brought about changes in the language of this period and the attempt to contribute to a growing body of research on nineteenth century linguistic creativity within the past decade, the chapter explains the choice to focus on nineteenth century data, and some key theoretical and practical decisions which allow for both a quantitative and a qualitative analysis, derived from a novel corpus driven methodology. Also, Chapter 4 describes the lexical items chosen to analyze in the following chapters along with the process of assigning corpus data to metaphoric and non-metaphoric categories. The findings are divided into three separate investigations—the series of case studies, presented in the next three chapters.

In light of semantic priming, Chapter 5 provides a top-down approach to analyzing the first case study in the datasets of the items *cultivated*, *flame* and *grew*. Each item has two corpora: concordance lines of metaphoric uses and concordance lines of non-metaphoric uses. These corpora are compared and contrasted to reveal evidence of lexical priming, which, Patterson argues, assists us in identifying when words and phrases are being used metaphorically, by focusing on lexical collocates and the wider semantic associations or preferences that these collocates imply. It is found that a range of lexical and semantic features are uniquely identified with metaphoric uses of the three items in nineteenth century writing, thus helping us to identify metaphoric language in contrast to literal language. These results support part of the drinking problem hypothesis, "which states that different senses of a word will avoid one another's lexico-grammatical features in order to avoid ambiguity" (p. 124). That is, readers get primed to associate these features with one sense or the other, which subsequently strengthens the differences between metaphoric use and non- metaphoric use.

Chapter 6 presents structural evidence of priming in the datasets of the items *cultivated*, *flame* and *grew*. The findings show that colligation lends itself to be another distinguishing feature of metaphoric language from non-metaphoric language. The items *cultivated*, *flame* and *grew,* as metaphors, can be argued to be different lexical items from their non-metaphoric counterparts. The findings also support the theory of Lexical Priming and suggest that lexical, grammatical, semantic, pragmatic and textual associations within the language all play a role in distinguishing between minute shades of metaphoricity, which, Patterson argues, is not a definitive or static concept.

Chapter 7 concentrates on the creativity of metaphoricity, or the more problematic or ambiguous data of metaphoricity, which emanates from the 'middle group' the co-raters had trouble identifying as either definitely metaphoric or definitely literal and which often gets overlooked in metaphor research. Meanwhile, this Chapter provides a qualitative discussion on the extent to which metaphor combines with other types of figurative meaning (e.g. simile, extended semantic meaning, polysemy and metonymy) and the extent to which lexical primings still exist and signal metaphoricity. On the whole, this chapter complements the discussions in Chapters 5 and 6 by painting a fuller picture of the complexity of metaphoric meaning. As Patterson proposes, "An exploration of the boundary at which terminology breaks down and metaphoricity becomes manifest in more 'creative' ways provides implications for the findings of the research so far." (p. 169) The evidence of lexical primings in this 'middle group' implies that lexical, grammatical, semantic, pragmatic and textual manifestations play an important part in distinguishing between subtleties in word senses, even in the cases of less obvious metaphoricity. Moreover, such findings indicate that metaphoric variations follow trends which fit into a recognized framework, thus conforming to our expectations. Instead of reducing creativity, this provides evidence for the open choice principle operating within the idiom principle (Sinclair, 1991). As Hoey (2008) states, metaphor, by its very nature, is creative within the realms of language, literature and thought. It follows that metaphoricity is a much more fluid concept, capable to change and shift through time and context and from person to person.

Chapter 8 rounds off the volume by summarizing the investigations of metaphors in the nineteenth century writing, highlighting differences in the lexical behaviors of metaphoric and non-metaphoric instances of a single item, when observing a large set of collocations, colligations as well as semantic, pragmatic and textual associations. These very differences substantiate the idea that language users are primed to recognize a metaphoric use of a word or phrase based on our awareness of such behaviors,

indicating that our ability to recognize metaphors in text can be accounted for by the Lexical Priming theory. Patterson also proposes future directions for corpus linguistics and metaphor studies: (i) a further exploration into the creative link between metaphor and pragmatic association, (ii) a further exploration into the types of metaphors in each of the sub-corpora or sub-sets of non-fiction sections and (iii) a diachronic comparison on metaphor with contemporary data.

3. A BRIEF COMMENT

Patterson' work, *Understanding metaphor through corpora: A case study of metaphors in nineteenth century writing*, demonstrates its own strengths while systematically showing us readers how the combination of corpus linguistics and the Theory of Lexical Priming enriches our understanding of metaphor at the level of collocation, colligation, semantics, pragmatics and text.

The first strength of this book lies in that Patterson integrates John Sinclair's theory of Phraseology and Michael Hoey's Theory of Lexical Priming, thus providing a solid theoretical foundation for the corpus-based metaphor study. John Sinclair points out that we follow the "principle of idiom" and the "principle of open choice" in language use and proposes the language description model that integrates lexical, grammatical, semantic and pragmatic features. Michael Hoey addresses the role of mental indexing in speech production and comprehension from the perspective of lexical priming. Patterson integrates these two theories and holds that metaphor should be studied from the perspective of corpus linguistics and psycholinguistics.

The second strength is methodological innovation. Patterson abandons the traditional literal-metaphorical dichotomy to identify metaphors and adopts a holistic approach to the study of metaphor, by integrating quantitative and qualitative methods to make a systematic exploration on the lexical, grammatical, semantic and pragmatic features of metaphorical language instances. The efficacy of this holistic view of metaphor is in that it contributes to explain the dynamic complexities of metaphor and is supposed to be at the forefront of any metaphor theory (p.215). In this sense, the book lends itself to shed invaluable insight into the field of cognitive linguistics, which has witnessed a quantitative turn in the past decade

A third strength of the book is the representativeness of the data sets. Up till now, few metaphor studies have studied the differences between different parts of speech in the use of metaphorical language from a lexis-based perspective. Moreover, unlike many metaphorical researches, which tend to start from a specific semantic domain and select a certain kind of metaphor as its object of study, Patterson identifies the target lexical items according to specific criteria: (i)the overall frequency of keyword lists (Keyness value ≥20.00); (ii) Frequency of metaphorical and non-metaphorical uses (20% of all the samples). Eventually, Patterson chooses three lexical items representing three main parts of speech (verb, adjective and noun), which goes a long way to compare the differences in the use of lexical metaphors that may be attributed to the difference in parts of speech.

The only drawback of the book may be attributed to misprints. For instance, in Table 4.5 on page 66, the part of speech of the verbal item "Grew" is misprinted as a noun. Also, in Table 5.3 on page 77, although Patterson mentioned in the text that the frequency data of metaphorical uses and non-metaphorical uses with significant differences were highlighted in blue and green respectively, she forgot to make an adjustment when the book is to be published. In addition, the personal pronoun "he, she **or** they" on page 149 is misprinted as "He, she **of** they".

Overall, the significance of Patterson's work *Understanding metaphor through corpora: A case study of metaphors in nineteenth century writing* is in that only through corpus linguistics have we been able to apply real empirical evidence to our arguments of what metaphor is. By demonstrating that metaphor is supposed to be approached from a linguistic perspective along with a psycholinguistic one, Patterson succeeds in drawing readers' attention to the efficacy and benefits

of combining corpus linguistic methodology with the theory of Lexical Priming. Above all, "Such a holistic view of metaphor can account for its dynamic complexity and should be at the forefront of any theory of metaphor." (p. 215) In this regard, the volume is an essential reader for students and researchers in corpus linguistics, metaphor studies, lexicography, semantics, and pragmatics. It is an important contribution indeed to the *Routledge Advances in Corpus Linguistics* series and comes highly recommended.

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