

**THE ROLE OF THE HEAD IN THE CONCEPTUALIZATION OF
RATIONAL BEHAVIOUR: A CROSS-LINGUISTIC STUDY
OF THE METAPHORICAL EXPRESSIONS OF THE
FOLK MODEL OF THE HEAD**

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ABSTRACT. In this paper I make a cross-linguistic study of the metaphorical expressions of the folk model of the head as the site of rational behaviour. I shall follow closely Johnson's notion of image-schema (1987) and the metaphor theory proposed in Cognitive Linguistics by Lakoff and his co-workers (Lakoff & Johnson 1980; Lakoff & Turner 1989; Lakoff 1987, 1993, 1996), although I differ from these authors in their account of the status of metonymy. Following Goossens (1995) and Ruiz de Mendoza (1996, 1997ab) I shall attempt to provide linguistic evidence that metaphors have a metonymic basis. I shall also try to develop a network of meaning of the metaphorical expressions of the folk model of the head as the site of rational behaviour which may be valid for English, French, German and Spanish, and in order to do so I will analyse simultaneously examples from these four languages.

KEYWORDS. Cross-linguistic study, metaphorical expressions, folk model, image-schema, metaphor theory, metonymy, network of meaning.

RESUMEN. En este artículo llevo a cabo un estudio de cruce lingüístico de las expresiones metafóricas del modelo popular de la cabeza como emplazamiento del comportamiento racional. Seguiré de cerca la noción de esquema de imagen de Johnson (1987) y la teoría de la metáfora propuesta en Lingüística Cognitiva por Lakoff y sus colaboradores (Lakoff y Johnson 1980; Lakoff y Turner 1989; Lakoff 1987, 1993, 1996), aunque difiero de estos autores en su visión del estado de la metonimia. Siguiendo a Goossens (1995) y Ruiz de Mendoza (1996, 1997ab) intentaré proveer evidencia lingüística de que las metáforas tienen una base metonímica. También intentaré desarrollar una red de significado de las expresiones metafóricas del modelo popular de la cabeza como emplazamiento del comportamiento racional que pueda ser válida para los idiomas inglés, francés, alemán y español, y con este fin analizaré simultáneamente ejemplos de estas cuatro lenguas.

PALABRAS CLAVE. Estudio de cruce lingüístico, expresiones metafóricas, modelo popular, esquema de imagen, teoría de la metáfora, metonimia, red de significado.

1. INTRODUCTION

Research in Cognitive Linguistics has been very interested in the study of metaphor¹ (see Lakoff & Johnson 1980; Lakoff & Turner 1989; Lakoff 1987, 1993, 1996). The cognitive paradigm stresses that metaphor has an experiential basis which is absolutely necessary in order to comprehend it. Since there are certain experiences which are common to all human beings, this has led to think that metaphors may approach a universal aspect of meaning, and crosscultural comparisons have turned out to be very fruitful.

Cross-linguistic research in this field has been carried out by some linguists (see Goddard 1996) but it has not received much attention yet. This is the reason why in what follows I shall attempt a cross-linguistic study of a folk model², that is, a combination of several metaphors which converge in a more dominant concept. We shall analyse in detail the folk model of the head as the site of rational behaviour in some European languages, namely English, French, German and Spanish.

We shall proceed in three stages. First, we shall study metaphor and metonymy from a cognitive perspective and we will focus on the problem of the relationship between metaphor and metonymy, arguing for a continuum from the former to the latter. Second, we shall attempt to provide evidence for the metonymic basis of the *head* metaphors by analysing examples taken from English, French, German and Spanish. Third, we shall make a cross-linguistic study of a sample of metaphorical expressions which make use of the concept "head", trying to develop a network of meaning of them, which will be valid to English, French, German and Spanish.

2. A COGNITIVE APPROACH TO METAPHOR AND METONYMY

Metaphor has been traditionally considered to be a figure of speech, which was studied by literary scholars. However, cognitive linguists have found out that metaphor is not just a matter of language and many of them have been interested in the study of metaphor (see Lakoff & Johnson 1980; Lakoff & Turner 1989; Lakoff 1987, 1993, 1996). Lakoff and Johnson contend (1980) that our conceptual system is basically metaphorical in nature. Thus, metaphor is pervasive not only in language, but also in thought and action. This is why the study of metaphor proves to be very fruitful indeed, because metaphors reflect our attitudes and beliefs, and they can give us important insights into the way in which we conceptualize the world around us.

Metaphor has been described by Lakoff and his co-workers as a mapping (i.e. a set of conceptual correspondences) between cognitive domains, by means of which we can understand and reason about abstract concepts in terms of our everyday experience. Johnson claims that "human *experience* and *meaning* depend in some way upon the body, for it is our contact with the entire spatio-temporal world that surround us" (Johnson 1987: xxi). Thus, it can be concluded that metaphors rely on bodily experiences and in order to demonstrate that this is the case we have decided to make a

cross-linguistic study of a particular folk model, namely the folk model of the head, which is encountered in different cultures.

Metonymy is defined by traditional rhetoric as a figure of speech. Lakoff has recognized that as metaphor, metonymy is also central to a theory of knowledge organization (Lakoff 1987). However, there are few works on this topic, and the treatment of it by most cognitive linguists is rather brief (Lakoff & Johnson 1980; Lakoff & Turner 1989; Lakoff 1987; Taylor 1995). As a result, the status of metonymy is less clear than the status of metaphor, and it still arouses some controversy.

Lakoff and Turner (1989: 103) claim that metonymy and metaphor are similar, because both are conceptual in nature, both are mappings, both can be conventionalized and both are means of extending the resources of a language. However, they think that there are some important differences between them: first, metonymy involves a mapping within one model, whereas metaphor is a mapping across different cognitive models. Second, metonymic mappings involve a “stand for” relation in contrast to metaphorical mappings, which consists of sets of correspondences. Third, the main function of metonymy is referential, that is, to refer to another category within the same model in order to highlight the first one, while metaphor seems to have a predicative function. A distinction between metaphor and metonymy had already been drawn by Jakobson in 1956³, but neither his hypothesis nor the one formulated by Lakoff & Turner have solved the problem of the relationship between metaphor and metonymy.

In 1976 Lévi-Strauss argued in favour of the interdependence of metaphor and metonymy. In recent years, the interaction between metonymy and metaphor has been studied by some linguists such as Goossens (1995), Taylor (1995), and Ruiz de Mendoza (1996, 1997ab). Goossens uses the term *metaphonymy* to describe different kinds of relationships between metonymy and metaphor. Taylor suggests that all metaphors have a metonymic basis but he rejects it afterwards. Ruiz de Mendoza considers that the study of metonymy has been too much neglected and he attempts to incorporate metonymy into the framework of communication theory. As far as the relationship between metaphor and metonymy is concerned, he contends that “both metaphors and metonymies may be used either referentially or non-referentially and the stand-for relationship is likely to be simply a by-product of the domain internal nature of the mapping “ (Ruiz de Mendoza 1997b: 3). He believes that the only crucial difference between them concerns the domain-internal or domain-external nature of the mapping, and this is why he argues for a continuum from metaphor to metonymy.

We agree with the cognitive linguists who think that all metaphors may have a metonymic basis. Therefore, we shall attempt to provide evidence for it in the following cross-linguistic study of the folk model of the head as the site of rational behaviour.

3. THE METONYMIC BASIS OF THE *HEAD* METAPHORS

The head can be conceptualized as a container of ideas, thoughts, and mental abilities. In the following metaphorical expressions⁴ the head stands metonymically for the mental faculties of a person:

- (1) (English) *to have a head for, to have no head for*
 (French) *avoir de la tête, n'avoir pas sa tête*
 (Spanish) *tener cabeza para, no tener cabeza para*

What is meant by these examples is that a person has (no) mental ability to do something (examples in English and Spanish) or that he has (no) mental faculties (example in French).

The same can be applied to this set of metaphorical expressions:

- (2) (English) *to have a good head*
 (French) *avoir une bonne tête*
 (Spanish) *tener buena cabeza*

because “good” (“bonne”, “buena”) does not really refer to the head itself but what what is contained inside it. Thus, the head is used again in a metonymic way because it stands for the whole of the mental faculties of a person.

The next examples show clearly that the head does not only stand metonymically for the mental abilities of a person but also for the whole person because it is his most salient aspect. The head is seen as the most salient part of the body in this folk model in which the rational behaviour of human beings is highlighted:

- (3) (English) *have a thick head*
 (French) *avoir la tête dure*
 (Spanish) *tener la cabeza dura.*

It is important to notice that in these examples above the head has a special feature, namely, it is “thick” or “hard” (*dure, dura*): the head is usually seen as a container into which ideas, thoughts and information go; however, if it is thick or hard these cannot enter easily. Then it comes as no surprise that these metaphorical expressions mean that a person cannot understand the ideas or the information he is given.

- (4) (English) *have a cool head*
 (French) *garder une tête froide*
 avoir la tête chaude
 (German) *einen kühlen Kopf bewahren*
 den Kopf heiß machen
 (Spanish) *mantener la cabeza fría*
 tener la cabeza caliente

These *head* expressions can be connected to the conceptual metaphor REASON IS COOLNESS; EMOTION IS HEAT. The heart is conceptualized as the site of emotions (see Niemeier 1997) and the head as the site of rational behaviour. Thus, the typical state

of the head is being cool, as the metaphorical expressions *garder une tête froide*, *einen kühlen Kopf bewahren* and *mantener la cabeza fría* illustrate. Nevertheless, this state can change, as is shown in *avoir la tête chaude*, *den Kopf heiß machen* and *tener la cabeza caliente*. We think that this is very interesting indeed, because emotions are always related to the heart, not to the head. Moreover, it emphasises that the head is used as a metonymy for the whole person: it can even reflect emotions, which are always connected with the heart. The capacity of rational behaviour and the capacity of having emotions are the two salient features of human beings which differentiate them from animals, and the head stands metonymically for both of them and as a result for the whole person.

4. RECURRING IMAGE-SCHEMATA IN THE HEAD METAPHORS

The examples which are going to be studied in the following pages are grouped into four sections under the following headings: the CONTAINER schema, the PATH schema, the UP-DOWN schema and the OBJECT schema (Johnson 1987). These image-schemata play a prominent role in the metaphorical projections which are analysed here, as we shall see.

4.1. The CONTAINER schema

Johnson points out (1987) that we experience our bodies as containers. The head can be conceptualized as a container, that is, a bounded region with its inside and outside, in the domain of three-dimensional space. Since the head is considered to be the site of rational behaviour, it may be seen as a container which contains ideas, thoughts and our mental faculties. The head is conceptualized as a container in metaphorical expressions such as

- (5) (English) *in sb's head*, *inside sb's head*
 (French) *en tête*, *dans la tête*
 (German) *im Kopf*
 (Spanish) *en la cabeza*, *dentro de la cabeza*.

As any other container, it can be full or empty:

- (6) (English) *to fill sb's head*
 (Spanish) *llenarle a alguien la cabeza con alguna cosa*.

The head is sometimes seen as a particular kind of container, namely a “storehouse”, where ideas, thoughts and information are stored. Thus, we find metaphorical expressions like

- (7) (English) *to put sth into sb's head*
to put sth out of sb's/one's head
to take sth into one's head
 (French) *mettre qqch. dans la tête à qqn.*
se mettre qqch. dans la tête

- (German) *etwas im Kopf behalten*
(Spanish) *meterle a alguien alguna cosa en la cabeza*
metersele a uno en la cabeza
sacarse alguien alguna cosa de la cabeza
sacarle a alguien alguna cosa de la cabeza.

All these expressions (except the one in German) refer explicitly to active human behaviour, because it is a person who stores information there and afterwards retrieves it. It is noteworthy that the “access” to the head is possible not only for the person to whom the head belongs but also to any other person.

4.2. *The PATH schema*

In the previous section we have been dealing with the head as a container. Now we shall focus on the process by means of which ideas, thoughts and information “go into” the head.

Every time a person receives any piece of information there is a source (another person), a destination (the person who receives the piece of information), a path, which connects the source and the destination, and a direction (toward the destination). Therefore, the PATH schema plays an important role in some *head* metaphors as we can observe in some metaphorical expressions such as

- (8) (English) *sth never entered sb's head*
get sth into sb's head
(French) *cela ne m'entre pas dans la tête*
aller (ne pas aller) dans la tête
ça va (ça va pas) dans sa tête
(German) *das geht mir im Kopf herum*
in den Kopf kommen
was ist ihm in den Kopf gefahren?
(Spanish) *entrarle a alguien alguna cosa en la cabeza*
*venir a la cabeza*⁵.

It can be noted that in these examples there is an element of the PATH schema which is not always present: the source. When we receive a piece of information there is a source from where it comes, but this is not necessarily the case when we are dealing with ideas or thoughts. It is noteworthy that in some of these metaphorical expressions the person who receives something is conceptualized as a container which contains the head. The head is conceptualized as a container which stands metonymically for the whole person.

4.3. *The UP-DOWN schema*

All the metaphorical expressions included here involve the UP-DOWN schema, but there are slight differences between them. The following set of examples is based on an obvious physical experience: the heaven, the air, the clouds, and the moon are UP:

- (9) (English) *have one's head in the clouds*
 (French) *avoir une tête en l'air*
 (Spanish) *tener la cabeza en las nubes.*

These *head* expressions mean that the person is not thinking in what he should (in contrast to the English expression we have *to keep one's head down*, which means “to avoid distraction”). The head is conceptualized as an object which could nearly “fly away”, that is, escape from the position where it should be as the site of rational behaviour⁶. There are two metaphorical expressions, namely *être dans la lune* (French) and *estar en la luna* (Spanish), which have the same meaning as the ones above and which can be interpreted in the same way, even though the term “head” is not explicitly mentioned in them.

It is important to notice that these metaphorical expressions are not necessarily connected with Lakoff & Johnson's conceptual metaphor HAPPY IS UP (1980). A person may not be thinking in what he should because of different reasons: it might be because he is happy, but this is not always so. Nevertheless, there are two metaphors which *are* related to the conceptual metaphor HAPPY IS UP and which can be included here, although *head* is not explicitly mentioned in them. We are referring to *to be on cloud nine* (English) and *estar en el séptimo cielo* (Spanish).

The next metaphorical expressions are based on the physical experience by which we consider the ground (e.g. the sand) to be down:

- (10) (English) *bury your head in the sand*
 (German) *den Kopf in den Sand stecken*
 (Spanish) *esconder la cabeza en la arena.*

These examples refer to active human behaviour. In (9) a person is unaware of what is happening, but this is not the case here. The meaning of these metaphorical expressions is that somebody wants to ignore an unpleasant situation and he hopes that it will stop if he does not think about it. The head is commonly held to be the place where reason and thought are located, and if somebody “buries” or “hides it in the sand” it means that this person does not want to use his capacity to reason and behaves in an irrational way: he seems to believe that if he does not think about his problems they will disappear.

It can be observed that in both (9) and (10) the kind of human behaviour presented is not the rational behaviour which is typically expected from people. We can infer from these examples that the head only functions properly when it is located in the right place, which is the one our physical experience shows:

- (11) (English) *have a good head on your shoulders*
 (French) *avoir la tête sur les épaules*
 (Spanish) *tener la cabeza encima de los hombros.*

The SCALE schema is obviously present in (12), in contrast to the previous examples in this section:

- (12) (English) *hold one's head high*
 (French) *porter haut la tête*
 (German) *den Kopf hoch tragen*
 (Spanish) *ir con la cabeza (bien) alta.*

We can observe that there seems to be a scale, in which PRIDE IS UP and SHAME IS DOWN. The SCALE schema appears also in the following set of examples:

- (13) (French) *plier/baisser/courber la tête*
 (Spanish) *bajar/doblar la cabeza.*

These metaphorical expressions can be related to Lakoff & Johnson's conceptual metaphor HAVING CONTROL or FORCE IS UP; BEING SUBJECT TO CONTROL or FORCE IS DOWN (1980). In German we find a similar *head* expression *den Kopf hängen lassen* but its meaning is different from the one of these expressions above; it means 'to be very sad' and it can be connected to Lakoff & Johnson's conceptual metaphor SAD IS DOWN (1980).

4.4. The OBJECT schema

The first section has dealt with the head as a container, which is a universal type of schema. In the second section the head has been seen as a container into which information, ideas and thoughts go. Afterwards the head has been taken as an object which people possess or rather "contain": a man is seen as a container which contains a head (9), (11). Then the head has been conceptualized as an object a man can manipulate (10), (12), (13). In this section we shall focus on another conceptualization of the head, namely, the head as an object of value. It can be observed that we have moved from a general level towards an specific level in the conceptualizations of the head; none the less all of them are compatible with one another.

Men can reason and behave rationally. This is an essential characteristic of human beings, because it makes them different from -and superior to- animals⁷. Since the capacity to reason and think is very important, the head, which is commonly held to be the site of rational behaviour, is a valuable object and it is considered to be the most important organ of our bodies, as it can be seen in the metaphorical expressions below:

- (14) (English) *to keep one's head*
 (French) *garder la tête*
 (Spanish) *conservar la cabeza*

which are never found referring to other parts of the body because they are not so salient aspects of the human being as the head (notice that in these metaphorical expressions and in the following ones the head is used clearly in a metonymic way to refer to the capacity to behave rationally).

The following metaphorical expressions show something negative:

- (15) (English) *lose one's head*
 (French) *perdre la tête*

(German) *den Kopf verlieren*
(Spanish) *perder la cabeza.*

If a person loses the valuable object where rational behaviour is kept, he will behave irrationally. This is why *lose one's head* (and the other expressions in French, German and Spanish) mean 'to become crazy'.

There are some metaphorical expressions in which the head is seen as if it had been damaged, and obviously they denote negative situations:

- (16) (English) *to scratch one's head*
(French) *se casser la tête*
casser la tête à qqn, rompre la tête à qqn
(German) *(sich) den Kopf zerbrechen*
(Spanish) *quebrarse la cabeza, romperse la cabeza*⁸
quebrar a alguien la cabeza.

When there is something which is difficult to understand the head (i.e. the place in which reasoning and thinking take place) cannot deal properly with it, and the effort is so great that it can be damaged. The damage is conceptualized in a different degree in each language. We can observe that in English the damage is never as serious as in French, German and Spanish. It can also be seen that there is another significant difference between English and the rest of the languages: in English it is always a person who *scratches his (own) head*. In contrast, the head is conceptualized in the other languages as an object of value which can also be damaged by other people.

5. CONCLUSION

In the foregoing paper I have made a cross-linguistic study of a folk model which can be encountered in different cultures: the folk model of the head as the site of rational behaviour. This analysis has had two aims: first, I have attempted to provide linguistic evidence for the hypothesis that metaphors are ultimately dependent on a prior metonymic mapping. Second, I have tried to show that it is possible to develop a network of meaning of the metaphorical expressions of the folk model of the head which may be valid not only for the English language but also for other languages of the Western culture.

The question if metaphors rely on a metonymic basis is still unanswered, but this study has suggested that this may be the case. A careful analysis of the metaphorical expressions referring to the folk model of the head demonstrates that their metonymic character is evident: the head stands metonymically for a person's mental faculties. Moreover the head is seen as the most salient feature of human beings and is used metonymically to stand for the whole person, who is indeed the one that experiences and thinks about the world around him.

Metaphors rely on everyday experiences as well as on bodily experiences. This led us to think that a cross-linguistic study of the metaphorical expressions of the folk model

of the head as the site of rational behaviour would prove to be fruitful. The great amount of similarities found among English, French, German, and Spanish demonstrate that our bodily experience plays a fundamental role in our conceptualization of abstract areas of experience. It must be added that a cross-linguistic study has provided us with more evidence to support our claims. We believed that the main clusters of the *head* expressions in English could be grouped under certain conceptualizations (container, manipulable object, object of value). After our analysis we have concluded that this may be the case not only for English, but also for many other languages such as French, German and Spanish.

NOTES

1. As Taylor (1995: 133) points out, the cognitive view of metaphor had been anticipated in Black's interactional theory of metaphor.
2. Notice that the notion of folk model differs from Lakoff's "conceptual metaphor", in which the internal coherence of a conceptual domain is especially relevant for the mapping from this conceptual domain onto another.
3. Jakobson claimed that every message was constructed in two poles: a paradigmatic pole (represented by metaphors), in which an expression was replaced by another expression, and a syntagmatic pole (represented by metonymies), in which an outstanding element was selected and evoked the whole syntagm. (See Jakobson 1956).
4. We have created a corpus in which we have gathered materials taken from several English, French, German and Spanish monolingual dictionaries. The examples found in the corpus do not encompass all the metaphorical expressions referring to the head but just the ones which are necessary to analyse the folk model of the head as the site of rational behaviour. Only those metaphorical expressions present cross-linguistically and common in everyday language are considered.
5. *Venir a la cabeza* has the same meaning as *venir a la memoria*, which has an equivalent in English (*come to one's mind*). Many *mind* expressions are very similar to *head* expressions both in form and in content in English, Spanish, German and also in French, although it is not so common in the last language.
6. This contrasts with other metaphorical expressions which are not related to *head* and which can be connected to Lakoff & Johnson's conceptual metaphor RATIONAL IS UP; EMOTIONAL IS DOWN, for instance, *I raised the conversation back up the rational plane* (example from Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 17).
7. This is the reason why whenever we want to say that somebody does not behave in a rational way we use *head* expressions which refer to an animal's head, not a person's head. This can be observed in these metonymies: (French) *tête de linotte* (French for *linnet*) and (Spanish) *cabeza de chorlito* (Spanish for *plover*). Curiously enough, both the linnet and the plover are kinds of birds, and we think that this is relevant if we bear in mind that popular belief attributes to birds a trifling psychology.
8. *Quebrarse o romperse la cabeza* has the same meaning as *devanarse los sesos*, which is close to the English expression *to rack one's brains*. The brain is an organ inside the head which is also said to contain thoughts. However, it must be noticed that in *to rack one's brains* what is referred to is not that organ but the matter it consists of. It is strikingly similar in the Spanish expression *devanarse los sesos*.

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