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Metaphor in The Semantics of Some English Food-Related Nominal Compounds

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ABSTRACT *The mechanisms and processes involved in the semantics of English nominal compounds have been the subject of extensive research. This paper is focused on the role of metaphor in the semantic structure of compounds used as culinary terms. The major metaphorical schemes and models have been outlined. On the basis of the predominant types of metaphor contributing to the semantics of food-related nominal compounds, some of the concepts and attributes which are particularly salient in this area of specialised language have been identified.*

1. Introduction

The semantics of compounds has been the subject of significant amount of research due to the fact that these linguistic units combine two or more parts into a semantic whole without any grammatical indication of the nature of their relation or the manner in which it has occurred. Metaphor-based expressions are particularly interesting from the point of view of semantic composition since the metaphorical interpretation of individual components is largely determined by the interpretation of the whole construction in which they appear. The types of metaphor involved in the semantics of food-related nominal compounds can be used as an indication of the salient attributes and concepts in an area of specialised language which is basic to human life.

2. Metaphor: the cognitive approach

Since Lakoff and Johnson's groundbreaking work on metaphor and cognition (1980), numerous studies within cognitive linguistics have been focused on the centrality of metaphor to our linguistic conceptualisation of the world. It has been regarded as a fundamental cognitive ability, a cognitive instrument rather than a stylistically attractive way of expressing ideas through language.

According to the traditional view of metaphor, it is based on the notions of similarity and comparison between the literal and the figurative meaning of an expression, and is composed of three elements: tenor, vehicle, ground (Leech 1969: 148). Within the cognitive approach, the tenor and the vehicle are explained in terms of concepts: the first one is viewed as the target concept, and the second as the source concept. Conceptual metaphor consists in the transfer of information from the source to the target concept. In Pencheva's view, metaphor is the mapping of one conceptual domain onto another via linguistic units and structures (Pencheva 2001: 229). What is transferred or mapped is not only the properties of individual concepts but also the structure, internal relation or logic of the entire cognitive model.

Kövecses (Kövecses 2010: 91-92) notes that when the source concept is mapped onto the target concept, some of its aspects are hidden (using Lakoff and Johnson's term (Lakoff, Johnson 1980: 10-13). The metaphor concentrates on one or several aspects of the concept and 'highlights' them.

The view adopted here is that both concepts are structured by frames, the cores of which are composed of a number of co-existing attributes. The values of these attributes are also concepts which provide further information, thus making the attributes more specific (Barsalou 1992: 30–39). The emergence of a metaphor-based nominal compound can be seen as the result of the highlighting of a particular attribute, or attributes, in the frame of the target concept.

The most common source concepts are based on our main experience with the surrounding world: the human body, health and illness, animals, plants, buildings, games and sports, food, heat and cold, light and darkness, movement and direction (Benczes 2006: 50, Kövecses 2010: 18-23).

The metaphorical system which underlies the conceptualisation of things is referred to as the Great Chain of Being (Lakoff, Turner 1989, Kövecses 2010). Based on folk ideas of the relationships between things in the world in the Jewish-Christian traditions, it is made up of hierarchical units, each one of them containing the positive attributes from the preceding one and adding at least one more. The chain represents a hierarchy of things and concepts and turns into a metaphor when one of its levels is used for the understanding of another (Kövecses 2010: 154-155). Its hierarchical structure lookes like this:

- PEOPLE: higher-order attributes and behaviour;
- ANIMALS: instinctual attributes and behaviour;
- PLANTS: biological attributes and behaviour;
- COMPLEX OBJECTS: structural attributes and functional behaviour;
- NATURAL PHYSICAL THINGS: natural physical attributes and natural physical behaviour.

Conceptualisation moves either upwards, from a lower source concept to a higher target concept, or vice versa.

3. Material

A mini-corpus of 160 food-related English nominal compounds was compiled and analysed by the author for the purposes of the present study.

4. Types of metaphor-based compounds

One approach to the analysis of metaphor-based nominal compounds is by using Benczes's five patterns of the effect of conceptual metaphor on compounds, i.e. (1) on

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the modifer; (2) on the head; (3) on both constituents of the compound; (4) on the compound as a whole; and (5) on the relation between the two constituents (Benczes 90-105). This approach, however, is not problem-free.

4.1. Metaphor-motivated modifier
It is hard to distinguish between the patterns of metaphor-based modifier and metaphor-based relation between the two constituents since in most cases metaphor motivates both. One example of a compound with a metaphor-motivated modifier is *bee wine* (the movement of the clump of yeast during fermentation resembles that of bees).

4.2. Metaphor-motivated head
In a large group of compounds, the metaphor act on the head: *bread stick*, *apple nugget*, *birch beer*, *ginger ale*, *field egg*, *cream horn*, *acorn coffee*, *beef tea*, *fruit leather*, etc.

4.3. Metaphor acting on both components
No examples of this pattern have been found in the corpus analysed.

4.4. Metaphor acting on the compound as a whole
In a large group of compounds, metaphor acts on the compound as a whole: *bullock's heart*, *pope's nose*, *granny's leg*, etc. These structures often result from the combined action of metaphor and metonymy and fall within the category traditionally referred to as 'exocentric compounds'.

4.5. Metaphor acting on the relation between the components
Benczes (Benczes 2006: 107–108) points at the existence of numerous compounds in which the components are connected by the semantic relation of resemblance, i.e. the second component is compared to the first one. In these compounds, the concept associated with the second component is metaphorically understood through the concept associated with the first component. Most of the metaphor-based compounds examined here belong to this type: *globe artichoke*, *ark shell*, *strawberry tomato*, *cherry tomato*, *kidney bean*, *bell pepper*, *bullnose pepper*, *choux pastry*, *chestnut mushroom*, and many others.

5. Metaphorical schemes and metaphorical models
The first step in the cognitive modelling of metaphors is establishing the nature of the source concept and the target concept. On this basis, the general metaphorical schemes connecting them can be defined. After that, more specific metaphorical models can be outlined according to the element/s of the source concept structure mapped onto the target concept.

5.1. Metaphorical schemes
The most frequently compared entities are inanimate objects (Pencheva 2001: 229). Naturally, the predominant metaphorical scheme in the language of food would be [Inanimate > Inanimate]: *globe artichoke*, *bell pepper*, *strawberry tomato*.

Another common metaphorical scheme is [Animate > Inanimate], e.g. *bullock's heart*. With the accumulation of knowledge about the world, the scheme becomes bidirectional and it is equally easy to compare both inanimate objects to people and animals, and animate entities to inanimate objects. An example of the [Inanimate > Animate] scheme is *coalfish*.

Due to the central position man occupies in cognitive and linguistic processes, the sub-scheme [Man > Inanimate object] can be expected to be dominant (Pencheva 2001: 234-235). In the examples studied, however, this scheme is not so common and acts mainly on the compound as a whole: *pope's eye*, *parson's nose*, *ladies' fingers*.

Zoomorphic metaphorical schemes also take active part in the word development processes and affect the choice of a word formation model (Pencheva 2001: 244). Their action can be seen in compounds such as *checky pig*, *bullock's heart*, *bullnose pepper*.

As evident from the examples above, in the process of mapping source concept elements onto the target concept structure, the metaphors acting on the compounds examined here move in both directions along the levels of the Great Chain of Being: from a higher to a lower level, as in personification, and from a lower to a higher level, e.g. with the [Inanimate > Animate] scheme.

5.2. Metaphorical models
A. The *Appearance* Metaphorical Model
The metaphors based on physical resemblance, or external similarity (material, shape and colour), have been referred to as 'identifying metaphors' (Pencheva 2001). This model can be subdivided into several submodels according to the attribute/s highlighted in the respective concept frames:

a) *Shape* sub-model
The image metaphor through which the ((Shape)) attribute is mapped onto the target concept acts on the relation between the components: *globe artichoke*, *ark shell*, *bell pepper*, *choux pastry*, *bridge roll*, *rock cake*, *rock salt*, and many others. In *field egg*, *bread stick*, *gum drops*, *cream horn*, the same type of metaphor motivates the head, whereas in *bullock's heart*, *ladies' fingers*, and *pope's nose* it acts on the whole compound.

b) *Colour* sub-model
In some compounds, the ((Colour)) attribute from the frame of the source concept is mapped onto the target concept: *chestnut mushroom*, *marble cake*, *coalfish*.

c) *Size* sub-model
Metaphors within this sub-model underlie the semantics of *button mushroom*, *button onion*. In *jumbo shrimp* metaphor acts together with metonymy since *jumbo* provides metonymic access to 'large animal'.

d) *Overall Appearance* sub-model
In *strawberry tomato*, *cherry tomato*, *pearl barley*, image metaphor structures the concept expressed through the first component of the compound and highlights the attributes ((Shape)), ((Colour)), and ((Size)) of the concept frame associated with the head word. In *apple nuggets*, this metaphor structures the second component.

Metaphor highlights the ((Overall Appearance)) attribute in the concepts associated with the heads of the compounds *ginger ale*, *birch beer*, *coconut milk*, *fruit butter*, *fruit leather*, *beef olives*, and with the modifier in *bee wine*. This type of metaphor acts on the compound as a whole in *gravel path* and *dragon eye*.

e) *Human/Animal Body* sub-model
The metaphor in this model is based on parts of the body and motivates either the compound as a whole (*ladies' fingers*, *bullock's heart*, *granny's leg*, *pope's nose/parson's*

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nose), or the relation between the two components (*kidney bean*, *bullnose pepper*).

B. The *Preparation* Metaphorical Model

This is a model characteristic of the examined area which often occurs in combination with the *Overall Appearance* sub-model. It is involved in the semantics of compounds having 'tea' and 'coffee' (highlighting the attribute ((Brewed))), and 'cheese' and 'loaf' (highlighting ((Moulded))) as their components: *acorn coffee*, *beef tea*, *headcheese*, *fruit cheese*, *loaf cheese*, *loaf sugar*, *meat loaf*.

With the exception of sub-model **e) *Human/Animal Body* sub-model** in the *Appearance* metaphorical model, models A and B most frequently result from two types of movement along the Great Chain of Being: horizontal (between same-level concepts), e.g. *chestnut mushroom*, or upward vertical movement, e.g. *bell pepper*.

6. Conclusions

The analysis has led to the identification of the metaphorical schemes and models involved in the semantics of food-related English nominal compounds. The predominant metaphorical scheme [Inanimate > Inanimate] acts mainly on the relation between the two components of compounds. In spite of the centrality of man to our conceptual system, the [Man > Inanimate object] sub-scheme is far less frequent than expected and acts on the compound as a whole. The examples studied have demonstrated that conceptualisation can move along the Great Chain of Being either horizontally or vertically, mainly upwards. The most widely distributed metaphorical model is *Appearance*, its *Shape* sub-model being the most productive one. Therefore, ((Appearance)) can be considered as the most salient attribute of metaphorically structured concepts externalised through nominal compounds in the examined area of specialised language.

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