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Using metaphor for peace-building, empathy, and reconciliation

Lynne Cameron

Introduction

In situations of conflict and violence, harmonious human relations are disrupted; the ‘otherness’ of people is foregrounded as shared humanity retreats into the background. The complexity of individual lives fades as people are lumped together into groups that threaten territory or integrity. Differences between groups are heightened and similarities are downplayed in this process of other-ing. The dehumanised Other becomes a faceless enemy, all empathy denied.

Repairing a society ruptured by conflict requires the renewed possibility of empathy as part of re-humanising and beginning to see others as neighbours again. Empathy is about one person connecting with another, reaching across gaps between Self and Other to understand how ‘the Other’ feels and thinks, lives their life, and sees their world (Cameron 2013: 3). In this chapter, I demonstrate how metaphor can contribute to dialogic processes of peace-building and reconciliation, and how metaphor became integral to a dynamic model that sees empathy as something we do, rather than something we ‘have’ (Cameron 2013).

Extract 1 gives an example of metaphor used in talk to show empathy. The speaker is a British Jewish woman participating in a focus group discussion on terrorism in the UK. Vehicle terms of verbal metaphors\(^1\) are underlined.

Extract 1

1732 I think,
1733 the Palestinians actually,
1734 have a .. good cause to be angry.
1735 and,
1736 erm,
1737 they’ve been persecuted,
1738 for a long long time,
1739 .. and,
1740 nobody took any notice,
1741 .. of their .. cry.
and, what happens, when you put somebody in a corner, they start to fight, and they’re fighting dirty.

Focus group of women, London

The verbal metaphors in the last three lines create a small metaphorical story-scenario (Cameron, Low and Maslen 2010) as the speaker tries to explain Palestinian anger: ‘fighting dirty’ as a result of being ‘put in a corner’. As the speaker imagines the perspective and emotions of Palestinians, and actions that might result, the metaphorical story-scenario helps her engage in an act of empathy. Metaphor supports an ‘imaginative connecting’ with a distant other that can underpin empathy.

Metaphor in dialogue may also function to encourage empathy in other participants. As often happens when people discuss difficult topics, metaphors open up an alternative space in dialogue; this shared dialogic space affords the possibility of coming together in a new perspective on the topic to speakers who may have come to the talk with disparate views. In this alternative space, metaphors can support speakers in ‘imaginative connecting’ with each other. I suggest that metaphor is important in creating affordances for imaginative connecting in peace-building, reconciliation, and empathy.

The term ‘peace-building’ is itself metaphorical, suggesting that peace is some kind of object or material that develops through a process of deliberate construction. As a metaphor, ‘building’ both hides and highlights (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). It highlights peace as open to change, and the intentional nature of processes designed to develop peace. Among possibilities backgrounded by the building metaphor is that of understanding peace as more organic, as something to be grown and nurtured. Later, I demonstrate how metaphors were deliberately chosen to highlight most relevant aspects of the concept of empathy, and to open up productive ways of thinking and understanding.

Situations of conflict and violence involve simplifications and intensification around who is ‘Other’ in relation to ‘Self’, and an amalgamating of individuals into groups to be defended or attacked. Conflict and violence often involve dehumanisation of the enemy, rendering people less than human, in a process that justifies changing or abandoning moral codes that would otherwise inhibit violence and killing. In Bakhtinian terms, the ‘other-ing’ that takes place in conflict can be described as creating an extreme alterity (Cameron 2013; Clark and Holquist 1986).

Peace-building and reconciliation act to close the gap of enhanced alterity constructed through violence and conflict. Empathy helps in reaching across alterity to understand how another person feels and thinks, lives their life, and sees their world.

The work of empathy is precisely trying to imagine a view of the world that one does not share, and in fact may find it quite difficult to share.

Halpern and Weinstein 2004: 581

Note that empathy is more than simply ‘putting oneself in the other’s shoes’. This kind of ‘self-focused empathy’ does only part of the work needed to imagine another’s life. Each individual is the product of their unique embodied experience in the world, and thus it is never possible to fully understand how someone else feels. ‘Other-focused empathy’ requires a leap of imagination to try to enter the world of the other and feel how it is for them in their shoes.
The imaginative connecting of empathy happens in how people think about each other, the labels they assign to each other, the stories they tell about each other, the attitudes they hold about each other and that they perform in dialogue. All these ways of connecting may draw on metaphor. Cognitive and affective connecting may be accompanied by more concrete connecting. For example, to mark progress towards peace, former enemies may engage in symbolic handshakes or sit next to each other in signing ceremonies. Such symbolic physical acts work as metonymies for the re-humanising and re-connecting processes of peace-building and reconciliation.

The difficulty referred to by Halpern and Weinstein above is a result of the extremes of conflict. Finding empathy for someone who may have inflicted violence on you or your family can be difficult and uncomfortable; entering into their perspective may require dealing with moral reasoning quite different from, and alien to, your own. Somehow, the other’s moral reasoning has to be understood, while not endorsed, so that the actions generated by that reasoning can be understood.

Through the dialogue and interaction of peace-building, re-humanising can take place. People need once again to be seen and known as individuals with shades of characters, rather than being all painted with the same brush. In extract 1, metaphor shifts the Other from the social group ‘Palestinians’ (1733) to an individual, if generic, ‘somebody’ (1744).

Dehumanising and re-humanising are not symmetric processes; dehumanising is the work of a moment and always possible even after reconciliation and peace agreements. As Halpern and Weinstein (2004) report, drawing on their studies in the former Yugoslavia and the work of Gobodo-Madikizela (2002) in South Africa, re-humanising happens much more slowly and requires hard work; and it can be undone very quickly. Because strong group mentalities rule during conflict, reconciliation often needs strong leadership, to support people in thinking beyond a ‘them and us’ perspective.

The Overview section that follows highlights key issues from three areas relating to conflict: metaphor in the dialogue of reconciliation, in framing conflict issues, and in labelling the Other. The Issues, Debates and Controversies section highlights issues around working with metaphors in discourse data, around choosing how to label these metaphors, and the importance of non-metaphorical language and physical action. The following section describes Current Research into metaphor and the development of empathy through talk, reporting the discovery of a ‘negativity bias’ in metaphor use. As a practical application, I describe how metaphor was employed in developing a practitioner-oriented model of empathy dynamics. The chapter closes with some indications for the use of metaphor in mediation and suggestions for further research.

Overview of metaphor and language around conflict

Levels of metaphor in reconciliation dialogue

Peace-building and reconciliation bring former enemies into dialogue, often mediated by a third party. For example, conflict transformation in northern Kenya was facilitated by a church-based peace-building team who brought together people from different communities in various activities that afforded opportunities for interaction (Cameron and Weatherbed 2014); in the reconciliation conversations used in extracts below, Jo Berry talks face-to-face with former IRA bomber, Patrick Magee, who had killed her father (Cameron 2007, 2011).

Such talk and interaction across the extreme alterity generated by conflict is a dynamic process in which people listen, make sense of what they hear, and speak. They may describe
how they have been affected and try to explain their motivations for engaging in violence. As they talk, connections, memories, images and emotions are activated, and may be offered into the talk.

Metaphor can occur at various levels in these discourse dynamics. The most ‘visible’ is verbal metaphor, in which some kind of incongruous or alien term occurs in the flow of the discourse. In extract 2, verbal metaphor vehicles in the talk of Patrick Magee are underlined, following the method of Metaphor-Led Discourse Analysis (Cameron et al. 2009; Cameron and Maslen 2010).

Extract 2

I am the person that caused your pain.
Even though it was the Irish Republican Army,
it was the republican movement,
it was the republican struggle that caused your pain.
But I can’t walk away from the fact that it was..
I was directly responsible to that.
I can’t hide behind the sort of..
the bigger picture

Across a stretch of talk, connected metaphor vehicles may be used, allowing the analyst to propose a ‘systematic metaphor’. It should be emphasised that a systematic metaphor is an analytic construct, derived from the specific data and context; it may not necessarily have any ‘conceptual’ validity (and different kind of evidence would be needed to claim so). Chapter 6 of this volume offers more detail on this idea. In this particular conversation, the speaker denies the possibility of metaphorically walking away from responsibility or hiding behind group membership, and instead accepts being directly responsible for the killing. These metaphors combine to produce a scenario in which the perpetrator must confront the human consequences of violence; perpetrator and victim come face-to-face and thus become visible to each other. Other metaphors in the conversations use terms connected to seeing to talk about knowing and understanding the other person, leading to the systematic metaphor DEHUMANISING IS NOT SEEING THE OTHER AS A WHOLE HUMAN BEING — REHUMANISING IS SEEING THE OTHER AS A WHOLE HUMAN BEING. Other verbal metaphors include the following:

it’s so easy to lose sight of the enemy’s humanity
it’s never the whole picture ... sometimes you get a glimpse
until we do see each other in our true light ... we’re always going to be dealing with some reduction or caricature

Non-metaphorical language and physical action also contribute to the idea that reconciliation involves acknowledging the full complex humanity of the other. There is talk of ‘coming face to face with’ the other and there is actual sitting side by side on a sofa.

In the messiness of talk, the analyst hunts for patterns in how people use metaphor. Such patterns can be semantic, distributional, and functional. Systematic metaphors mark a semantic pattern, with multiple, semantically connected vehicles related to a topic across a discourse event. ‘Metaphor clusters’ show distributional patterns, of places in the talk with a particularly high density of metaphors (see Cameron and Stelma 2004 for methods of finding clusters; also Koller 2003). Functional patterns occur when metaphors show a
tendency to be used for particular functions rather than others. For example, in primary classrooms, teachers were found to use metaphors particularly when controlling behaviour and at the beginnings of lessons when presenting an overview of content (Cameron 2003). A further pattern, identified empirically, is ‘the negativity bias’ and this is explained later in the chapter.

**Metaphor in framing, evaluating and distancing the Other**

Verbal metaphors work locally and across a conversation. Metaphor also works at the larger discourse level of the ‘frame’ (Bateson 1972; Goffman 1974; Ritchie and Cameron 2014). A *frame* can be thought of as a set of expectations that participants bring to an occasion (Tracy 1997), be that a social or political event, a conversation, or media content. Metaphorical framing occurs when an issue or idea is framed with metaphorical language, and recent research shows that framing influences reasoning around an issue or idea.

For example, Schön (1993) argued that framing in public policy debates often involves metaphors. He analysed debates over urban renewal policy in the 1950s, in which deteriorating neighbourhoods were framed either as ‘blighted areas’ or as ‘natural communities’. The first frame implied the need to cure or remove the ‘blight’ as something decayed and diseased; the alternative frame suggested something organic that must be supported and strengthened. Similar contradictory frames are apparent in many other policy debates; contemporary examples include ‘right to life’ vs. ‘right to choose’ and ‘estate tax’ vs. ‘death tax’ (Coleman and Ritchie 2011). Schön argues that the way an issue is framed can powerfully affect not only how the issue is understood but also what sort of solutions can be considered.

More recent work by Thibodeau and Boroditsky (2011) has shown that metaphorical framing influences people’s reasoning. They tested the capacity of familiar idiomatic metaphors to achieve framing effects through a series of experiments built around the metaphorical phrases ‘crime is a wild beast’ and ‘crime is an infectious virus’. Participants were asked to read a short paragraph describing an increase in the frequency of crimes in a fictitious city that included one or the other of these metaphors along with crime rate statistics, which were identical in the two conditions. Participants were significantly more likely to search for more information and advocate solutions to the crime problem that were consistent with the metaphorical frame to which they had been exposed than solutions consistent with the frame to which they had not been exposed. Those exposed to the phrase ‘crime is a wild beast’ tended to advocate solutions consistent with capture and imprisonment; those exposed to the phrase ‘crime is an infectious virus’ tended to advocate solutions consistent with treating and applying preventative measures. Equally significant, when asked why they advocated these particular solutions, almost all participants referred to the statistics; in fact, participants in both conditions were given the same statistics and so these could not account for differences. These results support Gibbs’s (2006) claim that metaphor vehicles, even when highly conventional, can influence responses, despite readers or hearers not being consciously aware of them.

**Conflict and social group identity**

If we add to this framing effect what we know about how conflict relates to group identity and categorisation, we can see how powerful metaphor can be in dehumanising processes. Work on inter-group relations and self-identity (Brown and Hewstone 2005; Pettigrew 2008;
Pettigrew and Tropp (2008; Staub 2001; Tajfel 1981) has shown how prejudice, conflict or tension heighten differences between groups, and how simplifying categorisations of the Other contribute to strengthening self-identity. The neuroscience of empathy also demonstrates bias towards in-group members (Lamm, Batson and Decety 2007; Xu, Zuo, Wang and Han 2009), conversely, it has long been known that inter-group contact can lead to reduction in prejudice (Allport 1979), and more recently that contact contributes to allowing the Other multiple identities (Brown and Hewstone 2005) and to increased perception of outgroup complexity (Swart, Hewstone, Christ, and Voci 2010).

Haslam’s (2006) review suggests that two kinds of dehumanising processes prevail in relation to social groups: ‘animalistic dehumanization’ that denies people uniquely human characteristics, instead seeing them as somehow animal-like; and ‘mechanistic dehumanization’ that denies people human nature, seeing them instead as some kind of objects or automata. Haslam does not mention metaphor explicitly, but his two-way categorisation of dehumanisation has a clear link to metaphor. The use of animal metaphors for dehumanised groups has been studied by, among others, Santa Ana (1999) and Musolff (2007) (see also Chapter 24 in this volume); activation of animal narratives and scenarios prompt emotions of revulsion and disgust, and carry dangerous entailments such as the need to metaphorically cleanse an area or prevent spread and contagion. An up/down orientation places the dehumanised Other lower than the Self, making them sub-human and open to humiliation and control (cf. the Great Chain of Being metaphor in Chapter 1). Mechanistic dehumanising metaphors represent ‘the other as cold, robotic, passive, and lacking in depth . . . implies indifference rather than disgust’ (Haslam 2006: 153).

Metaphor thus seems to be deeply entangled with the dehumanising and distancing of the Other that accompanies conflict and violence, through the framing of conflict issues and by contributing to the simplification of social identities and groupings.

Critical issues, debates and controversies

Metaphor is an instrument that can be employed for good or bad. It can intensify hatred between groups through labelling, through dehumanising, and through suggesting narratives of threat and danger. Metaphor can also contribute to attempts to grow empathy, build peace, and support reconciliation. It can facilitate the imaginative connecting required for re-humanising, by offering new spaces in dialogue where participants can move beyond the simplifying assumptions of conflict and reconnect with the Other.

In contexts of peace-building and reconciliation, we are dealing with the micro-dynamics of discourse – metaphor is being used in the flow of talk and response ‘in the moment’. I have long argued that the Discourse Dynamics approach and its associated method of Metaphor-Led Discourse Analysis are appropriate theoretically and practically for researching such events and processes (e.g. Cameron et al. 2009; Cameron and Maslen 2010).

The ‘discourse dynamic commitment’ seeks to understand how actual people use language resources in the shifts and flow of dialogue and interaction.

Cameron, in press

Conceptual metaphor theory (CMT), because of its commitment to generalise away from individual instances of use (Lakoff 1993), may be misleading if applied to particular instances of dialogue and interaction. In this section, I discuss two particular issues that arise.
The naming issue in metaphor research: risks in generalising upwards from discourse examples

While metaphor can contribute to dehumanising other social groups, a study of Arab collective identities in post 9/11 USA (Witteborn 2007) and another of college students (Moskalenko, McCauley and Rozin 2006) suggest that identity labels and groupings are themselves subject to change in circumstances of conflict. They are not necessarily fixed ways of seeing the other. Research into the metaphors that people use should investigate these dynamics, tracking their changing nature rather than assuming fixed beliefs or attitudes.

Likewise, although negative metaphors are undoubtedly used in the media about minority groups in US and UK society (Charteris-Black 2006; Santa Ana 1999; O'Brien 2003; Van Teefflen 1994), researchers have an ethical responsibility when they choose formulations for the metaphors not to exacerbate negative attitudes towards the Other. It can be risky to generalise too far away from the actual metaphor vehicles found in data. For example, Deignan (2005) re-analyses data from the study by Santa Ana (1999) and shows that the evaluative function of the metaphors is not as clear-cut as suggested in the original study.

Vehicle terms of verbal metaphors used in dialogue are often verbs and verbal nouns rather than concrete nouns, e.g. flooding, swarms, galloping rather than water, locusts or horses. There is now substantial corpus evidence that this grammatical difference matters. Different forms work differently as metaphors (e.g. Deignan 2005), and as Semino et al. (2004) remind us, talk of ‘galloping cancer’ does not necessarily imply that people imagine horses in their bodies (see also Chapter 7). Care must therefore be taken when generalising upwards to select labels for vehicle groupings and metaphors: a neutral label like *unstop-pable movement* may more accurately reflect what people say than an excessively negative label such as *pests*.

Not using metaphors at all

We saw above how metaphorical and non-metaphorical language occur in combination, and the same phenomenon can be observed in extract 1, where being ‘put in a corner’ (metaphorically) gives rise to ‘fighting’ (non-metaphorical). This point is important – metaphor contributes to the construction and development of ideas in talk but, in my experience, speakers are seldom totally reliant on metaphor. In fact, people can think-and-talk without using metaphors at all. Examining stretches of metaphor-free reconciliation talk revealed an interesting pattern, in which ‘metaphor absences’ seem to work as a challenge to the other person. Metaphor creates a certain distance from emotional pain that may make it easier to talk about. When metaphor is absent, highly painful events are narrated in a way that refuses mitigation. Such ‘bald narratives’, direct talk without metaphor, seem to have a role in pushing participants in reconciliation to come to terms with responsibility and reality (Cameron 2011).

Current research: metaphor and empathy in reconciliation conversations

In my study of metaphor in conversations between Jo Berry and Patrick Magee (Cameron 2007, 2011), I examine how victim and perpetrator use, negotiate and resist metaphors, and how reconciliation is marked by convergence over time towards shared metaphors.
The Other, who had been distanced and dehumanised through conflict, violence and loss, comes to be known through and with metaphor in the discourse activity of the conversations. The study found that metaphor contributes to the reconciliation process and supports the development of empathy in the following ways:

- Metaphor motivates and guides participation in reconciliation.
- Metaphor enables discourse encounters, as speakers adopt, adapt or challenge each other’s metaphors.
- Metaphor allows access to the emotions of the Other, while being affectively protective.

The study made use of the construct of ‘empathy’ to describe changes in attitudes to the Other arising out of the process of reconciliation, and introduced the notion of verbal and nonverbal ‘gestures of empathy’ to describe stretches of interaction that actively contribute to participants connecting across the gap of alterity generated by violence and conflict (Cameron 2011). Three types of gestures of empathy were found:

1. **Allowing connection.** These gestures of empathy offer the Other access to the speaker’s thinking and feelings about the past, the present and the future. They include:
   - offering the Other an explanation of feelings about events and situations;
   - attempting to explain events and emotions to the Other;
   - being willing to open oneself up to relive memories;
   - being willing to try to explain reasons for choices and behaviours;
   - opening oneself to critical reflection on past choices and actions, and sharing that with the Other.

2. **Entering into the other’s perspective.** These gestures of empathy attempt to understand the world view of the other through what is known about their experiences and emotions. They include:
   - anticipating the effect of one’s words on the Other, and mitigating them: ‘there’s that cruel word . . .’;
   - acknowledging the Other’s feelings, through choice of word or phrase: ‘you who’ve lost your father . . .’;
   - offering the Other a summary of what has been heard: ‘I suppose that’s because you carried your grief in isolation . . .’;
   - adding to the Other’s explanation or argument with one’s own supporting contribution;
   - speaking as if from the Other’s perspective to contextualise an utterance such as a request for further information: ‘this may be difficult for you but could you tell me . . .’.

3. **Shifting the perceived relation with the Other.** These gestures of empathy mark a shift in the relations between self and other. They include:
   - repositioning the Other: ‘your father . . . was a legitimate target (for the IRA). Meeting you though, I’m reminded of the fact that he was also . . . your father . . .’;
   - repositioning the Self, e.g. from being a victim to taking some responsibility through social group affiliation: ‘even though I’m the victim, I can also see I’m part of the people that oppressed you’;
   - discovering or acknowledging what is shared by both Self and Other, such as grief at lost comrades or being part of a family: ‘the pain on every side’.

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A possible negativity bias in metaphor use

Across multiple studies of discourse in contexts of violence and conflict, I have found an intriguing pattern that I call ‘the negativity bias’ of metaphor. I have found two types of discourse ‘negativity’ at work: (1) in relation to affect, i.e. making people feel physically or emotionally uncomfortable in some way, and (2) grammatically, i.e. the negative particle ‘not’ used with the verb.

The negativity bias appears as a functional pattern at the level of metaphor clusters, in which people use metaphor to express what they fear, dislike, or do not want in ‘negative alternative hypothetical’ (n-a-h) scenarios. Extract 3 shows an example of an n-a-h scenario as Pat Magee explains how his motivation for participating in IRA violence was political rather than personal ‘hatred’:

Extract 3

Pat: [it’s] not enough to sustain, during a struggle like this.
Jo: hhm
Pat: I don’t think so. you –
you couldn’t keep up with it, if it was just driven by that sort of – (1.0) hatred that gnaws away at you.
Jo: [hmh]
Pat: [you would] soon be a casualty of it.

The metaphors cluster in the short period of talk as Pat describes and highlights what it would be like to be motivated by hatred, i.e. the opposite of his actual situation. It is as if he first sets out his ‘reality’, and then presents the contrasting scenario in order to justify his choice to the other dialogue participant. We can note the affective strength of the ‘alternative’ metaphors that make up this contrasting scenario and their negative evaluative force. Several are extreme case formulations: driven; gnaws away at; casualty. The hypothetical nature of this contrasting scenario is signalled by conditional tenses (‘would’, ‘could’), by the conditional clause marker ‘if’, and by the negative forms ‘it’s not enough’ and ‘you couldn’t keep up with it’ that indicate the contrasting scenario did not happen.

Extract 4 shows another, very short, n-a-h scenario in which Jo Berry speaks of feeling connected to other victims through her grief at her father’s death, and then contrasts this with metaphors of SEPARATION.

Extract 4

Jo: and it felt like my heart was broken through the conflict.
(1.0) and, the suffering was .. my suffering.
I couldn’t separate it.
I couldn’t be detached anymore.

The emphatic metaphors in the last two lines create and deny an alternative, contrasting scenario in which Jo’s suffering would be individual, unconnected with others’.
In summary, negative alternative hypothetical (n-a-h) scenarios in talk are characterised by the following features:

- They relate to, and elaborate, a position taken by one of the speakers by focusing on the alternative or opposite; a contrasting scenario or narrative is evoked.
- The hypothetical nature of this contrasting scenario is made clear through the use of conditional tenses and clauses, often with negative polarity, signalled by words such as if, couldn’t . . .
- Strong verbal metaphors combine to exaggerate the alternative, hypothetical scenario, emphasising its high negative affect.
- The n-a-h scenario thus serves to demonstrate and support the speaker’s motivations and choices to the listener.

Similar effects can be created by single metaphors, as well as by clusters of metaphors. For example, when Jo asks:

> can I open my heart enough to hear Pat’s story?

She implies and rejects the negative alternative hypothetical scenario of a ‘closed heart’, unable to do empathy.

Metaphors used in this way help people to express and highlight what they reject, fear, or do not want.

Data collected in the Living with Uncertainty project (LwU), from situations of violence and conflict in the UK, Brazil, the USA and Kenya, also shows a clear negativity bias around many of the verbal metaphors. A negativity bias also appears in other data I have worked with, from more peaceful situations, so that, although the bias may be foregrounded in talk about negative topics such as crime and violence, it seems to be more widespread. The very vivid metaphors that feature when the negativity bias is active would seem to have a role in increasing the possibility of empathic understanding through talk. They attract a listener’s attention, while demonstrating and supporting the speaker’s explanation of motivations and choices.

**Using metaphor in developing a practitioner-oriented model of empathy**

An aim of the Living with Uncertainty project (LwU), and its follow-up project Empathy Dynamics in Conflict Transformation, was the development of a dynamic model of empathy in dialogue and interaction. To develop a model that would be usable by practitioners, the researchers worked with a conflict transformation NGO, deriving the model from project data collected together and choosing terminology in collaborative workshops. Metaphor was employed deliberately and reflectively in developing the model of empathy, exploiting three features that have emerged from my analyses of metaphor in use:

- Metaphor has a negativity bias.
- Making meaning from multiple, mixed, partial, overlapping metaphors is generally unproblematic (Cameron, in press).
- Metaphors have a particular facility for engaging emotional memory Cameron and Seu (2012).
Selecting the most appropriate metaphors to include in a model is a recursive process, moving between published literature, empirical findings, and systematic verbal metaphors across the data. A commitment to the complex dynamics of discourse systems (Larsen-Freeman and Cameron 2008) required generalised metaphors to be in the grammatical form of verbs.

The reflections of Jo Berry and Patrick Magee on their processes and their dialogic ‘journeys’ towards understanding each other offered metaphors for the model. In extract 5, Pat reflects on Jo’s metaphor for reconciliation as building bridges, and turns it around to apply to the political situation in Ireland that, he felt, motivated IRA violence. He produces a chain of three verbal metaphors as antonyms of building bridges: creating distances, barriers, exclusions.

Extract 5

1633 Pat there’s an <X adverse / inverse X>,
1634 to that er,
1635 . . . (1.0) you know,
1636 er,
1637 . . . (2.0) figure of speech
1638 you know,
1639 bridges.
1640 . . . bridges can be built.
1641 . . . and that is if you,
1642 .. actively –
1643 er,
1644 .. create.
1645 er,
1646 .. distances.
1647 . . . barriers.
1648 . . . or what are they?
1649 they are exclusions
1650 . . . (1.0) and er,
1651 . . a thing I believe absolutely fundamentally,
1652 is that er,
1653 . . . (1.0) if you exclude anybody’s voice.
1654 . . . (1.0) you know,
1655 . . you’re se- –
1656 you’re sowing the seed for later violence.

For the positive process of coming to know the Other in the model, connecting was selected as the key systematic metaphor (Cameron 2007, 2011). Building bridges was one type of connecting used in the data, alongside others such as shared, closeness. Empathy as connecting was also implied through metaphorical ways of describing lack of empathy – detached, shut out, locked out – and by metaphorical descriptions of actions that create empathy, such as breaking down barriers. While the individual verbal metaphors were too specific to use in a model, the label given to their systematic metaphor worked well as part of the model: Empathy in dialogue is connecting.

The connecting metaphor was developed in line with empirical findings from the full set of LwU studies, and with published studies in other disciplines, to provide a further layer to
the model that describes how people do empathy in talk. Close discourse analysis of how Jo and Pat managed their CONNECTING produced this descriptive part of the model, including the three types of gestures of empathy described above, two of which were given labels linked to CONNECTING: ‘Allowing connection’ and ‘Entering into the Other’s world’.

Antonyms or contrasts of CONNECTING were needed to describe how empathy is negotiated and resisted (Cameron 2012). I added the theoretical construct of ‘dyspathy’ to describe processes that work to prevent empathy (Cameron 2012). Three metaphorically labelled types of dyspathy emerged as ways of resisting empathy with labels suggested by data such as extract 5: DISTANCING, BLOCKING and LUMPING (Cameron et al. 2013). DISTANCING describes people avoiding empathy by positioning the Other as inaccessible through being far away and thus beyond consideration; BLOCKING describes people avoiding empathy by putting in place some kind of affective barrier, such as stereotyping or prejudice, that removes the need to think of others as individual and complex human beings. The third metaphorical antonym for CONNECTING that Pat produces in extract 5, exclusions, was covered by BLOCKING, along with other verbal metaphors such as ‘lock me in there’ and ‘closed down’. LUMPING was chosen as a label for the mechanism by which empathy is avoided when other people are ‘lumped together’ in a group or mass, rather than being seen as individuals. These metaphors of CONNECTING, DISTANCING, BLOCKING and LUMPING form the core of the new discourse dynamics model of empathy–dyspathy (Figure 29.1). The development process ensured that the three together have ecological and construct validity for describing, at a carefully constructed superordinate level, the human dialogic, psychological and neurological processes of empathy.

An online manual was collaboratively produced to introduce the model of empathy dynamics and is now being used in Kenya and Nepal (Cameron and Weatherbed 2014).

**Implications and recommendations for practice in reconciliation and conflict transformation**

By listening for how conflicted parties (individuals and groups) respond to each other’s metaphors, mediators can gain insights into the processes of reconciliation and conflict transformation. Indicators of potential and progress towards understanding the Other include:

- the same or similar metaphor adopted by both parties to reconciliation or conflict transformation;
- a metaphor not only adopted, but also extended, adjusted or challenged – this will offer clues to differences in perceptions;
- appropriation, when one party ‘allows’ another to use a particularly emotive metaphor to refer to their own feelings or experiences.

The potential of extending and shifting metaphors is available for mediators to use in intervening in talk:

- to explore ideas in more detail by extending and elaborating a metaphorical scenario;
- to encourage the sharing of metaphors;
- to explicitly encourage the challenging of metaphors.

When speakers connect metaphors to the real world e.g. physical actions like walking connected to JOURNEY metaphors, they may indicate powerful images and actions that mediators
can explore and that may prompt symbolic actions: e.g. a shared walk might carry meaning far beyond its simple physical activity.

Parties to reconciliation or peace-building may come with competing (metaphorical) frames for stories, topics and memories, and are likely to experience encounters with contradictory frames (Ritchie and Cameron 2014). Frame conflict is often only implicit, and
parties may remain unaware that they are framing differently. In other instances, parties may deliberately choose language to frame issues in a way favourable to their own position. In more complex cases, parties may be aware and intentional about some aspects of the framing but quite unaware of other aspects. Bringing implicit frames to the surface and making them explicit may be of benefit, both for understanding what went wrong in past interchanges and for improving the outcome of future dialogue.

Future directions

Future investigation into the negativity bias of metaphor in dialogue

The ‘negativity bias of metaphor’ merits further investigation, using corpus techniques and a range of data types, particularly from positive contexts. If the negativity bias can be confirmed, it would upturn accepted views of how we ‘live by’ metaphors, to use a famous phrase (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). If metaphor does indeed serve to highlight the negative, painful, angry side of human life, often in order to move us away from it, then metaphor is not a neutral indicator of how we think. Instead, metaphor would work as an indicator of what we reject, fear, or dislike. Metaphors do not simply construct concepts but point towards meaning and affect via their opposites or negatives. Rather than ‘living by’ metaphors, i.e. constructing our world through metaphorical concepts, it may be that we use metaphors to make the quiet shade we wish to live in.

More holistic research

This chapter has shown how various levels of metaphor can support the imaginative connecting with other people that is involved in doing empathy, peace-building and reconciliation. Metaphor can also contribute to conflict and dehumanisation. Moreover, metaphorical language is often integrated with non-metaphorical language and with physical, sometimes symbolic, actions in the world. And people sometimes do not use metaphor at all. I close with a call for more holistic research and methods that help understand more fully how metaphor operates within the vital human processes of moving away from conflict towards peace-building and reconciliation.

Notes

1 ‘Verbal metaphor’ is the term used in the discourse dynamics approach (Cameron et al. 2009) to refer to stretches of talk or written text where words or phrases are used metaphorically; no assumption of underlying conceptual metaphorising is made. It is similar to, but not the same as ‘linguistic metaphor’, which is held to be an instantiation of conceptual metaphor.
2 Research funded by the UK Arts and Humanities Research Board (now Council).
3 The Living with Uncertainty project (LwU) was funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council under its Global Uncertainties programme. Details and publications can be found on the project website: http://www.open.ac.uk/researchprojects/livingwithuncertainty/.
4 This work was funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council as a Knowledge Exchange project. Details and publications can be found on the project website: http://www.open.ac.uk/edict.
5 Pat’s reference to Jo’s ‘figure of speech’ is one of very few instances where the discourse provides explicit evidence of metaphoricity.
Further reading


See also

Living with Uncertainty project: http://www.open.ac.uk/researchprojects/livingwithuncertainty/.
Empathy Dynamics in Conflict Transformation project: http://www.open.ac.uk/edict.

References


