THE AFFECTIVE DISCOURSE DYNAMICS OF METAPHOR CLUSTERING

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Abstract

Metaphor is examined in the very different discourse contexts of the classroom and of reconciliation talk to highlight the neglected affective dimension. The distribution of metaphors across discourse shows clustering at certain points, often where speakers are engaged in critical interpersonal discourse activity. Clusters in classroom talk co-occur with sequences of agenda management where teachers prepare students for upcoming lessons and with giving feedback to students, both of which require careful management of interpersonal and affective issues. Clusters in reconciliation talk co-occur with discourse management and with two situations with significant affective dynamics: appropriation of metaphor and exploration of alternative scenarios.

Keywords: discourse dynamics, metaphor, clusters, affective, reconciliation.

This paper uses findings from two empirical studies of metaphor in talk to illustrate and discuss the phenomenon of metaphor clustering, paying particular attention to the affective dimension of metaphor use.

I have long argued that to understand metaphor, we need to study it in its context of use (e.g. Cameron, 1996) and have been developing a 'discourse dynamics approach' to metaphor analysis over a series of studies and projects (e.g. Cameron, in press). This approach starts from the position that metaphor is shaped by its use in the flow of talk between people, while simultaneously shaping that talk and the understandings people construct within it. The discourse dynamics framework is underpinned by two principles about language, thought and culture: their inseparable inter-connectedness and their dynamic nature. Metaphor from this perspective has multiple interconnected dimensions: linguistic, cognitive, affective, physical and cultural. Metaphor as a human activity needs to be considered in this full context of use, acknowledging that, although we may choose as researchers or theorists to focus on a particular dimension of metaphor, the others are still there, influencing what people do and say. The affective dimension, concerning emotions, feelings, attitudes and values (Damasio 2003), has often been neglected in metaphor studies, or is rolled up into 'cognitive' factors. One of the aims of this paper is to show the importance of the affective dimension in speakers' choices and use of metaphor in talk.

All dimensions of metaphor are dynamic, i.e. they unfold continuously in real time. In focusing on the dynamics of metaphor in discourse, we concern ourselves with change, and search for patterns of stability and variation. Like other dynamic systems (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, in press), human systems, including people in conversation, display change that is continuous but can also sometimes be sudden and more dramatic, with speakers' utterances and ideas self-organizing into new patterns. Let's take as an example the conceptual system of a student as a dynamic system that moves from an initial conceptualization of some idea to a more sophisticated one over time. Each conceptualization will be more or less stable, with greater or less flexibility or variability. The variability around a stabilized conceptualization allows it to continue to change as more is learnt. If we then move to conversation as a dynamic system, the metaphors used

by speakers in the talk may change and evolve, with some moving into relatively stable patterns of shared use, while others that are unstable may change rapidly or be dropped. Different types of change in a dynamic system show themselves on different timescales. A single explanation from a teacher might take only seconds and yet result in a new idea being grasped, or an already familiar idea being understood in a new way. On the other hand, a new skill may take a few weeks or months to be acquired, and it may take months or years for some behavioural patterns to be modified. Discourse too works on different timescales: what happens in the moment of face-to-face spontaneous talk is connected to the longer timescale of a whole conversation and to a series of conversations over longer periods of time.

In this paper I present metaphor clustering as one way in which metaphor use at the 'local' level, in the moment of talk, connects dynamically to the longer timescale of a 'discourse event', be that a lesson or a conversation. The discourse contexts of the studies drawn on are (1) classroom discourse between students and teacher (Cameron, 2003), and (2) conversations between a perpetrator of violence and a woman whose father was killed by him (Cameron, in press). In both situations, participants use metaphor as they try to cross gaps in understanding and emotions. Talk in the first situation aimed to encourage learning, and in the second situation to encourage reconciliation and the building of empathy.

The next section illustrates the multiple dimensions of metaphor on the local level of talk, highlighting the affective dimension, using the education data. The paper then proceeds with descriptions of metaphor clustering in the two discourse contexts, showing how discourse context can influence the nature of clusters.

Multiple dimensions of metaphor at local level

The first study (reported in Cameron, 2003) investigates classroom talk. If metaphor is as important as it is held to be for our thinking and

understanding of the world, then the classroom is one of the obvious places where one would expect to find metaphor being used for cognitive purposes. I expected to find metaphor used to help students understand formal concepts of the disciplines studied in school – history, maths, science and so on. It was, although not to the extent that I expected. However, I also found that metaphor played an even more important role in classroom discourse through its affective content. In the most ordinary exchanges in classrooms, metaphor carried values, attitudes and expectations between teacher and class. Over time, as metaphors were used and re-used, affective content works alongside ideational content, influencing children's learning opportunities and participation.

In the first extract, a class of students aged between 9 and 11 years, all using English as first language in a small rural school in the north of England, were being taught some dances for a performance to parents. The teacher has just stopped the music in order to give some feedback to some of the boys on how they were moving their feet.

Extract 1[1]   Dancing practice

1   boys - can you try and have your feet in what's called

2   first position

3   where your heels are just touching

4   and your knees are straight

5   and your toes are a little bit out

6   but not that much

7   about <u>at five to one</u>[2]

8   not like this

(*Teacher stands with feet wide apart*)

9   it looks funny - <u>like Charlie Chaplin</u>

(*Students laugh*)

As the teacher tells the children how to improve their dancing, she employs metaphor but not until she has explained, without using metaphor, how they could position their feet more elegantly (lines 1-6). The first metaphor, <u>at five to one</u> (line 7), invokes a visual image of the hands of a clock and acts to summarize what she has told them up to this point without metaphor. The second metaphor (line 9), <u>like Charlie Chaplin</u>[3], repeats and reinforces the idea of how to improve positioning, but appears in a contrastive comparison, beginning at line 8 with <u>not like</u>… As the teacher speaks, she adopts the Charlie Chaplin position of feet at right angles to each other and the children respond with laughter. While the first metaphor makes the teacher's feedback concrete for the students through a familiar image, the second one helps to diffuse the potential threat to the boys' face through the humour; what could have been a cruel imitation is turned into a memorable image as the teacher imitates the stance of Charlie Chaplin.

This first extract illustrates some key features of metaphor use found at this microgenetic or 'local' level where the speaker is engaged in 'talking-and-thinking' (Cameron, 2003, p. 35) as she acts. Firstly, we see how metaphor does not work alone but in interaction with non-metaphorical language, gesture and other affordances available in the context at that moment. The trajectory of the dynamic system of talk shows a move from non-metaphorical to metaphor to contrasting metaphor, and then a change of topic. Secondly, metaphor use in this extract was typical of many sections of classroom talk in being at the same time ideational (or cognitive) and affective. In its ideational role, metaphor can help students understand new or difficult ideas – here the metaphors helped the boys understand the required position of the feet. Metaphor contributes to the children's understanding by

'interpreting' ideas for them or reaching across the gap in understanding and offering them a way to understand. Metaphor may also help students to remember, through the use of vivid images like Charlie Chaplin. As here, metaphor often acts to summarize what has just been said in non-metaphorical ways. This summarizing function was found in studies of adults engaging in complaint sequences in phone conversations and employing metaphorical idioms to draw a sequence to a shared conclusion (Drew & Holt, 1988, 1995, 1998). The affective dimension of metaphor is evident in the particular choices of metaphor Vehicle terms and in how they are used. As happened in extract 1, metaphor in classroom talk often helped to construct the teacher's input as non-threatening, child-friendly, and supportive. This teaching style seems to be a particularly British phenomenon, with more directive styles being prevalent in many other countries (Alexander, 2001). The affective and interpersonal role of metaphor becomes more prominent still in stretches of talk that are in some way face-threatening, when giving feedback for example, as here, or when controlling the behaviour of students. Most teachers avoid telling students directly that they are wrong or doing something badly, and metaphor, often combined with humour, offers a way to avoid direct confrontation. Since correction, feedback and control all provide children with information as to desirable behaviours in the classroom, the metaphors also carry values, attitudes, and expectations.

Metaphor clusters in the classroom talk

We now move upwards from the local or micro timescale towards the longer timescale of the discourse event which in the education context was a 'lesson'. Lessons in this class usually lasted between 30 and 40 minutes, and were typically structured in three major sections: an opening phase, an activity phase, and a closing phase. The activity phase might itself be divisible into several sections; for example, there might be teacher input to the whole class, periods of group work or periods of individual activity with teacher intervention. Linguistic

metaphors, such as those underlined in extract 1, are not evenly distributed across a lesson as discourse event. Recall the teacher's dancing feedback and the way two contrasting metaphors were used one after the other in close succession as reinforcement and summary. Cameron (2003) found that, on the micro timescale, two or more metaphors were more likely to occur than single isolated metaphors. Moreover, metaphors that occurred 'in company' were, on average, found in groups of 3.5, indicating that co-occurrence was not a gradual phenomenon but a distinct one.

Clustering of metaphors has been observed in therapeutic talk (Pollio & Barlow, 1975), college lectures (Corts & Pollio, 1999), and in Baptist sermons (Corts & Meyer, 2002). Clusters appear in written text as well as in talk (Cameron & Low, 2004; Koller, 2003). In the spoken contexts of lectures and sermons, clustering seemed to arise from intensive explanations of specific topics through a single, elaborated, root metaphor. When clusters were found and investigated in the classroom talk, other types of clusters were also found.

Metaphor clusters can be found in transcribed talk or text by drawing a graph of the cumulative frequency of linguistic metaphors[4]. As each linguistic metaphor is spoken, so the cumulative total rises by one, giving the 'cumulative frequency' at that particular point in time. A graph is drawn with the horizontal or x-axis showing time and the cumulative frequency on the y-axis. Figure 1 shows the cumulative frequency graph of metaphors in a geology lesson (from Cameron, 2003). Along the x-axis, time is operationalized by dividing the transcribed talk into subsequent 'blocks' of talk, each containing 10 words, a measure designed to approximate to the units used in the Corts and Pollio study of college lectures (Corts & Pollio, 1999; Cameron & Stelma, 2004). When a cluster of metaphors is produced, the graph shows a sudden change upwards in slope. Although a statistical method can be used to identify which changes in slope are significant (details in Cameron & Stelma, 2004), in the classroom study this was done through visual inspection. In Figure 1, boxes are drawn around sudden

increases in slope that indicate metaphor clusters. Notice the clusters at the beginning and end of the lesson, and then several during it.
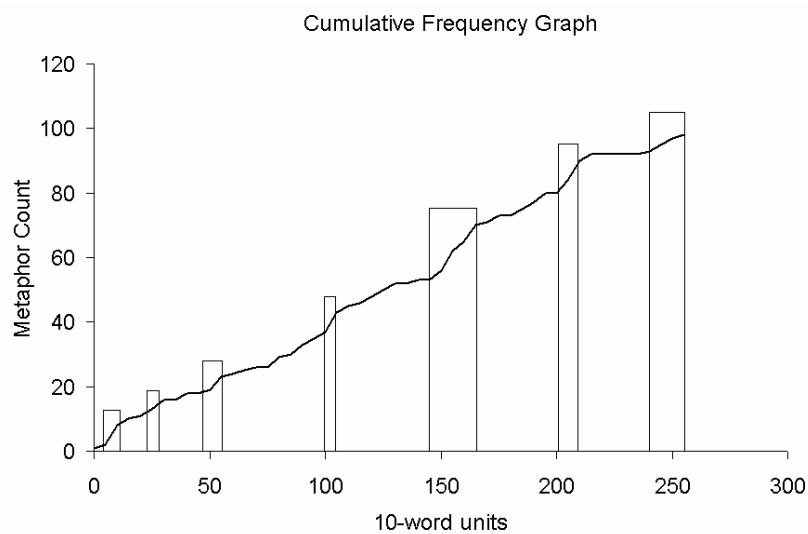

Figure 1 Cumulative frequency graph of metaphors in a geology lesson (from Cameron 2003)

Clusters of metaphors in talk seem to indicate a period of intensive interactional work. While college lectures produced metaphor clusters around explanations (Corts & Pollio, 1999), the more interactive discourse of the classroom produced clusters around other kinds of discourse activity. In particular, clusters occurred in organizational sequences of talk, called 'agenda management sequences', and in 'feedback sequences' like extract 1, where the teacher gave corrective or strategic feedback to children on their work or oral responses.

Agenda management sequences with clusters of metaphors nearly always occurred at the beginnings of lessons as the teacher was setting the scene, telling the students what was going to happen and what the content of the lesson was going to be about. Such sequences also occurred

inside lessons when new tasks or activities were introduced, and in closing lessons, where there might be talk about the agenda of future lessons. Extract 2 shows the metaphor cluster at the opening of the geology lesson.

Extract 2   Agenda management in a lesson opening

1   now what I'm going to do this afternoon

2   because I can't think of any other way to do it

3   is to give you a little bit of information

4   on which we can build our understanding of rocks

5   and the minerals that come out of rocks

6   and also how rocks weather

7   in other words what happens to rocks

8   when the snow and the wind and the ice and the rain and the temperature

9   acts upon them

10   so there are really two things we're going to look at

11   this half term

Metaphors used in agenda management sequences in fact emerged as the most common type of metaphors in the classroom discourse. This type of action sequences occurred often, and included multiple metaphors. In extract 2, as in most agenda management sequences, metaphor was used to talk about both the content of the

upcoming lesson(s) and the procedure. The teacher offers a preview of this and other lessons by telling them what the content would be and how they would meet that content. The metaphors thus play metacognitive and gatekeeping roles, helping to construct students' experience and potential participation at the opening of the lesson.

Learning and participation opportunities were often presented through metaphor, and we can see again in this example how metaphor carries an affective force. The choices of metaphor tend to downplay the cognitive demands of the lesson: give, a little bit and look at all invoke relatively effortless actions, while the knowledge that will be 'received' is concretized as things. The teacher might have formulated the same ideas differently, for example telling the students that they were going to have to work very hard to understand difficult ideas. Instead she chooses to present the agenda as less challenging and more accessible. She also uses the first person pronouns we, our, suggesting that she is joining with them in the lesson, rather than having a separate role in leading it. Both pronouns and metaphors serve to align teacher with students, and to construct expectations that learning will be a comfortable and not particularly demanding process. As with the feedback sequence from the dancing lesson shown in extract 1, this perspective on learning is quite characteristic of teachers in English schools and their relationships with students. We can suppose that agenda management sequences are critical points in lessons – the teacher must inform students about tasks that lie ahead while maintaining motivation and solidarity. As we move next to the reconciliation study, we see how, there too, metaphor clusters indicate particularly intensive or critical points in the talk, but how the nature of those points was different.

Reconciliation talk and metaphor clusters

The participants in this second study[5] were Jo Berry, whose father, Sir Anthony Berry, was killed by a bomb in 1984, and Pat Magee, who

planted the bomb on behalf on the Irish Republican Army during their conflict with the British government. Jo Berry had asked to meet Pat Magee in order to understand more about why the bombing happened, and they first met in 1999, after Pat Magee was released from prison under a peace agreement. Data for the study consists of talk from three points in time: conversations recorded at their second meeting at end of 1999 and at their fourth meeting in February 2000, and a radio interview recorded in March 2003. In addition to the timescales of the local (in the moment) and the discourse event (conversation, interview), this study has a third scale, measured in years and representing a series of connected discourse events.

In the reconciliation discourse, as in the classroom discourse, participants are divided by gaps and differences that their talk aims to bridge or fill. The gaps of knowledge, expertise and power that drive talk in classrooms are replaced here by differences in political beliefs and affiliations, socio-cultural histories and experiences.

Metaphor clusters were identified using a statistical procedure that involves comparing the distribution of metaphors with a Poisson distribution (details in Cameron & Stelma, 2004). Clusters were found at two scales of talk, in short exchanges of around 5 intonation units or 6 seconds (similar in length to extract 1) and in episodes of around 20 intonation units or 25 seconds (similar in length to extract 2). Most short clusters were contained within longer clusters. Figure 1 below shows a visual display of linguistic metaphors in an episode of conversation between Pat Magee and Jo Berry. Here time is shown on the y-axis, i.e. downwards, with the numbers (1705 etc) marking transcript line numbers[6]. Each diamond represents a linguistic metaphor, with the different positions and colours representing different groupings or domains; for example, the diamonds on the far left, which are blue on screen, are JOURNEY metaphors, and the next to those are SEEING metaphors, coloured red on screen. The shaded area is the metaphor cluster.
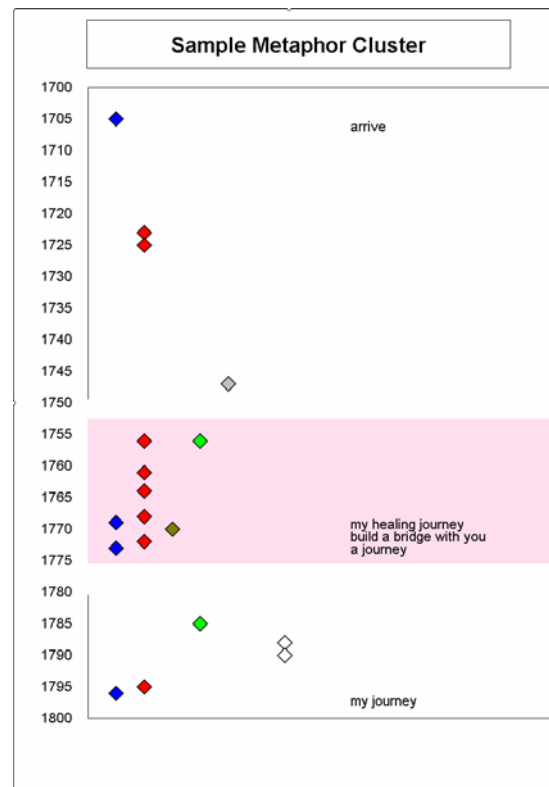
Figure 1   Metaphor cluster in a reconciliation conversation

Extract 3 shows the transcript for the section of talk identified above as a cluster. While some clusters occurred within the talk of a single speaker, in this case, the cluster spreads across turns from both speakers.

Extract 3   Metaphor cluster in a reconciliation conversation

1755   Pat   ...(1.0) got a <u>distorted</u> <u>picture</u> of me.

1756   perhaps,

1757		I don't know.
1758		.. I don't know.
1759	Jo	.. I think maybe they were just thinking,
1760		they wouldn't <u>see</u> a need to meet any of their victims.
1761	Pat	yeah
1762		yeah
1763	Jo	.. and so they ... therefore couldn't <u>see</u> why you would.
1764	Pat	[hmh]
1765	Jo	[and] I think it was more like that.
1766	Pat	... hmh
1767	Jo	and they could <u>see</u>,
1768		... how <u>from</u> <u>my healing journey</u>,
1769		if I could <u>build a bridge</u> with you,
1770		that would ...(1.0) help me.
1771		but they couldn't <u>see</u> —
1772		... perhaps there was even a need for <u>a journey</u>.

In the classroom talk, clusters occurred when the teacher was doing intensive interactional work – and it is the same here, except that the interactional work is different and often difficult on the affective plane.

Many of the clusters occur when one speaker is explaining his or her point of view to the other. In some cases, an explanation was affectively difficult because the speaker was expressing emotional pain; in other cases, the difficulty was more interpersonal, as for example when Pat explained to Jo why her father was considered a political target. Where metaphor was used in the expression of strong emotions and feelings it was often a way of mitigating the strength of these through indirectness, thus protecting oneself and / or the other person.

A further major site of metaphor clusters was episodes of discourse management. There was no external mediator present in the meetings, leaving Jo Berry and Pat Magee to handle topic opening, closure and change themselves. Clusters occurred for example at the beginning of conversations and when speakers were finding a new topic to talk about. There are similarities here with agenda management in the classroom discourse.

Analysis of clusters in the conciliation talk revealed two types of talk unique to this discourse context, both significant in reducing differences and gaps between the speakers: the first type was 'appropriation of metaphor' and the second was the 'exploration of alternative scenarios'. We now consider the affective dynamics of each of these.

Metaphor appropriation

Both speakers, at one time or another in the conversations, began to use a metaphor that had, until that point, been the 'discourse property' of the other. In a context of reconciliation, appropriation of the other's metaphor can be a significant step that acknowledges the other person's perspective through use of their language. At the same time, when a metaphor was appropriated, it was usually adjusted by the appropriator in significant ways. For example, when Jo Berry used the term <u>struggle</u> she changed its use slightly from the way Pat Magee had used it. The word plus definite article: <u>the struggle</u>, is a conventionalized phrase to

refer to the political conflict between Irish republicans and the British government, used by those who support it. So its use by Pat Magee reflects its conventionalized status within republican circles. When Jo Berry used the word, she spoke of <u>your struggle</u> and referred to difficult times in Pat's life. This appropriation subtly shifts the word away from its restricted, politicized use and back into the wider domain.

Extract 4 (from Cameron & Stelma, 2004) shows the first time that Pat Magee makes use of what had been Jo Berry's metaphor: <u>healing</u>. She used this metaphor Vehicle to refer to her process of recovering from grief, as in extract 3, line 1768.

Extract 4   Appropriation of <u>healing</u> as metaphor vehicle

1	PM	how do you <u>put it,</u>
2		er,
3		…(2.0) maybe that's <u>part of</u> <u>healing</u> too,
4		.. my <u>healing</u>
5	JB	your <u>healing.</u>
6		.. [yeah]
7	PM	[yeah]
8		…(1.0) you know,
9		er,
10		…(2.0) it's —
11		<u>something</u> I have to <u>go through</u>

12	JB	… hmh
13	PM	... if I'm going to sort of
14		er,
15		… (1.0) really retain my humanity

The appropriation, which takes place in line 4, is tentative and marked by hesitation, pausing and permission seeking. Jo Berry's response in lines 5 and 6 is a granting of permission to use the metaphor. From lines 10 and 11 to the end of the extract, Pat Magee is elaborating the Topic domain of his use of the <u>healing</u> Vehicle, shifting it from Jo's earlier uses. For Jo, <u>healing</u> refers to recovering from grief, while for Pat <u>healing</u> refers to a rehumanisation process that results from accepting the consequences of planting the bomb. The use, re-use and shifting of the metaphor gives rise to a metaphor cluster.

After this point in the conversation, the <u>healing</u> metaphors were used by both speakers. In terms of the discourse dynamics, the metaphors go through a significant change or bifurcation at the moment of appropriation, and then stabilize into a shared resource in the conversation that is available for both speakers to draw on. In terms of the process of reconciliation, the appropriation of metaphor is an infrequent but significant act since it explicitly marks an adoption, usually together with some shifting, of some part of the other person's way of talking-and-thinking.

The exploration of alternative scenarios through metaphor

The other type of discourse activity that uniquely co-occurs with metaphor clusters in the reconciliation talk is the exploration of alternative scenarios. In this kind of episode, a speaker moves from talking about what actually happened to talking about what might have happened, exploring alternative actions that they could have taken or alternative ways of feelings. The alternative is then rejected as a

possibility. For Jo Berry, an alternative to seeking reconciliation might have been to give in to anger and revenge. Pat Magee several times contrasts acting from hatred with acting from political conviction. In extract 5, Pat Magee considers what motivated other people involved in the violence, and contrasts those <u>driven by hatred</u> with those motivated by political convictions.

Extract 5   Using metaphor to explore alternatives

1	PM	I know very very few people,
2		...(1.0) that hatred was a <u>big part of</u> it.
3		... and those you could <u>say</u> to it,
4		... <u>say</u> that it was,
5		... wouldn't have lasted.
6		... it's —
7	JB	[hmh]
8	PM	[it's] not enough to sustain,
9		... during a <u>struggle</u> like this.
10	JB	hmh
11	PM	.. I don't think so.
12		... you —
13		you couldn't <u>keep up with</u> it,
14		if it was just <u>driven by</u> that sort of —

15   ...(1.0) hatred that <u>gnaws away at</u> you.

16   JB   ... [hmh]

17   PM   [you would] soon be <u>a casualty of</u> it.

The alternative is explored from line 8, explicitly marked by Pat's statements of perspective, <u>it's not enough</u> (8) and <u>I don't think so</u> (11), and by the use of conditional modals <u>couldn't</u> (13) and <u>would</u> (17). The dense mixture of strongly affective metaphors in lines 9-15 helps Pat Magee to explore the alternative scenario in more depth and later to reject it. Hatred is metaphorized as something very fast or demanding (<u>you couldn't keep up with it</u>) that takes control (<u>driven by</u>), and as some kind of animal that eats people (<u>gnaws away at you</u>). The outcome is severe and painful (<u>a casualty of it</u>). By describing an alternative in extreme affective terms like this, the choice of rejecting it becomes not just acceptable but the only reasonable course of action.

There were several instances of this type of discourse activity from both speakers across the conversations, where extreme affective metaphors were used to describe a choice not pursued. In terms of the discourse dynamics, an episode like this moves the system into a different pattern of talk, the negative alternative scenario, and then out of it again. In terms of the reconciliation process, such explorations of alternative scenarios seemed to be a significant and successful way of explaining to the other person why each had made the choices they had made over the years, and how these choices had affected their lives. By enabling participants to verbalize what were often very negative 'might-have-been' scenarios, they at the same time revealed the strength of their feelings and values to the other person.

Conclusion

This paper has highlighted the affective dimension of metaphor and its particular role in metaphor clusters. Metaphor everywhere has

an affective dimension, but where metaphors cluster together the affective impact is increased. In some types of clusters, the increased impact results from the combined numbers but in others, particularly the exploration of alternative scenarios in reconciliation talk, speakers may use metaphors with strong, even extreme, affective content.

Metaphor clustering seems to be a natural feature of language use, generated at particular moments of intensive interactional discourse activity, and found in many different types of talk and text. It is likely that clustering is generated by multiple factors. These would include the processing pressures of spontaneous talk that produce repetition and false starts, the nature of spontaneous conversation such as topic development through relexicalization, repetition (as with see in extract 3) and contrast (extracts 1 and 5) (McCarthy, 1988), and the tendency for metaphors to spread from one speaker to another in conversation.

Clustering is a phenomenon of the unfolding dynamics of metaphor in talk. It connects the local level of the linguistic metaphor in an utterance with groups of metaphors used in an episode of talk. The exact nature of the intensive discourse activity that generates clusters will vary with context, depending on the topic and goals of speakers, but we can be reliably expect that linguistic metaphors in discourse will occur in clusters at certain points. If clusters also sometimes indicate critical points in talk, then the set of clusters across a discourse event may be important 'way markers' in analysing the event as a whole. Cameron & Stelma (2004) suggest that findings about clusters offer researchers a technique to deal with large amounts of discourse data. After identification of linguistic metaphors, researchers can find clusters, investigate the discourse activity going on at those points, and use this to begin analyzing the particular discourse functions of metaphor.

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Notes

1. The transcription conventions for the classroom data are kept simple with pauses removed and each extract numbered separately.

2. The Vehicle terms of linguistic metaphors are underlined (details of identification procedures can be found in Cameron 2003, Ch 3).

3. Although the phrase like Charlie Chaplin has the form of a simile, it is considered as a metaphor (or metaphorical simile) because two unlike domains (Charlie Chaplin, the children) are connected. The metaphor Vehicle is considered to be the whole phrase including like (Kittay 1987).

4. Graphs can be created fairly easily in Excel.

5. The project, "Using visual display to investigate the dynamics of metaphor in conciliation talk", was supported by the UK's Arts and Humanities Research Board under its Innovation Award scheme. We acknowledge that support, and also thank the participants in the talk for giving permission to use the data.

6. In fact these are intonation units, but there is not space here to explain further (see Cameron & Stelma 2004).

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