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METAPHORS AND METONYMIES IN AMERICAN AND BRITISH SIGN LANGUAGES: A CONTRASTIVE COGNITIVE PERSPECTIVE

Cognitive Linguistics provides theoretical and methodological framework for a description of conceptual structure of signed languages. Articulation parameters of individual signs, such as hand-shape, location, motion, and orientation, all contribute to the creation of complex non-literal meanings. Being based on metaphors, metonymies, or metonymies-in-metaphor, the signs reflect various degrees of visual motivation or iconicity. American Sign Language (henceforth ASL) and British Sign Language (henceforth BSL), two unrelated languages, employ diverse strategies of conceptualisation to express the same concepts. These strategies range from identical, e.g. metaphor vs. metaphor, to different, e.g. metaphor vs. metonymy, with many intermediate configurations possible. The paper compares selected ASL and BSL signs related to various areas of experience. Some of the signs are also contrasted with their counterparts in other signed languages.

1. Introduction

Cognitive Linguistics provides a complex methodological framework for the analysis of human conceptual system (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 3). The claim that this system is largely based on metaphors and metonymies can be borne out by cross-linguistic evidence (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 1999; Radden and Kövecses 1999; Barcelona 2002; Ruiz de Mendoza Ibáñez and Díez Velasco 2003; Kövecses 2005; Panther, Thornburg and Barcelona 2009; Benczes, Barcelona and Ruiz de Mendoza Ibáñez 2011). Similar conceptual processes also underlie various signed languages (Brennan 1990; P. P. Wilcox 2000; Taub 2001; S. Wilcox, P. P. Wilcox and Jarque 2003; S. Wilcox 2008; Grzyska 2008).

Comparing and contrasting unrelated signed languages shows that they rely on diverse conceptual mechanisms to express concepts related to the same aspects of experience. The present paper claims that selected signs from American Sign Language (henceforth ASL) and British Sign Language (henceforth

BSL) strongly depend on metaphor, metonymy, and combinations thereof. The operation of these conceptual strategies in individual signs follows, however, different patterns in each of the languages.

2. Cognitive linguistics

One of the major claims of Cognitive Linguistics is that language provides access to human conceptual system, which “plays a central role in defining [...] everyday realities” (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 3). Concepts that people use in everyday interaction are largely non-literal. Being based on metaphors and metonymies, they reflect various patterns of embodied experience (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 1999; Lakoff 1987, 1993; Radden and Kövecses 1999; Kövecses 2002; Müller 2008).

Metaphor involves “understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another” (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 5). A more abstract concept of love, for example, can be understood in terms of a more concrete concept of journey:

- (1) a. *This relationship is not going anywhere.*
 b. *We're heading in different directions.*
 c. *It's been a long, bumpy road.*

Source domain experiences of going in a certain direction and encountering obstacles on the way are conceptually imposed on the target domain of a love relationship by means of a number of systematic mappings (Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 64).

The major function of metonymy is directing attention (Kövecses 2002: 147-148). The mechanism involves one domain or Idealized Cognitive Model (henceforth ICM), in which an entity called vehicle “provides mental access” to another entity, called target (Radden and Kövecses 1999: 21). Various metonymic relations are possible:

- (2) a. *Does he own any Hemingway?*
 b. *Hollywood is putting out terrible movies.*
 c. *The sax has a flu today.*

In (2a), for example, the name of the author refers to his literary output. The common metonymy THE PRODUCER FOR THE PRODUCT is motivated by a cultural belief that there is a unique connection between a work of art of distinctive value and its author (Taylor 1989: 123). Referring to well-known institutions by means of places in which they are located and identifying people by instruments that they use illustrate the metonymic mappings of THE PLACE FOR THE INSTITUTION and AN OBJECT USED FOR THE USER (Kövecses 2002: 144).

3. Signed languages: a cognitive linguistic perspective

Signed languages are complex systems of communication used by the deaf. As such, they rely on visual-gestural modality (S. Wilcox, P. P. Wilcox and Jarque 2003: 140). Like their phonic counterparts, they have the levels of phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics (Stokoe 1960; Sandler 2003; S. Wilcox 2008).

Each sign has four articulation parameters: configuration of the hands, also called hand-shape; location, that is, the area where the sign is produced; motion of the hands in the process of signing; orientation, that is, the direction that the hands face (Stokoe 1960; Battison 1978 cit. in S. Wilcox 2008: 1114-1115). Hand-shapes usually represent letters of a written language or numbers. The more numerous ideographic signs represent objects, actions, and ideas. Many of them involve specific hand-shapes as their components. In numerous signs, differences between a single articulation parameter contribute to distinctions in meaning. It is, for example, the case of the ASL signs for the concepts of DRY, UGLY, and SUMMER, in which the down-oriented dominant hand in one-shape changes into x-shape as it is drawn across the chin, the cheek, and the forehead, respectively. Being based on the same hand-shape, orientation, and movement, but a different parameter of location, the signs form a minimal triplet (Klima and Bellugi 1979 cit. in Sandler 2003).

Cognitive Grammar sees each linguistic sign as a symbolic structure made up of phonological and semantic poles that reside in conceptual space (Langacker 1987). Because signed languages operate in spatial-visual modality, their phonological pole consists of the visible moving articulators (S. Wilcox 2008). Hands can thus be conceptualised as objects moving in space and performing specific actions.

The gestural-visual modality is the reason why many signs have strong visual motivation. This means that “there is a link between an object or action and the form of the sign (e.g. it has the same shape or movement)” (Sutton-Spence and Woll 2010: 165-166). Taub (2001) employs the term ‘iconicity’ to refer to this link. Drawing on Mandel’s (1977) findings and assuming a cognitive linguistic perspective, she defines iconicity as “a relationship between our mental models of image and referent” (Taub 2001: 19). Many signs thus trace source domains of metaphors or vehicles of metonymies (Wilbur 1987; P. P. Wilcox 2000; Taub 2001; S. Wilcox, P. P. Wilcox, and Jarque 2003; S. Wilcox and Morford 2007; S. Wilcox 2008). The mental models underlying them “are partially motivated by our embodied experiences common to all humans and partially by experiences in particular cultures and societies” (Taub 2001: 19-20).

Wilbur (1987) applies the Lakovian concept of metaphor in the analysis of ASL signs. To date, P. P. Wilcox (2000), Taub (2001), and S. Wilcox (2002, 2008) have provided the most comprehensive analyses of conceptual metaphor, metonymy, and cognitive iconicity underlying many ASL signs. Brennan (1990 cit. in P. P. Wilcox 2000: 48-53) argues that metaphor is an integral part of the

structure of BSL. More recently, Sutton-Spence and Woll (2010) discuss many examples of metaphor- and metonymy-based signs in BSL.

4. Contrastive analysis

P. P. Wilcox (2000: 155-162) draws parallels between the articulation parameters of some ASL signs and their French Sign Language (Langue des Signes Française; henceforth LSF) counterparts. The author relies on the contrastive data to account for the sources and the evolution of the former. S. Wilcox, P. P. Wilcox and Jarque (2003: 144-149), in turn, compare and contrast conceptual mechanisms in ASL and Catalan Sign Language (Lengua de Signes Catalana; henceforth LSC). They list a number of metonymies, e.g. ACTION FOR INSTRUMENT and PROTOTYPICAL ACTION FOR ACTIVITY, in various ASL and LSC signs.

5. ASL and BSL contrasted

The first American school for deaf children was established in the 18th century in Hartford, Connecticut, by Laurent Clerc, a French teacher of the deaf, who came at the invitation of Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet. As a result, LSF mixed with the indigenous signed languages used in America to produce ASL (Lane 1984 cit. in P. P. Wilcox 2000: 157). Today the language belongs to the French Family of Signed Languages (henceforth FSL).

BSL has many regional varieties. They are used in England, Scotland, Wales, as well as by the Protestant community in Northern Ireland. The Australian and New Zealand deaf communities also use the recognizable varieties of the language (Smith 2010: 12).

Unlike their phonic counterparts, ASL and BSL cannot be mutually understood by their users. Mark Medoff's play about deafness, *Children of a Lesser God*, was first shown in London in ASL. As a result, the signs had to be interpreted to make the text intelligible to the BSL members of the audience (Crystal 2007: 161).

Apart from numerous contrasts, ASL and BSL also have elements in common. One of them is the use of similar mental strategies to express concepts, e.g. in the signs for 'important'. These signs employ different hand-shapes, locations, and orientations, but share the upward direction of motion (Lane 1990: 90; Smith 2010: 77). This single parameter is the source domain of the orientational metaphor IMPORTANT IS UP present in their conceptual structure.

A broader comparison of ASL and BSL signs related to various areas of experience shows a highly varied distribution of conceptual strategies involved. Some signs rely on a single process, e.g. only metaphor or metonymy. Others, especially in ASL, involve complex interactions of the two processes.

5.1. Metaphor vs. metaphor

Two signs can differ with respect to some of their articulation parameters. These differences often reflect various forms of the source domains of the same conceptual metaphors. In some cases, they are not significant. In other signs, the same metaphor is expressed in an entirely different way.

5.1.1. *The same primary metaphors in the signs for ‘friend’ and ‘help’.*

The ASL for friend is articulated by both hands in the one-shape, the right palm is down, the left palm is up, the index fingers are bent; the right index finger is hooked over the left one, and the action is repeated in reverse positions (Lane 1990: 72). In the BSL sign, “hands are clasped together and make short repeated shaking movement” (Smith 2010: 44).

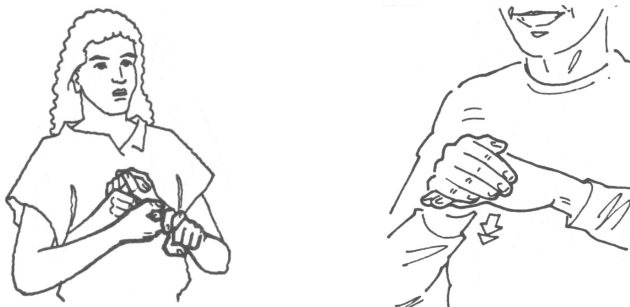


Figure 1. ASL and BSL signs for ‘friend’.

The two signs involve different configurations, orientations, and motions of the hands; the only common parameter is location of the hands next to each other and in front of the chest. The joined articulators represent closeness and intimacy, which are important components of friendship. In the ASL sign, the fingers are hooked in reverse positions. Such a configuration additionally highlights mutual reliance as an aspect of the relation. In both signs the articulators reflect the source domain of the primary metaphor INTIMACY IS CLOSENESS¹: the sensorimotor experience of “being physically close” and the primary experience “of being physically close to people you are intimate with” (Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 50).

The ASL sign for ‘help’ is articulated with two hands: the left one is open and its palm is up; the right one is in ten-shape, its palm is in, and it rests on the

¹ Taub (2001: 118-120) calls the metaphor INTIMACY IS PROXIMITY. The author also mentions its analyses conducted for ASL and BSL by Wilbur (1987) and Brennan (1990), respectively.

left palm before being raised with it (Lane 1990: 82). The BSL sign is produced by means of a similar hand configuration: the edge of the closed right hand rests on the palm of the left hand; the hands move forward or backward depending on whether the intended meaning is ‘I will help’ or ‘Help me’ (Smith 2010: 61).



Figure 2. ASL and BSL signs for ‘help’.

Both configurations of the hands reflect the idea of physical support as the source domain of the primary metaphor HELP IS SUPPORT. This sensorimotor domain is linked to the primary experience of “observing that some entities and people require physical support in order to continue functioning” (Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 52).

5.2. *Metonymy vs. metonymy*

Signs based on metonymy not only differ with respect to articulation parameters serving as vehicles, but are also open to alternative interpretations as far as types of metonymy are concerned. Some of them involve simple metonymic chains (Fass 1997: 73). The following analysis reflects an ascending order of complexity.

5.2.1. *Single metonymies in the signs for ‘cat’, ‘eat’, ‘spring’, and ‘autumn/fall’*

The ASL sign for ‘cat’ is articulated with the f-shaped right hand, its palm facing left, moving out right from the side of the mouth (Lane 1990: 33). In BSL the concept is signed with open hands placed at the sides of the face, repeatedly moving out and slightly flexing to clawed hands (Smith 2010: 47).



Figure 3. ASL and BSL signs for 'cat'.

Both signs represent cat's whiskers, that is, one of the prototypical properties of the animal. Different hand-shapes and the number of hands involved are different forms of the vehicle of the single metonymy PROTOTYPICAL CHARACTERISTIC FOR WHOLE ENTITY (S. Wilcox, P. P. Wilcox and Jarque 2003: 144).

The ASL sign for 'eat' is produced with the right hand in the and-shape touching the lips with fingertips a couple of times (Lane 1990: 58). In the BSL sign, "bunched hand makes small repeated movement backwards towards the mouth" (Smith 2010: 110).



Figure 4. ASL and BSL signs for 'eat'.

Though the signs involve a minor difference in motion, they both imitate putting food into the mouth, which is the initial part of the scenario of eating. Because the other parts, such as chewing the food and swallowing it, remain in the background, the signs are structured by the metonymy INITIAL SUB-EVENT FOR WHOLE EVENT (Radden and Kövecses 1999: 32-33).

In the ASL sign for 'spring', the dominant hand in the and-shape, its palm in and fingers pointing up, moves up twice through the non-dominant one in the c-shape, at the same time opening into the five-shape (Lane 1990: 162). The

BSL sign keeps the dominant hand open, and it “swivels to point upwards from behind” the non-dominant one (Smith 2010: 82).

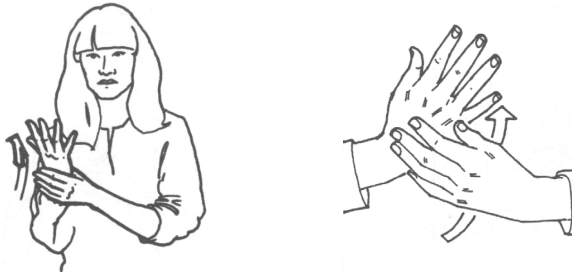


Figure 5. ASL and BSL signs for ‘spring’.

With minor differences in articulation, both signs represent the growth of vegetation by means of the upward motion of the articulators. With the shape-for shape iconicity, the spread fingers may additionally represent the approximate shapes of the referents (Taub 2001: 30), that is, the stems of plants or the networks of branches, which become visually more prominent when covered with leaves.² The signs highlight the most salient aspect of spring, but background its other aspects, such as rainfall, intensive sunlight, and higher temperatures. Because the growth of vegetation is an offshoot of the above-mentioned phenomena, the metonymy underlying the structure of both signs is EFFECT FOR CAUSE.

The ASL sign for ‘autumn/fall’ is made with the right hand in the four-shape, its palm down; the left arm is bent, the hand in the s-shape is held near the chin, its palm faces right; the side of the right index finger is then twice brushed down the left forearm and off its elbow (Lane 1990: 64). In the BSL sign, the right hand moves down with fingers fluttering from the left hand held open (Smith 2010: 82):



Figure 6. ASL and BSL signs for ‘autumn/fall’.

² See Taub’s (2001: 29-30) discussion of the ASL sign for ‘tree’. Its prototypical image is with leaf-covered branches.

With a minor difference in location, the upright non-dominant hand is shape-for-shape iconic of the trunk of a prototypical tree (Taub 2001: 29-30). In the BSL sign, the spread fingers of the non-dominant hand more specifically represent the network of branches; the movement of the dominant hand with the fluttering fingers is iconic of the movement of the falling leaves. The downward motion is thus a common morpheme of both signs. They represent the decay of vegetation, which is a salient aspect of autumn/fall. With such aspects of the season as shorter daylight hours and lower temperatures remaining in the background, both signs are based on the metonymy EFFECT FOR CAUSE.

It should be observed that the form of metonymic relation underlying the last two signs depends very much on how the concepts of ‘spring’ and ‘autumn/fall’ are construed. It is possible to view the seasons as events with distinct parts. In such case, the signs can be interpreted in terms of the metonymy SUB-EVENT FOR WHOLE EVENT as well.

5.2.2. *Simple metonymic chains in the signs for ‘winter’, ‘drink’, and ‘milk’*

In the ASL sign for ‘winter’, the hands in the s-shape, placed at the sides of the body and with the palms facing, “move [...] back and forth toward each other in short, shaking motions” (Lane 1990: 194). The BSL sign is similar in that “closed hands make quick quivering movement, as elbows are drawn to the body with shoulders hunched” (Smith 2010: 82).



Figure 7. ASL and BSL signs for ‘winter’.

With different locations and orientations of the hands, both signs imitate typical behavioural response to the sensation of cold: the hands are brought together in an attempt to warm up. Cold, however, is only one of the aspects of winter. Other salient elements of the season, e.g. the falling snow, are not highlighted in the process of articulation. In both signs, the metonymies PHYSICAL/

BEHAVIOURAL EFFECT FOR SENSATION CAUSING IT³ and THE PART FOR THE WHOLE⁴ form a simple metonymic chain (Fass 1997: 73).

The ASL sign for 'drink' is articulated with the right hand in the c-shape placed slightly below the chin, its palm facing left; the hand is then moved up and tipped towards the mouth as in the action of drinking (Lane 1990: 55). In the BSL sign, the full c-shaped hand moves upwards and tilts backwards near the mouth (Smith 2010: 108).



Figure 8. ASL and BSL signs for 'drink'.

In both cases, the hand-shape reflects a typical way of holding a glass – it is thus the vehicle of the metonymy MANNER OF INTERACTION WITH CONTAINER FOR THE CONTAINER.⁵ The motion is iconic of raising the glass, which is only the initial part of the whole scenario of drinking: such parts as swallowing the contents and putting the glass away are in the background. INITIAL SUB-EVENT FOR WHOLE EVENT (Radden and Kövecses 1999: 32-33) is thus the second metonymy in the simple metonymic chain underlying the structure of these signs.

In the ASL sign for 'milk', the right hand in the s-shape is placed in front of the body, with the palm facing left; the hand is then opened and closed several times in squeezing motion (Lane 1990: 110). In the BSL sign, two closed hands move up and down alternately; squeezing action is sometimes used or the hands may rub against each other (Smith 2010: 109).

³ The metonymy can also be formulated as EFFECT FOR CAUSE (Radden and Kövecses 1999: 38-39).

⁴ If winter is construed as an event with distinct parts, the second metonymy can be formulated as SUB-EVENT FOR WHOLE EVENT (Radden and Kövecses 1999: 32-33).

⁵ See S. Wilcox (2008: 1124) for the description of the ASL sign in terms of the metonymy SPECIFIC INTERACTION WITH PROTOTYPICAL ELEMENT FOR WHOLE ACTIVITY, and S. Wilcox, P. P. Wilcox and Jarque (2003: 145) for a discussion of similar metonymies in LSC.



Figure 9. ASL and BSL signs for 'milk'.

The signs differ with respect to the number and configuration of the hands involved, but both are based on a similar metonymic conceptualisation. First, the squeezing motion is used to access the action of milking the cows in the traditional way, that is, by squeezing the teats. It thus serves as a vehicle of the metonymy MOTION FOR ACTION. Because the action is further used to access the substance, the next metonymy is ACTION FOR SUBSTANCE.

5.3. Metaphor vs. metonymy

ASL and BSL express some concepts by means of signs based on different conceptual strategies. They usually involve a contrast of metaphor and metonymy. Also in this group of signs, various levels of complexity are possible.

5.3.1. *Single metonymy vs. metaphor in the signs for 'health'*

In the ASL sign, open hands in the five-shape are first placed on the chest and then moved away forcefully as they change into tightly closed fists; facial expression suggesting well-being is also used (Duke 2009: 215). In the BSL sign, tips of the flat hands first contact the chest, then move forward and change to closed hands with their thumbs up (Smith 2010: 20). In both cases, the hands either touch the chest or are placed in front of it. Their location points out to the section of the body which contains most of the organs crucial for its proper functioning.⁶

⁶ In a similar way, many ASL and BSL signs for various cognitive abilities are produced in the head area (P. P. Wilcox 2000: 102-24; Sutton-Spence and Woll 2010: 189-190).

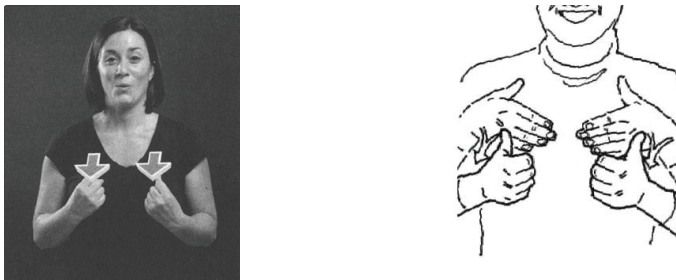


Figure 10. ASL and BSL signs for 'health'.

The ASL articulation clearly reflects physical strength and lack of distress as major components of health (Duke 2009: 214-215). The sign is thus based on the metonymy EFFECT FOR CONDITION. In the BSL sign, the position of thumbs is the source domain of the orientational⁷ metaphor HEALTH IS UP.⁸ The metaphor is a common way of conceptualising health in phonic English as well (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 15):

- (3) a. *He's at the peak of health.*
 b. *He's in top shape.*
 c. *As to his health, he's way up there.*

The BSL sign is thus more consistent with the phonic representations of the concept.

5.3.2. Simple metonymic chain vs. metaphor in the signs for 'ill/sick'

The ASL sign is articulated with both hands in the five-shape, their palms in, and the middle fingers bent. The right middle fingertip touches the forehead, while the left one is placed on the stomach (Lane 1990: 90). In a version of the sign, a single five-hand-shape touches only the forehead (ASLB). The middle finger is used to express feelings, and the hand articulation is emphasized by a facial expression of physical distress (ASLB; Duke 2009: 214). The BSL sign is produced with the edges of extended little fingers simultaneously brushing down the body (Smith 2010: 67).

⁷ I have decided to retain Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) original classification of metaphors into orientational, ontological, and structural despite the fact that the authors found it insufficient in the 2003 edition of the book. Following Grady's (1997) and Johnson's (1997) findings, many of the metaphors were classified as primary or complex (Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 45-59).

⁸ The same hand configuration is also a part of the BSL signs for 'good', 'great', 'kind', and 'generous' (Smith 2010: 20), all of which represent positive evaluations.



Figure 11. ASL and BSL signs for 'ill/sick'.

The ASL articulation points out to two common locations of pain, that is, the head and the belly. The sign is thus based on a chain of two metonymies, that is, LOCATION FOR PROTOTYPICAL SENSATION and PROTOTYPICAL SENSATION FOR SICKNESS. The BSL sign traces the source domain of the orientational metaphor SICKNESS IS DOWN (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 15). Its articulation thus corresponds to conventional everyday expressions reflecting the condition (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 15):

- (4) a. *He fell ill.*
 b. *He came down with the flu.*
 c. *His health is declining.*

The signs illustrate a difference in selection of conceptual strategies between the two languages, which, however, is absent in their phonic counterparts.

5.3.3. *Two metaphors vs. a simple metonymic chain in the signs for 'husband' and 'wife'*

The ASL sign for 'husband' is made with the right hand in open and bent shape, its thumb extended and also bent, touching the right side of the head; the left hand is held open in front of the body, its palm is up, and fingers point right. The right hand moves down and clasps the left one (Lane 1990: 88). The sign for 'wife' differs with regard to the parameter of location: the hand motion starts on the level of chin (Lane 1990: 192). The BSL sign is made with the right thumb and index finger repeatedly touching the upper part of the left ring finger (Smith 2010: 39).

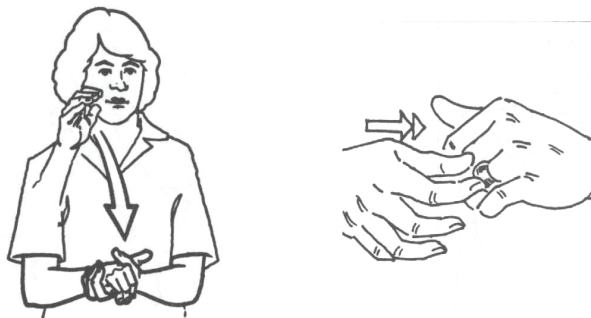


Figure 12. ASL signs for ‘husband’/‘wife’ and BSL sign for ‘husband/wife/spouse’.

The clasping of the hands is the ASL sign is the source domain of the metaphor LOVE IS A UNITY OF TWO COMPLEMENTARY PARTS or LOVE IS A BOND (Kövecses 1986: 62-67; 2002: 46, 58, 74). The metaphor suggests “perfect harmony, an idyllic state [...] perfect fit [...] in which the two parts maximally complement each other” and “captures a large number of our love experiences” (Kövecses 1986: 63, 64). The sign also represents the concept of physical closeness⁹ which makes the metaphor maximally motivated (Kövecses 1986: 65-66). The phonological contrast between the location of the right hand – it is placed higher in the sign for ‘husband’ and lower in the sign for ‘wife’ – is the source domain of the orientational metaphor HIGH STATUS IS UP; LOW STATUS IS DOWN (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 16). The sign, based on two metaphors complementing each other¹⁰, expresses the social stereotype of male supremacy (Jolly and O’Kelly 1980; Wareing 2003: 90). The BSL sign points out to the action of placing the wedding ring on the spouse’s finger. It thus involves the metonymy THE RING FOR BEING MARRIED, which serves as the basis for the metonymy BEING MARRIED FOR THE SPOUSE. The sign does not reflect the essence of marriage in the way the ALS sign does; nor does it convey any sexist overtones.

⁹ Taub (2001: 119) mentions the ASL sign for ‘marry’, in which both hands clasp each other. The author calls the underlying metaphor INTIMACY IS PROXIMITY, which, however, is not at odds with the unity and bond metaphor.

¹⁰ It is possible to interpret the clasping of the hands as a part of the scenario of the wedding ceremony which precedes the placing of the wedding rings on the spouses’ fingers. On such interpretation, the sign is structured by a metonymy-within-metaphor, which is a form of metaphonymy (Goossens 1990: 333-334).

5.4. Metaphor and metonymy interacting

Goossens (1990) argues that metaphor and metonymy often interact within the same expression. Various forms of the interaction are collectively labelled as metaphonymy. Signs that blend metaphor with metonymy or two metaphors with a single metonymy are most complex in terms of conceptual structure.

5.4.1. *Metonymy-within-metaphor in the signs for 'family'*

In the ASL sign, both hands assume the f-shape, their palms are out, the index fingers and thumbs touch; the hands then move out in a circle and end with their little fingers touching (Lane 1990: 65). In the BSL sign, the f-shaped hands move in a small horizontal circle.



Figure 13. ASL and BSL signs for 'family'.

In both cases the f-hand-shape represents the first letter of the word for the concept. It is the vehicle of the form-related metonymy PART OF A FORM FOR THE WHOLE FORM (Radden and Kövecses 1999: 28, 36). The circular motion of the hands suggests enclosure and conveys the idea that a family is a closed circle of people. This parameter is the source domain of the metaphor RELATIONSHIPS ARE ENCLOSURES: its primary experience is "living in the same enclosed physical space with the people you are most closely related to" (Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 53). The signs are thus based on metonymy-within-metaphor (Goossens 1990: 333-335).

5.4.2. *Metaphor and metonymy-within-metaphor in the signs for 'learn'*

The ASL sign is articulated with the curved right hand in the five-shape, its palm is down, and the fingertips are placed on the open left hand, whose palm is up; the right hand then moves up to the forehead as it assumes the and-shape (Lane 1990: 99). In the BSL sign, the right hand, held bent with the thumb

parallel to the fingers, moves back towards the side of the head with fingers closing onto the thumb (Smith 2010: 138).

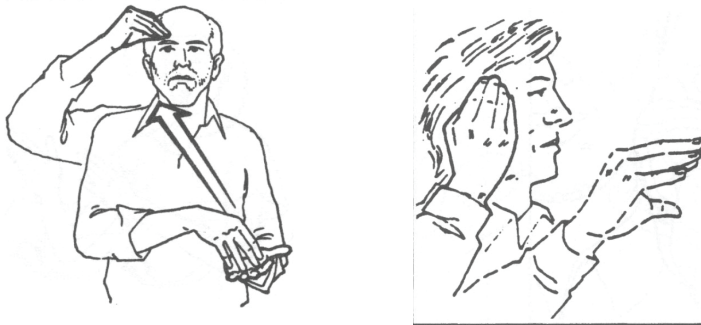


Figure 14. ASL and BSL signs for 'learn'.

In both signs, the major elements of structure are similar.

The ASL sign reflects conceptualisation of ideas in terms of objects. The motion of the dominant hand and the flat-o hand-shape morpheme are the source domain of the basic-level metaphor IDEAS ARE OBJECTS TO BE MANIPULATED OR PLACED. If used in the literal sense, the morpheme means that “thin, flat objects are moved or reorganized in a deliberate manner” (P. P. Wilcox 2000: 112-113). That is why it maps onto the target domain of learning, which involves metaphorical manipulation of ideas in a controlled and organized way. The final location of the dominant hand on the front of the forehead means that the ideas are “put into the head.” The location serves as the vehicle of the metonymy BODY PART (HEAD) FOR THE MIND: it is motivated by the folk belief that human cognitive abilities are located primarily in the head. The metonymy is embedded in the ontological metaphor THE MIND IS A CONTAINER FOR IDEAS: the ideas learned are stored in the mind (P. P. Wilcox 2000: 103-109). The sign is thus based on a combination of an ontological metaphor and metonymy-within-metaphor.

The articulation of the BSL sign starts in a different place, but the final shape and location of the dominant hand are very similar to the parameters of the ASL sign.¹¹ The conceptual processes underlying its structure are thus the same.

¹¹ See Sutton-Spence and Woll (2010: 193), who suggest that the sign represents “taking in abstract things, as if they were solid.” A similar view is expressed by Wilcox and Wilcox (2009: 747). In neither case is there a mentioning of the potential sources of the abstract ideas.

6. More than two signed languages contrasted

Taking into account other signed languages, e.g. the Polish Sign Language (Polski Język Migowy; henceforth PJM) and LSC, shows that various forms of metaphor-metonymy interaction are a more universal aspect of sign articulation. The PJM signs for ‘help’ and ‘learn’ (Hendzel 1995: 196, 285) involve the same primary and ontological metaphors as their ASL and BSL counterparts. The sign for ‘ill’ (Hendzel 1995: 53) is similar only to its BSL counterpart – both rely on the orientational metaphor SICKNESS IS DOWN (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 15). The signs for ‘winter’, ‘spring’, ‘autumn’, and ‘milk’ (Hendzel 1995: 324, 298, 101, 145), in spite of some articulation differences, are structured by the same metonymies. The sign for ‘drink’ (Hendzel 1995: 181) involves the same metonymies as its ASL and BSL counterparts, and LSC also expresses the concept in the same way (Wilcox 2008: 1124).

Some signs, however involve, differences on the level of morphological structure. In contrast to ASL and BSL, PJM employs compound signs to express the concepts of ‘wife’ and ‘husband’ (Hendzel 1995: 330, 139): the first elements indicate the sex of the person by referring, respectively, to a ring in a woman’s ear and the action of shaving, hence by means of the metonymies PROTOTYPICAL PROPERTY FOR PERSON and PROTOTYPICAL ACTION FOR PERSON. The second elements of both signs reflect the same metaphor of love as the ASL sign. An additional contrast is that whereas in PJM the signs express only prototypical properties or actions, in ASL they also convey some sexist overtones.

7. Conclusions

The comparison of the fourteen ASL and BSL signs points to a substantial degree of variation in the use of metaphor and metonymy. First, some signs, e.g. ‘cat’ and ‘milk’, differ with respect to the number of articulators used to express the same metonymies. Secondly, signs that are based on the same conceptual process involve differences in the articulation parameters. These differences range from three in the signs for ‘friend’ to only one in the signs for ‘help’; in both languages the signs are based on the same metaphors. Third, ASL and BSL employ different conceptual mechanisms to express the same concepts. It is, for example, the case of the signs for ‘health’.

A basic comparison of signs from more than two signed languages shows that a high degree of conceptual isomorphism is possible. The signs that involve similar conceptual processes may, however, have different morphological structures, e.g. a simple sign in ASL and BSL vs. a compound sign in PJM. The morphological complexity may be a factor increasing the signs’ conceptual complexity.

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