

Metonymy and the way we speak*

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In this article we investigate correlations between semantically equivalent expressions (organized in manner scales according to the formal properties of length, prosodic prominence, and grammaticalization) and their varying potential to trigger a certain metonymic interpretation. We focus on manner scales of past ability as well as semantically and logically similar expressions relating to human character traits/dispositions and external circumstances. Using the concepts of *strength of metonymic link* and *coercion*, we show that shorter, prosodically weaker and more grammaticalized members in these manner scales more strongly trigger the POTENTIALITY FOR ACTUALITY metonymy than their longer, prosodically stronger, and less grammaticalized counterparts.

Keywords: coercion, manner scales, POTENTIALITY FOR ACTUALITY metonymy, strength of metonymic link

1. Introduction

In the introduction to a volume edited more than a decade ago (Panther & Thornburg, 2003, p.1), the present authors claim that modern pragmatics and cognitive linguistics have in common many objects of inquiry: Both are concerned with (i) language use (usage events), (ii) the organization of discourse, (iii) the relation between language meaning/function and language structure, as well as (iv) the conceptual structure and use conditions of “figures of speech”, such as metonymy and metaphor. In this contribution we argue that a cognitive pragmatic approach that incorporates theoretical concepts from both cognitive linguistics

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and Neo-Gricean pragmatics sheds light on linguistic phenomena that have hitherto been regarded as belonging exclusively to the domain of pragmatics.

The present article is concerned with the role of metonymic reasoning within conceptual frames that are construed as *scales*. The notion of construal is crucial here, because, as observed by e.g. Horn (2006), such scales are not necessarily “semantic” but often “pragmatic”, in the sense that language users are at liberty to use conceptual material to construe such scales, sometimes ad hoc. Some scales have been insightfully analyzed by Neo-Gricean scholars such as Horn (1989, 2006) and Levinson (2000, pp. 79–98), in particular, the ones that are known as *Horn scales*, exemplified in (1):

- (1) a. *Quantifiers*: ⟨all, most, many, some⟩
- b. *Epistemic modality/attitude*: ⟨certain, likely, possible⟩, ⟨know, believe⟩
- c. *Temperature*: ⟨hot, warm⟩, ⟨cold, cool⟩
- d. *Emotion*: ⟨love, like⟩, ⟨dislike, hate⟩, ⟨ecstatic, happy, content⟩

Horn scales trigger inferences to the effect that the use of a weaker member of a scalar set conversationally implicates the negation of the stronger member(s). For example, if a speaker says that some event is *likely*, she is automatically understood as implicating that the stronger value on the epistemic scale, *certain*, does not hold. If a speaker claims that he *believes* the word *catachresis* means ‘mixed metaphor’, then the hearer’s default assumption is that the speaker does *not know* for sure that this is the meaning of the term.

The present article focuses on the role of pragmatic and metonymic reasoning in what we call *manner scales*, specifically the manner scale of past ability (analyzed in Section 4). In contrast to Horn scales, which are ordered in terms of their *meaning*, i.e., in which a stronger scale member entails a weaker member, manner scales are organized according to parameters of *form*. Words or expressions in a manner scale have the same (or a similar) conceptual content but they differ in their formal properties. The formal properties we consider in this article are (i) *length* (ii) *prosodic emphasis*, and (iii) *degree of grammaticalization/lexicalization*. We claim that, pragmatically, these three parameters correlate with degrees of *conceptual prominence*. The first two parameters are phonological and quantitative; the third belongs to the lexico-grammatical system.¹ For example, the three members of the manner scale ⟨*can*, *be able to*, *have the ability to*⟩ differ in length, as measured by the number of syllables and morphemes they contain. The two members of the scale ⟨*can* [k(ə)n], *CAN* [kæn]⟩ differ in terms of prosodic prominence (stress) and degree of phonological reduction. Finally, both of

1. We assume, as is usually the case in cognitive linguistics, that there is a continuum between grammar and the lexicon.

the above scales also differ in terms of degree of grammaticalization. In the scale *<can, be able to, have the ability to>* the modal auxiliary *can* is more grammatical (functional) than *be able to* and, a fortiori, *have the ability to*. In the scale *<can [k(ə)n], CAN [kæn]>* the first unstressed and phonologically reduced member is a more grammatical word than the second stressed, i.e., prosodically prominent, member.

In a nutshell, the thesis we argue for in this article is formulated in (2):

- (2) Shorter, more prosodically and phonologically reduced, more grammatical, and therefore less conceptually prominent items in a manner scale trigger metonymically based implicatures that are different from longer, more prosodically marked, more lexicalized, and therefore more conceptually prominent items in the same scale.

Our analysis is inspired by but partially also critical of the pragmatic work of Levinson (1995, 2000). It relies heavily on recent cognitive linguistic work on conceptual metonymy (e.g., Kövecses & Radden, 1998; Panther, 2005, 2006; Panther & Thornburg, 2005; Radden & Kövecses, 1999, 2007).

2. Key concepts

We begin by characterizing some key concepts used in our analysis. Following e.g., Langacker (1993), Kövecses and Radden (1998), Radden and Kövecses (1999, 2007), Ruiz de Mendoza (in press), we assume that, in a general sense, metonymy allows access to a concept (called the metonymic target) through another concept (called the metonymic source). For example, humans construct conceptual links between situations that are caused by other situations (cause-effect), possible events and actual events, producers and their products, parts and wholes, or between parts that belong to the same whole. Such associations may be metonymically exploited by language users. The basic metonymic configuration is diagrammed in Figure 1.

As can be read from Figure 1, we regard metonymy as an indexical relation between a linguistically expressed *source* meaning (vehicle) and a *target* meaning. In a prototypical metonymy the target meaning is *foregrounded*. Contextual factors, such as other associative links in the conceptual frame, the discourse context, and the situational context may play a role in helping the hearer identify the target meaning intended by the speaker. Targets may become conventional, i.e., entrenched, senses of a lexical item. Nevertheless, in our conception of metonymy, the relation between the source and the target is not conceptually necessary, i.e., the source does not semantically imply (entail) its target. Rather, the relation

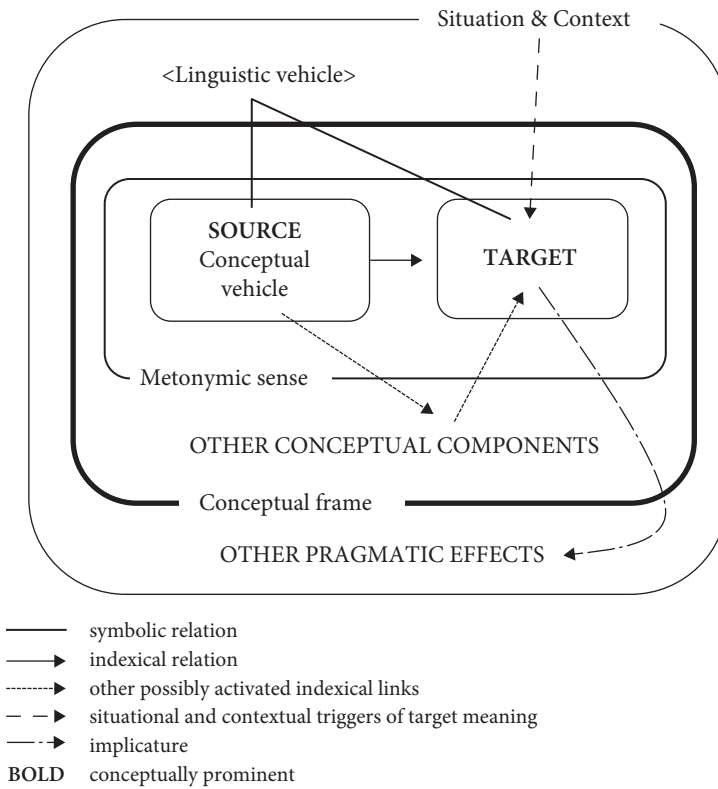


Figure 1. Metonymy

between source and target is contingent — a matter of associative, rather than deductive, reasoning.²

We consider conceptual metonymies to be natural inference schemata that underlie many conversational implicatures. Their availability accounts for why many of these inferences can be interpreted spontaneously without much cognitive effort (Thornburg & Panther, 1997; Panther & Thornburg, 1998). These pre-established associations among concepts can be exploited for reasoning purposes by language users.³ For example, consider an utterance like

(3) John is all red in the face.

The hearer of utterance (3) might understand the speaker as implicating that John is angry. This inference is based on a high-level metonymy that may be formulated

2. See Panther and Thornburg (2003), Panther (2005), and Panther and Thornburg (2007) for detailed discussion of the properties of prototypical metonymy.

3. The term 'pre-established' is not meant to imply that these conceptual associations are innate.

as PHYSIOLOGICAL EFFECT FOR EMOTIONAL CAUSE. The metonymic inference (or implicature) is cancelable: The reason for John's red face could be due to any number of causes, emotional or otherwise. More generally, the relationship between source and target meaning is not conceptually necessary but *contingent*.

Metonymic inferencing goes hand in hand with what is known as semantic *coercion*. For example, in the following sentence the time adverbial *within five months* coerces a PROCESS or ACTION reading of the stative verb form *knew*, most likely the process or action of *learning*:

- (4) Within five months she knew Latin.

This interpretation is induced by the conceptual metonymy STATIVE RESULT FOR TELIC PROCESS/ACTION, a subcase of the generic metonymic principle EFFECT FOR CAUSE.

Another key concept in our analytical approach is the *strength of metonymic link*. In previous work (e.g., Panther & Thornburg, 1998) we have proposed that metonymic links can vary in how strongly the metonymic target is evoked by the source meaning. The strength of a metonymic link between two concepts is both a function of the conceptual contiguity of source and target meaning, and a matter of linguistic and non-linguistic contextual factors in actual language use. For example, in sentence (4) the link between the source meaning 'knew' and its target meaning 'came to know', i.e., 'learned') is very strong if not impossible to cancel, as can be seen in (5):

- (5) # Within five months she knew Latin, but she hadn't learned it.

Sentence (5) is pragmatically odd (as indicated by '#') because there is a strong inferential link between the conceptual vehicle 'knew Latin' and the target meaning 'learned Latin', and this link is explicitly canceled in the *but* clause of (5). Still, it has to be emphasized that in this example the relation between source and target meaning is *not* one of entailment, i.e., it is not conceptually necessary. Common sense tells us that, under normal circumstances, proficiency in a language like Latin comes about through a process of learning. Nevertheless, the possible sources of knowledge are manifold: although it is unlikely that the knowledge of Latin is innate or comes about through some "act of God", such sources of knowledge cannot be excluded on purely conceptual grounds.

3. The relationship between modality and actuality

In what follows, we demonstrate the workings of coercion, conceptual metonymy, and strength of metonymic link in manner scales, i.e., scales that are based on

Grice's (1975) maxim of manner, one of the instances of the Cooperative Principle that, according to Grice, governs rational communication. By way of example, in Section 4 we analyze one particular manner scale, the scale of past ability, in some detail, arguing that it exemplifies the generic metonymic principle POTENTIALITY FOR ACTUALITY, where the strength of the metonymic link between POTENTIALITY and ACTUALITY depends on the formal properties of the members of the scale of potentiality. In this section, our goal is to justify the claim that the relationship between POTENTIALITY and ACTUALITY is metonymic and that this relationship is just a special case of a more general metonymic relationship obtaining between MODALITY and ACTUALITY.

The metonymy POTENTIALITY FOR ACTUALITY can be illustrated with sentence pairs such as (6) and (7):⁴

- (6) a. Beyond the door I *could see* the bluest sky. (COCA 2012)⁵
 b. Beyond the door I *saw* the bluest sky.
- (7) a. I *was able to speak* to her earlier and I asked her what she saw today.
 (COCA 2012)
 b. I *spoke* to her earlier and I asked her what she saw today.

The literal interpretation of (6a) is that the speaker had the ability to see the bluest sky, but *could* is evidently a strong metonymic index for the reading expressed in (6b), namely, that the speaker *actually* saw the bluest sky. Sentence (7a) literally conveys that the speaker *was able* to speak to the female referred to by *her*, but, in addition, the sentence invites the interpretation expressed in (7b) that the speaker actually spoke to the person referred to by *her* (for a more detailed analysis of the metonymy POTENTIALITY FOR ACTUALITY, see Panther and Thornburg (1999)).

POTENTIALITY is not the only modal concept that is metonymically relatable to ACTUALITY (see Panther & Thornburg, 2003, p. 4). To see this, compare the relationship between (8a) and (8b):

- (8) a. [C]onstruction crews *had to pour* a layer of concrete [...] before
 installing the stone roofing on the exterior. (COCA 2012)
 b. Construction crews *poured* a layer of concrete before installing the stone
 roofing on the exterior.

Sentence (8a) strongly suggests the truth of sentence (8b). The obligation or necessity to pour a layer of concrete implies that the concrete is actually poured — an

4. In all examples, words and expressions that are interpretively relevant have been italicized.

5. The acronym COCA refers to the Corpus of Contemporary American English. The date of examples appears in parentheses.

instance of the metonymic principle NECESSITY/OBLIGATION (to act) FOR ACTUAL ACTION.

Similarly, the truth of (9a) evokes the truth of (9b).

- (9) a. As a journalist, I *was allowed to tour* Lejeune's extensive, ongoing cleanup [...]. (COCA 2012)
 b. As a journalist, I *toured* Lejeune's extensive, ongoing cleanup.

Utterance (9a) invites the inference that (9b) is the case. The underlying (metonymic) inference schema can be formulated as PERMISSION (to act) FOR ACTUAL ACTION.

One might object at this point that the relationship between modality and actuality in examples (6)–(9) is not really one of (defeasible) metonymy, but rather one of entailment. Indeed, some linguists and philosophers have argued that the a.-sentences *entail* the b.-sentences in (6)–(9), an implicational relation that they refer to as *actuality entailment* (see Bhatt, 1999). For example, Asher and Hunter (2012, p. 57) assume that in French (10a) entails (10b) and that (11a) entails (11b):

- (10) a. Jeanne *a dû* prendre le train.
 Jeanne has must.PTCP take-INF the train
 'Jeanne had to take the train'
 b. Jeanne *a pris* le train.
 Jeanne has taken the train
 'Jeanne took the train'
- (11) a. Jeanne *a pu* prendre le train.
 Jeanne has can.PTCP take-INF the train
 'Jeanne was able to take the train'
 b. Jeanne *a pris* le train.
 Jeanne has taken the train
 'Jeanne took the train'

According to Asher and Hunter, the actuality interpretations of (10a) and (11a), i.e., (10b) and (11b), respectively, are *coerced* by the perfective aspect of the modal verbs of ability in (10a) and obligation in (11a). If the perfective aspect in sentences (10a) and (11a) is replaced with the imperfective aspect (IPVP), the inference of actuality is considerably weakened, i.e., neither (12) nor (13) entail that Jeanne actually took the train:

- (12) Jeanne *devait* prendre le train.
 Jeanne had.to.IPVF take-INF the train
 'Jeanne had to take the train'

- (13) Jeanne *pouvait* prendre le train.
 Jeanne can.IPVF take-INF the train
 'Jeanne could take the train'

Examples like (10a) and (11a) demonstrate that it is crucial to distinguish the metonymic inference POTENTIALITY/OBLIGATION FOR ACTUALITY from additional inferences driven by contextual clues, such as verbal aspect and time adverbials, which may strengthen an ACTUALITY interpretation. To repeat the main point, we contend that there is no entailment relation between the modalities of potentiality/obligation and actuality *per se*. The relationship between (10a) and (10b) and (11a) and (11b), respectively, can be regarded as a metonymically motivated generalized conversational implicature in the sense of Grice (1975), which, in principle, is cancelable. In our view, sentences (12) and (13) also induce an expectation of actuality, i.e., that Jeanne took the train; however, the metonymic strength of the link between POTENTIALITY/OBLIGATION and ACTUALITY is weaker (less tight) than in (10a,b) and (11a,b).

Asher and Hunter (2012, p. 57) adduce an example from English in which the inference of actuality is in fact explicitly canceled:

- (14) John was able to take the train, but he ended up taking the bus instead.

Utterances such as (14) can be seen as evidence that the relationship between POTENTIALITY and ACTUALITY is contingent. On the basis of cases like (14), Asher and Hunter conclude that in English the ACTUALITY interpretation of sentences containing perfective modals may be canceled. This analysis coincides with our view; however, Asher and Hunter do not provide any systematic empirical evidence that in French, in contrast to English, actuality entailments are always enforced, i.e., are non-defeasible, in modal sentences with perfective aspect.

4. Manner scales

Grice's (1975) submaxim of manner that is relevant for our analytical purposes is the instruction *Be brief* or, alternatively, *Avoid prolixity*. Levinson (2000, pp. 38, 136–137) formulates this maxim as a heuristic of non-stereotypical interpretation (*M-heuristic*): "What's said in an abnormal way, isn't normal" (38). This heuristic is the complement of what Levinson calls the *I-heuristic*: "What is expressed simply is stereotypically exemplified" (37). The letters *M* and *I* are mnemonic abbreviations for 'Manner' and 'Informativeness', respectively. Grice's maxim of brevity thus ends up in two complementary heuristics in Levinson's system. When a speaker linguistically acts in accordance with the brevity maxim, i.e., uses an

unmarked expression, she signals a stereotypical situation (I-heuristic); whereas, when flouting the brevity maxim, i.e., when using a marked expression, the speaker indicates an unusual, abnormal situation (M-heuristic). To illustrate with expressions from the *manner scale of past ability* that we explore in some detail in this section ('+>' stands for 'conversationally implicates'):

- (15) a. John could solve the problem. [I +> 'and he did']
- b. John had the ability to solve the problem. [M +> 'but he didn't']
 (adapted from Levinson, 2000, p. 138)
- c. John had the ability to solve the problem and he did.

Levinson explains the differing implicatures of (15a) and (15b) in terms of his I-heuristic and M-heuristic, respectively. According to him, the unmarked ("brief") modal *could* in (15a) stereotypically suggests, i.e., I-implicates, that John did indeed solve the problem, whereas (15b), with the marked expression *had the ability to*, M-implicates that he did not.

What is problematic about Levinson's Neo-Gricean approach is that it does not account for the *varying degrees of implicated likelihood* that John solved the problem. The likelihood that John solved the problem is high in (15a) and even borders on certainty. It decreases in (15b); but (15b) is still semantically compatible with the conjoined clause *and he did*, as evidenced in (15c). We agree with Levinson that the inferences induced by (15a) and (15b) differ, but we disagree with his contention that the M-induced implicature he postulates for (15b) is the first and strongest that comes to mind.

We now turn our attention to what we call the *manner scale of past ability*, focusing first on *could* and its increasingly more periphrastic counterparts *was/were able to* and *had the ability to*. As pointed out in Section 1, we claim that the members of this scale are sensitive to the POTENTIALITY FOR ACTUALITY metonymy. We argue that the strength of the metonymic link between POTENTIALITY and ACTUALITY is a function of the parameters 'length', 'prosodic prominence', and 'grammaticalization' of each member of the scale. In what follows we focus mostly on the length parameter.

An analytical problem arises insofar as *could* and *was/were able to* are, despite their differing lengths, virtually indistinguishable in their metonymic potential. The reason may be that, for many speakers of English, the past tense form *could* is not usable when single actions are referred to in the infinitive clause, and if past ability with single events is to be expressed, the periphrastic form *was/were able to* is preferred (see Ziegeler (2003, p. 172) for discussion of this issue). Nevertheless, *could* does occur at least with some action verbs with a past single event meaning, as an informal Google search of the expression *finally could* demonstrates:

- (16) I finally *could download* the “crappy” standard document.

Sentence (16) strongly evokes the actuality reading ‘I finally downloaded the “crappy” standard document.’

While action verbs collocate more easily with the periphrastic form *be able to*, perception verbs typically cooccur with *can/could*, as in (17):

- (17) He *could hear* his mother coming up the stairs.

Sentence (17) strongly conveys the target sense ‘He *heard* his mother coming up the stairs’. It is not at all uncommon in English to encounter perception verbs like *see, hear, smell, taste, and feel* specified by the modal auxiliaries *can/could* with a strong ACTUALITY effect. Thus, the selection of a modal word or expression of ability used as a trigger of a strong POTENTIALITY FOR ACTUALITY metonymy appears to depend on the semantic domain of the verb. Action verbs appear to prefer the periphrastic form *be able to* whereas perception verbs tend to co-occur with *can/could* (see Panther and Thornburg (1999) for the relevance of semantic domains in the activation of the POTENTIALITY FOR ACTUALITY metonymy).

The exact nature of the implication between a matrix sentence and its complement clause is also the topic of Karttunen’s (1970, 1971) classical studies on implicative verbs. Expressions of modality denoting POTENTIALITY, in particular ABILITY, are semantically *only-if* predicates in the sense of Karttunen (1970, 1971), i.e., they express a necessary rather than a sufficient condition for the truth of the infinitival complement clause that they head. Consider, for example, the relationship between (18a) and (18b) (Karttunen, 1970, p.331):

- (18) a. Bill *could/was able to* leave the country.
b. Bill *left* the country.

The modals *could/was able to* in (18a) express a necessary but not a sufficient condition for the truth of (18b). Thus it is possible to assert (18a) and to deny (18b) at the same time without contradiction:

- (19) Bill *could/was able to leave* the country, but did not do so.

In the same vein as Asher and Hunter (2012) (see Section 3), Karttunen (1971, p.355) argues that predicates of the *only-if* type are sometimes *implicative*, i.e., they express not only a necessary but also a sufficient condition for the truth of the infinitival clause. An example of a putatively implicative interpretation is (20):

- (20) In the last game, the quarterback *could/was able to complete* only two passes.

It is virtually impossible to cancel the implication that in the last game the quarterback actually completed only two passes. From examples such as (20) Karttunen

concludes that *could/was able to* is semantically ambiguous between a ‘only-if’ and ‘only if and if’ interpretation. However, it is not necessary to assume two semantic readings of *could/was able to* if the role of contextual factors is taken into account.

In contrast to the polysemy account favored by Karttunen, we propose that the “implicative” reading is to be regarded as a strong conversational implicature based on the POTENTIALITY FOR ACTUALITY metonymy, here in its more specific variant ABILITY FOR ACTUAL ACTION. The metonymic link between ABILITY and ACTUALITY is very tight in sentence (20). In this case, the strength of the metonymic link seems to be determined by the co-occurrence of three factors:

- i. The ability referred to is past ability.
- ii. The situations referred to are two specific events that occur in the time frame indicated by the temporal prepositional phrase *in the last game*.
- iii. The use of the focus particle *only* strengthens the assumption that the speaker refers to real events, rather than just to possible events.

Nevertheless, despite the strength of the metonymic link between ABILITY and ACTUALITY, it remains possible to cancel this link if the *manner* of verbalizing the situation expressed in (20) is slightly changed, as in (21):

- (21) In the last game, the quarterback certainly *COULD/was* certainly *ABLE to* complete two passes ... but he didn’t.

The interpretation of (21) is based on the prosodic manner scales $\langle \textit{could}, \textit{COULD} \rangle$ and $\langle \textit{was able to}, \textit{was ABLE to} \rangle$. The emphatic *COULD* or *ABLE* and the insertion of the adverb *certainly* have the effect of highlighting (or foregrounding) the vehicle expression, i.e., the meaning of ability, and, correspondingly, of backgrounding the target concept of actuality. The metonymic link between ABILITY and ACTUALITY becomes much weaker, opening up the possibility and even the likelihood that the quarterback did not complete two passes. To summarize, the use of the first member of the prosodic manner scale triggers a much stronger metonymic inference of actuality than the second member.

Despite the semantic similarity of *could* and *was/were able to*, there is evidence that *could* has an even stronger actuality effect than *was/were able to*. A speaker who uses *could* in order to express past ability relating to specific events would often be very misleading if she were not actually committed to the factuality of the proposition expressed in the complement clause. In order not to give rise to the strong actuality effect, a speaker would normally have to resort to a counterfactual construction such as (22):

- (22) In the last game, the quarterback could have completed (?only) two passes but in fact he didn't.

In terms of metonymic strength, the weakest expression in the manner scale is *had the ability to*. Levinson (1995, p. 105) assumes that *had the ability to* conversationally implicates the negation of the complement clause (see (15c). In contrast, and in agreement with Ziegeler (2003, pp. 178–182), we argue *had the ability to* conveys an expectation of actuality. There is no pragmatic inconsistency in an utterance such as (23):

- (23) John *had the ability to pass* his exams, and he did.

Nevertheless, the actuality effect of *have the ability to* is much weaker than that of *could* and *was/were able to*. To see this, compare (24a) and (24b):

- (24) a. ?John *was able to pass* his exams, but he didn't.
b. John *had the ability to pass* his exams, but he didn't.

The actuality expectation is more easily canceled in (24b) than in (24a).

That *could* and *was/were able to* occupy the leftmost position of the manner scale of past ability also becomes evident from their behavior within the scope of time adverbials such as *within two years*. For example, sentence (25a) has the coerced metonymic reading (25b):

- (25) a. Within two years she *could/was able to complete* her dissertation.
b. Within two years she *completed* her dissertation.

In other words, in (25a) the scope of the time adverbial *within two years* extends beyond the main clause to the predication of the infinitive complement clause *complete her dissertation*. The modal expressions *could/was able to* are so backgrounded that they are not affected by the time adverbial. Rather, the time adverbial in (25a) provides a time frame for what the subject referent *actually* accomplished, not for what she was *merely able* to accomplish.

The meaning of (25a) is in stark contrast to what we find when we replace *could/was able to* with *had the ability to*:

- (26) ?Within two years she *had the ability to complete* her dissertation.

The time adverbial *within two years* is only compatible with accomplishments, i.e., non-static, durative, and telic predicates (Saeed, 2003, p. 124). If (26) is judged acceptable, the time adverbial can only have *had the ability to VP* within its scope. The periphrastic modality expression is foregrounded, i.e., its literal ABILITY meaning is highlighted. There is however an interesting metonymically coerced interpretation of the static verb form *had* in (26): The expression *had the ability*

is shifted under the influence of the time adverbial *within two years* to the target meaning ‘acquired the ability’. This coerced sense is induced by the conceptual metonymy RESULT FOR TELIC PROCESS.

Figure 2 summarizes the results of our discussion of the manner scale of past ability in terms of the parameters ‘length’ and ‘prosodic prominence’. The graphic basically represents our thesis formulated in Section 2. An arrow between any two expressions in Figure 2 signals the relative strength or likelihood of an actuality interpretation. Thus *could* has a stronger actuality effect than *was/were able to*, which in turn has tighter metonymic link between ABILITY and ACTUALITY than *had the ability to*. Prosodic prominence, indicated by capital letters, draws the attention of the hearer toward the literal or source meaning of ability and backgrounds the target meaning of actuality.

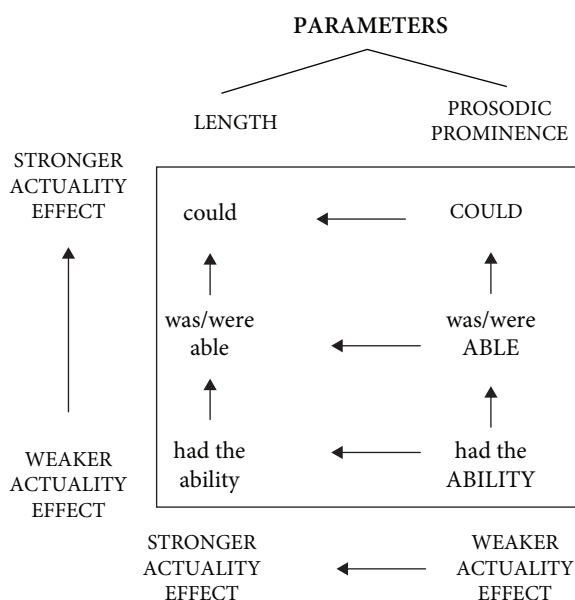


Figure 2. Strength of metonymic link between ABILITY and ACTUALITY

What is not explicitly represented in Figure 2 is the parameter of grammaticalization, which correlates with the length and prosodic properties of ability expressions. The shorter (and in oral language phonologically more reduced) and prosodically unmarked expressions are more grammaticalized (and correspondingly less lexicalized) than expressions that are longer and/or prosodically prominent (stressed). Thus, *could* is more “grammatical” than *was/were able to* and the prosodically marked *COULD*, which in turn is more grammatical than *was/were ABLE to*, etc. The likelihood of an ACTUALITY interpretation correlates with the status of the respective ability expression as a grammatical or functional item.

5. Other expressions related to *ability*

There are classes of expressions that are semantically and logically similar to ability expressions in that, like the latter, they also express a necessary but not sufficient condition for the truth of the complement clause they head.⁶ These seem to occur in two syntactic constructions given in (27) and (28):

(27) be + adj + *enough* + *to*

(28) have + *the* + N + *to*

A non-exhaustive list of such expressions is given in Tables 1–3. These expressions denote character traits or dispositions of human beings, and properties that pertain to external conditions that must be fulfilled for human beings to perform some action. The adjectival expressions listed in the left columns convey literally that the property denoted by the adjective is *sufficient to enable* the action denoted

Table 1. Positive human dispositions

Positive human dispositions / capacities / character traits	
BE + ADJ + <i>enough</i> + <i>to</i>	HAVE + <i>the</i> + N + <i>to</i>
brainy	brains
careful	— (but: <i>take care to</i>)
clever	cleverness
courageous	courage
curious	curiosity
gutsy	guts
handy	?handiness
intelligent	intelligence
kind	kindness
nosy	?nosiness
patient	patience
self-confident	self-confidence
shrewd	shrewdness
skillful	skill
smart	smarts
tactful	tact
talented	talent

6. Some of the semantic properties of these expressions have been investigated by Karttunen (1970, 1971).

Table 2. Negative human dispositions

Negative human dispositions / capacities / character traits	
BE + ADJ + <i>enough</i> + <i>to</i>	HAVE + <i>the</i> + N + <i>to</i>
arrogant	arrogance
audacious	audacity
avaricious	?avarice
brassy	brass/brazenness
–	chutzpah
covetous	?covetousness
–	gall
greedy	?greed
hubristic	?hubris
impudent	impudence
insolent	insolence
reckless	?recklessness
selfish	?selfishness
–	stamina
stupid	?stupidity
–	will power

Table 3. Extrinsically conditioned eventualities

Extrinsically conditioned eventualities	
BE + ADJ + <i>enough</i> + <i>to</i>	HAVE + <i>the</i> + N + <i>to</i>
–	chance
fortunate	fortune
lucky	(good) luck
unlucky	bad luck
unfortunate	misfortune
–	opportunity
–	time

by the embedded infinitive clause to take place; the *have* expressions listed in the right columns focus metaphorically on “possession” of the relevant quality needed to perform an action. The focus of our discussion is on the latter. Limitations of space prevent a more detailed analysis of the metaphorical structure of these expressions. However, it should be mentioned at this point that there is a rich array of inferences based on the concept of abstract POSSESSION alone. For example,

POSSESSION usually implies control of the possessed object, which, in this case, is a metaphorical object, and control is a prerequisite for putting the object to use in actual events. Thus, *have the courage* (see Table 1) involves “possession” of the metaphorical object COURAGE, which is often conceived as a pre-condition for the performance of an action. And in fact saying that *X had the courage to do A* often amounts to metonymically suggesting that *X performed A*. Thus the POTENTIALITY FOR ACTUALITY metonymy is also at work in these expressions.

With regard to Tables 1–3, we first note that there is no manner scale analogous to the scale *<be able to, have the ability to>*; i.e., there is no scale *<be patient enough to, have the patience to>* because the two expressions do not differ significantly in length. In other words, the expressions in Tables 1–3 do not form manner scales along the length parameter. However, there is the possibility to create a manner scale in terms of prosodic emphasis (*have the patience to, have the PATIENCE to*). The first expression conveys a strong metonymic link to ACTUALITY, especially in the past tense; the second, with emphatic stress, foregrounds the source meaning and is, correspondingly, less tightly linked to ACTUALITY.

The fact that there is no manner scale based on length seems to correlate with the strength of the implicature induced. That is, *have the courage/patience to*, etc. seem to have stronger actuality effects than *have the ability/possibility to*, which are part of a manner scale ordered along the parameter of length. Compare (29) and (30):

- (29) Mary had the ability/possibility to solve the problem. (weaker actuality effect in comparison to (30))
- (30) Mary had the patience/courage to solve the problem. (stronger actuality effect in comparison to (29))

In other words, since there is no contrast between a longer and shorter expression in cases like *have the patience*, the implicature induced for such periphrastic expressions covers more conceptual ground than in cases like *have the ability/possibility* type, which do have shorter alternatives.⁷

Second, we note that the *have* expressions often denote metaphorical possession in the sense that the possessed object can be *found, lost, taken, grabbed, seized*, and so on. For example, one can *lose/find, one's patience/courage* or *grab/seize an opportunity/chance*. Interestingly, *seize, take, find*, and *grab the N* seem to be more strongly linked to actuality than *have the N*.⁸

7. A similar phenomenon has been observed in connection with VP inversion constructions by Birner and Ward (1992).

8. Consider a scale such as *<seize the opportunity, have the opportunity>*. This is not a manner scale but more like a Horn scale in the sense that the left member *seize the opportunity* entails the

Finally, as we have already observed in Section 3 with respect to the ability scale, past tense and specific event contexts render more actuality effects than generic contexts; e.g., compare (31) with (32):

(31) #John was brainy enough/had the brains to score a 95% on yesterday's test ... but he didn't.

(32) John had the brains to score high on every test ... but he didn't.

The first clause in (31) strongly suggests that John *scored* a 95% on the (specific) test that took place the day before the utterance, but this strong expectation is canceled in the *but* clause. In cases like (32), the cancelation of actuality is much more natural because there is no definite reference to particular test event as in (31).

6. Summary and conclusion

In conclusion, with regard to expressions of ability, human disposition, and circumstance, we have shown that:

- contrasting sets of expressions (manner scales) with the same or similar semantic content are subject to differing metonymically induced interpretations;
- the shorter and prosodically less prominent expressions are more backgrounded and are therefore more strongly linked to their metonymic target;
- grammatical or function words are in general short and, as a consequence, yield stronger actuality effects than their more “wordy” and more prosodically prominent counterparts;
- the more “wordy” and prosodically more prominent expressions foreground the source meaning of the vehicle and consequently connect more weakly to their metonymic target.

right member *have the opportunity*. The former has a very strong interpretation of actuality that seems non-cancelable, as in (a), whereas the latter is easily defeasible, as in (b).

- a. #He seized the opportunity to buy the stock ... but he didn't.
- b. He had the opportunity to buy the stock ... but he didn't.

Still, the relationship between *seizing the opportunity to do A* and actually *doing A* is not one of entailment, but one of contingency, and is thus metonymic. Example (c) illustrates that even a seemingly non-defeasible metonymic inference can be canceled:

- c. He seized the opportunity to buy the stock ... but the unexpected computer failure prevented him from making the transaction.

In general, we suspect that shorter and more grammaticalized forms are subject to different types of metonymic inferences than longer semantically equivalent expressions. Confirmation of this hypothesis would lead to the conclusion that metonymic inferences are sensitive to the formal properties of language.

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