Extension and its Limits

Edited by

Grzegorz Drożdż and Andrzej Łyda

CAMBRIDGE SCHOLARS PUBLISHING

Extension and its Limits,
Edited by Grzegorz Drożdż and Andrzej Łyda

This book first published 2014

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN (10): 1-4438-6516-8, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-6516-6

CHAPTER ONE

METAPHOR AND METONYMY SHAPING GRAMMAR: THE ROLE OF ANIMAL TERMS IN EXPRESSIVE MORPHOLOGY AND SYNTAX

KLAUS-UWE PANTHER

The present chapter focuses on two expressive English constructions, exemplified by verb particle constructions such as *to monkey around* and binominal noun phrases like *a bear of a man*. The analysis of such "critter constructions" requires a rich apparatus of conceptual tools, including animal folk modals, metaphorical and metonymical mappings, and possibly other types of pragmatic inference. I claim that animal folk models, as reflected in the lexico-grammar of languages, tend to be conservative, i.e., they are often based on outdated biological models. As a consequence of this "cultural lag", it cannot be assumed that animal metaphors in critter construction reflect the way individual language users think about animals. The conceptual analysis of critter constructions challenges the simplistic idea widely held in cognitive linguistics that human thinking is largely determined by conceptual metaphors. Metaphors are often merely ways of speaking, rather than ways of thinking.

Key terms: animal folk models, critter constructions, cultural lag, metaphor and thought

1. Introduction

A long-standing scholarly tradition in anthropology, philology, and linguistics holds that culture is reflected, at least to some extent, in language structure and use. For example, according to Karl Vossler (1921), a scholar steeped in German idealist philosophy, language cannot be adequately described and explained without consideration of its cultural context. More recently, Paul Friedrich (2005:219), among others, has

claimed, "[c]ulture is a part of language just as language is a part of culture and the two partly overlapping realities can intersect in many ways – for which process the term 'linguaculture' may serve".

It is a truism that cultural knowledge is reflected in the vocabulary of languages, i.e. in the meaning of certain culturally loaded keywords (see e.g. Wierzbicka 1997). It is less obvious and open to debate whether linguistic form (phonological and/or morphosyntactic structure) can be motivated by cultural factors.

In the present chapter, I argue that the lexico-grammatical structure of a language may indeed be affected by cultural or folk models.[1] I focus on two emotionally charged English constructions whose meanings are shaped by animal folk models. The analysis of such expressive constructions requires a rich apparatus of conceptual tools, including – besides the notion of animal folk model – metaphorical mappings, as well as metonymical reasoning and possibly other types of pragmatic inference. In section 2, the analytical tools needed for the analysis of such "critter constructions" are presented.

The first case study is an exercise in "expressive" morphology. I investigate animal-denoting nouns *converted* to verbs in verb-particle constructions such as *pig out*, *horse around*, or *chicken out*. The verbs in these expressions evoke animal behavior and are used metaphorically as vehicles for the conceptualization of human behavior and action. The conceptual structure of three such expressions, i.e. *rat out*, *beaver away*, and *clam up* has been investigated in some detail by Panther and Thornburg (2012). The main results of this study are summarized in section 3.

The second case study, which is the main concern of this chapter, deals with a construction that instantiates "expressive" syntax (section 4). It takes as its point of departure Foolen's (2004) important work on expressive binominal constructions of the type NP_1 *of* NP_2 in several Germanic and Romance languages. I focus on a subtype of the binominal expressive NP_1 *of* NP_2 construction in English, viz. the pattern *a* N_1 *of a* N_2, exemplified by expressions such as *a shark of a lawyer*, *a mouse of a woman*, and *a rat of a boyfriend*. The first noun in such constructions often denotes an animal that, analogously to the verb-particle constructions with

[1] The terms *cultural model* and *folk model* are used equivalently in this chapter.

converted animal terms, relies for its adequate interpretation on folk models of the respective animal mentioned in the construction.

Section 5 concludes the chapter with some brief reflections on the status of animal models and the relationship between metaphor and thinking.

2. Descriptive tools

In the larger context of cognition, the relationship between language and culture can be diagrammed as in Figure 1.

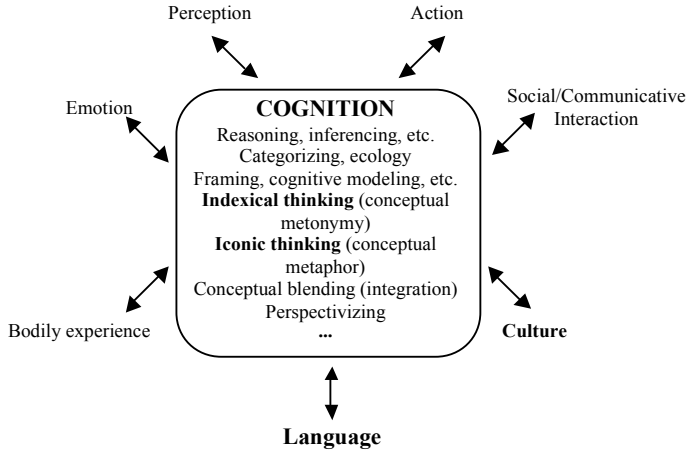

Fig. 1. Cognition, language, and culture (adapted from Panther and Radden 2011:2)

Following Panther and Radden (2011:2), the term *cognition* in Figure 1 refers to higher mental faculties such as categorizing, reasoning, inferencing, framing, cognitive modeling, indexical and iconic thinking, conceptual integration, and perspectivizing. These central components of cognition are connected to various "peripheral" systems such as bodily experience, emotion, action, social interaction, culture, and, last BUT not least, language. The double-headed arrows represent the idea that the peripheral systems are both influenced by, but also feed into, cognition (for more details see Panther and Radden 2011:2-13). In the context of the present chapter, the interactions between the cognitive faculties of indexical thinking and iconic thinking, which underlie metonymy and

metaphor, respectively, and the peripheral systems of language and culture are especially relevant.

Figure 2 depicts a conception of metonymy that has been developed within the last fifteen years by the present author and Linda Thornburg (e.g. Panther and Thornburg 1998, 2003, 2007; Panther 2006).

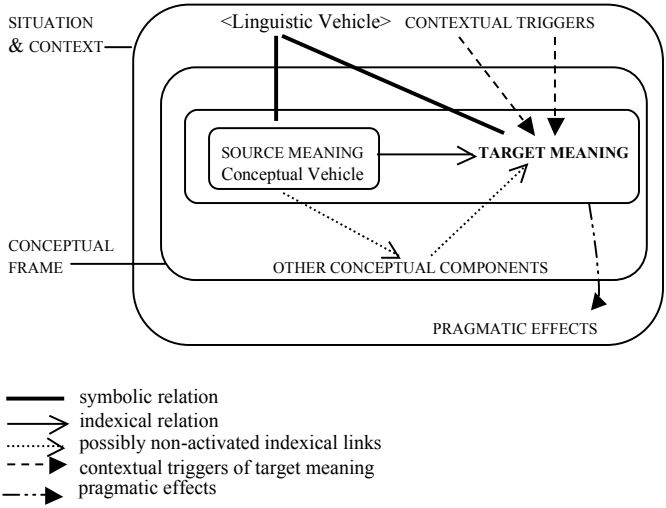

Fig. 2. Metonymy

Metonymies do not occur in isolation but rather in a certain extralinguistic situation and a linguistic context. A metonymy involves indexical reasoning within *one* conceptual frame, taking as its point of departure a *linguistic vehicle* whose denotatum (source meaning) serves as a *conceptual vehicle* to access a figurative target meaning (see also Dancygier 2009 for the conception of metonymy as frame reasoning). The relationship between source and target meaning is often not conceptually necessary but contingent, i.e. defeasible. In this respect, metonymies are like conversational implicatures in the Gricean sense but they are here viewed as conceptual associations and contiguities that *underlie* many implicatures. From the hearer's perspective, other components of the conceptual frame may be activated, especially in the case of unconventional metonymies, which facilitate the comprehension of the intended target meaning. We also assume, as repeatedly emphasized by Antonio Barcelona (see e.g. Barcelona and Valenzuela 2011:28), that

metonymy is more basic than metaphor – contrary to the view of many metaphor scholars (see also Panther 2006).

A final characteristic of metonymies is that they may have pragmatic effects. For example, it certainly makes a difference whether a restaurant customer overhears one server saying to another *Table 5 wants another beer* or whether the server in question refers to the customer as *The guest at Table 5 wants another beer*. In this particular case, the customer might feel slightly offended by the definite description *Table 5* – even if, for the service personnel, *Table 5* is an economical shorthand term for referring to and identifying a specific customer.

The second tool needed for the analysis of the two critter constructions is conceptual metaphor, whose properties are diagrammed in Figure 3.

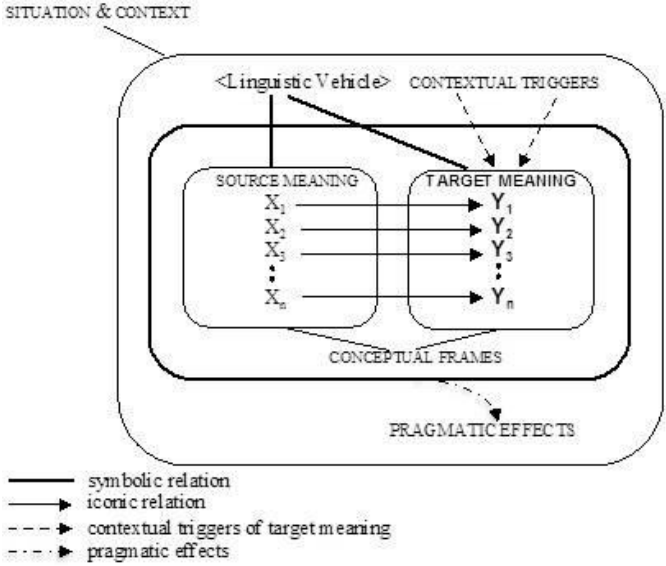

Fig. 3. Metaphor

Figure 3 is inspired by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's foundational work on metaphor (e.g. Lakoff and Johnson 1999, 2003). These authors conceive of metaphor as a set of mappings from one conceptual frame (source) into another conceptual frame (target).[2] Lakoff and Johnson

[2] Lakoff and Johnson use the term *domain* for what is called *frame* here.

(2003:113) emphasize that metaphor does not involve a similarity relation between source and target concepts. For example, there is no similarity between UP (source) and HAPPY (target).[3] Nevertheless, I claim that the "similarity" between source and target is structural: the target frame inherits the conceptual organization of the source frame. Furthermore, the kinds of inference (sometimes infelicitously called "metaphorical entailments") that are operative in the source frame are usually mirrored in the target frame.

Finally, what is needed in the analysis of the two expressive critter constructions is some notion of cultural model or folk model. For the purposes of the present study, it suffices to adopt Quinn and Holland's (1987:4) characterization of 'cultural model':

> Cultural models are presupposed, taken-for-granted models of the world that are widely shared (although not necessarily to the exclusion of other, alternative models) by the members of a society and that play an enormous role in their understanding of that world and their behavior in it.

An animal folk model comprises information such as the following:

i. the rank of the animal in question on some ontological hierarchy, called the Great Chain of Being by Lakoff and Turner (1989:4);
ii. the character of the animal;
iii. its physical appearance;
iv. its typical behavior;
v. its habitat;
vi. its diet;
vii. the social organization of the species.

It has to be emphasized at this point that folk beliefs regarding points (i)-(vii) are by no means scientifically accurate. Present-day folk models and superstitions are often more or less equivalent to worldviews going back to the Middle Ages, Antiquity, and possibly prehistoric times.[4]

---

[3] It can however be argued that the relation between UP and HAPPY is metonymic rather metaphoric.

[4] A good example of an outdated astronomical model that enjoys popularity up to the present day is astrology, the "study of the movements and relative positions of celestial bodies interpreted as having an influence on human affairs and the natural world" (Oxford American Dictionary online, s.v. *astrology*). In the Middle Ages, astrology was one of the seven "liberal arts", studied as a serious subject at European universities.

The influence that animal folk models may have on linguistic meaning is schematically diagrammed in Figure 4.

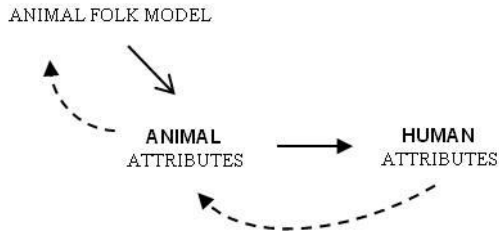

Fig. 4. Animal folk models

In critter constructions, attributes are selected from the animal folk model and metaphorically used to characterize humans. Whether the metaphorical mapping is unidirectional, as assumed by Lakoff and Johnson, is debatable. An interactionist account of metaphor would allow for the possibility of "feedback", in this case, from the human domain back into the animal domain. For example, the metaphor PEOPLE ARE WOLVES conceptualizes the character and behavior of humans, but vice versa it also sheds light on how people endow wolves with negative human characteristics such as ferocity, cruelty, etc.

3. Expressive morphology

In a recent article the present author and Linda Thornburg (Panther and Thornburg 2012) investigated verb-particle constructions whose verbal slot is occupied by an animal term. The central thesis of the article is that (often outdated) cultural or folk models shape the interpretation of verb-particle constructions with animal terms as their verbal heads. The relation between animal model and verb-particle construction is diagrammed in Figure 5.

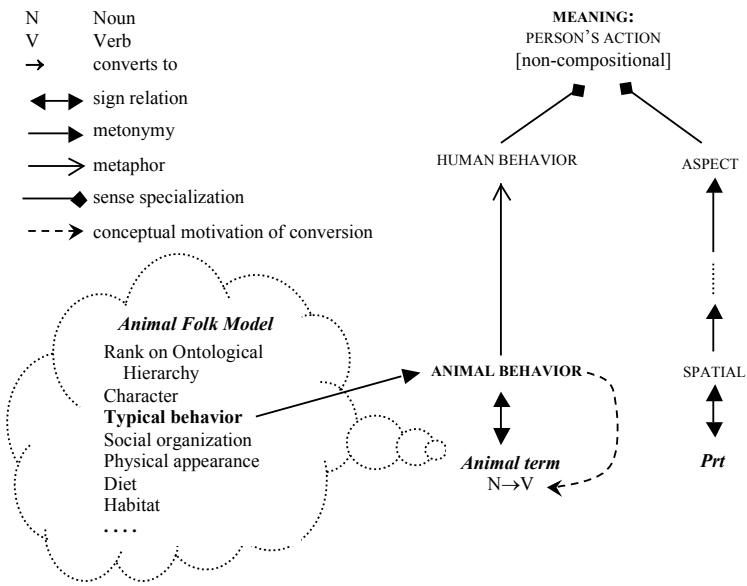

Fig. 5. The impact of animal folk models in verb-particle constructions (adopted from Panther and Thornburg 2012:70)

The basic idea of Panther and Thornburg's approach is that a feature of the animal model is selected (here: typical behavior) and metaphorically projected into the domain of human behavior. The selection of the feature BEHAVIOR enables the original animal noun to be converted into an action verb. The particle contributes a spatial schema that is metonymically elaborated into an aspectual value such as TELIC, DURATIVE, PUNCTUAL, etc. This aspectual value contributes to the overall meaning of the verb-particle construction as an ACCOMPLISHMENT, ACHIEVEMENT, or ACTIVITY (in terms of Vendler's 1957 aspectual categories).[5]

Panther and Thornburg (2012) analyze *rat out* 'inform on', *beaver away* 'work hard', and *clam up* 'abruptly stop speaking' in some detail, showing how the meaning of the converted animal term is fed by a traditional folk or cultural model of the animal in question.

[5] Apart from strictly aspectual meaning, the particle may contribute additional descriptive senses; e.g. in *pig out* the particle conveys the notion of 'beyond a boundary', which figuratively conveys the meaning 'beyond what is normal'.

The meaning of the verb-particle construction *rat out* (x_{AG}, y_{PAT}) is shaped by a negative cultural model of rats that contains components such as 'low on ontological hierarchy', 'lives in filthy habitat', 'carries diseases', 'displays vile behavior'. It is this last trait that is the crucial feature in the composite meaning of *rat out*. It is mapped into the human frame as 'morally reprehensible behavior' by some AGENT (x_{AG}) towards some PATIENT (y_{PAT}). The spatial source sense of the particle *out* contributes the aspectual value TELIC to the overall meaning of *rat out* via a series of metonymies. In its source sense, *out* designates the motion of some object *y* (here, the patient *y*) from a non-visible region into a region where *y* can be seen by some third party; VISIBILITY of *y* is then, via metonymic inference, linked to KNOWLEDGE about *y*; and finally, there is an inference from KNOWN (*y*) to KNOWN (*y*'s LOCATION, INTENTIONS, etc.), i.e., the PATIENT's location, plans, etc. are revealed to some third party by the informer *x* (sense specialization).

The meaning of *beaver* in the intransitive verb-particle construction *beaver away* is rooted in the stereotype of beavers as industrious animals. This feature is projected into the human frame. The spatial particle *away* marks the aspect of the event coded by the verb *beaver* as DURATIVE. As in the case of *rat out*, the aspectual meaning can be derived via metonymic chaining. Panther and Thornburg (2012:74-76) propose that *away* evokes the motion of some *x* (the AGENT of the ACTIVITY) along an unbounded path. From this input the aspectual value of an UNBOUNDED ACTIVITY can be inferred. Via an operation of sense specialization, the composite meaning of *beaver away* 'work hard' is derived.

The third verb-particle construction analyzed in Panther and Thornburg (2012:76-78) is *clam up*. A central behavioral property of clams is that they close their shells immediately when under threat. The behavior of clams is metaphorically equated with the behavior of persons who suddenly close their lips. This action induces the metonymic inference of 'stop talking' or 'falling silent'. The particle *up* evokes a vertical (upward) movement of something towards some goal (or completion point). This movement is interpreted as instantaneous and abrupt, i.e. PUNCTUAL. The composite sense of *clam up* is both TELIC and PUNCTUAL, i.e., it is an ACHIEVEMENT in Vendler's (1957) aspectual terminology.

As two additional examples that illustrate Panther and Thornburg's method of analysis, let us briefly consider *chicken out* and *monkey around*. The first is based on a folk model of chickens as nervous and fearful birds

that run away or flap their wings in panic at the slightest danger. This property is metaphorically related to the cowardly behavior of humans who withdraw from a task or challenge because they are too fearful. The aspectual meaning of the particle in *chicken out* can be derived metonymically from the spatial source meaning 'movement out of a container (difficult situation)' that the agent is too fearful to face. The particle has the aspectual sense TELIC and the construction as a whole is either an ACCOMPLISHMENT (if the motion (= action) is DURATIVE) or an ACHIEVEMENT (if an abrupt, i.e. PUNCTUAL, change of state occurs).

The verb-particle construction *monkey around* is based on a folk model that views monkeys as being close to humans, but at the same time – as the racist use of *monkey* indicates – also as very distinct from "real" human beings. Monkeys are very agile, live on trees in the jungle, like to eat bananas (at least when they are kept in zoos), and exhibit playful and rambunctious behavior. This last trait seems to be the basis of the meaning 'behave in a boisterous and disorderly way'. The aspectual meaning ACTIVITY is motivated by the particle *around* here meaning '(moving) randomly and unsystematically', which metonymically induces a non-telic DURATIVE interpretation.

What all the above verb-particle constructions have in common (for many more examples, see Panther and Thornburg 2012), is that they function according to the template given in Figure 5. A stereotypical behavioral trait from the relevant animal folk model is selected and is metaphorically interpreted as human behavior. The particle accompanying the 'animal' verb is literally a spatial concept that, via a series of metonymic inferences, acquires an aspectual target sense. Finally, the sense of the verb-particle construction is motivated by the metaphorical and metonymic meanings of the verb and the particle, respectively, but the meaning of the whole construction cannot be predicted or computed in a strictly compositional way from the meaning of its parts.

4. Expressive syntax

In English and other languages, there exists a pattern of the form NP_1 *P* NP_2, in which *P* is usually some equivalent of the English preposition *of*. This construction exhibits a highly expressive meaning and can be found cross-linguistically. The following examples, and many more, have been collected by Foolen (2004):

English
(1) a bear of a man, a hell of a job, a dream of a car, a dud of a film, a blast of a party
Dutch
(2) zijn twee apen van kinderen ‘his two apes of children’
German
(3) ein Engel von einer Frau ‘an angel of a woman’
French
(4) un fripon de valet ‘a scoundrel of a servant’
Italian
(5) una bestia di avvocato ‘a beast of a lawyer’
Spanish
(6) el imbécil de tu hermano ‘this idiot your brother’

The expressions listed in (1)-(6) have syntactic heads that are metaphoric and often connote a high degree of emotivity. In semantic terms, they seem to function as modifiers rather than conceptual heads. In section 4.1 a specific subtype of this construction is introduced and its syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic properties are discussed in more detail in sections 4.2-4.4.

4.1. Constructional homonymy

The focus of the present chapter is on the specific pattern *a* N_1 *of a* N_2, i.e. the case where both nouns in the pattern are specified by the indefinite determiner *a(n)*. Consider utterances (7)-(14):

(7) Prosecutor Bahrman painted a portrait of a man who had simply had enough of his wife ... [COCA[6]]
(8) My father told me a story of a man that wanted something very badly as a boy. [COCA]
(9) I think it is the right thing for them to do to pick a governor of a state that has got a great story to tell. [COCA]
(10) What can I say? I forgive you. A quarter of a century ago you danced with my girlfriend. [COCA]
(11) I told him he’s doing a hell of a job as president, is what I told him. [COCA]

[6] COCA stands for *Corpus of Contemporary English*, a freely available balanced 450 million word corpus made available by Brigham Young University [http://corpus.byu.edu/coca]

(12) You're innocent, and have to prove it beyond a shadow of a doubt. [COCA]
(13) A hint of a smile was twitching onto Cody's face. [COCA]
(14) [...] I don't think there is a ghost of a chance, for example, that the oil embargo will be lifted [...][COCA]

A closer look at the binominal expressions in (7)-(14) reveals that the pattern *a N_1 of a N_2* represents a case of constructional homonymy, in the sense of Chomsky (1957:86).[7] Ignoring sentence (10) for the time being, one can say that sentences (7)-(9) and (11)-(14) structurally look alike, but they are conceptually remarkably different. In (7)-(9), *portrait*, *story*, and *governor* function both as syntactic and conceptual heads of their respective noun phrases; in contrast, in examples (11)-(14), the syntactic heads *hell*, *shadow*, *hint*, and *ghost* cannot be regarded as conceptual heads. Thus, there is a mismatch (i.e. lack of isomorphism) between syntactic structure and conceptual structure in (11)-(14). In (11) *hell* is the syntactic head, but it does not make sense to say that the sentence is about a hell; rather it refers to the job performed by some U.S. president. The noun *hell* functions semantically as a modifier, or even intensifier, of *job*; the speaker intends to convey the idea that the president performs 'a great job'. Similarly, in (12), intuitively, the speaker's message is not about the syntactic head *shadow* but about the doubt that people may have about the addressee's innocence; *shadow* thus functions as a highly expressive metaphorical modifier of the semantic head *doubt*. The syntactic heads *hint* and *ghost* in (13) and (14), respectively, again serve as conceptual (metaphorical) attributes rather than as conceptual heads, i.e., they semantically modify *smile* and *chance*, respectively.

But what about *a quarter of a century* in (10)? Is utterance (10) about a quarter, i.e. a part or fraction (of something), in which case quarter would be both syntactically and conceptually the head of the binominal phrase? Or, is it rather about a time period (spanning twenty-five years), in which case *century* would conceptually head the binominal construction? The phrase *a quarter of a century* resembles measure phrases such as *a pound of coffee*, *a teaspoonful of sugar*, or *a pinch of salt*. In these expressions the denotatum of the second noun is conceptually salient, i.e., it functions as the conceptual head of the phrase. If this analysis is correct, *a quarter of a century* must be treated analogously to examples (11)-(14), in which the functions of syntactic head (N_1) and conceptual head (N_2) are dissociated.

[7] Chomsky actually uses the term *constructional homonymity*.

However, what distinguishes *a quarter of a century* from examples (11)-(14) is its lack of expressivity.

In what follows, I ignore temporal constructions of the type instantiated in example (10) and focus on the clearly definable distinction between constructions exemplified in (7)-(9) and (11-14), respectively. I refer to the binominal expressions in (7)-(9) as instances of the 'unmarked' *a N_1 of a N_2* construction. This type is by far the most common in terms of token frequency, which justifies calling it 'unmarked'. It is also unmarked in the sense that it exhibits an isomorphic relationship between its syntactic and semantic structure, as shown below. In contrast, the binominal expressions in (11)-(14) display a remarkable asymmetry between form and content/function, which motivates calling them 'marked'.

To summarize, noun phrases of the structure *a N_1 of a N_2* have at least two readings, which do not seem to be conceptually related. It is, therefore, justified to call the pattern *a N_1 of a N_2* constructionally homonymous, in contrast to many other constructions, e.g. the ditransitive construction, which exhibits a family of senses, i.e. is a polysemous construction.

4.2. The a N_{ANIMAL} *of a* N_{HUMAN} construction

Foolen (2004) was among the first cognitive linguists to investigate constructions of the type illustrated by (11)-(14) in various Germanic and Romance languages (see examples (1)-(6) above). The present chapter is inspired by Foolen's important work but also tries to move beyond it in several respects, aiming, in particular, at a more precise distributional and semantic-pragmatic analysis of the marked *a N_1 of a N_2* construction in English. The present study is further restricted to marked *a N_1 of a N_2* constructions – typically those in which the N_1 slot is occupied by an *animal term* and N_2 denotes a *human being*. In the following, I refer to this specific construction as the *a N_{ANIMAL} of a N_{HUMAN}* construction, whose formal, conceptual, and functional properties are spelled out in in the subsequent sections. Along the way, this construction is – where helpful and necessary – compared to the unmarked *a N_1 of a N_2* construction.

The *a N_{ANIMAL} of a N_{HUMAN}* construction can, like the verb-particle constructions discussed in section 3, be called an *expressive critter construction*. It is instantiated by utterances (15)-(20), collected from the English language corpora *WebCorp* and the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA).

(15) Deneuve's co-worker is mired in an abusive relationship with "a pig" of a man [...] [WebCorp]
(16) All you need is the constitution of a lion and a lamb of a husband. [WebCorp][8]
(17) [...] I kinda miss being a clam of a person [...] [WebCorp]
(18) Marge is a mouse of a woman, thin and frazzled [...] [COCA]
(19) [...] one fella tiny, nervous, prancing sideways, shaking his glossy black mane, a racehorse of a man, sixteen if he was a day [...] [COCA]
(20) But what makes her different than the average college student who juggles a heavy workload and a rat of a boyfriend? [WebCorp]

To give the reader an idea of the animal terms occurring in the first noun slot of this construction, the American English corpus COCA was searched for the time span between 1990 and 2012 with the human noun *man* in the second noun position. The frequency figures are given in Figure 6.

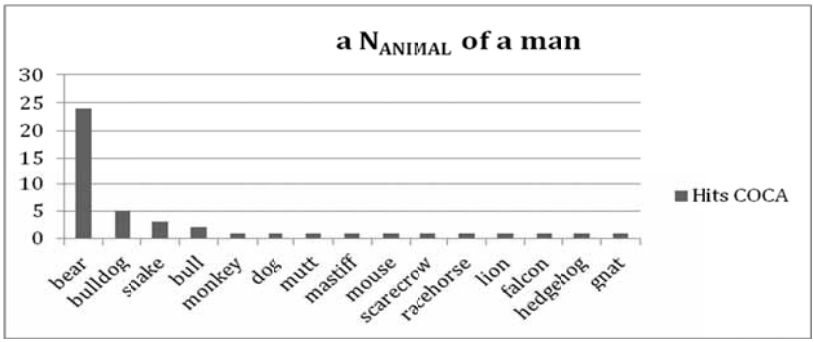

Fig. 6. Frequency of the type *a* N_{ANIMAL} *of a man* in COCA (absolute numbers).

By far the most frequent animal term in the *a* N_{ANIMAL} *of a man* pattern, and thus possibly the most entrenched expression, is *bear*, but exoticisms like *a hedgehog of a man* or even *a gnat of a man* are also attested. The list of possible animal terms in the first noun slot is most likely indefinitely large; i.e., the construction is highly productive.

[8] WebCorp is a freely available corpus provided by the City University of Birmingham, U.K.

4.3. Some formal constraints

Before investigating the semantics and pragmatics of the marked (vs. the unmarked) construction in more detail, some remarks about formal properties of the *a* N_{ANIMAL} *of a* N_{HUMAN} construction are in order; more specifically, the question has to be addressed whether there are constraints on determiners (articles and demonstratives) before N_1 and N_2 and on the grammatical number of the two nouns. Consider the expressions in (21) with varying determiners (including zero) before the N_1 and the N_2 position:

(21) a. a bear of a man
b. *a bear of the man
c. the bear of a man
d. this bear of a man
e. *the bears of a man
f. *these bears of a man
g. bears of men

As can be seen from the examples in (22), the binominal expressions (21a), (c), (d), and (g) are all attested, whereas no instances of patterns (21b), (e), and (f) can be found in the two corpora WebCorp or COCA:

(22) a. A bear of a man with a reserved nature, he could seem imposing at first glance but almost always rendered help to those who needed it […] [WebCorp]
b. *: not attested in WebCorp and COCA
c. They became concerned about him dying before his time, just like the bear of a man before him […] [WebCorp]
d. But from the moment she meets Howard Barr, this bear of a man makes her feel like a woman. [WebCorp]
e. *: not attested in WebCorp and COCA
f. *: not attested in WebCorp and COCA
g. By the end of the weekend I am deeply struck by the many forms of male beauty: Big roaring bears of men, fierce flying falcons of men, deep diving trout of men. [WebCorp]

The fact that some patterns are not attested in either WebCorp or COCA is not conclusive evidence that they constitute systematic gaps, but one can at least tentatively assume that formal constraints on determiner selection and grammatical number assignment exist. This problem is, however, beyond the scope of the present chapter. My focus is on conceptual and

pragmatic differences between the unmarked construction and the expressive construction, in particular on the one with an animal term in the N_1 position.

4.4. Syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic properties of the unmarked vs. the marked construction

4.4.1. Basic syntactic, conceptual, and expressive properties

The *a* N_{ANIMAL} *of a* N_{HUMAN} construction and unmarked a N_1 *of a* N_2 construction exhibit a number of formal and conceptual-pragmatic differences. To begin with, consider the contrast between (23) and (24):

(22) a copy of a magazine [unmarked construction]
(23) a bulldog of a man [marked expressive construction]

As pointed out in section 4.1, in the unmarked construction (23), the syntactic head *copy* also functions as the conceptual head of the construction. In contrast, in (24), syntactically, *bulldog* is the head of the noun phrase. It could also be regarded as an emotionally charged *expressive head* (see Foolen 2004). However, semantically, it does not function as a head, but as a *conceptual modifier* of N_2.

In this connection, the question arises if it is possible to go one step further and regard the conceptual modifiers *bulldog (of)*, *mouse (of)*, and *lamb (of)*, etc., not as syntactic heads but as *syntactic modifiers*. This analysis has in fact been proposed by Bas Aarts (1998) for expressions such as *a hell of*, e.g. in *a hell of a problem*, which he parses syntactically as follows:[9]

(24) $[_{\text{NP}}$ a [hell of a] problem] (Aarts 1998:119)

Is it justified to analyze *a bulldog of a man* analogously, viz. as in (26)?

(25) $[_{\text{NP}}$ a [bulldog of a] man]

For cases like *hell of*, the syntactic modifier analysis is plausible on the grounds that an erosion and contraction process can be observed, which, in

[9] Aarts' analysis is criticized on syntactic grounds by Abraham (1997), who relies on a prepublished version of Aarts (1998).

the written language, manifests itself in the spelling *hella* (cf. modifiers like *sort of* > *sorta* and *kind of* > *kinda*). Data of this sort abound, e.g.:

(26) If nothing else, Sendek's quirky effort will be a hella good résumé line when he graduates from college […] [WebCorp]

What is more, *hella* has developed an intensifier meaning, which is almost completely dissociated from its original metaphorical meaning 'hellish' (as e.g. *in a hell of a job* 'a hellish job'). It is even possible for *hella* to modify (and intensify) adjectives, as in (28):

(27) Nicole is hella fine. [WebCorp]

As far as critter constructions are concerned, this kind of contraction is not possible; (29a-d) are unacceptable formations:

(28) a. *a beara a man [= a bear of a man]
b. *a lamba a husband [= a lamb of a husband]
c. *a racehorsea a man [= a racehorse of a man]
d. *a mousea a woman [= a mouse of a woman]

The unacceptability of examples like (29a-d) supports the conclusion that there is, in fact, a *mismatch* between the syntactic structure of the expressive critter constructions and their conceptual organization.

Table 1 summarizes the contrast between an unmarked construction such as (23) and a marked expressive critter construction such as (24):

Table 1. Syntactic, conceptual, and expressive properties

Construction	*a* N_1 of *a* N_2 UNMARKED	*a* N_{ANIMAL} *of a* N_{HUMAN} MARKED
syntactic head	N_1	N_{ANIMAL}
conceptual head	N_1	N_{HUMAN}
syntactic modifier	—	—
conceptual modifier	—	N_{ANIMAL} *of*
expressive head	—	N_{ANIMAL} *of*

Table 1 should not be interpreted as meaning that no syntactic modifier can appear in the two constructions. On the contrary, it is possible to say:

(29) a. a good copy of a magazine
b. a copy of an interesting magazine
(30) a. a huge bear of a man [WebCorp]
b. a bear of a young man [WebCorp]

Thus both nouns in the marked and in the unmarked construction can be modified by adjectival attributes.[10] However, neither N_1 *(of a)* in the unmarked construction nor N_{ANIMAL} *(of a)* in the marked construction can function as syntactic modifiers.

4.4.2. A semantic criterion: entailment

The unmarked *a* N_1 *of a* N_2 pattern and the marked N_{ANIMAL} *of a* N_{HUMAN} construction differ strikingly in their semantic implications. Consider first an instance of the unmarked N_1 *of a* N_2 pattern:

(31) Peter Cavendish was a member of a team searching for signs of extraterrestrial intelligence. [COCA]

Sentence (32) entails (33a), but not (33b):[11]

(32) a. ⊨ Peter Cavendish was a member (of some class X) searching for signs of extraterrestrial intelligence.
(33) b. ⊭ Peter Cavendish was a team searching for signs of extraterrestrial intelligence.

(33b) is unacceptable because the lexical item *team* has the default interpretation that a team consists of more than one person.[12]

Analogously, (34) entails (35a), but not (35b):

(34) This is a photograph of a castle.

---

[10] Interestingly, in (31a) *huge* semantically modifies *man*, not *bear*, whereas in (30a) *good* semantically modifies *copy*, not *magazine*.

[11] The symbol '⊨' signifies 'entailment'; '⊭' stands for 'non-entailment'.

[12] Note that the cardinality implication of *team* 'more than one person' is pragmatic rather than semantic. The implication is defeasible – a clear indication that it is a generalized conversational implicature rather than an entailment. It is possible, without contradiction, to use expressions such as *one-man team*.

(35) a. ⊨ This is a photograph (of something).
b. ⊭ This is a castle.

It has to be stressed that (35b) is not an entailment of (34), although a metonymic interpretation is possible, in which *castle* stands for 'pictorial representation of a castle'.

As can be seen from examples (32) and (34), it is the syntactic head that determines the entailment properties of the unmarked *a* N_1 *of a* N_2 pattern.

Now consider the semantic implications of the *a* N_{ANIMAL} *of a* N_{HUMAN} construction. The following sentences narrate an episode in a casino or similar gambling establishment:

(36) A bulldog of a man examines his hand, tosses two cards in. [COCA]

(37) a. ⊨ A man examines his hand, tosses two cards in.
b. ⊭ A bulldog examines his hand, tosses two cards in.

Utterance (36) entails (37a), i.e., a specific man examines his hand of cards, but (36) does not entail (37b). No exemplar of the species *canis familiaris*, here a bulldog, performs this action. Of course, it is possible to interpret (37b) metaphorically as referring to a man with bulldog-like properties. However, the relevant point in the present context is that sentences containing the *a* N_{ANIMAL} *of a* N_{HUMAN} construction entail that the predicate holds of the referent of *a* N_{HUMAN}, which constitutes the conceptual head (rather than the syntactic head) of the construction. In (36), the predicate phrase *examines his hand* cannot literally hold of a bulldog. But what is the semantic-pragmatic status of the syntactic head N_{ANIMAL} in the marked critter construction? An answer to this question is given in section 4.4.3.

The implicational properties of the *a* N_1 *of a* N_2 pattern and the *a* N_{ANIMAL} *of a* N_{HUMAN} pattern are summarized in Table 2. Strictly speaking, only the denotata of *sentences* have entailments. Consequently, the two nominal constructions appear as constituents within a sentence (symbolized by the subscript S in Table 2).

Table 2. Entailment properties of *a N_1 of a N_2* and *a N_{ANIMAL} of a N_{HUMAN}*

[S … [NP *a* N_1 of *a* N_2] …] UNMARKED	[S … [NP *a* N_{ANIMAL} *of a* N_{HUMAN}] …] MARKED
⊨ [S … [NP *a* N_1] …]	⊭ [S … [NP *a* N_{ANIMAL}] …]
⊭ [S … [NP *a* N_2] …]	⊨ [S … [NP *a* N_{HUMAN}] …]

4.4.3. Referential properties

Another feature that differentiates the unmarked *a* N_1 *of a* N_2 pattern from the *a* N_{ANIMAL} *of a* N_{HUMAN} pattern is the way in which the two constructions and their nominal constituents relate to extralinguistic reality (as conceptualized by the speaker). Compare (38) with (39):

(38) a story of a boy [unmarked]
(39) a bear of a man [marked]

Consider the use of the (38) and (39) in (40) and (41), respectively:

(40) In 1837-38, Dickens published a story of a boy of unknown parentage.
(41) A bear of a man entered the room.

In (40) and (41), the expressions *a story of a boy (of unknown parentage)* and *a bear of a man*, respectively, are used in argument positions: in (40), *a story of a boy (of unknown parentage)* is the direct object of *published*; in (41) *a bear of a man* is the subject of the sentence. Argument positions are suited *par excellence* for referential purposes, but there are crucial differences in referentiality between the unmarked and the marked construction. In (40) both *a story* and *a boy* refer to a specific story and a specific boy, respectively; whereas in (41) *a bear* is used non-referentially, more precisely, attributively, and *a man* is used referentially.[13] Table 3

[13] In this article I do not consider the issue of (non-)referentiality of the unmarked *a* N_1 *of a* N_2 construction and the marked *a* N_{ANIMAL} *of a* N_{HUMAN} construction in predicative positions. For an in-depth study of reference in general, see Abbott (2010).

summarizes the referential properties of the two constructions in argument positions.

Table 3. Referential and attributive properties of *a N_1 of a N_2* and *a N_{ANIMAL} of a N_{HUMAN}*

a N_1 of a(n) N_2		*a N_{ANIMAL} of a N_{HUMAN}*	
a N_1 +REF_{spec}	a N_2 +REF_{spec}	a N_{ANIMAL} -REF, +ATTR	a N_{HUMAN} + REF_{spec}

Abbreviations: +REF_{spec} = specific (individual) reference; -REF = non-referential; +ATTR = property.

To conclude, the most striking difference between the unmarked *a N_1 of a N_2* and the marked *a N_{ANIMAL} of a N_{HUMAN}* construction is that in the former the first noun phrase and the second noun phrase refer to specific individuals, whereas in the latter the first noun phrase, which contains the animal term, is not referential but rather denotes a property assigned to the referent of the second noun phrase. The second noun phrase in the marked construction, *a N_{HUMAN}*, is not the syntactic head of the construction, but it has specific reference, i.e., it is the linguistic vehicle that links the marked construction to the extralinguistic world of individuals and objects.

4.4.4. Anaphoric constraints

Another difference between the unmarked and the marked construction is manifested in their potential to serve as antecedents of anaphoric pronouns. Compare (42) and (43):

(42) John took a picture of a man and later *one* of a woman.
(43) *Marge has to deal with a rat of a boyfriend at home and *one* of a boss at her workplace.

As illustrated by (42), the first indefinite noun phrase in the unmarked construction, which is referential, can be anaphorically resumed by the indefinite pronoun *one*. In contrast, as demonstrated by (43), the same kind of anaphoric resumption is impossible in the case of the marked construction. The unacceptability of (43) is a natural consequence of the fact that *a N_{ANIMAL}* is not referential but functions as a conceptual modifier of the following human noun phrase (see Table 3).

The two constructions also behave differently with regard to their ability to be coreferential with definite pronouns. How they contrast is illustrated by (44) and (45):

(44) A friend$_i$ of a friend$_j$ I had met in Mansa was renovating her$_i$/*her$_j$ small restaurant located across the street from the rest house where we were staying. [COCA]

As (44), an instance of the unmarked construction, shows, the antecedent of *her* can only be the first noun phrase, i.e. the noun phrase that contains the syntactic (and conceptual) head. Coreference with the second embedded noun phrase is excluded.

In comparison, in the case of the marked expressive construction, coreference is possible only with the second (referential) noun phrase. An authentic example with an expressive non-animal term in the N_1 position is (45):

(45) [...] a mountain$_i$ of a man$_j$ – over seven feet tall, by the looks of it – stands in the ambulance bay entrance of a hospital. Clutched in *its$_i$/his$_j$ hands are the feet of a small woman who is dangling, fully conscious, with her head pointed straight at the floor. [WebCorp][14]

The constraint on coreference follows straightforwardly from the assumption that the expressive head in the marked construction is non-referential. Coreference is possible only with the syntactically embedded second noun phrase, which has a human referent. This analysis is also supported by the fact that a *relative pronoun* can corefer only with the embedded conceptual head – not with the expressive head:

(46) a mountain$_i$/elephant$_i$ of a man$_j$, which$_{*i}$ /who$_j$ is over seven feet tall […]

In (46), the relative pronoun *which*, which has non-human referents as its antecedents, cannot be used; only *who* is acceptable, which corefers with *a*

[14] In principle, the same point could be made with animal terms such as *bear*, *bulldog*, or *lion* as the expressive head. However, there would be the problem that some dialects of English allow reference to animals with masculine and feminine pronouns. It is for this reason that an example with an inanimate expressive N_1 (*mountain*) has been chosen to illustrate the relevant anaphoric constraints.

man. This coreference constraint is again a clear indication that *a mountain* and *an elephant* are not referring expressions in (46).

The anaphoric constraints for the unmarked and the marked construction are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4. Anaphoric constraints

Construction	*a N_1 of a N_2*	*a N_{ANIMAL} of a N_{HUMAN}*
Coreference relations	(i) indefinite *one* (ii) personal/possessive/relative pronoun corefers with NP_1	(i) *indefinite *one* (ii) personal/possessive/relative pronoun corefers with NP_2

4.4.5. Topicality

Another pragmatic property that distinguishes the two constructions is the varying potential of the indefinite noun phrases to function as topics. Consider first the unmarked construction:

(47) A nephew of a businessman was abducted by several unidentified men midnight of Monday in Cagayan de Oro City, police said. [WebCorp]

Sentence (47) is topically about a nephew (of a businessman), not about a businessman.

Different from (47), sentence (48), which is also an instance of the unmarked construction, could have two interpretations:

(48) […] a photograph of an ancestor in uniform may be an admired part of the family's collection of artifacts. [Google]

On the one hand, (48) can be considered to be about a photograph (of an ancestor), i.e., *a photograph* is the topic of the sentence. On the other hand, *an ancestor in uniform* could also function as the topic of (48), and in the subsequent discourse the speaker could talk about the ancestor rather than the photograph. The reason for this topical ambivalence is to be sought in the tight metonymic link between a person and his/her representation in a picture or photograph.

In a marked critter construction topical ambiguity, as in (48), cannot arise:

(49) A bulldog of a man entered the room.

In (49) the syntactic head *bulldog* is not topical: The sentence is about a man, not about a bulldog.

The findings about the topicality properties of the two constructions are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5. Topicality properties of the unmarked and the marked constructions

Construction	*a* N_1 *of a* N_2	*a* N_{ANIMAL} *of a* N_{HUMAN}
Topic	a N_1 Exception: If N_1 is a picture noun, then by metonymic extension, *a* N_2 is a possible topic.	a N_{HUMAN}

4.4.6. Figure-ground organization

A final property that distinguishes the marked from the unmarked construction is their internal organization in terms of figure and ground. In Talmy (2000:184) the figure is characterized as "a moving or conceptually movable entity whose site, path, or orientation is conceived as a variable", whereas the ground is regarded as a "reference entity", "with respect to which the Figure's site, path, or orientation is characterized". Talmy's definition is aimed at capturing the difference between sentence pairs profiling spatial relationships as in (50), but also more abstract relationships as in (51):

(50) a. The bike is near the house. (Talmy 2000:314)
b. ?The house is near the bike. (Talmy 2000:314)

(51) a. My sister resembles Madonna. (Talmy 2000:318)
b. ?Madonna resembles my sister. (Talmy 2000:318)

The sentence pairs in (50a,b) and (51a,b) express basically the same content (at least, they are truth-conditionally equivalent), but while

sentences (50a) and (51a) are fine, there is something distinctly odd about (50b) and (51b). As to the sentences in (50), it is more natural for the smaller, movable object 'bike', whose location is defined relative to the bigger, immobile object 'house', to function as figure, whereas the 'house' is a natural ground (or landmark in Langacker's terminology). Thus (50a) is normally more adequate than (50b). Analogously in (51), the resemblance relation is best defined relative to the speaker's sister as figure, as in (51a), rather than relative to pop star Madonna, as in (51b).

The permutation of figure and ground is usually referred to as 'figure-ground reversal'. I contend that some kind of figure-ground reversal is also at work in the marked construction, as compared to the unmarked construction; however, unlike the standard cases cited in the cognitive semantic literature, it is not meaning-preserving but indicative of a conceptual contrast. To see this, consider the nominal expression *a picture of a woman* in (52):

(52) The artist pointed to a picture of a woman.

The first meaning of *a picture of a woman* is 'a pictorial representation of a woman'. This is an instance of the unmarked construction, as can be demonstrated by applying the battery of syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic tests developed in sections 4.4.1-4.4.5. The second meaning of the expression is, however, expressive and can be paraphrased as 'a paragon of a woman', i.e. a woman who is a perfect instance of the category 'woman', e.g. smart, beautiful, elegant, etc. This second meaning is comparable to the expressive sense of *a* N_{ANIMAL} *of a* N_{HUMAN} constructions like *a lamb of a husband*, *a racehorse of a man*, *a rat of a boyfriend*, etc. Table 6 lists the differential behavior of the two constructionally homonymous constructions instantiated by *a picture of a woman*.

Table 6. Comparing the unmarked and the marked (expressive) sense of *a picture of a woman*

PROPERTIES	*a picture of woman* 'a pictorial representation of a woman' UNMARKED	*a picture of woman* 'a paragon of a woman' MARKED (expressive)
syntactic head	*a picture*	*a picture*
conceptual head	*a picture*	*a woman*
"expressive" head	—	*a picture*
entailment	⊨ *a picture* (of x)	⊨ *a woman* (x)
referentiality	*a picture* REFERENTIAL *a woman* REFERENTIAL	*a picture* NON-REFERENTIAL/ATTRIBUTIVE *a woman* REFERENTIAL
anaphoric constraints	(i) indefinite *one* (ii) personal/possessive/ relative pronoun corefers with NP_1 or NP_2	(i) *indefinite *one* (ii) personal/possessive/ relative pronoun corefers with NP_2
potential topic	*a picture*	*a woman*
figure-ground organization	**figure-ground**	**ground-figure**

*use is unacceptable

In the last row of Table 6, the thesis to be defended in this section is printed in bold. I claim that the perceptual structure of the unmarked construction ('a pictorial representation of a woman') is as represented in (53), whereas the structure of the marked construction ('a paragon of a woman') is as in (54):

(53) $[\text{a picture}]_{\text{figure}}$ of $[\text{a woman}]_{\text{ground}}$
(54) $[\text{a picture}]_{\text{ground}}$ of $[\text{a woman}]_{\text{figure}}$

In (53), *a picture* is interpreted relative to the reference entity (or 'landmark' in Langacker's terms) *a woman*: a specific picture represents a specific woman. In contrast, in (54), *a picture* denotes a property of a woman, i.e., it functions as a semantic modifier of *woman* in the same

sense that *perfect* is a modifying attribute in *a perfect woman*.[15] The "figure-ground reversal" at work in (54), in comparison to the unmarked pattern in (53), is obviously not meaning-preserving but leads to a completely different meaning due to the semantic function of *a picture* as a conceptual modifier.

5. Conclusions

This chapter has demonstrated how two constructions that contain animal terms rely for their interpretation on a cultural model of the animals in question. A verb-particle construction such as *rat out* 'inform on (someone to a person of authority)' or an expressive noun phrase construction such as *a rat of a boyfriend* 'a morally despicable boyfriend' are assigned their respective senses via selection of a component of a (negative) cultural model of rats. The meaning of such constructions – like that of many other expressions in natural language – is not compositional but motivated. This result is in line with Langacker's (2008:14) principle of *naturalness*, which stipulates that

> Language – when properly analyzed – is by and large reasonable and understandable in view of its semiological and interactive functions, as well as its biological, cognitive, and sociocultural grounding.

Animal folk models, as reflected in the lexico-grammar of languages, tend to be conservative (exhibit "cultural lag"), i.e., they are not immediately influenced by new scientific insights nor by cultural developments, e.g. changes in attitudes towards animals (see Panther and Thornburg 2012). The animal metaphors used to conceptualize human behavior are thus often based on outdated biological models.

A consequence of this kind of conceptual "fossilization" is that metaphorical coding – in particular in terms of animal metaphors – does not necessarily reflect the thinking of the individual language user. The analysis of critter constructions challenges the somewhat simplistic idea widely held in cognitive metaphor theory that human thinking is largely determined by metaphor. Metaphors are often just ways of talking, rather than ways of thinking.

[15] To emphasize an important point again: from the semantic fact that *a picture (of)* serves as a conceptual modifier, it does not necessarily follow that it is also a syntactic modifier (see section 4.4.1).

References

Aarts, Bas. Binominal noun phrases in English. *Transactions of the Philological Society* 96, (1998):117-158.

Abbott, Barbara. *Reference*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Abraham, Werner. Ein Schatz von einem Kind: zur Prädidatssyntax binominaler Nominalkonstituenten. *Groninger Arbeiten zur germanistischen Linguistik* 41, (1997):1-11.

Chomsky, Noam. *Syntactic Structures*. The Hague: Mouton, 1957.

Foolen, Ad. Expressive binominal NPs in Germanic and Romance languages. In *Studies in Linguistic Motivation*, edited by Günter Radden and Klaus-Uwe Panther, 75-100. Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 2004.

Friedrich, Paul. Maximizing ethnopoetics: fine-tuning anthropological experience. In *Language, Culture, and Society: Key Topics in Linguistic Anthropology*, edited by Christine Jourdan and Kevin Tuite, 207-228. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Lakoff, George and Mark Johnson. *Philosophy in the Flesh*. New York: Basic Books, 1999.

—. *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003.

Langacker, Ronald. *Cognitive Grammar: A Basic Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Panther, Klaus-Uwe. Metonymy as a usage event. In *Cognitive Linguistics: Current Applications and Future Perspectives*, edited by Gitte Kristiansen, Michel Achard, René Dirven, and Francisco J. Ruiz de Mendoza Ibáñez, 147-185. Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 2006.

Panther, Klaus-Uwe and Günter Radden. Introduction: Reflections on motivation revisited. In *Motivation in Grammar and the Lexicon*, edited by Klaus-Uwe Panther and Günter Radden, 1-26. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2011.

Panther, Klaus-Uwe and Linda L. Thornburg. A cognitive approach to inferencing in conversation. *Journal of Pragmatics* 30, (1998):755-769.

—. Introduction: On the nature of conceptual metonymy. In *Metonymy and Pragmatic Inferencing*, edited by Klaus-Uwe Panther and Linda L. Thornburg, 1-20. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2003.

—. Metonymy. In *The Oxford Handbook of Cognitive Linguistics*, edited by Dirk Geeraerts and Hubert Cuyckens, 236-263. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

—. Conceptualizing humans as animals in English verb particle constructions. *Language Value* 4, (2012):63-83. http://www.e-revistes.uji.es/languagevalue.

Quinn, Naomi and Dorothy Holland. Culture and cognition. In *Cultural Models in Language and Thought*, edited by Dorothy Holland and Naomi Quinn, 3-40. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.

Talmy, Leonard. *Cognitive Semantics.* Vol. 1. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000.

Vendler, Zeno. Verbs and times. *The Philosophical Review* 66, (1957):143-160.

Vossler, Karl. *Frankreichs Kultur im Spiegel seiner Sprachentwicklung: Geschichte der französischen Schriftsprache von den Anfängen bis zur klassischen Neuzeit*. Heidelberg: Carl Winters Universitätsbuchhandlung, 1921.

Wierzbicka, Anna. *Understanding Cultures through Their Keywords*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.