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## **The causal frame as a motivating factor of figurative meaning**

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### **1 Introduction**

Metonymy is a central conceptual strategy (Dirven 1993), which has been found to underlie some grammatical phenomena (e.g., Panther et al. 2009; Bierwiazzonek 2013; Ruiz de Mendoza 2021: chap. 2). One of the central points of attention in this research domain has been the motivating role of the EFFECT FOR CAUSE metonymy, which has been argued to underlie some grammatical constructions (e.g., *He gave me bruises* ‘a beating that caused bruises’) (see Kövecses and Radden 1998; Panther and Thornburg 2000). Herrero (2018) has further noted that, beyond grammar, this metonymy is prone to interacting with hyperbole (e.g., in *We had to refuel 1000 times* the cause of frequent refueling is the excessive length of the trip). However, the EFFECT FOR CAUSE metonymy can play a more important role than has been identified in the previous literature. The present paper offers a preliminary investigation in this direction by examining the following analytical situations: (i) the motivation for the apparent ascription of properties from one entity to another, which can result in a figure of speech traditionally called *hypallage* (e.g., as in a *sad film* ‘a film that causes sadness’); (ii) cases of personification where the effect and the cause are designated by the same expression (e.g., in *Death is a thief*, death is figuratively treated both as an effect and a cause); (iii) some metaphorical amalgams that would otherwise contain a source-target mismatch (e.g., filthiness can only map onto immorality on the grounds of the similarity in the revolting effects of both domains on people); (iv) cases of synesthesia involving cross-domain similarity of effects (a *dull red* is one lacking intensity, like a *dull noise*). The resulting picture is one where the EFFECT FOR CAUSE metonymy is seen as a ubiquitous phenomenon which can not only motivate grammar but also act as a prerequisite for other cognitive operations resulting in conceptually complex figurative expressions.

### **2 The EFFECT FOR CAUSE metonymy in grammar**

Koveces and Radden (1998:56) exemplify the impact of cause-effect relationships in conceptualization. For example, the property of being healthy is attributed to people, but we can also say that someone has a *healthy complexion* meaning that he or she is healthy since good health generally shows in a healthy complexion. This is a case of the CAUSE FOR EFFECT metonymy. The converse metonymy, EFFECT FOR CAUSE, these authors point out, is not only possible too, but it seems to be more productive. In general, a state or event can stand for the entity or condition that caused it. For example, a *slow road* is one where traffic is slow because of the poor conditions of the road and a *sad book* is a book that causes its readers to feel sad. There are other expressions that respond to the EFFECT FOR CAUSE metonymy; for example, in *She's our hope* (i.e., the cause of our hope) the emotion stands for the cause of the emotion, and in *Here comes trouble* the mental state stands for the person that causes it.

Panther and Thornburg (2000) have noted that the RESULT FOR ACTION metonymy is a special case of the EFFECT FOR CAUSE pattern. The RESULT FOR ACTION metonymy underlies grammatical constructions where a resulting state or event stands for whatever causes it. For example, in *How to be*

*rich in one week*, based on the construction how to be + adj, actually means ‘How to act in such a way that, as a result, one can become rich in one week’. The licensing activity of this metonymy is evidenced by the oddity of using adjectives that are not clearly resultative: #*How to be tall/old/clever in one week*. The same applies to other constructions. This is the case of the imperative negative (*Don’t be deceived by what he says* ‘Do something to the effect so that as a result you will not be deceived by what he says’), the imperative with a non-actional verb (*Know this chapter by next Tuesday* ‘Do something to the effect that you will know this chapter by Tuesday’) and *What’s That N?* (*What’s that bruise on your leg?* ‘What caused that bruise on your leg?’).

The EFFECT FOR CAUSE metonymy can easily be integrated into the ACTIONS ARE TRANSFERS metaphor, illustrated by Lakoff (1993) with the example *He gave me a kick*, where the action of kicking is treated as an object that is transferred from the kicker to the person that receives the kick. Now, actions like kicking (or any other type of vigorous blow) can also be treated in terms of their underlying effect-cause structure. Evidence of this is the use of *bruises* in *He gave me bruises*. Here, the notion of *bruises* stands for the cause of the bruises as inferable from the context of situation.

We may wonder why the EFFECT FOR CAUSE metonymy underlies grammatical constructions like those discussed above. One plausible reason relates to what Langacker (1993) called *cognitive saliency*, which results in such preferences as our tendency to assign greater prominence to humans over non-humans, to containers over their contents, to controlling entities over controlled entities, and to wholes over parts. In the same vein, it may be argued that, since effects are usually easier to identify perceptually than their corresponding causes, there is a tendency for effects to take cognitive precedence over their causes. This cognitive saliency principle accounts for the possibility of activating the EFFECT FOR CAUSE metonymy within the ACTIONS ARE TRANSFERS metaphorical framework resulting in the expression *He gave me bruises*. This expression alternates with *He gave me a kick*, which places more emphasis on the causal action thereby relegating the effect to a secondary role. A similar rationale applies to the other examples discussed above: *Don’t be deceived by what he says* gives prominence to the negative result (being deceived) over the actions that lead to such a result; in *Know this chapter by next Tuesday*, the focus is on the gain of knowledge over the actions leading to it; in *What’s that bruise on your leg?* the existence of the bruise takes precedence over the implicit cause of the bruise.

### 3 Effect-for-cause and figurative language

Through the activity of the EFFECT FOR CAUSE metonymy, the “effect-over-cause” preference can also play a supportive role for figurative language use. This can happen in at least three ways. In one of them, this metonymy can result in one of the various recognized forms of *hypallage*. In the literature, hypallage has often been explained as a “transferred epithet” (Huddleston and Pullum 2002:558). It consists in using an epithet to qualify a noun denoting an entity other than that to which the epithet applies. We have seen some examples of this phenomenon in Section 2, with expressions like *healthy complexion*, *slow road*, and *sad book*, which involve a causal pattern (Dupriez 1991:213). However, hypallage can respond to other metonymic motivations, as in the phrase *a thoughtful cigarette*, where someone is smoking a cigarette while absorbed in thought. This expression illustrates a more complex metonymic pattern which transforms the manner of performing an action (thoughtfully) into a property of the object of the action. The property of the object thus stands for the manner in which such an action is performed. There are still other possible metonymic sources for hypallage, but EFFECT FOR CAUSE, as pointed out by Kövecses and Radden (1998) provides a productive pattern (see also Peña and Ruiz de Mendoza 2022).

A second way in which the EFFECT FOR CAUSE metonymy supports figurative language use is through its interaction with other figures of speech. Herrero (2018) provides us with an example of interaction between the EFFECT FOR CAUSE metonymy and hyperbole: *We had to refuel 1000 times*. Here, the target meaning of the hyperbole can be paraphrased as ‘We had to refuel too many times (more than expected)’. This paraphrase captures what relevance theorist call explicated meaning (cf. Sperber and Wilson 1995) that can be used to derive the implicature that the trip was excessively long, on the grounds that frequent refueling would be a logical effect of an excessively long trip (the cause). This implicature is guided by the abductive inferential schema provided by the EFFECT FOR CAUSE metonymic pattern (cf. Panther 2005; Panther and Thornburg 2018). However, note that the metonymy does not require the hyperbole to convey this implicature; that is, a roughly equivalent non-hyperbolic utterance like *We had to refuel too many times* could likewise stand for the assumption that the trip was too long. Conversely, we could use a hyperbole to convey this assumption without the support of the EFFECT FOR CAUSE metonymy: *The trip was 1000 times longer than we thought*. This means that the hyperbole and the metonymy are self-standing, neither of them being a precondition for the activity of the other.

There is a third way in which the EFFECT FOR CAUSE metonymy can play a role in figurative language use. In this third way, the metonymy becomes a licensing factor for a given figurative use, a situation that is conceptually more complex than the other two, but which results in more tightly integrated conceptual combinations (Ruiz de Mendoza 2017). One example is provided by the well-known metaphor *Death is a thief*, which personifies death. This personification is possible because we can conceive of death not only as the result of the process of dying but also as the result of willful action. This latter interpretation relates to our understanding of death in terms of the EFFECT FOR CAUSE metonymy, as reflected in *Drinking will be your death* where *your death* (the effect) stands for ‘the cause of your death’. Now, a cause can exist without a controlled action (e.g., old age deterioration can cause death or excessive rain can cause a flood). However, in everyday experience we often perceive controlled actions as being causal and the resulting changes of state as being the effects associated with such causal actions (e.g., killing causes death, striking an object can cause it to move, hitting a glass can cause it to break, etc.). Because of this tight relationship between actions and causes and between results and effects, assigning an intentional nature to ‘death’, when seen as a cause, follows naturally. Thus, the causer of the event of death can also be seen as the agent of a death-causing action. This dual nature of the notion death, which allows us to see this concept as an effect and a cause, on the one hand, and as an agent, on the other hand, is the reason why death is often personified. One classical example of this personification is the depiction of death as a hooded skeleton that carries a scythe (see Fauconnier and Turner 2002:291–295 for a detailed study of this depiction). In the case of *Death is a thief*, the dual nature of ‘death’ is used to see death as “depriving” people of their lives (where life is a state), in analogy with thieves, who deprive people of their possessions (where a possession is an object). In general, the cessation of a state can be treated metaphorically as the loss of a property (e.g., *She lost her optimism*). If the cessation is caused, it can be seen in terms of deprivation (e.g., *They took away my freedom*). We can label this metaphor (CAUSING) THE END OF A STATE IS (CAUSING) A LOSS. Since life is a state, a specification of this metaphor can happen by means of the incorporation of the metaphor LIFE IS A POSSESSION (cf. *He sold his life dearly*) into (CAUSING) THE END OF A STATE IS (CAUSING) A LOSS. In *Death is a thief*, these two metaphors, which can be operational independently of each other – as illustrated by the examples provided above – give rise to one of the various patterns of metaphorical amalgams discussed in Ruiz de Mendoza and Galera (2014:97) (see also Ruiz de Mendoza (2017:153; 2021:117). In this pattern, which is represented in Figure 1 below, the function of the metaphor LIFE IS A POSSESSION is to parameterize the generic nature of the correspondences of the receiving metaphor (CAUSING) THE END OF A STATE IS (CAUSING) A LOSS.

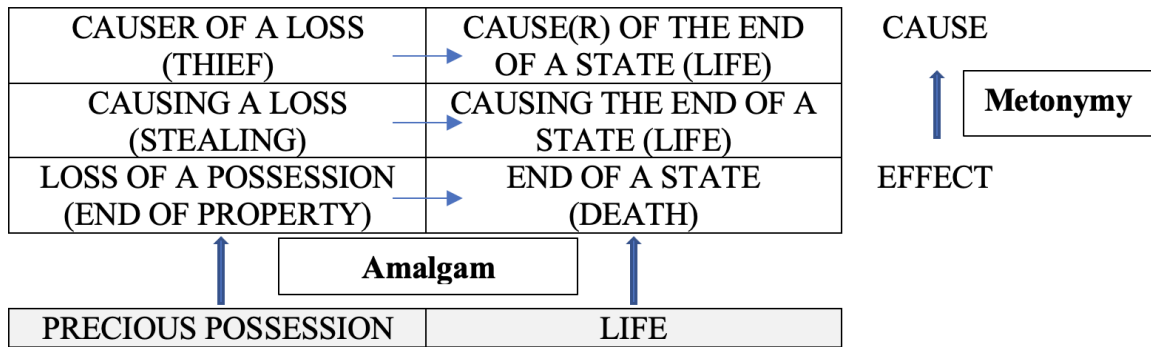


Figure 1. *Death is a thief*

This metaphorical amalgam is possible thanks to our ability to see death, from a metonymic perspective, as an effect that stands for its underlying cause. Once seen in this way, death can be ascribed an agentive nature. The EFFECT FOR CAUSE metonymy thus becomes a prerequisite for the personification of death.

Another analytical situation is illustrated by the metaphorical expression *My boss is a pig* ('oppressive'). This expression is the result of combining A PERSON IS A PIG, which is one of the many specifications of PEOPLE ARE ANIMALS, and IMMORALITY IS FILTH (Ruiz de Mendoza and Galera 2014: 97). Evidently, the latter metaphor acts as a specification of the behavioral element of the former. Again, the question is – as in the case of *Death is a thief* – what licenses this kind of amalgam. The answer lies in our understanding of the activity of the EFFECT FOR CAUSE metonymy as providing a point of convergence for the two metaphors: filthiness and immorality can raise feelings of disgust in us; such feelings, in turn, afford access to, and stand for, their underlying causes, which can thus enter into an analogical relationship whereby a pig's filthiness can map onto a boss's abusiveness. Without the metonymy – which here, unlike in *Death is a thief*, acts on both the metaphorical source and target domains – the underlying causes would not participate in the mapping. The reason for this is that the causes are in principle unrelated and can only be brought together through their shared effects. Why this can happen is not difficult to understand if we take into account the principle whereby the effect stands out over its cause because of its stronger perceptual accessibility. Figure 2 captures the essentials of this metonymy-licensed amalgamation process.

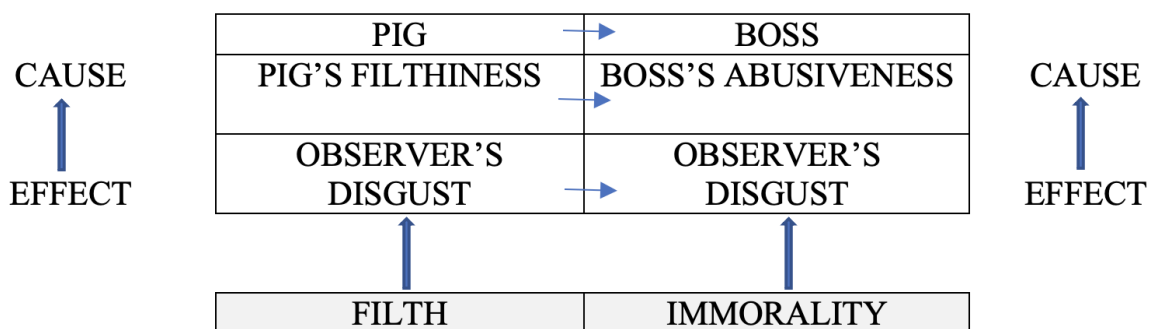


Figure 2. *My boss is a pig*

This analytical pattern is quite close to the one found in *synesthesia*, where one sense is described in terms of another sense. For example, we can say that colors and aches are *dull*, when they are not intensely felt. However, only noises are literally dull, also when they lack intensity, as in *The box hit the floor with a dull thud*. We may wonder what allows the transfer of *dull* from the domain of hearing to the domain of vision. Strik Lievers (2017) has argued that examples like *dull color* are metaphorical. They are, since we use our knowledge about our perception of intensity in the domain of sound to reason about our perception of intensity in the domain of color. However, there is an additional factor: the metaphor combines with hypallage, which is based on the EFFECT FOR CAUSE metonymy. This metonymy has a licensing role, since it enables the otherwise impossible cross-sensory mapping. There is nothing intrinsic to the domain of sound that allows us to map it onto the domain of color. However, if we expand these two domains to make them include how people relate to them in terms of effect-cause relationships, then, the cross-sensory mapping is workable in a meaningful manner: as with the metaphorical amalgam in *My boss is a pig*, where the similarity of effects allows us to map an animal's filthiness onto human abusiveness, in *dull color* the similarity of effects in terms of intensity allows us to map sound onto color. That way, a *dull color* is one that causes little or no impact on people in terms of brightness, just as a dull noise is one that has little impact on people in terms of loudness.

## 4 Conclusions

This paper has examined the role of the EFFECT FOR CAUSE metonymy in figurative language. It has revealed the existence of three activity patterns. One consists in the direct application of the metonymy to produce hypallage. Hypallage can be supported by other high-level patterns, but EFFECT FOR CAUSE is a productive one probably because of its grounding in the cognitive saliency principle according to which effects tend to take precedence over causes. This precedence is in turn grounded in perception, since effects are generally more accessible in sensory terms than their underlying causes. In the second pattern, the metonymy interacts with hyperbole to produce special meaning effects, but both the metonymy and the hyperbole are independent of each other. In the third pattern, the metonymy plays a licensing role. This has been exemplified by means of two cases of metaphorical amalgam and an example of synesthesia. In the first case of amalgam, the metonymy motivates the dual nature of death as an effect and a cause, thereby allowing us to treat it as an agent, which motivates the personification of death as a thief. In the second case, the metonymy enables the integration of IMMORALITY IS FILTH into PEOPLE ARE ANIMALS by bringing together two initially unrelated causes through the similarity of their effects. This property of the EFFECT FOR CAUSE metonymy is also at work in cases of synesthesia where two initially unrelated causes are made part of a cross-sensory metaphorical mapping through the similarity of their effects.

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