HOW *LIKE*-SIMILE RELATES TO METAPHOR: AN EXPLORATION OF ANALYTICAL PARAMETERS

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Abstract: Traditional accounts of figurative language consider *like*-simile and metaphor to be largely equivalent. However, more recent research shows that metaphor expresses a closer association between the two terms of comparison than *like*-simile. This paper proposes a variety of criteria to understand the similarities and differences between these two figures of speech, among them the abstractness of the resemblance relationship, the greater subjectivity of metaphor, and the role of comparison in contrast to other factors. This discussion casts light on the metaphor-simile equivalence versus non-equivalence debate.

Keywords: correlation metaphor, high-level resemblance, low-level resemblance, resemblance metaphor, simile, subjectivity

1. Introduction

In literary theory and rhetoric simile has traditionally been defined as an overt comparison and metaphor as a covert comparison (cf. Leech 1969: 156; Holman 1972: 498). In both cases, the comparison departs from our common expectations). For example, *Jane's house is like her neighbor's* compares two houses but cannot be considered simile since there is nothing unexpected about that kind of comparison. However, the sentence *Her house is like a pigsty* ('a messy, dirty, and smelly house') is a simile since the comparison is unusual and therefore taken as non-literal or figurative. Moreover, since both simile and metaphor are based on comparison, theorists have also claimed that they are functionally equivalent, the only difference being one of syntactic expression (cf. Fogelin 1988; Miller 1993; Tversky 1977). In this view, the simile *Her house is like a pigsty* and the metaphor *Her house is a pigsty* are essentially equivalent.

This view of simile is the one that has been popularized in handbooks, dictionaries and encyclopedias. For example, Brown and Miller's (2013) reference work *The Cambridge Dictionary of Linguistics* does not have a separate entry for simile. Instead, it refers to the entry for metaphor, which is defined as "the comparison of two categories" when the comparison is "not overtly signaled", whereas simile is "a metaphor in which the comparison is signaled" (Brown and Miller 2013: 284). The idea that there can be implicit or explicit signaling of the comparison refers to what traditional accounts call the "ground", that is, whatever the two terms of the comparison have in common (Leech 1969: 156).

The same dictionary entry illustrates simile with examples like *as good as gold*, *as poor as a church mouse*, and *Pleasures are like poppies spread*, and then exemplifies metaphor with the sentence *The firm is on the rocks*. This metaphor, according to this dictionary, "maps" the business world, as a source domain (traditionally called the vehicle), onto voyaging on the ocean, the target domain (traditionally called the tenor). The assumption that metaphor is a mapping from a source to a target domain has evidently been borrowed from George Lakoff's now well-known formulation of Conceptual Metaphor Theory within Cognitive Linguistics (cf. Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Lakoff 1987, 1993). A metaphorical mapping is a set of correspondences between discrete conceptual domains where relevant aspects of the target domain (traditionally called the *tenor*) are understood in terms of the structure and logic of corresponding items in the source domain (traditionally called the *vehicle*). Interestingly, this selection of examples is not at all like the "pigsty" examples provided above. On a superficial look, they illustrate the general idea that there is an unexpected comparison. Thus, we think of gold as a valuable metal, of many churches attended by ordinary people attend as poor places, of scattered flowers as ephemeral, and of being "on the rocks" as being in a dangerous situation when sailing on the sea. However, on closer inspection, these examples reveal deeper processes than mere feature-based comparison. We discuss them in greater depth in Section 2 below. This discussion points to the need for a re-exploration of the relationship between metaphor and simile, especially *like*-simile, which is redefined in Section 3 in terms of three parameters, viz., high vs. low-level resemblance, subjectivity vs. objectivity, and the primary versus secondary role of the comparison. Then, the application of these parameters to a variety of contrasting examples allows us to further investigate the metaphor-simile equivalence issue. Finally, Section 4 offers the main conclusions of the present study.

2. Beyond attribute-based comparison

Let us start with the simile *as good as gold.* In principle, this expression compares an entity or a state of affairs with gold in terms of shared "goodness". However, the notion of "good" is too broad; for example, a good Christian is a loyal follower of Christ's precepts; a good engineer is one that makes effective designs of technical equipment; a good neighbor is one that behaves kindly; a good game is one that spectators enjoy, etc. To tell which aspect of being good applies, the ground for the comparison ('goodness') needs to be restricted. This can happen through contextual adaptation or through the conventionalization of its use. In this connection, the comparison *as good as gold* has two heavily conventionalized senses: in one it applies to a well-behaved person (e.g., a student in class); in the other, to an authentic or genuine object (e.g., a painting). These two senses are frequently associated with "good" but how they relate to "gold" is unclear if we stick to why we think of gold as being "good". Gold

is "good" in the sense that it is materially valuable and it can relate to behavior only in that good behavior is admirable, important, useful, etc., and to genuineness only to the extent that we think of gold in terms of the purity of the metal. Non-material value and purity are in fact metaphorical notions whose relevance in this simile goes beyond the material into the attitudinal world. Thus, the comparison is not between material attributes of gold and corresponding material attributes in a person or an object, but between the intensity of the way in which the two terms of the comparison are taken to be desirable (i.e., good) through convention.

Take now the second comparative expression: *as poor as a church mouse*. This comparison is non-transparent or idiomatic. In origin, the expression was *as hungry as a church mouse*, which made reference to the fact that priests blessing the sacrament bread were required to prevent any crumb from falling to the altar or to the ground. Because of this, in folk logic, church mice had no bread crumbs to feed on. Since hunger and poverty are easily associated in our minds, once speakers lost track of the origin of the comparison, the shift from the original ground to the new one was straightforward. As with the previous example, the material aspects of the comparison (e.g., hunger, poverty) are secondary to the other more subjective features. In the present case, the comparison with the hungry mice situation adds playfulness and intensity to the interpretation.

Then, we have an example of *like*-simile: *Pleasures are like poppies spread.* Admittedly, without any further context, this example of simile is difficult to interpret since the basis for the comparison is unclear. This is not necessarily the case with other *like*-similes whose ground is not specified. Examples such as *run like the wind* ('fast'), *climb like a money* ('skillfully'), and *grow like weed* ('very quickly') are easy to understand since they focus on prominent properties of the source of the comparison. They are also frequent, which provides accessible default interpretations. However, *like*-similes can be less transparent. When that happens, speakers have the choice to provide further discourse elaboration to clarify the ground for the comparison. This is the case with the *like*-simile *Pleasures are like poppies spread.* It is part of a quote from the poem "Tam O'Shanter", by Robert Burns, and it actually reads as follows:

> But pleasures are like poppies spread,
> You seize the flower, it's bloom is shed.

This simile makes more sense when we think of pleasures as elusive and ephemeral. In Burns's poem this conceptual association is made possible through the metaphorical analogy between seizing a flower

and having pleasure. Seizing a flower can make it fall apart in the same way that pleasures can dissipate. This analogical elaboration points to the nature of the ground of comparison between pleasures and scattered poppies.

Finally, we come to the metaphor *The firm is on the rocks*. Here, *The Cambridge Dictionary of Linguistics* takes for granted the existence of some underlying comparison between a business and a journey. If such a comparison is possible, we should be able to provide the following metaphorical equation together with its *like*-simile rendering: *A business is (like) a journey*. This statement is indeed possible if we think of a business and a journey as sharing a means-goals pattern; for example, travelers and businesspeople have goals that they want to achieve (e.g., get to their destination and make the business prosper respectively), they have plans in this regard, they may need to sort out difficulties, and so on. Within the context of this mapping, the specific expression *on the rocks*, which belongs to the journey domain, makes reference to being shipwrecked on rocks in the sea. The situation thus invoked applies to a business that, like a sinking ship, is in danger, unable to continue its activities. Much of the meaning of the metaphorical sentence *The firm is on the rocks* can be captured through a *like*-simile whose source domain is expressed through a nominal expression: *The firm is like a ship on the rocks*.

This deeper analysis shows that simile can be related to metaphor since both figures of speech involve what we can call *interpretive* comparison. This notion is inspired in the relevance-theoretic discussion of interpretive uses of language (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 228), which are those whose propositional form is not true of a given state of affairs but invokes it through inference. When the propositional form matches reality there is a *descriptive* use of language. Evidently, in this view of the descriptive/interpretive distinction, the comparison *This house is like a pigsty* is interpretive. It requires the hearer to find a way in which a house can resemble a pigsty and then to explore possible meaning implications that match contextual requirements. Since pigsties are remarkably filthy, the most central meaning implication is that the house is too dirty for human cleanliness standards. Subsidiary inferences add to this central meaning; e.g., the house is disgusting, uncomfortable, uninhabitable. Other possible inferences would relate to contexts in which the speaker, beyond complaining, recommends some remedial course of action; e.g., the landlord or the tenants should be asked to clean the house; social services should take care of this situation, etc. This kind of interpretive activity, of course, is not required in a literal comparison because of its descriptive nature. The propositional form of *Jane's house is like her neighbor's* applies descriptively to a state of affairs in which two houses are found to be (nearly) alike, with any meaning implication being directly based on this propositional form rather than on an

interpretation of such a form. For example, one possible implication could be: "if the two houses are alike Jane should not envy her neighbor". This implication is built on the speaker's perception of the two houses as being very similar, thus rendering envy meaningless.

The analysis also shows that the nature of the comparison is not the same in metaphor as in *like*-simile. It is true that sometimes the difference between the two figures is nearly inconsequential. This is the case of *This house is like a pigsty* and *This house is a pigsty*, where the metaphor only seems to set up a tighter relationship between the two terms of comparison. However, there are situations that favor either a metaphor or a *like*-simile. Compare:

(1) He is lightning. How could he not dodge the attack?
(2) Inspiration is like lightning. You never know when it will strike.

Example (1) highlights the protagonist's speed as something intrinsic to him. One of the outstanding properties of lightning is its extreme and sudden speed. The intrinsic nature of the property in example (1) seems to favor a metaphor, *like*-simile (*He is like lightning*) being somewhat less apt to capture this meaning requirement for the context provided in the example. On the other hand, example (2) refers to a less remarkable property of lightning: its random nature. This property provides a good fit for inspiration, which, being bound to creativity, is uncontrolled. However, it is not an essential property of lightning but one that relates to how it can affect objects in nature. Using a *like*-simile to capture this property is a better solution than using metaphor (*Inspiration is lightning*).

Then, we have different formal constraints on metaphor and *like*-simile. The previous example, *The firm is on the rocks*, provides adequate illustration of this point. It cannot be directly converted into *like*-simile since one of its terms (expressing the source domain) is not an explicit nominal expression, as we noted above. *Like*-simile requires its two terms to be of this kind, whereas metaphor allows more expressive variation. This is not a new observation by any means. Take the following stock metaphor (Leech 1969: 156):

(3) The ship plowed the waves.
(4) The ship was a plow through the ways.

Only (4) can be rendered in the form of a *like*-simile:

(5) The ship was like a plow through the waves.

The meaning shared by (3), (4), and (5) is the idea that the ship cut through the waves like a plow that plows the land. However, the differences in syntactic realization have consequences from the point of view of how the relationship between the two terms of the comparison is envisaged. The relationship between the ship and the plow is tighter in (3) and (4) than in (5). In turn, (3) requires construing the state of affairs designated by the expression from an actional perspective, whereas (4) is focused on the solidity of the ship's hull and the sharpness of its plow-like keel. Furthermore, from a pragmatic perspective, the tightness of the relationship between the properties of a plow and a ship provided by the metaphorical solutions in (3) and (4) underscores the subjective aspects of meaning interpretation. In the metaphor, the visual impact of the ship's keel as it cleaves through the surface of the water is greater than in the *like*-simile, where the relationship between source and target is not as close.

The observations made in this section suggest that metaphor and simile serve different meaning functions and that the study of the relationship between the two figures of speech requires an examination of other analytical parameters than mere attribute-based comparison. Some such parameters are addressed in Section 3.

3. Parameters of analysis

This section discusses different analytical criteria to separate metaphor from *like*-simile. These two figures have been argued to be equivalent to the extent that they involve two terms of comparison that have to be explored for implicit similarities. We will not address restricted comparison based on the formulation *X is as Y as* Z since it makes the ground for the comparison explicit. Section 3.1 introduces the distinction between two broad levels of cross-domain similarity, high and low, the former of which applies to metaphors grounded in the correlation of experiences. These metaphors have been clearly differentiated from resemblance metaphors (e.g., Grady 1999) but, from the point of view presented here, all metaphors involve some form of resemblance. This makes the distinction between high and low-level resemblance important to adequately deal with the differences between *like*-simile and metaphors of any kind. Section 3.2 introduces the notion of subjective intensification and evaluation into the analysis. Many scholars, usually literary theorists, have noted the greater meaning impact of metaphor over simile. This section makes an explicit connection between this intuitive insight and experimental evidence considering *like*-simile a less restricted figure of speech than metaphor. It also highlights the role of

metaphor in conveying subjective evaluative meaning as opposed to *like*-simile, which is generally inconsistent with this meaning function. Section 3.3 deals with the categorization view of metaphor, which comes from experimental psychology. This view of metaphor has been used by some scholars to separate this figure from *like*-simile, which seems to be based on comparison rather than categorization. We examine the strength of this view in terms of the distinction between metaphors based on high-level and low-level resemblance, which redefines the role of resemblance in metaphor. Finally, Section 3.4 uses insights from the preceding sections to address the metaphor-simile equivalence issue.

3.1. High vs low-level resemblance

The widespread assumption that metaphor is based on resemblance explains why metaphor and *like*-simile have normally been treated as mere expressive alternatives. With the advent of work on conceptual metaphor in the early 1980s, however, resemblance was seen as just one way of producing metaphor. The emphasis changed to the study of metaphor in terms of the co-occurrence of experiences. This is the essential thesis in Lakoff and Johnson (1980) and in subsequent developments of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (cf. Gibbs 2014, 2017; Grady 1999; Kövecses 2020ab; Lakoff 2009, 2014; Lakoff and Johnson 1999). Resemblance metaphor fell into disinterest in favor of correlation metaphor because the latter was seen as more central to embodied thought, i.e., the assumption that many aspects of human cognition, including abstract thought, are shaped by sensorimotor experience (Bergen 2012; Gibbs 2006; Ritchie 2017). For example, in the metaphor *She felt weighed down with sorrow*, emotional suffering is treated as a physical burden. This metaphor results from the correlation of our physical experience of handling heavy objects, which cause us to bend down, and the psychological discomfort that this situation causes. This correlation of physical and psychological experiences makes the metaphor possible. Conversely, people cheer "up" when they feel free from difficulties. Metaphorically, affliction is a "burden" that can bring us down, and happiness is the release from burden, which is physically reflected in our adopting an upright posture. Evidently, burdens map onto difficulties but there is no physical resemblance between those concepts. However, there is experiential correlation, as noted above. Consequently, Lakoff and Johnson (1980, 1999) assigned to this metaphor the status of a *correlation metaphor*. Metaphors of this kind abound. Here are a few more examples taken from Lakoff and Johnson (1999: 51-54):

AFFECTION IS WARMTH (*She is a warm person*): people feel warm when they are held affectionately.

IMPORTANT IS BIG (*It was a big victory*): big things exert major forces and fill our field of vision.

SIMILARITY IS CLOSENESS (*The new model was a close copy of a previous design*): objects of the same kind tend to group or be grouped together (a flock of birds, a grove of trees, a deck of cards, etc.).

ORGANIZATION IS PHYSICAL STRUCTURE (*She brought together people's individual ideas into a common vision*): understanding the structure of an object requires forming conceptual representations of the relationships between its components.

STATES ARE LOCATIONS (*He is in trouble*): we correlate certain locations with how we feel in them (warm in bed, cool in the shade, safe at home, etc.).

The importance of correlation metaphors in human thought can hardly be overstated. They even play a role in grammar. For example, since states are locations, changes of state are changes of location. This entailment is reflected in some grammatical configurations like some variants of the English resultative construction. Compare *She cut the slice thin* and *She cut the slice into strips*. Both sentences are resultative. However, the first one uses an adjective to express result, while the second one, in the absence of an adjective capturing the kind of change, resorts to a prepositional phrase denoting a figurative change of location. This figurative use, which shapes one of variants of the resultative construction, is licensed by the metaphor A CHANGE OF STATE IS A CHANGE OF LOCATION (Ruiz de Mendoza and Luzondo 2016).

Let us now return to a previous example, *The firm is on the rocks*. Lakoff and Johnson (1999) classify similar expressions as examples of the correlation metaphor PURPOSES ARE DESTINATIONS. This metaphor is grounded in the co-occurrence of two experiences: reaching a position in space and the goal to reach such a position. In terms of this correlation, the expression "on the rocks", which descriptively captures the existence of a major impediment to reach the intended destination, is interpretively used to talk about a serious difficulty to achieve planned goals. The question is that classifying this example as a correlation metaphor, in Conceptual Metaphor Theory, seems to exclude the existence of source-target resemblance (Grady 1999). However, our preliminary analysis of this metaphor did identify a common means-goals pattern for the source and target domains of this metaphor (business and voyaging respectively). In fact, this common pattern is also shared with other metaphors where goal-oriented activities are seen as journeys: keeping love relationships alive over time, career paths, cooperative work, and so on. The reason for this is that these metaphors are all grounded in the more basic correlation metaphor PURPOSES ARE DESTINATIONS, where purposes and destinations share high-level

conceptual structure related to achievement; that is, we have a similar feeling of achievement when reaching a position in space and when accomplishing a goal.

Not any correlation of experiences gives rise to correlation metaphor. High-level similarity is needed. Here are some examples of non-metaphorical correlations:

- Hearing thunder and seeing scared animals running away.
- Seeing puddles on the ground after a day of heavy rain
- Seeing someone lighting a fireplace and other people approaching it to warm up.
- Seeing someone trip over a stone and fall to the ground.
- Feeling amazed while watching the stars in the night sky.
- Holding a person's hand and feeling cared for.
- Drinking coffee during the night and staying awake.
- Feeling emotional relief while counseling with a psychotherapist.
- Feeling tired while making a strenuous effort.

There is no high-level similarity between these pairs of non-metaphorical correlations listed above. By contrast, each of the correlation metaphors drawn from Lakoff and Johnson (1999) is grounded in high-level similarity (Ruiz de Mendoza and Barreras 2022: 21-23; Peña and Ruiz de Mendoza 2022: 99-102 for more detailed accounts of this phenomenon):

DIFFICULTIES ARE BURDENS: Similar feelings of discomfort when handling heavy objects and facing challenges.

AFFECTION IS WARMTH: Similar feelings of comfort when treated with affection and when in a warm place.

IMPORTANT IS BIG: Similar experience of awe and wonder when faced with important events and when in the presence of huge objects.

SIMILARITY IS CLOSENESS: Similar experience of spatial contiguity when comparing objects and when objects are close to each other.

ORGANIZATION IS PHYSICAL STRUCTURE: Similar experience of perceiving structural and logical connections when understanding and learning from sensorimotor perception or when involved in intellectual pursuits.

STATES ARE LOCATIONS: Similar feelings of being in the same condition when in a certain place or in a certain state.

Some scholars have argued for a metonymic origin of correlation metaphors on various grounds, the most common assumption being that the correlation of two experiences integrates them into a common domain of reference (cf. Barcelona 2000; Brdar and Brdar-Szabó 2007; Kövecses 2013; Radden 2002). The question, anyway, is that, independently of their origin, correlation metaphors, like metaphors in general, are used to reason about the world. Metonymy, on the other hand, is a matter of perspective. In metonymy, the source domain provides a point of access to the target domain with which it is experientially related (Kövecses and Radden 1998; Langacker 1993). As a result, the target concept is envisaged from the perspective of the source concept. The existence of a reasoning system is evident in any of the correlation metaphors described above. For example, affectionate people are "warm" and people can be described as warmer or colder depending on how affectionate they are, so much so that a very cold person can be described as "a block of ice". Similarly, decisions can be "big" or "small" in varying degrees depending on their importance. When we reason about decisions in terms of figurative size the central metaphorical correspondence hinges on their impact on people. There is no way in which we can postulate a metonymic shift from big to important and still preserve the underlying reasoning system with all its potentially associated meaning effects.

Making a distinction between low and high-level similarity has consequences to understand how reasoning works for metaphor and for *like*-simile. Both resemblance metaphor and *like*-simile make use of low-level similarity, which is based on sensory perception. For example, the sentences *Her eyes are (like) diamonds* and *Her eyes are as bright as diamonds* map the brightness of diamonds and the impact it can have on people (e.g., feeling attracted to it) onto corresponding attributes in a lady's eyes. High-level similarity, on the other hand, is restricted to correlation metaphor since *like*-simile prefers low-level similarity and high-level similarity is not easily realizable through the equative A IS (LIKE) B form, especially if A and B do not directly share any high-level structure in terms of which they can be categorized. Thus, while it would be possible to say that difficulties are (like) burdens, it would be odd to say that states are (like) locations, or that being similar is being close. Difficulties and burdens can be categorized as challenging situations. This common high-level structure allows for a similar experiential reaction when faced with either difficulties or burdens. The situation is different in the case of states and locations. There is no common superordinate category. A state is a condition or mode of existence, but a location is a bounded region in space. It is not a condition, although we can associate certain conditions

with certain locations. It is only because of this association that the metaphor STATES ARE LOCATIONS is possible.

It should be noted that correlation metaphor can lead to conceptual conflation, that is, the mixing up of the source and target categories in the mind. This phenomenon, called conceptual *conflation*, is a consequence of the embodied nature of correlation metaphor. When two distinct concepts are conflated, they become indistinguishable, for practical purposes, unless the subject consciously decides to set them apart through *deconflation* (Grady and Johnson, 2002). For example, when conflation happens, people use the adjectives warm and cold as if they were literal, although it is possible to differentiate between them through conscious effort. The A IS (LIKE) B form requires the application of this latter process, but, in general, it is not cognitively productive to deconflate concepts unless there is some motivating factor to that effect. Take again the business-journey mapping. The usual manifestations of this mapping reveal conflation. For example, the sentence *Our business is finally moving fast in the right direction* is much more natural than the following awkward paraphrase: 'Our business is finally making progress fast in the way in which we wanted it'. Deconflation, on the other hand, underlies the less usual manifestation *A business is (like) a journey*. The interpretation of this example, unlike the one based on conflation, is not self-evident. This problem can be sorted out by making the ground for comparison explicit through discourse elaboration. Notice the following examples:

> Growing a business is like a journey with many challenges, it is easier with the right partner by your side.[1]
> Building a business is like a journey. You take small steps every day down a road to keep going.[2]
> Starting a business is a journey - with a beginning, middle and end.[3]
> Building a business is like a journey, and like every journey it has a beginning, middle and end.[4]
> A business is a journey. You must commit, have goals, and a vision, because you cannot build what you have not clearly thought out.[5]

Metaphor or *like*-simile can be used, although not necessarily indistinctly. There are some differences that will be discussed in the following sections. What matters most now is to realize that for a correlation metaphor to take the form A IS (LIKE) B, which is comparative, it should be possible to categorize A and B in terms of a common higher-level concept. This common categorization makes the underlying correlation be sensitive to deconflation. In the case of *A business is (like) a journey*, a business and a journey can both be categorized as goal-oriented activities, which facilitates deconflation. Still, since the

speaker is aware that the deconflated conceptualization may be difficult to grasp, some lower-level elaboration of the high-level elements of the comparison is a communicative convenience. In the examples above, such an elaboration includes having a vision, cooperation, effort, and the awareness that challenges may come up at any stage.

3.2. Subjectivity

In a previous section, we noted that metaphor sets up a tighter relationship between its source and target domains than *like*-simile, thereby intensifying the subjective aspects of meaning. This intensification can cooperate with one of the characteristics of entity-based metaphors: the source attributes are often magnified (i.e., hyperbolic) versions of their target counterparts. Metaphors mapping animal features to people provide some illustration. A warrior is "a lion" or "like a lion" when fighting with instinctual courage and determination; also, when displaying unusual physical strength and ferocity. However, these are lion's attributes that the warrior cannot match. This metaphor is inherently hyperbolic. Similarly, a large, solidly built person can be referred to as a bull, but we cannot expect anyone to be as big and strong as a bull. We also use the expression *a bull in a china shop* to refer to someone who behaves recklessly and clumsily in a situation that requires delicacy and care. The clumsiness of a bull, of course, is only so from an anthropocentric perspective and, then, once interpreted this way, it is applied back to the bull. This anthropocentric perspective also applies to the warrior-lion example (see Lakoff and Turner 1989: 195) and in general to any metaphor intended to highlight human attributes by placing them in correspondence with other world entities. For example, a person at work is a "machine" is he or she is capable of working tirelessly or, in other contexts, if that person acts in a rigid, mechanical, unconscious way. In this case too, as in the "people-as-animals" examples, the attribute in question is not only seen from an anthropocentric perspective, but it also represents a magnified version of a human attribute.

Relevance theorists have already noted the ability of hyperbole to combine easily with metaphor (Carston and Wearing 2015). They attribute this phenomenon to the lack of a real dividing line between metaphor and hyperbole, since both uses of language require broadening the source concept to adjust it pragmatically to the requirements of the target meaning. In this view, saying that a person is "an angel" ('really kind and lovable') can be both metaphorical and hyperbolic. If we take a cognitivist perspective, this example is a case of metaphor that maps relevant heavenly attributes of angels to corresponding attributes in a person. Since the source attributes exceed by far their target counterparts, the result is hyperbolic. Hyperbole is evaluative, i.e., it is designed to have psychological impact, whereas metaphor is mainly denotational, i.e., it supplies a reasoning mechanism. However, if we express the same mapping

in the form of a *like*-simile, the result is less impacting from the evaluative point of view. Consider these two examples:

(6) Your son is an angel / a real / a literal angel.

(7) Your son is like an angel /#a real /#a literal angel.

As (6) shows, metaphor is capable of being intensified through hedges like *real* or *literal* ('no less than' or 'clear case of'). This situation does not hold for *like*-simile, as evidenced in (7). The reason for this lies in the greater conceptual tightness in the ascription of attributes resulting from metaphor if compared to the looser association provided by *like*-simile. Being "an angel" requires invoking a closed set of properties that belong to the best example of the category in question, the so-called *prototype* (cf. Rosch 1978; Taylor 1995), which involves subjective assessment. On the other hand, being "like an angel" opens the range of properties to any that are contextually or discursively specifiable. This open nature of *like*-simile is what favors non-subjective elaborate depictions of the ground of comparison:

(8) Your son is like an angel that guides our way through life in times of confusion.

There is experimental evidence that is consistent with this discussion. According to this evidence, *like*-simile sets up a less tight, more open relationship between the terms of comparison than metaphor. For example, Glucksberg (2001) found out that the utterance *My lawyer is a shark* was usually interpreted by experimental subjects in terms of the lawyer taking advantage of others for personal gain. However, the simile *My lawyer is like a shark* was additionally taken to refer to the lawyer's voracity in monopolizing cases, his ruthless aggressiveness, and even to his physical energy and stamina.

One possible explanation for this difference between metaphor and *like*-simile lies in the iconic motivation of both expressive choices (cf. Ruiz de Mendoza 2022: 279). As is well-known, iconicity is the linguistic phenomenon according to which the similarity of formal aspects of language may reflect conditions in the world (Croft 2008; Givón 1985, 1995). In terms of iconicity, the explicit comparison marker *like* creates what Haspelmath (2008) has termed formal discontiguity between the two terms of the comparison, thereby motivating their looser, more open association. By contrast, the formally contiguous relationship provided by metaphor creates a tighter, more restricted source-target relationship, which makes it more amenable to intensification and to the incorporation of other subjective meaning associations (e.g., prototype effects).

3.3. Categorization

We mentioned before that metaphor and simile have traditionally been considered two alternative ways of conveying the same figurative meaning based on comparison. However, aware of the different ways in which experimental subjects interpret both figures, Glucksberg and Haught (2006) argued that metaphor is a categorization statement; on the other hand, *like*-simile is a similitude statement. In the experimental evidence, subjects chose to associate higher-level properties to metaphor and lower-level properties to *like*-simile. In the metaphor *Ideas are diamonds* the properties were those of valuable entities in general, while in the simile *Ideas are like diamonds* the properties related to the actual gem (e.g., being rare, desirable, bright, etc.).

It must be noted that Glucksberg and Haught (2006) based their thesis on a limited range of metaphorical expressions. They only took into account metaphors based on low-level resemblance of the A is B kind and their corresponding *like*-similes. However, it is questionable whether the categorization view of metaphor can apply to correlation metaphors (Grady 1999; Lakoff and Johnson 1999). It is possible to say that ideas and diamonds are both valuable entities, that lawyers and sharks are predatory creatures, that good-willed people and heavenly angels are kind benevolent beings, and so on. The problem is posed, as we discussed in Section 3.1, by those correlation metaphors for which there is no common high-level category, such as AFFECTION IS WARMTH and STATES ARE LOCATIONS. This means that the categorization view of metaphor can only apply to metaphors based on low-level resemblance and to those based on high-level resemblance provided that the source and target domains can be categorized in terms of a shared high-level superordinate concept. The latter are one type of correlation metaphors. Other correlation metaphors do not involve categorization statements, whether explicit or not, but their focus is not on resemblance either. Instead, they exploit experiential correlation, with resemblance serving a mere licensing function.

The greater focus of metaphor on categorization is further supported by analytical situations where a correlation and a resemblance metaphor combine into one single conceptual complex. Ruiz de Mendoza (2017) and Miró (2018) discuss the metaphorical expression *My boss is a pig*, used by an employee to refer to an immoral boss. This expression combines A PERSON IS A PIG with IMMORALITY IS FILTH. These are two self-standing metaphors. The pig-person mapping is a resemblance metaphor that relates human behavior to animal behavior. Thus, a person can be "pig" if gluttonous, greedy, or untidy. In turn, expressions like "a dirty mind" or "dirty joke" suggest obscenity on the grounds that both

dirtiness and immoral behavior can cause disgust. In the combination of the two metaphors, IMMORALITY IS FILTH is built into A PERSON IS A PIG precisely on the grounds that different causes can produce similar effects of disgust. Through the EFFECT FOR CAUSE metonymy, the similarity of effects makes it possible to relate their otherwise unrelated underlying causes. As a result, a pig's filthiness can map onto a boss's immorality. The question is that this "metaphorical complex" exploits high and low-level similarity, but the focus of attention is on the categorization of the boss and the pig as disgusting entities. Evidence for this assertion is found in the inability of the simile *My boss is like a pig* to convey the same meaning as the metaphor. This simile calls for an open-ended exploration of the source and target domains to look for low-level similarities (e.g., like pigs, the boss is unclean, untidy, smelly, etc.).

3.4. Equivalence

In traditional accounts, metaphor and *like*-simile are treated as interchangeable, that is, as alternative ways of expressing the same meaning. This approach postulates that metaphorical statements are convertible into *like*-simile and, conversely, that statements based on this kind of simile are convertible into metaphor without any significant loss in meaning. However, there are scholars that have argued that metaphor and *like*-simile are not fully equivalent. The non-equivalence view has received support from theorists such as Chiappe and Kennedy (2000), Dancygier and Sweetser (2014), and Romano (2017), who argue that metaphor is preferred when the relationship between the two terms is easy to grasp. The situation with *like*-simile is different, since it is preferred when there is an unclear relationship between the two terms. This means that the interpretation of *like*-simile is less restricted than that of metaphor, probably because of the greater propensity of metaphor for conventionalization. Researchers have also noted that *like*-simile is more sensitive to elaboration than metaphor (Romano 2017), although metaphor can also be elaborated when the speaker feels that its meaning is not completely clear, perhaps because it is not conventional. This was the case of some examples of elaboration of *A business is a journey*, which were provided above.

In any event, the general situation is that *like*-simile requires the hearer to choose one from among several source attributes, whereas in metaphor the attribute or attributes that apply to the target is predetermined through convention. In a less general situation, metaphor requires the hearer to select contextually noticeable attributes. In the case of *Her eyes are diamonds* convention tends to gear interpretation to the brightness of the eyes. By contrast, the unconventional metaphor *Her eyes are shooting stars* directs interpretation to perceptually prominent characteristics of the source and target domains. For example,

the light produced by a shooting star in the night sky as it enters the earth's atmosphere can evoke the brightness of the pupils in contrast to the rest of the eye.

Resemblance metaphor and *like*-simile require the search for cross-domain similarities. The two figures, however, differ in the way that such a search takes place, which usually involves default conspicuity in the case of metaphor versus context or discourse-based inferences in *like*-simile. This view of the two figures is in accordance with the categorization and comparison approaches to metaphor and simile respectively. A lawyer is metaphorically a shark because the conspicuous behavior of lawyers and sharks can be categorized as "predatory." By contrast, the similarity search in *like*-simile focuses on listing attributes common to the source and target domains, on the assumption that one or more of those attributes may be present in relation to the context or the preceding or following discourse. As a consequence, the statement that a person is "like" a shark can refer to an aggressive person, like the metaphor, but also to a voracious eater or to a fast swimmer. These attributes do not categorize, but simply describe the person.

4. Conclusion

This paper has studied *like*-simile in its relation to metaphor. Against traditional accounts of figurative language, where simile is formally defined as an overt comparison and metaphor as a covert comparison, we have considered conceptual differences between the two figures. There is evidence in the literature that metaphor tends to express a closer association between the two terms of comparison than *like*-simile and that metaphor is more sensitive to becoming conventional and more restricted in its interpretation. On the other hand, there is a tendency in *like*-simile to make the ground for comparison explicit in subsequent discourse elaboration. In addition, this paper has proposed and discussed the adequacy of other criteria to understand the similarities and differences between *like*-simile and metaphor, among them the abstractness of the resemblance relationship, the greater subjectivity of metaphor, and the primary role of comparison in *like*-simile in contrast to its secondary role in metaphor. In terms of abstractness, the cognitive-linguistic notion of correlation metaphor has been discussed as involving high-level resemblance, while low-level resemblance is at the base of resemblance metaphors and *like*-similes. We have also argued that subjectivity in metaphor, which can have evaluative or intensifying effects, arises from its characteristically tight source-target relationship, unlike *like*-simile, which is based on a looser relationship that endows it with objectivity. Finally, we have argued that the well-known categorization view of metaphor does not apply to correlation metaphors whose source and target

domains cannot be categorized in terms of a shared high-level superordinate concept. These and other observations made in our discussion point to the non-equivalence of metaphor and *like*-simile.

Notes

Funding

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Resumé

Francisco J. Ruiz de Mendoza Ibáñez is the co-head of the international research group *Lexicom* (www.lexicom.es). He has headed six national research projects and supervised fifteen doctoral dissertations, most of them with international mentions and research excellence awards. He is the author of over 170 papers published or accepted for publication in national and international journals and book series. He has co-edited eight books on different topics in cognitive and functional linguistics. He has also authored or co-authored nine other books, the most recent being the *Cognitive Modeling. A Linguistic Perspective* (with Alicia Galera, 2014, John Benjamins), which received the 2015 AESLA Research Award for Experienced Researchers, *Ten Lectures on Cognitive Modeling. Between Grammar*

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