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FROM METONYMY TO METAPHOR AND BACK AGAIN

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Abstract

The paper discusses some cognitive processes that underlie emergence, development and disappearance of image (“one-shot”) metaphors. It is claimed that expressions with a primarily literal meaning can function in a particular discourse so that they become elevated to the status of rich image metaphors. The first step on the way towards metaphorization involves the emergence of metonymic expressions, which are based on the speakers’ choice of salient elements of events or situations. Two or more such metonymies can then coalesce via conceptual integration to create an image metaphor. The metaphor, in turn, can be transformed into an idiomatic expression, separated from its original non-verbal context. The discussion is illustrated with a slogan used in connection with recent social and political developments in Poland.

*el lenguaje es un conjunto de imágenes, comportando,
si bien se mira, una metáfora cada vocablo*
Leopoldo Lugones, *Lunario sentimental*, prologue, 1909

Attached to the issue of the daily *Gazeta Wyborcza* (henceforward *GW*) dated on the weekend of 8–9 October 2016, the readers find a sticker that they are encouraged to wear on their clothes: an opened black umbrella bearing the inscription NIE SKŁADAMY PARASOLEK ‘We do not fold ladies’ umbrellas’. Against the black background, the red letters make up a sentence that seems easy to process, especially that it appears in the (situational) context of rainy autumn. It can be taken to fulfill “the fundamental discourse function of describing an event or

situation” (Langacker 2016: 409). But does it really? Who exactly does the verb refer to? What actually is the relation between the (plural) subject and the (plural) object? Are *parasolki* indefinite or definite (‘umbrellas’ vs. ‘the umbrellas’), or is it a point-of-reference construction implying possession (‘our umbrellas’)? There are some clues that prompt possible interpretations. The first person plural form is marked by the morphological marker on the verb *składamy* ‘[we] fold’, and the morphology of the object suggests that it is a ladies’ umbrella (*parasolka* [F] vs. *parasol* [M]). Thus the expression is taken to mean ‘We (presumably: [some] women) do not fold (presumably: our) umbrellas (most likely: when it rains)’. But it still remains open for differing, more specific, interpretations (what women? how many? where? when?, etc.). To anybody interested in verbal communication the reason is obvious: natural languages are inherently metonymic (cf. Langacker 2009). However, the crucial question to ask at this point is “why”: why should anybody wear a sticker that proclaims something that, on first glance, looks like an obvious platitude? Literal interpretation cannot provide an answer. And since no verbal context exists, either preceding or following the expression in question, some other (non-verbal) context is required. At this point, the question that arises is: “What kind of knowledge is needed in order to make sense of the GW’s action”?

In the 1980’s the world of linguistics was revolutionized by a new theory of metaphor, proclaimed by the prominent American linguist George Lakoff (1987). A systemization of earlier insights and, at the same time, a rejection of Aristotle’s views, Lakoff’s theory of conceptual metaphor was based on the assumption that metaphors arise from and are based upon people’s physical, bodily experience. Thus metaphor was no longer seen as mere ornamentation, but as a mode of thinking. Metaphors were shown to be born from experience common to all human beings, with their instantiations embracing elements of differing cultural, social and even geographical contexts. Lakoff considered conceptual metaphors to be products of mappings of concepts between source and target cognitive domains. But he was also aware of the existence of another type of metaphorical structures, which he called “one-shot” or image metaphors. Such metaphors arise through mapping of one rich (detailed) image upon another. They are also conceptual, in the sense that the process involves mapping between particular mental images (Lakoff 1990). While the cognitive theory has clearly favoured the first type of metaphor, the second kind was underestimated. Even in those works which emphasized the opposition between universality and variation (e.g. Kövecses 2005) they were not the main object of consideration, most probably because their analysis does not easily yield to generalizations, which are the aim of any theory. And yet it is generally acknowledged that rich image metaphors are creative and that the mechanism underlying their creation is very productive. It seems, therefore, that rich image “one-shot” metaphors are worth investigating, and this is precisely the task undertaken further in this essay. More specifically, it seems interesting – from the point of view of the functioning of discourse – to observe the time line: the emergence, the development, and the disappearance of “one-shot” metaphors.

In what follows I will argue that expressions with a primarily literal meaning can function in a particular discourse so that they become elevated to the status of rich image metaphors.

Within a discourse, “an expression is never really self-contained, but emerges from a substrate one facet of which is its place in the ongoing discourse” (Langacker 2016: 409). The *GW* slogan quoted above is indeed part of “the ongoing discourse”, but it does not include either a following or a preceding expression, which might provide “the immediate basis for its interpretation” (Langacker 2016: 409). Langacker’s “substrate” is nonverbal: it is the image of thousands of women who on Monday October 3rd, 2016 went out into the streets of Polish towns protesting against the government’s proposition of restrictive legislation unconditionally banning abortion and postulating imprisonment for women who undergo abortion. The protesters, mostly women, wore black clothes. In most Polish towns and cities the Monday was a cold and rainy day, so they were carrying opened umbrellas. Moreover, the “ongoing discourse” between the journalists of *GW* and its readers calls for the mental operation of projecting this past image onto the future: the slogan was interpreted as a warning for the government against similarly unpopular proposals which might be made in the future.

It is precisely this interpretation that was succinctly expressed by the journalist and TV presenter Monika Olejnik. Just four days after the manifestation she wrote in her regular *GW* column: ‘The image of those Monday ladies’ umbrellas will stay [with us] as a symbol of women’s power’ (*GW*, 07.10.2016; transl. E.T.). The point is that while the protesters were dressed in black, many of the “Monday ladies’ umbrellas” that they were carrying were colourful. Then where does the black umbrella on the sticker come from?

The path that leads from the image of protesting women to the drawing representing an opened black umbrella is quite complex. As both the participants in the protest and those who watched TV reports can testify, it was “a sea of colourful ladies’ umbrellas” that could be seen in the pictures, mostly taken from the air. In photographs that were zoomed in, TV audiences could see that nearly all the participants were indeed wearing black. Thus there were two features that were perceptibly most salient, therefore giving rise to two metonymies: OPENED (COLOURFUL) LADIES’ UMBRELLAS CARRIED BY THE PROTESTERS FOR THE PROTESTERS, and BLACK CLOTHES WORN BY THE PROTESTERS FOR THE PROTESTERS. It might be interesting to observe that neither of these two metonymies arises either through the awareness of a close relation between two things within the same domain, or through a conventional cultural association (Turner 1987: 21). The two properties were selected by the journalists because of their perceptual salience. And most probably because the two expressions represent the *pars pro toto* metonymy with the *totum* having the same referent, they subsequently coalesced into one: OPENED BLACK LADIES’ UMBRELLAS CARRIED BY THE PROTESTERS FOR THE PROTESTERS.

It seems that is exactly at this point that the elusive fuzzy border between metonymy and metaphor is crossed. “A sea of opened umbrellas” and “a crowd of people/women wearing black” are two images that – for many – have been stored

in memory and therefore only have to be recalled whenever needed. Monika Olejnik's "Monday ladies' umbrellas" (nb. no colour mentioned) are selected as the most salient perceptual feature of a particular event, but they become a general symbol of "women's power", due to the underlying conceptual metaphor *POWER IS A GREAT MASS/NUMBER*. In the same vein, in the October 8–9 issue of *GW* the sociologist Krystyna Skarżyńska tells the lady journalist who interviews her: 'And those women, when in mass, can [do] an awful lot' (transl. E.T.). On October 10th, 2016, another *GW* journalist, Jacek Żakowski, wrote: 'It's cool that so many ladies' umbrellas were there on Monday October 3rd.' (transl. E.T.). It will be noticed that in none of those texts are the umbrellas actually described as being either *OPENED* or *BLACK*.

Unlike the remembrance of the manifestation as photographed by a drone, "a crowd of people/women carrying opened *BLACK* umbrellas" is a mental construct. The association with "black" brings in another dimension: there is a conventional cultural association of black with mourning and low spirits (cf. e.g. *czarny nastrój* 'black mood'), which most probably motivated the organizers of the protest, who had called for the participants to wear black. But the cultural convention associates black also with evil, which actually gave rise to attacks from those who opposed the movement and who called the participants "black witches", or – with a stronger feeling for the abstract – "a black power". As is well known, the inherent selectivity of metonymic and metaphorical associations is both a blessing and a curse.

The "black umbrella sticker" which has inspired the present discussion represents what Charles Forceville refers to as "verbo-pictorial metaphor" (Forceville, forthcoming). The constituent "black" is rendered via the colour of the depicted umbrella, and the constituent "ladies" via the verb morphology (cf. above). To quote Monika Olejnik again, it can be interpreted as 'Women have to be watchful and ready to undertake yet another action' (*GW*, 07.10.2016, transl. E.T.). The diagrammatic representation of the interpretation reveals a blend, which comes as the result of conceptual integration (fig. 1).

As was said, "Nie składamy parasolek", if interpreted literally, is just a platitude – a thing that is usually not used in discourse without an appropriate context (cf. e.g. *Dzieci, nie składamy parasolek, bo zaraz będzie padać* 'Children, we are not folding our umbrellas, it is going to rain'), since it does not carry any new informational load. It is the (non-verbal) context in which it is used that turns it into a metaphor: an illustration of Lugones' manifesto: *una metáfora cada vocablo*.

With a metaphorical interpretation prompted by differing situational contexts the slogan stands a chance to become an idiomatic expression. Idioms are in many ways reminiscent of rich image metaphors in that one image is mapped onto another. For instance, when on some occasion Lisa chooses to ignore her friend and for some reason pretends that she cannot see or hear her, one might say that "Lisa has sent her friend to Coventry". Neither the speaker nor the listener (or, for that matter, the agent or patient of the expression) can be aware of the origins of the idiomatic phrase, which is most probably a particular event in the history of the 17th century England (www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/sent-to-coventry.html), yet most people will get the intended metaphorical meaning.

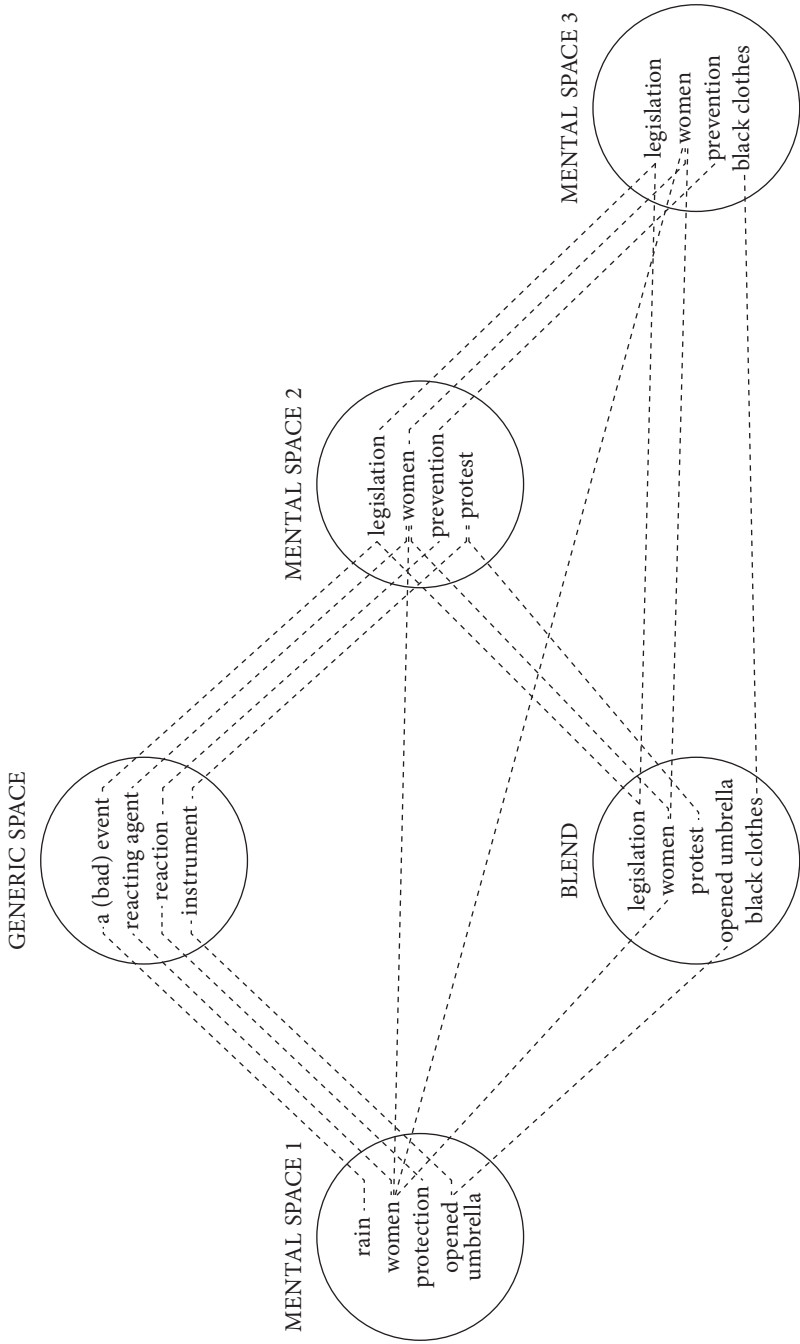


Fig. 1. Emergence of a metaphor: OPEN UMBRELLAS/BLACK CLOTHES IS A PROTEST

It is then quite plausible to believe that, with time, the protest of October 3rd, 2016 will be forgotten, but the phrase would still remain to be taken to mean that whoever the “we” refers to, the agents will be considered as watchful and ready to undertake action when necessary. Indeed, metonymic reference to “ladies’ umbrellas” was actually elevated to serve as an umbrella (pun not intended) term to refer to the sum total to the October protests and their anticipated outcome. The interview with Krystyna Skarżyńska, published in the *GW* issue of 8–9 October 2016, is titled “Rewolucja parasolek” ‘the revolution of ladies’ umbrellas’ (transl. E.T.). The reference-point construction is – in contemporary Polish – fairly productive and it reflects the cognitive process of referring to an entity via its perceptively salient and subsequently metaphorized property, as in *pomarańczowa rewolucja* ‘orange revolution’ of 2004/2005 in the Ukraine, which owes its name to the colour chosen as a sign of identification by Wiktor Juszczenko’s campaign workers. The name of *sametová revoluce* ‘velvet revolution’ of 1989 in Czechoslovakia illustrates a more complicated conceptual process: the *pars pro toto* metonymy SOFTNESS OF VELVET FOR VELVET, combined with the (conventional) metaphor GENTLE IS SOFT, motivates the name of a particular event which – although prototypically characterized by violence – proved to be non-violent, or gentle.

However, in Polish political discourse after-October 3rd, 2016 ladies’ umbrellas have been gradually replaced by “black”: originally, the colour of the clothes worn by the protesters. In *GW* (which, as was said, is the source of the corpus used in this essay) it appears as an element of several alternative phrases: *czarny strajk* ([the] black strike’), *czarny marsz/protest (kobiet)* ([the] black march/protest [of women]’), *czarny poniedziałek* ([the] black Monday’). Reference to ladies’ umbrellas is non-conventional, or non-associative, and therefore can be used for unique identification of the particular event. On the other hand, the adjective *czarny* (or its counterparts in other languages) has a well-grounded, trans-cultural metaphorical meaning, grounded in the day-night cycle: the darkness of the night makes things mysterious and difficult to recognize, hence menacing and powerful, and, further along the conceptual path, bad or evil. Naturally, things or events having this property will be undesirable by men. Hence a multitude of references to events which took part on various Mondays and were considered bad or menacing. Under the heading “Black Monday” Wikipedia lists as many as 13 historical events, beginning with the Dublin massacre of 1209 and ending – interestingly – with “3 October 2016, strikes and demonstrations by women in Poland” (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Monday). By extension, *czarny poniedziałek / black Monday* can also refer to such recurring events as, for instance, the first day at school after summer holidays. Therefore, without appropriate context, *czarny strajk/protest/marsz* would be most probably interpreted as reference to either a historical or a recurrent event. The conclusion seems obvious: as means of unique event identification umbrellas are better than the colour black.

And yet it is *czarny* that prevails. At first it appears in phrases printed with inverted commas (e.g. Marek Beylin in *GW* of October 12th repeatedly uses the phrase *czarny strajk*), or preceded with *tzw.* (‘so-called’, e.g. Janusz Anderman in *GW* of

October 12th, 2016). Then it gradually becomes conventionalized, which is signified by the disappearance of the inverted commas: for instance, it is *czarny protest* that can be found in *DF/GW*¹ of October 13th, 2016. Interestingly, in *GW* of the same date Janusz Rolicki uses the phrase *czarne demonstrantki* ('[the] black female protesters'). It is fairly complex conceptually. First, it employs the conventional *totum pro parte* metonymy COLOUR FOR DRESS OF THAT COLOUR (cf. "she always wears white"), which is combined with the metaphor BLACK CLOTHES IS PROTEST, and, finally, with the *pars pro toto* metonymy PARTICIPANTS OF EVENT FOR EVENT, i.e. Turner's "metonymy of associations". Thus we have, in a way, come back to where we started from, and arrived at metonymy. The complicated three-stage process as shown above illustrates a more general way in which language develops – however, a more detailed discussion has to be left to another occasion.

At this point it might be worthwhile to reflect upon possible reasons for the choice that, as was said, seems less effective communicatively. While it has to be realized that possible answers cannot go beyond the level of speculation, it might be assumed that they might be elevated to the status of hypotheses.

First, as demonstrated by scholars (cf., e.g. Tabakowska 2008; Bołtuć 2016), Polish texts situated on the scale between the colloquial and the literary tend to prefer rather formal registers. "The umbrella revolution" can just sound not formal, or not serious, enough.

Second – and perhaps more importantly – the adjective *czarny* brings into the name of the October 3rd protest a political undertone, well expected from journalist of the *GW* orientation. A voice of anti-government opposition, *GW* might well appreciate yet another metaphorical extended meaning of *czarny*: according to colour psychology, it "creates fear and intimidation" and "can create a fear of the future" (<http://www.empower-yourself-with-color-psychology.com/color-black.html>). Thus the black protest of women, or the Black Monday, should be taken as a warning by all those who provoked the protest in the first place: the black protest is a Black Monday for the government who proposed the unpopular legislation.

The creative productivity of the metaphor is best illustrated by the title of Janusz Anderman's column in *GW* of October 12th, 2016: "Czarno przed oczami" (lit. 'black in front of eyes'), '[everything] went black for [them]'. The phrase refers to a momentary loss of sight which comes as the reaction to a sudden and intense experience – physical or psychic. The conventional metaphorical extension is that of a strong negative reaction to an experience. The motivation for the extension is straightforward: losing the ability to see is a strongly negative, or traumatic, experience. But behind Anderman's column, which was written "there and then", the unspecified viewer sees, literally, a crowd of women dressed in black. And then everything goes black for them – also in the metaphorical sense: the sight of women dressed in black becomes an augury of a black future.

In reference to translation, the "ladies' umbrellas case" becomes an obvious instance of untranslatability. For Teresa Bałuk-Ulewiczowa, whose influential papers

¹ *DF* (= *Duży Format*) is a supplement to *Gazeta Wyborcza*.

are truly canonical texts within the field of Translation Studies and translation pedagogy, it would probably constitute an instance of what she defines as culture-specific, and culture-bound, “absolute untranslatability” (Bałuk-Ulewiczowa 2000). It seems, however, that the case might prove untranslatable even within a single culture: with time, the “black protest of women carrying opened black umbrellas”, will probably become yet another item on the long list of historical events, no longer immediately identifiable for general public – just like the case of the group of Royalist soldiers imprisoned by Cromwell in the town of Coventry. Provided that the umbrellas make it to the store of idioms. And if they do, one can easily imagine, for instance, somebody folding their umbrella when the situation does not promise any bad surprises on the part of those in power.

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