

**MEMBER FOR MEMBER category metonymy
in
Norse skaldic kennings**

Karen Sullivan
ksull@berkeley.edu
University of California at Berkeley

1. MEMBER FOR MEMBER metonymy: a genre-specific process

- The metonymy (CATEGORY) MEMBER FOR (CATEGORY) MEMBER abounds in the Norse court poetry called *dróttkvætt*, but is rare in ‘natural’ everyday language. This genre-specific metonymy demonstrates that different linguistic genres can reveal different aspects of metaphor and metonymy.
- MEMBER FOR MEMBER metonymy is evident in kennings like *hangaTyr* ‘hanged-men’s Tyr’, which refers to Odin by naming Tyr; and *fet-Meili* ‘pace-Meili’ referring to the speedy god Hœnir by naming the god Meili. According to Sturluson, any god’s name could be applied to any other god (1976); or in other words, any member of the category GODS could refer metonymically to another member. This metonymy operates in a few other categories:

Table 1. MEMBER FOR MEMBER categories

| Category | Category members |
|------------------------|--|
| GODS | Odin/Gaut/Rognir, Thor, Thialfi, Tyr, Hœnir, Meili, etc. |
| BIRDS | raven, eagle, hawk, falcon, starling, woodcock, gull, grouse, cuckoo, crane, swan, goose, bird ... |
| LIQUIDS | ale, mead, beer, water, dew, rain, surf, wave, blood, sweat, tears, liquid ... |
| BODIES OF WATER | sea, lake, river, pool, sound, fjord, inlet, bay, flood, fen, brook, channel, spring, waterfall ... |
| ANIMALS | bear, hog, warg/wolf, ox, horse, leopard ... |

The category members in boldface in Table (1) are found in *Skáldskaparmál* as metonymic targets. Fewer members of a category serve as targets than as donors.

2. MEMBER FOR MEMBER metonymy vs. metaphor

- Fidjestøl (1997:25) notes the operation of the process in question in the category LIQUIDS:

If...we take the kenning *benja tár*, ‘tears of wounds’ = ‘blood’ (or *benja dōgg*), we are not dealing with a synecdoche but with a metaphor. There is a resemblance – both are fluids – but the switch ... is made from one conceptual domain to another.

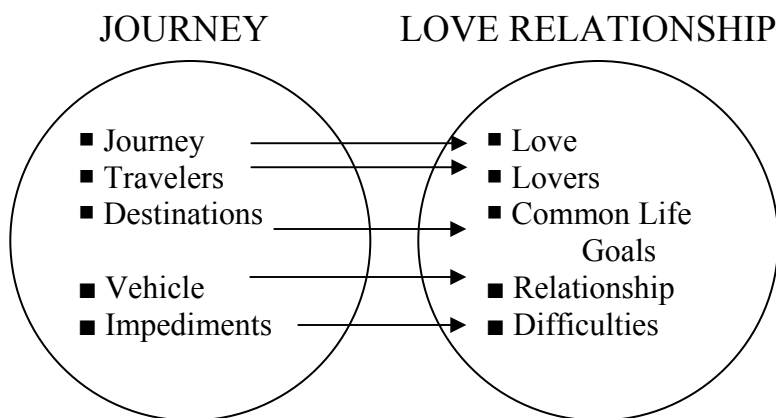
If metaphor is defined entirely in terms of a crossover between domains, then these processes can be called metaphor. But in conceptual metaphor theory, the definition of metaphor is more complex.

- Lakoff and Turner (1989:103) outline three characteristics of metaphor that distinguish it from metonymy:

In *metaphor*, there are two conceptual domains, and one is understood in terms of the other. In *metaphor*, a whole schematic structure (with two or more entities) is mapped onto another whole schematic structure. In *metaphor*, the logic of the source-domain structure is mapped onto the logic of the target domain structure. None of this is true in metonymy.

The ‘schematic structure’ of a metaphor looks like the system of mappings in LOVE IS A JOURNEY (examined in greater detail by Lakoff and Johnson [1999:64-67]):

Figure 1. LOVE IS A JOURNEY



- MEMBER FOR MEMBER metonymy does not allow one domain to be ‘understood in terms of the other’. A metaphor mapping from GOOSE to RAVEN would map the prototypical characteristics of a goose not typically shared by a raven: a long neck, silly behavior, etc. (thus referring to an unusually long-necked or silly raven). Yet the BIRD FOR BIRD category metonymy does the opposite: it allows one bird, such as a GOOSE, to stand for another, like RAVEN, by virtue of the shared characteristics of the two, or ‘family resemblances’ (cf. Rosch and Mervis 1975) – such as wings, beaks, etc. The kenning *Yggs gögl* (Ygg’s [Odin’s] goslings = Odin’s birds = ravens) does not refer to particularly silly ravens, but could refer to any ravens (the BIRDS associated with Odin).

- MEMBER FOR MEMBER metonymies rarely involve ‘two or more’ mappings or a ‘whole schematic structure’. For example, the SEA may be termed *løgr* ‘lake’, *bekkr* ‘brook’, etc. Seas, lakes, floods, and the rest all belong to the superordinate category BODIES OF WATER; but beyond that these domains offer no structure that can map to SEA.

- MEMBER FOR MEMBER metonymy does not allow the ‘logic of the source-domain structure’ to facilitate target-domain reasoning. The BIRD FOR BIRD metonymy in the kenning, *svans matr* (swan’s food = hawk’s food = corpses), in fact actively ignores logic related to SWANS, which are not known for eating corpses. The metonymy impedes, rather than facilitates logic, so that a kenning without the metonymy, like *hróka matr* (hawks’ food = corpses) is easier to understand than a kenning using the metonymy, like *svans matr* (swans’ food = corpses). The crucial feature of HAWK in these kennings is a trait not shared by SWAN (and certainly not mapped from SWAN).

- Another well-known characteristic of metaphor is that it generally maps from concrete to abstract. MEMBER FOR MEMBER metonymy never does, because category members represent the same level of abstraction.

- Metaphor is unidirectional, whereas MEMBER FOR MEMBER is bidirectional: for example, SEA can be called ‘river’ and RIVER can be called ‘sea’; likewise ‘sky’s blood’ refers to WATER while ‘tears of wounds’ refers to BLOOD.

3. Dróttkvætt kennings vs. conversational language

- Unlike most everyday conversation, *dróttkvætt* intentionally flaunts all four Maxims of the Gricean Cooperative Principle: Manner, Quantity, Relation, and Quantity (Grice 1989).
- The conversational maxims are inapplicable because the function of skaldic poetry differs from that of natural speech. Fidjestøl characterizes this distinction succinctly (1997:41):

The skald appears to be the polar opposite, as it were, of the ordinary language-user, because his need for means of expression is of a peculiar kind. Although he is a professional user of language, he has in fact little he needs to say.

- Lindow (1975) suggests that the comprehension of skaldic poetry, like riddles, served a marker of initiation and group status: ‘I submit that skaldic poetry was so difficult to understand, so riddle-like in its poetic language, because this made it even more exclusive’ (1975:322).
- Meissner (1921) estimated that a set of approximately 106 target concepts are involved in kennings, with 10-15 of these predominating. This limited set made the targets of both metaphors and metonymies more transparent than in normal conversational contexts, facilitating comprehension of the unusual metonymy MEMBER FOR MEMBER.
- Fidjestøl also comments on the limited subject matter of kennings (1997:45):

If we did not already have a relatively clear expectation of what different kennings might mean, we should find that many of them were practically impossible to interpret because of the variation.
- The commonality of the two-part kenning form and the potential presence of a ‘determinant’ also helped reveal the metonymic target. The determinant seems obligatory in GODS and ANIMALS but is optional elsewhere (as in BODIES OF WATER [Sturluson 1976: 148, 220-1]).

- Certain category members tend to be chosen as the target of the metonymy, probably for their usefulness in two-part kennings:

Table 2. Typical target category members.

| Category | Category members | Usual target member(s) |
|-----------------|---------------------------|------------------------|
| GODS | Odin, Thor, Tyr, etc. | - |
| BIRDS | swan, goose, gull, etc. | raven, eagle |
| LIQUIDS | beer, water, tears, etc. | blood, mead, tears |
| BODIES OF WATER | sea, lake, fjord, etc.. | sea |
| ANIMALS | bear, ox, warg/wolf, etc. | - |

4. MEMBER FOR MEMBER in *dróttkvætt* vs. *hrynhent*

- MEMBER FOR MEMBER metonymy distinguishes *dróttkvætt* from other genres such as the later *hrynhent* form.
- Kennings themselves are not eschewed in *hrynhent*, despite some authors' suggestions (cf. Frank 1978). Both the two-part kenning form, and metaphor, abound in *hrynhent* – as they do in 'natural' everyday language. Only MEMBER FOR MEMBER metonymy was anathema to *hrynhent* poets' attempts at a more naturalistic writing style.

5. Conclusions

- MEMBER FOR MEMBER metonymy is a defining characteristic of the *dróttkvætt* genre.
- The existence of MEMBER FOR MEMBER demonstrates that cognitive linguistics must recognize all types and genres of language use.

References:

- Fidjestøl, Bjarne 1974.** “Kenningsystemet: Forsøk på ein lingvistisk analyse”. *Maal og Minne* 1974, 5-50. [English translation in *Bjarne Fidjestøl, Selected Papers*, Odd Einar Haugen and Else Mundal, eds. Odense: Odense University Press, 1997:16-67.]
- Frank, Roberta 1978.** *Old Norse Court Poetry: the Dróttkvætt Poetry* (Islandica, XLII.) Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.
- Grice, Herbert Paul 1989.** lectures on “Logic and Conversation”, published in *Studies in the Way of Words*.
- Hollander, Lee 1945.** *The Skalds*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Lakoff, George and Mark Johnson 1980.** *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Lakoff, George 1987.** *Women, Fire and Dangerous Things*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Lakoff, George and Mark Turner 1989.** *More than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Lindow, John 1975.** “Riddles, Kennings, and the Complexity of Skaldic Poetry”. *Scandinavian Studies* 47, 311-27.
- Meissner Rudolf 1921.** *Die Kenningar der Skalden: ein Beitrag zur skaldischen Poetik*. (Rheinische Beiträge und Hilfsbücher zur germanischen Philologie und Volkskunde, 1.) Bonn: K. Schroeder. [Reprinted 1984, Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag]
- Rosch, Eleanor 1975.** “Cognitive Reference Points”. *Cognitive Psychology* 7:532-47.
- Rosch, Eleanor, and Carolyn Mervis 1975.** “Family Resemblances: Studies in the Internal Structure of Categories”. *Cognitive Psychology* 7:573-605.
- Sturluson, Snorri 1976.** *Edda*, Guðni Jónsson, ed. Íslendingasagnaútgáfan.