

# THE WORLD BETWEEN US: THE SOCIAL AFFORDANCES OF METAPHOR IN FACE-TO-FACE INTERACTION

*by*  
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This article explores how the use of metaphor in social interaction helps transform abstract emotional experience into sharable intersubjective phenomena. The theoretical outset is a new dynamic view on metaphor (Müller 2008, 2011; Müller & Tag 2010; Gibbs & Cameron 2008; Cameron 2011), in particular the contemporary notion of metaphoricity (Müller 2008; Jensen & Cuffari 2014; Jensen 2017). Unlike traditional notions of metaphor, metaphoricity is to be seen as a scalar value: something which is more or less activated or present. Metaphoricity is not absolute – i.e. either present or not present at all. It can be enacted in different degrees – but does always entail some kind of double meaning. Furthermore, the article advances a view on metaphoricity informed by distributed, enactive and ecological approaches to cognition (De Jaeger & Di Paolo 2007; Chemero 2011; Cowley & Vallée-Tourangeau 2013; Steffensen 2013; Hutchins 2014; Gallagher 2017) in which metaphoricity is seen, not as an expression of underlying cognition or a ‘window’ onto ‘the mind’; but rather as cognizing body-minds in action coordinating possibilities for co-experience. Thus, an attempt to identify shared metaphorical meaning as interactively afforded in naturalistic, non-experimental data is explored. These theoretical considerations are put to the test in analyses of video recordings of children engaged in a leaning activity, as well as a couple in therapy. Both examples highlight key aspects of how metaphorical behaviors (words, voicing, postures, gestures, facial expressions) enact a joint system of experience which makes us capable of graphing a ‘world between us’, i.e. an interpersonal world of sharable experiences and emotions.

## *1. Introduction*

Unlike other animals we, as human beings, are not naturally ingrained,

or simply built-in, to the world around us. Due to our reflective nature, we are time and again inclined to think about and reflect upon all that is happening around us instead of just being involved in the flow of events. That is why we usually need to act to get a grip on the world, instead of performing the intellectualist exercise of analyzing and dividing the world into pieces. Rather, it is our active exploration and different kinds of ‘doings’ that make the world immediately sensible. This sense-making (Linell 2009), however, is rarely carried out in isolation. Often, getting a grip on the world involves acting together with other people in various ways, either at a distance through mediated communicative means or in face-to-face interaction carried out in and through daily encounters. The latter oftentimes constitutes the most direct and unmediated way of getting a grip on the world due to the principal affordances (Gibson 1979) of face-to-face interaction: the immediate inter-bodily dynamics and possibilities for impulsive action and thought enabled by the interactive environment in the here-and-now capable of transforming the world around us into the world between us.

In this article, I will explore a specific aspect of this transformation: the social affordances of metaphor, or how getting a grip on the world is tied to the way that people make sense together in and through metaphorical action, i.e. metaphorical language infused with inter-bodily behavior. I will show how metaphorical action constrains our behavior when we attempt, not only to make ourselves understood, but to express and understand ourselves in light of the other. That is, to build an interpersonal geography that several participants can inhabit at the same time and develop together. The theoretical motivation of these investigations comes from a new perspective on metaphorical meaning somewhat different from the one traditionally dominating metaphor studies. Within classic conceptual metaphor theory (CMT) (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, 1999; Lakoff 1993) there was a strong focus on the cognitive underpinnings of metaphor use: “In short, the locus of metaphor is not in language at all, but in the way we conceptualize one mental domain in terms of another” (Lakoff 1993: 202).

Thus, even though CMT set out to investigate metaphor in our daily lives (hence the title, *Metaphors We Live By* (Lakoff & Johnson 1980)), in fact the research paradigm that emerged in the 1980's and 1990's often had a stern focus on the cognitive foundations of metaphors, as figure of thought residing in the minds of individual writers or speakers, on the expense of contextual factors.<sup>1</sup> To some degree, this has changed in the last 10-15 years as part of a more dynamical approach to metaphor (see next section). This article can be seen as part of this development since it proposes an alternative to the cognitive linguistic tradition of investigating metaphor as primarily an inner cognitive phenomenon underlying thought and language. Thus, I want to propose an ecological perspective (Steffensen & Fill 2014) in which the production of metaphor is seen as part of our actions in general (Gibbs 2013a; Jensen 2017). It is embedded in the ways that we do things in the world and hence metaphorical meaning is viewed as enacting a joint system of experience (Jarvilehto 2000; Steffensen 2012) which makes us capable of grasping a world between us, i.e. an interpersonal world of sharable experiences and emotions.

This perspective will be laid out in greater detail in the theoretical part, explicating recent developments within cognitive science and metaphor studies. In the empirical part, these theoretical advancements will be explored further in analyses of naturalistic data consisting of recordings of children engaged in a learning activity and a couple in therapy. Finally, in the conclusion, perspectives for understanding metaphorical meaning, as well as the concept of getting a grip on the world in an ecological way will be discussed.

## 2. *Theoretical part*

### 2.1 Ecological cognition and affordances

In the following two sections I will present a brief summary of the latest theoretical development within firstly cognitive science and secondly metaphor studies.

Within the last 10-15 years a new concept of cognition has emerged. It has been labeled 4E-cognition (enacted, embedded, embodied, extended) (Menary 2010; Stewart et al 2010; Chemero 2011; Clark 2011; Jensen 2014a) but is now often summarized as ecological cognition (Cowley & Vallée-Tourangeau 2013; Anderson 2014; Peters 2016). In brief, an ecological approach to cognition challenges the idea of cognition as skull-bound, and thereby tied to the individual, while instead promoting a view of cognition as skull- and body-transcending (Steffensen 2013). Thus, an ecological perspective opposes the internal/external distinction between inner cognitive processes and outer actions or behavior (Cuffari & Jensen 2014). Instead, the study of cognition is seen in contexts, which means that any individual action is seen in direct relation with the environment. External and internal cognitive resources are intertwined in a way that it becomes very hard to draw a line between the two (Clark 2011).<sup>2</sup>

The basic argument is that even though cognition is clearly dependent on neural activation in the brain (seated in the head), it cannot be thoroughly understood as an internal process. Instead, cognition “is something we do: we enact it, with the world’s help, in our dynamic living activities. It is not something that happens inside us” (Noë 2009: 64). In this sense cognition is not (an internal) precondition for action; it is not (just) an inner mental architecture that defines the route by which we are able to navigate in the world; rather, cognition is part of the navigation itself. In other words, we don’t have or possess cognition (or cognitive abilities), instead we ‘do’ cognition in our active and explorative sense-making (Linell 2009; Jensen 2017). In this way cognition is re-conceptualized as part of an organism-environment-system (Chemero 2011; Jarvilehto 2000; Steffensen 2013).

A central notion in an ecological approach to cognition is James Gibson’s (1979) theory of affordances which offers an interesting perspective on how the environment guides action and perception. Affordances are often explained as action possibilities, which, according to Gibson, are what the environment “offers the animal, what it provides or furnishes,

either for good or ill” (Gibson 1979: 127).<sup>3</sup> The core idea is that the agent perceives the possibilities for action within an environment directly. Direct perception means that an agent perceives, not neutral pieces of information that need to be put together, but instead a world of value in accordance with our distinct abilities. Thus, the seagull directly perceives the surface of the water as an opportunity to land (or look for food), while humans may see the same surface as opportunity to swim or dip your toe.

From an ecological perspective, the principal *affordance* of face-to-face encounters is the possibility to share action, i.e. the possibilities for co-action, co-thinking and co-feeling in the flux of social interaction. The immediate inter-bodily dynamics enabled by the interactive environment in the here-and-now of ‘doing language’, or *linguaging* (Thibault 2011), with other people affords impulsive action and thought in a joint space. Relating this to language, metaphorical expressions can be seen as possibilities for different types of actions in the same vein as affordances in a physical environment: e.g. a metaphorical expression appearing in a conversation, often accompanied by gesture,<sup>4</sup> can be directly perceived as opportunity to develop, elaborate, contrast, play with, or just re-use structures from the same source domain or metaphorical imagery. Different kinds of language use, including metaphors, set up affordances for trajectories of further action in human dialogue; they invite further actions:

In talking with each other, humans create affordances, opportunities that invite the other into seeing and moving in certain directions that look promising: Conversations seek good prospects. They seek to provide affordances for going on. (Hodges 2007: 597-598)

Furthermore, our use of words and their representational value can be reframed as *joint coordination*. Importantly, verbal utterances cannot be treated in isolation; rather they are always to be seen as part of a larger configuration of coordinated whole-bodied behaviour (Linell 2009;

Steffensen 2012; Thibault 2011; Pedersen 2012; Jensen 2014; Jensen & Cuffari 2014). Utterances and bodily movements are fundamentally other-oriented (Linell 2009); anticipating responses and hearing is an interpretive act in itself. From an ecological perspective, meaning potentials are inherent in all interactions although the meanings are not fixed. Meaning emerges through dynamical and active exploration and negotiation by all participants involved.

## 2.2 From metaphor to metaphoricity

Somewhat parallel to the ecological turn in cognitive science there has been a shift in the study of metaphor from classical conceptual metaphor theory to dynamic views on metaphor, building on, but also criticizing, some of the core tenets of CMT.

One of the most quoted paragraphs in the literature on metaphor is to be found in one of the first pages of *Metaphors We Live By*:

The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another. (Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 5)

In one line, the cognitive turn in the study of metaphor was introduced. Instead of looking at metaphor as a chiefly rhetorical or poetic device, the focus of study is turned to the underlying cognitive mechanisms governing our experience and conceptualizations. Metaphor was now studied as a psychologically real process of mapping between conceptual domains (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, 1999; Kövecses 2005; Gibbs 2006) zooming in on the manner in which we comprehend abstract concepts as if they were embodied physical phenomena (Johnson 2007). In short, the relationship between cognition, body and language was highlighted linking linguistics with phenomenology and cognitive psychology in a way which proved extremely productive for a whole new generation of metaphor scholars. A new field was developed with an, at the time, innovative focus on the

ways in which our early pre-linguistic embodied experiences structure the way we comprehend and talk about abstract concepts.

However, looking back it now seems clear that the first part of the quote – “understanding” – came to dominate at the expense of the second part about “experiencing”. For many years, the object of study was the way we understand and account for one abstract (target) domain in terms of another more concrete (source) domain tied to a more direct embodied experience (Jensen 2016). Much less focus was on how we, as acting embodied creatures, enact one level of experience in terms of another type of experience; how we, in-and-through our daily actions, bring forth different types of double meaning (Jensen & Cuffari 2014). This experiential dimension in metaphorical meaning was to a large degree downplayed in the sense that production of metaphor was studied solely as a mental and individual achievement. Little attention was paid to the context and the way we produce metaphoric language together and share metaphorical meaning in an interpersonal ecology.

In recent years, however, a more dynamic view on metaphor has been proposed (Cameron 2007a, 2011; Gibbs & Cameron 2008; Müller 2008; Müller & Tag 2010; Gibbs 2013a; Jensen & Cuffari 2014; Jensen 2017). Metaphor scholarship is now advancing beyond its original research focus on cross-domain conceptualization in individual cognition to emergent experiencing in dynamic social interactions. One crucial such shift is that from targeting metaphor to *metaphoricity*. This notion has first and foremost been developed in several works by Cornelia Müller and colleagues (Müller 2008; Cienki & Müller 2008; Müller & Tag 2010), proposing that metaphoricity:

may be more or less activated. Degrees of activation are reconstructable through an account of foregrounding activities and strategies employed by participants in a conversation. Activating metaphoricity manifests itself as a dynamic and temporally orchestrated profiling of multimodal utterances. [...] Metaphor activation regarded in this way follows an inter-

actively negotiated flow of attention; it has an interactive as much as a cognitive and an affective side. (Müller & Tag 2010: 93).

The shift from metaphor to metaphoricity is based on various studies pointing to the fact that quite often “the double meaning of certain verbal actions is as much in the behavior as in the words themselves” (Jensen & Cuffari 2014: 279); furthermore, psycholinguistic evidence suggests that “most linguistic units fall somewhere between metaphoric and literal, so that metaphoricity is a scalar value which influences processing gradually” (Dunn 2014: 1-2). Thus, talking about metaphoricity rather than metaphor entails a shift of focus from metaphor as a cognitive product (of a cross domain mapping) and a well-defined and restricted linguistic entity to a focus on the process of creating and enacting some kind of metaphorical, i.e. double, meaning. Furthermore, it opens up the possibility of seeing metaphor as a gradable phenomenon in that it rejects the idea of literal and/or figurative meanings as sharply distinguishable positions (Jensen 2017), while instead pointing to a perspective on words and utterances as, rather than carrying fixed and clearly defined meanings, entailing meaning potentials which are to be explored and negotiated between members of a language community (Linell, 2009).<sup>5</sup> In this fashion, the dynamic perspective changes our view on metaphorical meaning production. Conceptualization becomes an active ‘doing’ in a conversational environment. It is part of the way we experience things together – and the way we negotiate and communicate our experiences. In this way, metaphoricity can be examined as part of an adaptive and coordinated behavior among various participants in interaction.

Relating this development to the theme of this volume, the use of metaphor relates to the idea of getting a grip on the world in (at least) two ways which again can be traced to the above described development within metaphor studies:

1) In the original layout of CMT, metaphor is embodied, i.e. the concepts we use in order to make sense of the world are based on bodily



experiences. Thus, in using expressions like, “I don’t see your point”, “your arguments are blurred by your opaque language”, “she is extremely bright”, “can you shed some light on your ideas”, we get a grip on the abstract concepts of knowing and understanding by talking (and thinking) about them as if they were optical phenomena; hence the conceptual metaphor KNOWING IS SEEING.

2) The dynamic view on metaphor is not just embodied, but inter-bodily; this view makes it possible to investigate in a more detailed manner how metaphors are used in face to face interaction as a way of achieving a shared platform in the flow of conversation. When using metaphorical language, images are created that somehow set an ‘anchor’ in the conversation. The way we talk and reason about a given topic is embedded in the structure of the metaphor. Often the expression, as well as the accompanying gesture, is reused in the conversation whereby it acquires a constraining function as an anchor by which we explore, experience and ultimately understand a given phenomenon. This way of getting a grip on the world in-and-through sharable metaphorical images will be investigated further in the analyses.

### 3. *Empirical part*

#### 3.1 Transcriptions and data

A dynamic, and ecologically informed, perspective on metaphor also involves methodological commitments for studying metaphor in a different way than the dominant one in the CMT tradition. These commitments concern both the kinds of data that are considered, the ways in which these data can be represented in order to enable a focus on the proper unit of study, as well as specific criteria for identifying metaphoricity (Jensen & Cuffari 2014). The methodological points include commitments to:

1) Naturalistic data. An ecological perspective involves a vantage point in naturalistic data, e. g. naturally occurring spoken interaction or alternatively an experimental setting simulating a real situation. The assumption

behind this methodological point is that social interaction forms a key locus for the enactment of metaphoricity and, consequently, that an ecological study requires an examination of the details of interaction.

2) Stretches of interaction. The experience of metaphorical meaning always takes place in a situation. In the words of dialogical linguist Per Linell: “All sense-making, that is, all communication and cognition, is situated (...). That is, you can never *not be in a situation*” (Linell 2009: 49). How we enact and experience metaphoricity is bound up with the embodied, dialogical, socio-cultural, and specific cognitive affordances of situated interactions. Therefore, the object of study is not isolated words or single utterances, but stretches of talk, or rather stretches of whole-body interaction.

3) Transcriptions combining words with images: Investigating the totality of multimodal expressions is vital in order to investigate the entanglement of metaphoricity with the ongoing interaction. Thus, in the following analyses a word-based transcription of the entire sequence will be presented in order to capture the sequential progression of the discourse situation. The transcriptions are inspired by a basic (and somewhat simplified) version of the notation conventions within conversation analysis developed by Gail Jefferson (Jefferson 2004). A complete overview of the transcription symbols is attached as an appendix to the article. However, since metaphoricity is seen as bound up with bodily movements and dynamics, a transcription of words cannot stand alone. Hence, both transcriptions are combined with images of the ongoing interaction. The pictures provide a visual impression of the dynamics of the situations directly depicting embodied actions such as posture, gaze, gesture, and facial movements. Images have the advantage of favoring an in-situ impression of the interaction instead of a retrospective description (as is often seen in comment lines annotating bodily behavior); they show the dynamics instead of trying to explain them.

The following examples are recordings of naturally occurring social

interactions taking place in different institutional settings. The first example is from a larger data set of video recordings of couples therapy.<sup>6</sup> The second example is a recording from a Danish kindergarten with a female pedagogue and three children.<sup>7</sup> The sequence is from the first session with a married couple and a female couples therapist. In both transcriptions the original Danish is translated into English. Both examples were chosen for analysis since they caught my eye in relation to the how metaphor emerges in social interaction in different ways.

### 3.2 Analysis 1: Wind at one's back

#### 3.2.1 Metaphoricity and the constraints of couples therapy

This example is from a 58 minutes long video recording of a couples therapy session involving a Danish couple, Mike and Ann. As a starting exercise, they are asked to say something positive about each other before they get to the problems in their relationship. The sequence begins with the therapist asking Mike to describe how he is affected, and what it means to him, when Ann is in a good mood. In the first line and forward, he is trying to account for how he is positively affected by this and subsequently Ann is mirroring his description.<sup>8</sup> A central task in developing a procedure for analyzing metaphoricity is to be able to identify metaphoricity as something distinct in the data. Inspired by the works of the Praggeljaz group (Cameron et al. 2009), the starting point for this analysis is a contrast in meaning between a particular entity and the ongoing discourse topic: Thus, the words marked in red in the transcript are the so-called *vehicle terms*. These are phrases that “can be justified as somehow anomalous, incongruent, or ‘alien’ in the ongoing discourse; they have some other meaning that is more basic in some way and that contributes to the meaning in context through comparison” (Cameron 2011: 71).<sup>9</sup>

**Example 1**

Participants: T: Therapist, M: Mike, A: Ann

Duration: 1:15 minutes

1 T: °°what it means to me°°

2 M: what (.) yes what (.) what it means to me is that (.) eh: like I sort of **release some of my own resources** (1.0) it's like eh (0.5) that I (0.3) **get a start** >and now I can hear it's getting too long< h heh it's like **having the wind at one's back from the start** when you are running

3 A: hmm↑ (0.2) so what I hear you say is that **you release** (0.2) **some energy** and that eh (0.5) it is like (.) **running with the wind at one's back right from the start without warming up** (0.2) is that correct  
(.) is [THAT]

4 M: [HEH] HEH

5 A: THAT what you are saying

6 M: ahr [what I mean]

7 A: [heh heh heh]

8 T: [yes↑ (0.1) yes]

9 M: now [try and listen] what I like (.) more like to be absolutely precise what I mean is that (.) eh **I get a starting point that eh** (.) I mean

10 A: [heh heh heh]

11 M: [where I like] eh:: (0.2) so that (1.0) .h >we:ll I'm like **moving fast** >if you can put it like that< like yeah exactly **moving fast when you start the race** if you can put it like that (1.0) so eh (1.5) **it just runs** °°that is how you explain it yes (0.2) and it gives you something (.) that°° that's how it is  
[I think]

12 T: [mhm↑]

13 A: yes .h (0.1) so what I (0.1) hear you say (.) is that eh (0.1) **you simply feel that you are running with the wind at one's back from the start**

14 M: h↑

15 K: mhh↑

16 M: absolutely correct

In analyzing this sequence, it is important to bear in mind the specific constraints and affordances of couples therapy. In other words, the way the metaphoricality unfolds can be seen as a type of attunement to the specific affordances of this particular kind of ecological niche, in this case the living practice of couples therapy. According to Gibson, an ecological niche is a set of affordances that offers the animal (or the person) different ways of life in the sense of different types of behavior (Gibson 1979). In this type of couples therapy both physical and social affordances can be identified as playing a key role for a certain type of behavior. The physical arrangement of sitting closely face-to-face with the therapist in the middle (see example 1) clearly affords an interpersonal engagement and emotional coupling (more about this in section 2.2.3). Equally important is the way the dialogue is structured around the practice of mirroring. When the first speaker says something the second speaker cannot reply freely with for instance counter arguments, elaborations, questions, or

just change the topic. Instead, the second speaker is obliged to mirror his/her conception of what has just been said (often beginning with the phrase “what I hear you say is...”). The idea is to force the couples to listen and try to understand what the other partner is saying. The consequence is that the speed of normal conversations is reduced considerably and the topic of conversation is kept for a much longer time.

Consequently, these tight *social constraints* allow for more patience and in-depth understanding (that is the ideal at least) while at the same time allowing a dominant role for the therapist who oversees and to some degree controls the development of the dialogue. In relation to the development of metaphoricity, the low speed, repeated patterns, the tendency to stay on topic and the interpersonal focus of mirroring all afford an elaborated, negotiable and fully developed type of metaphoric reasoning.

### 3.2.2 Patterns of metaphoricity

Throughout the sequence, we can find a clear pattern of vehicle terms related to notions of running and/or of moving fast, introduced by Mike and re-used (and developed) by Ann as adequate descriptions of how Mike feels when Ann is in a good mood. The image of running with the wind at one’s back is repeated three times by both Mike and Ann and distributed throughout the sequence in the following way:

#### **Pattern 1:**

- M: L. 2: it’s like having the wind at one’s back from the start when you are running
- A: L. 3: it is like (.) running with the wind at one’s back right from the start without warming up
- A: L. 16: you simply feel that you are running with the wind at ones back from the start

These ongoing conceptualizations draw on the physical experience of movement and propulsion as both troublesome and demanding, in the case of obstacles, or conversely, as easy and effortless if there is a helping factor. Running with the wind at one's back can be experienced as exactly such a helping factor. Thus, we can identify a loosely structured pattern of vehicle terms that entails the metaphorical meaning potential: FEELING GOOD IS HAVING THE WIND AT ONE'S BACK.

However, the metaphoricity in this example is by no means tied to a single type of metaphoric reasoning. Prior to the articulation of the image of running with the wind at one's back, Mike talks about "releasing my own resources" and "getting a start". Subsequently these images are reused by Ann (in addition offering the elaboration "without warming up") and they are joined by other related expressions such as "moving fast", "start the race", "it just runs", "gives you something" as can be seen below:

**Pattern 2:**

- M: L. 2: like I sort of release some of my own resources
- A: L. 3: you release (0.2) some energy

**Pattern 3:**

- M: L. 2 it's like eh that I (0.3) get a start
- M: L. 9: I get a starting point
- M: L. 11: I'm like moving fast
- M: L. 11: moving fast when you [start] the race
- M l. 14: it just runs<sup>10</sup>

It is important to stress that these three patterns of metaphoricity are entangled with each other both conceptually and on a pragmatic level, e.g. the notion of a "start" is prevalent, in both pattern 1 and 3, in both

to “get a start”, “getting a starting point”, “from the start”, and “when you start”. This is clearly a highly-conventionalized expression with only little novel metaphorical value. Still, it can be combined with other expressions like “running”, “moving” or “race”, thereby achieving a slightly higher level of metaphoricity by stressing a conceptual structure of forward movement of various kinds. This structure is promoted and developed by both Mike and Ann, and it is interesting how one metaphoric structure affords either a direct re-use of the same image or use of a related image. As previously investigated by among others Lynne Cameron (Cameron 2007; Cameron et al. 2009), once a type of metaphor is introduced into a conversation others (or related ones) will often follow. Again, the metaphoricity works as social affordances, that anchor and constrain different ways of understanding and highlighting certain aspects of how Mike feels when Ann is in a good mood. In this manner, the metaphoricity is tightly constrained by the dynamics of mirroring (they are explicitly told to mirror each other), in which Ann is describing her understanding of Mike’s account of his experience of the impact on her mood. Consequently, they both come to understand each other in the light of the other, thereby developing a unifying metaphorical structure that enables a shared understanding.

### 3.2.3 Affect, inter-bodily dynamics and intersubjective meaning

Looking at the trajectory of metaphoricity in this example, it is notable that even though the two mirroring turns by Ann in line 3 and line 16 are quite similar, Mike’s feedbacks are rather different. The first one is more or less rejected (l. 9: “ahr what I mean”) and instead, another elaborate account is offered as a correction or alternative explanation. The second one on the other hand receives an immediate non-verbal accept (l. 17: “.h↑”) as well as an explicit verbal approval (l. 21: “absolutely correct”). This is all the more the more noticeable since Ann’s second last turn does not bear much resemblance with Mike’s second long turn from line



14 which it is supposed to mirror. In order to explain this discrepancy in response it is necessary to focus on how the inter-bodily dynamics influences the construction of metaphoricity as the sequence proceeds. This dimension also has a bearing on the social affordances of metaphor pointing to the fact that the intersubjective acceptance of metaphorical meaning is deeply intertwined with affective embodied dynamics. Again, we need to bear in mind that metaphoricity is not just about words, but is deeply embedded in multimodal and expressive behaviors that are co-developed between the participants.

Figure 1 shows two set of images from different parts of interaction (all in first half of the sequence), leading up to a key point which fundamentally changes the affective dynamics between Mike and Ann and thereby alters the coordination of intersubjective meaning:



Figure 1

Overall, the two sets of pictures point to a clear development in the dynamics between Mike and Ann. The first set of pictures depicts Ann's

first attempt at mirroring in line 3. Ann and Mike are sitting still, looking straight at each other almost motionless; the only visible facial movements are related to Ann's talking. In other words, the level of inter-bodily dynamics and inter-affective involvement is low. This stands in clear contrast to the second set of pictures. Ann is about to finish her mirroring when Mike starts to laugh. Ann smiles and immediately attunes her voice (volume and smiley voice) to the loud laughter of Mike. Subsequently Mike starts gesturing with both hands, talking with a smiley voice while leaning forward and smiling as Ann begins to laugh simultaneously.

Interestingly, this sudden increase in inter-bodily dynamics and inter-affectivity happens at the same time as Mike – on a verbal level – is rejecting Ann's attempt at mirroring. Subsequently, from line 12-14 he is trying to make a new and better account of what he said in the beginning. This account however is characterized by many pauses, hesitations, half-finished phrases and meta-comments. Still, throughout this long turn the inter-personal alignment between Mike and Ann, established in the laughing sequence described above, is kept alive by the use of many head nods, Ann laughing in line 13, smiles and a general reciprocity of glance. In other words, an inter-personal alliance between Mike and Ann is developed and sustained, not so much on a verbal level, but on the level of inter-bodily dynamics and affect. Thus, the inter-bodily level complements and compensates for the discrepancy on a verbal level between Mike's long and somewhat messy turn and the subsequent short mirroring of Ann. In other words, the emergence and co-acceptance of the final metaphorical image is affectively motivated. Affect in face-to-face interactions often “manifests itself as embodied inter-affectivity”, suggesting that “affect is in fact a dynamical and shared ‘in-between’ phenomenon, jointly created by participating interlocutors” (Böhme et al. 2014). The intersubjective acceptance and co-development of this metaphorical structure, and consequently its function as a social affordance, is as much a result of adaptive and expressive behaviors as it is of verbal negotiation.

### 3.3 Analysis 2: Pain in the heart



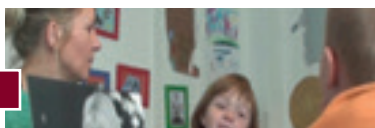




In Example 1, we saw how different metaphorical structures are used and explicitly negotiated back and forth, ultimately creating an emotional and experiential alliance among adults with an intimate knowledge of each other. In the second example, we will investigate how the embodied and performative emergence of metaphoricity constrains children's understanding of an emotional state in a kindergarten. This type of metaphoricity is less elaborated at a verbal level; still, at an embodied and performative level it is highly activated.

Kay, Louise and Simon all attend a Danish kindergarten for 4- to 6-year-olds. A popular learning activity in the kindergarten are the so-called emotion talks. These are led by one of the pedagogues who initiate the talk by showing the children a picture of another child with a distinct emotional expression. Then they all talk about the child in the picture and the emotion expressed there. The goal of these emotion talks is to get the children to articulate emotional experiences and to help them to make sense of different emotions. In this case, as shown on the pictures, the pedagogue presents the children with a photo of a girl with a sad expression on her face. The following sequence takes place right after the picture has been presented for the children. In the first line, the pedagogue responds to a question (from Simon) as to whether the girl on the picture (Anna) might be dead. As in the previous example the vehicle terms are in red while other terms important for the analysis are marked in blue.

**Example 2**

Participants: P: Pedagogue, K: Kay, L: Louise

Duration: 22 seconds

<p><b>1 P:</b></p>	<p>is sad because she knows someone who is dead we don't know that (.) we can only look at Anna's face we cannot know [what makes her sad]</p>	
<p><b>2 K:</b></p>	<p>[&gt;↑ oh I have a pain in the heart&lt;]</p>	
<p><b>3 K:</b></p>	<p>oh I have a pain in the heart now (.)that I hear about these ☺ fee::lings</p>	
<p><b>4 L:</b></p>	<p>and I have-</p>	
<p><b>5 P:</b></p>	<p>=do you get a pain in the heart Kay?</p>	
<p><b>6 K:</b></p>	<p>[yes ☺]</p>	
<p><b>7 L:</b></p>	<p>[&gt;and I] and I get a pain in the stomach&lt; °in hearing about these feelings°</p>	
<p><b>8 P:</b></p>	<p>°yeah I understand that°</p>	
<p><b>9 K:</b></p>	<p>o..Ouch</p>	

In the first two lines, the pedagogue outlines what we call a *possibility space*, marked by the words and phrases in blue. It is explained by the pedagogue that surely the girl on the picture is not dead, but she might know someone who is dead. However, as observers we cannot know what has caused her sadness. We only have access to the expression of sadness (“we can only look at Anna’s face”), not the reason causing sadness. Put differently, the possibility space offers only the epistemic mode of seeing (from a 3rd person perspective), rather than knowing (from a 1st person perspective). However, this structuring of seeing vs. knowing as the only liable option is challenged by the two girls, Kay and Louise, in the following turns. Instead, they enact and populate a metaphoric *experience space* in the discourse that reconfigures the experiential affordances in the on-going next moments of the interaction. Let us now take a closer look at the embodied actions constituting this space.

### 3.2.1 Sadness as articulating and performing pain

In the beginning of the sequence, Kay has been sitting remarkably still alternating between gazing at the picture and sometimes at the pedagogue. But in line 2 she suddenly shifts into a more active mode. Just before she utters, “oh I have a pain in the heart”, Kay starts performing various bodily actions. Most notably, she opens her mouth wide and makes a contorted face as if in pain (see first picture from top). The pedagogue’s attention, however, is still on the other girl, Louise (sitting behind Simon, the boy, and therefore not visible in the picture). Not having received the attention of the pedagogue, Kay then repeats her turn in line 3 about having a pain in the heart and adds, “now that I hear about these feelings”. Kay thereby puts her emotional “outburst” into context, and notably at the end of this turn, she changes her emotional style. She smiles, gestures vividly, and gazes at the teacher as well as at the other children with a playful look on her face (probably due to the fact that she now got the pedagogue’s attention; see second picture from the top). Finally, at the end

of the sequence, in line 8, Kay again performs a whole-body expression of pain – or perhaps rather of being wounded – by leaning forward with open mouth and smiley eyes, grimacing, and opening her mouth open wide and wider while saying “ouch” (see third picture). Again, she is performing pain.<sup>11</sup> Thus, a particular way of getting a grip on the image and idea of sadness is being enacted in-and-through a metaphorical articulation and playful performance of pain. Looking at the picture of the sad girl somehow affords associations of physical pain (even though the girl in the picture in no way looks as if she is in physical pain). In this way, sadness is understood as physical pain. However, the physical pain is clearly not shared by Kay (who is smiling and making funny faces); it is displayed as a publicly available and socially recognizable way of understanding and experiencing sadness.

### 3.2.2 Experiential affordances of metaphoricity

The above described enactment of pain is not restricted to one participant, however, but unfolds in an interplay between the physical surroundings, the pedagogue, and the two girls. Thus, Kay’s actions work as a social affordance for a further elaboration of a related metaphorical structure. In this case, the other girl, Louise, in line 6 draws on an equally embodied source domain by articulating “a pain in the stomach” as an experiential consequence of talking about sad feelings. In this way, the initial actions of Kay afford a dialogical array (Hodges 2009) in the interaction, paving the way for a further metaphorical elaboration. Together, while competing for the pedagogue’s attention, Kay and Louise enact an experience space in which they explore and play with the experience of sadness and pain in-and-through the use of metaphoricity.<sup>12</sup> In this way, the metaphorical potential of this example is by no means restricted to the words alone. Treated as a whole of inter-bodily dynamics, the girls’ actions are *co-experiential*. They are elaborating on sadness by trying out conventional, as well as more unconventional, images of sadness as pain. Jointly they are appropriating

new ways of understanding sadness by playing, not just with popular expressions, but with recognizable behaviors associated with the emotion of sadness too. A famous quote of Mikhail Bakhtin seems relevant here:

The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes one's 'own' only when the speaker populates it with his own intentions, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention. (Bakhtin 1981: 294)

However, the two girls are appropriating, not just the words, but the behavior and expressions of sadness too. In that sense, the embodied behavior of the children employs the culturally conventionalized associations between the human heart and human emotions. For centuries, the heart has been used metaphorically and metonymically as a locus of human emotion – an embodied localization (Kövecses 2005). Thus, the double meaning is also tied to socio-cultural constraints on the linguistic behavior, emerging from the way the children utilize the affordances of the distributed cognitive system of a learning environment: the physical arrangement of the environment (sitting around a table, being presented with an image), the scaffolding of the pedagogue, as well as the pedagogical tradition of linking play with learning activities. Note that appropriate (pedagogue-affirmed) deployment of cultural knowledge is itself a goal of the emotion talks and a value that the girls seek to realize by their participation in the conversation.

To sum up, neither of the girls are in physical pain or emotional pain, but in a playful way they perform both. Thus, a conceptual metaphor of UNDERSTANDING SADNESS IS PAIN PERFORMANCE is being performed and employed as a shared platform for investigating the idea of being sad (seen from the perspective of a 4-year-old). In other words, it sets an anchor and further (metaphoric) understandings are reached by engaging in activities around that anchor. Thereby the metaphoricity constrains the way in which the participants understand and experience the topic of the conversation/learning activity.

#### 4. Conclusion: *The interworld of metaphor*

The notion of getting a grip on the world, derived from the philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty (and later elaborated by among others Hubert Dreyfus), is, as most other abstract concepts, clearly a metaphor. In Dreyfus' words:

Merleau-Ponty's inspiration for his notion of maximal grip comes from perception and manipulation. When we are looking at something, we tend, without thinking about it, to find the best distance for taking in both the thing as a whole and its different parts. When grasping something, we tend to grab it in such a way as to get the best grip on it. (Dreyfus 2003)

This description nicely lays out the source domain (in Lakoff & Johnson's terms) of the embodied experience of touching and holding something firmly in order to be able to keep, investigate and perhaps control it. These bodily practices are related to the way that the human body, in particular the hands and their skilled efficiency in grasping objects, structure our way of thinking and talking about the target domain of understanding, comprehending and knowing. This metaphor also adds a layer of sensitivity and feeling to the otherwise somewhat abstract and intellectualist idea of understanding, comprehending and knowing as mere mental processes. One of the great advantages of metaphor is that it makes our understanding easier by highlighting certain aspects of a given abstract, and perhaps rather complex, phenomenon. That is, unlike similes, in which A is like B ("O My Love's like a red, red rose," Robert Burns), metaphors do not make an overt comparison. Still, they function by means of using something known to describe something unknown; in this case, our embodied experiences of touching and grasping are mapped onto so called mental processes.

However, this metaphor also carries with it a certain viewpoint, i.e. the idea of the individual as the principal observer and investigator of the world. It is the individual subject who grasps, holds and thereby gets



a grip on something. There is by no means anything unusual about this vantage point in the individual subject as the prime investigator and the locus of thinking and understanding. Our linguistic structures and concepts in the Western world are all bound to individual reasoning as the primary way of understanding the world. Still, in light of the theoretical perspective and analyses of this article it seems relevant, in all modesty, to point to an alternative way of getting a grip on the world; one that is embedded in the dynamics and cooperation of human face-to-face interaction, rather than in the minds of individuals.

A key notion in this regard is Per Linell's notion of an "interworld". According to Linell, researchers working in social interaction as a field of study from a dialogical (or ecological) perspective should strive for a more balanced view on meaning:

Meanings are simply not out there in the environment, because they must be ascribed by sense makers. But as Hilary Putnam insisted, "meanings just ain't in the head" either. [...] Whereas most monologists typically speak about meanings as appearing and residing in an 'inner world' of the cognizing individual, dialogists would evoke the 'interworld'; meanings, understandings, contents (of thoughts) and ideas are interrelated phenomena between individuals and between the subject (who thinks, understands, means) and the affordances of his or her ecosocial world. (Linell 2009: 159-160)

Thus, the metaphorical reasoning, understanding and feeling in the two examples analyzed in the previous section cannot not sufficiently be captured as either an individual product of underlying cognitive processes, or a mere choice of words, or for that matter as independent features of the environment. Rather, they appear as interrelated phenomena between the participants, negotiated, elaborated and developed in the ongoing flow of interaction. They work as social affordances in the sense that they enable certain further (metaphorical) ways of talking, thinking, acting and feeling about the topic of conversation. As argued by the one of the

founding fathers of CMT, Mark Johnson: “At the human level, cognition is action – we think in order to act, and we act as part of our thinking” (Johnson 2007: 126). The metaphorical ways of getting a grip on the world, analyzed here, are all bound to cognitive co-action, thinking and feeling as active explorations of the world around us carried out in collaboration with our interlocutors. In this way, the use of metaphor needs to be understood as a doing in the world that is embedded in the environmental structures of the inter-personal ecology. In face-to-face interaction, we often think and feel, and thereby get a grip together, in-and-through our abilities to act in the present situation. One way of accomplishing this is by the use of metaphor, not as an individual inner cognitive process, but as joint cognitive actions in the fast flow of human interaction.

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## Notes

1. For an overview of the critique raised against CMT the last 30 years (and counter arguments), see Gibbs 2013.
2. The act of writing is an example of a distributed cognitive processes, where one externalizes thinking using artifacts (e.g., computer, paper, pencil, the written words), and then this activity in turn provides a feedback (looking at the material signs) which changes and constrains the thinking process in-itself (Menary 2010). Thus, the action of writing down enables a trajectory of further thinking different in nature from that of a cognitive process without any feedback from written artifacts.
3. Most of Gibson's work was on visual perception in both animals and humans. However, since then the notion of affordances has travelled into the both the social sciences and the humanities in particular in relation to studies in design studies, social psychology, sociology, social interaction, and human-computer interaction (Hodges 2009; Chemero 2011; Dotov et al. 2012; Jensen & Pedersen 2016).
4. Many studies in the last 10 years have documented and described how metaphors in conversation are often marked, elaborated and developed by the means of gesture (Gibbs & Cameron 2008; Müller 2008; Müller & Tag 2010; Cienki & Müller 2008; Cienki 2013; Jensen & Cuffari 2014).
5. The notion of meaning potentials implies on the one hand a rejection of essential meanings of words and lexical items, while on the other hand recognizing meaning potentialities as being structured between core aspects and more peripheral ones: "lexical meaning potentials are open but, of course, not endlessly open. Words have no entirely fixed, stable, always valid ('eternal') meanings. However, attempts at situated fixation occur in some activity types, for example, when a strict terminology is crucial and targeted" (Linell 2009: 342).
6. This recording stems from my Ph.D. dissertation in which I investigated the interactional and cognitive dimensions of emotions and memory in couples therapy. Before the recordings took place contracts of permission and anonymity were signed by all the parties involved and all the names used in the transcriptions are pseudonyms.
7. This recording was initially undertaken by a student of mine in the course Interpersonal Communication at University of Southern Denmark. Before the recordings took place, contracts of permission and anonymity were

signed by all the parties involved and all the names used in the transcriptions are pseudonyms.

8. This type of couples therapy is called Imago Relationship Therapy, in which the act of mirroring plays a key role (Feldman 1999).
9. This does not imply that all of these words are considered metaphorical in themselves; still, taken together they all contribute to the emergence of metaphoricity.
10. One could argue, of course, that both pattern 1 and 3 describe feelings in terms of forward movement. However, only pattern 3 describes the wind at one's back as the determining factor behind positive feelings.
11. The vehicle term "a pain in the heart" points to a physical experience that is anticipated by her whole-body activity before and during her utterance. In that sense, the restricted focus on wordings entailed in the notion of a vehicle term seems insufficient here. It is not only Kay's wordings but her total embodied behavior – connecting the experience of physical pain with sad feelings – that contrasts with the on-going discourse, and in that sense has the potential of being interpreted metaphorically.
12. This does not imply a completely conscious use of metaphoricity as such. This way of acting arises as part of the ongoing flow of conversation characterized by spontaneity and playfulness, not careful and conscious choice of words or behavior. (For a more thorough discussion of the balance (or continuum) between conscious and no-conscious actions, see Gibbs 2011.) Furthermore, Chris Johnson (1997) has argued that young children in some cases start with confluences of experience which later become deconflated, allowing for mappings between what comes to be understood as separate domains.

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## Appendix

### Transcription symbols

- (.): Pause in speech in microseconds
- (1.0): Pause in speech in seconds
- [.]: Overlapping speech across turns
- ::: Prolonging of sound
- ↑: Rising intonation
- ...: Emphasis
- >.<: Faster speech
- <.>: Slower speech
- °: Soft voice
- °°: Whisper
- ☺: Smiley voice
- §: Overly correct pronunciation
- : Gaze direction
- .h: In breath
- h.: Outbreath
- CAPITAL LETTERS: High volume