*Is a metaphor (like) a simile? Differences in meaning, effect and processing**

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Abstract

Current theoretical work in metaphor and simile studies is preoccupied with the precise nature of the difference between them, and whether metaphors and similes are essentially interchangeable (as comparison theories hold) or altogether different in meaning and effect (as categorization theories would suggest). Adhering to the categorization line, I illustrate differences in effect by close examination of examples, and show that the fundamental difference in reference, and the intrinsic focus of the simile form on precise points of similarity between two concepts, is responsible for a range of distinctive effects. Contrary to popular thought, simile can sometimes be more powerful than metaphor.

1 Introduction: simile and metaphor compared

Considered at the most basic linguistic level, the difference between metaphor and simile seems slight: both commonly involve the juxtaposition of two concepts in order to enhance appreciation of one of them, differing only in the presence of absence of the word 'like'. The two statements 'Mary is a bulldozer' and 'Mary is *like* a bulldozer', for example, are likely to lead the hearer to the same broad kinds of judgments about Mary's personality. The fact that the two do function as distinct linguistic figures of speech, and are used in different contexts, however, has led many metaphor theorists working on the comprehension of figurative language to consider specifically the relationship between metaphor and simile. Theoretical thinking is sharply divided on one central issue: whether they are indistinguishable in meaning and so interchangeable, or altogether different in their effects.

Accounts of the effects of metaphor go back as far as classical writings, and many recent theorists still use Aristotle as a framework or springboard for the development of their own line. Robert J. Fogelin draws on the following passage

* I am hugely indebted to my supervisor Robyn Carston for her inspirational guidance and unfailing support throughout the writing of this paper.

from Aristotle which suggests that, although metaphors should essentially be taken to be nothing more than elliptical similes, metaphor might have greater rhetorical force than simile in certain circumstances:

> The simile, as has been said before, is a metaphor, differing from it only in the way that it is put; and just because it is longer it is less attractive. Besides, it does not outright say that 'this' *is* 'that', and therefore the hearer is less interested in the idea. (Fogelin 1988: 27)

This account takes for granted a series of assumptions about the way metaphor and simile function: firstly, that they are not only interchangeable but entirely equivalent; secondly, that a longer formulation is necessarily less appealing; and, thirdly, that direct equation (saying that 'this' is 'that') is intrinsically more interesting than mere comparison. I disagree with this stance on all counts, and aim to show that not only are supposedly corresponding metaphors and similes often very different in meaning and effect (something that has been undertaken by many critics), but that similes, far from being merely hedged metaphors, explicitly explained and therefore of less force, can in certain circumstances have greater force by virtue of the length and form Aristotle criticizes.

The *Princeton Encyclopaedia of Poetry and Poetics* (1990) defines metaphor as a verbal relation in which an idea or image is enhanced "by the presence of one or more other ideas". Explanation of the mechanism by which the ideas are related, however, is deftly avoided; and this question is central to metaphor studies. Broadly speaking, the field divides into those who view metaphor comprehension as a process of direct comparison, highlighting similarities between different named concepts by a process of feature-matching, and those who envisage it as involving the formulation of novel abstract categories potentially encompassing (among other things) both the encoded concept of which they bear the name and the target of the metaphor. The comparison approach takes for granted, even depends upon, the fundamental equivalence and therefore interchangeability of metaphor and simile: both compare different concepts, and metaphors, which usually involve strictly untrue statements (as Mary is not actually a bulldozer), are understood by implicit translation to the simile form, which does not involve such a contradiction and so is easier to process. George A. Miller (1993: 357) sets out an attempt "to defend a version of the traditional view that a metaphor is an abbreviated simile"; and Fogelin (1988: 357) claims that metaphors "differ from similes in only a trivial grammatical way: metaphors are similes with the terms of comparison suppressed". The categorization approach, by contrast, introduces the idea that metaphors do not refer directly to the encoded concept named at all, but to a novel abstract category of the same name, potentially including both concepts but not necessarily comparing them. Consider the following much-used example:

(1) My lawyer is a shark.

According to Relevance Theory, a distinction is to be made between the encoded concept SHARK, used to refer to actual sharks, and the related ad hoc concept SHARK*, applicable both to actual sharks and to those things that share enough properties with them to be included in a newly-formed category. In the comprehension of the metaphor, the word shark is understood as referring to the category SHARK*. In this case, simile and metaphor must be processed differently (as simile does refer directly to the encoded concept) and are likely to have different effects. It is my aim to show that the categorization account does a better job of accounting for the differences in effect and meaning of metaphor and simile which (as I will go on to show) evidently exist.

As part of its definition of metaphor, *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms* (1999) offers the following description: "A comparison is usually implicit; whereas in simile it is explicit". This antithetical formulation, introducing simile directly into the definition, is proof of the extent to which not only is our thinking about metaphor and simile intertwined, but our thinking in general conditioned by the process of comparing one thing to another. George Lakoff's pioneering and compelling theory of conceptual metaphor claims that our entire cognitive makeup is fundamentally metaphorical in nature: we understand the world through a series of core conceptual metaphors ('Purposes are Destinations', 'Difficulties are Impediments to Motion', 'More is Up') based on experience (Lakoff 2008, Lakoff & Turner 1989). This could be extended (or reduced, depending on one's perspective) to a theory of conceptual *simile*: we see everything in terms of comparison, and make sense of the world by attempting to understand new things in terms of the already known or understood. That versions of the same hypothesis apply to both metaphor and simile only shows quite how linked they are, and how difficult to separate. The very fact that simile and metaphor are so often considered together, one used to illuminate the other, and so intertwined in terms of the way we think and write, might be interpreted as support for the case that the difference between them is merely a linguistic or terminological one, and that metaphor might simply be shorthand for simile. However, it is my contention that not only are the effects of metaphor and simile in many cases fundamentally and strikingly different, but they are different due to their linguistic form in ways that have not been considered even by those who adopt the same general line as I do.

2 Simile and metaphor contrasted

There are many ways in which it is clear that a simple interchangeability account will not stand up to close inspection. Whilst metaphor theorists tend to keep to

instances which depend upon the use of the copula form, which can be so handily adapted to suit either metaphor or simile – 'X is Y' versus 'X is like Y' – the scope of the linguistic form of both metaphor and simile is a great deal more broad. In many cases there is no simple metaphorical equivalent for similes, particularly those which branch out to depend upon the combination of other verbs with 'like'. Consider the following simile:

(2) Mary *sings like* an angel

Its meaning is certainly not captured by the simplified and broader 'Mary *is* an angel', but is difficult to paraphrase in metaphor form otherwise. It is not just with the introduction of more sophisticated verbal constructions, however, that metaphor and simile begin to diverge: there are all manner of further linguistic manifestations of simile – 'as...as, 'more...than a ...', 'like a ...to a ...' and a series of standard conventionalized verbs of behaviour and appearance (*look like, seem like, act like* and so on) – which make translation problematic. This asymmetry works in both directions, too: it is often not possible to invent a simile for a given metaphorical structure. Beyond the simple copula form, many different parts of speech can be used metaphorically in a way which simile cannot mimic (consider 'She bit his head off!', for example). Metaphor and simile are fundamentally quite different phenomena that differ in the contexts in which they can have a meaningful role. It is too easy to take as a starting point the relatively few linguistic forms which can be easily adjusted to fit both forms and use this as a basis for a much stronger argument in favour of the similarity between them than we are justified in maintaining.

In fact, even keeping to the copula forms it seems obvious to me that – contrary to what many theorists on both sides of the debate claim, or even simply take as read – metaphor and simile are *never* properly interchangeable, in the sense that one could be used in place of the other without compromising meaning or effect. The conventional phrase 'Mary is an angel' may well be *paraphraseable* as 'Mary is *like an angel in some respect*' – most people, whether or not they accept the definition of metaphor as 'elliptical simile', would acknowledge as much – but for any context-bound utterance of the original metaphor, a simile could *not* be directly transposed without changing the meaning. Much of Glucksberg & Haught's (2006) work is based on double metaphor-simile structures of the type 'My lawyer is (like) a shark', but in my opinion they do not emphasize enough the crucial point – central to their own argument as well as mine – that the two sentences can, and usually do, mean different things, due to the fundamental difference in reference described above: the simile refers directly to the encoded concept 'shark', whereas the metaphor to a superordinate category which encompasses both real sharks and the lawyer. Glucksberg & Haught (2006: 361) object to the standard comparison

account on the grounds that it relies on the assumption that "metaphors and similes are essentially equivalent to one another. A metaphor can always be paraphrased as a simile". Ironically, however, their wording of the objection itself relies upon the erroneous assumption that 'equivalent to' and 'paraphraseable as' are themselves equivalent. It may well be possible to paraphrase a metaphor as a simile loosely, in order to understand it more clearly, but a great leap is involved in the extension that the same effect is produced, or that metaphor and simile are consequently essentially the same.

Comparison theorists typically do treat metaphor and simile as in some sense the same, however. It is my intention to show that not only are metaphor and simile different in meaning, in effect and in the way in which they are processed, but that these differences are all due to a fundamental bias in the form of the simile towards the terms of the comparison being made. By the terms of the comparison, I mean the particular properties of the encoded concept accessed in deriving the intended points of similarity between topic and vehicle. Simile, unlike metaphor, refers directly to encoded concepts, and the form prompts the hearer to actively consider points of comparison, which can lead to interesting and varying effects. The fact that simile is more concerned with the terms of comparison means that, for example, more intricate analogies can suit the simile form better, whilst those which intend to convey vehemence or emotive force can be more effective as metaphors. Consider the following pair of examples:

(3) a. The mind is (like) a computer.
b. The mind is (like) a kitchen.

Neither is particularly strongly conventional, in either form; but it seems to me that the two forms lead to subtly different meanings in each case, if put in the right context. The simile 'The mind is like a computer' leads the hearer to think of ways in which the two concepts might be comparable: both take in, process and store information, for example, and both can be considered in terms of circuits and pathways. The metaphor form, by contrast, involves less direct online contemplation of the precise terms which have prompted the juxtaposition of the two concepts, but says something quite emphatic about the mind. In a conversation marvelling at the complexity of the human brain, or a heavily rhetorical speech about human nature, the metaphor might be more suitable. The opposite is the case for the kitchen example: 'the mind is a kitchen' sounds patently absurd because of the emphatic associations of metaphor which seem out of place in this context; it is perfectly possible, of course, to imagine a context in which ridicule is the intended aim, which would of course make the metaphor entirely appropriate and effective. 'The mind is like a kitchen', in encouraging more measured reflection on the ways in which they might be alike, might lead one to consider a surprisingly fruitful set

of shared qualities: the mind is full of useful things, carefully stored in assigned places, the site of creation...these obviously involve a bit of a stretch, but it is precisely because the simile form encourages us to make such stretches that it works, whilst the metaphor might have been dismissed, with a laugh, out of hand.

I will now look at further examples, some used by theorists to develop their stances and some of my own, in order to develop this idea.

3. Differences in effect

3.1 Some critical viewpoints

A number of theorists have attempted to produce experimental evidence for specific, predictable ways in which metaphor and simile might differ. Ravid Aisenman (1999) draws a distinction between what he calls 'attributive' and 'relational' comparisons in determining which figurative form is most appropriate: an attributive comparison involves the mapping of a shared one-place predicate attribute from topic to vehicle, for example 'the sun is like an orange → both *orange-coloured*, both *round*'; a relational predicate, on the other hand, involves a secondary association, such as 'the sea is like a big aquarium → both *contain fish and water*'. His results suggest that similes are favoured for the mapping of attributive, and metaphors relational, predicates. Gibb & Wales (1990: 199) propose a different determinant: "concreteness of vehicle, specificity of the tenor, and concreteness of the predicative adjective preceding the vehicle" influence which is the more appropriate. Their results suggested that similes seemed to be preferred in the case of concrete vehicles, whereas metaphors were preferred for abstract vehicles; and that a tenor that was preceded by a definite article or possessive pronoun was common among items assigned the simile form, whereas metaphor was assigned to items with no direct article. Examples cited such as "His alcohol...faithful panacea" (for which the subjects must fill the gap with metaphor or simile form) sound odd to me, and therefore might be considered an unsound basis for comparison; the basic idea, however, is simple and appealing.

Both Bowdle & Gentner (2005) and Glucksberg & Haught (2006) also carry out experiments committed to finding ways in which simile and metaphor might differ. The results of both lead to neat general findings. According to Bowdle & Gentner, novelty favours similes and conventionality metaphors, so the simile form is best suited to new metaphorical ideas and the metaphor form to those that have become accepted and familiar. The "career of metaphor" as they term it, therefore, involves a gradual shift from simile to metaphor as a figurative use becomes more established. Glucksberg & Haught contest this line directly, arguing that it is the fact that the simile form refers to the literal encoded concept whereas the metaphor to a superordinate category that is key: as a result, the effect of similes will be to

invite less metaphorical readings. Simile will be deemed more apt when the vehicle evoked is literally applicable to the topic, whereas metaphors prompt more emergent properties (that is, those which are not literally applicable to the vehicle but derived in the interpretation of the topic) and apply more aptly to less literal connections. Glucksberg's later analysis concludes: "whether a metaphor is understood more easily in categorical vs comparison form, does not depend on novelty or conventionality but instead on the referential and semantic properties of the metaphor. As Glucksberg & Haught (2006a) put it, 'Different metaphors will have different careers'" (Glucksberg 2008: 79).

In my opinion, all of these experiments touch upon important ideas; but the fundamental experimental approach is flawed. By necessity, all begin from the assumption that there exist figurative ideas that can be expressed by linking two concepts together, using either metaphor or simile, and that which form is "preferred", considered the most "apt", "natural" or "appropriate" in any instance will reveal something about the form.[1] My suggestion, however, is that, rather than there being something intrinsic to the meaning of the concepts employed to which metaphor or simile is better suited, the metaphor or simile itself is responsible for the meaning, due to its fundamental linguistic form. There is no one overarching prerequisite independent of the form that determines whether metaphor or simile is preferred – whether it be the nature of the predicates involved, concreteness, aptness or familiarity,[2] novelty or conventionality, vehicle- or topic-applicability – but the inherent form of metaphor or simile is responsible for a range of different effects, potentially involving all of the above, which differ case by case, and context by context. The linguistic form of similes refers directly to literal encoded concepts, and encourages consideration of the specific terms of the comparison intended in each case; something is like something else *in certain respects* that the simile itself demands contemplation of. Metaphor, on the other hand, involves no such direct consideration of the terms, but instead more commonly draws the hearer's attention to the fact of the juxtaposition of two concepts and how emphatically they are judged to be related. Consider the following exchange:

(4) Kate: Is your sister like your mum then?
Anna: Like her? My sister IS my mother!

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[1] The notions of "preference", "aptness", "appropriateness" etc are used extensively by theorists in this field – see especially Blasko & Connine (1992), Bowdle & Gentner (2005), Gibb & Wales (1990) and Aisenman (1999) – in my opinion without sufficient consideration of their problematically subjective nature.

[2] See Blasko & Connine (1992) for a full account of the role or aptness and familiarity in metaphor processing.

Clearly in this context, the copula form is being used to strengthen the vehemence of Anna's feeling that they are alike, rather than the precise terms of the ways in which they might be. This distinction between terms and force, precision versus vehemence, conveyed by the intrinsic linguistic form, influences the meaning of a figurative statement. In the example above, it is clear that the use of the metaphor form adds to the force of the statement; and it is commonly assumed that this quality extends to metaphors in general always being more effective than similes. I intend to show that, in the right circumstances, simile's focus on terms can in fact have the more powerful effects. This will become clearer as I consider more examples. Though their overall mission to find a generalized reliable rule for when simile or metaphor is better is, I believe, flawed, Bowdle & Gentner and Glucksberg & Haught look at some interesting cases and come to some very useful conclusions, so I will begin by turning to look at some of these in more detail.

3.2 Bowdle and Gentner: novelty and conventionality

Bowdle & Gentner's first main prediction is that "there should be a shift in mode of expression from the comparison (simile) form to the categorization (metaphor) form as figurative statements become more conventional" and this prediction was tested by giving subjects figurative statements in both forms (such as 'Time is (like) a river' and 'A soldier is (like) a pawn') and asking them to indicate "which grammatical form they preferred for each statement" (2005: 200). The blithe acceptance that it is appropriate to think of conventionality independent of form is, I think, mistaken: in verbal communication conventionality is usually brought about precisely due to association with specific forms. 'She's an angel' is a conventional metaphor, whilst 'he's as white as a sheet' is a conventional simile, and in both cases it is the form itself that makes the figurative image conventional, not the idea behind it – 'he is a white sheet' would not be considered conventional by extension. Aside from this, however, I think the conclusions that similes work for novel figurative usages and metaphors for conventional has, with a few qualifications, much to be said for it. In my opinion, both novelty and conventionality are key, but it is a point about the effects of simile due to its form that makes them so. As I said above, the simile's reference to an encoded concept draws our attention to the terms of comparison, the particular shared qualities leading to points of similarity, and it is for this reason that, in certain cases, if a figurative idea is new to the hearer, it will make more sense as a simile. Equally, because metaphor does not focus on terms of comparison, a new idea might sound anomalous as a metaphor because the hearer expects it to be easily interpretable in a fixed conventional sense. Consider the following example:

(5) Sarah: How are you getting on with your new housemate?
Edward: He's a bluebottle.

I think Sarah would struggle to find one obvious and accessible relevant reading for Edward's remark. 'To be a bluebottle' is not a familiar and conventionalized notion and so there is no preformed concept to appeal to. The use of the metaphor form, though, suggests that there is a particular understood meaning, and she might be driven to assume that 'being a bluebottle' is slang for a specific meaning of which she is simply not aware. If, on the other hand, Edward had originally replied "He is like a bluebottle", Sarah would be much more likely to think on the spot of specific ways in which someone might be like a bluebottle, and would then have no problem coming up with a series such as "he buzzes around the house making lots of noise and irritating me". Because of the simile's focus on terms – that is, on the points of likeness between the housemate and bluebottles – a relevant reading is facilitated.

Sometimes novel statements can be understood as if conventional, because of the fact (exemplified in the bluebottle example) that the use of the metaphor form in conversational contexts carries with it an assumption of a fixed applicable denotation. Describing a heavily pregnant woman, 'Mary is a Teletubby' is not an established conventional phrase, but it is apparent from the use of the metaphor form that there is some specific sense (in this case probably related to shape and size) in which a superordinate category of Teletubby-like things is intended. 'Mary is like a Teletubby' would, I think, misleadingly suggest there are different, more various ways in which Mary might be like a Teletubby, and so sounds a little odd. 'Mary looks like a Teletubby', of course, would be fine, and perhaps it is the existence of this option that makes the simple copula form less felicitous.

Conventionality is also of particular importance when conventional metaphors are being overturned by the unexpected use of a simile, and again it is because of simile's focus on terms that this applies. The statement 'Sam is a pig' is so conventional as to be barely metaphorical at all in meaning any longer: there are broadly two possible understood readings, depending on the context – either he is greedy, or he is considered to be horrible in some way – but both are equally established. If, however, I was to say "Sam is *like* a pig", the introduction of the simile would lead me to consider actual ways in which someone might really be like a pig, and result in the rejuvenation of a slightly stale metaphor. 'Sam is a pig' is likely to be spoken with more force or passion, but 'Sam is like a pig' will induce more vivid effects in the course of processing. Similarly, the statement "it was *like* a kick in the teeth" is perhaps more likely to make the hearer think about actually being kicked in the teeth than the familiar metaphor's idiomatic usage to mean any painful or disappointing thing. Glucksberg & Haught consider the possibility, suggested by both Fogelin and Ortony, that "metaphors might somehow be more

'vivid'" (2006: 364). In these cases, however, the opposite appears to apply: the focus on terms evokes a more precise, and so arguably more visually vivid, image.

It has become a colloquial commonplace to insert the adjective 'literal' to add rhetorical force to metaphorical utterances which are clearly not:

(6) That meal was so spicy – my mouth was *literally* on fire!

It is interesting that, although the literal associations of the simile form are often imagined to have a qualifying effect, the term 'literal' is here used (or rather misused) to strengthen the metaphor. Even though it is not true, the implication is that imagining the person's mouth really on fire is more vivid or powerful; and this is exactly the effect of using a simile with literal points of similarity in place of the expected metaphor. It seems that part of the appeal is that on some level the interaction between the clearly conflicting literal and metaphorical meanings makes the assertion of the connection between the concepts discussed more striking. The Gricean view of metaphors as deviations from accepted linguistic norms, violating conversational maxims of communication – which is exemplified in Searle's account of the priority of the literal in metaphor processing: "when the utterance is defective if taken literally, look for an utterance meaning that differs from sentence meaning" (1993: 103) – is now widely discredited by categorization theorists;[3] but some recognition of the way literal meaning remains activated and interacts with the fully processed and interpreted metaphorical meaning is necessary.[4]

Robyn Carston (2009) suggests that there may be two kinds of metaphors which might be processed differently, a "prosaic (practical) sort" and a "more poetic (imaginative) sort", and that the latter "retain their 'literal' meaning" to some extent. This seems to me to be a crucial issue: I agree that there are two distinct uses to which metaphor can be put, and any conclusions drawn will be misleading without sufficient attention being paid to this division. Metaphors can be used in conversation, in order to communicate specific information, or (usually in literary contexts) to create effects by evoking images. The conversational, communicative type is more likely to be conventional, and in these cases metaphors are almost always more emphatic than a corresponding simile would be. The different effects of the metaphor are not simply due to how conventional it is, however, but to whether it is being used to lead the hearer to a specific informative conclusion, or intends a wider array of less specific related implicatures to be accessed. The

[3] See Sperber & Wilson (2008) for a literal-loose-figurative continuum account, and Johnson (1996) for an overview of recent processing evidence against the priority of the literal in metaphor processing.

[4] Recanati discusses the effect of the literal meaning on metaphorical interpretation further (2004: 77).

longer, less conventional and more poetic a metaphorical use becomes, the less appreciable is the difference in effect between metaphor and simile. It is for this reason that in a poem such as John Donne's 'Valediction Forbidding Mourning', whether the poem is saying that the situation of the two lovers is *like* workings of a compass or actually metaphorically *is*, has a less profound effect on the reader's interpretation, due to the sustained nature of the trope.[5] Most of the distinctions I make in this dissertation apply to verbal communication rather than poetic use.

3.3 Glucksberg and Haught: emergent properties and adjective insertion

The general thrust of Glucksberg & Haught's argument is that metaphors cannot always be understood "in terms of their corresponding similes", and so the comparison account of metaphor processing must be flawed. The difference in reference – simile referring to "the literal concept" and metaphor to "an abstract (metaphorical) category" – results in it being "possible for metaphor and simile to differ in (a) interpretability and (b) in meaning" (2006: 360). I am entirely in agreement with this conclusion, but I think that they do not push it far enough in exploring the possible effects of, and so differences between, metaphor and simile. They begin by showing experimentally that the simile form is more likely to evoke literal properties of the vehicle, whereas the metaphor form evokes more emergent properties not applicable to the literal vehicle. Asked to explain the meaning of the simile 'Some ideas are like diamonds', subjects came up with adjectives to describe ideas such as "rare and desirable" and "valuable". Asked about the metaphor 'Some ideas are diamonds', subjects tended to respond more metaphorically: "brilliant and insightful", "fantastic and creatively very unique" (2006: 364). These results seem very clearly to support my line about the terms of comparison in simile: because the simile refers to the literal encoded concept 'diamond', it encourages further consideration of terms of comparison that apply to that encoded concept, unlike the metaphor, which in this case seems to evoke not only more figurative, but more emphatic adjectives, in keeping with the form's leaning towards vehemence.

As a means of testing the effects of novelty, Glucksberg & Haught come up with an ingenious method of adjective insertion to tweak accepted familiar figurative uses. To the much-examined example 'My lawyer is (like) a shark', they added a series of adjectives that would be applicable to either the topic (lawyer) alone, the vehicle (shark) alone, or both, to see whether the aptness of the ensuing figurative differed as a metaphor or simile. They predicted that with an adjective such as 'well-paid', for example, literally applicable only to the topic, the simile should be "non-apt and difficult to interpret", resulting as it does in the anomalous notion of

[5] I am indebted to Robyn Carston for discussion of this example from a paper given in Stockholm, May 2009.

an actual shark that is well-paid. The metaphor, on the other hand, should be fine as it is not a literal encoded sense of shark that is being used and so there is no processing block. They use their findings (which validate this prediction) to refute Bowdle & Gentner's line about novelty: since these novel forms work better as a metaphor, "novelty per se does not privilege simile over metaphor in terms of aptness" (2006: 369). While this might be true, it seems to me that these findings are in fact rather limited in terms of informative significance: they only confirm the (admittedly very important) point that simile refers to the literal concept whilst metaphor refers to an abstract category of things possibly including it. There is also once again a problem here based on the grounds on which preference or aptness is gauged: it seems to me that 'like a well-paid shark', though technically anomalous, could in fact be used as a deliberate and clever flouting of the accepted norm, for effect. Imagine the following exchange:

(7) Peter: He's like a shark!
Julie: Yeah – like a well-paid shark...

The same can be done for a metaphor involving an adjective strictly only applicable to the encoded concept: the utterance "He's a razor-toothed shark" can easily be understood as an imaginative extension of the familiar metaphor, particularly powerful if the person in question has a particularly flashy smile, for example. There are no bounds to what is and isn't allowed in the creation of metaphors and similes, as long as the intended effect is successfully conveyed; context and pragmatics are at the heart of the problem with attempts to find hard and fast rules for the use of either metaphor or simile.

This adjective insertion case in fact appears to me to boil down to a simple grammatical point: the metaphor allows the reading 'My lawyer is a well-paid SHARK*', effectively a condensed form of 'My lawyer is a SHARK* and is well-paid'; the simile, however, simply does not allow the corresponding condensed reading 'My lawyer is like a shark and is well-paid' because the implied ellipsis is at too great a remove, and the 'like' has scope over both parts of the sentence. It is a point about the grammar of English rather than the meaning of the simile or metaphor itself that is responsible for this difference. This is borne out by an example singled out by Glucksberg & Haught as a particular favourite: 'his job was (like) a *secure* jail'. The insertion of the adjective 'secure' led to very different readings for the metaphor and simile: as a simile, subjects described a maximum security penal institution, whereas as a metaphor they understood it to be referring to job security. While Glucksberg & Haught take this simply as corroboration of their central argument that simile and metaphor can have different readings, and leave it at that, I think the fact that inserted adjectives can either qualify a concept, or merge with it to form a new compound concept, is of potentially wider

significance. The simile invites the reading 'like a [secure jail]' (a compound concept) whereas the metaphor suggests 'a [secure] jail' (an adjectivally qualified simple concept). Whilst the difference may look slight, it is I think possible that it is responsible for a whole range of other effect differences. Take the following example:

(8) She's (like) an opinionated volcano.

Here, I think, the metaphor could equally validly be read either as 'OPINIONATED VOLCANO*' (as a compound concept) or 'opinionated VOLCANO*' (ie a VOLCANO* which also happens to be opinionated), but the second of the two is more likely to be accessed, because it is easier to interpret sensibly. As a simile, however, it can only mean 'like an [opinionated volcano]', an entirely anomalous but nonetheless – and perhaps consequently – striking concept. The same applies to a whole series of adjective-enriched concepts which, by virtue of the simile form, must be viewed as compounds and are consequently more striking in their effect: 'He's a grunting creampuff' is open to the weaker interpretation 'He's a CREAMPUFF* and he's grunting', whilst 'He's *like* a grunting creampuff' can only mean 'He's like a creampuff which is grunting', again an anomalous but very striking image. On Glucksberg & Haught's terms, these should be "non-apt and difficult to interpret" similes, but whilst they are certainly unusual, I think they are perfectly interpretable and particularly effective. Very often similes can be more effective than metaphors precisely because they are usually more closely associated with an ideal of the literal, referring as they do directly to encoded concepts, and so in instances in which the use of a simile does not conform to these expectations a more powerful effect is produced. It is for this reason that Blackadder's famous outrageously absurd characterisations ("you're a girl with as much talent for disguise as a giraffe in dark glasses trying to get into a polar bears-only golf club", for instance) are in the form of similes: metaphors carry no expectation of literal correspondence to the real world and so such an elaborate one would simply sound a bit odd; similes on the other hand are usually expected to conform to some norm of reality, and so are effective because the terms (stated in this case) are so surprising.

In summary, I think that all of these theorists are right to look for ways in which simile and metaphor differ in effect and meaning, but wrong to hope to find a general rule for determining which is the more apt or suitable in different cases. It is not that figurative ideas when new work better as similes and later better as metaphors, or that it depends on whether literal or metaphorical qualities are used; but rather that the nature of the simile form, focussed as it is on the terms of comparison, gives rise to a range of different effects, all ultimately traceable to this focus, but which differ depending on the context and circumstances of use. Sometimes a mixture of the different effects discussed so far can come into play all

at once, in order to create an even stronger one. I will now look at an example and work backwards to the source of its effects.

(9) Is Sally pretty clever, then?
Clever? She's (like) a walking encyclopaedia!

It seems to me that, while the metaphor adds greater vehemence to the statement, in this case the simile form is a great deal more visually vivid, for a number of reasons. Firstly, being relatively familiar and conventional, as a metaphor it is somewhat stale, and the unexpected switch to simile invites comparison in a more considered (and so potentially richer) way than accessing the preconceived concept WALKING ENCYCLOPAEDIA* to mean 'knowledgeable person' would allow. This is a case of rejuvenation similar to the 'Sam is like a pig' example I discussed earlier. The focus on terms encourages us to focus on the actual action involved, and might very well lead to the envisaging an encyclopaedia walking down the street, which, if both speakers know Sally, might be particularly entertaining. What is more, it is in part the fact that there is no such thing, and that the idea of a person being like a walking encyclopaedia is in literal terms anomalous, that makes the effect striking: again, metaphors are not expected to be literal, and so would be more readily accepted and have a less striking effect.

All of these examples clearly concern terms of comparison, but it is equally clear that there is no one rule for precisely what effect this focus on terms will have in any given case. For (3), the kitchen example, the simile's focus on terms does seem to lessen the force of the comparison, whilst providing more intricate grounds; in (9), the encyclopaedia example, the opposite is the case, and it is the focus on terms which in fact makes the ensuing effect more visually vivid and powerful. It is often generally assumed without much reflection that similes always have the effect of the kitchen example, watering down a powerful image by focussing too heavily on the terms rather than the force with which the point is being made; but the range of examples I have discussed shows that the respective effects of metaphor and simile cannot be so neatly classified.

4 The notion of the literal in simile and metaphor studies

It is striking how often the distinction between the 'literal' and 'figurative' elements of metaphor and simile are used in discussing the relationship between them (given that both are traditionally defined as figurative tropes), and how rarely attempts are made actually to define the literal and figurative in this context. Fogelin writes:

> A person committed to the comparativist account of metaphors will hold at least these two theses:
> I. The *literal* meaning of a metaphor of the form 'A is a φ' is the same as the *literal* meaning of the counterpart simile of the form 'A is like a φ'
> II. The *figurative* meaning of a metaphor of the form 'A is a φ' is the same as the *figurative* meaning of the counterpart simile of the form 'A is like a φ' (Fogelin 1988: 28).

With further elaboration, his point becomes clearer: according to the comparison view, metaphor and simile must "say the same thing" (1988: 29), but not because simile is a literal translation of a figurative metaphor; the figurative nature of simile must not be forgotten. Davidson (1978: 38) considers the possibility that "the figurative meaning of a metaphor is the literal meaning of the corresponding simile". The fact that on the face of it these statements appear to be in direct contradiction is simply proof of how loosely the terms are used, since what Davidson means by this – presumably that a (literally false) figurative metaphor can be understood by translating it into a (literally true) simile – is perfectly compatible with Fogelin's line. In fact, many critics use the terms loosely: Searle (1993: 95) introduces the anomalous term *literal simile* to the debate, adding offhandedly as a footnote that "By 'literal simile' I mean literal statement of similarity", which seems to me a rather presumptuous leap.

The 'sameness' of metaphor and simile is often used to explain how metaphor processing works, based on the common assumption that simile is somehow a clearer, simpler or more explicit form of something that has essentially the same meaning as metaphor, so that translation of a metaphor into a simile will facilitate accessing the intended meaning; and in this context, too, the notion of the 'literal' is remarkably central given how poorly it is defined. Glucksberg (2008: 68) describes the classic comparison account of metaphor processing as follows: "When a statement of the form X is a Y is literally false, then it is converted into a true simile, X is *like* a Y, and then treated exactly as any literal comparison". Lynne Tirrell (1991: 337) similarly outlines the 'reductive simile theory of metaphor' as involving the following steps: "reduce metaphor to simile, then conflate simile and literal comparison". Both critics are discussing an account to which they themselves do not adhere, and so perhaps unfairly provide deliberately cursory descriptions, but the centrality of the connection between simile and literal comparison is striking. It seems to me that the key question here, as far as the importance of the notion of the literal to simile is concerned, is this: what does it actually mean to be *literally like something*? Is there a clear enough distinction between the literal and the non-literal in simile to make a meaningful distinction between 'literal comparison' and simile?

Consider the following statement:

(10) Sam eats like a pig.

I think that most people would unquestioningly describe this as a simile, a figurative use that leads the hearer to think about Sam in a certain (derogatory) way that our associations about pigs accentuate; and yet, if Sam customarily eats his dinner by lowering his head toward the plate, spilling crumbs and snorting to himself, there is a strong sense in which he is *literally* eating like a pig, that is, in the same way that a pig eats. Does this make the comparison literal rather than figurative? Davidson (1978: 41) claims famously that "all similes are true...because everything is like everything"; and it is presumably this line that Glucksberg (2008: 68) has in mind when he writes of the comparison theory that "Similes are always literally true because any two things must always be alike in one way or another". It seems to me, though, that a simile might very well be 'literally true' without itself being entirely and unequivocally literal in its terms and intended meaning. This leads to considering degrees of literalness, however, which is problematic for so many of the accounts that base their definition of how simile and metaphor function on the distinction between the literal and figurative. Consider another tricky example:

(11) Get your paws off me!

This utterance is clearly non-literal if aimed at an overly forward human being with hands. But is the related sentence 'Your hands are like paws' literal or figurative? Clearly, it depends on the context: to an unwanted suitor "Leave me alone – your hands are like paws" is fairly uncontroversially a figurative simile; in an encyclopaedia for children 'Your hands are like paws' is straightforwardly a literal comparison. But the fact that it is context-dependent is unsettling if a line is to be drawn between literal comparison statements and simile. Also, if the ways in which things are alike depends on the perspective of the speaker, it seems wrong to try to gauge whether they are *literally* alike or not: if the manner in which my lecturer delivers a lecture reminds me of my six-year-old cousin's rendition of the giant in his school play, can they be said to be 'literally alike'? There are likely to be literal points of similarity: both might shout, and gesticulate wildly; equally, both might look nervous and stumble over their lines. How many points of literal similarity must there be to make a comparison literal rather than a simile?

Various attempts have been made to come up with a definitive gauge of the boundaries between the literal and the non-literal in figurative use. Glucksberg's "paradox of unlike things compared" (2008: 72) draws attention convincingly to the fact that it is a feature of literal comparison statements that they cannot be changed into metaphors without sounding wrong, whereas similes can: the literal comparison statement 'coffee is like tea' cannot be appropriately paraphrased as a

categorical assertion 'coffee is tea', whereas the simile 'my lawyer is like a shark' makes sense (albeit with, as I have been arguing, a different meaning) in metaphor form. For straightforward cases of comparison using concepts in the same lexical or semantic category, this is a neat and effective test: 'a sparrow is like a robin' would be considered literal because both are birds, and sure enough doesn't seem to work in metaphor form 'a sparrow is a robin'. The theory breaks down with more borderline cases, however: 'a sparrow is like a plane' clearly involves category crossing from sentient being to machine, but both do *literally* move through the sky. 'A sparrow is a plane' would be a perfectly valid (if clunky) metaphor, but the comparison form could equally be considered literal in certain respects.

Andrew Ortony's (1993) salience model is particularly appealing. He argues that whether a comparison is literal or nonliteral can be determined on the basis of measuring predicate salience: if high-salient properties of both concepts are applicable, the comparison is literal; if, however, high-salient properties of one are low-salient properties of the other, it is a simile. He uses the following example to illustrate this point:

(12) Encyclopaedias are like gold mines.

He claims that there are very few, if any, high-salient predicates applicable to both, but that high-salient predicates of gold mines are lower-salient predicates of encyclopaedias, making the statement a simile. Unfortunately, however, Ortony does not specify what any of these properties or predicates are, making it hard to judge the theory. The crucial point seems to me to be that, regardless of salience, the primary ways in which encyclopaedias can be said to be like gold mines are themselves figurative, in that two different meanings apply: both 'store' information which is considered 'valuable', but a goldmine's storage is physical while an encyclopaedia's is textual, and gold is valuable in monetary terms whilst facts are as information. It is the associated properties of the overlying concepts that are being used in either their literal encoded senses or not. Because the particular qualities applied are not literal, the comparison as a whole is not literal. It is the features and terms of the concepts applicable rather than the comparison itself that can be considered 'literal' or not.

5 The role of the literal in simile and metaphor processing

It seems to me that the reason the term 'literal' crops up so frequently – and so unpredictably – in this area is because there is one sense (which I have discussed already) in which it is crucial to the fundamental difference between simile and metaphor. Similes straightforwardly refer directly to the literal encoded concept,

although the terms of the concepts used in comprehension case by case might be figurative; metaphors, however, must either (according to the comparison view) be taken to refer to the literal encoded concept, in which case they are not literally true and their meaning is understood by some more complex mechanism, or (on a categorization reading) refer not to the literal encoded concept but to abstract categories potentially including it, often created ad hoc. In both cases, the concept of the literal is key. At the heart of the differences in effect of simile and metaphor, as we have already seen, this point is also central to the differences in processing between the two.

Sperber & Wilson (2002: 3) state boldly that "literalness plays no role in our account of language comprehension". This is clearly a reaction against the traditional Gricean view that, as they put it, "the meanings of figurative utterances are generated by systematic departures from their literal meanings" (2002: 4). Central to the Relevance Theory account is the idea that there is a continuum from literal through loose to figurative use, and so the literal is not a separate thing which must be considered and rejected in order to progress to a figurative understanding. One way in which the literal *must* play a role in Relevance Theory, however, is in providing an adequate account of how metaphors and similes respectively are processed.

The majority of critical work on metaphor processing relies on the idea that a form of mapping from a source domain to a target domain is responsible for metaphor comprehension; where they tend to differ is in how this mapping works. Comparison theories based on feature-matching, and the discovery of similarities between two named concepts, deal straightforwardly with the literal or encoded senses of the words. This results in the complication that what the metaphor appears to be saying is not literally true, but can be solved by appeal to the simile form: 'X is Y' may not be true, but it is really saying 'X is like Y', which can then easily be processed and understood by finding ways in which they are alike. The only difference between metaphor and simile is that metaphor must be converted to simile in order for its intended meaning to be extracted, but both mean the same thing and have the same effect.

There are various problems with this account, not least that if the ways in which concepts are alike are figurative (as is often, if not always, the case with simile) then conversion to simile brings us no closer to 'literal truth' than with the original metaphor. As Fogelin (1988), Tirrell (1991) and Searle (1993) all discuss, the metaphor 'Juliet is the sun', for example, even paraphrased as 'Juliet is *like* the sun', still necessitates metaphorical input, as it is only in figurative terms that qualities of the sun can be attributed to Juliet (brightness, warmth, nourishment and so on). Each of these in turn is a metaphor of sorts, even if so entrenched in our everyday language that they are now taken to be encoded meanings, and so, in this sense, simile is no more literal than metaphor. The biggest problem with the

similarity account, though, to my mind, is that it necessitates the assumption that simile and metaphor are interchangeable in meaning and effect, in order for the translation from metaphor to simile for ease of processing to be legitimate; with examples which cannot be translated from one to the other (such as non-copula forms) or those which show divergence in meaning or effect (as discussed extensively above), the theory collapses.

By contrast, categorization theories are faced with the task of giving an account of how metaphor and simile are processed differently. According to the Relevance Theory account of metaphor processing, for instance, an utterance 'X is a Y' involves some work to reach the explicature 'X is a Y*' by creating a new starred CONCEPT*on the spot which encompasses both the literal encoded concept named and the person or thing referred to; but from this point (particularly if the metaphor is relatively conventional or familiar, or the context particularly clear) a series of implicatures associated with the newly accessed category fall out quite easily. This ad hoc concept account of metaphor processing, according to which the encoded concept is not part of the explicit meaning at all, cannot apply to simile processing, which, however it is carried out, must work with the literal encoded concept itself. For simile processing, a relatively straightforward explicature corresponds to the utterance 'X is like a Y', but it leaves the hearer with much more to do in order to access the possible relevant associations of the term.

To return to Davidson (1978: 39), the dictum that "everything is like everything, in endless ways" – a statement I fully support in principle – is used, I believe wrongly, as criticism of the "trivial" nature of simile as compared to metaphor: he uses this line as a reason for rejecting the metaphor-as-elliptical-simile view, as he claims that metaphors are more sophisticated than the reduction to "painfully trivial simile" would allow. His own words, though, seem to me to suggest precisely the opposite: the fact that the ways in which everything is like everything are "endless" is surely a sign of how complex simile has the potential to be, and therefore how potentially rich. It is from the basic (and unjustified) assumption that similes are more explicit than metaphors that many critics go on to consider the possibility that simile is mere explication of an inherently more sophisticated metaphor; in fact, similes are no more explicit in the clues they give to how utterances are ultimately intended to be interpreted than metaphor. There seems to me to be an important, and often overlooked, distinction between linguistic explicitness and explicitness of meaning: similes are certainly linguistically flagged in a way that metaphors are not, encouraging the hearer to embark on a process of comparison; but they are no more specific in pointing to intended meaning. What is more, there is a question of ascertainability: it is easy to spot when a metaphor is literally false, and so easy to recognize it as a metaphor, whilst similes are often very difficult to distinguish from literal comparison statements, and so might require more effort to be understood correctly. Glucksberg (2008: 73) makes this point in strongly

categorization terms: "similes should require more interpretive work because they would tend to evoke both metaphor-relevant and metaphor-irrelevant – that is literal – properties. In contrast, metaphors, because they refer directly at the category level, should evoke only properties of the category". Glucksberg & Keysar's radical inversion of the widely accepted view that metaphors are implicit similes suggests instead that similes are understood as implicit category statements, and then processed as metaphors would be: "When metaphors are expressed as comparisons (ie as similes), then they are interpreted as implicit category statements, rather than the other way around" (1990: 16). They go on to conclude that simile perhaps therefore "potentially poses a more difficult comprehension problem for a listener" in that the class inclusion is not expressed explicitly, and so "imposes an additional cognitive burden on the listener". It seems to me that there is much to be said for the suggestion that similes involve more processing: whether or not similes are implicit class inclusion statements (and I tend towards thinking not), there is certainly a case to be made for saying that to understand simile more processing effort has to be carried out, both because similes contain within them straightforwardly metaphorical elements, while posing as something more literal, and because the intrinsic focus on terms encourages the hearer to explore the potentially applicable terms in more depth than a similar metaphor might. The next question I want to address is the connection between this notion of extra processing and the potentially richer effects of simile.

It is possible that the very fact of there being greater processing effort involved is itself responsible for the creation of greater effects. Relevance Theory holds that greater relevance is achieved by the combination of greater cognitive effects with as little processing effort as possible, "other things being equal";[6] but it seems to me that the relationship between cognitive effects and processing effort might be most usefully applied to the simile case if turned on its head: rather than that processing effort must be offset by greater cognitive effects achieved, the fact that more processing is necessary might in itself be responsible for making the cognitive effects stronger. The common assumption that greater explicitness in the simile as opposed to metaphor form necessarily means less powerful effects is mistaken: the fact that the simile form more labouredly invites the hearer to think about the ways in which a comparison might be relevant may well just lead to more, different and more interesting ideas being considered. To return to the Aristotle quotation with which I began, in many ways the unqualified dictum of the metaphor that 'this' *is* 'that', far from intrinsically making us more 'interested', might discourage us from really considering the terms of the association; this is certainly the case for very conventionalised metaphors. Simile, in oppositely

[6] The Relevance Theory account is particularly clearly outlined in Wilson & Carston (2008: 407-9).

encouraging contemplation of the terms of association, leads to wider and more imaginative connections.

6 Focus on terms – more processing, greater effect?

Most of the experimental papers on metaphor and simile I have considered conclude with a discussion of the possible effects of the differences observed between metaphor and simile. The key question seems to be this: what precisely is the effect of the presence of 'like'? Two very different lines emerge: Aisenman (1999: 49), at one extreme, confidently concludes that "communicating resemblance through metaphor, which is in fact an assertion of identity, commits one far more than using a simile that contains the hedging term *like* and so is much more restricted in the degree of similarity it can suggest"; Bowdle & Gentner's conclusions claim the opposite: "similes, unlike metaphors, invite comparison, and are therefore likely to involve a larger radius of potential commonalities" (2005: 200). In line with Aisenman, Glucksberg & Keysar (1990: 15) suggest that people "only use simile when they want to hedge or qualify the underlying metaphor". Gregory & Mergler's conclusions, however, are in keeping with those of Bowdle & Gentner: "Using the simile form should indicate that shared attributes between subjects and predicates exist, and should increase the possibility of a subjective interpretation of what makes sense" (Gregory & Mergler, 1990: 157). All agree that simile and metaphor are very different in effect; there seems to be very little consensus on exactly how, and why. Whichever line is adopted, however, all focus on the effect of the 'like'.

Glucksberg & Haught (2006: 375) suggest that the metaphor 'I felt I was a sardine' doesn't capture the more familiar 'I felt like a sardine' because its "narrow, unidimensional communicative content", referring to only one possible feature of sardines (manner of packing rather than fishiness/oiliness/size...) is better suited to simile than metaphor. I am unconvinced by this reasoning on a number of grounds: for one thing, the verb 'to feel' is, I believe, part of the linguistic form of the simile and so very definitely biases the example towards favouring simile; it would be more accurate, I think, to compare 'I felt like a sardine' to 'I was a sardine'. Furthermore, I don't think that the content of the comparison is by any means "unidimensional" – the metaphor could bring to mind all manner of possible qualities relating to the size, role and insignificance in the right context. I think they are confusing the fact that there happens to be an accepted conventional use of the phrase (obviously referring to the density of crowding) with the necessity of limiting our interpretation, in context, to that one most common use. They use the fact that, precisely because it is the simile that is conventional, the metaphor is less familiar and so sounds odd, to suggest it fails to 'capture' the effect; but as with so

many of these examples I think a different, and not merely reduced, effect could be achieved, by subverting the familiar conventionalized simile form:

(13) The tube was packed yesterday – we were sardines crammed in a metal tin!

In fact, it seems to me entirely plausible that the simile is all the more effective because the fact that there are so many highly salient ways in which people are not like sardines makes the comparison sounds more amusingly striking. Rather than that unidimensional terms suit simile, it is precisely because they usually don't that the form is effective in this case.

Limited terms can have a role to play in the effect created, but it seems to me more likely that, rather than narrowness of applicability suiting simile, it merely brings the two forms closer together in effect. An example discussed by Ortony (1993: 344) led me to consider the following (slightly adapted) formulation:

(14) My head is (like) an apple without a core.

It seems to me that there is here less difference between the metaphor and simile, perhaps because of the fact that the possible applicable terms are so limited: it is equally obvious in both forms that emptiness must be being referred to. The more precisely the predicate makes the explicit connection, the less of a gap there is between the metaphor and simile forms, because there is less need actively to seek potentially applicable terms, the main distinguishing factor between metaphor and simile.

Aisenman (1999: 49) suggests that the presence of 'like' makes the simile a "weaker linguistic tool", but one that is consequently well-suited to descriptions of appearance rather than function. Elaborating on his findings that relational predicates correlate with the metaphor form and attributive predicates with simile, and that relational features are usually associated with the function of the object, and attributive with its form or structure, he suggests that perhaps "speakers will more readily represent a functional resemblance by using the stronger linguistic tool – the metaphor. The attributive features, by contrast, which describe what Gentner (1983) calls 'mere appearance', can be adequately expressed by a weaker linguistic representation of resemblance – namely, the simile". These findings stand in direct contradiction to those of Bruce Fraser (1993: 340), whose small study on the interpretation of novel metaphors led to the tentatively-made conclusion that "The simile was more likely than the metaphor to evoke an interpretation involving the behaviour of the X". 'He's like a frog' provoked significantly more responses about jumping than 'He is a frog'. It certainly seems to me that 'Mary is (like) a

beanpole', for example, in which it is in terms of appearance alone that a beanpole can be compared to Mary, sounds odd as a simile.

Gibb & Wales (1990: 209), whose findings point to metaphor being better suited to abstract concepts and simile to concrete, suggest that, if referring to "specific instances" rather than "abstracted characteristics", "A kind of perceptual jarring may be the result of an assertion of an identity relation, giving the strong sense of dissimilarity between the two", in which case the "less forceful assertion carried in simile" would be more "congruous". Again it seems to me, however, that not enough consideration is being given to context here: the kind of "perceptual jarring" involved in creating an identity statement out of very different concepts might be a positive form of powerful effect, in the right circumstances, as in my discussion of the effect of the activation of both literal and metaphorical elements in metaphor comprehension.

The simile-as-hedge line conforms to the accepted notion that simile is inherently less striking in its effects because of its form. In my opinion, however, the fact that simile invites comparison as a conscious process, and the fact that the form encourages contemplation of the precise terms of comparison, can in the right context lead to more powerful effects. As I have shown, focussing on terms tends to lead to a more elaborate or intricate comparison, so the effects are different: use of the simile form can lead to the retrieval of a more precise and sophisticated meaning, whilst the metaphor form might merely reinforce emphatically a point already clear. This is particularly useful for novel formulations which might be clearer as similes. The focus on terms does not simply increase specificity, however: stale images can be rejuvenated by more profound contemplation of terms, and literally anomalous comparisons can be made more striking. As well as having different effects, similes can be more effective than a corresponding metaphor would be. Context is crucial: time and again the examples I have been looking at suggest that, more than any single feature of metaphor or simile, it is the fact of subverting norms that creates effect. It is pointless trying to come up with a definitive answer about which is intrinsically better in different cases, because it is always to some extent based on what effect the other would (and, if in use, does) have due to its form. Metaphors and similes, used in verbal or even written communication, are used in a context with an intended meaning and a recovered interpretation, and never in a vacuum as these critics consider them, and their effects cannot be accurately gauged without taking context into account. Once context is considered, however, and furthermore applied productively, the potential for simile and metaphor to have different and interesting effects is irrefutable.

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