Chapter 9. Image alignment in multimodal metaphor

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Abstract

This chapter focuses on how image alignment as a design strategy figures in the construction of multimodal metaphors. Six editorial cartoons from *The Christian Science Monitor* are used as illustrative examples. Image alignment can take many forms. It can be linear, curvilinear, or exhibit a two-dimensional pattern. It works by making some constituent components of the alignment salient, surprising, evocative, or otherwise noticeable, or by making the shape of the overall alignment conspicuous and unexpected. Sometimes it is only implicitly involved in a design choice. How non-pictorial elements in a multimodal metaphor interact with the aligned pictorial components is explained by concrete examples. As to the conceptual basis for image alignment as a design strategy, a tentative thesis is put forward for future research: image alignment renders the abstract concept SIMILARITY visible on the basis of the experiential correlation that motivates the primary metaphor SIMILARITY IS ALIGNMENT.

Keywords: cartoon, design, image alignment, primary metaphor, multimodal metaphor

1. Introduction

This chapter focuses on image alignment and how it figures in multimodal metaphor. Image alignment as a design strategy was explored in Teng and Sun (2002), which elaborated and extended Forceville's (1996) account of pictorial simile. The core idea of this strategy is this: when pictorial components are approximately aligned with one another with respect to size, orientation, and distance, the alignment thus formed is apt for expressing an idea that connects these pictorial components. For example, when the pictorial components depict things of different kinds, the alignment is apt for

expressing pictorial simile. As another example, if the components depict things that can be seen as incompatible, the alignment can express an oxymoron in pictorial terms. A quick look at the following cartoon (figure 1) may give us a good sense of how image alignment figures in pictorial representation. This cartoon features a pattern of image alignment apt for expressing pictorial simile. A newspaper is placed in alignment with books on a shelf. The newspaper is positioned in the middle of this alignment, and the books that flank it on both sides are all well-known horror novels. The front-page headline of the newspaper indicates that the news is about the United States. News and horror stories are of different narrative styles and presumably belong in different genres; however, the alignment suggests some similarity between the components. This cartoon, then, suggests that news about the US is similar to a horror story. The word "HORROR" engraved on the front of the upper shelf further supports this reading. Following the standard A IS LIKE B format of simile, this pictorial simile can be labeled AMERICAN NEWS IS LIKE HORROR NOVEL (see Teng, 2006: 73–74 for further discussion of this example). The expressiveness of image alignment as shown in figure 1 is not confined to pictorial representation, but also plays an important role in the design of multimodal metaphor.

Figure 1. The Horror Show, by Clay Bennett, *The Christian Science Monitor*, May 13, 2004, page 8. © 2004 The Christian Science Monitor (www.csmonitor.com). All rights reserved. Reprinted with permission.

Multimodal metaphor is a newly formed research topic proposed and explored by Forceville (2006/this volume, 2008). This newly defined research topic incorporates Lakoff and Johnson's (1980a, b) insight that the occurrence of metaphors is not restricted to language. It directs attention to the phenomenon that metaphorical thoughts can be present in different modes of representation, and, more importantly, in a diverse range of combined versions of different modes of representation. Briefly, a metaphor is multimodal when its "target and source are each represented exclusively or predominantly in different modes" of representation, or when its targets and/or source "are cued in more than one mode simultaneously" (Forceville 2006: 384). I shall restrict my discussion to a subtype of multimodal metaphor, previously called "verbo-pictorial metaphor" (Forceville 1996: 148-162), and examine how image alignment as a design strategy may figure in it.

Six examples are discussed in the next section. All of them are taken from *The Christian Science Monitor*, for which they were created by Clay Bennett, the paper's editorial cartoonist. (The reader may survey Bennett's cartoons, which are full of verbo-pictorial metaphors, by visiting his personal website at http://www.claybennett.com.) The purpose of the following discussion is to give a robust sense of how image alignment participates in the construction of multimodal metaphors. In the final section, a tentative thesis concerning the conceptual basis for image alignment as a design strategy is put forward for future research.

2. Image alignment as a design strategy

Let us begin with a simple form of image alignment – juxtaposition. Consider figure 2, which juxtaposes two images. The one in the left panel is a blurred image of a garbage can brimming with a mixture of rubbish and surrounded by scattered emptied tins and wasted food. The one in the right panel is essentially the same as that in the left panel, but it has such high resolution that people can see more clearly what it is about. The alignment suggests that the two images are connected via some idea. The word "Television" printed at the bottom of the left panel and the phrase "High-Definition Television" printed at the bottom of the right panel further suggest what that idea is: TV programs are piles of garbage, and watching programs on a high-definition television will not change that. This alignment and the printed words jointly form a metaphor which, following the standard A IS B format, can be labeled TV PROGRAMS ARE GARBAGE. This

metaphor is multimodal in that the target TV PROGRAMS is chiefly represented through the verbal representations "Television" and "High-Definition Television," with the aid of the pictorial element that marks out the difference in image resolution, and the source GARBAGE is exclusively represented in the pictorial mode of representation.

Figure 2. High-Definition Television, by Clay Bennett, *The Christian Science Monitor*, June 15, 1998, page 8. © 1998 The Christian Science Monitor (www.csmonitor.com). All rights reserved. Reprinted with permission.

Consider next figure 3. Again there is a pattern of alignment. The image in the left panel depicts a rhino, and the words "Southern Africa" above it indicate where the rhino is located. The image in the middle panel depicts a panda, and the words "Western China" above it indicate where the panda is located. The image in the right panel depicts a dove with an olive branch in her beak, and the words "Middle East" above it indicate where the dove is located. The words "endangered species" are printed on a rectangular box, which is superimposed on the upper parts of the panels. The label "endangered species," positioned this way, suggests that the alignment puts the three depicted creatures in the same category, and conveys the message that rhinos in Southern Africa, pandas in Western China, and doves in the Middle East are all endangered species. It is assumed that people know that rhinos in Southern Africa are endangered, as are pandas in Western China.

However, doves are not really endangered species, and they are not indigenous to the Middle East. Joining the doves to the endangered species suggests a metaphorical reading, and the readers are expected to take notice of the fact that doves and olive branches are often used as a symbol of peace in Western cultures. Taken together, this design suggests the metaphorical reading that peace in the Middle East, like rhinos in Southern Africa and pandas in Western China, is an endangered species. This metaphor is multimodal in that the target PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST is chiefly represented by the image of a dove holding an olive branch in her beak, and the source ENDANGERED SPECIES is chiefly represented by the category label "endangered species," aided by the depiction of a rhino and a panda that serve as illustrative examples of endangered species. Following the standard A IS B format, this metaphor can be labeled PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST IS AN ENDANGERED SPECIES.

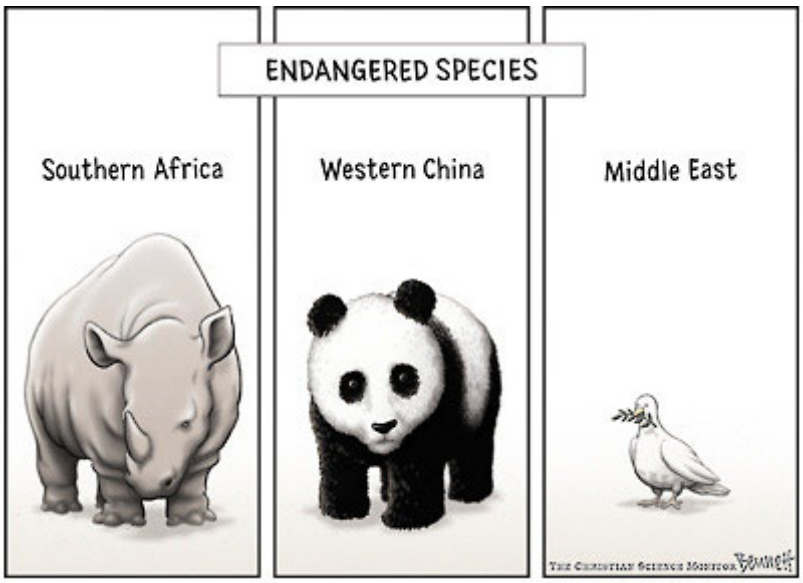

Figure 3. Endangered Peace, by Clay Bennett, *The Christian Science Monitor*, May 24, 2002, page 10. © 2002 The Christian Science Monitor (www.csmonitor.com). All rights reserved. Reprinted with permission.

Alignment in figures 1, 2, and 3 is linear along the horizontal axis, but it can also exhibit other patterns. Consider figure 4. This cartoon depicts scores of worshippers aligning themselves in a two-dimensional pattern,

which is underlined by the layout of the carpets. The white gowns that the worshippers wear and the decorative patterns on the carpets are further cultural elements that suggest to the readers that the worshippers are Muslims. The worshippers are on all fours, and most of them point their bodies in the same direction. At the center of this alignment, however, one worshipper, bearing a rifle and a pistol, holds his body in the opposite direction. The overall alignment suggests the interpretation that all the worshippers belong in the same group; they all believe in Islam and live according to its rules. However, the depiction of the opposite body-orientation at the center of this alignment suggests that the rifle-bearing worshipper is an exception. This cartoon is an editorial cartoon from *The Christian Science Monitor*, and the readers surely understand this important detail. While admiring the cartoon's gentle sense of humor and the empathy it expresses with Muslims, the readers may also take in its political stance and read the message as follows: unlike the rest of Muslims, the rifle-bearing man is not really a true believer, or his religion is not true. The word "terrorism" printed on his belt and the bewildered look of another worshipper beside him reinforces this interpretation. The metaphor embedded in this overall interpretation can be labeled MISGUIDED BELIEF IS AN OPPOSITE BODY ORIENTATION. Many readers would undoubtedly arrive at the same interpretation without noticing the word on the belt of the rifle-bearing man, because of the prototypical depiction of a terrorist. (I thank Francisco Yus for pointing out this to me.) This implies that the word "terrorism" does not play any essential role in their interpretation, and, as a result, the metaphor in this cartoon is hardly multimodal. It is worth emphasizing, however, that "terrorism" plays an important role from a design point of view. It guides people's interpretations, and for the people who do not take the depiction of the rifle-bearing man as a prototypical depiction of a terrorist, it frames their interpretation. (For further discussion on the guiding and framing of image interpretation, which Barthes examined under the concept of anchoring, see Barthes 1985 [1964]: 28-30, and Forceville 1996: 71-74.) From this viewpoint, MISGUIDED BELIEF IS AN OPPOSITE BODY ORIENTATION can be considered a multimodal metaphor, in that it becomes multimodal when the target MISGUIDED BELIEF is chiefly represented through the word "terrorism," aided by the depiction of a rifle-bearing man, and the source OPPOSITE BODY-ORIENTATION is exclusively represented by a pictorial component in the image alignment. Whether a design is multimodal depends on how it achieves its effect, and it is important to specify in what way a particular metaphor is, or becomes, a multimodal metaphor.

Figure 4 Call to Prayer, by Clay Bennett, *The Christian Science Monitor*, September 24, 2001, page 8. © 2002 The Christian Science Monitor (www.csmonitor.com). All rights reserved. Reprinted with permission.

Figure 5 exhibits alignment in a curvilinear form. In figure 5, two army officers are pondering possible scenarios and what action the military should take. The American flag and the US badge on their upper arms indicate that they are US army officers. The words "war on terrorism" on the door window depicted in the upper left corner of the picture indicate that it is military strategies for war on terrorism that they are pondering. They seem to come to terms with a difficult situation, and reach a decision: an endless deployment of armed forces and non-stop military operations throughout a vast geographical area. The metaphor embedded in this interpretation is chiefly represented by the model tanks on the map, which line up into a curving shape reminiscent of the mathematical symbol of infinity "∞".The model tanks metonymically represent the deployment of armed forces, the map represents a vast geographical area, and the curving alignment reminiscent of the mathematical symbol of infinity metaphorically represents what the strategic deployment will lead to. This is a multimodal metaphor, which can be labeled THE DEPLOYMENT OF ARMED FORCES AGAINST TERRORISM IS AN INFINITY DEPLOYMENT IN A VAST GEOGRAPHICAL AREA.

Figure 5. Terrorism Strategy, by Clay Bennett, *The Christian Science Monitor*, September 13, 2004, page 8. © 2004 The Christian Science Monitor (www.csmonitor.com). All rights reserved. Reprinted with permission.

As shown by the above examples, image alignment can take many forms. It can be linear along the horizontal axis (figures 1, 2, and 3), a two-dimensional pattern (figure 4), or a curvilinear form (figure 5). Despite the diverse forms it can take, alignment of any of these forms can be strategically deployed in the construction of multimodal metaphors through its central use for connecting a set of pictorial components in a way that is apt for expressing a certain idea. Figures 2-5 show how this strategic deployment may work. In figure 2, the two pictures of garbage cans are essentially the same except the contrast in image resolution between them. This contrast is a design choice made within the framework defined by the overall alignment. In figure 3, the dove, unlike the rhino and the panda, cannot properly be labeled “endangered species”; it is much smaller in size than the other two animals; and, more important, it is symbolic of peace. This contrast, again, is a design choice in the framework defined by the overall alignment. It is worth noting here that alignment is defined in terms of iconic features such as size, orientation and distance, and, as a result, the symbolic representation in figure 3 is anchored to the alignment via the iconic function of the pictorial components. In figure 4, the worshipper at the center of the alignment is in stark contrast to the rest of worshippers

with respect to their body-orientation. This is a design choice, too. All these choices make some constituent components of the alignment salient, surprising, evocative, or otherwise noticeable. In figure 5, the model tanks line up into a shape reminiscent of the mathematical symbol of infinity. This is a design choice that makes the shape of the overall alignment conspicuous, and, probably, unexpected in that context. In contrast to figure 3, the symbolic representation in figure 5 is achieved via the overall shape of the alignment, rather than a particular aligned component. Design choices of the sort just described point to the directions in which the readers should take their interpretations, but they do not determine their interpretations. The above discussion of figures 2-5 shows how one may proceed to work out pertinent and well-balanced interpretations.

Figures 6 and 7 show that image alignment may be only implicitly involved in a design choice. In figure 6, a business person and a laborer each stand in an erect position, watching a zigzag arrow on a large sheet, which covers most of the wall. The word "economy" printed on the arrow indicates that it is a graphic report on economy. The "Y" shaped lines, which represent the edges and the corner, define an unconventional three-dimensional spatial frame. The business person and the laborer are in positions orthogonal to each other within this spatial frame. The business person's position defines a viewpoint from which he sees a growing trend in the economy. The laborer's position defines another viewpoint from which he sees a downward trend in the economy. Notice that the business person and the laborer in figure 6 would stand next to each other if they were aligned in a normal, spatial frame. It is against this implicit understanding of the normal alignment that the unconventional spatial frame and the consequent opposing viewpoints are made possible and salient. This design gives a succinct, metaphorical account of the economic situation. The target is the economic trend; it is represented by the arrow and the word "economy." The source is the direction that the arrow is supposed to point in. It is represented by the arrowhead and its spatial relations to the positions of the business person and the laborer. Connecting the target to the source yields a metaphor that cannot but be formulated in somewhat laborious terms: THE DIRECTION OF THE ECONOMIC TREND IS THE DIRECTION OF THE ARROW AS IT IS VIEWED FROM EITHER THE BUSINESS PERSON'S POSITION OR THE LABORER'S POSITION IN THE UNCONVENTIONAL SPATIAL FRAME. This metaphor expresses a critical stance on the economy by reminding people of the existent alternative perspectives, and using the unconventional spatial frame, instead of a normal spatial frame, metaphorically suggests that the

conventional assumption that a growing economy will eventually benefit all people is not, or no longer, valid.

Figure 6. It's an Escher-type Economy, by Clay Bennett, *The Christian Science Monitor*, November 5, 2003, page 8. © 2003 The Christian Science Monitor (www.csmonitor.com). All rights reserved. Reprinted with permission.

Alignment implies an orderly arrangement of pictorial components, and the examples we have encountered up to this point are effective in exposing how an orderly arrangement of pictorial components may figure in the construction of multimodal metaphors. Nonetheless, a disorderly array of pictorial components may also participate in the construction of multimodal metaphors, especially if such an array is intended for a particular effect against a backdrop of some understood, orderly alignment. Figure 7 is a case in point. In this cartoon, five sheets of paper are arranged in a rather untidy way. Moreover, the four sheets in the background have been damaged – some letters were cut out from them. The sheet in the foreground is intact, and the letters cut out from the background sheets have been pasted on it. The scissors, the glue, and the scattered shreds give further evidence of the clipping and pasting. The symbol "SeCuRitY" thus created on the foreground sheet is a jumble of both lower case and upper case letters, and the letters are not lined up in an orderly way. One can tell from the context

that the symbols printed on the background sheets were “Liberty,” “Justice,” “Equality,” and “Freedom,” but, because of the clipping and pasting, they are now in bad shape. This design suggests the following interrelated interpretations: (a) the cuttings metaphorically mean that liberty, justice, equality, and freedom have been severely and dangerously compromised; (b) the clipping and pasting metaphorically mean that liberty, justice, equality, and freedom have been curtailed in the service of security; and (c) the jumbled form of “SeCuRitY” metaphorically mean that security measures have been badly managed. On top of all this, the fact that the five sheets of paper are not well arranged suggests the metaphorical reading that issues concerning liberty, justice, freedom, equality and security have not been handled carefully. It is worth emphasizing that disorder need not be a poorly thought-out design choice. It can be carefully crafted so as to suggest that an action has been performed. The disarray in figure 7 testifies to such a design choice. It is the implied actions, rather than the things portrayed, that figure importantly in this construction of multimodal metaphor.

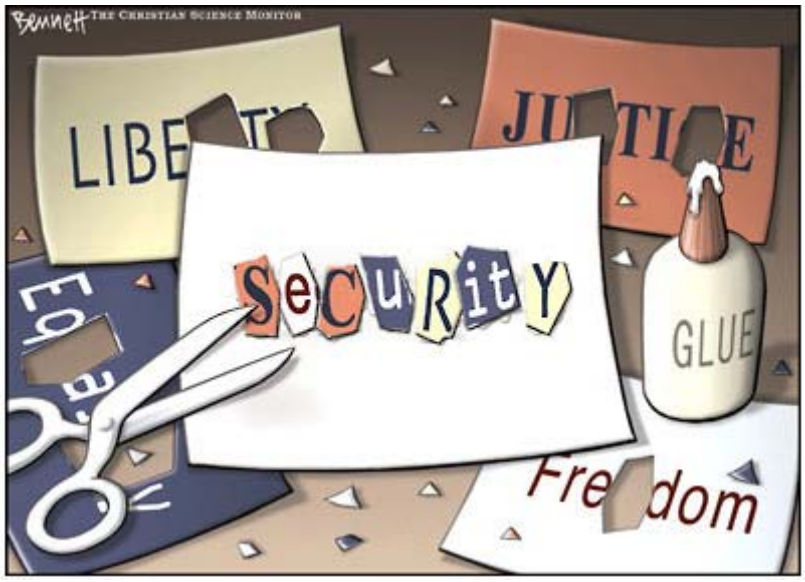

Figure 7. Homeland Security, by Clay Bennett, *The Christian Science Monitor*, October 11, 2001, page 8. © 2001 The Christian Science Monitor (www.csmonitor.com). All rights reserved. Reprinted with permission.

3. Conclusions and suggestions for further research

In this chapter, I have focused on image alignment as a design strategy in the construction of multimodal metaphors. Various uses of this strategy and the design choices that point out the directions the interpretations should take are described. How verbal and other non-pictorial elements in a multimodal metaphor interact with the aligned pictorial components is explained by concrete examples. A few further suggestions that are more amenable to empirical evaluation may be considered. In figure 2, "Television" and "High-Definition Television" are essential to the interpretation of the cartoon. Most people probably will have no clue how to read the garbage images if the verbal representations are removed from the picture. It is also likely that many people will have no idea what figure 3 is intended to mean if "endangered species," "Southern Africa," "Western China," and "Middle East" are deleted from it. By contrast, if the target audiences are already familiar with the political cartoon genre, "terrorism" in figure 4 is probably dispensable because of the prototypical depiction of a terrorist. "Economy" in figure 6 is also likely dispensable because of the typical portrayal of a boss and a laborer. As to the mathematical symbol of infinity in figure 5, if the model tanks were lined up into a shape other than the mathematical symbol for infinity, the metaphorical meaning would be lost. Finally, the lower and upper case letters in figure 7 are definitely verbal elements, but they are also pictorial components by design. In addition to the texts guiding and framing readers' interpretation, the garbage in figure 2, the dove-with-olive branch in figure 3, the terrorist in figure 4, the American flag in figure 5, and the boss and the laborer in figures 6 are all pictorial components that carry symbolic or cultural meanings familiar in the Western world. When the target audiences are conversant with the symbolic and cultural meanings, those pictorial components can be good choices for communicative purposes. (For an empirical study of audience responses to political cartoons, see El Refaie, this volume.)

It is worth noting that the cartoon's metaphors are mainly pictorial in their modes of representation, and the verbalizations of their metaphorical meanings can sometimes be a laborious task. Figure 6, for example, is a case in point (see Forceville 2006: 390-392 about the implications of this phenomenon for metaphor research). From a design perspective this should not be a surprise, since words and pictures belong to different modes of representation and are suitable for different communicative purposes. The idea of image alignment as a design strategy discussed above offers a per-

spective from which different modes of representation (here pictures and language) can be deftly combined and coherently understood.

It is also worth noting that the patterns of image alignment discussed above should not be taken to be instances governed by the invariance principle, one version of which runs as follows: "Metaphorical mappings preserve the cognitive topology (that is, the image-schema structure) of the source domain, in a way consistent with the inherent structure of the target domain" (Lakoff 1993: 215; for a slightly different version, see Turner 1991: 172-182; for a critical discussion, see Brugman 1990, Lakoff 1990, Turner 1990; for a discussion of how this principle fares against blending theory, see Turner 1996: 108-109; for a discussion of how this principle should be further revised, or abandoned, see Lakoff and Johnson 2003: 253-254). The patterns of image alignment, despite their image-schematic and topological nature, are not something to be preserved or overridden in the metaphorical mappings. Or to put it differently, the idea of *target domain overrides* is just not appropriate to frame the issues concerning the role of image alignment in the construction of multimodal metaphors. Instead, it is more suitable to consider them as constructional schemas, and the design choices described in the previous section as elaborations of the schemas. (For a recent discussion of constructional schemas in cognitive grammar, see Langacker 2008: 167-174; for a discussion of elaboration, see Langacker 2008: 198-205.) This line of thinking gives us a way to apply cognitive grammar and its usage-based approach to design research. (I thank Francisco Ruiz de Mendoza and an anonymous reviewer for prompting this clarification.) It also suggests the hypothesis that primary metaphors may well serve as a common conceptual basis for multimodal constructions. A metaphor is primary in the sense that the association of the target with the source is directly based on an experiential correlation between them (Grady 1997a: 47-48; see also Grady 1997b, 1999, 2005, Grady and Johnson 2000, Johnson 2007: 178-179, Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 45-73). Moreover, the source and target concepts refer to basic dimensions of experience, the shared structure of which coincides largely with parameters relevant to the characterization of basic grammatical categories in cognitive grammar, and the metaphorical mappings appear not to be governed by the invariance principle. (Grady 2005: 1606-1607).

One entry in Grady's (1997a: 281-299) list of primary metaphors is SIMILARITY IS ALIGNMENT. The linguistic examples and the experiential motivation for this metaphor are given below:

Motivation:

> Objects may be oriented in the same way because they serve similar functions, are involved in similar processes or acted on by similar forces.
> And/or, orientation is a basic parameter for perceptual/cognitive classification.

Examples:

> Her new dress is very much *in line with* those worn by her coworkers.
> There are stunning *parallels* between these two novels (Grady 1997a: 283).

Let us suppose that Grady is correct about this metaphor (and I think he is). One may ask what is the relationship between this metaphor and the image alignment discussed in this chapter. My guess is that this metaphor provides the requisite conceptual underpinning for image alignment (I thank Charles Forceville for suggesting this point to me). It seems then that image alignment renders the abstract concept SIMILARITY visible on the basis of the experiential correlation that motivates the primary metaphor SIMILARITY IS ALIGNMENT. In the last resort, it is this primary metaphor that sustains the framework for the design choices described above. One may further hypothesize that each design strategy that enables people to render an abstract concept visible on the basis of the relevant experiential correlation in fact is based on a primary metaphor. More data from a diverse range of designs have to be examined before one can substantiate this conjecture about primary metaphors and design strategies.

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