Register-dependency of deliberate metaphor

Markus Egg
Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin
markus.egg@rz.hu-berlin.de

Topic of my talk is the dependency of metaphor on register (Deignan et al. 2013): Register is functionally determined linguistic variety; and the function and motivation of metaphor (as a non-literal mode of communication) has been the focus of an intensive debate. I will investigate this dependency by comparing a specific kind of metaphor, viz., deliberate metaphor (DM), in different registers.

Following Lakoff and Johnson (1981), metaphor introduces target domains (TDs) by mapping the structure of another, the source domain (SD) onto the respective TD, e.g., in the well-known metaphor of life as a journey. This process often goes unnoticed both in the production and processing of metaphor, but not in DMs, which are recognised by their hearers/readers (Steen 2009). DM intends to change the addressee’s perspective on a topic (Steen 2008), and therefore is one way of alienation (Schklowsky 1971). Alienation through metaphor brings together quite dissimilar domains, thus the mapping of the SD structure onto the TD introduces an unfamiliar perspective on the TD.

DM dependency on register will be investigated in a corpus-based approach, investigating texts of two domains, viz., sermons, and academic lectures. The texts are taken from the genre of didactic discourse, because DM – though otherwise quite rare – appears in didactic discourse with a higher frequency than usual (Beger 2011; Beger 2015).

The variable is the use of metaphor as defined above for the reference to key concepts in the texts. The variants are different instantiations of metaphor for these, in particular, either as deliberate or as non-deliberate metaphor, or in terms of literal, non-metaphorical expressions. As subvariants, different ways of indicating DM in form and content (Steen 2009; Krennmayr 2011) will be distinguished, among them signalled metaphor (similes, expressions like as it were, inverted commas...), direct metaphor (perhaps excluding clichéd phrases like he is a pig), and extended metaphor. We will also distinguish the source domain of the metaphor, following the ‘Master Metaphor List’ (Lakoff et al. 1991) of the Cognitive Linguistics Group. The presentation targets the questions a, c, and e as listed in the call for papers.