Impossible Metaphors
or
Why 'Beautiful' Can't Be Used Metaphorically

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ABSTRACT. In this paper, I show that De Clercq's account of the metaphorical uninterpretability of aesthetic terms is flawed. What is required for metaphorical interpretability, on my view, is the joint satisfaction of two conditions: (i) multi-dimensionality and (ii) the presence of a default dimension. Aesthetic terms lack metaphorical readings because they fail to satisfy (ii), even though they satisfy (i). The account I offer is preferable to the accounts offered by individual theorists mentioned in the paper as it is a more predictively adequate and uniform account of the phenomenon of impossible metaphors in general.

I. Introduction

In his paper, "Aesthetic Terms, Metaphor and the Nature of Aesthetic Properties," Rafael De Clercq argues that aesthetic terms, such as 'beautiful', 'elegant', and 'unharmonious', etc. defy metaphorical interpretation, because there are no particular, "delineated, unified, and self-standing" categories of things to which they are to be applied. As a result, it is not possible to use them metaphorically because it is not possible to commit something like a "category mistake" with respect to such terms.[1]

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[1] The claim under consideration in this paper is a claim about expression types, not expression tokens. In (Kim 2006, Ch. 3, Section 2.2), I discuss the metaphorical uninterpretability of certain expression tokens, namely, ones that have already been used

In this paper, I am to show that De Clercq's thesis is flawed as an account of both the metaphorical uninterpretability of aesthetic terms and the phenomenon of impossible metaphors in general. I claim that, just as what makes an expression type an indexical is its context-dependence, what allows an expression type to be metaphorically interpretable is its "dimension-dependence"; that is, it must potentially contribute different meanings along different dimensions or respects. Furthermore, metaphorically interpretable expressions require a default respect or dimension that is conceptually more basic and prior to the others. Generating metaphor then involves striking a balance between being sensitive to a *multiplicity* of dimensions and privileging a *single* dimension as conceptually more basic than the rest. This account is not only more predictively adequate, it uniformly accounts for a diverse range of metaphorically uninterpretable expressions, which includes functional terms (e.g., determiners, tense indicators, modals, auxiliaries, negation, connectives, complementizers) and predicate-limiting terms (e.g., with respect to *x*).

The paper will proceed as follows. I will first briefly motivate the claim that aesthetic terms are metaphorically uninterpretable. Next, I will summarize and critique De Clercq's explanation of the metaphorical uninterpretability of aesthetic terms. Finally, I will present a dimensional account of metaphorical uninterpretability and show how it better accounts for the metaphorical uninterpretability of aesthetic terms and other "impossible metaphors" including functional categories and predicate-limiting expressions.

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metaphorically. I call this phenomenon the non-iterability of metaphorical interpretation. There, I argue that if we assume that operators are by nature iterable, and if there are such things as METAPHOR operators just as there are PAST (tense) and POSSIBLY (modal) operators, we should predict there to be contexts where we can use 'Juliet is the sun' to mean what's expressed by 'METAPHOR[METAPHOR [sun]]', given that the METAPHOR operator has no mandatory phonological correlate in natural language. But there are no such contexts. So metaphorical interpretation is not iterable, and this suggests that the operator account of metaphor is flawed. But here, I am limiting myself to the phenomenon and explanation of the metaphorical uninterpretability of expression types, not tokens.

II. The Metaphorical Uninterpretability of Aesthetic Terms

In his paper, "Aesthetic Terms, Metaphor and the Nature of Aesthetic Properties," De Clercq observes that it makes no sense to say that something is beautiful metaphorically speaking, or to say something is metaphorically elegant, metaphorically harmonious, or metaphorically sublime. In other words, aesthetic terms appear to resist metaphorical interpretation. De Clercq goes on to offer an account of why this is the case, and it is his explanation that I primarily challenge in this paper.

However, the intuition that aesthetic terms resist metaphorical interpretation is not necessarily one that is universally shared, and I antecedently acknowledge that I know of no fully reliable empirical test for the metaphorical uninterpretability of a given expression type. Part of the difficulty has to do with (i) borderline cases (e.g., '*garish* words', 'a *gaudy* batting average', etc.); (ii) differing degrees to which words express metaphoricity; (iii) varying individual intuitions about whether a word or phrase is metaphorically used; (iv) a lack of agreed criteria for metaphoric identification; and (v) the considerable variability between external resources, such as dictionaries.

One noteworthy resource for our purposes, which aims to mitigate some of the aforementioned difficulties, is the Pragglejaz Group's "Metaphor Identification Procedure" (MIP). The procedure minimizes the degree of inconsistency between analysts by employing external resources, such as dictionaries as a frame of reference to check individual intuitions, and by relying on post-analysis discussion between analysts. The procedure, in a nutshell, is as follows.

1. Read the entire text-discourse to establish a general understanding of the meaning.

2. Determine the lexical units in the text-discourse.

3. (a) For each lexical unit in the text, establish its meaning in context, that is, how it applies to an entity, relation, or attribute in the situation evoked by the text (contextual meaning). Take into account what comes before and after the lexical unit.

    (b) For each lexical unit, determine if it has a more basic con-
temporary meaning in other contexts than the one in the
given context. For our purposes, basic meanings tend to
be:

    — More concrete (what they evoke is easier to imagine,
see hear, feel, smell, and taste).

    — Related to bodily action.

    — More precise (as opposed to vague)

    — Historically older.

    Basic meanings are not necessarily the most frequent
meanings of the lexical unit.

    (c) If the lexical unit has a more basic current-contemporary
meaning in other contexts than the given context, decide
whether the contextual meaning *contrasts* with the basic
meaning but can be understood in *comparison* with it.

    4. If yes, mark the lexical unit as metaphorical.[2]

And by the standards of MIP, aesthetic terms do seem to generally avoid
metaphorical interpretation. Take the examples, 'beautiful data', 'ugly
truth', and 'elegant proof'. MIP generally treats the aesthetic terms in
such examples as non-metaphorical.

Beautiful from 'beautiful data':

    (a) *Contextual meaning*: (i) pleasing or (ii) confirming, clear, unam-
biguous, rich, etc.

    (b) *Basic meaning*: very pleasant (This is the second sense of 'beau-
tiful' used in Macmillan.[3])

    (c) *Contextual meaning versus basic meaning*: If the contextual mean-
ing is taken to be (i), it is very closely related to the basic mean-
ing and does not significantly *contrast* with it. If on the other

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[2] Pragglejaz Group (2007), p. 3 (my emphases).

[3] The *Macmillan Dictionary* is used in MIP as the primary resource for basic meanings
on the grounds that it has an adequate corpus (i.e., 220 million words) and is recent (i.e.,
aims to provide a description of current English). The *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary
on Historical Principles* is consulted for supplementary information about etymology.

hand the contextual meaning is taken to be (ii), it contrasts with the basic meaning. However, there is not a clear way of understanding the contextual meaning in *comparison* with the basic meaning.

Metaphorically used? No.

Ugly from 'ugly truth':

   (a) *Contextual meaning*: (i) unpleasant, or (ii) harsh, inconvenient, brutal, etc.

   (b) *Basic meaning*: unpleasant (This is the second sense of 'ugly' used in Macmillan).

   (c) *Contextual meaning versus basic meaning*: If the contextual meaning is taken to be (i), it is the same as the basic meaning. If on the other hand the contextual meaning is taken to be (ii), it contrasts with the basic meaning. However, there is not a clear way of understanding the contextual meaning in comparison with the basic meaning.

Metaphorically used? No.

Elegant from 'elegant proof':

   (a) *Contextual meaning*: simple and effective

   (b) *Basic meaning*: simple and effective (This is the second sense of 'elegant' used in Macmillan).

   (c) *Contextual meaning versus basic meaning*: The contextual meaning is the same as the basic meaning.

Metaphorically used? No

The assumptions involved in MIP are not entirely uncontroversial. For instance, if post-analysis discussion between analysts must be relied on in order to converge differing analyses, in what sense does the method count as a non-arbitrary, systematic, and improved way of resolving differences in individual intuitions? I do not aim in this paper to offer any defense of the intuition itself that aesthetic terms are metaphorically uninterpretable. Instead, I will assume for the remainder of the paper that

the intuition is at least shared by many and hope that I have provided at least enough initial motivation for the intuition to evaluate two distinct explanations of why aesthetic terms may tend to resist metaphorical interpretation.

III. *De Clercq's Account*

The explanation that De Clercq offers for why aesthetic terms resist metaphorical interpretation is that

> "[a]esthetic terms do not have a particular area of application associated with them. There is not a particular kind of object to which they are to be applied. As a result, it is not possible to commit something like a "category mistake" with respect to such terms."

By contrast, terms for animal species such as 'elephant' and 'crocodile', which can be used metaphorically, are to be applied within the animal kingdom; to apply them outside this area is to commit a "category mistake."

This is not to say that metaphorical usage requires an *actual* categorical mistake. 'The brain is the heart of the nervous system' is metaphorical even though there is no actual substitution of one domain of application for another, according to De Clercq. Rather, the claim is that metaphorical usage requires *the possibility* of a category mistake, which is a condition that is satisfied by 'heart.' E.g., 'Investigators have hit the *heart* of the criminal investigation.' And it is precisely this condition that is *not* satisfied by aesthetic terms such as 'beautiful', 'elegant', and 'sublime', for a category mistake for these terms seems in principle impossible.

Two qualifications are necessary. First, though the term 'elegant' may only be used literally to describe entities exhibiting lines or movement, the lines or movements themselves need *not* be *literally* present for the term 'elegant' to be literally applicable. For example, a line of thought may literally be elegant even though thoughts do not literally have lines.

Second, De Clercq thinks the kinds of categories, which can potentially generate metaphors, must be "delineated, unified, and self-standing". Hence, the reason why 'elegant' cannot be interpreted metaphorically is

because the category of elegant objects that literally and figuratively exhibit lines or movement includes wildly disparate entities, including visual objects, auditory events, and nonperceptible entities such as emotional or intellectual progressions. As such, this is not the kind of category that can potentially engender the category mistakes required for metaphor-generation.

i. Aesthetic Terms Have No Home Domain of Application

A primary component of De Clercq's claim is that aesthetic terms lack metaphorical interpretation because, since there is no category to which the applicability of aesthetic terms is restricted, they cannot be involved in a category mistake. In short, aesthetic terms lack metaphorical interpretation because they have no home domain of application. This claim can potentially be understood in one of two ways.

> **Strong Formulation:** The reason why aesthetic terms are metaphorically uninterpretable is because there are *no* categories to which aesthetic terms can, in principle, not be applied; that is, aesthetic terms apply to *all* categories.

> **Weak Formulation:** There may be some categories to which aesthetic terms cannot be applied. But the reason why aesthetic terms are metaphorically uninterpretable is because their application is *not restricted to any particular category*.

Both formulations are problematic however. The strong one, while explanatorily adequate, is vulnerable to counterexamples. And the weak one avoids counterexamples, but it does so at the cost of explanatory adequacy.

Strong Formulation

The strong formulation of De Clercq's claim would indeed explain why aesthetic terms lack metaphorical interpretations. After all, if a potential category-mistake is what is required for metaphorical interpretability, it would make sense to appeal to the *unrestricted categorical applicability* of aesthetic terms to explain their *metaphorical uninterpretability*. For if there were no categories to which aesthetic terms could not be applied,

this would explain why aesthetic terms could not possibly be involved in category mistakes and hence be interpreted metaphorically.

The problem, of course, is that it is false that there are no categories to which aesthetic terms cannot in principle be applied. 'Graceful' cannot, in principle, truly, literally, and non-fictively be applied to objects which lack a literal or figurative line or movement. Entities that lack intentional design or style cannot, in principle, be said to be 'tacky,' 'edgy,' or 'funky' in their aesthetic senses.[4] And 'beautiful' cannot, in principle, be applied

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[4] Interestingly, if we do apply an aesthetic term such as 'graceful' to an object which lacks literal or figurative lines or movement (e.g., an unbounded and still body of water or a stagnant reservoir of energy), this application inevitably results in a literal but *fictive* or *make-believe* use of the aesthetic term, rather than a metaphorical use of it. The same appears to be true of all aesthetic terms. If one uses 'tacky' or 'edgy' to describe something that lacks intentional design or style — e.g., a tacky electron, some edgy produce, etc., the terms appear to automatically default to a fictive reading, e.g., one in which the produce becomes animate and starts behaving in an edgy way, rather than a metaphorical one — e.g., one in which the produce is somehow metaphorically edgy.

However there is no reason to think that the automatic switch to a fictive rather than metaphorical reading is due to the fact that aesthetic terms can in principle be applied to all categories. Rather, the default switch appears to have more to do with the inherent difference between pretense and metaphor. Consider the following sentence:

(1) The electron is tacky.

The difference between pretending (1) to be true and construing (1) as a metaphor, according to Camp (2009) is that, in pretending (1) to be true, we change our conception of the actual world in order to accommodate the fixed, literal meaning of 'tacky'. Whereas in construing (1) as a metaphor, we shift the meaning of the word 'tacky' in order to accommodate our fixed conception of the actual world. Another way of putting this point is to say that in pretending that (1) we imaginatively change the content of what an electron is — i.e., by endowing it with properties that tacky things possess and real electrons lack, and erasing properties of actual electrons that tacky things do not have. (Camp 2009, section 2) Pretending hence often involves entertaining wildly counter-factual situations or possible worlds, which we can effortlessly conjure up without restriction.

By contrast, in construing (1) to be a metaphor, we hold our conception of the actual world fixed and shift the meaning of 'tacky' to accommodate that fixed conception. Thus, by comparison, one is subject to far more constraints in generating metaphors than in conjuring up fictional worlds in that we are not free to wildly depart from the literal meaning of a term in an attempt to accommodate our fixed conception of the actual world; for if we do, we risk being not understood. So there is a preexisting asymmetry between pretense and metaphor in that the former is easier to generate, given its fewer restrictions, than the latter. And this asymmetry is overdetermined in the case of aes-

to things which are not perceivable. So if is untrue that aesthetic terms apply to all categories, it cannot be because of their universal applicability that aesthetic terms are metaphorically uninterpretable.

Weak Formulation

According to the weak formulation, there are some categories to which aesthetic terms cannot be applied. But the reason why aesthetic terms are metaphorically uninterpretable is because their application is *not restricted to any particular category*. The problem with this account is that, although it avoids counterexamples, it is explanatorily inadequate. After all, if there are some categories to which aesthetic terms cannot in principle be applied, why couldn't aesthetic terms be involved in category mistakes? And if they could, we should expect to there to be metaphorical interpretations of them at least some of the time. But this is precisely what De Clercq denies. In other words, if potential category mistakes are what explain metaphorical uninterpretability, then De Clercq's weak formulation fails to explain the metaphorical uninterpretability of aesthetic terms, because category mistakes are possible for aesthetic terms even if such terms are not restricted to any particular category.

ii. Delineated, Unified, and Self-Standing Categories

Secondly, De Clercq assumes that an expression is metaphorically interpretable only if it is possible to commit a category mistake with respect to the term, where a category must be a "delineated, unified, and self-standing" set of things brought together by "natural similarity". 'Elegant' literally applies to a set of wildly disparate objects, which fails to constitute a category in his sense. Hence, the term fails to be metaphorically interpretable.

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thetic terms, because aesthetic terms have no figurative meanings beyond their literal ones, if my starting intuitions are right. The general asymmetry between pretense and metaphor and the unavailability of metaphorical meanings in the case of aesthetic terms then are why statements like (1) default to a fictive reading rather than a metaphorical one. And this lack of metaphorical meanings for aesthetic terms need not have anything to do with the absence of a home domain of application or the impossibility of being involved in a category-mistake.

But this cannot be the reason for the metaphorical uninterpretability of 'elegant', for a great number of metaphorically interpretable expressions fail to have unified, self-standing, and well-delineated extensions. That a unified category is not required for metaphorical interpretability can be shown by the fact that metaphorical uses of the term 'game' abound.[5] Yet, as Wittgenstein famously noted, the term 'game' denotes a wildly heterogeneous category, including some members that do and others that do not involve equipment, scoring, competition, use of leisure time, or turn-taking, etc. The categories in question also need not be self-standing. Chomsky's tea/water example in his "Language and Nature" paper illustrates that 'tea' and 'water' are highly socially determined and context-dependent predicates.[6] The same weak tea-like substance is taken to be the denotation of 'water' when it comes out of a faucet and the denotation of 'tea' when served in a teacup. Yet, socially determined predicates such as these can certainly be used metaphorically.[7] Finally, categories need not be well-delineated in order for their expressions to be used metaphorically. In "Context and Logical Form," Stanley shows that the loosely delineated extension of 'water' includes substances ranging from pure H_2O to muddy puddle water.[8] And in *Beyond Rigidity*, Soames argues that 'water', in its expansive sense, may include instances of ice or water vapour, and points out that (i) not all water is chemically the same (e.g.,

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[5] (i) "Life is a game."

(ii) Neil Strauss' New York Times bestseller title "The Game" refers to the art of picking-up women.

(iii) "To bide upon't, thou art not honest, or,

If thou inclinest that way, thou art a coward,

Which hoxes honesty behind, restraining

From course required; or else thou must be counted

A servant grafted in my serious trust

And therein negligent; or else a fool

That seest a *game* play'd home, the rich stake drawn,

And takest it all for jest." (Shakespeare, *Winter's Tale*, I, 2, 342)

[6] Chomsky (1995)

[7] In the case of 'tea' or 'coffee', we have: (i) "You are the cream in my *coffee*"; (ii) "Three Cups of *Tea*: One Man's Mission to Promote Peace One School At A Time"; (iii) "the chimpanzee's *tea* party"; (iv) "I think, therefore I am a *tea* kettle"; (v) "I did not invite you over here for *tea* and scones", etc.

[8] Stanley (2002)

heavy water, or D_2O (deuterium oxide) may also count as water), and (ii) even pure water is a mixture of H_2O, deuterium oxide, and tritium, where two quantities of liquid may both count as pure water, despite the fact that the ratios of these ingredients can differ quite substantially.[9] Thus, 'water', as well as terms like 'bald', have vague and indeterminate boundaries of application. Yet metaphorical uses of these terms are prevalent.[10]

Furthermore, De Clercq appears to be presupposing a form of essentialism, where categories are sets to which entities belong necessarily; "If an entity falls under the corresponding concept, then *necessarily so.*"[11] So he appears to be assuming that the categories necessary for metaphor generation must also be cross-culturally constant, decontextualized, and stable.

Current psychological and linguistic research however shows that the boundaries between conceptual categories are often far from determinate and the categories are shifty, goal-dependent, and culture-relative.[12] Such

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[9] Soames (2002), 286-297.

[10] (i) "Smooth runs the *water* where the brook is deep." (Shakespeare, *Henry the Sixth*, Act 3, scene 1, line 53)

(ii) "I am standing *water.*" (Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, Act 2, scene 1, line 225)

(iii) "That's a fault that *water* will mend. (Shakespeare, *Comedy of errors*, III, 2, 867)

(iv) "I to the world am like a drop of *water* That in the ocean seeks another drop (Shakespeare, *Comedy of errors*, I, 2, 197)

(v) "Men's evil manners live in brass; their virtues we write in *water.* (Shakespeare, *Henry VIII*, IV, 2, 2605)

(vi) "One of the prettiest touches of all and that which Angled for mine eyes, caught the *water* though not the fish, was when, at the relation of the queen's Death, with the manner how she came to't bravely Confessed and lamented by the king, how Attentiveness wounded his daughter." (Shakespeare, *Winter's tale*, V, 2, 3190)

(vii) 'And Death, that *bald*-head buzzard

Stalls in halls where the lamp wick

Shortens with each breath drawn.' (Sylvia Plath, "Old Ladies' Home")

[11] De Clercq (2005).

[12] (i) *Categorial boundaries are fuzzy*: Psychologist, Adrienne Lehrer, for instance found that if all optional semantic features of the term 'bottle', such as [made of glass], [narrow at top], [for containing liquid], etc. are disregarded, there are not enough features left with which to distinguish it from other terms, such as 'flask'. On the other hand, if all optional features — i.e., those regarded as unnecessary by more than 90 percent of the informants — are made obligatory, then a sentence like 'Some bottles are not made of glass' would be marked as contradictory. (Goatly, 1997, 20-21)

(ii) *Categories are culture-relative:* When shown a cow, a chicken, a patch of grass and asked which belongs with the cow, Americans tend to choose the chicken (as both are

empirical findings certainly do not rule out a categorical account of metaphor. For instance, indeterminate boundaries do not preclude a category-mistake, for 'the Pythagorean theorem is bald' seems to involve a category error even though the boundary between the concepts *bald* and *not-bald* is not determinate. So De Clercq's claim that metaphor requires the possibility of a category error might still be right, even if De Clercq is wrong about his particular theories of what categories are and how they are determined.

However, if categories are found to be poorly delineated, internally heterogeneous, context-dependent, interest-relative and culture-dependent, etc., it strikes me that the motivation for appealing to categories correspondingly suffers. For once we start to incorporate and concede features like shiftiness, fuzzy boundaries, heterogeneity, and cultural and interest relativity, etc. in light of empirical findings, it becomes less obvious what we stand to gain by pursuing a category-based account at all. Non-category-based accounts appear to account for the phenomenon just as well, without making as many concessions.

On the other hand, there would be a kind of empirical finding that would threaten De Clercq's claim that metaphor requires category mistakes. These would include instances of metaphors surviving cross-cultural translation in the face of the relevant categories not surviving. I do not

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animals), while Asians tend to choose the grass (as the cow eats the grass). (Nisbett, 2003) This is admittedly an ambiguous, and hence non-ideal, example, since *belonging with* may not be the same as *belonging in the same category*. I may think that a craft knife belongs with a model-maker rather than with a surgeon without it being the case that I also think that a craft knife and a model-maker are more appropriately categorized together than, say, a craft knife and a scalpel. I might think that the craft knife and the scalpel belong in the same category, that the model-maker and the surgeon belong in their own separate category, and despite that also think that the craft knife belongs with the model-maker and the scalpel with the surgeon. Thanks to Paul Sludds for this point.

(iii) *Categories are goal-dependent:* Zebras and barber poles both have the feature 'striped', but most people categorize zebras with non-striped horses rather than with barber poles, and motivate this categorization by appeal to a theory with a more general goal — e.g, picking out things that may be of use in agricultural work, etc. (Murphy and Medin, 1985) And according to Graff (2000) and Stanley (2005), the semantic content of vague terms such as color terms ('blue') and gradient adjectives ('tall', 'old', 'bald') on the one hand and terms like 'know' on the other, respectively, are significantly constrained by people's specific goals and contextually-determined practical interests.

know of any such study currently, but we do know that (i) metaphor, unlike idiom, is largely translatable across languages.[13] (ii) Nonliterate individuals categorize objects in situation-bound, context-dependent ways, rather than by means of decontextualized, abstract, scientific concepts or categories which are usually only acquired with formal education; and insufficient literacy or education does not appear to pose a problem for metaphor use or recognition.[14] And (iii), it is rather patients with autism who have problems recognizing contextual appropriateness but readily master abstract and decontextualized image schemas. And they are documented as having problems with figurative language.[15] Of course, much more empirical support is needed to drive the point home, but the aforementioned studies involving illiteracy and autism do appear to suggest that metaphor competency is largely independent of fluency with categories.

IV. A Dimensional Account

According to my account, metaphorical interpretability has little to do with (i) the possibility of being involved in a category mistake, or (ii) the extent to which a category is unified, self-standing, and well-delineated. Rather it essentially has to do with the presence of a default dimension within multiple dimensions.

A "thematic dimension" is a term introduced by Bartsch (1987) and first applied to the case of metaphor by Leezenberg (2001). The predicate 'good' in 'The soufflé is good' might be said to denote a pre-property that is in need of thematic specification. 'Good' is a pre-property in that, before one specifies HEIGHT as the dimension along which the term 'good' is to be interpreted, it fails to express a property. Thematic dimensions then are contextual parameters in addition to speaker, place and time, which

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[13] Of course, some metaphors are less successfully translatable across languages or cultures. "Bedbug" is a term of endearment in Nigeria, unlike in the United States. But because these differences in interpretation have more to do with fleeting contextual presuppositions rather than pre-existing, fixed conceptual categories, they can be overridden by the presence of sufficiently strong or rich contextual cues.

[14] Leezenberg, 2001, section 1.1

[15] MacKay and Shaw, 2004.

specify the *respect* in which a pre-property is said to be true of the subject.[16] Once it has been contextually specified that HEIGHT is the dimension along which the term, 'good', is to be employed, one can evaluate whether the soufflé belongs to the set of things that are good with respect to height and determine the truth value of the sentence.

Returning to the question of metaphor, a first condition for the metaphorical interpretability of an expression is *multi-dimensionality*; that is, an expression must be interpretable along multiple dimensions.[17] Take the term 'swamp' for instance. 'Swamp' is multi-dimensional in that something can be a swamp with respect to orderliness, hospitality, inundation, climate, or transparency, etc. A second condition is that a metaphorically interpretable expression must privilege one of its dimensions as more basic and/or original than the rest; that is, it must have a *default dimension*. Interpreting an expression along its default dimension usually results in an expression's literal meaning, but this need not be the case.[18] Thus in

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[16] Dimensions differ from categories of things to which a term can be applied in that the former is a contextual parameter, like speaker, time, or place, whereas the latter is a particular superset of the term's extension. There may happen to be interesting ways in which these two notions overlap and converge, but they are at least conceptually separable.

[17] Multi-dimensionality should be distinguished from lexical ambiguity. An ambiguous term (e.g., 'bank') has distinct lexical definitions (i.e., *edge of a river* and *financial institution*) which are unrelated to each other. By contrast, a multi-dimensional predicate (e.g., 'is a swamp') yields properties that are related to one another (e.g., *is overwhelming, is inhospitable, is opaque*, etc.), even if loosely, by the default-dimensional core meaning (i.e., *is water-logged*).

[18] What makes a dimension the default one and what makes its other dimensions nondefault? Clearly, on pain of circularity, the default-non-default distinction cannot be explained in terms of the literal/metaphorical distinction, since the default/non-default distinction is supposed to explain what makes a use metaphorical. Thus, I do not appeal to the notion of literality in defining a default dimension. Instead, I propose that a default dimension is the dimension which a term is assumed to be interpreted along in the absence of overt contextual cues that override it. As it is assumed in MIP, default dimensions often pair with predicates to yield properties that are (i) more concrete, (ii) related to bodily action, (iii) more precise, and (iv) historically older. But these are merely one set of possible guidelines, not core principles.

Could a default dimension and literal interpretation ever come apart? This would presumably occur when a figurative or non-literal interpretation is more familiar or basic than its literal one. In a case like this, it is the non-literal interpretation that would be

the case of 'swamp,' the default dimension is geology. It is by virtue of simultaneously satisfying these dual conditions that an expression such as 'swamp' is metaphorically interpretable.[19]

The problem with aesthetic terms then is that while they satisfy the first condition (i.e., they are multi-dimensional), they fail to satisfy the second (i.e., they lack a default dimension). That is, something can be beautiful or elegant in indefinitely many respects — e.g., precision or imprecision, curvature or angularity, interrelatedness or independence, etc. — yet no single respect stands out as being more basic or primary than the others.

This claim is importantly less restrictive than and hence different from De Clercq's claim that aesthetic terms lack a unified, self-standing, and delineated home domain of application. Of course, altering the thematic dimension typically results in a corresponding change of extension.[20] But on the favored account, a default dimension need only be recognizably contrastive with respect to the other dimensions; a default dimension need not further determine an extension that is unified, self-standing, or well-delineated. This results in an account of metaphorical interpretability that is more empirically adequate and generalizable to other varieties of impossible metaphors.

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generated by the default dimension. Examples might include expressions like 'dint' in the idiom, 'by dint of'. The literal meaning of 'dint' is blow, stroke, or force. The default or common meaning is cause or means.

[19] "This country [Japan] is a swamp … more terrible than you can imagine. Whenever you plant a sapling in this swamp the roots begin to rot; the leaves grow yellow and wither. And we have planted the sapling of Christianity in this swamp." (Shusaku Endo, *Silence*)

[20] Changing the thematic dimension can be achieved easily. All that is required is to make a different dimension contextually salient, which can in turn be done by the mere mention of a new dimension. For instance, saying something about the taste of a soufflé in a conversation can by itself change the dimension of 'good' from HEIGHT to TASTE. Changing the default dimension however is far less easy to do. This, presumably, can only be accomplished over large stretches of time, as users of the term slowly grow accustomed to the shift.

V. Other Impossible Metaphors

In his paper, "Metaphor and Lexical Semantics", Michael Glanzberg notes that *functional categories*, including determiners, quantifiers, tense, modals, negation, complementizers, etc., fail to be metaphorically interpretable. Such expressions primarily provide the 'grammatical glue' that binds words together into sentences rather than providing the substantial content of a sentence, as nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs do. We can, of course, find functional categories which occur in metaphorical sentences. But in none of these cases can we find anything like a metaphorical interpretation of the functional categories themselves.

> **Quantifiers**: Art left the prey of *every* vulgar thief.[21]
>
> **Complementizers**: The pouch feared *that* it would leak.
>
> **Tense/modals**: She *might* stare death in the eye.
>
> **Negation/conjunction**: Juliet is *not* the sun.

The same is true of what Leezenberg calls "predicate-limiting expressions." Predicate-limiting expressions are constructions that make linguistically explicit the thematic dimension or respect in which the dimensionally sensitive (e.g., metaphorical) expression is to be interpreted. An example of a predicate-limiting term in a non-metaphorical sentence would be 'financially' in "John isn't doing so well *financially*." As Leezenberg points out, such terms cannot themselves be interpreted metaphorically, because it is they that force a metaphorical interpretation of the terms they modify. And if such terms determine metaphorical content, it would be odd if they could be part of that content.

> (2) Cambodia has become *Vietnam's* Vietnam.[22]

Despite a superficial similarity, predicate-limiting adverbials therefore are unlike manner adverbials, which can themselves undergo metaphorical interpretation.

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[21] Shakespeare, Sonnet 48.
[22] Boas & Keysar (1993), referenced in Leezenberg, 220.

(3) The drums *demurely* wake the sleepers.[23]

While Glanzberg and Leezenberg each offer distinct explanations for why functional categories and predicate-limiting terms, respectively, are metaphorically uninterpretable, a single dimensional account can capture the phenomenon of impossible metaphors as a whole. First, functional categories lack metaphorical readings because, while they may be said to have a default dimension, they are not multi-dimensional. Determiners (e.g., *the*), quantifiers (e.g., *every*), tense (e.g., *-ed*), modals (e.g., *might*), negation (e.g., *not*), complementizers (e.g., *that*), etc. play a largely syntactic role and are therefore too semantically impoverished to contribute various meanings along multiple dimensions.

Next, take the predicate-limiting expression, 'with respect to temperament,' in 'Joan is a saint with respect to temperament.' Here too, 'with respect to temperament' cannot be interpreted metaphorically because the predicate-limiting expression as a whole fails to be multi-dimensional. Of course, the expression-type, 'temperament,' which is a constituent expression of the predicate-limiting expression, can be metaphorically interpreted in some contexts. But the constituent term inevitably lacks a metaphorical reading when it directly follows a 'with-respect-to' operator and when it is placed within the context of a predicate-limiting expression.

To this, one may object: But surely it is possible to ask "In what respect is Joan a saint *with respect to temperament?*" Doesn't this suggest that 'with respect to temperament' can be interpreted along more than one dimension? I deny that the 'with-respect-to' operator is iterable or embeddable in the aforementioned way. As a result, I deny that 'with respect to temperament' is itself multi-dimensional or dimension-sensitive. At best, we may ask: '*In what way is* Joan a saint with respect to temperament?' But 'in what way' is an interrogative phrase which elicits information about manner, not thematic dimension.

Q: In what way is Joan a saint with respect to temperament?

A: Joan is a saint with respect to temperament *in that she is placid.*

---

[23] Shakespeare, referenced in Leezenberg, 220.

A key difference between expressions that denote information about manner (e.g., manner adverbials) and those that express information about dimensions (e.g., predicate-limiting adverbials) is that, unlike the former, the latter involve presupposed information, which is evidenced by their behavior under operations like negation, modals, or questioning.

>   a. John does well *financially*.
>
>   b. John does not do well *financially*.
>
>   c. John does not necessarily do well *financially*.
>
>   d. Does John do well *financially*?[24]

That is, presuppositions and hence content involving dimensions survive operations such as negation, modals, or questioning, whereas assertions and content concerning manner do not. For this reason, we can tell that 'in that she is placid' is not a predicate-limiting adsentential expression, but rather a manner adsentential expression in that it fails the presupposition test.

>   a. Joan is a saint with respect to temperament *in that she is placid*.
>
>   b. Joan is not a saint with respect to temperament.
>
>   c. Is Joan a saint with respect to temperament?
>
>   d. Perhaps Joan is a wolf with respect to temperament.

In that she is placid does not survive the operations of negation, modals, and questioning, which indicates that it is a manner adsentential expression involving asserted information, rather than a predicate-limiting expression involving presupposed information.

VI. Conclusion

To summarize, I have tried to show that De Clercq's thesis is flawed as an account of both the metaphorical uninterpretability of aesthetic terms and the phenomenon of impossible metaphors in general. On my view,

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[24] Leezenberg, 218-219.

what is required for metaphorical interpretability is the joint satisfaction of two conditions: (i) dimension-dependence or multi-dimensionality and (ii) the presence of a default dimension. Aesthetic terms lack metaphorical readings because they fail to satisfy (ii), even though they satisfy (i). Functional categories and predicate-limiting expressions cannot be interpreted metaphorically because they fail to satisfy (i), though they may be said to satisfy (ii). The account I offer is preferable to the accounts offered by individual theorists mentioned in the paper as it is a more predictively adequate and uniform account of the phenomenon of impossible metaphors in general

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