Chapter IV

COMPONENTS OF METAPHORIC PROPOSITION

A proposition consists of two functional components, which are most often called the TOPIC and COMMENT. However, as Bates and MacWhinney point out, "research on topic-comment relations has been marked by confusions and contradictions regarding the basic descriptions" (1979:175). The confusion is a result partly of a heterogeneity in terminology and partly of a disagreement about the nature of expressing propositions. Table 1 (from Bates and MacWhinney, 1979) summarizes this diversity in terminology and in theoretical standpoints:

TABLE 1
Topic-Comment Terminology

	Bipolar Terms		**Origin**
1	New information	Old information	Baroni, Fava and Tirondolar,1973 Bates, 1976 Chafe, 1976
2	New information	Given information	Clark and Havilland, 1977
3	Comment	Topic	Bates, 1976 de Laguna, 1927 Hornby, 1972 Sechehaye,1926 Vygotsky, 1962
4	Figure	Ground	Bates, 1976 MacWhinney, 1974
5	Bound information	Free information	Rommetveit, 1974
6	Conversational dynamic element	Conversational static element	Firbas, 1964
7	Rheme	Theme	Halliday, 1967
	Bifunctional terms		
8	Information focus	Theme	Halliday, 1967
9	Focus	Perspective	MacWhinney, 1977a
10	Secondary topicalization	Primary topicalization	Fillmore, 1968

11	Focus	Presupposed	Chomsky, 1971a Jackendorf, 1972
12	Emphasis	Theme	Deszo, 1970

Related logical terms

13	Proposition	Presupposition	Bates, 1976
14	Predicate	Argument	Reichenbach, 1947
15	Operator	Nucleus	Seuren, 1969

(Bates and MacWhinney, 1979:176)

There are major theoretical differences concerning this important issue. Some think that setting up TOPICs and giving COMMENTs is a single process. Givon (1976), for instance, "has proposed that there is a single continuum from presupposed, background information, to proposed, foreground information" (Bates and MacWhinney, 1976:175). Others, like Chafe (1976) see this process as being comprised out of two (and maybe more) "distinct sometimes orthogonal functions" (Bates and MacWhinney, 1979:176).

Metaphor has been studied intensively in recent years, but the confusion in terminology and diversity of ideas has just increased. Table 2 partially summarizes this confusion:

TABLE 2
Components of Metaphor: Terminology

1	Tenor	Vehicle	Richards, 1936/81 Harris et al., 1980 Malgady, 1977 Malgady and Johnson, 1980
2	Topic	Vehicle	Paivio, 1979 Ortony, 1979a Verbrugge and McCarrell, 1977 Hoffman and Honneck, 1980 Connor and Kogan, 1980 Gardner and Winner, 1978 Winner, 1988
3	Topic expression	Comment expression	Cohen, 1979
4	Current topic	Old information	Miller, 1979

5	Referent	Relatum	Miller, 1979
6	Frame	Focus	Black, 1962
7	Primary subject	Secondary subject	Black, 1979 Boyd, 1979
8	Head	Modifier	Cohen, 1979
9	Logical subject	Logical predicate	Ricoeur, 1978
10	Expression used literally	Expression used metaphorically	Searle, 1979
			(And many other different terms)

The heterogeneity in terminology reflects vast theoretical differences about the constituents of metaphor as well as about the nature of their relationship.

It is not our intention to add to this conglomeration of terms by bringing new ones into the arena. On the contrary, it seems possible to reduce the list. Having identified metaphor with PROPOSITION, we will use terminology which depicts the functional character of the two constituents: The TOPIC is what the metaphoric proposition is about. The COMMENT is what is being said about the TOPIC. In pragmatic analysis, the TOPIC and the COMMENT are answers to two different types of questions of immediate concern (Ochs, 1983). The TOPIC answers the question: “What is it (the proposition) about?”. The COMMENT answers the question asking “What about it (the TOPIC)?”

“QUESTIONS OF IMMEDIATE CONCERN” TO THE INTERACTING PARTICIPANTS

The TOPIC and the COMMENT can be determined very precisely by establishing “questions of immediate concern”. These questions have been defined as “a question (or set of questions) an utterance is a response to” (Ochs Keenan and Schieffelin, 1983:73). They may be explicit, as they often are in discourse with children. For instance, they may be uttered as a way of initiating a new TOPIC ('You know what?'), or as requests for additional information ('What happened today in school?'), etc.

However, very often questions of immediate concern are implicit and have to be determined by a linguist or a listener on the basis of the ongoing conversation and its context. Ochs Keenan and Schieffelin write that "in many instances the question of immediate concern may be understood by the speaker and the hearer because it arises from their shared background knowledge" (1983:74). In fact, closeness or a great deal of shared background knowledge is almost indispensable in discourse with very small children who do not always express the TOPIC in their one-word utterances. For example, when Giga was in his second year he used to wake up at night and say: "My!". I would usually reply with "Do you want to come to my bed?" That single word was, indeed, his request to take him to my bed. The TOPIC he was addressing was an answer to the question of immediate concern which I articulated.[1]

The same utterance can be an answer to different questions of immediate concern depending on the overall context. For instance, if you hear "Alex said he wouldn't be coming", you have to know what question of immediate concern this utterance is answering. The possibilities are numerous: Who called?, What did Alex say?, What happened to Alex?, Who can we count on?, What's the good news? or any other question relevant to the participants in the conversation.

In short, both the participants in a discourse and the researcher may sometimes find it difficult to determine the immediate concern the speaker is addressing. The listener can then resort to a repair sequence by explicitly asking for additional information either about the TOPIC (a general "What?" or some similar question checking what the speaker is talking about); or about the COMMENT ("You did **what**?", "You want some **what**?"). A researcher can construct the question of immediate concern from the records. The more complete the records are

[1] We shall return to the issue of closeness further in this chapter.

(including the nonverbal situation and some history relevant to the discourse), and the better knowledge the researcher has of the participants, the more reliable will be the assumed question of immediate concern.

In studying metaphor in children, it is of the primary importance to establish the immediate concern the child is addressing. Since children's utterances are more dependent on the ongoing nonverbal context and on the presupposed shared background knowledge (which children tend to "overestimate"), their utterances cannot be properly interpreted without this kind of information. Consider the following example:

> *(1)*
> *[Jovan (2;4), grandmother Nana, Ana, Aug. 29, 77]*
> *Jovan took two long and narrow cushions from Nana's bed. He crossed them on the floor, sat on the construction and said:*
> *J: "I'm building an airplane. It is not a mineral airplane it is a plain airplane."*
> *We speak a lot of "mineral" and "fresh or plain" water[2] Jovan's mother does not let him drink mineral water, only fresh water. (Of course, he loves mineral water which he sneaks whenever he can from other members of the household). In the example, the cushions were also something he was not allowed to play with, but he snatched them while we were talking. I can only think he wanted to say that what he was doing was nothing bad ("sour", "mineral"), but, on the contrary, he was claiming to just be playing a "plain" i.e. unforbidden game.*
>
> (author's collection)

In this example the little boy utters words which, for a moment, puzzled even his closest adults[3] It took quite a while to find a possible interpretation for his "mineral airplane" and "plain airplane"[4] He himself couldn't answer the question,

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[2] In Serbo-Croatian "kisela voda" means "mineral water", but the adjective "kisela" means "sour". "Obicna voda" can be translated with "plain, fresh water".

[3] Jovan was living in the household with his parents, his grandparents, and me, his aunt, from the time he was born until he was 6 years old.

[4] The confusion was also connected to the Serbian expression he used: "kiseli avion", since the word "kiseli" usually means "sour" and is never used for "mineral" except in the idiom "kisela voda". Thus, we first thought he said "sour airplane" and "plain airplane". And that, to us meant nothing.

'What does it mean, the mineral airplane?' and it was clear that in that form it was not helpful to me or the others in the household. The initial question of immediate concern was 'What was he telling us?'. For he was, clearly, telling us something, otherwise he could have simply said “I am building an airplane”. Only the shared knowledge about the prohibition of mineral water and the shared knowledge that playing with those cushions was also forbidden, helped us construct an assumption about his immediate concern: a request to be allowed to play with the cushions. Had an unfamiliar researcher heard Jovan's utterance, the chances would have been high for the expression “mineral (sour) airplane” to end up being analyzed as an “anomaly”.

THE TOPIC OF A METAPHORIC PROPOSITION

The first step in understanding a segment of a discourse is to understand what is it about, i.e. to find out what is its TOPIC. For a participant in a conversation this step is completed when s/he identifies a particular TOPIC. What is of interest to us, is to find out how this intuitive process works. In other words, we are interested in how the propositional TOPICs are encoded in actual conversation and on what does it depend. We are also interested in the relationships between different TOPICs, particularly in the dynamics of linking several TOPICs together.

In contemporary studies of metaphor it is often assumed that the TOPIC is the grammatical subject of an utterance/sentence and, in fact, this may be the case. For example in “The society is a sea.” (Black, 1979), the TOPIC is “The society”. Or in “Sunlight is golden dust” the TOPIC is “Sunlight”.

In these examples, a metaphoric proposition is explicitly stated, and its TOPIC coincides with the grammatical subject of utterance. But, as we have discussed, a metaphoric proposition does not have to coincide with the surface form of an utterance/sentence. Hence, the TOPIC of a metaphoric proposition does not **have**

to coincide with the TOPIC of an utterance/sentence. For instance in the above example, the TOPIC of Jovan's utterance was “I am building an airplane”. The metaphoric proposition Jovan implied was “I request that my playing with these cushions be not ‘mineral’ but ‘plain’”. The TOPIC of his implied metaphoric proposition was his request concerning the use of the cushions.

However, even though we have to differentiate between the TOPIC of an actual utterance and the TOPIC of one of the propositions implied by it, there are important similarities between the two. Pragmatic studies of discourse reveal some crucial points about the TOPIC of an utterance, important for the study of metaphor.

First, speakers (and writers) can choose from a variety of linguistic devices to express a TOPIC. “The amount and type of topic specification required,” write Bates and MacWhinney, “will be a function of the amount of shared information that speaker and listener can assume at a given moment in conversation” (1979:179). At one end of the continuum, “the minimal surface form for indicating topic is the zero form, that is, ellipsis of the topic” (ibid.,:181; stress mine). Moving along the continuum, a TOPIC can be expressed by a pronoun, a noun phrase, a noun phrase with a modifier (of a different complexity), and, finally, by a whole utterance or a set of utterances previous to the actual point making COMMENT. The modifiers of a noun phrase can also range from an adjective through a relative clause (ibid.,: 181-182). Thus, laying out a TOPIC may require, in certain cases, more than one sentence/utterance.

On the other hand, several TOPICs (and COMMENTs) can be nested in a single utterance. Bates and MacWhinney give the following illustration:

> *“It was **this** beer, not the other one, which was drunk by the man who had only **recently** returned from Cincinnati (as opposed to the guy who came back from there a month ago).”*

There are several TOPIC-COMMENT levels in this utterance. "***This*** *beer* serves as a COMMENT to the topicalized beer (*the other one*). In turn ***this*** *beer* serves as a topic for the comment *was drunk by a man*. *The man* is the topic for the comment about returning from Cincinnati. *Returning from Cincinnati* is the topic for the comment ***recently***" (ibid.:177). An utterance/sentence, then, not only can imply several mutually related or nested propositions, but also each one of the propositions can be a TOPIC of another!

That the TOPIC of a proposition can itself be a proposition is a most crucial discovery! In fact, Ochs Keenan and Schieffelin define the TOPIC as "the proposition about which the speaker is either providing or requesting new information" (1983:68; stress mine). If the TOPIC of a proposition can itself be a proposition and not just a "simple" reference, an object (event, action, state), then what we have here is a repetition of the same or similar structure at two (maybe more) different levels. This phenomenon, known as **recursion**, has been extensively described by Hofstadter as a phenomenon regularly occurring in logico-mathematical systems, language (syntax), art and music.

RECURSION

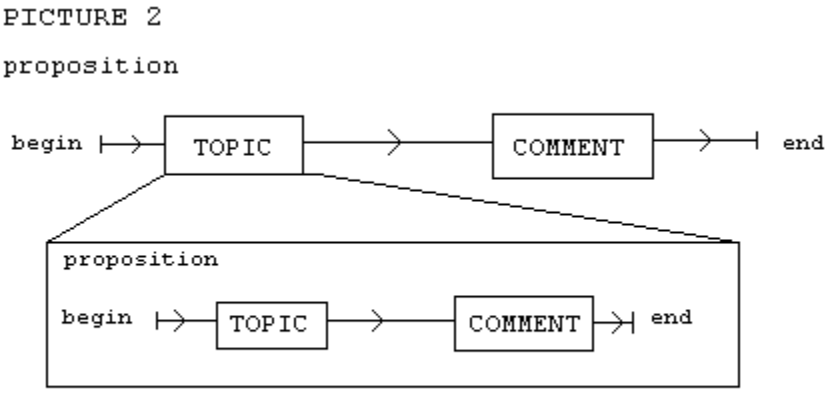
Recursion is repetition of the same or similar forms at deeper and deeper levels of a complex structure. "What is recursion?", wrote Hofstadter, "...nesting and variations of nesting... Stories inside stories, movies inside movies, paintings inside paintings, Russian dolls inside Russian dolls..." (1980:127). Recursion is one of the principles of building syntactic structures in language, and also may be a principle in building its semantic and pragmatic structures. This phenomenon is of such a great importance in analyzing metaphor that it warrants a more detailed description.

A recursive structure is a "recursive transition network" (Hofstadter, 1980:131). It is an algorithm containing two or more nested levels of instruction. The same

set of instructions may be called at each of the levels. Syntactic rules are a good example: a phrase within a phrase calls for repeating the rules of building a phrase in the midst of another phrase. For instance in the sentence “A man [who saw the murder] ran to the police station”, the phrase within the square brackets is an embedded sentence “A man saw the murder”. If the rule for building a sentence is: S = Noun Phrase + Verb Phrase, then a rule to build a Noun Phrase in this sentence is: NP = S, or NP = NP + VP. In other words, on the level of the whole sentence, a part of it may have a function of a Noun Phrase. On the level of the part itself, the Noun Phrase is a sentence in its own right.

Let us now return to PROPOSITION and find out how the recursive processes fit in there. If the TOPIC of a proposition can be another proposition, then, as said before, we have a recursive structure similar to the recursive structures in syntax. In other words, we have a proposition within a proposition. The diagram in Picture 2 is a graphic illustration of this.

PICTURE 2

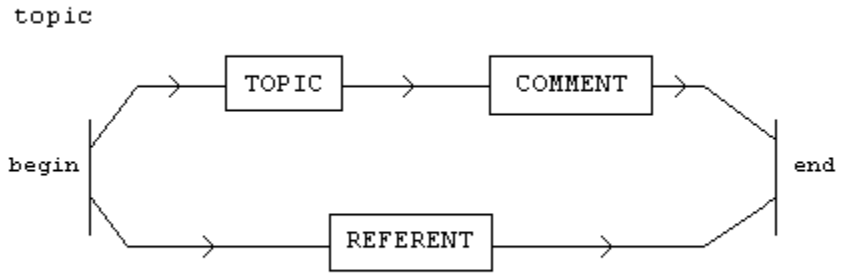


In this diagram we can see the dynamics of building a proposition. There are two recursive levels: the level of the main PROPOSITION and the level of the TOPIC. Within the level of the PROPOSITION, a part of it functions as the TOPIC. However, on the level of the TOPIC, we see that it consists of another

proposition with its own TOPIC and COMMENT.[5] Building a proposition is a dynamic recursive process involving several steps. One starts by setting up the TOPIC. But to establish a TOPIC, one needs to state one or more other propositions.

There is, however, a problem with this diagram. If this were the meaning structure of a metaphoric proposition, or of any proposition, we would have gotten caught up in an endless regression of ever deeper levels of the TOPIC! Like in Zeno's paradox, where an arrow could not reach the target because it would first have had to reach the half way to it, and to reach that point it would have had to reach the half way to that, etc., here we would never reach the point of making a single COMMENT. However, a TOPIC does not have to be another proposition. It can also be a simple referent, about which there are no presuppositions to begin with. In other words, the TOPIC may be simply a thing (object, action, event, situation) the proposition refers to. It is, in fact, more accurate to assume that there are two ways of building a TOPIC (see Picture 3).

PICTURE 3



[5] It should be noted that the RTN (Recursive Transitional Network) for PROPOSITION does not have a path going straight from BEGIN to COMMENT. This is possible on the surface level of an utterance which can be elliptical and thus without a topic. However, we are here describing implied propositions, and on that level, any proposition has to have a topic!

In Picture 3, the top path contains a recursion: To build this TOPIC, we have to first build another TOPIC. This sounds strange, but is in fact very often the case in everyday speech and writing. It happens every time when in order to lay out a TOPIC (about which we are to make a COMMENT), we first have to establish or refer to certain knowledge or point of view in our audience. For instance, the TOPIC of one of the S.J. Gould's articles in Natural History (2/89) is the need for an interdisciplinary study of the origins of humankind involving (at least) archaeology, genetics and linguistics. In order to present it, however, Gould first described the linguistic work of the older of the Grimm brothers, Jacob, regarding phonetic changes between Proto-Indo-European and Germanic languages (Gould, 1989:20). Thus, the first TOPIC he wrote about was that "the compilers of Rapunzel and Rumpelstiltskin also gave the world a great scholarly principle in linguistics" (1989:20). He made the following COMMENT as a transition to his main TOPIC: "[this idea] struck me as one of the sweetest little facts I ever learned - a statement, symbolic at least, about interdisciplinary study and the proper contact of high and vernacular culture" (1989:20). To present his main TOPIC (interdisciplinary studies), Gould chose to first present the interdisciplinary works of Jacob Grimm.

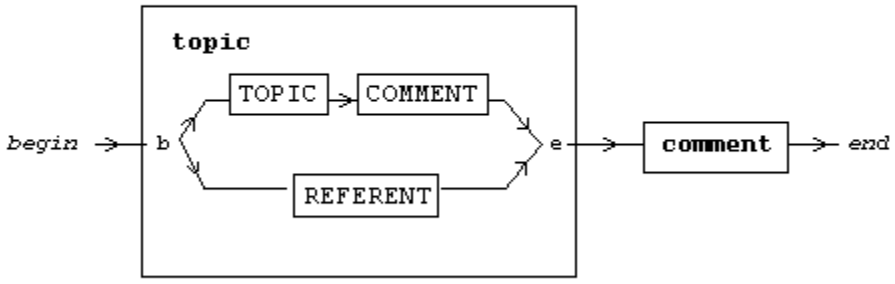
Let us now return to the diagram in Picture 3. The bottom path contains only a REFERENT. In establishing a discourse TOPIC "speakers refer to individuals, objects, events etc., in such a way that the listener can mentally identify the referent" (Ochs Keenan and Schieffelin, 1983:90). In other words, speakers have to direct the attention of a listener to a particular segment of reality. Referents can be located either in the physical space (the setting of the conversation), or in the memory space (background knowledge and relevant parts of previous discourse) (ibid,:91). Children and adults use a variety of strategies to identify referents in the physical space: Looking at (x); Holding (x); Reaching for (x); Offering (x); Pointing at (x); Touching (x); and several verbal strategies including Naming (x) (ibid.:92-95). In contrast, identifying referents in the memory space is possible

only through verbal means (old information markers, i.e. definite articles; naming; notice verbs like 'remember' and 'know'; anaphoric pronouns; tense markers etc.).

We can return now to the structure of a PROPOSITION. The diagram in Picture 4 represents all the possible steps one may take in building the PROPOSITION. We can also see the inner structure of the TOPIC. Since the simplest TOPIC consists only of a REFERENT, the simplest PROPOSITION indicated in the above diagram would take the path: BEGIN; TOPIC: [BEGIN; REFERENT; END]; COMMENT; END.

PICTURE 4

proposition



The processes represented in this diagram can be illustrated by numerous children's utterances. Here is one from my collection:

(2)
[Jovan, (1;9), an adult, Fall-Winter 1976/77]
Jovan is intrigued by trains that pass near our house and could be seen through windows. But he is still small and needs to be picked up to look out of a window. When he hears a train passing, he excitedly runs to the nearest adult exclaiming:
J: "Foo-foo! Foo-foo!" (His word for "train")
He holds his arms up in the air clearly indicating he wants to be picked up. When taken to the window, he watches the train as it passes and gives one of two COMMENTs:
1. J: "Foo-foo maye!" (in a high voice). ("Small train")

2. J: "Foo-foo ae-goo!" (in a deep voice). ("Big train")[6]
(author's collection)

Jovan's first utterance ("Foo-foo! Foo-foo!") is a proposition which refers to the sound of a passing train. Jovan identifies the sound through his own expression for a train: "Foo-foo". This identification is a COMMENT about the sound. The structure of this proposition is, then: BEGIN; TOPIC: [BEGIN; REFERENT (sound); END]; COMMENT ("Foo-Foo"); END.

The second utterance in the example (in each of the two variants) is also a proposition. But here, the boy does not simply refer to the passing train (looking, pointing), he uses a word ("Foo-foo") to do so![7] Although this word now functions as a pointer, a label, it implies a whole structure of knowledge of this boy. The TOPIC of this utterance is, therefore, also a proposition. The boy makes COMMENTs about the length of the train ("maye" meaning "small", or "ae-goo" meaning "big"). The structure of his proposition ("The train is small/big") can be represented as follows:

BEGIN; TOPIC: [BEGIN; REFERENT (train); COMMENT ("Foo-foo"); END]; COMMENT ("maye" or "ae-goo"); END.

Building propositions involves much more complex processes than has been indicated in the literature on children's semantic development. Propositions do not just appear already made, (as they look when in written form), it is a dynamic process that takes place in time. In the same conversation, at one point in time, a phrase can be used as a TOPIC, and at a different time, as a COMMENT. Every

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[6] The example was originally taken in "Serbian language". However, at that age, Jovan's language was highly idiosyncratic (phonetically). The only adults who could understand his peculiar expressions were members of the household. This is not untypical for very small children who are just beginning to speak. Nevertheless, the words "maye" and "ae-goo" bear some phonetic similarity to Serbian words for "small" ("mali") and "big" ("veliki"). And "Foo-foo" is simply a Serbian rendition of the familiar "Choo-choo", Jovan learned from our "baby-talk.

[7] One of the objectives of this work is to investigate the status of using words to "name" objects. We shall discuss evidence that raises a serious doubt as to whether "naming" can be reduced to simple "labeling", as proposed by E. Clark (1983). We will return to this issue later, in the section about "comment".

completed step becomes a part of the given and shared knowledge, and in that sense, a part of a TOPIC. Every next step does something to the previously set TOPIC, and, therefore, is a COMMENT. This process is not always smooth, and the participants can retrace their steps in order to clarify something. If that happens, what was to be a TOPIC can again functionally become a proposition in its own right. On other words, Zeno's paradox is true only if, in a conversation we cannot settle the matters around the TOPIC, and instead of going on with a COMMENT, we have to retrace our steps, and go back to the original proposition. (Of course, the same can happen at that level, and on the next one.) To use a previous example, if you were told “Alex said he wouldn't be coming”, you could ask “Who is Alex?” The speaker would then have to clarify his TOPIC, which was given as a simple reference (Alex), with a whole proposition. For instance “Alex is the mailman”. Only then would you be able to make sense of the main COMMENT (“he wouldn't be coming”).

So far, we have shown the structure of the TOPIC and the PROPOSITION as they appear to be in pragmatic studies. A point of interest in our study is to determine whether, in building the TOPIC in a metaphoric proposition, one can take either one of the two paths and use either a simple referent (object, action, state, event) or another proposition. This, however, cannot be shown without considering the other part of the proposition, its COMMENT.

THE COMMENT OF A METAPHORIC PROPOSITION

We have, thus far, shown complex processes involved in setting the TOPIC of a proposition. Even the TOPIC, as we have seen, may involve a certain amount of commenting. The COMMENT is the other vital part of the proposition and, in this section, we will describe its functions and processes it involves.

Making a COMMENT is a complex process which simultaneously relates the speaker to the TOPIC and to his audience. In a sense, it is a gesture by which two interrelated goals are achieved:

a. The COMMENT is a communicative gesture the speaker uses to relate in some significant way to his/her listener(s): a request, demand, threat, compliment, insult, lecture, greeting, narrative, question, warning, etc. It is a speech act which works upon the listener moving her/him in a certain direction, expressing and provoking certain attitudes and feelings between the speaker and the listener.

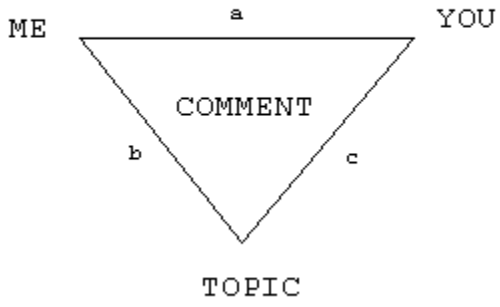
b. At the same time, the COMMENT operates upon the TOPIC, shaping the way of seeing it and putting it in a particular perspective. Thus, the COMMENT changes the relationships of both the speaker and the listener toward the TOPIC.

These two sides of commenting are inseparable from each other. On one hand, our conceptions about the world and its phenomena are socially and culturally determined. On the other hand, presenting them to others and/or changing them has a social significance. When making a COMMENT the speaker establishes, at the same time, a particular relationship with the listener(s) and with the TOPIC. The same is true for the listener when s/he hears a COMMENT. The interaction between the cognitive and the social aspects of the COMMENT can be represented as in Picture 5.

Characteristically, these two aspects of commenting have been dealt with quite separately, each one in different scientific disciplines. The cognitive aspect of the COMMENT is traditionally studied in propositional logic (as truth/falsity of an assertion); in semantic studies (as rules that govern combinatorial aspects of word meaning. i.e. selection restriction rules); in cognitive psychology and/or psycholinguistics that grew out of the previous two disciplines; and in most of the

studies on metaphor (as variously described processes of transfer of meaning). The social aspect of the COMMENT is traditionally studied in sociolinguistics and in some pragmatic studies. That is why the two aspects, even when considered to be interacting, i.e. having a systematic influence upon each other, have rarely been described together. Yet the idea is far from being novel.

PICTURE 5



Generalizing from the existing literature, several global characteristics of COMMENT seem to surface:

a. Commenting is, indeed, the core of communication, the ultimate motive and the outcome of it. The point of an utterance (or a discourse) is located in its COMMENT. That is why, in contrast to the TOPIC which can be omitted in the surface expression, a COMMENT is always present in some form (Bates and MacWhinney, 1979).

b. Every aspect and every part of an utterance is involved in commenting: its intonation, position in a discourse, who uttered it, to whom, in what situation, the choice of words, their phonetic and grammatical shape (for instance, verb tense or mode) and the syntax, even pauses or silence. (See works by: Austin, 1962; Bakhtin, 1981 and 1986; Baugh and Scherzer, 1984; Burke, 1966; Ervin-Tripp and Mitchell-Kernan, 1977; Giglioli, 1972; Gumperz and Hymes, 1986;

Hymes, 1974; Ochs and Schieffelin, 1979; Pride and Holmes, 1972; Stubbs, 1983; Vygotsky, 1934/87; Whorf, 1956; etc.).

c. Connected to the previous is the contextual dependence of COMMENT. All aspects of the context play a role in the process: the background knowledge of the speaker and the listener, their attitudes and feelings and their beliefs as to how much of the knowledge/feeling complex they share with each other; the social positions and the relationship of the speaker and the listener; the audience (its presence, absence and relationship to both the speaker and the listener); the situation (the cultural and the social setting); the physical environment; etc. Each of these can substantially modify a COMMENT: both its shape (linguistic texture) and its content (the "point").

STATUS OF THE VEHICLE IN STUDIES OF METAPHOR

Studies of metaphor are, in a sense, studies of specific conditions, mechanics and effects of making a COMMENT in this particular instance: metaphor. However, metaphoric vehicle is prevailingly seen as a unique process, different and even opposite from all other "literal" kinds of commenting. (Ortony, 1979c; Searle, 1979; Black, 1962 and 1979; Winner, 1988; and others). Only a small number of works are based on the continuity between metaphoric and other kinds of commenting (Johnson, 1980; Fish, 1980; Lakoff and Johnson, 1980; Bamberg, 1980; Budwig, Bamberg and Strage, 1982; Wittgenstein, 1953).

A metaphoric vehicle is usually conceptualized as a static element (a word, a concept, a set of implications, a category, a domain, an experience) which enters into some kind of a relationship with the other element of metaphor (TOPIC). Theories of metaphor differ in conceptualizing this relationship, but the elements are seen as independent of their different functions within the relationship. The functional difference between the TOPIC and the VEHICLE (COMMENT) is

either not considered or is not thought to be essential for understanding each of the two components of metaphor.

There is much more research concerning the cognitive aspect of metaphoric vehicle than concerning its social features. Moreover, as mentioned before, these two aspects are studied apart from each other, in very different scientific contexts and on different analytic levels. In cognitively oriented theories, the stress is on the processes of understanding and conceptualizing: how do we recognize something as a metaphor (incongruity, deviance from norm); the steps involved in interpretation (or cognitive resolution) of a metaphoric COMMENT; how do we use metaphors (to express emotions, ideas) etc. In these studies metaphor is usually analyzed out of its original context (actual conversation or text) and the particular combination of a TOPIC and a vehicle is regarded to be a sole determinator of a new meaning. In turn, the new metaphoric meaning is regarded as universal and understandable as such to all fully developed and normal speakers and listeners (of a particular language). The notion of a "correct" interpretation of a metaphor and/or "genuine" metaphor as opposed to "quasi" or "pseudo" metaphor grew out of these views (Gardner, Winner, Vosniadou, Ortony, Pollio, and others).

On the other hand, the small number of studies that stress social aspects of metaphoric commenting (see studies in Sapir and Crocker, 1977; Cohen, 1978; Gerrig and Gibbs, 1988) are not, in fact, dealing with metaphor as an issue (except Cohen, 1978 and Gerrig and Gibbs, 1988), rather they are oriented to describing and understanding particular socio-cultural phenomena (rituals, politics, family structure and kin relationships and the like) in which certain metaphors act as experience organizing devices. Nevertheless, these studies reveal significant facts about the social aspects of metaphoric COMMENT (which are discussed in detail in the further text).

COGNITIVE OPERATIONS INVOLVED IN COMMENTING

In making a COMMENT, the speaker gives and/or changes the perspective on the TOPIC. Therefore, by definition, a COMMENT is an active part of a proposition. It changes the way a listener (and/or a speaker) perceives the TOPIC. It, in a way, tells the listener what to do with the TOPIC. “It leads to a modification in the way the listener represents the situation in working memory (Feigenbaum, 1970:457) or consciousness (Chafe, 1974)” (Bates and MacWhinney, 1979:183; stress authors'). According to Bates and MacWhinney, there are at least three basic commenting operations “that can be involved in modification of information: addition, contrast and replacement” (ibid.:183).

Addition of new information is one of the most pervasive aspects of the COMMENT. While the TOPIC is often described in pragmatic literature as “old”, “given” or “certain” knowledge, the main role of the COMMENT is to add “new” information to a discourse. In fact, this difference can be used as a means of establishing what is a TOPIC and what a COMMENT in a particular utterance. For instance, in some studies of children's one-word utterances, the contrast between “certain” or “given” on one hand, and “uncertain” or “new” on the other, was used to establish their status as COMMENTs. In the Example (2) above, Jovan's “Foo-foo!” is a COMMENT which encodes **a sound** (of a passing train) which is new to the situation. Moreover, as an indication of a train, the sound is not quite certain. (It could have been a particularly noisy truck, as, indeed, had happened before!) At that point Jovan just proposes that it be a train. Once he sees the train, he further COMMENTs upon its length.

The other two operations involved in making a COMMENT are **contrast** and **replacement**. New information can contrast with the old and thereby provide a perspective or a background against which the TOPIC is set. In the light of the

previous history of the episode described in Example 2, each time Jovan comments about the length of a train, he essentially contrasts it to other trains. In effect, he is saying "This train is big. And this train is small. And this train is....", etc. In making a contrast one sets up parallel predications around one of the aspects of the situation.

The greatest change in perception of the topical element occurs when a COMMENT calls for **replacement**. When a COMMENT replaces the earlier conception of the TOPIC, it, in a sense, "undoes" the previous COMMENT. Replacement, as a commenting operation, is of great interest for the study of metaphor. There too, a COMMENT, in a way, undoes an earlier predication and sets up a new one. To show how replacement works in metaphor is one of the goals of this study and is discussed in detail below (see the section on "use-mention" difference).

LINGUISTIC DEVICES FOR ENCODING THE COMMENT

The COMMENT of a proposition, like the TOPIC, may be encoded by different linguistic devices in an actual discourse. First, depending on the closeness of the relationship between the speaker and the listener and/or the amount of shared background knowledge, "different amount of specificity" will be required to encode a COMMENT. This happens in highly structured situations. For example, if an utterance is an answer to a question "Would you like a cup of tea?", a COMMENT may be encoded with only one word ("No" or "Yes") (Bates and MacWhinney, 1979:183; Vygotsky, 1934/86:134). Vygotsky also showed that when the speaker and the listener are very close, not only can they omit the TOPIC ("subject") from the surface of an utterance, but the "amount of specificity" needed to encode the COMMENT ("predicate") may also be minimal (Vygotsky, 1934/87:134). In the example Vygotsky quotes from Tolstoy's Anna

Karenina (part IV, chapter 13), Kitty and Levine communicate using only initial letters:

> *"I have long wished to ask you something." "Please do." "This," he said, and wrote the initial letters: W y a: i c n b, d y m t o n. These letters meant: "When you answered: it can not be, did you mean then or never?" It seemed impossible that she would be able to understand the complicated sentence. "I understand," she said blushing. (part of the example quoted by Vygotsky, 1934/87:237)*

This is not just a literary example. We are told that "in just this way, Tolstoy told his future wife of his love for her" (Vygotsky, ibid.:238).

In sum, on one extreme, a COMMENT may be encoded by several sentences or phrases; and on the other it may need just a word, or even less. "At the minimal level, a point may carry with a wink, a nod, or a point of the index finger in some relevant direction", (Bates and MacWhinney, 1979:182).

Like the TOPIC of a proposition and for the same reasons, the propositional COMMENT does not have to coincide with the grammatical predicate of an utterance. The psychological predicate, as Vygotsky called the COMMENT of an implied proposition, can, in fact, be any part of an utterance, depending on what question of the immediate concern the utterance is an answer to. Vygotsky gave the following example.

> *"In the sentence 'The clock fell,' the emphasis and meaning may change in different situations. Suppose I notice that the clock has stopped and ask how this happened. The answer is, 'The clock fell.' Grammatical and psychological subject coincide: 'The clock' is the first idea in my consciousness; 'fell' is what is said about the clock. But if I hear a crash in the next room and inquire what happened, and get the same answer, subject and predicate are psychologically reversed. I knew something had fallen - that is what we are talking about. 'The clock' completes the idea. The sentence should be changed to 'What has fallen is the clock'." (Vygotsky, 1934/87:220)*

THE “USE-MENTION” DIFFERENCE BETWEEN COMMENT AND TOPIC

As discussed earlier, a COMMENT (and a whole proposition) may be a TOPIC for another COMMENT. The terms TOPIC and COMMENT refer to a difference in function at a given point in discourse. At every point in discourse, a previous COMMENT is part of the “picture” of the TOPIC, and a new COMMENT is added. Thus, any part of a discourse goes through two stages: first, as a COMMENT, it organizes and shapes the way in which one perceives certain segments of reality; and second, as a TOPIC, it is a unit which can be further shaped by another COMMENT.

Let's take the following sentence as an example: “A man was standing in a doorway”. In building this sentence, one starts by naming the subject - “A man...”. At that moment in the discourse, the use of a particular word serves not only to focus our attention to a certain segment of reality but it does so through mentally organizing that reality in a particular way (“somebody human, male, adult”). At that point, naming is a COMMENT, a predicate to the referred reality. It is easy to see it is a predicate, if we try substituting other words that refer to the same reality, but are different predicates. “Somebody”, “a man”, “a beggar” may all refer to the same person, but clearly with a different degree of specificity.

At the very next moment the utterance continues and another COMMENT is given about the mentioned man - “... was standing...”. At that point, the previous COMMENT (“A man”) functions as the TOPIC, the old information. The new COMMENT (“...was standing...”), by adding new information works to shape this TOPIC (of a man).

Then comes the next COMMENT - “...in the doorway”. At this point, the previous COMMENT (“was standing”) becomes a part of the TOPIC and the new COMMENT (“in the doorway”) works on the whole image of the TOPIC (“a man was standing”).

There is a great difference between these two functions. Taken as the COMMENT, a word (or phrase) becomes an operative part, a “processor” that acts upon some cognitive content. As the TOPIC, it is that content. This difference was described by Hofstadter (1980) as a “use - mention” difference. When commenting, we are actively using symbols to direct and shape our images. In contrast, when s symbol is taken as the TOPIC, it only “mentions” a referential point, i.e. it is taken for a mere label. To illustrate this striking difference in function Hofstadter used “self-referential” sentences. For example:

“IS WRITTEN ON OLD JARS OF MUSTARD TO KEEP THEM FRESH” IS WRITTEN ON OLD JARS OF MUSTARD TO KEEP THEM FRESH.

or

“IS A SENTENCE FRAGMENT” IS A SENTENCE FRAGMENT.
(Hofstadter, 1980:434,435)

In both examples the same phrase is printed twice, once in quotations and once free of them. The quoted part is just “mentioned”. The other part is the operative part, the COMMENT which tells us what to make out of the quoted phrase.

There is evidence that “as early as the one-word stage children have both the TOPIC-COMMENT distinction and the concept of agent” (Bates and MacWhinney, 1979:190). Most pragmatic studies show, for example, that children encode the COMMENT while at the same time they omit the TOPIC. The following example from my collection illustrates a child's use of this difference for a special purpose:

> *(3)*
> *[Jovan, 3 years; whole family of adults, May 1, 1978]*
> *It was Jovan's third birthday. There was a party of adults (his mother and father, his grandparents, his great uncle and aunt and me, his aunt), since Jovan was the only child in the family. While we were sitting and chatting,*

Jovan was running around and playing. At a moment of complete silence, Jovan's great uncle asked him solemnly:
U: "Jovan, who do you love the best?"
J: "Nobody!"
Then, Jovan ran to me, and whispered in my ear:
J: "You are Nobody!"

(author's collection)

In this episode, Jovan exploited the "use"-"mention" distinction in the same way L. Carroll did in "Through the Looking Glass":

> *The White King: "And I haven't sent the two Messengers, either. They're both gone to the town. Just look along the road, and tell me if you can see either of them." "I see nobody on the road," said Alice. "I only wish I had such eyes," the King remarked in a fretful tone. "To be able to see Nobody! And at that distance too! Why, it's as much as I can do to see real people, by this light!" (Carroll, Through the Looking Glass, ch. VII)*

When Jovan (and Alice) used the word "nobody" for the first time, he used it as a predicate to "the person I love the best" (and Alice as a predicate to "who I see on the road"). As a predicate, "nobody" organizes the TOPIC ("the person I love the best") in a particular way ("there is no such person"). But at the very next moment Jovan inverts the proposition, taking "nobody" to be a TOPIC - a symbol that just "mentions". This TOPIC's conventional predication ("no person") is now replaced by a new COMMENT ("is a person I love the best"). In this way the word "nobody" acquires a new meaning, a new connotation! Having done that, Jovan adds a new COMMENT (to the TOPIC "nobody = the person I love the best"): "is you". In the Carrollian example the White King makes the same inversion.

Jovan used the "mention-use" difference in a creative way, to solve a difficult social problem: to evade a public declaration of his love for a particular person, and yet, to secretly (whispering) inform that person about his feelings.

CONCLUSION

A metaphoric proposition, like any other proposition has two basic components: the TOPIC and the COMMENT. In pragmatic and sociolinguistic studies as well as in studies of metaphor, these two components have been described in very different terms and from various, even contrasting theoretical positions. The major difference is between the theories that view these concepts as structural and static elements; and those theories describing them functionally as different but interdependent components.

In this chapter, we tried to present several reasons for supporting the functional explanation. They can be summarized in the following way:

a. Since a proposition and an utterance in which it is expressed are not identical, the TOPIC and the COMMENT of a proposition can be determined only as answers to different questions of immediate concern. The TOPIC is an answer to "What is it about?" and the COMMENT answers "What about it (TOPIC)?" The questions of immediate concern depend on the social and physical context (including the socio-cultural and personal relationship between the speaker and the listener, their background knowledge, particularly the part they assume to be mutually shared, their immediate situation and intentions, the relevant history of their relationship, the presence/absence of audience, the physical setting, etc.).

b. Different grammatical parts of the surface utterance may serve as "encoders" of the TOPIC and the COMMENT. Both may need different amount of specificity depending on the closeness of the interlocutors. The closer they are, the less encoding is needed.

c. Moreover, the TOPIC and the COMMENT are functions dependent on the flow of a discourse. What may have served as a COMMENT at one point in time, may, and usually does, become a part of the TOPIC at another point.

Therefore, any “fixing” of the TOPIC and the COMMENT to a particular structural element of an utterance is inappropriate. Their role is dependent on TIME, i.e. on a particular point in discourse.

d. A TOPIC may consist of a simple referent or of another proposition. Thus, a proposition can contain a TOPIC with any number of layers of implied propositions (which are usually called: presuppositions).

e. This shifting situation, however, does not mean that the TOPIC and the COMMENT can, in any way, be fused into a single function (as proposed in some pragmatic studies) nor can they be regarded as functionally comparable components of a proposition (as often described in studies of metaphor). The TOPIC functions as cognitive content (perception, image, concept), i.e. as material which, in a sense, is to be “processed”. The COMMENT is the “processor”, the operative part which “works” on this material.

In conclusion, we must stress that the processes of setting TOPICs and making COMMENTs are far more complex than has been described in the current theories of metaphor. These processes involve usage of different encoding devices and movements on several nested levels of organization. They also depend on dynamic changes in orientation toward particular elements at different points in discourse. Finally, and most significantly, the TOPIC and the COMMENT are not merely cognitive tools. They are social devices which enable participants to relate to each other.

These features of the TOPIC and the COMMENT are not only characteristics of a metaphoric proposition, but of all propositions. However, they are crucial for a functional analysis of metaphor. In the following chapters, we shall discuss particular characteristics of metaphoric propositions and what makes them different from the rest of speech.