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How We Resist Metaphors*

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ABSTRACT

Most people love metaphor, but we still sometimes find ourselves resisting their presence or meanings for various reasons. We resist metaphors both as a general strategy (e.g., "Metaphors are meaningless" or "Mixed metaphor are incoherent"), and as a response to some metaphors in very specific situational and discourse contexts (e.g., "I do not like the idea that my cancer treatment is seen as a war against my body"). People resist metaphors they have produced, metaphors imposed on them by others, and metaphors that they find to be offensive or that negatively stigmatize other individuals, or groups of people. But metaphors are also resisted for their lack of explanatory power in, for instance, scientific communities. There are also many ironies associated with metaphor resistance, such as consciously resisting some metaphor while still being governed by that same metaphor in our unconscious thinking and actions. Most generally, though, metaphor resistance is its own kind of metaphorical action. Taking a dynamic systems approach to resistance to metaphors, we discuss several implications of these observations for theories of metaphorical thought and language.

KEYWORDS: dynamical systems, irony, metaphor, metaphorical action, mixed metaphor, resistance, unconscious thinking

1. Introduction

Metaphors are a key part of the ways people think, use language, and perform different expressive actions. They play such a prominent role in determining

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who we are and what we experience that metaphors are essential to how we live. Not everyone agrees with this conclusion and even those of us who are major metaphor enthusiasts still encounter specific metaphors that we resist for one reason or another. Our goal in this paper is to explore some of the ways that people resist metaphors. Metaphor resistance can be both a general strategy (e.g., "Metaphors are meaningless"), and a response to some metaphors is very specific situational and discourse contexts (e.g., "I do not like the idea that my cancer treatment is seen as a war against my body").

Resistance is an act of selective rejecting, avoiding, or opposing something, either physically, psychologically, or verbally. Even a single-cell organism can resist objects that are capable of damaging it. We resist metaphors as if they are foreign entities trying to enter our bodies. Resisting metaphors comes in various forms, ranging from complete dismissal of some metaphorical concept (e.g., THE MIND IS A BLACK BOX), discomfort with a particular metaphorical phrase (e.g., "Love is an economic exchange"), to resisting some metaphorical ideas because of a preference for alternative metaphorical concepts (e.g., "I prefer to think of international trade negotiations as a journey and not as a war").

As with all assessments of belief and belief resistance, our capacity to resist metaphors is highly probabilistic. We may resist some metaphors more than others, and even recognize that our antipathy toward some metaphorical idea may be quite partial. After all, every metaphor illuminates some ideas or meanings yet hide others. Our hesitation in fully accepting all the entailments of some metaphorical idea (e.g., LOVE IS A JOURNEY implies constant changes, even interruptions, in our love relationships) may be offset by our acceptance of what is positive in a metaphor's entailment, e.g., "Love can surmount obstacles and get better over time along the way").

Resisting metaphors are not merely private cognitive decisions that individuals make only on specific occasions in their lives. Many forms of metaphor resistance involve communities of people, including scholars within academic disciplines, openly debating the merits of particular metaphorical ideas over long periods of time (e.g., paradigm-shifts in scientific revolutions). Our resistance to metaphor is also not necessarily a conscious experience (e.g., "That metaphor does not describe me at all") as many forms of resistance arise without awareness from the cognitive unconscious. There are even cases when we may consciously resist some metaphor but are still under its effects in our ongoing, automatic behaviors throughout our everyday lives. Some attempts at metaphor resistance may backfire by ironically making undesired metaphorical ideas even more prominent in our thoughts and actions.

More generally, resistance to metaphors can involve a selective rejection of one or many aspects of a metaphor, from their sensory-motor components to their emotional valence, cultural implications, or their metaphorical nature altogether (in preference for literal language). In these ways, metaphor

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resistance unfolds in different ways, for varying reasons, along a series of timescales, ranging from fast-acting, on-the-spot personal decisions, to slower developing thoughts about some topic, to even slower cultural and historical shifts in collective beliefs. Resistance to metaphor is often partial and ignited by local political, ideological, social, and aesthetic contingencies.

We now outline some of the ways metaphors may be resisted in human life. This list is by no means exhaustive, but presenting it now should open up future scholarly discussions of the role that metaphor resistance plays in everyday thought and larger social-cultural contexts. Our conclusion describes some of the possible implications of these various ways of resisting metaphor for contemporary metaphor theory and research.

2. Suspicion of metaphor / a preference for literal meaning

There is a long history of antipathy toward all things related to metaphor, dating back to the time of the ancient Greeks. Although Aristotle famously acknowledged that metaphor "is the mark of genius" (Aristotle, 1995, p. 22), many ancient scholars were suspicious of metaphor because of its ability to mislead (e.g., the language of poets and politicians who may not be interested in speaking the truth about empirical reality). As Plato warned, "a cautious man should above all be on his guard against likenesses: they are a very slippery sort of thing" (Pender, 2003, pp. 60–61). In this spirit, Thomas Hobbes (Cantalupo, 1988, p. 22), later in the seventeenth century, wrote that "words used metaphorically" were employed to "deceive others". It is no wonder then that, in 1670, an English legislator proposed an act of Parliament that would outlaw "fulsome and 'luscious' metaphors" (Hawkes, 1972, p. 31).

In the twentieth century, many philosophers and scientists have deemed metaphors to be 'emotive', 'poetic', and 'meaningless', especially in contexts of trying to ascertain the validity of empirical propositions (e.g., the Vienna Circle). Davidson (2005) claimed that metaphors are "patently false", while Wierzbicka (2001) suggested that metaphors are "dangerous" and associated with "false images drawn from this world". One of the worst criticisms a scientist can make of a theory is that it is 'just metaphorical', which is tantamount to saying that the theory is false, unscientific, and of little practical value.

There are many debates in the contemporary world of metaphor scholarship about whether people really think in significant metaphorical terms (e.g., conceptual metaphors) as opposed to using metaphorical language to convey ideas that are mentally represented in literal or non-metaphorical ways (see Gibbs, 1994, 2017). To take one example, Pinker (2007) offered a vigorous critique of Lakoff's (1996) arguments about metaphor in political discourse

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and the more general claim that metaphors underlie abstract thought. Pinker defended the traditional ideas that truth and objectivity must necessarily be characterized in non-metaphorical, or literal, terms. He claimed that debates over politics, and, more broadly, the nature of objective truth and rationality in science, are not just contests between competing metaphors. There must be some literal concept in the mind that a linguistic metaphor may shine a light upon. Most critically, for Pinker, "people effectively transcend the metaphors implicit in their language" (2007, p. 248). Furthermore, even if "conceptual metaphors are an essential tool of rhetoric, ordinary conversation, and thought itself … this doesn't mean that people are enslaved by their metaphors or that the choice of metaphor is a matter of taste or indoctrination" (2007, p. 250).

The claim that people are not "enslaved by their metaphors", which is ironically metaphorical, implies that there must always be ways to assess human events and truths about external reality through means other than metaphor. Under this view, linguistic metaphor can sometimes be appreciated as a communicative device, but the idea that thought itself is metaphorical should be strongly resisted. These debates over whether conceptual metaphors are basic to human thought and action (i.e., "metaphor wars"; Gibbs, 2017) are representative of a long-held suspicion of metaphors. These long-standing views of metaphor as deviant, misleading, and, at times, only ornamental, motivates people, from scientists to writing teachers, to warn against the use of metaphor as a category of human thought and expression in most areas of speech and writing.

But non-specialists also openly disparage metaphors. There is a current internet site titled 'I fucking hate metaphors' in which the author makes the following argument:[1]

> I hate metaphors because they build a strawman into an otherwise civil discussion. This then causes the group to defer the discussion of the original (hard to solve) problem, and begins debating the merits of the analogy that was used (the easier problem), leaving the actual reason you're meeting wholly unresolved. … I'm not a monster, *I just want to be able to understand what the fuck you're trying to tell me*.

Some people resist metaphor because they see it as nothing but a distraction from clear thinking and communication. Hatred of metaphor partly fuels metaphor resistance. Many metaphor researchers have faced resistance in their academic lives simply because they study the topic of metaphor. Resisting metaphor as a category of thought and expression has unfolded along a very

[1] <https://medium.com/@itsdevlin/i-fucking-hate-metaphors-1945fbf928de>.

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long timeline and likely underlies other instances of resistance to very specific metaphorical concepts and other linguistic and non-linguistic expressions.

3. Resisting scientific metaphors

Metaphor plays a significant role in scientific revolutions. Many of the 'paradigm-shifts' seen in varying scientific disciplines are deeply rooted in different metaphorical concepts proposed to explain some phenomenon or topic. For example, in the history of experimental psychology, there is a long set of different metaphors proposed to explain mental life. One study of the mental metaphors in a corpus of articles published in *Psychological Review* between 1894 and 1975 revealed that, during this time period, four main categories of mental metaphors were employed: animate being metaphors (e.g., "Reaction arcs block each other, varying in tension, until one waxes strong enough"), neural metaphors (e.g., "Thinking is neural impulses shifting along associative fibers from one area to another"), spatial metaphors (e.g., "habitual connections between ideas"), and systems metaphors (e.g., "The nervous system is like a switchboard mechanism") (Gentner & Grudin, 1985).

Psychologists, like most scientists, often ignore the metaphorical character of their own theories. Yet each advance in psychological theory demanded some implicit understanding of the metaphorical underpinning of the new theory or paradigm-shift. Psychological writings, in different ways, aimed to deconstruct the earlier metaphorical theory, often by showing its weakness in explaining new data, and to impress upon readers the wisdom of embracing some new metaphorical vision of mental functioning. In this manner, the evolution of new theories in psychology is not just a subtle dropping of one idea and sliding into a new metaphor, but involves an explicit rejection, or at least resistance of, the earlier theory and its metaphorical underpinnings (e.g., rejecting animate being metaphors for spatial and systems metaphors).

These arguments persist long after a new theory, with its different metaphors, has gained traction in a specific area of psychology. For example, the long-standing embrace of behaviorism during much of the first half of the twentieth century (e.g., THE MIND IS A BLACK BOX) was significantly overturned in the 1950s and 1960s with the rise of cognitive psychology and its advocacy of the MIND IS A COMPUTER metaphor. Behaviorism was seen as inadequate to explain aspects of cognitive and linguistic behaviors, as seen, for example, in Chomsky's famed critique of Skinner's work on verbal behavior (Chomsky, 1959). Becoming a cognitive psychologist back in the 1950s

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through the 1970s required a resistance to, and rejection of, the MIND IS A BLACK BOX metaphor.[2]

Nonetheless, behaviorists by no means rolled over and blindly accepted the new vision of the MIND IS A COMPUTER metaphor. Skinner (1977), for example, eighteen years after Chomsky's famous critique, wrote a well-known paper titled "Why I am not a cognitive psychologist", in which he outlined his own resistance to the new MIND IS A COMPUTER metaphor and defended the value of the BLACK BOX metaphor. Skinner's argument, similar to those advanced by other experimental psychologists, focused not just on the metaphor, but on the specific entailments of the MIND IS COMPUTER metaphor (e.g., memory representations), which he viewed as problematic for a science of behavior. More contemporary resistance to specific metaphorical conceptions of the human mind and language was seen in debates over whether the MIND IS A BRAIN metaphor (e.g., neural networks) offered significant advantages over the MIND IS A COMPUTER metaphor. Once again, these debates involve the advocacy of specific metaphorical views, their presumed theoretical implications, and the resistance of alternative metaphors.

The shift in metaphors over time in experimental psychology likely involves two different aspects of metaphor resistance. On the one hand, psychologists may have slowly become aware of the inadequacies of the MIND IS A BLACK BOX metaphor and then sought out an alternative metaphorical model for characterizing mental functioning. But there are surely many cases in which psychologists encountered the newer MIND IS A COMPUTER metaphor which led them to realize the deficiencies of the older MIND IS A BLACK BOX metaphor. In this way, metaphor resistance can be facilitated by the mere existence of an alternative metaphor that sheds light on the difficulties with the preceding metaphorical view of the mind.

These examples from psychology illustrate one prominent manner in which people work hard to resist the implications of certain metaphors for human minds. Even during long periods of so-called "normal science" (Kuhn, 1957), which unfolds after a major paradigm-shift, scholars in all sciences still engage in meta-theoretical and theoretical discussions over the relative merits of both old and new metaphors. Resisting scientific metaphors is an enduring facet of scientific life. Individual scholars may resist specific metaphors for various

[2] The metaphor of the mind as a black box was used to emphasize that we cannot directly study the internal workings of the mind, so we should avoid it as a scientific subject of investigation. Behaviorists studied the responses given by an animal to a certain stimulus, which corresponds to manipulating the inputs of the black box and observing its outputs (without looking inside). The cognitivist revolution advocated for the computer metaphor of the mind, which assumes that, the 'internal mind' can be analyzed into systems (memories), representations (e.g., semantic knowledge), algorithms (e.g., syntax), and mechanisms (e.g., a parser for language).

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reasons and embrace different metaphorical models. Yet these acts of resistance are embedded within slower time-scales in which scientific theories emerge and are assessed within larger scientific communities over many decades, or longer periods of time.

4. Resisting conventional and mixed metaphors

Many people voice disdain, even hatred, for all things that are clichéd and conventional in human life. Any set of words, gestures, or other bodily actions that arise as matters of pure convention or serve as platitudes are frequently dismissed as insincere, or automatically performed without much prior consideration. A prominent example of this belief was seen in a book published in 1939 in which the philosopher Susan Stebbing advanced the claim that metaphor, especially clichéd metaphor, called "potted thinking", must be avoided. Stebbing drew a comparison between clichéd thinking and potted meat (i.e., a canned product, such as Spam, that you might find in a wartime ration pack). As Stebbing wrote, "Do not accept the metaphor too hastily!" She elaborated on this idea using a metaphor, perhaps ironically (Stebbing, 1934, p. 42):

> Potted meat is sometimes a convenient form of food; it may be tasty, it contains some nourishment. But its nutritive value is not equivalent to that of the fresh meat from which it was potted. Also, it must have originally been made from fresh meat, and must not be allowed to grow stale. Similarly, a potted belief is convenient; it can be stated briefly, sometimes also in a snappy manner likely to attract attention.

Potted thinking takes something that once had high "nutritive value" and packages it in a way that is easier to sell but in which it is harder to find any genuine nourishment. The worst type of potted thinking we grow into is the habit of "using words repeated parrot-fashion – put another way, when we start talking in slogans that have no thought or consideration behind them at all", such as seen in conventional metaphors and other clichéd figurative expressions (Stebbing, 1939, p. 87).

This skepticism of some forms of metaphorical language is partly rooted in the long-held preference for literal meaning and language. But these warnings about repeating clichés and conventional metaphorical expressions, more specifically, are a major form of metaphor resistance that has been widely repeated by language teachers, writers and poets, and even academic metaphor scholars for a very long time.

Quite a few metaphor scholars continue to downplay clichés and conventional phrases by claiming, among other things, that these facets of language are at most 'dead' metaphors (e.g., idiomatic phrases) and no longer convey active metaphorical meanings (see Gibbs, 1994, for a review). The important

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focus in metaphor studies, under this view, should be on novel metaphorical comparisons, such as seen in classic resemblance metaphors (e.g., "*Juliet is the sun*", "*Man is wolf*", and many more poetic literary creations). There may be occasions when a speaker or writer awakens the dead metaphorical meaning for some idiom or conventional metaphor within some discourse context. For the most part, though, the theoretical analysis of clichéd and conventional phrases places them in the dustbin of what are really the most interesting, novel, and creative forms of linguistic creativity. Both as a practical tool of ordinary language use, and as a topic of scholarly study, clichés and conventional expressions are to be mostly resisted.

Of course, the revolution in metaphor studies arising from conceptual metaphor theory has placed clichéd and conventional language in the center-stage of scrutiny for understanding the "metaphors we live by" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Consider the conventional expressions "blow your stack", "flip your lid", and "hit the ceiling", each of which refers to the act of becoming suddenly angry. There is now an abundance of experimental research demonstrating that people produce and understand conventional expressions, such as the ones listed above, via cross-domain mappings (e.g., ANGER IS HEATED FLUID IN A CONTAINER) (Gibbs, 1994, 2006, 2017). People do not understand their meanings simply by looking up each phrase in a phrasal dictionary and then retrieving their implied meanings en bloc. This conclusion runs counter to the claims of those who resist the metaphoricity in conventional words and expressions. Despite these findings, there remains continued resistance to the use and study of what is most clichéd and conventional in the world of metaphorical thinking and language.

Another form of metaphor resistance is seen in the many prohibitions against mixed metaphors. Even a casual look at what is said about metaphors on the internet reveals a wide range of admonitions against mixed metaphors (e.g., "When you use metaphor, do not mix it up. That is, don't start by calling something a swordfish and end by calling it an hourglass" and "Even if a mixed metaphor sings, it should be derailed" (Gibbs, 2016, p. vii).

These and other warnings constitute one of the most persistent forms of resistance against metaphor, or at least specific kinds of metaphorical expressions. But people mix their metaphors quite frequently in speech and writing, and most listeners or readers appear to not have great difficulty in understanding what is trying to be communicated when they encounter mixed metaphors. Consider the following excerpt from a long-time item in the *New Yorker* magazine, titled "Block That Metaphor!" (with "Block" serving as a wonderful metaphor for the idea of resisting or rejecting) (see Lonergan & Gibbs, 2016, p. 58):

"As I look at it with broad brush, there are a lot of things going South at the same time," said Morris Goldstein, a former International Monetary Fund

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official and senior fellow at the Institute for International Economics in Washington. "Where's the good news coming from? There's no silver bullet out there!"

Readers must find ways of creating an overall meaning of the different metaphoric phrases together. The mixing of metaphors, with their very different source domains (e.g., a "broad brush", "things going South", and "no silver bullet") may pose a formidable task that listeners and readers encounter all too often in everyday discourse. But empirical studies show that people are generally quite good in making sense of mixed metaphorical passages such as the one above (Lonergan & Gibbs, 2016). People may have some talent for dealing with mixed metaphors precisely because of their abilities to conceive of certain, mostly abstract, topics in multiple metaphorical ways. Just as we understand love relationships to be like journeys, constructing a building, going insane, being under the influence of magic, and so on, we can also understand different topics from a variety of metaphorical perspectives. This is a major part of the metaphorical mind, namely our cognitive flexibility to think of ideas in a variety of metaphorical ways, even if some of these combinations seem contradictory.

We do not claim that all instances of mixed metaphors are necessarily felicitous and appropriate in all kinds of discourse contexts. However, the strong admonitions against mixed metaphors are based on outdated beliefs about the logical mind in which metaphors are again to be resisted because they mislead or deceive. Mixed metaphors appear and are successful because they do not indicate the output of a confused mind, but because they reflect the in-process operation of our metaphorical reasoning skills.

5. Resisting one's own metaphors

People sometimes express verbal metaphors and then later on voice resistance to what they uttered. For example, the 2020 BBC drama "All Creatures Great and Small" about a veterinarian in the United Kingdom during the 1930s had an episode in which he was asked to examine a race horse who seemed to be a bit ill. Unfortunately, the horse was quite sick and had to be immediately put down. This caused many problems for the veterinarian. At one point, he was discussing these concerns with his housekeeper, who advised him to just continue working as best he could. She said "Just get right back into the saddle – poor choice of words", implying that it was not in good taste to talk about getting back in the saddle (a metaphor meaning 'to get back to work') right after a race horse, which obviously had saddles, had just been put down. We sometimes utter

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metaphors but quickly realize their inappropriateness in context for one reason or another.

A very recent case of resisting one's own metaphor emerged in the context of contemporary 'cancel' culture in the United States in which anyone who voices something politically incorrect (e.g., sexist, racist) must be 'canceled' or removed from positions of responsibility. The Dean of Law at the City University of New York decided to immediately retire, or cancel herself, after she employed a metaphor at a faculty meeting which she later believed may be offensive to others. The meeting was on hiring a new Associate Dean and she referred to herself as a "slaveholder"[3] in order to take the blame for an earlier hiring proposal some colleagues thought would have a "disparate racial impact". The Dean stated in a later message to the faculty:

> In a misguided effort to draw an analogy to a model of reparations in order to place blame on myself, as Dean, for racial inequities at our school, I thoughtlessly referred to myself as the 'slaveholder' who should be held responsible. I realized it was wrong the minute I heard myself say it and couldn't believe the word had come out of my mouth.

We sometimes resist our own metaphors if we perceive these to be possibly offensive to others, regardless of our original intentions in saying what we did.

A different case of resisting one's own metaphor unfolded over a much longer period of time. The great American poet Adrienne Rich published a poem in her second collection called "The Diamond Cutters and other poems" (Rich, 1955). The volume included the poem "The Diamond Cutters" which was an obvious allegory to writing poetry being like looking for, finding, and precisely cutting diamonds in Africa.

Twenty years later, Rich published a collection of her best poetry which included the poem "The Diamond Cutters" (Rich, 1975). But Rich also published in the collection an apology for the metaphor expressed by the poem. She explained that she had "trouble with the informing metaphor of the poem", which was initially employed to help her "write about the craft of poetry" (Rich, 1975, p. xv), yet its use, she now believed, was irresponsible and unethical since the metaphor rendered invisible the "enforced and exploited labor of actual Africans in actual diamond mines" (1975, p. xv). Rich's commentary illustrated how one can sometimes resist one's own metaphor at a much later point in time given changes in one's own beliefs, as well as emerging ideas within the culture as a whole (e.g., greater sensitivity to social justice for exploited individuals).

[3] <https://www.law.com/newyorklawjournal/2021/03/22/slaveholder-comment-prompts-cuny-law-deans-departure/?slreturn=20210301164731>.

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Our resistance to some metaphor is often partial and complex. Consider the case of one writer who resisted the metaphor of cancer as a journey because journeys usually have positive/pleasant connotations, which did not apply to his experience.

> Cancer is not a journey. Stop with the meaningless platitudes. Cancer is a kidnapping. A hijacking. You're going along, living your life and BAM. A bag gets thrown over your head and you are captured and you don't know where the hell you are going. Or you are at gunpoint, being forced to drive by someone who won't tell you the destination or how long it will take and you're trying not to piss yourself. Or you have been thrown out on the side of a desolate highway with no water, no food and no map. You watch the car disappear in the distance. You might die of thirst. You might die.[4]

Instead of substituting the journey metaphor for another, the writer described his experience with cancer as a different kind of journey: a kidnap, in which "you don't know where the hell you are going", or "the destination", and you get "thrown out on the side of a desolate highway", "with … no map", etc. The source domain (i.e., journey) is kept, but the valence is switched over to a negative scenario.

Switching from one metaphor to another in creating a vision of one's life may seem like true resistance from our distant perspectives as metaphor scholars looking at people's discourse for clues on how they are thinking. The lesson here in this example suggests that letting go of one metaphor and finding a better one is not always a deliberative process of rejection and acceptance. Our lives sometimes unfold in ways that closes the door on some previously useful metaphor while simultaneously opening up a new door with a new metaphorical idea to help us move forward in life.

6. Resisting metaphors about you that are imposed by others

Some of the greatest, and perhaps bravest, acts of metaphor resistance occur when individuals are presented with a metaphorical idea about themselves that they believe is not relevant in their experience. A notable example of this is found in the writings of Susan Sontag in her two books *Illness as metaphor* (1978) and *AIDS and its metaphors* (1989). Sontag's own experiences with cancer motivated her criticism of the ways disease was metaphorically characterized. She famously criticized the war metaphor for cancer and blamed

[4] <https://janecawthorne.com/cancer-not-journey/>.

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healthcare professionals for their silent acceptance of this idea (Sontag, 1978, p. 58):

> There is the 'fight' or 'crusade' against cancer; cancer is the 'killer' disease; people who have cancer are 'cancer victims' … Cancer cells do not simply multiply; they are 'invasive' … Cancer cells 'colonize' from the original tumor to far sites of the body. Rarely are the body's 'defenses' vigorous enough to obliterate a tumor that has established its own blood supply… Patients are 'bombarded' with toxic rays.

People often voice dismay with the WAR when applied to their own illnesses, because of its implied suggestion that winning the war (defeating the cancer) depends on fighting hard enough (see Wackers et al., 2021, for examples of the different ways that people resist violence metaphors when applied to their experiences with cancer). In many cases, patients are encouraged to find alternative metaphors other than WAR for conceptualizing their illnesses (but see Seixas, 2021, for an argument on the positive values of the WAR metaphor during the Covid-19 pandemic). For example, journey metaphors are frequently embraced by patients precisely because this opens up discussion about their own goals, directions, and progress, with physicians serving as trusted guides rather than as authoritative generals in a war scenario. Many other metaphors for illness are created by patients, referring to source domains like chess matches, a monster, a dream, and a dance.

Another arena in which people have openly resisted metaphors imposed upon them is seen in the world of disability studies (Goethals et al., 2020). Negative portrayals of disability flood everyday discourse, as seen in the following metaphorical expressions:

I've had the craziest day.
She is such an emotional cripple.
The snowstorm completely paralyzed the city.
That's such a lame excuse.
What are you blind? What are you deaf? Idiot! Moron! Retard!

Metaphorical uses of disability contribute to the continued domination and marginalization of people with disabilities. As one writer observed (Schalk, 2013):

> The use of disability metaphors promotes an ideology of impairment as a negative form of embodiment. These metaphors typically position disability as invariably bad, undesirable, pitiful, painful, and so on. They are, therefore, ableist because they promote discriminatory attitudes toward people with disabilities.

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Various scholars and disability advocates have criticized, in particular, conceptual metaphor theory for its embrace of the normative, healthy body in its theories of the embodied underpinnings of metaphorical thought and language. For example, the primary metaphor GOOD IS UP presupposes that being down, or lower, is bad or something less. Yet people in wheelchairs sit in a spatially lower position compared to many others and are, nonetheless, just as good as people who are positioned upward. Disabled individuals have urged the disabled community to create their own metaphors, ones that are appropriate for their specific bodily experiences (e.g., asking "students to find the 'scents' of previous course" concepts rather than asking if they can "see" connections"; Vidali, 2010, p. 49), rather than rely on those typically seen in many linguistic communities, which are too often heralded as reflecting the true nature of human embodiment and cognition.

A different example of resisting metaphor imposed by others comes from a performance piece on contact improvisational dance involving a professional dancer and the first author (Gibbs, 2003). When Gibbs described systems of metaphors, along the lines of conceptual metaphor theory, he noted instances of GOOD IS UP and BAD IS DOWN and how these implicit metaphors may underlie the creation and interpretation of certain dance movements in contact improvisation. But the dancer replied to this narrative by aptly noting, "I never feel so free as when I am crawling on my belly across the dance floor". This small act of resistance was a simple personal observation, but the dancer's comment also reflected a strong rebuke to any ideological system that aimed to define her experiences as a dancer.

Finally, even young children can resist metaphors when applied to their own experiences. One three-year-old girl who participated in a study on children's learning of primary metaphors, commented when presented with the IMPORTANT IS BIG metaphor that this was not true, because she was small and still important, exactly as her parents had taught her (Siqueira & Gibbs, 2007). The girl's comment showed her resistance to a common metaphorical idea given her personal beliefs.

Resisting other people's metaphors about us is a fundamental form of how we create our own self-concepts. These individual acts of resistance against metaphors imposed on yourself by others are most critically attempts to reject the stigma associated with the to-be-resisted metaphor. Acts of metaphor resistance are often performed to protect one's identity in a world where others wish to define us from the outside.

7. Resisting metaphors in public discourse

We sometimes resist metaphors we encounter in public discourse that are not specifically directed at us for various reasons. For example, the great American

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poet Wallace Stevens once wrote a book of novel aphorisms that included the example "Reality is a cliché that we escape through metaphor". This expression beautifully captures one of the great qualities of, at least some, metaphors; namely, their ability to offer novel ways of seeing the world, ones that resist conventional, clichéd understandings of our everyday realities. One of us, the first author, has in the past noted his love–hate relationship with Stevens' example. Even though the phrase expresses something quite meaningful about the wonders of metaphor, it also fails to acknowledge the empirical fact from contemporary metaphor studies that metaphor is very much a part of our mundane understanding of daily life. An alternative to Stevens' metaphorical phrases, which captures this new understanding of metaphor's role in human life, is "Metaphor is the reality from which there is no escape". Metaphor is not optional in life, but is a fundamental, constitutive scheme by which we automatically make meaningful sense of ourselves and the world (Gibbs, 2017).

Metaphor resistance is not simply an all-or-none affair. Just as we can continue to deeply love former lovers, even though we now sometimes really dislike or even hate those same people, we can both love/admire certain metaphors while simultaneously resisting them. This resistance is not a total denial of the past love we had for the metaphor, such as Stevens' aphorism, but because it does not fulfill our present needs, we push against it and maybe seek something new and more inspiring.

Our everyday lives are full of instances in which we feel the need to resist some metaphorical ideas that are debated in various public forums. For example, there are many metaphors within the world of politics, some of which may be resisted. Lakoff (1996) proposed that the conceptual metaphor THE NATION IS A FAMILY plays a critical role in structuring political discourse. But this general metaphorical idea has two very different realizations. Conservative politicians in the United States adopt the 'strict father model' of the family, which assumes that stern discipline is necessary to educate family members. This implies, among other things, that there should not be a welfare program or other governmental support because this effort will not train family members to be independent and self-sufficient. Liberal politicians, on the other hand, embrace the 'nurturant parent model' of the family by which family members grow through love, empathy, and caring. This metaphorical view leads to advocacy for government programs that help family members, or citizens.

Since Lakoff's proposal, many people have argued in favor of one of these two visions of the NATION IS A FAMILY metaphor, and resisted the other. As is usually the case in acts of metaphor resistance, it is the specific entailments of different metaphors that serve as the battleground in different acts of resistance. Conservatives dislike the idea that US citizens are sometimes

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automatically given governmental aid without having to earn those benefits through hard work or some kind of public service. They implicitly resist the 'nurturant parent model' for the unearned gifts this metaphor seems to assume is necessary as part of being a citizen in the US nation. Liberals, many of whom claim that there are social injustices which demand reparations of some kind to those who are disadvantaged, resist the 'strict father model' for its inability to take care of individuals, or populations of individuals, who are in need of financial assistance, for instance.

Acts of resistance to either of the two sub-types of the NATION IS A FAMILY metaphor are carried out continually in everyday discourse and through debates over various legislation to support, or defeat, proposal that further support, or resist, the 'strict father' or 'nurturant parent' metaphors of governmental responsibilities. People may also resist the application of these metaphors in some contexts, but advocate their utility in different situations (e.g., strict father model works great for business, but not for the welfare of families). In other political contexts, people sometimes openly resist when their earlier speech is incorrectly characterized by opponents as expressing a particular metaphor (e.g., "I did not say that the government should be plundering anyone's savings") within UK parliamentary debates (de Lavalette et al., 2019).

Our resistance to some people's metaphorical statements sometimes leads us to call out these instances for others to study and resist. Metaphor resistance is a social act as much as it may be a private, personal decision. Take the case of Donald Trump, Jr., the former President's son, who, in 2016, during the election campaign against Hillary Clinton, sent out a Twitter message that showed a colorful bowl of the fruit-flavored sweets Skittles.[5] Along with this image, Trump asked, "If I had a bowl of Skittles and I told you just three would kill you, would you take a handful? That's our Syrian refugee problem", referring to the debate over whether the US should accept refugees from war-torn countries, such as Syria. Trump then added: "This image says it all. Let's end the politically correct agenda that doesn't put America first."

This PEOPLE ARE FOODS metaphor has been employed in other contexts to suggest that, if a few people in a group are bad, it would be dangerous to accept even one into some new community or nation. Many individuals protested Trump's metaphorical depiction. The people who made Skittles, sent out a press release that stated: "Skittles are candy. Refugees are people. We don't feel it is an appropriate analogy." Analysts calculated the probability of being killed in a terrorist attack by a refugee was 1 in 3.6 billion.[6] People began

[5] <https://www.bbc.com/news/election-us-2016-37416457>.
[6] <https://www.vox.com/2016/9/20/12987202/skittles-tweet-donald-trump-syrian-refugees>.

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to post pictures on social media of migrant children, looking dirty and scared, and posted a picture of a scared little girl wearing a life-vest, while sitting in boat, with the comment: "Not a Skittle." But Trump supporters fired back with tweets such as "Are liberals just really dumb today and don't understand what an analogy is? No one said that people are literally skittles". Trump Jr. also responded in another tweet and defended his earlier Skittle posting: "To me it was a simple metaphor."[7]

Excusing one's metaphors as just being a "simple metaphor" may not be convincing to one's adversaries. Very offensive metaphors may also be counterproductive in advancing the causes of those using them (Hart, 2021). Still, one way by which people resist political messages is to focus on the literal content of a speaker's words rather than their intended metaphorical messages. In doing so, these critics also may be advancing their own social status by 'virtue signaling' because of their fierce determination to alert the broader public to those who express offensive metaphors. Openly denouncing people for their metaphors is its own competitive sport in contemporary Western cultures.

8. Resistance to metaphors in experiments

Many tests of metaphor understanding and appreciation in experimental psycholinguistics and cognitive neuroscience ask participants to make different decisions about certain metaphors, or give people different metaphorical scenarios from which they are to make various social judgments. These experimental studies also, rather implicitly, assess resistance to metaphor.

Every act of metaphor understanding sets the stage for resisting that metaphor. We do not just comprehend metaphors to derive their metaphorical meanings, but interpret them to infer pragmatically relevant messages in different discourse contexts. For example, studies have demonstrated that people take more time to understand the metaphorical statement "My lawyer is also a shark" when that remark contradicted a previously stated belief (e.g., "Lawyers are always kind") than when the metaphor strengthened a previously stated idea (e.g., "Lawyers are persistent") (Gibbs et al., 2011). The total time to understand a metaphor incorporates our assessment of its validity and appropriateness in the context in which it appears. There will always be cases in which a listener disagrees with the premise of a particular metaphor, which sometimes creates resistance to what a speaker may have wanted to communicate in context. These moments of resistance are surely part of the total time it takes people to interpret a metaphorical statement in discourse.

[7] *Ibid*.

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Different experimental tasks tap into these moments of resistance to metaphor in various ways. Studies that ask people to judge the appropriateness of a metaphor in some discourse context essentially open up the possibility for resistance to that expression if it is seen as inappropriate for that situation. Lower appropriateness ratings, or longer times to make appropriateness judgments, signal some degree of metaphor resistance. In some cases, participants had to select one of several metaphors (e.g., "blow your stack" vs. "jump down your throat") (Nayak & Gibbs, 1990), based on which one best fits the prior discourse, an instruction that also prompts people to, at the very least, form some resistance to one of the possible candidate metaphors. This type of experimental task mimics what people may do in some cases of speaking/writing in which they, even momentarily, determine which of several possible metaphorical words or phrases to employ in a particular discourse situation.

People's resistance to metaphors in experiments is, not surprisingly, driven by their prior beliefs and present discourse motivations. For example, the persuasive power of some metaphor (e.g., "If college students want to play ball with the best, they shouldn't miss out on this opportunity") in discourse also reflects, to varying degrees, the sense that a metaphor should be resisted precisely because of its inability to persuade in that context. Studies show, for instance, that metaphors are most persuasive when they argue for ideas which resonate with participants' preferences and interests, or are less persuasive when they do not (Ottari et al., 1999).

One's immediate bodily experience may also play a role in resistance to certain metaphors. In one social judgment study, participants who first tasted sweet candy rated their own levels of agreeableness as higher than participants who tasted non-sweet candy (Meier et al., 2012). The lower ratings in the non-sweet condition may reflect some resistance to thinking about oneself as agreeable when the situation does not metaphorically elicit this, compared to the more congruent sweet candy with sweet person condition. Many studies now demonstrate similar metaphorical priming effects between specific bodily experiences (e.g., eating sweet candy) and social judgments which may also reveal the influence of metaphor resistance (Landau, 2018).

A different experimental context in which metaphor resistance implicitly emerges examined the interaction between type of metaphors and people's social stereotypes in a social judgment task (Elmore & Luna-Lucero, 2017). When an idea was described as a light bulb (implying suddenness and genius) and attributed to a woman, participants rated the idea as less genius-like than when it was attributed to a man. When the same idea was described as a seed (implying long time and effort "to grow") and attributed to a woman, participants rated the idea as more genius-like than when it was attributed to a man. The metaphors in this experiment interact with the stereotypes of white male scientists having sudden revolutionary ideas (women, on the other hand, can be

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geniuses, but with time and effort). Thus, the very same metaphor seems to yield opposing effects by altering the gender of the inventor in a story. Most generally, people resisted the application of certain metaphors to men or women based on their stereotyped beliefs about gender. We do not just resist metaphors in isolation, but often do so in specific tasks requiring judgments about the relevance of a specific metaphor to different people and their professions.

These studies are merely illustrative of just a few of the possible ways that existing experimental research may reveal the presence of metaphor resistance in different understanding or appreciating tasks. Resistance is surely a relevant, but unacknowledged, facet of what people do when encountering metaphors in many experimental settings. This observation points to the great need to closely examine resistance of various sorts operating within experimental metaphor studies.

9. The irony of metaphor resistance

Metaphor resistance can, in different ways, be an ironic experience. First, there are many cases in which people openly, consciously, resist the implications of some metaphor, often when applied to themselves, and yet still mostly function under the influence of the very metaphor they resist. Consider again the several cases where individuals resist some metaphors that are imposed on them by others (e.g., the disabled woman and the dancer who both resisted the conceptual metaphors GOOD IS UP and BAD IS DOWN, or the young child who resisted the primary metaphor IMPORTANT IS BIG). People can consciously resist specific metaphors yet also be constrained by those same metaphors in many aspects of their daily lives. Disabled individuals still perceive being good as being up, such as in their own case of wanting to remain upright, and not down, even when in their wheelchairs. A dancer may resist the idea that BAD IS DOWN given her joyful experience of crawling on her belly across the dance floor, but, nonetheless, mostly appraise her own, and others', experiences of UP as being much better overall than being DOWN (e.g., health and illness). Young children may resist the common metaphorical idea that IMPORTANT IS BIG as a general comment about their own size and relative importance. Yet here too, young children automatically recognize that big things are important to pay close attention to in many daily contexts. Many of us today may promote the idea that black can be beautiful and powerful (e.g., the slogan "Black is beautiful" that arose during the 1960s social justice movements), but also automatically recognize that the metaphorical ideas GOOD IS CLEAN/WHITE and BAD IS DIRTY BLACK have important utility in everyday health and food consumption contexts.

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Our conscious rebellions against certain metaphors do not necessarily reflect a total rejection of that metaphor in all aspects of our unconscious thinking and bodily actions. We can scream out against some metaphors, but those complaints may not characterize all of who we are and what we believe. Human beings are notorious for believing that their conscious beliefs are the prime drivers of their behaviors when, in fact, our actions are typically constrained by a whole host of cognitive and affective unconscious processes (Wilson, 2002). There is some irony, then, in thinking that one's conscious ideas or beliefs are the driving force in our lives when this is infrequently the case. We may resist metaphors with all our conscious might and yet still think in many automatic ways in terms of those resisted metaphors.

A different irony within metaphor resistance is seen in the fact that consciously trying to put something out of our minds, or trying to resist the influence of some idea/metaphor, may actually increase its prominence in our minds. There is a large experimental literature, mostly within social psychology, which shows this ironic effect of failed thought control. When people were asked to speak about whatever comes to mind, and not think about the idea of a 'white bear', this made participants more susceptible to speaking about 'white bears' (Wegner et al., 1987). Paradoxical effects of thought suppression also arise in regard to social attitudes and personal memories, suggesting, for example, that putting effort into not saying something sexist, racist, or homophobic, actually enhanced the possibility that one actually says the undesired words (Wegner et al., 1996).

There are no studies that show resistance to metaphors (e.g., ignore, forget, resist) leading to these being more memorable or persistent in mind (i.e., ironic effects of failed thought control). We can extrapolate from the ironic effects literature to suggest that strongly resisting some metaphor, for various reasons, may increase the amount of attention to that metaphor, therefore making it harder to ignore or forget, especially when under emotional stress from perhaps being confronted with some disturbing metaphor. These cases of failed resistance to metaphor poise another complexity for what makes resistance a significant part of the metaphors we live, and try to not live, by.

The ultimate irony of metaphor resistance is that resisting metaphor is a metaphorical action. After all, in resisting a metaphor, we are engaged in an imaginative act of pushing back against an idea that we conceive as a physical object or force trying to enter our bodies/minds. When someone strongly argues that human thought is not primarily metaphorical, they are resisting a metaphor by engaging in a mental process which is exactly what they are trying to resist. Resisting metaphor is its own sort of metaphorical performance.

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10. Conclusions

We have outlined several ways in which metaphor resistance emerges in our daily lives. Resistance to metaphors unfolds in different timescales, from the (milli)seconds or minutes of resisting a metaphor in an experiment to the long years of ongoing debates about the usefulness of a scientific metaphor, which is resisted by a whole scientific community. Thus, resisting a metaphor is not simply a private cognitive decision that occurs in a very short frame, nor is it necessarily a conscious experience.

Resistance to metaphors may be directed at different aspects of the metaphors, from their status as a figure of speech and thought (i.e., suspicion of metaphors/preference for the literal) to their specific linguistic realizations (i.e., clichés, mixed metaphors) and their content, which can be deemed inappropriate for different reasons. Resistance can be partial (by keeping the same concept but switching roles and valence) or complete (resisting a source domain altogether). One can resist the use of the metaphor in a certain context (which might be sensible) without trying to banish it from language and culture. Our resistance to a metaphor can be directed at its aptness or aesthetic value. Resistance to metaphor can be automatic, unconscious, and subjective, or it can be premeditated ("I can choose to see this experience through a new metaphoric lens") and argued about collectively. Some people resist a metaphor because they prefer others (e.g., switching "cancer as a war" to "cancer as a journey"), but sometimes they prefer no metaphors at all (e.g., "let's call cancer what it is: a disease").

Moreover, people resist metaphors that are imposed on them as a way of finding new conceptualizations to live by. People resist metaphors in public discourse because of their possible negative impact in how events unfold in society. Sometimes, people choose to revoke their own metaphors because they realize they can be offensive to others. In some cases, the gap between what metaphors are meant to express and other possible (even literal) associations leads to an ideological dispute over metaphors, in which the resistance is arguably misplaced.

This broad analysis of some of the varieties of metaphor-resistant experience strongly suggests a critical need to incorporate resistance as a significant part of scholarly explanation of metaphorical thinking, language, and expressive actions. Simply put, each metaphorical performance sets up the conditions for resistance to that action. Just as people do not blindly interpret language apart from its social, pragmatic effects (e.g., see epistemic vigilance; Sperber et al., 2010), they do not use or encounter metaphors without some immediate appraisal of their possible implications for our in-the-moment adaptive behaviors. For this reason, metaphor resistance is not a special event that only occurs on very particular occasions. People always, to one degree or another, examine

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metaphors for their utility as matters of acceptance and resistance. Individual moments of resistance unfold along various dimensions that include people's conscious thoughts, their cognitive unconscious appraisals, their bodies, their cultural beliefs, and their social engagements with others. Metaphor resistance, to some extent, may have an embodied feel to it, just in the way that any metaphorical thinking process has its roots in embodied experience.

The complex dynamics of metaphor resistance is difficult to explain because the resistance may involve at the same time multiple partial constraints that range from personal preferences to ideological, historical, and environmental factors. A person who is resisting a metaphor because they think it is a cliché may be at the same time resist the use of stock phrases (language), the lack of imaginative effort (action), the content which is uninformative or dull (thought), the metaphorical image (e.g., a lame vehicle), the creative status of the metaphor (e.g., innovative), the appropriateness of a cliché metaphor given cultural developments, etc. Resistance to metaphor, for these reasons, is probabilistic, multifactorial, and dynamic, and likely emerges as products of local self-organization processes in human adaptive behaviors. Our acknowledgment of different timescales along which metaphor may be resisted is consistent with proposals to study and explain human behavior as an ever-emerging dynamical system (Chemero, 2011; Gibbs, 2006, 2017, 2019; Spivey, 2020). The main highlight of the dynamical view, in this context, is its acknowledgment of multiple causes for metaphorical behaviors, including our resistance to metaphors at different times and occasions. Metaphor resistance, partly because it is its own metaphorical action, is always emergent from the interaction of these varying constraints along different timescales. It is critical, in our view, to again situate metaphorical thinking, including that related to metaphor resistance, as part of the dynamical–ecological mind which is always embodied, enactive, embedded, and extended (Gibbs, 2019).

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