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## *LIKE* USED IN SIMILES FROM A RELEVANCE THEORY PERSPECTIVE\*

### 1 INTRODUCTION

Most previous studies on simile have concentrated on its semantics or discussed the taxonomy of kinds and features. Some have attempted to draw a clear line between simile and comparison (Ortony 1979; Fishelov 1993; Bredin 1998). These studies, unfortunately, result in too diverse a variety of definitions of simile. There have many contrastive studies on simile in comparison with metaphor. It has been assumed that metaphor is usually considered to be vivid and impressive. Such vivid figurativeness in metaphor seems to be caused by logical anomaly, which is what is traditionally called the violation of selectional restriction.

Sato (1978) argues against the traditional views, attempting to break down the prevailing delusional prejudice that simile is less figurative (or poetic) than metaphor because of its logical normality. He insists that simile is an expression which generates novel or less familiar similarity rather than an expression based on (or generated by) similarity. His suggestion is cognitive in the sense that it explicates the mechanism of the speaker's production of simile from the hearer's viewpoint. His approach is like the dawn of the cognitive approach.

Our concern is neither in distinguishing simile from metaphor nor giving a clear definition. Our cognitive approach (i.e. relevance theory) aims to clarify how the hearer understands a given utterance (a simile expression, here<sup>1</sup>).

First, the following section briefly outlines relevance theory used in this paper. In section 3 we review the previous semantic or taxonomic analyses. Section 4 is

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this paper I call the linguistic form 'P is like Q' a simile expression, whether it is figuratively interpreted or not, for convenience.

devoted to the cognitive pragmatic (i.e. relevance-theoretic) analysis of simile. I focus on the explicit aspect of simile expression, in particular on the part the simile marker *like* plays. I would like to argue that there are two ways in which *like* contributes to the interpretation of the simile expression 'P is like Q': an individual concept or a conceptual constituent of the ad hoc concept Q-LIKENESS.

## 2 OUTLINE OF RELEVANCE THEORY

Relevance Theory is an inferential model for interpreting utterances based on the notion of 'relevance'. 'Relevance' is defined in terms of effect and effort: 'An assumption is relevant in a context to the extent that its contextual effects in this context are large' and 'an assumption is relevant in a context to the extent that the effort required to process it in this context is small' (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 125).

Ostensive communication is a communication of the presumption of optimal relevance:

- (1) Presumption of optimal relevance (revised)
    - (i) The ostensive stimulus is relevant for it to be worth the addressee's effort to process it.
    - (ii) The ostensive stimulus is the most relevant one compatible with the communicator's abilities and preferences.
- (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 270)

In utterance interpretation the hearer wishes to achieve more cognitive effects with less unjustifiable processing effort. This means that the hearer understands utterances in consistence with the principle of relevance:

- (2) Principle of relevance
    - (i) Human cognition tends to be geared to the maximisation of relevance.
    - (ii) Every act of ostensive communication communicates a presumption of its own optimal relevance.
- (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 260)

Clause (2i) is called the 'cognitive principle of relevance' which concerns our cognition, and clause (2ii) the 'communicative principle of relevance' which applies to (ostensive) communication. We call clause (2ii) 'the principle of relevance' because an utterance is normally ostensive communication. Relevance theory assumes that any utterance is interpreted through the only procedure based on effect and effort:

- (3) Relevance-theoretic comprehension procedure
  - Follow a path of least effort in computing cognitive effects.
    - a. Consider interpretations in order of accessibility.
    - b. Stop when your expectation of relevance is satisfied. (Wilson 2000: 420)

An utterance consists of the conceptual constituents which contribute to part of the

explicature and the procedural meaning which functions as an indicator of some interpretive process. The conceptual representation is the natural language which corresponds to a concept or a combination of some concepts, and the procedural representations, such as *but, after all, he*, is the encoding which has some inferential constraint on information processing in utterance interpretation. (Blakemore 1992; Wilson and Sperber 1993)

According to Sperber and Wilson (1997), there is not always a one-to-one correspondence between the concept and its (public) words. A concept is a psychological entity in our individual mind, i.e. the language of thought or mentalese, which is 'invisible' to others. A word, on the other hand, is an entity shared in our world, i.e. a 'visible' symbol. For instance, there is no French correspondent to the English word *sibling*. This, however, does not mean that the French do not have the concept BROTHERS-OR-SISTERS<sup>2</sup>. The word *open* can be used to communicate diverse concepts, such as UNCORK (e.g. *open the bottle*), and UNSCREW (e.g. *open the lid of the machine*). The concept OPEN for the natural language *open* varies from context to context. This might imply that there is a flexible correspondence between the word and the concept conveyed, and between the lexical concept and the one communicated by the speaker (i.e. ad hoc concept). Words are constituents of the logical form of an utterance, while concepts compose the explicature of an utterance.<sup>3</sup>

The proposition expressed by an utterance is a development of a logical form, and it is pragmatically interpreted as explicature (i.e. the proposition or assumption the speaker intends to communicate) by means of disambiguation, saturation, free enrichment and ad hoc concept construction (Carston 1996, 2000, 2002). Now consider the process of narrowing and loosening in constructing an ad hoc concept.

- (4) a. I want to meet some bachelors. (Carston 1996)  
 b. Bill is a bulldozer. (ibid.)

In (4a) *bachelors* would refer not to the lexical concept UNMARRIED MEN but the relevant concept, say, bachelors eligible for marriage: the denotation of the relevant (i.e. ad hoc) concept would be a subset of the set denoted by the lexical concept. This process is called 'narrowing'. (4b) is a so-called metaphor: *Bulldozer* does not refer to a bulldozer as a machine but might denote a certain person, such as an assertive person or an untidy person and so on. In short, it is loosely to be interpreted as the ad hoc concept BULLDOZER\*.<sup>4</sup> The denotation of the ad hoc concept BULLDOZER\* could be the loosening of the lexical concept, and there would be a non-identical resemblance between the lexical and the ad hoc concept. In both the processes, the ad hoc concept would be constructed in consistence with the principle of relevance.

<sup>2</sup> Throughout this paper, small capital letters stand for a concept, not a natural language word.

<sup>3</sup> 'Logical form' in relevance theory is not identical to that in generative grammar. Roughly, it refers to a structured linguistic chain which is expressed by an utterance.

<sup>4</sup> The asterisk (\*) accompanying a concept stands for an ad hoc concept, not a lexical concept, in the manner of Carston (2002).

## 3 PREVIOUS ANALYSES

It has been assumed that simile is a trope or figure of speech for the purpose of comparison. It is a linguistic expression that reflects our recognition of similarity when comparing two things (i.e. entities, events, action etc.) or their properties. Basically, comparison is a cognitive means of similarity judgement. Ortony (1979) classifies the simile expression 'P is like Q' in two ways: as an ordinary similarity statement and as a simile (as a kind of trope). These two interpretations are exemplified in (5a) and (5b) respectively:

- (5) a. Encyclopedias are like dictionaries. (Ortony 1979)  
       b. Encyclopedias are like gold mines. (ibid.)

According to Ortony, intuition helps to judge the literalness of a sentence: supposing that we are asked whether (5a) and (5b) are true or false, we would intuitively answer 'true' in (5a) and 'false' in (5b). In contrast, from the viewpoint of logic (e.g. *reductio ad absurdum*), (5b) seems to be literally true because a thing is necessarily similar to another in a certain, however trifling, point. If so, simile would be kind of tautology, which is not informative or informationally significant at all. However, simile is indeed informative, and so it is not considered to be literally true. From the views (i.e. intuition and logic) it follows that ordinary similarity statements rest on literal comparison while similes rest on non-literal comparison.

Ordinary similarity statements are those in which two things are mutually (or bi-directionally) similar. Mutual similarity means that one thing is similar to another and vice versa. In contrast, similes are those in which one aspect is unidirectionally similar to another. Unidirectional similarity implies that, for example, we can understand the linguistic expression 'A is like B' but not 'B is like A'. Ortony proposes that these two kinds of interpretation are due to the 'predicate application' process. Through this process, the simile expression 'P is like Q' may be interpreted as follows: it is interpreted as literal comparison if the high-salient predicates of P are identical with those of Q, and, on the other hand, as a non-literal comparison if the high-salient predicates of Q correspond to the less-salient ones of P. In (5a), for example, the high-salient predicates of *dictionaries* (e.g. a kind of book) correspond to those of *encyclopedias*, and therefore (5a) is an ordinary similarity statement. In (5b) the high-salient predicates of *gold mines* (e.g. stores of precious material) fall within the less-salient ones of *encyclopaedias*, and therefore (5b) is interpreted to be a simile. His approach is significant as a taxonomic study because it sets up definite criteria to distinguish between similarity statements and similes, and seems to be valid in explaining whether 'P is like Q' is a simile or not. But though he calls his approach a predicate application 'process', it rather describes characteristics of each interpretation than clarifying the real processing. Consequently, the cognitive question arises: How are salient predicates understood or chosen? Ortony, of course, is not concerned with such a cognitive question, and so makes no remarks on the interpretive process of salient or less-salient predicates.

Fishelov carries out a taxonomic analysis of simile expressions from the syntactic and semantic viewpoints. He focuses on two types of similes: poetic simile and

non-poetic simile. He argues that the former are similes which are used in 'poetics, as a means of reinforcing an impression', and the latter, on the other hand, are similes which are 'a practical means of thinking, as a means of placing objects within categories.' To characterize non-poetic similes, he proposes three syntactic principles and five semantic principles.

Before reviewing his principles, we would like to review the traditional terminology used in similes. (However, the details of these principles are not my concern here.)

(6) John is eating like a pig.

First, simile expressions consist of two things being compared, which are the 'topic' and 'vehicle'. In (6) *John* is a topic, which is something the speaker is speaking about, while *pig* is a vehicle, which stands for the image the speaker brings into the discussion because of its being analogous to the topic. Second, what is essential for simile expressions is the simile marker *like*. It plays a part in directing the hearer to construct analogies between the topic and the vehicle. The third characteristic is the ground, the aspect(s) shared by the topic and the vehicle, which corresponds to *eating* in (6). The ground is the basis of the analogy between the topic and the vehicle, and is usually described in the form of a predicate. To sum up, a simile expression typically consists of four elements, which are not necessarily obligatory: the topic, the vehicle, the simile marker and the ground.

Let us return to Fishelov's principles which characterize non-poetic similes. One of the syntactic principles is the order of the four elements. This principle states that the normal order is T-G-M-V. Another syntactic principle is the explicitness of the four elements. One of its subcategorized principles is the explicitness of G (the ground), which claims that G's being explicit is the best way to understand simile expressions economically, efficiently, and clearly. On the other hand, one semantic principle states that the topic and the vehicle do not belong to the same category. This principle enables us to distinguish between non-poetic simile and mere comparison.

Note that principles are principles, not rules. This means that the principles proposed by Fishelov are not necessarily observed. In fact, the purpose for which he uses them is to 'characterize' non-poetic similes. Then, how are poetic similes characterized? Simile expressions are regarded as poetic similes when the principles above are deviated from, or more precisely, when one of the semantic principles and one or two other syntactic or semantic principles are deviated from. To sum up, non-poetic similes follow principles and poetic similes do not. This system is very complicated, and so it is not appropriate as a cognitive model because it lacks psychological reality. But obviously, such a cognitive aspect is not his concern. His proposal is helpful in elucidating the essences of similes.

As regards poetic similes, Fishelov discusses two distinct characteristics: (i) defamiliarization of the familiar (similarity) ground and (ii) familiarization of the unfamiliar. The key notion of these characteristics is 'ground', which, as mentioned above, refers to some feature(s) shared by the topic and the vehicle, namely the ground on which the topic is similar to the vehicle. The sentence (6), for instance, might mean something like *John is similar to a pig in the way he eats*, where the

predicate *eating* indicates similarity, namely the feature shared by the topic *John* and the vehicle *pig*. While we recognize some features shared by the two things being compared (which are linguistically expressed as the topic and the vehicle), we might recognize some unusual aspects to them by the explicit description of the (similarity) ground. That is to say, the explicitness of G might reactivate the unfamiliar similarities between the topic and the vehicle. This characteristic Fishelov calls 'the defamiliarization of the familiar'. In contrast, when we recognize that the topic has little to do with the vehicle, we might be surprised at the assumption of similarities between them. But such unfamiliar relation might be justified by the ground. This characteristic he calls 'the familiarization of the unfamiliar'. These two characteristics seem to indicate the increasing degree of figurativeness.

Sato (1978) casts light on the two cognitive directions followed in recognizing similarity. One is the direction to similarity from difference, which might motivate ordinary similes, and the other is the direction to similarity from identity, which inspires a creative (or, in a sense, surrealistic) simile. In comparing two distinct things, we usually recognize the similarity relation between them. This recognition is not unsurprising, and so it might bring about simile which is 'transparent' in the sense that any hearer can understand it easily. In seeing the same things, we usually do not recognize the similarity between them but simply identify them. The recognition of the same things as similar would be abnormal, but it might motivate a creative simile which is 'opaque' as opposed to 'transparent' as mentioned above. Sato argues not that similarity generates simile, but that simile generates similarity. From a general consideration of his argument we might conclude that the hearer's job to understand simile is to find out the similarity that the speaker's simile generates.

Bredin (1998)'s main aim is to distinguish simile from comparison and to clarify what simile is. He defines comparison as a mental process in which the hearer inspects 'the things being compared in order to discover whether they are alike or not'. The definition implies that comparison is a general mental process in similarity judgment and it covers the so-called simile. Whether an utterance expressing a certain similarity is a simile or not depends on what type of comparison it is. He argues that there are two types of comparison: symmetrical and predicative. The symmetrical comparison is a statement of the relation in which each identifies the other. The predicative comparison, on the other hand, is a predication about the character of the topic: one of the two things being compared describes the other. Let us consider the examples below (where (b) examples are the inverted version of (a) examples).

- (7) a. Michael is like Anne.
- b. Anne is like Michael.

- (8) a. My mistress' eyes are like the sun. (Fishelov 1993)
- b. The sun is like my mistress' eyes.

(7a) is a symmetrical comparison because it indicates that *Michael* is identified by *Anne*, that is, because it states the resemblance to Anne in order to identify who Michael is. Such symmetrical relation between the two things being compared suggests that (7a) is almost equivalent to (7b), at least semantically or in terms of its

situation. In short, it is natural that if Michael resembles Anne, Anne resembles Michael. The symmetrical comparison is characterized by the interchangeability of the topic and the vehicle. In contrast, it is clear that (8a) is not equivalent to (8b). (8a) is acceptable (or understandable) because *the sun* is interpreted as an appropriate predicate of the topic, not as a symmetrical relation, while (8b) is terribly difficult to understand because the vehicle makes little or no reference to the character of the topic. This shows that the interchangeability in (7) does not work for (8), so that (8a) is a predicative comparison. It follows that the so-called simile is a predicative comparison.

What is important in his argument are two kinds of comparison. These suggest that there is a possibility of interpreting 'like NP' in two ways. In other words, the simile expression 'like NP' can be used to describe the similarity relation between the two things being compared or to predicate the character or features of the topic. The latter does not rest on mere similarity judgment though it is expressed by *like* which indicates similarity by itself.

There are, at least, two points that are common in the previous analyses above: first, simile is recognized on the basis of comparison, and second, a typical simile expression 'P is like Q', where both P and Q are noun phrases, can be interpreted either literally or figuratively. The first point would suggest the speaker's viewpoint: the speaker, by way of simile expressions, intends to convey some similarities between the things being compared. The similarities, which are uniquely proposed by the speaker, are in his own mind even though they are accessible to the hearer. The second point, on the other hand, would suggest the hearer's viewpoint: the hearer tries to understand some similarities which the speaker presents by means of similes, or similarity judgment the speaker has made by comparing two things. This might imply that many of the previous analyses have confused the speaker's with the hearer's viewpoints. But we should note that there are some differences in linguistic communication between the two sides. When we hear the speaker's utterance, we cannot grasp all the things he wants to communicate, or rather we cannot connect with the content in the speaker's thought. It follows that all the hearer can do is to understand the content approximating to what the speaker wants to convey. (This idea is called 'interpretive resemblance' in relevance-theoretic terms.)

The question, then, is naturally raised: how does the hearer interpret the linguistic expression 'P is like Q', or how does he recognize similarities proposed by the speaker which are not immediately obvious? I think the question may be appropriately resolved in terms of relevance theory, which is a cognitive pragmatic theory of communication from the viewpoint of the hearer.

#### 4 THE MEANING OF *LIKE* AND ITS CONTEXT-DEPENDENT MEANING

The aim of this section is to clarify in terms of relevance theory how 'like Q' in the simile expression 'P is like Q' may be interpreted, especially how the simile marker *like* contributes to the interpretation of 'like Q'. This clarification might cause theory-internal concern with the way in which *like* contributes to the interpretation: Is



*like* conceptual or procedural? *Like* used in simile expressions may be conceptual in consideration of their corresponding metaphors or procedural with respect to the functional similarity to the hedges such as *sort of*.

The simile marker *like* encodes the lexically conceptual meaning SIMILAR, which indicates some similarities or similarity relations between the two (or more) things being compared. The statement *He's very like his father*, for example, can be paraphrased as something like *He's very similar to his father*. The paraphrase would show that *like* designates some similarities between *he* and *his father* in, say, looks, personality and so on. At the same time, *like* has an implicative meaning that is directly opposed. It implies some differences between the two things being compared. In brief, similarity analytically implies non-identity. The above statement might imply that *he* is not identical with *his father*. These two aspects of the concept of *like* are, as it were, the head and tail of a coin. I mean that *like* puts direct emphasis on similarity while it gives an indirect hint of non-identity. The two sides of *like* would help the hearer dig up from simile diverse similarities hidden by the speaker. I would like to maintain that *like* has a conceptual meaning SIMILAR in the linguistic expression 'P is like Q' and that it functions as an individual concept or a conceptual constituent of the ad hoc concept Q-LIKENESS.

It is generally assumed that simile involves such simile markers as *like* or *as ... as*, and that it is not as figurative as metaphor because of the simile marker which corroborates logical normality. Furthermore, some simile expressions have a similarity ground. Before discussing the linguistic expression 'P is like Q', which is the topic of this paper, we would like to compare a simile with a similarity ground to that without one. The two types are shown below:

- (9) a. Her eyes were grey like stones through clear water. (adapted from BNC)
- b. Her eyes were like stones through clear water.

Both sentences are generally regarded as similes.<sup>5</sup> The only difference between (9a) and (9b) is that (9a) contains the word *grey*, which indicates a ground of similarity between *her eyes* and *stones through clear water* whereas (9b) does not. The presence or absence of the similarity ground would have great influence on each interpretation in both explicit and implicit aspects. In (9a) *grey* functions not only as a similarity ground, helping the hearer determine the interpretation of *stones* as grey ones, but also as the predicate of the subject *her eyes*, describing the color of *her eyes* for the hearer to understand what they are like. The interpretation of (9b) is more dependent on the hearer than that of (9a): What the hearer has to do to understand (9b) is to discover some similarities between *her eyes* and *stones through clear water*, or some particular characteristics of *her eyes* which are similar to those of *stones through clear water*. The hearer's pragmatic labor would require knowledge about eyes and stones. Exploiting such knowledge, the hearer would retrieve the relevant characteristic which would correspond to the similarity ground overtly expressed in (9a). This would suggest that more similarities could be found in (9b) than in (9a). In

<sup>5</sup> Koizumi (1997) defines similes as 'tropes in which no explicit reference is made to the ground of similarity' (my translation), not tropes which involve such markers as *like*.

relevance-theoretic terms, the hearer devotes more processing effort to the interpretation of (9b) and achieves all the more cognitive effects from it than that of (9a).

As the previous analyses show, it has been assumed that the simile expression 'P is like Q' can be interpreted as a mere similarity statement (i.e. what Bredin calls symmetrical comparison) and a so-called simile (i.e. what Bredin calls predicate comparison). These two types of interpretation are almost tantamount to literal and figurative interpretations in the traditional fashion. They, however, are likely to provide a misleading suggestion that each interpretation should be made through the interpretive process specific to it. If this is right, human cognition is inefficient; for one thing, it would require at least two different kinds of processes for different interpretations (i.e. literal and figurative). For another, the mechanism distinguishing literalness from figurativeness would have to be installed in the human interpretive system. Relevance theory, therefore, assumes one single interpretive process for any utterances (i.e. any ostensive stimuli), which is called the relevance-theoretic comprehension procedure (mentioned in section 2). This would mean that the distinction between literal and figurative interpretation is of little importance, and that it is just the result that is automatically arrived at via the relevance-driven interpretive procedure. In short, either of the interpretations is consistent with the principle of relevance.

Following the relevance-theoretic comprehension procedure, 'P is like Q' is normally interpreted as either of the two statements: the speaker states (i) a certain similarity relation in an actual state of affairs or (ii) the speaker's thought about a topic. In the case of the statement (i), the speaker would describe the situation of a person or thing being similar to another. The examples in (10) show the similarity between Michael and Anne, and between encyclopaedias and dictionaries respectively.

- (10) a. Michael is like Anne.
- b. Encyclopaedias are like dictionaries.

In a given context (10a) might mean that Michael resembles Anne in, say, personality or looks. Likewise, (10b) might be a statement about some resemblance between encyclopaedias and dictionaries in quality and purpose and so on. It follows that when 'P is like Q' denotes an actual state of affairs in which an entity (P) has some resemblance to another (Q) in a certain respect, *like* has the conceptual meaning SIMILAR. (This will be summarized at the end of this section.)

In cases (such as (10)), what about the logical implication of the concept SIMILAR (i.e. non-identity)? Does it really contribute to the interpretation of (10a) and (10b)? From (10a) the hearer can assume that Michael and Anne are not one and the same person. This assumption, however, is self-evident, and it is not relevant in that she cannot achieve any cognitive effects. The implicative side of *like* plays little part in interpreting the simile expression 'P is like Q' which states similarity.

Next, we would like to consider the statement (ii) in which the speaker's thought is described in the simile expression 'P is like Q'. 'Like Q' would, in a given context, express her thought about the characteristics of some state of affairs, event or

situation. In such cases she would hold in mind that an entity seems to contain or share some unusual or unfamiliar features of another which are ‘invisible’ in the sense that they are intrinsic and not accessible to the others. She might perceive some bizarre similarities between the two things being compared. In other words, such unexpected resemblances exist only in the speaker’s mind.

One of the ways to articulate a speaker’s thought which comes to his mind based on comparison would be the phrase ‘like NP’. It would communicate the thought NP-LIKENESS.

- (11) Sometimes she thought that food was like a gag. (BNC)

We cannot normally find or discern some resemblance between food and a gag. In hearing (11) in a given context, however, the hearer could understand the speaker’s thought GAG-LIKENESS of which he did not take notice until he heard it. (11) might state that *that food* is of GAG-LIKENESS, rather than *that food* is similar to a gag.

Two important points here are (i) that the concept NP-LIKENESS which the speaker intends to communicate in a given context is expressed by the combination of two or more public words (i.e. *like* and noun phrase(s)), and (ii) that the meaning of *like* in this case is attributed to its logical (or analytic) implication of ‘non-identity’. First of all, the first point, as mentioned in section 2, would remind us of the relation between public words and their concepts: two or more public words can be interpreted as a single concept as a whole (e.g. *hot dog*). Following this asymmetric relation between words and concepts, it is possible that the phrase ‘like NP’ which is a combination of multiple public words could signify a single concept as a whole. There is supporting evidence of the asymmetric correspondence of ‘like NP’: the scope of negation takes the interpretation of ‘like NP’ as a single concept, as Uchida (2002) shows. Consider the simile expression (12a) in comparison with its corresponding metaphor (12b).

- (12) a. Jack is not like a donkey. (Uchida 2002)  
b. Jack is not a donkey.

(12b) does not mean Jack is not actually a donkey in a physical sense, but that he is not a blockhead. Carston (2002) argues that the negative operator *not* in (12b) negates the ad hoc concept DONKEY\*. The same goes for the negation of the simile such as (12a): what is negated is not the proposition that John is similar to a donkey but that Jack has some kind of features which are donkey-like. This means that the simile phrase *like a donkey* is interpreted as one single concept DONKEY-LIKENESS as a whole.

Moreover this is supported by another crucial example:

- (13) I think Matsui will have a hard time, at least in his first year, because he’s too Japanese. *Ichiro and [Hideo] Nomo are not like Japanese.* (Italics mine.) (Time April 28-May 5, 2003)

Obviously, the italicized utterance means that Ichiro and Nomo are dissimilar to the Japanese stereotype, whose corresponding conceptual representation is

JAPANESE-LIKENESS. It does not state that the baseball players are similar to Japanese. It follows that *like Japanese* is interpreted as a single concept. Again, the ad hoc (single) concept is dependent on the context, and varies from context to context.

My discussion comes up against a technical problem: I use the notion of ‘ad hoc concept’ in a broader sense than Carston does, who is the first to publicly introduce it in Carston (1996). Carston (2002) argues that only an ‘atomic’ concept can be interpreted ad hoc through the relevance-theoretic comprehension procedure, namely in consistence with the principle of relevance. By atomic concepts she means ‘simple unstructured entities’ (Carston 2002: 321). Following Jerry Fodor, she assumes that ‘concepts encoded by (monomorphemic) lexical items are atomic and not so decompositional’ (ibid.). In contrast, structured strings of atomic concepts she calls ‘complex’ concepts. But she does not make any reference to the criterion of ‘simplicity (of a concept)’ and the clear distinction to be drawn between atomic and complex concepts. For example, is the concept which corresponds the word *sibling* atomic or complex? It seems to be decomposed into BROTHER and SISTER. But it also seems to be regarded as a gestalt-like concept whose constitutive concepts are not linguistically visible. It might be atomic in a sense. This instance might suggest that both atomic and ‘atom-like’ concepts (i.e. concepts in which two or more concepts are contained in a particular context) can be interpreted as an ad hoc concept. The following discussion will go on, using ‘ad hoc concept’ in the broader sense.

There is further evidence which would support ‘like NP’ as a single concept. The ad hoc concept NP-LIKENESS can be lexicalized as a linguistic expression ‘NP-like’, such as *mask-like* in (14a) and *bear-like* in (14b). In these examples *like* functions as a suffix:

- (14) a. Mr Malfoy said nothing. His face was suddenly mask-like. (HPPS)
- b. The enormous, bear-like dog bounded forwards. (HPPA)
- c. \*The enormous, like a bear dog bounded forwards.

Both *mask-like* and *skull-like* are linguistically or formally one-word. Their concepts may be pragmatically interpreted as MASK-LIKENESS and BEAR-LIKENESS, which are essentially equivalent to the linguistic expressions *like a mask* and *like a bear* respectively. But it is clear that even though different linguistic forms denote the same concept, they have different grammaticality, as shown in the pair of (14b) and (14c). The syntactic distinction would be due to the grammatical requirement that the linguistic form ‘like NP’ is only in predicative use (not due to the semantic requirement). It follows that just as the suffix *-like* makes some conceptual contributions to the construction of the ad hoc concept NP-LIKENESS, so does the simile marker *like*.

How does *like* contribute to the interpretation of ‘P is like Q’? In some cases it is a conceptual constituent of the explicature on its own, and in other cases it constitutes a part of the ad hoc concept NP-LIKENESS in the explicature of ‘P is like Q.’ In Bredin’s terms, the former cases are symmetrical comparisons and the latter predicate ones. In fact, one might have an intuition that there are symmetrical/predicate distinctions. But the distinctions are assumed to be due to the distinctions of the explicature derived in the interpretive process. They are illustrated in a generalized form as in (14):

- (15) a. P IS LIKE Q (symmetrical comparison)
- b. P IS [Q-LIKENESS] (predicate comparison)

This illustration would suggest that we represent different mental representations in different interpretations, and that we intuitively distinguish between the mental representations which are brought to consciousness in each interpretation. Furthermore, what is crucial here is the different contribution of *like* to each explicature, in particular 'like Q'.

First, *like* in literal cases is interpreted as a lexically encoded concept SIMILAR, which contributes to the explicature as such. Recall that *like* has two aspects in its meaning: the lexical meaning 'similar' and the logical implication 'non-identity'. The example (10a), repeated below as (16a), might have the 'similarity-based' meaning as in (16b) and the 'non-identity-based' implication as in (16c):

- (16) a. Michael is like Anne.
- b. Michael is similar to Anne.
- c. Michael is not identical with Anne.

However, it is plausible that (16c) is less relevant than (16b) in the sense that the assumption (16c) is so self-evident that it is not worth processing and gives rise to few cognitive effects. In the case of symmetrical comparison, *like* simply assures us that there is at least one similar point between the topic P and the vehicle Q, and therefore its tail side (i.e. non-identity) does not make much contribution to understanding 'P is like Q.'

How, then, does *like* contribute to the ad hoc concept NP-LIKENESS which is pragmatically constructed in the predicate comparison? More precisely, what part do the two aspects of *like* play in interpreting 'like NP' as NP-LIKENESS? Parallel to (16), the example (8a), repeated below as (17a), seems to mean something like (17b) and to logically imply something like (17c):

- (17) a. My mistress' eyes are like the sun.
- b. My mistress' eyes are similar to the sun.
- c. My mistress' eyes are not identical with the sun.

At first glance, the analysis of (17a) as (17b) seems to be reasonable, but it would be inadequate in that the assumption communicated by (17a) is not an assumption like (17b) but the assumption that *my mistress' eyes* contain some properties peculiar to *the sun* (which indicate the similarity between the two). In short the vehicle in (17a) just predicates the properties of the topic. They are explicated as a single ad hoc concept NP-LIKENESS as a whole. In other words, the similarity indicated by *like* lies between the properties (i.e. encyclopedic assumptions) of EYE and those of SUN (as concepts, not as entities). The communicated concept NP-LIKENESS would consist mainly of the assumptions that are retrieved from similarities with the topic P. In brief, Q-LIKENESS in 'P is like Q' would be something like 'Q's (encyclopedic) properties or assumptions similar to P'. It follows that *like* in the predicate comparison case indicates similarity at the level of concept, namely encyclopedic assumptions stored

in each concept while in a symmetrical comparison it denotes a similarity at the level of the entities which are expressed by each linguistic form. Consequently, the interpretive problem of *like* to be resolved by pragmatic inference is: What is similar to what in which respect(s)?

If the discussion above is true, (17c) has to be reconsidered. Assuming that the 'similarity' meaning of *like* plays a part at the conceptual level, so likewise would do its 'non-identity' implication. What is not identical with what at the conceptual level, then? One possible answer analogous to the similarity at the conceptual level would be that the lexical concept EYE is not identical with the ad hoc concept SUN-LIKENESS. The ad hoc concept is made of properties stored in the lexical concept SUN, but it usually does not refer to the 'genuine' sun because it is based on the similarity with *my mistress' eyes*. In short, the 'non-identity' implication of *like* would leave the property of, say, a central star in the solar system outside the ad hoc concept SUN-LIKENESS. We should note again that an ad hoc concept is one that the speaker intends to convey in a 'particular' context, which the hearer interprets in consistence with the principle of relevance. This means that it is in a high degree of context-dependency while it does not predicate the 'genuine' entity in any case. As a consequence, (17b) and (17c) have to be accommodated to the following:

- (18) a. The (encyclopedic) properties or assumptions stored at EYE are similar to those stored at SUN.
- b. The (encyclopedic) properties or assumptions stored at EYE are not identical with those stored at SUN.

My discussion seems to account for our intuitive understanding that there is sometimes little difference between simile and metaphor. It was assumed that a simile minus *like* equals a metaphor. In a given context a simile might have the same interpretation as its corresponding metaphor, though they are different in linguistic form.

- (19) a. Bill is like a bulldozer.
- b. Bill is a bulldozer.

In relevance-theoretic terms, (19a) might derive the same cognitive effects (in particular, some contextual implications) as (19b). The implicit aspects (i.e. implicature) of the interpretation are almost the same while the explicit aspects (i.e. explicature) are different. There is a strong possibility that the cause of the interpretive similarity between (19a) and (19b) lies in implicature (or contextual implications).

Within relevance theory, implicature (i.e. communicated assumptions which are derived purely via pragmatic inference, including implicated premises and conclusion) is qualified by the degree of strength, ranging from strong to weak. Weak implicature, on the one hand, is implicated assumptions which are weakly communicated. In metaphor, a wide range of assumptions are made weakly manifest. Strong implicature, on the other hand, is implicated assumptions which are strongly communicated. Usually a small number of assumptions are made strongly manifest.

Generally speaking, strong implicature is likely to be determinate, or shared in mind by hearers while weak implicature is indeterminate, or varies from hearer to hearer. Returning to the similarity in communicated content between simile and metaphor, the hearer is likely to identify the strong implicature derived from simile with that derived intuitively from metaphor.

Supportive evidence is found in B's two ways of replying A's asking which would yield the strong implication though they communicate completely different assumptions explicitly.

- (20) A: Shall we go to the cinema?  
       B1: I have an exam tomorrow.  
       B2: I'm tired.

But what is common is the implicit assumption which is strongly communicated in the exchange: B1 and B2's reply to A's asking is a refusal, which would be something like *I don't want to go to the cinema with you*. However, other implicatures differ between B1 and B2, of course. This would suggest that when two utterances are linguistically (or explicitly) different, they might communicate the same 'strongest' implicature (though otherwise they would communicate different implicatures). The same seems to be true for the relation between simile and metaphor.

According to Carston (1996, 2002)'s analysis of metaphor, such as (21a) below, the speaker intends to explicitly convey the assumption which involves an ad hoc concept (i.e. a concept dependent on a particular context).

- (21) a. Bill is a bulldozer.  
       b. BILL IS A BULLDOZER\*.

The ad hoc concept BULLDOZER\* would be constructed by loosening the lexical concept BULLDOZER because it lacks the logical property 'a kind of vehicle' stored at the lexical concept. Carston argues that metaphor is characterized as including the ad hoc concept constructed by loosening the lexical concept or rather by dropping some of its logical properties. This characteristic would be the source of the implicature derived in metaphor.

What is the cause of the implicature derived from simile which is similar to that derived from metaphor? A possible clue to the question would be the 'tail' side of the two aspects of *like*: non-identity. The 'non-identity' implication, as mentioned above, seems to be characterized as making inert the function of the concept of the noun phrase following *like* as referring to the 'genuine' entity. These very characteristics would be essentially equivalent to the derivation of the implicatures in metaphor, and would give rise to the same (strong) implicature as metaphor.

These observations above account for the theory-internal question: Is *like* conceptual or procedural? To sum up, *like* in 'P is like Q' has the conceptual meaning SIMILAR in the case of symmetrical comparison, where it denotes some similarity between P and Q, and it contributes to the interpretation as such. What about cases of predicate comparison which contain the ad hoc concept Q-LIKENESS?

Suppose that *like* has the procedural meaning like TO LOOSEN THE FOLLOWING

NOUN PHRASE.<sup>6</sup> It seems that the gap between the lexical concept and the pragmatically inferred one (i.e. ad hoc concept) is caused by *like* or its procedural meaning. The supposition might be analogous to Itani(1995)'s analysis of the hedge *sort of*. She regards *sort of* as a concept loosener which loosens its associated concept (e.g. *A whale is sort of a fish.*) As Higashimori and Yoshimura (2003) point out, it is not clear what contribution *sort of* and *like* in the composite phrase *sort of like* make to the interpretation.

- (22) I mean Louis seems to be really sort of like a different cat but it's not.  
(BNC)

If *like* is procedural, what would its difference in procedural meaning be from *sort of*? Would *like* and *sort of* work individually to give rise to different effects though they have the same procedure? Since *like* is conceptual as the discussion above shows, it predicts that *sort of* might loosen its following ad hoc concept NP-LIKENESS to which *like* makes a conceptual contribution.<sup>7</sup> In any case, the idea that *like* is procedural raises some serious problems concerning compositionality: it cannot account for examples (12a), (14a) and (14b). In (12a) the simile marker *like* as a constituent of NP-LIKENESS is within the scope of the negative operator *not*, and in (14a) and (14b) the suffix *-like* makes a contribution to 'NP-like' both linguistically and conceptually. These problems would be serious enough to give up the analysis of *like* as procedural.

## 5 CONCLUDING REMARKS

This paper has shown that there are two ways in which the simile marker *like* contributes to the explicature of 'P is like Q'. One is a statement of a relation, called symmetrical comparison, where *like* plays a part as the lexical concept SIMILAR. The other is a statement of the character concerning the topic, called predicate comparison, in which *like* is a conceptual constituent of the ad hoc concept Q-LIKENESS which contributes to the whole explicature.

Either way, *like* is conceptual in the relevance-theoretic sense. The distinction between two types of interpretation lies at the level of similarity. In symmetrical comparison the similarity relation indicated by *like* would be at the level of entities which are referred to by the topic P and the vehicle Q. In predicate comparison, on the other hand, it would be at the level of concepts which contain in them all kinds of encyclopedic assumptions. The simile marker *like* in itself corroborates some resemblance at the relevant level, but it does not solve the pragmatic question: What resembles what in which respect(s)? The solution to this pragmatic question would be dependent on the hearer's labor through the relevance theoretic comprehension

<sup>6</sup> The supposed procedural meaning was proposed in my previous work, Kurokawa (2001). But I have made an alternative proposal in Kurokawa (2003) in order to retract the past proposal. In this paper I would like to maintain the new proposal by adding supporting evidence.

<sup>7</sup> I leave aside discussion of the correlation between *sort of* and *like*.



procedure.

The analysis of *like* could account for the adequacy of interpreting two (or more) public concepts as one single concept dependent on a particular context, and, in addition, explain the intuitively similar relation in interpretation (especially the implicit side) between simile and metaphor. Furthermore, it might suggest that there is some clear-cut difference in function in contribution to utterance interpretation between *like* and the hedge *sort of*.

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