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ON CONTIGUITY AND THE NATURE
OF *METONYMIC SHIFT*

1. INTRODUCTION

The widely spread traditional approach to metonymy is clearly, in many respects, at odds with the cognitive approach to the phenomenon. First, metonymy has been traditionally perceived as a phenomenon which operates on names of things, as a matter of language especially literary or figurative language (Radden and Kövecses 17). According to more recent studies, however, metonymy is a highly structured cognitive mechanism rather than a simple linguistic matter (for the arguments in support of the conceptual basis of metonymies see part 2.). Second, the traditional and the cognitive view of metonymy are also at variance as to the location and nature of the metonymic relationship. According to the traditional view, metonymy "involves the substitution of the name of one thing for that of another thing and assumes that the two things are somehow associated" (Radden and Kövecses 17). According to the cognitive view (e.g. Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live*; Lakoff, *Women, Fire*; Gibbs *Metonymy in Language*; Warren, *Aspects of Referential Metonymy*; Radden and Kövecses, *Towards a Theory of Metonymy*), on the other hand, in a metonymic model one concept does not seem to be merely substituted for another one, but appears to be conceptualised by means of its relation to the other concept and contiguity relationships need not be physical, but can be only conceptual (can result from human construal of the world). Based on the cognitive research Radden and Kövecses proposed the following definition of metonymy:

> metonymy is a cognitive process in which one conceptual entity, the vehicle, provides mental access to another conceptual entity, the target, within the same idealized cognitive model (21).

The present paper concentrates on the two latter elements of the above mentioned definition of metonymy – namely on contiguity and the nature of metonymic shift. The aim of this article is to show some imperfections of the traditional approach to these issues. Both contiguity and the nature of metonymic shift have been already quite thoroughly discussed

by numerous cognitive linguists (e.g. Lakoff *Women, Fire*, Radden and Kövecses *Towards a Theory of Metonymy*, Koch *On the Cognitive Bases*, Feyaerts, *Metonymic Hierarchies*; Panther and Thornburg, *The Role of Conceptual Metonymy*). This article is an attempt at putting these observations together, comparing them (since they are sometimes at variance with each other), organizing them, and drawing conclusions for the future.

2. METONYMY – A COGNITIVE PROCESS

Before we start analysing different approaches to the location and nature of the metonymic relationship, let us concentrate on the first element of the above-mentioned definition of metonymy (namely on the fact that metonymy is not a mere linguistic phenomenon but a highly structured cognitive mechanism) and consider some of the evidence for the conceptual basis of metonymies.

1. Metonymies are reflections of some general cognitive phenomena rather than random, arbitrary occurrences (for a detailed analysis of the cognitive and communicative principles which determine the selection of a particular metonymic vehicle see Radden and Kövecses (44–54)).

2. Most cases of metonymy are highly conventionalised, and thus used unconsciously and automatically. In the [MARRIAGE] frame in Polish, for example, one highlighted element: *ślub* (vow) conventionally stands for another element: *marriage* (ceremony) (Koch 148).

3. Many examples of metonymy do not show up in language. The stereotypical HOUSEWIFE MOTHER subcategory, for example, which metonymically stands for the entire MOTHER category, does not have a name of its own (Lakoff 87).

4. Metonymy is used in reasoning and serves the function of providing understanding.
    a. We seem to conceptualise one concept by means of its relation to the other. When we say, for example: *He's got a Picasso in his den* (Lakoff and Johnson 37) – we think of the painting in terms of its relation to the painter.
    b. We make judgments about people by means of social stereotypes – ideals help us make judgements of quality – and cognitive reference points help us make approximations and estimate size (Lakoff 86).
    c. We are able to draw inferences about what is meant on the basis of a subpart of a scenario or frame which metonymically evokes the entire scenario or frame (Gibbs 68).

5. Based on our ability to think metonymically, we create, are able to understand, and even perceive as more natural some seemingly anomalous utterances.
    a. We are able to understand antecedents of pronouns, which do not agree in person, number or case.
    b. We make inferences during text processing and make sense of seemingly incoherent stories.
    c. We also comprehend seemingly nonsensical, tautological statements (Gibbs 69).

3. CONTIGUITY RELATIONSHIPS

As could be seen above, metonymy is not merely a linguistic phenomenon. Thus, intuitively, the location of the relationship between the source and the target should also be extralinguistic. The intuition seems to be confirmed by quite ample evidence given by

numerous linguistic sources. Let us begin the analysis, however, with the first account of contiguity which appeared in Rhetorica ad Herennium: "*Denominatio* [i.e., 'metonymy'] is a trope that takes its expression from *near and close things* and by which we can comprehend a thing that is not denominated by its proper word" (qtd in Koch 141). The words near and close, which appear in the above definition, may indicate physical contiguity of things. This is not surprising since contiguity relationships were traditionally located in the world of reality and limited to an observable relationship between two referents (Radden and Kövecses 19). However, as Feyaerts points out, reality is "a domain which does not exist independently of human understanding, knowledge and belief" (317) and contiguity relationships should therefore be placed at the conceptual level rather than located in the world of reality.

Lakoff and Johnson perceive "the conceptual level" in terms of the whole range of conceptual associations commonly related to an expression. As they note, metonymic concepts are grounded in our experience and the grounding "usually involves direct physical or causal associations" (39–40).

The PART FOR WHOLE metonymy, for example, emerges from our experience with the way parts in general are related to wholes. PRODUCER FOR PRODUCT is based on the casual (and typically physical) relationship between a producer and his product. THE PLACE FOR THE EVENT is grounded in our experience with the physical location of events. And so on.

Koch adds an interesting point to the above mentioned account. As he notes, contiguity originally belongs to the conceptual domain of space and applying it to other conceptual relations "seems to involve a metaphor on the metaconceptual level: by choosing exactly this term, we conceptualize, on the metaconceptual level, different types of conceptual contiguity in terms of spatial contiguity" (146) [1]. We can see this if we analyse Lakoff and Johnson's example of THE PLACE FOR THE EVENT metonymy:

> 1. Let's not let Thailand become another **Vietnam**. (39)

We seem to conceive of the relation between the source domain (place – *Vietnam*) and the target domain (event – *war*) in terms of some spatial contiguity. Although an event is not a physical entity we end up with the notion of contiguity of place and event by ascribing the event to the place where it happened.

Koch also claims that we do not need to retain the spatial metaphor and he proposes an alternative frame model [2] to explain the concept of contiguity. Contiguity, according

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[1] Interestingly enough, a similar process seems to take place in metaphorisation. As Szwedek noted (2), the elements of a metaphorical relationship (both static (object, container, etc.) and dynamic (event, activity)) have to be conceptualised as objects (objectified) before they are introduced into the process of metaphorisation.

[S]ince objects have clear boundaries, and events and activities have been objectified, they also 'inherit' boundaries, although of a different kind. Those boundaries are inferentially delineated/inherited and have the form allowed by the nature of the target domain (IH), for example, in the case of events and activities, they have a temporal character. Once we accept the boundaries, we naturally recognise the structure – static in objects, dynamic in events and activities.

[2] Koch seems to use the notion of frame in Panther and Radden's understanding, as "a cover term for what is variously called 'domain,' idealized cognitive model' (ICM), 'schema,' 'scenario,' 'script,' etc." (Panther and Radden 9).

to him, should be perceived as "the relation that exists between elements of a frame as a whole and its elements" (146).

> By recurring to frames, we can easily understand metonymic phenomena because frames – and this is a point I would like to stress – are non-linguistic, conceptual wholes. When acknowledging the latter fact, we do not have to overproliferate linguistic-semantic descriptions only for the sake of metonymies.

Somewhat along the same lines Dirven argues that "[c]ontiguity cannot be based on any form of objective or 'natural' contiguity. This has the far-reaching implication that contiguity must be taken to mean 'conceptual contiguity' and that we can have contiguity when we just 'see' contiguity between domains." (qtd in Feyaerts 317)

Thus, if there is no objective or "natural" reality, contiguity needs other structures to operate within. The structures or networks are called *frames* by Koch but they have also been described in the cognitive-linguistic literature as *scenes, scenarios, domains*, etc.

The fact that metonymy operates within conceptual structures seems to be confirmed by another interesting argument. Metonymy, as Koch noted, works on prototypical frames and contiguities, namely the most salient element of a prototypical frame often becomes the vehicle not only for the prototypical frame but also for the less prototypical ones from which it happens to be physically absent. The word *bar*, for example, which initially denoted only the counter in a public house and was one of the elements of the prototypical PUBLIC HOUSE frame, owing to its salience has now come to stand for the whole frame. What is more, it has also come to stand for the less prototypical PUBLIC HOUSE frames from which it is physically absent. "We have to acknowledge," as Koch says, "that there are perhaps public houses without a counter, which we would nevertheless call *bars*" (145). It seems clear then, that the relationship between two referents (in the example above: the counter and the public house) is not located in the world of reality and must take place in some kind of conceptual frame instead. To sum up the discussion on contiguity let us use Koch's words which, as it seems, capture the issue best.

> [A]n intralinguistic solution for contiguity seems inappropriate from the outset. The metonymy Eng. bar 'counter; public house' is possible thanks to our knowledge of public houses and counters and not thanks to our knowledge of the word bar. It is not our knowledge of words (and their semantic features), but our knowledge of the world that determines contiguities. So metonymy is not a problem of linguistic structure, but a problem that concerns the relation between language and the extralinguistic world. Contiguity has to be considered as constituting a conceptual, extralinguistic and not intralinguistic relationship. (145)

4. THE NATURE OF METONYMIC SHIFT

It seems clear by now where the metonymic relationship takes place. Let us now see what the nature of the relationship is. Let us start the discussion with a quotation from Lakoff:

> Given an ICM with some background condition (e.g., institutions are located in places), there is a "stands for" relation that may hold between two elements A and B, such that

one element of the ICM, B, may stand for another element A. In this case, B = the place and A = the institution. (78)

In terms of the placement of the relation that holds between the source and the target (a conceptual frame or an ICM) Lakoff's account does not differ much from Koch's (presented in the previous section). Interestingly enough, however, in his definition Lakoff mentions the nature of the metonymic shift, which does not differ much from the one given by traditional rhetoric. Lakoff presents metonymy as a relationship involving substitution "a 'stands for' relation that may hold between two elements A and B" (78) which is usually represented by the notation X FOR Y, "where x represents the *source* meaning (also called 'vehicle') and y symbolizes the *target* meaning of the metonymic operation" (Panther and Thornburg 94). Such an approach to the relationship, however, is clearly at odds with the latest findings of numerous cognitive linguists (e.g. Radden and Kövecses *Towards a Theory of Metonymy*, Koch *On the Cognitive Bases*, Feyaerts, *Metonymic Hierarchies*; Panther and Thornburg, *The Role of Conceptual Metonymy*). Let us now see what the shortcomings of the substitution view are and what other theories concerning the nature of metonymic shift have been proposed instead.

Lakoff and Johnson who in *Metaphors We Live By* claim that metonymy "has primarily a referential function, that is, allows us to use one entity to *stand for* another" (37) seemingly accept the *substitution* view of metonymy. Nevertheless, they also admit that metonymy "serves the function of providing understanding" (37), which ultimately proves the imperfection of the "substitution" view. Lakoff and Johnson note for example that in:

2. ***The Times*** *hasn't arrived for the press conference yet.*

The Times is used not only with reference "to some reporter or other but to suggest the importance of the institution the reporter represents" (36). Similarly, the painting in the example:

3. *He's got **a Picasso** in his den.*

is conceptualised by means of its relation to the painter. As Lakoff and Johnson point out: "[w]hen we think of a Picasso, we are not just thinking of a work of art alone, in and of itself. We think of it in terms of its relation to the artist." (39). Following the line of Lakoff and Johnson's argument, Warren, adds that:

> It is important that we realise that the traditional definition of metonymy, viz. "substituting for the name of a thing the name of an attribute of it or something closely related" (*OED*) is not correct in that no substitution is necessarily involved. We do not refer to music in *I like Mozart*, but to music composed by Mozart; we do not refer to water in *The bathtub is running over*, but to the water in the bathtub. (128)

Developing the above mentioned observations, Radden and Kövecses suggest an interesting modification to the substitution view. They claim that metonymic relationships "should more adequately be represented by using an *additive* notation such as X PLUS Y" rather than the *substitutive* one x FOR y, since the entities involved in them are interrelated and "form a new, complex meaning" (19).

Panther and Thornburg (94) have come to the same conclusions. They give Levinson's example of implicature (*I*- Heuristic, where *I* stands for 'Informativeness'), which as they note, bears a strong resemblance to Lakoff's metonymic models (86-89). According to Levinson "lexical items routinely implicate stereotypical pragmatic default readings: What is expressed simply is stereotypically exemplified" (37). This heuristic is related to Grice's Maxim of Quantity: "Do not make your contribution more informative than is required." Panther and Thornburg give the following example of an I-implicature in English:

4. *I need **a drink***.

The statement above would normally be understood as expressing the (adult) speaker's desire for a glass of alcoholic beverage rather than e.g. milk. In accordance with traditional conceptions of metonymy it could be argued that in the above example the meaning of *alcoholic drink* is substituted for the source meaning of *drink*. According to Panther and Thornburg's (94) and Radden and Kövecses's (19) view, however, the meaning *alcoholic* is added as a conceptual modifier to the meaning of *drink*.

Nevertheless, the *addition* view presented above does not seem to be very precise since intuitively in a prototypical metonymy the target concept seems to be more prominent than the vehicle (the source concept) [3]. Thus, giving them both (the source and the target) equal prominence, which seems to be implied by the addition notation (X PLUS Y), does not seem to be accurate, especially with reference to more prototypical examples of metonymy. The problem of 'equal prominence' seems to have been resolved by Panther and Radden (11) and later by Panther and Thornburg (95-97) who propose some refinement of the addition view. Panther and Radden claim that "both reference point and target are always present as elements of the conceptual frame, but are highlighted to different degrees" (11). They follow Langacker's assumption that metonymy is "basically a reference-point phenomenon affording mental access to the desired target" (Langacker 30). Figure 1., shows how, in "a *linguistically manifest* metonymic relation, a *source meaning* is related to a *target meaning* by means of a linguistic form (e.g. morpheme, word, phrase, sentence) [...] the *linguistic vehicle*" (Panther and Thornburg 96-97). The figure also indicates that the source meaning is conceptually present (*salient*) or activated and is not obliterated by the target meaning.

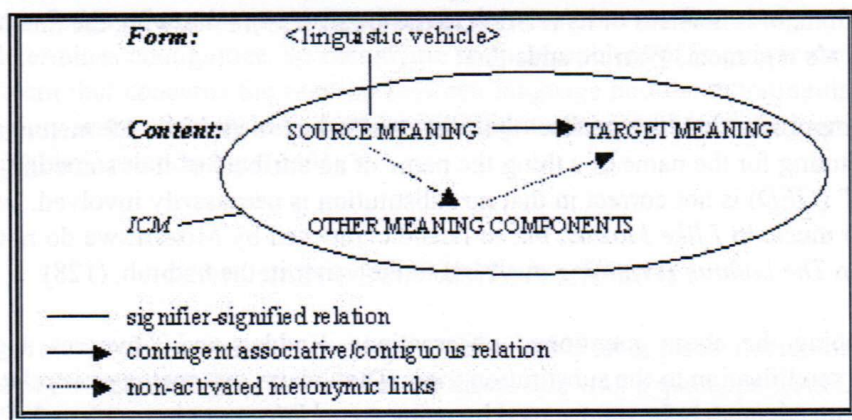Let us consider Panther and Radden's example:

Figure 1. The basic metonymic relation (Panther and Thornburg 94)

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[3] For a detailed discussion on prototypicality of metonymy see part 5.

5. *The first violin* has the flu. (9)

As Panther and Radden note, the source concept *the first violin* evokes the whole knowledge structure to which it belongs (musicians, the notion of music represented in scores, etc.). The source is also immediately associated with the first violinist – the player of the instrument, who in turn is defined as one of the most outstanding members of the symphony orchestra. A non-literal interpretation of the noun phrase *the first violin* is triggered by the predication *has the flu* as well as the attribute *first*. The metonymic reading "involves a shift from the instrument to the musician as the most readily available element in the frame" (9). As a result of the metonymic shift, the reference point (*the first violin*) is backgrounded, and the target (*the first violinist*) is foregrounded [4].

Based on the above presented arguments we come to the following conclusions. First, in a metonymic relationship, both the source and the target are conceptually present, which seems to exclude the *substitution* view. Second, the source and the target are not equally prominent, which in turn proves the imperfection of the *addition* view. Thus, it seems that instead of *substitution* or *addition* we can only talk about the degree of foregrounding of either the source or the target in a conceptual frame.

5. PROTOTYPICALITY OF METONYMY

In the light of the arguments presented in part 4 it seems clear that both the *substitution* and *addition* view of metonymy are inaccurate and that metonymy should be perceived as a phenomenon in which the reference point (*vehicle* or *source*) activates the part of knowledge (*conceptual frame*) to which it belongs and affords mental access to the desired target. It is also important to remember that the reference point and the target are always present as elements of the conceptual frame but are foregrounded to a different degree. In this section we will analyse the degree of foregrounding of either the source or the target and see what influence it has on prototypicality of a given metonymic relationship.

According to Panther and Thornburg (103) in prototypical metonymies the target meaning is conceptually more prominent (foregrounded) than the source meaning and consequently it is also the target meaning that is available for further elaboration in the ensuing discourse. Let us first focus on the prominence of the target meaning. Let us consider the following example:

6. General Motors **had to stop** production on Monday but they resumed it on *Thursday*. (103)

In the first clause in the example above both the source meaning (the 'OBLIGATION' sense) and the target meaning (the 'FACTUALITY' sense) are active. Nevertheless, the *but*-clause "makes pragmatic sense only if the clause *General Motors had to stop production on Monday* has the prominent metonymically derived reading 'General Motors *stopped*

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⁴ For a detailed analysis of different degrees of foregrounding see part 5. on prototypicality of metonymy.

production on Monday'" (103). Let us consider another example (its metonymic structure is sketched in Figure 2.):

> *7. North Korea's **willingness** to publicly flout its international commitments suggests it is trying to force itself onto Washington's agenda to win an oft-stated goal: talks with its longtime foe about a nonaggression treaty.* (qtd in Panther and Thornburg 103)
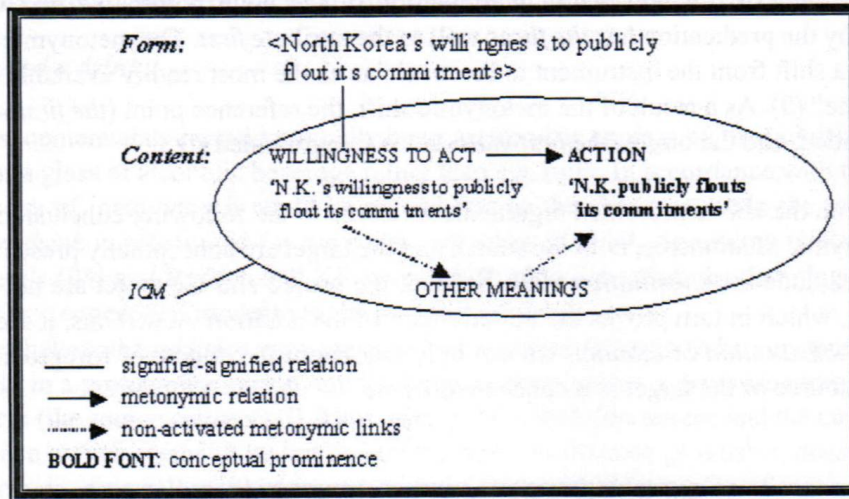

Figure 2. Conceptual prominence of target meaning (Panther and Thornburg 103)

Here, similarly to the first example, both the source meaning (WILLINGNESS TO ACT) and the target meaning (ACTUAL ACTION) are active but it is the target meaning that seems to be "conceptually more *important* and *relevant*" (Panther and Thornburg 103) (despite the high degree of activation of the source meaning). Example 7 is thus, not so much about what North Korea is willing to do but what it has already done and will do in terms of nuclear weapons development.

Let us now consider another characteristic of prototypical metonymies – the 'availability' of the target. To see this let us go back to example 7. In this example the metonymic target (ACTUAL ACTION – *North Korea **has already developed** or **will develop** the nuclear weapons*) is available for further elaboration – it is, as Panther and Thornburg note, "the starting-point of future debates about what can be done about this dangerous situation" (103). Let us consider another example where the target is more prominent and thus available for the ensuing discourse and where the conceptual shift from the source to the target is also reflected in grammatical form (see also Figure 3):

> *8. The first violin has the flu. **She** cannot practice today.*
> *9. The first violin has the flu. **It** is a Stradivarius.* (Panther and Radden 10)

It is evident that ***She** cannot practice today*, where *she* anaphorically refers back to the target (*the first violinist*), is a felicitous continuation of *The first violin has the flu*, whereas ***It** is a Stradivarius*, where the pronoun is coreferential with the reference point (*the first violin*), is not. In other words, there is, as Panther and Thornburg say (105), *topic continuity* between the more conceptually prominent target (*the first violinist*) and the coreferential pronoun *she*.

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Form:              <the violin>

Content:           OBJECT USED ——→ USER
                   'the first violin'   'the first violinist'


NORMAL FONT: Conceptually backgrounded
BOLD FONT: Conceptually prominent
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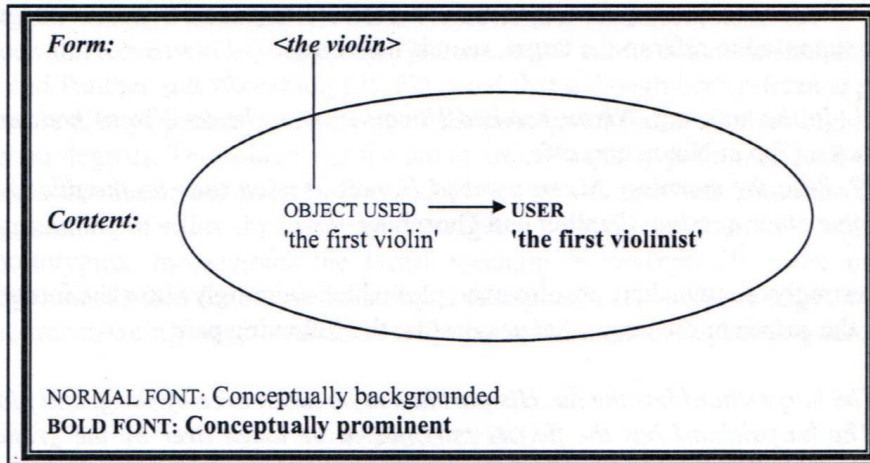
Figure 3. Conceptually prominent target meaning (Panther and Thornburg 105) [5]

Let us now analyse a less prototypical example of metonymy of Lakoff and Johnson's, which surprisingly enough has been often quoted as a typical one:

*10. **Nixon** bombed Hanoi.* (qtd in Panther and Thornburg 105)

The meaning that is conceptually prominent in the sentence above is not the one of the indeterminate target (presumably *American soldiers*), but the one of the source (*Nixon*) (see Figure 4.).


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Form:              <Nixon>

Content:           ULTIMATE CAUSER ——→ IMMEDIATE CAUSER
                   'Nixon'              'U.S. Air Force Pilots'


NORMAL FONT: conceptually backgrounded
BOLD FONT: conceptually prominent
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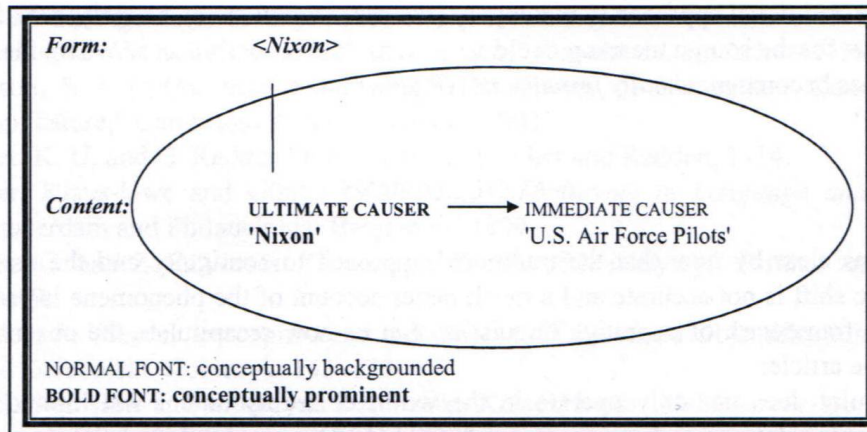
Figure 4. Conceptually prominent source meaning (Panther and Thornburg 104)

The fact that ULTIMATE CAUSER FOR IMMEDIATE CAUSER is a more peripheral metonymic relation is also confirmed by the *unavailability* of the target for the ensuing discourse. Let us consider the following examples:

The above examples are *about* Nixon, rather than the pilots that bombed Hanoi and it is the source meaning that is conceptually prominent in them. Thus, the target meaning is

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[5] In their example Panther and Thornburg use the sax instead of the violin.

not available for the ensuing discourse and the pronoun *they* used in the second example, which is supposed to refer to the target, sounds rather odd.

> *11. In the morning, **Nixon** bombed Hanoi; at noon **he** (= Nixon) had lunch with aides. (Topic: Nixon himself)*
> *12. ?#In the morning, **Nixon** bombed Hanoi; at noon **they** (= the pilots) were on some other mission. (Panther and Thornburg 104)*

Interestingly enough, there are also examples which seemingly allow the foregrounding of either the source or the target. Let us consider the following pair:

> *13. The harpsichord has the flu. **His** part has to be taken over by the grand piano.*
> *14. The harpsichord has the flu. **Its** part has to be taken over by the grand piano.*
> (Panther and Radden 11)

In the first sentence (example 13) the target meaning is highlighted and the possessive pronoun *his* anaphorically refers to the target meaning (*the musician*). In the second sentence (example 14), on the other hand, where the possessive pronoun *its* is "grammatically congruent the reference point expression" (Panther and Radden 11) the source meaning is seemingly prominent. In fact, however, the possessive pronoun *its* conceptually relates to another target in the same conceptual frame – namely "to the part assigned to the harpsichord in the score" (11). Thus, in both cases the target meaning, though in each case a different one, seems to be activated.

In the light of the above-mentioned arguments, there may paradoxically seem to be some truth in the traditional approach to metonymy (*the substitution view*). Namely, substitution of the target for the source meaning could be seen as "the borderline case where the target meaning has become *maximally prominent*." (Panther and Radden 11) [6]

6. CONCLUSIONS

It seems clear by now that the traditional approach to contiguity and the nature of metonymic shift is not accurate and a much better account of the phenomena is provided within the framework of cognitive linguistics. Let us now recapitulate the observations made in the article:

1. Contiguity does not only operate in the world of reality and is not limited to an observable relationship between two referents. As Dirven noted, "contiguity must be taken to mean 'conceptual contiguity' and (...) we can have contiguity when we just 'see' contiguity between domains" (qtd in Feyaerts 317).
2. Using the *substitutive* notation X FOR Y to represent metonymies does not seem to be very accurate since both the source and the target are always conceptually present as elements of the conceptual frame in a metonymic relationship.

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[6] Nevertheless, in such cases there does not seem to be any metonymic relation any more.

3. Using the *additive* notation X PLUS Y rather than the *substitutive* one X FOR Y, as Radden and Kövecses (19) suggested [7], is not very accurate either. Panther and Radden (11) and Panther and Thornburg (95-97) noted that although both reference point and target are always present as elements of the conceptual frame they are highlighted to different degrees. The source and the target are not equally prominent and, therefore, it seems that instead of *substitution* or *addition* we can only talk about the degree of foregrounding of either the source or the target in a conceptual frame.

4. In prototypical metonymies the target meaning is conceptually more prominent (foregrounded) than the source meaning. Consequently it is also the target rather than the source meaning that is available for further elaboration in the ensuing discourse.

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[7] This was also implied by other linguists e.g. Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 38) and Warren (1999: 128).