Keynote address
Metaphor Festival 2016, Metaphor Lab at University of Amsterdam,
31 August – 3 September 2016

Title: Using Clean Language to Model Embodied Mental Metaphors

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Abstract

In the 1980s a counselling psychologist, David Grove, devised a therapeutic method for working with the metaphors used by his clients who suffered from severe traumatic memories (Grove & Panzer, 1987). Grove’s method not only worked with the client’s language but also with their mental metaphors and the embodiment of those metaphors (Casasanto & Gijssels, 2015).

Since metaphors are pervasive in everyday speech and thought (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) Grove created a precise set of questions that minimally introduced his own verbal and nonverbal metaphors into the conversation. He called the questioning process Clean Language.

In the 1990s Penny Tompkins and I systematised Grove’s work so that, in addition to psychotherapy, it could be applied in business, education, health and research (Lawley & Tompkins, 2000).

Our generalised version of Grove’s approach, Symbolic Modelling, applies Clean Language and Cognitive Linguistics to modelling mental constructs. The clean practitioner takes a biological phenomenological stance i.e. a third-person modelling of a first-person reality from the latter’s perspective (Maturana & Varela, 1992). This can go beyond the identification of metaphors to discovering how they work together to form a coherent model that shapes meaning, decisions and action (Tosey, Lawley & Mees, 2014)

Over 60 theses, academic papers and professional articles have been published which make use of a clean approach. Recently Clean Language has been systematically used in qualitative research interviews. By adhering to a strict protocol the interviewer is prevented from introducing any content or leading questions into the conversation, ensuring that the descriptions obtained are sourced exclusively from the interviewee’s personal vocabulary and experience. A spin-off from this research has been the development of a detailed method for assessing the ‘cleanness’ of any interview and therefore the authenticity of the data collected.

Drawing on my 5,000+ hours of face-to-face implementation, this presentation will review the development of clean approaches to modelling embodied mental metaphors.