

Motion Expressions in Music Criticism – An Investigation of their Conceptual Motivation and their Metaphoricity

Nina Julich-Warpakowski

Universität Leipzig
Institut für Anglistik

Music is commonly and conventionally described in terms of motion: melodies fall and rise, and motifs may follow a harmonic path. The thesis explores the motivation of musical motion expressions in terms of conceptual metaphors (Lakoff & Johnson 1999). Specifically, it analyses whether musical motion expressions are based on the time is motion metaphor (Johnson & Larson 2003, Cox 2016). Furthermore, the thesis investigates whether musical motion expressions are perceived as low in metaphoricity because of their conventionality in music criticism, and because of a more general association of music with motion, given that people often literally move when they make music and when they listen to music.

For the analysis, a 6.7-million-word corpus of texts from the genre of music criticism was compiled including music analyses and concert reviews retrieved from journals and newspapers published in the UK and the US. As an initial study, a sample of 10,000 words was retrieved from the corpus and exhaustively analysed for metaphorical expressions applying MIPVU (Steen et al. 2010). In a second study, key motion verbs in the entire music criticism corpus were identified in a keyword analysis, and selected path and manner motion verbs were further analysed in a concordance analysis. The two corpus studies are complemented by an online rating study, in which participants' perceived degree of metaphoricity of musical motion expressions was measured. In the rating study, participants also had to indicate their degree of knowledge of classical music. The influence of this variable on the perceived degree of metaphoricity of the musical motion expressions was statistically tested.

The findings from the corpus studies indicate that while motion expressions are frequent in music criticism, only a few cases can be traced back to the time is motion metaphor. Instead, motion expressions often function to highlight the motivic-harmonic development in a musical piece irrespective of a real-time perspective. Furthermore, musical motion expressions function to highlight the action of a performer and as such imply aspects about a specific rendition of a musical piece:

„the soloist floats over the accompaniment“

or they are employed to describe the melodic shape of a musical passage:

„the [melodic] line tumbled down“

The lack of time is motion-based metaphorical expression in the music criticism corpus can be explained by the communicative and genre-specific setting: In music criticism, music is described in a manner that is divorced from its experience in real time; instead, the music analyst focuses on how musical elements change and develop over the course of the musical piece from a distanced, synoptic perspective; and the music critic focuses on characteristic aspects of a specific rendition of a musical performance irrespective of how music progresses over time.

The results from the rating study demonstrate that the degree of metaphoricity of musical motion expressions depends on participants' knowledge of (classical) music: Participants with more knowledge of music tend to perceive musical motion expressions as more literal. The findings support an acculturation view of metaphor (Caballero & Ibarretxe-Antuñano 2013) and indicate that the metaphoricity of an expression, rather than being a collective property shared by all language users, depends on the socio-cultural background of the individual user.

Acknowledgements

Completion of this PhD project was made possible through a Doktorandenförderplatz awarded to the author by Leipzig University. The author would also like to thank her supervisor Doris Schönefeld.

References

- Caballero, R. & Ibarretxe-Antuñano, I. (2013) Ways of perceiving, moving, and thinking: Revindicating culture in conceptual metaphor research. *Journal of Cognitive Semiotics* 5(1–2), S. 268–290.
- Cox, A. (2016) *Music and Embodied Cognition. Listening, Moving, Feeling, and Thinking*. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press.
- Johnson, M. & Larson, S. (2003) Something in the Way She Moves. Metaphors of Musical Motion. *Metaphor and Symbol* 18(2), S. 63–84.
- Lakoff, G. & Johnson, M. (1999) *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought*. New York: Basic Books.
- Steen, G. J., Dorst, A. G., Herrmann, J. B., Kaal, A. A., Krennmayr, T., & Pasma, T. (2010) *A method for linguistic metaphor identification: From MIP to MIPVU*. Amsterdam, Philadelphia: John Benjamins.