



**THE BRUCE WILLIS OF SANDWICHES: THE Y OF X IS Y OF Z  
CONSTRUCTION ON ITS JOURNEY TOWARDS A PARAGON MODEL,  
AS ONE WAY OF ACHIEVING INTERSUBJECTIVITY<sup>1</sup>**

**O BRUCE WILLIS DOS SANDUÍCHES: A CONSTRUÇÃO Y DE X É Y  
DE Z EM SUA JORNADA PARA UM MODELO PROTOTÍPICO, COMO  
UMA FORMA DE ALCANÇAR A INTERSUBJETIVIDADE**

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**ABSTRACT**

The present article is concerned with innovative metaphorical expressions with proper nouns in a subtype of so-called XYZ constructions, such as *Is sad singleton Vladimir Putin the Jennifer Aniston of European politics?*, which link relatively disparate domains and which may cause interpretation difficulties, leading to the problem known as de Saussure's paradox. Veale (2014) believes that they are "double-edged comparisons that can cut both ways, since information inevitably flows in both directions, ... to meet in the middle to construct a blended mental image." We argue that such constructions are better explained as metaphors based on metonymic paragon models. A closer look at these constructions reveals that they are most of the time used in discourse in such a way that the speaker provides mapping-like statements justifying the pairing of X and Y: speakers create remarkable links between disparate domains on purpose, but they also attempt, in observance of the Gricean principle of cooperation, to facilitate the processing of such expressions and deliberately explicate what seem to be underlying mappings in keeping with the maxim of quantity until supplying enough information to safeguard the interpretation of the figurative expression in the direction of what they have in mind, i.e. ensuring intersubjectivity. In light of similar constructions without any explications, which can be analyzed as based on metonymic paragon models, we realize that spelling out the reasons for the pairings of proper nouns actually seems to function as a trigger for the online creation of novel paragons or quasi-paragons, or for an ad hoc modification of existing paragons. We claim that it is actually these explications that "cut both ways," i.e. apply to both X and Y, which means that we witness a dynamic (re)construal of meaning whereby a paragon model is strengthened or modified, or is being created.

**KEYWORDS:** blending; XYZ construction; intersubjectivity; paragon; mapping.

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## RESUMO

O presente artigo dedica-se às expressões metafóricas inovadoras com nomes próprios em um subtipo de construções XYZ, como *Is sad singleton Vladimir Putin the Jennifer Aniston of European politics?*, que ligam domínios relativamente discrepantes que podem causar dificuldades de interpretação, levando ao problema conhecido como “Paradoxo de Saussure”. Veale (2014) acredita que essas são “comparações de dois gumes que podem cortar nos dois sentidos, uma vez que a informação flui inevitavelmente nas duas direções, ... para se encontrar no meio para construir uma imagem mental mesclada”. Argumentamos que essas construções podem ser melhor explicadas como metáforas baseadas em um modelo prototípico metonímico. Um olhar mais atento sobre essas construções revela que, na maioria das vezes, são usadas no discurso de tal forma que o falante fornece declarações semelhantes a mapeamentos que justificam o pareamento de X e Y: falantes criam ligações notáveis entre domínios diferentes propositalmente, mas também tentam, em observância ao princípio da Cooperação de Grice, facilitar o processamento dessas expressões e explicar deliberadamente o que parecem ser mapeamentos subjacentes de acordo com a Máxima da Quantidade até fornecer informações suficientes para salvaguardar a interpretação da expressão figurativa na direção do que eles têm em mente, ou seja, garantir a intersubjetividade. À luz de construções similares sem qualquer explicação, que podem ser analisadas com base em modelos prototípicos metonímicos, percebemos que explicar as razões para os pareamentos de nomes próprios, na verdade, parece funcionar como um gatilho para a criação *online* de novos protótipos ou quase protótipos, ou para uma modificação *ad hoc* de protótipos existentes. Afirmamos que são realmente essas explicações que “cortam dos dois lados”, isto é, aplicam-se a X e Y, o que significa que observamos uma (re)construção dinâmica de significado por meio da qual um protótipo é reforçado ou modificado, ou está sendo criado.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Mesclagem conceptual; construções XYZ; intersubjetividade; protótipos; mapeamento.

## Introduction

It is nowadays almost a commonplace of the conceptual metaphor theory to say that the function of metaphor is understanding, Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 36f) say that metaphor is “principally a way of conceiving of one thing in terms of another, and its primary function is understanding,” while metonymy “has primarily a referential function, that is, it allows us to use one entity to stand for another.” However, both of the above statements have to be relativized. While Lakoff and Johnson see metonymy as having primarily referential function they are aware of its additional functions and point out not only that metonymy is “naturally suited for focussing” (LAKOFF; JOHNSON, 1980, pp. 37ff), but that it can just like metaphor have a role in construal. It makes it possible for us to see and understand things in alternative ways.

However, figurative uses of lexical items, i.e. both metonymic and metaphorical ones, can occasionally lead, if not to misunderstanding, then at least to certain problems in understanding, as we show in Part 2. In fact, we could say that the more creative a metaphor or metonymy, or their combination, the more serious this problem becomes. This can be seen as a special variety of what is often referred to as the Saussurean paradox, introduced in 1.2. One of the solutions that is in keeping with Gricean maxims, as we illustrate on the example of the so-called figurative X is Y of Z constructions of the type *This is the Bruce Willis of sandwiches* in Part 3, is to attempt to achieve intersubjectivity by indicating in the context how these figurative expressions are to be interpreted. We argue in Part 4 that these figurative X is Y of Z constructions are not to be analysed as cases of conceptual integration or blending, but as metaphorical expressions on their way to become metonymic paragon models.

## Meaning in cognitive linguistics

One of the tenets of cognitive semantics, and more generally of cognitive linguistics, is that meaning making is an open and dynamic construal operation, and that the folk model of conduit metaphor (REDDY, 1979, 1993) is at odds with reality. This model implies that lexical items as well as larger units built of them, such as phrases, clauses or utterance, are containers holding and transmitting a certain amount of fixed semantic substance. On the contrary, for cognitive linguists the whole of language is a structured, but not a closed or fixed code. It is rather open-ended (GYÖRI; HEGEDÜS, 2011, p. 318) to a degree that is not detrimental to its functioning as a successful means of communication among humans. It is open for modification, extension, and is constantly negotiated in the course of usage events.

This also applies to the semantic aspects of language. Meanings are not fixed rigidly in advance and forever outside any context of usage, and they are not homogenous in the way that must be assumed for any modular approach to language to make sense, with its semantic primitives, strict encapsulation of “linguistic” knowledge, and such like. It is rather, as Lee (2001, p. 10) puts it, that: “... instead of thinking in terms of words as expressing ‘concepts’, we should think of them as tools that cause listeners to activate certain areas of their knowledge base, with different areas activated to different degrees in different contexts on use.”

In other words, meanings can be worked out only by enlisting our total encyclopedic knowledge organized in complex matrices of domains. In Langacker’s (1999, p. 379) words “... a lexical item takes on a subtly different value every time it is used, depending on which array of associated conceptions it happens to evoke on a given occasion, and the specific level of activation they achieve.”

The process of such online construction of figurative meaning is bound to be complex, dynamic and flexible, and its output can be revised at every step if necessary, further enriched with information, or subsequently depleted of it, depending on the cognitive mechanisms employed, mainly metonymy and metaphor.

## Language change and the Saussurean paradox

The approach to meaning advocated by cognitive linguists implies that human language should be seen as being in constant flux, subject to changes of all kinds, not only semantic ones. However, accounting for changes in language is a huge challenge for many linguistic models. As Trask points out

... if a language is primarily an orderly system of relations, how is it that a language can change without disrupting that system? To put it another way, how can a language continue to be used effectively as a vehicle for expression and communication while it is in the middle of a change, or rather in the middle of a large number of changes? This puzzle is known as the **Saussurean paradox**, and it is not a trivial issue. (TRASK, 1996, p. 250)

Trask goes on to illustrate this by some analogies of other areas of human activity that are regulated by rules or norms:

How can anyone play football or chess successfully if the rules of football or chess are constantly being changed during play? How can an orchestra play a symphony if the score of the symphony is changing during the performance? How can a case be tried in court if the law is constantly changing during the trial? (TRASK, 1996, p. 250)

Specifically, the paradox is that:

Such analogies would appear to suggest that the constant changes in our language must of necessity have an adverse effect on our ability to use it successfully.

And yet this is not so. Apart from the handful of specialists who are deliberately looking for evidence of change in contemporary speech, people hardly ever even notice the existence of changes in their language; when we do notice a change, it is usually no more than a new word or two. When we recall how dramatically English has changed in the last 40 generations or so, since the time of Alfred the Great, this issue becomes altogether mysterious. How on earth can a language be transformed so utterly, in such a seemingly short time as 40 generations, while at the same time its speakers go on speaking it happily without being disturbed by the changes and usually without even noticing them? (TRASK, 1996, p. 250)

We remember well that for de Saussure the value of a unit or a linguistic sign in a linguistic system is determined by its relations to other elements in the system. If some relations change, the value of a unit changes. To use one of de Saussure's favourite metaphors or analogies, we can say that the value of a chess figure in a particular position on the table (relative to other figures) is different in a position when the player cannot legally move it from its value when it can move freely. If some of the units appear or disappear, the value of all the units with which it was in relation, or with which it enters a new one, also changes. Thus, if a rook is lost, this affects the king, because a possibility for castling is limited, and losing both rooks, makes it impossible; on the other hand, promoting a pawn that had managed to make it all the way to the other side of the board to another figure, such as a queen, rook, knight or a bishop, apparently affects the value of these figures.

So, in theory at least, the appearance or a disappearance of just a single word would affect the whole linguistic system and ultimately lead to its functioning less well. In practice, however, we know that this is normally not the case. What is more, the addition of a new element, e.g. of a new word, may optimize a linguistic system, if not immediately, then at least after some time of reshuffling of relations within the system.

However, there is another possible locus of change, and therefore another possibility for disruption. Linguistic signs for de Saussure are units consisting of the signifier, or the form, and

the signified, or the content, mutually linked by social convention. The link is arbitrary: there is absolutely no reason why a given linguistic form should be used to signify a given content and not some other.

If the link is arbitrary it can be loosened, and a new content may replace the old one. The social convention is of course very strong, and by preserving the originally arbitrary links, it preserves the functionality of the system. Due to the strength of the convention, an impression may arise that linguistic forms are vessels or containers for more or less fixed contents or meanings, as evidence by the above-mentioned conduit metaphor. But words and other linguistic units, as pointed out above, do not have (absolutely) fixed meanings. Admittedly, they exhibit some relatively stable basic or core semantics, but it is rather subject to construal, i.e. it can be elaborated from one context of use to another. But even their basic or core semantics may change over time.

These changes may be slow or quick, gradual or sudden, but very often they are fairly imperceptible. Sometimes they take place right in front of our nose and are plain to see, but as often as not they occur without being noticed at all. Let us illustrate this by two examples from Spanish and Portuguese, where lexemes became polysemous as a result of a series of metonymic shifts.

In the first example we consider the polysemy of *tienda*, which, according to *Diccionario de la lengua española* of the Royal Spanish Academy, can have the following meanings:

1. Armazón de palos hincados en tierra y cubierta con telas o pieles sujetas con cuerdas, que sirve de alojamiento o aposentamiento en el campo, especialmente en la guerra. (tent)
2. Toldo que se pone en algunas embarcaciones para defenderse del sol o de la lluvia. (awning/overhang)
3. Especie de toldo que se pone sobre los carros para defenderse del sol o de la lluvia. (awning/overhang)
4. Casa, puesto o lugar donde se venden al público artículos de comercio al por menor. (shop or store, “house, stall or place”)

It would be difficult to make any sense of this unless we start from the etymological source of the word, which is the PIE root *\*ten-* to ‘stretch’, giving in Latin *tendere*, with participle *tentus* ‘stretched; stretched out; extended; distended’, from which *tenta* was formed in Mediaeval Latin as a feminine singular noun use of *tentus*. It is obvious that we have a metonymic shift from the concept of being extended/stretched to something that is extended/stretched, in other words we have a shift from a quality to an entity that exhibits this quality. From there we can follow a series of further metonymic shifts. First, this entity is associated with the function of shading or protection from rain (as in awning), due to which it is also associated

with the area/ space covered that way, and then also including any mechanical support, yielding the concept of tent as a shelter for people in the countryside. The same structure was also used with one of its sides open in market places, which accounts for its generalization into the shop/ store sense.

No less interesting is the Portuguese word for shop, *loja*. According to *Dicionário Brasileiro da Língua Portuguesa* (<http://michaelis.uol.com.br>), it has the following meanings:

- 1 ant O piso térreo de um prédio, geralmente usado como armazém ou oficina.
- 2 ant Átrio para entrada de carruagens.
- 3 Estabelecimento comercial onde se vendem mercadorias diversas ou um único produto: ...
- 4 Bot Cada uma das subdivisões de uma antena que contém os grãos de pólen; lóculo.

*Dicionário Priberam da Língua Portuguesa* describes the word in a very similar fashion:

- 1 Estabelecimento de venda ou de comércio (ex.: loja de brinquedos).
- 2 Piso ao nível ou quase ao nível da rua.
- 3 Piso térreo de uma habitação que serve para armazenamento ou para apoio às atividades agrícolas (ex.: a loja está cheia de tralha; a enxada está na loja).
- 4 Templo maçônico (ex.: a maçonaria local possui lojas em vários municípios).

While there is a plausible link between the ‘shop’ sense and the storage or workshop sense, the link with the concept of being situated on the ground-level or street-level, or being used as a storage is a bit less immediately clear, let alone with the idea of being used for agricultural activities, or of the entrance hall for carriages. All of these make sense when seen as a series of metonymic shifts starting from the etymological source of the word. *Loja* is of course related to cognate Romance words, ultimately coming into Portuguese from Old French, where *loge* was used to refer to ‘arbour, covered walk-way.’ There are Mediaeval Latin words *lobia* and *laubia*, but this Old French word, just like the two Mediaeval Latin words, is believed to be derived from Frankish *\*laubija*, meaning ‘arbour, protective shelter made of foliage.’ This is, of course, related to Old High German *loupepa*, (which also had *louba* ‘porch, gallery,’ and *loub* ‘leaf, foliage’), ultimately coming from Proto-Germanic *\*laubq* ‘leaf, foliage.’ Note also that Modern German has *Laube* ‘bower.’

It will be seen that there are points of overlap between the Spanish and the Portuguese word. First of all, we note that the history of both words starts from something that is stretched or placed above a place in order to protect it from rain or sun. In one case it is the foliage, in the other it is a piece of cloth or hide. From the idea of being protected above we have the shift to the whole consisting of the protective shelter and the space below it. It is further extended to a

structure such that also has protection on three of its sides, one side being kept open. From there we move to a building or part of a building exhibiting the same structural schema that could, due to these structural properties, be used for various activities. Two closely related activities among these are manufacturing and selling various objects, and the word in question may come to be used to refer to a place in which they take place, later specializing to just a place where something is sold, i.e. a shop. A locality with this particular structure and function can as a rule exist on the ground level, or the street level, which explains another extension of *loja*.

### Figurative shifts and the problem of understanding

What we have just seen are series of metonymic shifts that took place in stages over a protracted period of time, based on conceptual contiguity, and where the immediate context is enough for a hearer to decide what is actually meant. However, in some cases, there may obtain metonymic indeterminacy. An utterance may contain two expressions that can both be interpreted metonymically, but one of these metonymies blocks the other. In other words, the two potential metonymies are in a paradigmatic relationship, i.e. in complementary distribution. Brdar and Brdar-Szabó (2003) analyze a number of predicative adjectives with or without prepositional complements that can be conventionally used in an utterance like *He was clear on that issue* to refer to a speech act ('to speak clearly on some issue'), where the speech act itself is not explicitly coded in the expression but conventionally evoked via a predicational metonymy<sup>4</sup> MANNER (OR LINGUISTIC ACTION) FOR LINGUISTIC ACTION. A sentence like:

(1) *I'll be brief.*

can in fact be interpreted in two ways, not only as containing a predicational metonymy of the above type, but also as containing a referential metonymy. It lends itself to an analysis in which the subject, which in our examples always denotes a person, i.e. the speaker, stands for his/her utterance:

(2) *I'll be brief.* ('My speech/words, etc. will be brief')

This SPEAKER FOR UTTERANCE metonymy can be seen as a special case of the more ubiquitous PRODUCER FOR PRODUCT metonymy, or SPEAKER FOR SPEAKER'S LINGUISTIC ACTION (Panther, 2005: 375). Ruiz de Mendoza (fc) aligns examples like (2) with hypallage, or transferred epithet, along the lines of *sad novel* (a novel that makes readers sad). *I'll be brief*

4 Within the framework of a pragmatic typology of metonymies proposed in Panther and Thornburg (1999: 335f), expressions like the one highlighted in (1) are characterized as instances of propositional metonymy. Propositional metonymies come in two subtypes. In a predicational metonymy, illustrated in (1), one propositional content stands for another propositional content, while in a referential metonymy, exemplified in the alternative analysis of the same utterance in (2), one referring expression, usually a noun phrase, is the vehicle for an implied target that is also a referring expression normally realized as a noun phrase. The third type of discourse-pragmatic metonymy, extensively discussed in Thornburg and Panther (1997) and Panther and Thornburg (1998), is illocutionary metonymy where one illocutionary act stands for another illocutionary act.

ascribes 'brevity' to the speaker, but this description is epiphenomenal. Only one of these can be activated at a time, either the predicational or the referential metonymy. One might suppose that this is just a rare, special case of rivalry between two metonymies, but it can be observed with many cases of the MANNER FOR THE ACTIVITY metonymies across several domains, as shown in in Brdar-Szabó and Brdar (2003).

In some cases of metonymic indeterminacy or vagueness a single metonymic vehicle allows simultaneous access to two potential targets. The following headline of a news article would normally be interpreted so that *Budapest* as a metonymic vehicle has the city council as its target:

(3) *Relief and disappointment as **Budapest** gives up 2024 Olympic dream*<sup>5</sup>

Note, however, that the first sentence of the article says the following:

(4) *Hungarians displayed a mixture of disappointment and relief on Thursday after the government ended **Budapest's** bid to host the 2024 summer Olympic Games in the face of growing popular opposition.*

This indicates that the initial assumption about the first mention of *Budapest* was incorrect, as the interpretation now moves in the direction of the CAPITAL FOR GOVERNMENT metonymy. It actually turns out that the formal cancellation was filed by the city council and not the government itself. This means that our headline actually blends two metonymies sharing the same vehicle, viz. metonymic source. In other words, we have a sort of indeterminacy, or uncertainty, as to the reference of the metonymically used name of the capital city, at least of a post-hoc type, after reading into the article.

Indeterminacy is, however, much more frequent in the case of metaphors. The metaphorical shift may be recognized as such, but the addressee may be left puzzled as to what is intended, or may simply interpret the metaphor in a way that deviates in some respects from what was intended by the speaker. As we know very well, metaphorical mappings are always partial – it is not the whole target domain that is overwritten by the whole of the source domain. Conceptual metaphor is all about highlighting or focusing on certain elements and hiding or defocusing others, and these processes take place on two opposed ends, what happens on one end need not be a reflection of what happens on the other.

The iceberg metaphor is very popular when talking about culture, organizations, thinking, etc., but we can turn the tables and apply it to the conceptual metaphor itself, i.e. what we see are just the labels for the two domains, the rest is more or less invisible. In a recent article Barnden (fc) uses the following example:

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<sup>5</sup> Available at <<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/reuters/article-4252598/Olympics-Relief-disappoint-ment-Budapest-gives-2024-Olympic-dream.html>>. Accessed on 23/2/2017.



(5) *Peter's the bubbles in Mary's champagne.*

to show that one and the same metaphor can be interpreted differently, depending on the kind of (current) beliefs one has “about people, bubbles, champagne.” Peter may be construed as the source of excitements in Mary’s life, exploiting the role of the bubble in the enjoyment of a glass of sparkling wine. However, it is possible that the metaphor means that Peter’s role in Mary’s life is peripheral, as bubbles are just pockets of air immersed in wine, not part of the wine substance. Without any further context, and even sometimes despite the context, the interpretation will depend on the hearer’s current beliefs, which may match what was intended by the speaker or not.

Whenever communicating, the hearer (and the speaker) normally have a Theory of Other Mind. As Tomasello (1999, pp. 14-15) points out “... the child comes to experience herself as a mental agent—that is, a being with thoughts and beliefs that may differ from those of other people as well as from reality...”

However, on the basis of just hearing example (5), the hearer cannot be certain and would need to allow for alternative interpretation.

### **Towards intersubjectivity via mappings understood in terms of Gricean Maxims**

What we have seen here is just one aspect of a more general perennial problem known in cognitive linguistics as intersubjectivity. This is the question of how humans succeed or fail in achieving conceptual alignment, i.e. how they come to share more or less the same thoughts following some communicative acts involving language and/or some other communication system. It is clear that the Saussurean paradox, i.e. the fact that human languages are prone to change, only makes the problem of achieving intersubjectivity worse.

Verhagen (1995, 2005) argues that in the prior treatment of a number of linguistic phenomena, too much attention was spent on the object of conceptualisation rather than on what goes on in the conceptualizer. Verhagen (2005, p. 28) shows on three areas of the grammar – negation, finite complementation and discourse connectivity – that in such constructions the speaker presents content to the hearer in such a way that the latter is led to particular interpretations, attempting to attain inter-subjectivity.

In the rest of this article we are concerned with a particular case of figurative uses of proper names in a particular constructional environment that results in their change into more common-like nouns. The particular constructional environment in question is often referred to as the XYZ construction. It comes in many subtypes, but we will just concentrate on the figurative cases where the element Y is realized as a proper name used to indicate some property attributed to X, as far as the category or domain specified by Z is concerned.

Our main aim will be to show that, in keeping with Verhagen’s claim, the speaker presents

the figurative construction in such a way that it may lead the hearer closer to the intended interpretation. In other words, the speaker provides some clues, specifically what looks like metaphorical mappings in the co(n)text, which are supposed to guide us as close as possible toward what the speaker has in mind.

We believe that what we witness here is in keeping with Grice's Cooperative Principle, as well as with Gricean Maxims of Quantity and Manner (although seemingly flouting the latter):

The Maxim of Quantity

Make your contribution as informative as is required

Do not make your contribution more informative than is required

The Maxim of Manner

Avoid obscurity of expression

Avoid ambiguity (p. 45-46)

Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity)

Be orderly

The figuratively used proper name that functions as Y in the construction in question, we will argue, may in due time develop from something metaphor-like into a more or less well familiar metonymic paragon model, as a result of which they no longer need to be propped up by specifying intended mappings in the context in order to interpret them in a way intended by the speaker.

### **Figurative X is Y of Z constructions and the problem of the meaning of Y**

#### **Figurative X is Y of Z constructions introduced**

We assume here the notion of grammatical constructions as defined by Goldberg (1995, p. 4): "a form-meaning pair  $\langle F_i, S_i \rangle$  such that some aspect of  $F_i$  or some aspect of  $S_i$  is not strictly predictable from C's component parts or from other previously established constructions." This is echoed in Croft (2001, p. 18), for whom constructions are "pairings of form and meaning that are at least partially arbitrary."

As mentioned before, in this article we are concerned with one type of the XYZ family of constructions, specifically with the subtype containing a proper name as Y and an inanimate or animate NP as X, such as:

(6) *The Bruce Willis of sandwiches. It will ninja kick your stomach, it will fight terrorists, it will reunite your family and cure your lingering toe fungus...*<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Available at <http://freewilliamsburg.com/graham-deli> >. Accessed on 21/10/2010.

(7) *Active verbs are the **Bruce Willis of a press release**. They grab the reader, move the action along, and leave a trail of mangled, bleeding corpses in their wake.*<sup>7</sup>

(8) *Designed to be waterproof (even around the zipper area), too, the Space Case is the **Bruce Willis of the suitcase world**.*<sup>8</sup>

(9) *Flamingo Tongue Snail*

*The **Bruce Willis of the ocean** suffers no harm and is truly unbreakable. In fact, the snail becomes toxic by absorbs venom from sea fans, much to the demise for their predators.*<sup>9</sup>

(10) *Yanis Varoufakis, the **Bruce Willis of Greek fiscal policy***<sup>10</sup>

Veale (2014) notes a difference between examples like (6-8), where incongruity obtains because an individual Y is used to describe an inanimate X, or an X that is an animal or plant (9), and more conservative examples, such as (10), characterized by analogy as both X and Y are humans. However, there are also instances where both X and Y are inanimate:

(11) *I'm proud of it because Gibson is **the Mercedes of guitars**. It's not just any brand; it's the most high-profile guitar manufacturer in the world.*

(12) *The Bumbleride is **the Mercedes of strollers**. There, I said it. We pushed this thing, fully loaded with a kid and all the assorted kid gear we could cram into it, up hills and over grass, through dirt and gravel and nuclear waste (ok, I'm stretching it a bit here), and it performed with extreme awesomeness.*

### The XYZ family of constructions

The construction type we are concerned with here is just one in a family of related constructions. A number of researchers have observed that constructions may form a family of related constructions, e.g. the resultative construction can be seen as an intricate network of more specific constructions (cf. GOLDBERG; JACKENDOFF, 2004; PEÑA CERVEL, 2016, 2017). XYZ constructions are also a family of related more specific constructions, some of which are more literal, while some are figurative.

While general affinities within families and their core members at the macro- and the meso-constructional level (TRAUGOTT, 2008a) are relatively well outlined, we know much less about the nitty-gritty details of individual micro-constructions that populate “the bottom of the mental constructicon” (HOFFMAN, 2013, p. 315). We use the term micro-construction in

<sup>7</sup> Available at < <https://writegoodtheblog.com/2012/10/>>. Accessed on 26/10/2012.

<sup>8</sup> Available at < <https://www.trafalgarc.com/real-word/six-pieces-revolutionary-luggage-will-transform-way-travel/>>. Accessed on 21/10/2019.

<sup>9</sup> Available at < <http://awesomeocean.com/top-stories/bizarre-sea-creatures/>>. Accessed on 21/10/2019.

<sup>10</sup> Available at < <https://imgur.com/gallery/ZGXOc8w>>. Accessed on 21/10/2019.

the sense of Traugott (2008a and b), Trousdale (2008), Traugott and Trousdale (2010), i.e. as deeply entrenched, substantive constructions populating the bottom of the mental constructicon.

In order to shed more light on the relationships between individual micro-constructions in the XYZ family, on the core and peripheral members of the micro-family, and on how this family extends, we first examine some features shared by the construction as a whole as well as those that can be invoked so as to distinguish between members of the family (cf. Brdar 2017).

XYZ constructions have received a lot of attention in cognitive linguistics, from their first mention in works by Turner and Fauconnier. Typical realizations of the construction family exhibit the following constructional schema:

- (13) *Rodney Mullen* is **the Einstein** *among skateboarders*  
X COP Y Z

Where Z can be realized as a possessive expression in the genitive (*of Zs*) or as a prepositional phrase introduced in most cases by the preposition *of*, though other prepositions are also possible (e.g. *among*). In addition to these three elements, Turner and Fauconnier point out that there is also an element W that is normally not mentioned explicitly but which relates to Y in the same way that Z relates to X:

- (14) *Jones is the Ronaldo of MMA, whereas Anderson is Zidane.*  
X (Jones) Z (MMA fighting)  
Y (Ronaldo) W (football)

Most of the time the element W can easily be inferred, even if it is not explicitly mentioned in the context. In the following example it is explicitly mentioned:

- (15) *Humboldt is the Shakespeare of travelers – as much superior in genius to other travelers as Shakespeare to other poets.*

This construction is ubiquitous and found in many languages. Here we show some examples from German (16-17), Spanish (18-19), and Polish (20-21):

- (16) Doch wie sieht es aus, das perfekte Modell, **der George Clooney oder die Angelina Jolie unter den Taschen**? Die Tasche, die einen Stauraum bietet wie ein Multi-Van, die robust ist wie Rocky...<sup>11</sup>

“But what does it look like, the perfect George Clooney or the Angelina Jolie among bags? The bag which offers as much space as a multi-van, which is as robust as Rocky...”

- (17) Die Show wird vom mehrfachen Pyrotechnik-Weltmeister Joachim Berner inszeniert

<sup>11</sup> Available at < <https://www.schuhstation.de/taschen/aktentasche/> Accessed on 21/10/2019.

– er ist *der Lionel Messi unter den Pyrotechnikern*.<sup>12</sup>

“The show is designed by multiple pyrotechnics world champion Joachim Berner – he is the Lionel Messi among pyrotechnicians”

(18) *Estos son los Jordan, Phelp y Messi de los robots*<sup>13</sup>

“These are the Jordans, Phelp and Messi among robots”

(19) *Roberto Innocenti, una de las leyendas vivas de la ilustración, de esos autores increíbles que revolucionaron el género en el último cuarto de siglo XX, es como el Meryl Streep de los libros ilustrados, versátil, impecable en su técnica y profundo en sus recursos y temas.*

“Roberto Innocenti, one of the living legends of book illustration, one of those incredible authors who revolutionized the genre in the last quarter of the 20th century, he is like the Meryl Streep of illustrated books, versatile, impeccable in his technique and profound in his resources and themes”

(20) *Helvetica jest tym w typografii czym Toblerone wśród czekolad*.<sup>14</sup>

“Helvetica is in typography what Toblerone is among chocolates”

(21) *Prawda jest taka, że Liebherr to jest mercedes wśród lodówek, ale nawet mercedesy nie są bezawaryjne*.<sup>15</sup>

“The truth is that Liebherr is a Mercedes among refrigerators, but even Mercedes is not faultless”

Note the translations of (15) into various languages:

German:

(22) *Humboldt ist der Shakespeare der Reisenden.*

Spanish:

(23) *Humboldt es el Shakespeare de los viajeros.*

Portuguese:

(24) *Humboldt é o Shakespeare dos viajantes.*

12 Available at <<https://www.stuttgarter-zeitung.de/inhalt.lichterfest-killesberg-lichterfest-der-lionel-messi-der-feuerwerkskunst.c719dcb0-3d35-4a59-bdfa-cc46e4a285bd.html>>. Accessed on 21/10/2019.

13 Available at <<https://www.mediatrends.es/a/102460/robots-deportistas-robocup-2016-cristiano-ronaldo-lionel-messi-michael-phelps/>>. Accessed on 29/9/2017.

14 Available at <<http://www.postermuseum.pl/wirtualne-muzeum/kolekcja-plakaty-obcego-/5,strona.html>>

15 Available at <<http://piekielni.pl/10075>>. Accessed on 21/10/2019.

Italian:

(25) *Humboldt è lo Shakespeare dei viaggiatori.*

Croatian:

(26) *Humboldt je Shakespeare među putnicima.*

Hungarian:

(27) *Humboldt az utazók Shakespeaere-je.*

There are several subtypes. In addition to what we have seen so far, there is also a biclausal variant:

(28) “*Soleimani is to terrorism sort of what Trump is to real estate, ...*”<sup>16</sup>

X                      Z                                      Y                      W

Turner and Fauconnier include here also some subtypes that are more or less perfectly literal:

(29) *Elizabeth II is the queen of England.*

While it is obvious that it structurally follows the pattern, it is also more than obvious that such examples are non-figurative and are therefore of no interest for us here. Actually, X is also of less interest for us, as the real locus of figurative action is Y prep Z.

### The XYZ constructions as blends

What all these constructions, however, share according to Turner and Fauconnier, even the most literal ones, is that their meaning arises through blending: “XYZ construction is specialized to evoke blending” (TURNER; FAUCONNIER, 1999. p. 413). This also applies to simple cases, as explained by Steen and Turner (2013):

This XYZ construction has routine everyday uses, as in “Paul is the father of Sally.” It has been analyzed by (Turner 1991, 1998, Fauconnier & Turner 2002). XYZ contains the “y-of” construction. A “Y of” expression prompts us to perform the following operations:

1. Call up an input space for the relational frame containing y (the element named by Y).
2. Construct a blended space.
3. Project from the element y selectively to create an element y’ in the blend.

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16 This example is from Brdar (2017).

4. Provide for a  $w$  in the input space that will bear an appropriate relationship to  $y$ .
5. Project from that element  $w$  selectively to create an element  $w'$  in the blend.
6. Project the  $y$ - $w$  relationship selectively onto  $y'$ - $w'$  in the blended space.
7. Provide open-ended connectors from  $y'$  and  $w'$  in the blend. We expect these connectors to make connections at some point.
8. Expect the open-ended connector from  $w'$  in the blend to connect to something picked out by the noun phrase that will follow 'of.'

Veale (2014, p. 16) also believes that these are “double-edged comparisons that can cut both ways, since information inevitably flows in both directions, from  $Y$  to  $X$  (the real message) *and* from  $X$  to  $Y$  (the humorous bonus), to meet in the middle to construct a blended mental image.” This interpretation is in our opinion more appropriate in the case of  $XYZ$  constructions in which both  $X$  and  $Y$  denote persons, as in (6), or (just) perhaps if both  $X$  and  $Y$  denote inanimates. But even then, as we will show, this is not binding.

Veale may be right in the first part of his comment when he talks about “double-edged comparisons that can cut both ways” (2014, p. 16). However, it is not necessarily the case that “information *inevitably* flows in both directions” (ibidem). But even when it does, it does not automatically mean that we are dealing with a case of information meeting “in the middle to construct a blended mental image” (ibidem). Constructions like (6-15) do not involve genuine blending as they are better explained as metaphors based on metonymic paragon models (LAKOFF, 1987, pp. 87-88) or on the member of the category for property metonymy where well-known individuals are metonymically recategorized as a class on the basis of their salient property (KÖVECSES; RADDEN, 1998, p. 54).

It is clear that in (24),

(30) *Is sad singleton Vladimir Putin the Jennifer Aniston of European politics?*<sup>17</sup>

The target domain, i.e. Vladimir Putin, gets something from the source domain (Jennifer Aniston). However, on closer inspection, we realize that the source domain does not get any elements of the target domain, i.e. Jennifer Aniston inherits no attributes of Vladimir Putin. In other words, there is no two-way traffic in the sense predicted by the blending theory (as also adopted by Veale): what sentence (30) is about is not a fictive creature resembling both Putin and Aniston at the same time. There is, however, another outstanding property of such examples that goes uncommented by the proponents of the blending approach. This property can be, as a rule, noticed in most cases in somewhat broader context.

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<sup>17</sup> Available at <<http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/comment/ghosts-of-christmas-past-what-effect-could-posting-pictures-of-nativity-plays-have-on-the-next-9937919.html>>. Accessed on 1/12/2017.

The crucial point is that such constructions are accompanied by some sort of explications that look like ordinary metaphorical mappings that happen to be spelled out. The phenomenon of explication is not unique to our XYZ constructions. It can be found whenever some relatively or absolutely novel elements are introduced. This is the case, for example, when abbreviations are introduced.

(31) *Do you have to lift your head to see the computer screen clearly? Do you suffer from a strained neck or shoulder muscles? These are among the most common complaints in today's work place. You are suffering from CVS – Computer Vision Syndrome.*

(32) *The soldiers call them **VBIEDs**, pronounced VeeBids, for **vehicle borne improvised explosive device**.*<sup>18</sup>

This of course does not apply when abbreviations are used to actually hide meanings in texting:

(33) ***MOM** (mother over shoulder), **POS** (parent over shoulder), **PAL** (parents are listening), **PIR** (parent in room), **LMIRL** (let's meet in real life), **IDKWTD** (I don't know what to do), **TWD** (texting while driving), **CTN** (cannot talk now)*

Explications in context are also characteristic of (novel) blends:

(34) *So why don't I like **edutainment**? The problem is with the way that creators of today's edutainment products tend to think about learning and education. Too often, they view education as a bitter medicine that needs the sugar-coating of entertainment to become palatable ...*<sup>19</sup>

(35) *This season, add versatility to your look with a sweater that's worn as outerwear. Our Seymours River **Swacket** combines the soft comfort of merino wool sweaters with the biker jacket silhouette...*<sup>20</sup>

Finally, we find the same with similes. As we can see from the following examples with Bruce Willis, in some cases the explications have to do with his role in a particular film, while in some other cases they characterize him in more general terms:

(36) *OpenStack is like **Bruce Willis from the sixth sense**... It just doesn't realize that it's been dead the whole time.*<sup>21</sup>

(37) *But Clark strategist Chris Lehane rightly says that Lieberman is like "**Bruce Willis in The Sixth Sense: He's dead and doesn't know it yet.**"*<sup>22</sup>

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18 Available at <[https://www.waywordradio.org/vbied\\_1/](https://www.waywordradio.org/vbied_1/)>. Accessed on 1/12/2017.

19 Available at <<https://web.media.mit.edu/~mres/papers/edutainment.pdf>>. Accessed on 1/12/2017.

20 Available at <<https://www.timberland.com/shop/womens-seymours-river-merino-wool-swacket-7664j019>>. Accessed on 1/12/2017.

21 Available at <<https://twitter.com/cxi/status/999668627891601408>>. Accessed on 29/11/2019.

22 Available at <<https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2004/01/wesley-clark-invades-new-hampshire.html>>. Accessed on 4/7/2020.



(38) *The trick is versatility. While his counterpart in this debate specializes on the offensive end, Smart can draw whistles on both sides of the ball, selling the slightest contact to warrant a charge or getting cheap free throws. Smart is like **Bruce Willis**--his acting talent is undeniable, but he just never gets the recognition he deserves.<sup>23</sup>*

(39) *That was exactly what I wanted. You got wounded, you loose skills, you have to try harder. 'It is **like Bruce Willis**, right? Wounded, bleeding but still fighting back!'<sup>24</sup>*

(40) *We are talking about Ford. Yes, Ford. If I could compare Ford to a Hollywood actor; I would say it is **like Bruce Willis** in one of the Die Hard flicks. Although he is hungover and broken, John McClane gets stitched up, pissed off and takes care of business.<sup>25</sup>*

(41) *Eeezy – didn't we have this exact point made last year by you? I thought I showed you that PAA had made 2-3x operating profits? TBH I can't be bothered to go through all results again to check but maybe the post can be found. PAA is **like Bruce Willis**, refusing to die and re-living the same scenario year after year.<sup>26</sup>*

When talking about mappings Kövecses (2002: 12) says that “to know a conceptual metaphor is to know the set of mappings that applies to a given source-target pairing.” It is these mappings that provide much of the meaning of the metaphorical linguistic expressions (or linguistic metaphors) that make a particular conceptual metaphor manifest. Not all mappings are equally important. Kövecses (2000: 83) talks about central as those that relate to the main meaning focus: “Let us call mappings like these *central mappings*. Mappings are central if they map what we have called the main meaning focus of the source (i.e. central knowledge) onto the target.” The explications that we have documented above do not exactly qualify as central or as elements of central knowledge, at least not in all cases.

### Why is X the Y of Z? Spelling out the mappings

The figurative bit in our example (30), repeated and expanded here as (42), actually stretches over a larger portion of the text:

(42) *Is sad singleton Vladimir Putin the Jennifer Aniston of European politics? Since splitting with his wife, Lyudmila (VladMila called it a day in June 2013), the **unlucky-in-love** leader has **healed his heart by focusing on his passions** – mainly shirtless horseriding, waging war in Ukraine and predicting the recovery of the rouble. At his annual press conference on*

23 Available at < [https://www.silive.com/sports/2019/01/who\\_would\\_win\\_best\\_actor\\_in\\_th.html?OutputType=amp](https://www.silive.com/sports/2019/01/who_would_win_best_actor_in_th.html?OutputType=amp)> Accessed on 30/1/2019.

24 Available at < <https://boardgamesthattellstories.wordpress.com/2013/01/29/are-you-designing-game-you-better-have-vlaada-chvatil-in-your-testing-group/>>. Accessed on 30/11/2019.

25 Available at < <http://www.autospies.com/news/REVIEW-Does-Ford-s-Fiesta-Have-What-It-Takes-To-Be-A-Game-Changer-53790/>>. Accessed on 4/7/2020.

26 Available at < <https://uk.advfn.com/stock-market/london/parallel-media-PAA/share-chat?from=375&page=379>>. Accessed on 4/7/2020.

*Thursday, however, Vlad finally opened up about his heartache. “Everything is fine – do not worry,” he reassured the concerned journalist.*

This paragraph apparently puns on the many relations of Jennifer Aniston after her breakup with Brad Pitt as well as on the fact that she practices yoga and budokan karate. This text does not stop here, but goes on with making fun of politicians because the next paragraph takes up Tony Blair:

(43) *Putin is not the only statesman to have been taken off guard by a sudden interest in his love life. The irrelevant yet ubiquitous former PM Tony Blair – **the Kerry Katona of European politics?** – probably hoped the interview in *The Economist* would focus on his vision for peace in the Middle East and various charitable endeavours. Alas, all anyone really wants to know is this: was he schtupping Mrs Murdoch or what?*

An important package of information on Kerry Katona is necessary in order to understand this. Kerry Jayne Elizabeth Kay (*née* Katona, formerly McFadden and Croft; born 6 September 1980) is an English singer and media personality best known for her television work, predominantly in light entertainment and reality shows. In 1999, 18-year-old Katona rose to fame as a member of *Atomic Kitten*, an all-female pop trio. After marrying Brian McFadden and taking his surname, Katona moved into television work, appearing on and presenting a mix of light-entertainment programmes such as *Britain’s Sexiest...*, *Loose Women*, and *elimiDATE*. She appeared on Lily Savage’s *Blankety Blank* in 2001. In February 2004, she won the third series of the British reality TV show *I’m a Celebrity... Get Me Out of Here!* That July, she and McFadden appeared as judges on the RTÉ talent show *You’re a Star*, which was used to select the Republic of Ireland’s Eurovision Song Contest entry. Between 2007 and 2009, Katona was the subject of three MTV reality shows: *Kerry Katona: Crazy in Love*, *Kerry Katona: Whole Again*, and *Kerry Katona: What’s the Problem?* In late 2009, Katona attempted to become a contestant on *Celebrity Big Brother 2010*, but was rejected by the show’s executives after she failed the required psychological tests. Katona’s latest reality show *Kerry Coming Clean* aired on 24 June 2010. Katona also featured in two series of *Kerry Katona: The Next Chapter*. Katona was a contestant on *Dancing on Ice Series 6* with English ice skater Daniel Whiston. Katona was the first housemate to enter the Big Brother House for the 2011 series of *Celebrity Big Brother* alongside Amy Childs and Tara Reid and others. Tony Blair gets here two properties from Kerry Katona: being irrelevant and ubiquitous, but Kerry Katona does not get anything Blair-like.

These explications that we have observed can be sparse, or, on the contrary, very rich, and sometimes even somewhat enigmatic. As for their position, we see that they can come in front of the XYZ construction, or follow it:

(44) *People shove peanut butter, nastily, into too many things. It’s an unhealthy obsession.*

*Peanut Butter is the Miley Cyrus of spreadable edibles.*<sup>27</sup>

Consider now some examples with Lady Gaga as the source domain, with various kinds of explications:

(45) *Red Velvet is the Lady Gaga of layer cakes. Dramatic, over-the-top, in-your-face and artificially colored. You either love it or hate it.*<sup>28</sup>

(46) *The Ulster Fry is the Lady Gaga of breakfasts - a terrible thing to behold. It's sort of wrong yet at the same time it gets your attention.*<sup>29</sup>

(47) *Cornell is the Lady Gaga of the law-school world. Both are white hot, but the explanations behind each's popularity don't fully add up.*<sup>30</sup>

(48) *Not capable of accepting the "this is the way we've always done it" attitude, **Claudia is the Lady-gaga of the New Zealand Legal Industry, challenging the norm and bringing fresh ideas to add efficiency and flair to a traditional profession.***<sup>31</sup>

What all these examples reveal is that figurative X is Y of Z constructions are most of the time used in authentic discourse in such a way that the speaker provides explications justifying the pairing of X and Y, thus ensuring the basis for achieving intersubjectivity:

(49) *Coriander is the Gwyneth Paltrow of the herb world – some people love it, some people don't!*<sup>32</sup>

(50) *Beaches are the Valium of the travel world. They soothe, they relax, they make you realize that "real life" occasionally needs escaping.*<sup>33</sup>

We claim that Veale was not entirely wrong. It is actually these explications that "cut both ways," i.e. apply to both X and Y. They are not typical mappings in formal terms. Normal metaphorical mappings usually do not appear in utterances, but they are more likely to appear in the case of deliberate use of innovative, creative expressions. What they do is not qualify X in terms of properties of Y, at least not always, but rather emphasize (sometimes even hyperbolically) the qualities of Y, which may be well-known and/or obvious, but they simultaneously help strengthen or further build the paragon model of Y by adding fresh pieces of information. This means that we witness a dynamic (re)construal of meaning whereby a

27 Available at <<https://comicvine.gamespot.com/forums/battles-7/peanut-butter-vs-jelly-1530845/?page=2>>. Accessed on 22/1/2014

28 Available at <[https://www.heraldextra.com/lifestyles/food-and-cooking/recipes/red-velvet-the-lady-gaga-of-cakes-wears-well-during-the-holidays/article\\_ebcf9e8e-40b6-11e2-9d7b-0019bb2963f4.html](https://www.heraldextra.com/lifestyles/food-and-cooking/recipes/red-velvet-the-lady-gaga-of-cakes-wears-well-during-the-holidays/article_ebcf9e8e-40b6-11e2-9d7b-0019bb2963f4.html)>. Accessed on 15/12/2011.

29 Available at <<https://fakeplasticsouks.blogspot.com/2017/05/>>. Accessed on 1/7/2017.

30 Available at <<https://www.wsj.com/articles/BL-LB-24576>>. Accessed on 3/2/2010.

31 Available at <<https://www.lawfest.nz/personnel/claudia-king/>>. Accessed on 5/7/2020.

32 Available at <<https://www.movenourishbelieve.com/nourish/pick-of-the-week-a-guide-to-everyday-garden-herbs/>>. Accessed on 14/5/2013.

33 Available at <<https://www.pinterest.com/pin/624663410799069160/>>. Accessed on 29/9/2020.

paragon model is strengthened or modified, or is just being created from scratch. At the same time, these explications form a basis that provides clues as to how the expressions is to be interpreted, thus helping intersubjectivity.

### **The role of metonymic paragon models in figurative X is Y of Z constructions**

As pointed out by Veale (2014), some XYZ constructions are congruous, while some are incongruous. In the former, X and Y belong to domains that are in an analogous relation, as in (10), where both X and Y refer to human beings (Varoufakis – Bruce Willis). This is also true of (51) and (52) because both X and Y are objects:

(51) *Milka is the Mercedes of chocolates*<sup>34</sup>

(52) *Valrhona, keenly sought by patissiers for its purity, is known as ‘the Ferrari of chocolates’ and available up to 85pc cocoa butter.*<sup>35</sup>

As can be seen from (51-52), Y is in some cases not accompanied by any explications, and actually appears to need no such explications in order to work. These seem to be genuine examples of the so-called metonymic paragon models. According to Lakoff (1987: 87), a paragon is an individual member or a set of individual members of a category “who represent either an ideal or its opposite.” Needless to say, paragons can be based not only on humans, but also on organizations and inanimate objects.

A paragon model is essentially metonymic (just like stereotypes, etc.) as an ideal member of a category stands for the whole category. Barcelona (2003, 2004: 364) improves on Lakoff’s analysis as he demonstrates that the model is based on two metonymies, first the name of the bearer of a given outstanding property comes to stand for the property in question, which is followed by the ideal member of a category for the whole category. Thus, the paragon *Shakespeare* that we have seen before stands for the class of writers that have an immense literary talent. As a result, *Shakespeare* becomes a class name and is in part coded as a common noun as far as its grammatical behaviour is concerned.

As pointed out in Brdar and Brdar-Szabó (2007), the axiological notions ‘best of’ and ‘worst of’ as the most problematical in the paragon model arise in another metonymic tier due to the imposition of a scalar model (Israel 1997, 1998) on these contrastive properties. The scalar model allows the metonymic mappings of the type WHOLE SCALE FOR UPPER/LOWER END OF SCALE (cf. RADDEN; KÖVECSSES, 1999, p. 32), whereby the property is interpreted as being exhibited to the maximum, either in the positive or negative sense. The scalar model and this type of metonymy have been shown to motivate a number of hyperbolic expressions

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34 This example is from Brdar (2017).

35 Available at < <https://www.independent.ie/life/food-drink/heres-to-an-easter-full-of-chocolate-26644577.html>>. Accessed on 29/3/2010.

in Brdar-Szabó and Brdar (2010), but also lexical reduplications (BRDAR; BRDAR-SZABÓ, 2011) as well as some intensifying adjective compounds (BRDAR; BRDAR-SZABÓ, 2013).

The constructions in most of our examples, however, seem to be creative, novel expressions. It could be hardly claimed that Ys in these examples have already attained the status of anything close to paragons in the above sense – there is simply no unique property with which they could be identified. Rather, speakers seem to engage in creating an ad hoc quasi-paragon model, the reasons for which (mostly ephemeral) are typically explicitly stated in the context. In a manner of speaking, these are attempts at creating some cultural models that are open and dynamically structured in the sense they do not preclude revisions and additions. Consider how Jennifer Aniston is characterized in a blog, effectively creating a kind of a model:

(53) *If I were in a stressful laboratory situation — part of some study with a circular web of EEGs attached to my head — and scientists made me look at photos of Jennifer Aniston, I feel my heart rate would slow to a relaxed pace. The electrical activity along my scalp would tranquilize with the comfort of Jennifer Aniston's taut smile and swimming pool colored eyes. We've known Jennifer Aniston's face for a long time now; can conjure it as quickly as a childhood phone number, as our own belly-buttons.*

*Jennifer Aniston is a brand sold to us in a way that is vague enough for mass-consumption. She is a perpetual Woman in Her Thirties. She is the idea of doing yoga in your living room (sans DVD). She is that thing of drinking six to eight glasses of water a day. Or she is a symbol of a woman broken-hearted; "Jen: I can't stop loving Brad." Jennifer Aniston is flattened so that we can project people we know or believe that we are onto her; because as humans we can never see the thing we are looking at but only how it reflects ourselves back.*<sup>36</sup>

The following examples with Gwyneth Paltrow and Monica Lewinsky reflect in their mapping-like comments some of the popular beliefs about them:

(54) *But **carrots**? They're just out there, shrieking, "Hi, we're some carrots! Love us for it!" They never have to prove themselves. They are **the Gwyneth Paltrow of the food world.** They'd make the most stylish vegetable list, even wearing a pink ballgown three sizes too big.*<sup>37</sup>

(55) ***The mushroom-stuffed ravioli was the Gwyneth Paltrow of pastas: smooth, blond and lightweight, paired with white asparagus spears, poached quail eggs...***<sup>38</sup>

(56) *Small Car. **BMW Mini Cooper. The Gwyneth Paltrow of small cars: racy, stylish, and oh, so fashionable.***<sup>39</sup>

36 Available at <<https://thoughtcatalog.com/rachel-r-white/2013/04/arent-we-all-jennifer-aniston/>>. Accessed on 16/11/2019.

37 Available at <<https://hotelsongs.tumblr.com/post/16138163914/i-think-a-man-ought-if-he-can-help-it-to-behttps://thoughtcatalog.com/rachel-r-white/2013/04/arent-we-all-jennifer-aniston/>>. Accessed on 15/ 11/ 2019.

38 This example is from Brdar (2017).

39 This example is from Brdar and Brdar-Szabó (2007: 137).

(57) *Indeed, this is **the Monica Lewinsky of burgers**: Oversized, juicy, a little messy, a burger that you know you should resist, but you simply can't.*<sup>40</sup>

(58) *While John Sprung, television executive at Paramount studios said: “This has turned out to be **the Monica Lewinsky of digital television**. Everybody knows the truth; nobody cares enough to do anything about it.”*<sup>41</sup>

Metaphorically speaking, they are as open as Wikipedia, anybody can contribute her or his bit, which is always open to revision by other participants in the project. While paragons may be said to belong to offline, archived collective memory, these quasi-paragons are part of online collective memory that must be kept alive unless it perishes or gets transformed into something more permanent.

### Concluding remarks

It has been suggested that figurative XYZ constructions are “double-edged comparisons that can cut both ways, since information inevitably flows in both directions, from Y to X (the real message) *and* from X to Y (the humorous bonus), to meet in the middle to construct a blended mental image.” Although these constructions seem at first sight to be very good candidates for an analysis based on conceptual integration we have provided evidence that they do not involve genuine blending and that they are better explained as metaphors based on metonymic paragon models, and actually progressing towards a paragon status.

Authentic discourse data indicates that speakers very often provide explications guiding the listener towards the intended interpretation. What these explications do is not qualify X in terms of properties of Y, at least not always, but rather emphasize (sometimes even hyperbolically) the qualities of Y, which may be well-known and/or obvious, but they simultaneously help strengthen or further build the paragon model of Y by adding fresh pieces of information. This means that we witness a dynamic (re)construal of meaning whereby a paragon model is strengthened or modified, or is just being created from scratch. Speakers engage in creating ad hoc quasi-paragon models, the reasons for which (mostly ephemeral) are typically explicitly stated in the context. In a manner of speaking, these are attempts at creating some cultural models open to revisions and additions. At the same time, these explications form a basis that provides clues as to how the expressions is to be interpreted, thus helping intersubjectivity.

The humorous effect is in part due to the unexpected pairing of two entities, but not to any sort of clash of their properties in the blended space, which is a common place in analyses carried out along the lines of the blending theory. This humorous effect stems from the fact that the expectation that paragons should evoke some property of stellar importance (something

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40 Available at < <https://www.newsweek.com/american-beat-bills-burgers-127013>>. Accessed on 8/7/2006.

41 Available at < [https://www.tech-notes.tv/Archive/tech\\_notes\\_053.htm](https://www.tech-notes.tv/Archive/tech_notes_053.htm)>. Accessed on 8/7/2006.

memorable, essential which marks the referent as either best or worst in its category) is actually not fulfilled, as the explications usually point out something trivial, ephemeral, often negative.

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