

EMBODIED FIGURES OF SPEECH:  
PROBLEM-SOLVING IN ALICE'S DREAM OF WONDERLAND

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Conventional figures of speech such as *grin like a Cheshire cat* or *mad as a March hare*, along with other semantically opaque expressions like *mock turtle soup*, motivate characters and episodes in Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. This paper examines the way in which the challenges posed to the child's understanding by such expressions are presented in the framework of a dream mentation. Elements of these syntactically frozen linguistic strings are freed from their typical collocational position, which allows for their consideration in a dynamic problem-solving activity. It is found that the child is engaged in working out three aspects of conventional metaphors and similes: their discourse function, the evaluative stance they convey, and the epistemic correspondences between the source (animals) and the target (people). By creating a simulation of a dream, Carroll gives a subversive view of the relationship between language and representation in highlighting the mismatch between the child's solutions to linguistic puzzles and their everyday use in communication.

KEY WORDS: Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, problem-solving, metaphor, simile, idiom, representation.

The variety of critical approaches adopted to Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (AAW) since its publication in 1865 reflect the changing critical paradigms of different generations of critics and evince the extraordinary wealth of this work, along with its continuing call to reflection and analysis (Phillips 1971). It is hardly surprising, then, that the growth of modern linguistics should have sparked a number of critical studies that focus on the centrality of language in Lewis Carroll's work, finding that the author raised questions that would be of concern to linguists over a century later (Sutherland 1970; R. T. Lakoff 1993; Hidalgo Downing 1998). Those parts of the text that abound in phenomena like polysemy or homophony, or which bear on reference, as well as more social aspects of conversational interaction (terms of address or turn-taking, for example), not only provide some of its most humorous passages, but also highlight the metalinguistic preoccupations of the author through his creation, the child-dreamer Alice. Indeed, the dream as a whole may be read as a dynamic problem-solving activity, in which learning—understood as the individual's process of responding to incoming information and relating it to knowledge already held— is taking place. After all, the problematic role of language in mediating experience and knowledge is at the heart of many of the reversals and transformations of Alice's dream world. And, through the child's solutions to

linguistic puzzles, Lewis Carroll shows a subversive view of language and representation—a view particularly salient in the dynamic consideration of metaphor and conventional figuration in general.

As the narrative insistently reminds us, a fundamental characteristic of natural languages is the ability of a limited number of linguistic signs to refer to very different areas of human experience. *King* and *queen*, for example, may denote monarchs or face cards, just as *door* or *key* may refer to concrete and abstract concepts. The conceptual divergence associated with linguistic forms (especially when motivated by metaphor) may be endemic in natural languages and prove little obstacle to ordinary language processing, but this referential flexibility is a problem for children—and, indeed, for linguistic theory. For children, the main problem seems to reside in the fact that their knowledge of a metaphor vehicle (or source domain) may differ in significant ways from that which informs a figurative extension of that term (Vosniadou 1987), leading them to misinterpret even conventional extensions. For linguists, apart from the notorious difficulty of deciding on what constitutes the literal or core meaning of a word, there exist, among others, the problems of determining how the different senses of polysemous items relate to each other, and what the cognitive status of such sense relations might be in terms of an individual's mental grammar (Taylor 2003). Carroll's preoccupation with these problems is not simply a marginal concern in *AAW*. Rather, as this paper attempts to show, it motivates much of the action and events of the narrative.

To indicate the importance of this concern, the description that follows focuses on what I will term, for the sake of convenience, "figures of speech." This phrase is used to denote two different but complementary phenomena. On the one hand, it is used to refer to linguistic manifestations—tropes such as metaphor, metonymy or simile, among others. Formulae such as *A is B*, *A is in B*, or *A is like B* capture certain differences between these figures, although the relationship between such formulae and the way the tropes are actually instantiated in language may be a tenuous one (Brooke-Rose 1958; Goatly 1997). Furthermore, the distinction between metaphor, metonymy and simile is often less than clear cut (Goossens 1990; Barcelona 2000). Obviously, these tropes have always interested rhetoricians and literary critics, but their ubiquity in everyday discourse (Lakoff and Johnson 1980) has also drawn the attention of an increasing number of linguists, particularly those interested in the relationship between such language uses and what they might reveal about human thought and understanding. In this sense, the figures of speech alluded to in these pages are prosaic, everyday expressions. However, it should be noted at the outset that few are actually instantiated in the text, but must be inferred from the strategies employed by the child in interpreting them.

This leads to the second unconventional use of "figure of speech" (playing on the different senses of "figure") which identifies a strategy of processing consisting in the creation of a character from a nominal group (particularly an animal name) to illustrate the meaning of the verbal string in which it appears. In this case, "figure of speech" would refer to a psychological process, a way of reacting to verbal input, arising from an incongruity perceived by the child between two areas of experience or knowledge and resolving the perceptual difficulty so that some meaning is transferred across the domains (Cameron 1999). This "metaphoric processing," which Gibbs (1999) contrasts with the processing of metaphoric language, allows us to distinguish between an expression regarded as having metaphoric potential (what an analyst might identify as a linguistic

metaphor) and another which, in a particular context, might lend itself to a metaphorical interpretation. Cameron's example of a "hot spell" (1999: 109) nicely illustrates this distinction. Obviously, this would not normally be regarded as a metaphor, but the child who relates *spell* with *witches* has processed the combination metaphorically. Likewise, not all linguistic metaphors (particularly conventional or dead ones) will necessarily be processed metaphorically by ordinary language users. As will be seen, the fossilised strings from which Alice derives her characters may not be "figures of speech" for the theorist, but for her they are all semantically opaque utterances whose incongruities she attempts to resolve in very similar ways.

The similarity in these processing strategies allows us to see how Carroll's simulation of a child's dream mentation manages to effectively render one particularly salient characteristic of human dreaming—its single-mindedness—and to relate this to his "life-long interest in the relationship between dreaming and consciousness" (Peterson 1979: 28). For, as Rechtschaffen points out, in dreams we may discern a "strong tendency for a single train of related thoughts and images to persist over extended periods without disruption or competition from other simultaneous thoughts and images" (1978: 907). Whereas in dreams the related thoughts and images might be experienced as troublesome repetitions, the fictional simulation of this single-mindedness may be discerned as the reformulation of the same thought—a problem—in various forms. That is, for all the bizarreness of its events and characters, *AAW* does not read as a series of discontinuous episodes loosely tacked together by the journey through Wonderland. Rather, Alice's dream mentation pivots on the recall of the stimuli of her waking hours—that of the classroom and elsewhere. In the course of the narrative, we read of her (mis)recollection of factual knowledge of Mathematics, History or Geography. Language, both the subject and medium of classroom instruction, is also part of the daytime input recalled. However, Alice's preoccupation with the cognitive stimulation of her waking hours is replayed in her dream in ways that render the challenge to her understanding, but not the ways such problems might be posed, solved or replayed in a real dream. For cognitive scientists such as Squire (1987) or Tulving and Schacter (1990), factual knowledge of this kind would be stored in semantic memory, while Alice's dream recapitulates this in episodic form. That is, in his fictional creation of a dream sequence, Carroll converts one type of information storage into another, creating a bizarre narrative that does not depict episodes experienced in real time (as dreaming of events of the daytime might be replayed in sleep), but renders facts as though they were events. This allows the author to engage Alice in a dynamic problem-solving activity in which causal chains, for example, are rendered as temporal sequences. And although the conflation of episodic and other kinds of information is not unusual in children, it is this transformation that endows the narrative with a consistent unreasonableness responsible for much of the nonsense—and genius—of the work.

### **Language and the animals of Alice's dream mentation**

Alice's interlocutors in her musings on language are, for the most part, animals. This is hardly surprising, since children's dreams tend to figure a relative abundance of animals, a tendency which decreases with age (Foulkes 1982). The twist, in this fictional world, is that Alice's dream animals render only a few of which she might have first-hand

knowledge. For example, we know that Alice has a cat called Dinah, yet Dinah does not appear in the narrative. Instead, we find a number of animals—a dodo, a Cheshire cat, a gryphon or a mock turtle- which belong to the realm of mediated experience. Evidently, Alice knows of them through adult language use, or descriptions and commentary from informed interlocutors.

In Alice's memory, conflated with other perceptual input, are a number of idiomatic expressions, such as *grin like a Cheshire cat* or *mad as a March hare*, which are projected in her dream and appear alongside other characters, animal and human. As is well known, such expressions are linguistic instantiations of a more general metaphoric schema in which man is "seen as" an animal. Figurative expressions drawing on the source domain of animals abound in English, as in other languages. These, like other cross-domain mappings discussed in the literature on conceptual metaphors, are conventional and tend to be idiomatic in the discourse communities that use them. Needless to say, *grin like a Cheshire cat* or *be as mad as a March hare* are, strictly speaking, similes, not metaphors, in the real world of language. They are examples of idiomatic frames (either *as* + adjective + *as* + nominal group or verb + *like* + nominal group) where the slots for adjective, verb, or nominal groups are filled by lexical items which become fossilized through usage. Although some variation is possible in the nominal group slot (as in the case of *mad as ...* which can be filled by *a March hare* or *a hatter*), the options open to speakers will be restricted to those comparisons which are felt to be commonsense in their community. Madness, in Spanish, for example, is conventionally associated with goats or heifers (*estar [loco] como una cabra/chota*) or a coffee-maker (*estar como una cafetera*), but these comparisons are not conventional in other languages and would therefore present a challenge to "commonsense" thinking in other cultures. Thus, although Goatly (1997: 185) might see similes as adding extra precision or specificity to a verb such as *grin* or an adjective such as *mad*, such precision may not be obvious to those not familiar with the conventional thinking behind these comparisons.

This is precisely Alice's problem with such conventional similes. For her these comparisons are new and unusual, and she searches to find their sense. Just as she operates on other input data, here she unpacks the linguistic components of these phrases, isolating the nominal groups from their typical collocational position. In this way, a free NG element is produced, which can then fill various grammatical slots (as S, Cs, Od, Oi etc.). In other words, she creates "vehicle" terms. So, while some would argue that metaphors are simply reduced similarity statements, Alice reverses the process and isolates NG March Hare or Cheshire Cat, allowing them more complex syntactic and textual roles. And this appears to be very similar to the process whereby metaphoric vehicles realised by nouns change class as they grow conventional, becoming adjectival (for example, *catty* or *waspish*) or verbal (*dog*, *rat*, or *ferret* being only a few of the animal names which have undergone this shift [Deignan 1999: 185–89]). This reassignment of grammatical category is a necessary first step in another kind of conflation: namely, Alice's fundamental transformation of the information available in constructing her own version of it. So, the child frees a fixed element in a verbal string and allows it movement: she "embodies" it, generating an episodic, narrative and active construct. Different systems of knowledge and memory, the perceptual and the episodic, are thus conflated, just as metaphorical animals and real world animals also become one and the same thing in her dream mentation.

**Problem 1: Metaphorical idioms in discourse**

Recent studies on metaphorical idioms have drawn attention to certain recurring distributional patterns in discourse. For example, conventional figurative expressions are very often used in conversation to close a topic or negotiate a transition to another (Drew and Holt 1998). Alice seems to have adverted this particular discourse function of idioms, as one of the most delightful reversals in the work shows. In chapter 3, the mouse has told his long *tale/tail* when the animals are gathered beside Alice's pool of tears. The reception to his story being unsympathetic or nonsensical, the Mouse leaves the gathering in a huff. An exchange between a young crab and its mother follows: "Ah, my dear! Let this be a lesson to you never to lose *your* temper!" "Hold your tongue, Ma!" said the young Crab, a little snappishly. "You're enough to try the patience of an oyster!" (Carroll 1994: 38). At least two remarks can be made about this exchange. First, its anomaly arises from the role reversal implied in topic control. The status afforded to children is usually not such that topic-closure will be controlled by them—and certainly not in these terms and in Victorian times! More importantly, the young Crab uses a figure of speech to shut his mother up—or, more politely, to close the topic, as speakers do in conversation. But unlike in real conversation, the expression chosen is not a conventional usage. In the context of Alice's dream, however, the most important point is the child's awareness of a discourse function of figuration. As we see, the conventional phrases embodied in Alice's dream are, from the child's perspective, similarly novel or unconventional. In turn, this feature, being salient for the child, may help to explain her petulance and even bad temper in her relations with the embodied figures of speech in her dream. If her exposure to such language has been in the context of topic closure, then we may find it possible to understand why it figures so centrally in her dream mentation. Closing a conversational topic using what is, for the child, a semantically opaque expression may well arouse frustration—and explain her preoccupation with these meaningless utterances.

**Problem 2: Metaphorical idioms and evaluation**

These expressions as used by adults are difficult for Alice to make sense of, but she has evidently focused on one important trait of such usage: their affect. One of the reasons why literal paraphrases of metaphorical idioms rarely provide satisfactory translations of their meaning is that idioms, unlike their literal counterparts, imply an evaluative stance towards the situation or behaviour being described (Nunberg, Sag and Wasow 1994). In this sense, the equation of man and animal in language is accompanied by negative connotations. Lakoff and Turner (1989: 170–80) argue that animals figure lower on the hierarchy in our folk conception of the Great Chain of Being, and therefore seeing man as an animal attributes the former with the instinctual or bestial qualities of the latter. Alice has evidently gathered the negative import of the figurative use of animal names she has heard—grinning like a Cheshire cat is not a pleasant or valued type of smiling, nor is the madness of the March hare viewed sympathetically. In fact, in her understanding of the negative affect conveyed by these standard comparisons, she appears to attribute more negative qualities to these animal expressions than is probably intended. This can be perceived in her somewhat fearful attitude on approaching the animals her sleeping mind

has created from figures of speech. Her remarks on the madness of the March Hare (“perhaps as this is May it won’t be raving mad—or at least not so mad as it was in March” [Carroll 1994: 78]) point to a fear of the degree of insanity to be displayed, far more than that probably understood by the adult speaker from whom Alice will have heard the expression. Likewise, when she meets the Cheshire Cat, Alice focuses on the threatening nature of the Cat’s appearance (“it had *very* long claws and a great many teeth, so she felt it ought to be treated with respect” [Carroll 1994: 75]). This is a necessary condition of her strategy in solving the problem of why an animal of this kind should be construed unfavourably, given her previous experience of cats. In this regard, the nightmare qualities of the dream are never far from Alice’s perception, and yet there is a conspicuous absence of animal figures that could pose a real threat to the child—she does not dream of lions or tigers or any other wild beasts which might eat a little girl up. One of the reasons for her changes in size may be the need to rehearse as undesirable what might not otherwise be attributable to harmless animals. Meeting a puppy, for example, should be a pleasurable experience, but for Alice the encounter is dangerous, because at this stage of the dream (chapter 4) she has shrunk. Alice may be relating the negative import of puppy-like behaviour or boisterousness to language uses, and this will explain the coherence of her evocation of a harmless pet with other embodied figures of speech in the work.

Regarding this evaluative stance, it is pertinent to recall Leach’s discussion of animal terms and verbal abuse, which he relates to taboo, and hence with the anxiety and fear that such usage arouses in members of a particular cultural group (1964). He points out that those animals that do not fit easily into categories such as livestock, wild or game are typical candidates for verbal abuse, and the use of their names for a person constitutes a serious insult when employed to address or refer to another person. In this sense, one of the most taboo animals in British English is the pig (a conspicuous example of uneasy category membership because it shares our food but ends up on the table itself). The magical nature of taboo might well be perceived in the metamorphosis of the baby in chapter 6: the Duchess calls the baby “Pig!” and it does indeed turn into one!

### **Problem 3: The search for similarity**

Alice’s imagination hence reveals a grasp of what might be termed the pragmatics of the figurative use of animal terms—she has worked out a discourse role and an intended evaluative stance in their use. However, the central problem to be solved is the *sense* of these propositions: she has to work out why these expressions are apt or felicitous comparisons. What is a Cheshire Cat and why is it associated with grinning? Is smiling something that cats can do? Why are hares or hatters mad? What on earth is a Mock Turtle? Her informants, being products of her own mind, can only give her the kinds of answers she would provide herself. Consequently, a Mock Turtle is, according to the Duchess “the thing Mock Turtle soup is made from” (Carroll 1994: 110), to which Alice responds with the central question: “I never saw one, or heard of one.” Meeting the Mock Turtle, imagining what this “animal” is like, is a necessary condition for working out the meaning of the name for a particular kind of soup.

Our understanding of Alice’s solution to the sense of the phrase has probably been mediated by Tenniel’s illustration of a hybrid creature—a calf with a turtle shell—but the

illustrations were drawn after the composition of the narrative, and in the text there is no reference to the drawing, although the narrator directs the reader's attention to the illustrations on other occasions (Carroll 1994: 110, 128). In fact, in the text there is no allusion to a calf, and the description provided is extremely meagre. The only salient aspect of the Mock Turtle's physical appearance described is the tears in its eyes, the source of its unhappiness being regret for once having been real:

"Once," said the Mock Turtle at last, with a deep sigh, "I was a real Turtle."

These words were followed by a very long silence, broken only by an occasional exclamation of "Hjckrrh!" from the Gryphon, and the constant heavy sobbing of the Mock Turtle. (Carroll 1994: 112)

Alice has singled out two aspects for attention: the attributive adjective *mock* and sorrow or weeping. Evidently, an adult parsing of the phrase *mock turtle soup* would interpret the unit as consisting of an adjective modifying a compound noun *turtle soup* (an imitation of a particular type of soup without the necessary ingredient), but Alice has, again, unpacked the constituents. She ignores the noun head *soup*, making the noun *turtle*, instead, the head of the nominal group. As regards the Mock Turtle's weeping, it may be that Alice has associated the name of a soup with the conventional expression *crocodile tears*, which alludes to a kind of weeping which is feigned or not real, just as the turtle is not real. Alice may thus be relating the "mockness" of the turtle to another falseness standardized in idiomatic language.

Speculation about an association between *crocodile tears* and the Mock Turtle would be unconvincing were it not for the tendency of idioms to prompt the appearance and behaviour of more than one animal character in the various episodes of the narrative. Thus, the names of most of the animals that play a part in Alice's dream occur in conventional metaphors or similes, although some of these expressions have fallen into disuse since the work was written. A case in point is the mouse that struggles to escape drowning in the pool produced by Alice's weeping (Carroll 1994: 26–30). The *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) records "drown" and "mouse" in figurative collocations such as *like a drowned mouse* to describe a person's being in a miserable plight, or *drunk as a drowned mouse* as a way of referring to inebriation. This linguistic collocation could certainly be responsible for the physical adjacency of the mouse at a point when Alice fears that she will be "drowned in [her] own tears" (Carroll 1994: 27). In the same way, the absence of aquatic creatures in the sea of tears suggests that the concentration of salt in the water is such as to make marine life unviable. In other words, Alice's tears have produced a "Dead Sea." Not surprisingly, the Dodo, the archetypal representative of "deadness" (in the idiomatic frame *as dead as a dodo*), figures prominently on the scene.

The dynamic nature of Alice's problem-solving can also be traced in the course of her dream, albeit in relation to a somewhat different use of language to those under consideration here. R. T. Lakoff has drawn attention to Alice's interpretation of the "conventional metaphor" "I'm not myself" as "literal and highly physical" (1993: 373) in chapter 2. However, to class this expression as a metaphor from a theoretical perspective is not unproblematic. The verb *be*, like many others, lends itself to use in more than one time schema (Vendler 1967). That is, in an activity schema, the verb can mean *behave* and be used in continuous aspect; to refer to a state, it cannot. To use Vendler's words,

“precisely those verbs that call for two or more time schemata will provide the most interesting instances of conceptual divergence . . . an ambiguity which, if not detected, might lead to confusion” (1967: 98). Indeed, Alice has not detected the alternative time schema of *be*, possibly because the verb is not marked for this aspect. So, early on in the dream, the child concludes that if she’s not herself, she must be another little girl called Mabel. However, in Chapter V she returns to the problem again (following her encounter with the puppy). Here Alice’s projected interlocutor is the Caterpillar, the prototypical exemplar of metamorphosis in the elementary school classroom. Alice alludes specifically to the changes in state from chrysalis to caterpillar, and from caterpillar to butterfly, and this appears to partially solve the problem for her of how one can be and not be at the same time (despite the formal impossibility of this through the logic of negation). Of course, the idiomatic meaning of the phrase *I’m not myself* is *I’m not behaving/feeling as I usually do*, a transitory rather than a permanent state of affairs. Thus, in the real world of Alice’s waking life, *not being oneself* might well be the remark made to a child to explain the changes in behaviour induced by drugs or alcohol. Interestingly, the Caterpillar, a dynamic exemplar of essence preserved despite metamorphosis, is smoking a hookah, an on-line demonstration of changing states.

The Caterpillar episode is, to my mind, crucial to understanding Lewis Carroll’s playful musing on figurative tropes through a child’s eyes. For a central problem of metaphor is, indeed, the neither/both solution or cognitive challenge of vehicle terms. If *Juliet is the sun* she is both Juliet and not Juliet at the same time, just as she is the sun and not the sun too, through the domain incongruity of topic and vehicle terms. In this sense, the thematic importance of Alice’s changes in size may not be unconnected with her preoccupation with the expression *not be oneself*. Her own metamorphoses—from a normal-sized child to a giant or from giant to midget—can be understood as her rehearsals of what being and not being oneself at the same time might entail. She herself embodies a figure of speech just as the animals in her dream mentation embody madness or smiling, while still retaining their essential characteristics. Her height may change—and thus enact “not being”—but her commentaries on the experience of these transformations depict the “essential” Alice adapting to the circumstances.

The working out of the neither/both solution is particularly salient in the episodes involving the Cheshire Cat. Alice’s main problem with the expression seems to be that smiling, as far as she knows, is not a behavioural characteristic of cats (although the Duchess informs her otherwise [Carroll 1994: 70]). Hence, her embodied projection of the cat is detailed in its depiction of the face and the crescentic smile it displays. At first, she works on the collocation of the animal name with a county, and associates the cat with a typical product of Cheshire, its cheeses. The disappearing of the Cat may thus be the result of the cheese being consumed. The child’s reasoning, as presented in the text, follows a spatio-temporal organization, where changing settings render the temporal ordering of Alice’s episodic mentation. So the first identification of the Cheshire Cat with the cheese arises from physical adjacency: Alice meets the cat in the Duchess’s kitchen, a setting in which food is the salient element. The shape and colour of the cheese, however, suggest the moon, and accordingly Alice next meets the Cheshire Cat sitting in the branches of a tree. Climbing a tree is, of course, normal behaviour for a cat, and Alice preserves the essential qualities of the feline in this imagining. But higher than herself and partially obscured by foliage, the Cat now exhibits that behaviour that so exasperates Alice. It disappears and



reappears at will (just as the moon does when obscured by cloud) and finally leaves its crescent-shaped smile behind. The relationship between the waxing and waning of the moon and madness now becomes a prominent attribute of the Cat, leading, in narrative understanding, to the Tea Party, presided over by two linguistic exemplars of madness, the March Hare and the Hatter.

The insanity exhibited by these figures at the Tea Party is, first and foremost, a language-centred madness. All three characters present are what I have called embodied figures of speech (*dormouse* may be used figuratively to denote a sleepy or dozy person, according to the *OED*). Their own problems with figurative language are the source of some of the absurdities and misunderstandings that invest this episode with that quirky humour so typical of the work as a whole. And it is in this two-fold projection of figuration that Alice's almost obsessive preoccupation with metaphor becomes most obvious. At Alice's age, the child is able to appreciate the dual meaning of terms, and the conventional figurative extension of the noun *butter* (as used in expressions like *to butter someone up* or *to give someone the best butter*) is one of the semantic extensions dwelt on. Oil and butter are similar in that they are greasy; accordingly, the Hatter has oiled his watch with butter, following the March Hare's advice. Justifying the soundness of his advice (the watch has ceased to work) the March Hare repeats twice "It was the *best* butter," in what appears to be the kind of verbalism which Piaget has found characteristic of the child who, without understanding a metaphor, uses it with his own meaning conferred on it (1926: 129–30). The isolation of the necessary features of *butter* which makes its metaphorical use comprehensible is beyond Alice. Butter, for her, is associated with eating, putting on bread, and hence the *best butter* failed to make the watch work because *some crumbs must have got in as well* (Carroll 1994: 83) (an interpretation that recalls Cameron's subjects' metaphoric processing of *traffic jam* [1996: 52]). The partial mapping of the source term, which is what makes it possible to structure a target domain in terms of a concrete source domain, is not understood by Alice. She maps the whole of *butter*, as she has experience of it, onto the target—making nonsense of this conventional metaphor. Nevertheless, just as Alice grasps the general import of other figures of speech, she evidently relates figurative butter with its effect on animate entities such as people. However, to match her understanding of its metaphorical use with a human, she would presumably also need access to a fully developed metaphoric schema (*MAN IS A MACHINE*), because only in this way would the relationship between greasing mechanical objects like watches and easing social relationships become apparent.

The puzzling connection between animate and inanimate entities (*butter* and *humans*) is further explored in relation to other conventional metaphorical collocations with *draw* and *time*. In this regard, it is especially interesting to see how Carroll anticipates recent interest in chunks and collocations, the object of much study in corpus linguistics. For example, singled out for attention at the Tea Party are transitive verbs which normally require a human or animate patient, and yet are found here in collocation with *time*. So, Alice puzzles on how one can *tell someone something* and also *tell the time*. Similarly, *beat* and *murder* normally require a human as direct object, but *time* also appears in this position. Alice identifies a metaphoric usage insofar as she recognizes a domain incongruity here. However, rather than recognizing the polysemous senses of *beat* or *murder*, she restructures the domain *time* in a way that differs significantly from the adult's. If Time can be told, beaten or murdered, then it must be, like herself, the victim or cat's

paw of more powerful beings. It is therefore not surprising that Alice can identify with time and human abuse of it!

### Discussion

Language is one of the means by which ideas and beliefs may be transmitted from one person to another in any particular community. As Sperber says, “[t]he process of communication can be factored into two processes of interpretation: one from the mental to the public, the other from the public to the mental” (1996: 34). This interpretative process may inspire the transformation of ideas, although some appear, superficially at least, to be replicated almost exactly in the minds of large numbers of speakers, causing them to propagate more effectively than others over long periods of time. To learn about belief systems, the public representation of ideas may often be studied through their linguistic instantiation, genres like sermons or smaller, fossilized units of discourse like idioms being only two of many such instantiations. Certain cognitive linguists, for example, have studied the relationship between language and thought, adducing the existence of conceptual metaphors through the systematic correspondence between linguistic items that connect two disparate domains (G. Lakoff 1990). Nevertheless, the rich and complex conceptual metaphors described by cognitive linguists may not necessarily portray the individual’s mental representations of them (Steen and Gibbs 1999: 2–3). And this mental representation is precisely what Carroll’s fictional dream humourously depicts. Alice, the individual chosen to enact the process of interpretation, is a particularly apposite choice, for she is at an age susceptible to authority—what parents or teachers tell her will be believed because of the reliability of the source. So, Alice does not question the truth of the comparisons and identifications which are fossilised in usage, but tries to accommodate her understanding to them in the course of her dream, accepting these comparisons because children will generally trust adult informants. As Sperber reminds us, the kind of reflective beliefs encoded in the language uses discussed in this paper may be rationally held “not in virtue of their content, but in virtue of their sources” even if they are not fully understood (1996: 92). As he points out, the spread of these half-understood reflective beliefs is due almost exclusively to communication. And of course, idioms and other entrenched figurative expressions occupy a privileged position in the propagation of the commonsense views of a particular society.

However, as has been seen, the process of interpretation of the folk beliefs regarding the equation of people and animals expressed in English idioms requires an adjustment of the knowledge already held by the child. In this sense, the fundamental reversal in the portrayal of how Alice aligns her mental representation with that of the linguistic evidence shows that, in this process of accommodation, the child does not follow the unidirectional mapping described as *PEOPLE ARE ANIMALS*. The epistemic correspondences between the source (animals) and the target (people) are reversed in the dream. Rather than mapping knowledge about the source onto the target, or attributing animal characteristics to humans, as Lakoff and Turner propose (1989), she endows her dream animals with the human characteristics that will fit the linguistic expressions that use animal names. So, apart from talking, as humans do, Alice’s dream animals take tea, grin or weep, have watches, act in unpredictable or insane ways, among other things. In short, these animals

embodied in Alice's dream display the human characteristics attributed to them through conventional figures of speech. And here lies the fundamental difference between *AAW* and other animal tales, where the motivation for humanising animals responds to quite dissimilar and far less reflective concerns about the personification of mute beasts.

In this sense, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* is a subversive work, for in showing us the creation of meaningfulness in the child's mind from the nonsensical wisdom encoded in conventional figuration, Carroll draws attention to the mismatch between the world view of the adult society that uses such language and the child who confers meaning on it. And in the highlighting of this mismatch, the author points to the ideological, cultural bias of language. In his fictional simulation of a seven-year-old's dream, Carroll portrays the accommodation of domain knowledge to language input, suggesting that, in the course of the child's life, many more such restructuring activities will take place to modify her mental representations of these domains. Over the years, this gradual restructuring will result in the progressive alignment of her personal representations with the linguistic instantiations of a particular way of understanding. Then, the grown-up Alice, fully enculturated, will no doubt accept as commonsense what is no more than a particular language-speaking society's views of what animals, time, and other areas of human experience are. When we meet her, however, she is still independently making meaning, in defiance of the wisdom of the language-speaking community to which she belongs.

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