Metaphor use in the construction of crime and criminals

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The use of metaphorical expressions is a powerful feature in the construction of crime and is therefore frequently found in crime news reports (as well as in other texts). For a systematic analysis of metaphorical meaning among other stylistic features in newspaper reports on crime I refer to Tabbert (2015, 2016).

This paper has a distinct focus on metaphor and explores how metaphors contribute to meaning making in newspaper reports on crime, how they participate in bringing about ideological meaning in those texts and thus serve to maintain power relationships in society. Crime, in a nutshell, is perceived as 'an act of rule-breaking' (Hayward & Young, 2007: 111) and those who break socially established rules are being punished, not least in order to show the law-abiding society that the system works. Crime, according to Durkheim (1938: 67), is perceived as an 'integral part of all societies' in two ways: First, the 'innovative force' of law-breaking can be a means to change governing law and further develop society (as it has happened, for instance, when same sex intercourse ceased to constitute a crime) and second, sanctioning criminal behaviour is a means to maintain boundaries in society and to ensure people's trust in the system as a means to secure power.

Before I turn to metaphor a short explanation is in order as to what I understand by ideological meaning of texts and how I approach deciphering it, for a more detailed explanation of my view of ideology I refer to Tabbert (2016: 27ff).
Grounded in the ideational meta-function of language (Halliday, 1970), Jeffries (2010: 14) pleads 'not to lose sight of the fact that there is a level at which texts organize the world we experience, and that this is demonstrable in the words and structures of the texts themselves'. This means that the world brought about by a (newspaper) text is, in fact, 'the construction of a particular description of the world through language' (Jeffries, 2015: 384). Following Simpson's (1993: 7) argument that 'no use of language is considered truly neutral, objective and value-free', any description of the world through language is value-loaded because it carries at least hints of attitude. I therefore understand ideology 'as the attachment of values to the constructed text world following a judgmental process' (Jeffries, 2015; Tabbert, 2016: 36) and am of the conviction that language does, in fact, '*construct* ideology' (Simpson, 1993: 6). To detect ideological meaning in newspaper articles on crime thus means to identify those value-judgments in the use of language by decoding 'stylistic choices which shape a text's meaning' (Simpson, 1993: 8). This includes the use of metaphors.

Metaphors, according to Lakoff and Johnson's seminal work (2003: 5), make use of 'understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another'. Although their publication has been extensively criticised and their model has meanwhile been further developed, it still serves to gain a solid basic understanding of how metaphors work and therefore of the central importance of metaphorical meaning making for the construction of crime.

The mapping of source and target domain onto each other is the reason why only similar features of both are emphasised whereas other, not congruent features of both domains are suppressed. Steen (2007: 38) refers to this phenomenon as 'selective mapping'.

The following example serves to illustrate this point:

> Example 1
>
> Höxter-Hexe über das erste Todesopfer "Dann packten wir sie in die Truhe"
>
> (Höxter-Witch about the first death victim "Then we put her in the chest [here: deep freezer]")
>
> Bild, 6th December 2016[1] (translation is mine)

Offender Angelika W.[2] is named a "Hexe" (witch). Selective mapping means that only shared features of the source domain (Hexe/witch) and the target domain (the female offender Angelika W.) come into focus whereas others, for example Angelika W. being a trained gardener, divorced wife and mother, as well as a witch's original existence as a fictional character in fairytales are erased from the picture. The aim of using the conceptual metaphor WOMEN ARE WITCHES in a newspaper report on the trial against Angelika W. and her partner is an attempt to make sense of extreme form of deviation that shows in their crimes. The cruelty of their actions [(attempted) murders and prior torture of their victims] becomes a dominant character feature of the offender Angelika W. herself by selective mapping. In Fauconnier and Turner's (1993, 2002) further developed model of metaphor, vital relations from both 'witch' and 'Angelika W.' as two separate input spaces are blended and form a new, blended space in which the conceptual understanding of WOMEN ARE WITCHES exists.

A witch, according to a definition provided by the OED, is a 'female magician, sorceress; in later use especially a woman supposed to have dealings with the devil or evil spirits and to be able by their co-operation to perform supernatural acts'. Although nothing supernatural happened in the commitment of those crimes, Angelika W's construction as evil and as if she had a pact with the devil are attempts to explain the deviant Other (Kövecses & Douthwaite, forthcoming 2022) whose crimes are not only *contra legem* but so inhuman that they can only be understood by aligning her with the devil.

Metaphors, however, do not create meaning in isolation and therefore need to be examined by using the entire stylistic toolkit [for an introduction to Stylistics see, for example, (Jeffries & McIntyre, 2010) among others]. A closer look at the already mentioned headline (Example 1) reveals that Angelika W. is named "Höxter-Hexe" in a noun phrase functioning as subject and also as sayer of a verbiage presented in Direct Speech (Semino & Short, 2004; Simpson, 1993). Höxter is a German city and the place where Angelika W. and her partner lived and committed their crimes. This space deixis contributes to the construction of geographical and cultural proximity of the case as a news value (Bednarek & Caple, 2012: 64; 2014, 2017), aided by alliteration (Höxter-Hexe).

News values are the threshold 'an event has to cross […] before it will be registered as news' (Bednarek & Caple, 2012: 39; Galtung & Ruge, 1965). They thus 'determine what makes something newsworthy' (Bednarek & Caple, 2012: 40), meaning worthy to report on in the news. Newsworthiness is thus not only a 'property' of an event but 'becomes a quality of texts' because, seen through a constructivist approach lens, 'newsworthiness is created for the audience through language, image, typography, and so on' (Bednarek & Caple, 2014: 136f, 139). Over the years,

various news values have been collected across various publications. Bednarek and Caple (2012: 63ff), for example, list the following criteria: timeliness, proximity, prominence, consonance, impact, novelty, superlativeness, personalisation and aesthetics, which apply to news in general. With a particular focus on crime news, however, Jewkes (2004: 217ff) extracts the following six most salient criteria: risk, sex, proximity, violence, spectacle and graphic imagery (mainly on TV) as well as children. With regard to the Höxter-case, proximity, violence (here including torture and murder) and spectacle (as well as sex if one considers that the women killed were lured by dating advertisements) can be immediately traced in Example 1. This underpins the discursive construction of news values in the headline by means of stylistic choices.

On further examination of Example 1, Direct Speech supports the proximity of the case as it allows for immediate access to Angelika W.'s utterance. It almost feels like a front-row seat in court where she apparently made this utterance. In addition, Direct Speech brings about another news value, personalisation, as it appears that Angelika W. talks directly to the reader.
The pre-modifying ordinal number 'first' implies that there are more than one (death)victim which underlines the superlativeness of the case by highlighting intensifying aspects of the crime (Bednarek & Caple, 2012: 76ff). The personal pronoun 'sie' (her, 4th case) is an anaphoric reference to 'death victim' with the victim named in a depersonalised, gender-neutral way. Her only identification feature is that she was first. This accords with the naming choice for the offender (examined above) as victim and offender are perceived as binary opposites to each other on a continuum scale (Jančaříková, 2014; Tabbert, 2015). The more devilish and thus inhuman the offender is constructed, the more dehumanised the victim becomes at the other end of the scale. Seen from the other direction this means that the anonymous construction of the victim contributes to Angelika W.'s inhuman presentation. The increased monstrosity of the offender leaves the victim without individual markers. This is further supported by her being mentioned in less prominent grammatical places in this headline, namely in an adverbial ('about the first death victim') and in an object position ('her'). The latter, seen from a transitivity perspective (Simpson, 1993: 89ff; 2014), makes the victim the goal of a material action process with 'we' (Angelika W. and her partner) as the actor. The German verb 'packten' (put) has a collocational preference (Louw, 2000) for inanimate objects which accords with the fact that the offenders put the victim's dead body in a deep freezer, designed for storage of frozen meat/food. This indicates Angelika W.'s emotional detachment from the victim, deprived of any empathy: to her it is merely a corpse, treated like meat and stored in a deep freezer, characteristics she shares with a 'witch'.

This example shows that a headline alone can already reveal a vast amount of information about how the offender (and her victim) is perceived: ostracised from society and constructed as an outsider (Becker, 1966). In addition, women lawbreakers are, according to Sandman (2021: 3), generally perceived as 'doubly deviant' in that they 'transgress both criminal law and the boundaries of femininity'. The Höxter-case made headlines precisely because it is highly newsworthy and those features which construct it as newsworthy can be traced in the headline already. The crimes Angelika W. and her partner committed are beyond belief. Thus Angelika W.'s metaphorical perception as a witch allows for a distance between her and the audience and provides a simple and straightforward explanation for why she did it: because she is evil.

The second example also employs a metaphor although in a completely different context and along a different trajectory. Here a victim addresses offenders in court in an attempt to inquire their motive for attacking him and his family:

      Example 2:

"If you are genuinely remorseful, you will waste no more time in telling us […] the real reason we were targeted."

The Guardian, 29th January 2015

This example draws on the conceptual metaphor TIME IS MONEY. The victim, a law professor who got beaten up in his home, regards the offenders' execution of their procedural right to remain silent as a 'waste of time'. TIME can only be wasted if it is conceptualised as LIMITED RESOURCE, VALUABLE COMMODITY or MONEY. The selective mapping or, in other words, the highlighting of shared features of both TIME and MONEY predisposes our thinking in a particular way (Goatly, 2007: 24).
Further, the presupposition triggered by a counterfactual conditional (Levinson, 1983: 184) in combination with negation ('no'), a comparative adjective ('more') as well as the negatively connotated noun 'waste' construct a hierarchy of values: The victim's interest to know the motive is perceived as being superior to offenders' procedural rights, at least from the victim's point of view who aligns himself with the court by means of an inclusive 'we'.

However, this example needs further unpacking in order to fully appreciate its meaning:
As for context, Example 2 is taken from an article reporting on sentencing hearing at Kingston Crown Court, UK, where the victim, Paul Kohler, addressed the defendants directly. In the first clause, the conditional ('if'), the adjective phrase functioning as subject complement ('genuinely remorseful'), in particular the adverb 'genuinely', and Direct Speech imply (Grice, 1975, 1978) that the victim thinks the offenders only pretend to be remorseful. The thus negated presence of remorse shows that this utterance has, in fact, two different addressees: the offenders but also the court at sentencing stage. Directed at the latter is the pragmatic presupposition (Levinson, 1983: 204ff) contained in this first clause, namely that the victim thinks that the court expects the offenders to show (genuine) remorse. Negating the existence of remorse implies that the victim has taken it on himself to bargain with the offenders in the presence of the deciding body that first, revealing the motive is proof of remorse, and second, that genuine remorse is usually considered as mitigating circumstance and brings about a more lenient sentence. The victim thus takes the conflict with the offenders back into his own hands although the sentence length is not for the victim to decide. This reminds me of Christie's (1977) remarks on the handling of criminal offences by the criminal justice system: the original conflict between victim and offender brought about by the crime is taken out of the victim's hands and instead being put into the hands of authorities. Here, however, the victim by means of his utterance attempts to manipulate both offenders and the court and takes back his conflict by siding with the court as the powerful authority in this setting. The victim expects the court to press for revelation of the motive and thus to have the victim's interest in mind.
In the second clause, the modal auxiliary 'will' is deonticly as well as boulomaicly shaded although being primarily epistemic. The victim can, of course, not be sure whether the offenders will lay open their motive, however, 'will' indicates a strong conviction on the victim's part that they will do so in the future and thus reveals the victim's point of view (Simpson, 1993: 48). It is precisely this strong conviction that causes a deontic shade as it puts pressure on the offenders to fulfil the victim's expectations. The victim is playing out a sympathy margin that is 'the amount of leeway a given individual has for which he or she can be granted sympathy and not blamed' (Kenney, 2002: 241) and thus creates an obligation. As Simpson (1993: 48) remarks, 'the deontic system is of crucial relevance to the strategies of social interaction, especially to tactics of persuasion and politeness'. Here, the victim tries to persuade the offenders to give away their motive for the attack and utilises moral obligation but also an implied reward in pointing out remorse as a mitigating circumstance. The use of the auxiliary 'will' seen in context further adds a boulomaic shade to the sentence as it underlines not just the victim's strong confidence (epistemic) but also how much the victim desires to know the motive. Triggering three modal systems at once (epistemic, deontic and

boulomaic), each tending towards the stronger end of a continuum, accounts for a strong illocutionary force behind this utterance.

The negated metaphor ('waste no more time') opens three text worlds embedded in the text world of Direct Speech: the first is the text world brought about by the metaphor TIME IS MONEY where a 'blended space' (Fauconnier & Turner, 1993: 2; 2002) and thus a 'blended world' (Gavins, 2007: 149) is built in which TIME is conceptually perceived as MONEY as a 'result of the conceptual merger of two otherwise independent text worlds'. This blended world as a separate mental representation on the same ontological level as the text world of Direct Speech provides the basis for the following two possible but mutually exclusive worlds: A modal text world with a hypothetical future scenario that (more) time is wasted, and another modal text world projecting a future scenario where no more time is wasted, the latter being a negation of the first. The reason why these two modal worlds exist in parallel is, apart from them being two possible future scenarios, the fact that negation opposes non-events against events in a construction of 'unrealized worlds' (Nahajec, 2009: 109; 2021)[3]. To process negation therefore means to imagine the positive before it can be negated only in a second step. In our example, the reader first imagines a future continued waste of time before being able to imagine a future scenario where no time is wasted because the offenders give away their motive. All three text worlds are enactor-accessible with text-world enactors being 'temporally-specific' (Gibbons, 2019: 8) versions of the real offenders, the real victim and the real court who are participants in the real world (or discourse world) of the sentencing trial in court (reported on by a journalist in the newspaper article which makes it a split discourse world).

At this stage we need to remember the world switch initially brought about by Direct Speech which transports the reader 'to the time and location where the conversation actually took place', that is to the victim-enactor's origo (Gavins, 2007: 50, 95), meaning the sentencing hearing at Kingston Crown Court on Thursday, 29th January 2015 in the presence of, at least, victim, offenders, court and journalist. Direct Speech thus has the effect of diminishing distance between the victim-enactor in the text world of Direct Speech and the implied ideal reader in the same text world and thus ultimately between the real victim making that Direct Speech in that court discourse world and the real reader as discourse-world participant in a different (split) discourse world of the reading situation. Notice that the real victim and the real reader do not inhabit any discourse world together (if one assumes that the reader was not present in court on that day). However, Direct Speech allows the reader to identify with the victim's origo and thus his viewpoint because of 'internal focalisation' (Genette, 1980) for as long as Direct Speech lasts. 'Focalisation', a borrowed term from narratology, refers to 'who speaks' and 'who sees' which both is the victim in our example. The victim focuses inwardly, on his confidence and desire as we have seen with regard to the modal auxiliary 'will', and thus on his point of view. This explains how Direct Speech, in fact, narrows down the reader's perspective to the victim-enactor's perspective and accounts for the effect that the reader is drawn into the court scenario as if facing the offenders alongside the victim. As a consequence for the discursive construction of news values, this quote enhances proximity of the case and illustrates the impact this crime has on the victim (Bednarek & Caple, 2012: 64f). Further, the blended world of the TIME IS MONEY metaphor is familiar to the reader as discourse-world participant because it is a conventionalised metaphor and its use therefore relates to the news value of consonance as a stereotypical aspect of an event (Bednarek & Caple, 2012: 67).

The reason for pointing out the world-switches happening in Example 2 is to raise awareness of the fact that although all these worlds are highly accessible, they are nevertheless worlds brought about by the text and as such 'mental representations of the discourse' in the reader's mind (Gavins, 2007: 10). One might argue that this applies to all newspaper reportage *tout court* and precisely this argument is central to the purpose of this essay. If we want to unravel and expose ideological

meaning in newspaper reports on crime, we need to be able to peel apart different layers of meaning (including metaphorical meaning) and witness their interplay to fully appreciate how ideological meaning is brought about and how manipulation works. The study of metaphor can thus contribute to revealing power relations in crime-related texts.

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Endnotes

[1] https://www.bild.de/regional/ruhrgebiet/mord/folter-hexe-spricht-ueber-die-taten-49090068.bild.html, accessed 31.07.2019

[2] for more information on this case I refer to Landgericht Paderborn, Urteil vom 05. Oktober 2018 – 1 Ks 53/16 –, juris

[3] This would be different if we had past tense and we therefore knew which scenario of the two actually took place.