

Are Motion Metaphors for Music Low in Metaphoricity? A Rating Study.

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Music is commonly and conventionally described in terms of motion and space: pitch is *high* and *low*, melodies *fall* and *rise*, and motives may *follow* a harmonic *path*. Cognitive linguistic approaches to the phenomenon of musical motion assume that it is based on conceptual metaphors (Johnson & Larson 2003, Jandausch 2012) in which more concrete domains are used to reason about more abstract domains (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, 1999). According to Johnson and Larson (2003), musical motion is based on the conceptual metaphors TIME IS MOTION and CHANGE IS MOTION.

Other scholars argue that musical motion is not metaphorical. According to Shove and Repp (1995), musical motion is physiologically real because people move when they make music or when they listen to music. Clarke (2001) claims that hearing motion in music is a truly perceptual phenomenon based on the fact that when we hear sounds changing, we can deduce that the source of the sound is moving (e.g. becoming louder is coming closer). Musical motion may alternatively be explained by fictive motion (Talmy 2000). While fictive motion prototypically refers to dynamic descriptions of static spatial scenes, it has also been applied to non-spatial domains like mathematics (Marghetis & Nunez 2013) or descriptions in wine tasting notes (Caballero 2007).

Given this discussion, the present study aims to investigate whether musical motion is perceived as less metaphorical compared to more prototypical cases of metaphorical motion. In doing so, the study aims to contribute to the current debate of viewing metaphor as a gradable phenomenon (Hanks 2006, Müller 2008). According to Hanks (2006), the metaphoricity of an expression is low 1) if frequency of the expression is high, or 2) if its source and target domain are conceptually close.

For the present study, 83 English-speaking participants rated 52 sentences according to their degree of metaphoricity as well as association to actual motion on a five-point Likert scale in an online rating task. Each sentence expressed a different motion condition, which was either literal, fictive, musical, or metaphorical. Participants also had to indicate their level of knowledge about (classical) music. Frequency of the motion verb (operationalised by absolute frequency of the verb lemma in the BNC) was also documented. Musical motion was expected to be perceived as less metaphorical because it might be conceptually closer to literal or fictive motion. Moreover, participants with a musical background were expected to perceive musical motion as less metaphorical given that they are more familiar with it.

The results show that there is a frequency effect: The more frequent the motion verb, the more

likely a sentence is rated as less metaphorical. Furthermore, there is an interactive effect between knowledge of (classical) music and motion condition: The higher the level of musical knowledge, the more likely musical motion was rated as less metaphorical. The findings indicate that “frequency breeds literalness” (Hanks 2006: 21) and that the perception of metaphoricality is not absolute but depends on the knowledge and experience of the individual language user.

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