

Metonymy

Corpus search Part 2

Based on the BNC

Metonymic uses of company /organisation names and names of places

- Markert, K. and Nissim, M. 'Metonymic Proper Names: A corpus-based account'
- Markert, K. and Nissim, M. 'Corpus-based metonymy analysis'

1. Thoughts on Markert and Nissim's 'Metonymic Proper Names: A corpus-based account'

Markert and Nissim use the BNC to investigate metonymic uses of company and organisation names. Their main aim is to identify the range of 'metonymic patterns' in which a company/organisation name (such as McDonalds, Barclays, Shell) might occur. They begin with an already wide repertoire of such 'patterns' in line with the cognitive linguistic formula that metonymy is a case of 'X for Y' and claim that in their corpus search not only did they find all these patterns in use but also discovered an additional pattern they hadn't thought about before.

I have a number of reservations about this particular way/rationale of using the Corpus; to tell you the truth, momentarily I even started doubting whether the corpus searches we are attempting have any point at all! Let me explain what I mean: if the cognitive linguistics people get in the corpus and find evidence that confirm their theoretical assumptions and then, we get in the corpus and find evidence that confirm our theoretical assumptions –although fundamentally different from theirs-, then it is quite reasonable to start doubting the point of using the corpus at all. Whatever theories we might come up with and no matter what their credibility, the corpus will always surface with evidence to support them.

In a more sober second round of thinking I started realising that the true problem is not the Corpus –or problems inherent in corpus analysis if you want- but the way these people use it. A critical feature of our rationale of corpus analysis is that it concentrates on *observable elements* of word/concept behaviour. The fact that 'red' does not pick out exactly the same concept in the context of eyes gleaming in the dark and in the context of eyes affected by the symptoms of flu is an observation of facts of word/concept behaviour in the utterances the corpus made available. We find that the word/concept under investigation is fine-tuned differently according to context and then take this observable fact into account and try to see if our hypotheses about concept adjustment / ad hoc concept formation best explain it or not.

Now this is very different from observing in a corpus that a company name can be used to refer to different things (the employees, the establishment, the particular branch) and concluding that this observation is evidence for the existence of conceptual patterns! The existence of such conceptual patterns cannot in any way be an observable fact of the behaviour of the investigated concepts in the corpus; the only observable fact is that in some contexts the reference of the name of a company can be deferred and used to pick out things other than the company (the employees, the establishment, the particular branch). To assume that each case of deferred reference consists a 'conceptual pattern', however, is rather an arbitrary *interpretation* of the facts observed in the corpus and more importantly, an *interpretation* that is not in any way immediately legitimised by these facts.

What the investigators should be thinking -but do not- is: deferred reference is an observable fact whose existence is confirmed by the corpus. The other thing confirmed by the corpus is that reference can be deferred to various different directions according to context. What sort of criteria /tests do I use to identify and categorise these observable facts? (if they were asking themselves this question they would have realised that some of the examples they have accepted as metonymic uses of company names are not metonymies, at least by the criterion of deferred reference) How do these facts relate to my hypotheses about conceptual patterning? Is conceptual patterning the best way of explaining the existence of these facts?

What these corpus analyses seem to be doing instead is arbitrary *leaps* from observations to interpretations that do not necessarily follow from the observations.

2. Corpus Findings in Markert and Nissim that might have import on our work

The 2 main things that got my attention in Markert's corpus research concern

a) the frequency of metonymic uses of the words investigated in relation to non-metonymic uses. Even though they have far looser criteria of identifying metonymies than we do (=> we should expect that occurrences that we wouldn't want to treat as metonymic they will take them to be metonymies too) they seem to be coming up with very similar results on the generally low frequency of metonymic expressions in the corpus. The literal uses of company names were by far the most frequent in their search. This result is in line with the findings of our first corpus search on musical instruments where from the hundreds of occurrences of names of musical instruments only a couple were metonymic. What does this finding tell us?

b) the varied relative occurrence/distribution of the alleged metonymic patterns. Some metonymic uses are far more frequent than other: e.g. *company name for members* is a lot more frequent than *company name for event* (see table p.12)

This finding is interesting for at least 2 reasons:

- i) It would be interesting to ask how a cognitive linguistic approach of 'metonymy as the realisation of respective conceptual patterns' would go on to explain this fluctuation in frequency. And more importantly, can it explain it?
- ii) How would WE explain such a fluctuation? I would think that varied degrees of accessibility of the actual referent might (amongst other factors such as additional effects for instance) play an important part in the speaker's decision to use a metonymic or a non-metonymic expression. Also, do we want to say that some metonymies (company name to refer

to company people or to the particular branch) might as well have received some degree of conventionalisation, therefore speeding up the search for the actual referent in contrast to more novel/one-off metonymic uses (company name to refer to company indexes) that might involve greater processing effort?

c) The question of how metonymy relates to *systematic polysemy/ systematic ambiguity* is one that we have also encountered in other papers and in previous meetings we have treated it as one of the issues a RT approach to metonymy should be able to address.

3. Are all their examples really metonymic?

Again in this paper, the authors treat as metonymies instances that a deferred reference test would not confirm as metonymic:

a) *Which wide body jets serve dinner?* (p.2)

Presumably M & N assume that the true referent of 'wide body jets' is sth else (e.g. the flight attendants?). But:

747-300s are amongst the wide body jets that serve dinner and have a good safety record too

? 747-300s are amongst the wide body jets that serve dinner but look overworked and don't seem to smile to the passengers enough

b) *China has agreed to let a United Nations investigator conduct an independent probe...* (p.2)

M & N assume that the true referent of 'China' is the government of China. But:

China had agreed to let a United Nations investigator conduct an independent probe... but as it was soon after hit by the floods, the investigation had to be postponed

4. Corpus search 2, BNC

Search term:

Downing street, 10 Downing street

Hypothesis

We want to look at the metonymic uses of this particular place name with the following main aims:

- We want to see if there is variation in the actual referent picked out by the metonymic use of the terms (=> yes, the referent varies significantly according to context)

- We want to see if narrowing also occurs together with the metonymy [e.g. show that *Downing street*, i.e. the entire street in which *10 Downing street* belongs, is used to pick out referents associated with the narrower 10 Downing street (=> yes, it seems that in some examples this is the case)]

Findings

In discussing the findings of this corpus search, Deirdre suggested the following:

Let's take for instance the proper name 'Downing street'. 'Downing street' is used in a strong locative sense in utterances such as:

'He wrote to Downing street' [literally true]
 'The neighbours at Downing street' [literally true]

However, the examples found indicate some gradation from such purely locative uses to cases where the locative sense disappears completely:

Type 1

Purely locative

'... the gate across Downing street...'

Type 2

Locative with strong (political) implications

'...talks with Margaret Thatcher in Downing street'
 '...internal discord on the exchange rate between Sir Alan Walters in Downing street ...'

Here we assume that the fact that Downing street is the place where the prime minister lives becomes very important and brings about strong additional effects.

Type 3

The locative sense becomes very weak and the (political) implications prevail

'...Mr Kinnock would be in Downing street with a raised...'
 'A Downing street spokesman'

Type 4

The locative sense disappears totally

e.g. in utterances where Downing street refers to the prime minister

Only Type 4 is metonymic. It seems therefore that there is a *threshold* somewhere between Type 3 and 4. This threshold distinguishes between a case in which a

proper name maintains its locational sense but at the same time carries very strong (if not mainly) implications and a case in which a proper name loses its locational sense completely.

We must also note here that in many cases we seem to have more than pragmatic processes related to the locational sense taking place simultaneously; more specifically, some form of *Locational Narrowing* also seems to be taking place in conjunction with the gradation briefly described above. For instance we could say that the interpretation of the utterance:

a) The prime minister slept at Downing street

possibly goes through two at least 'stages' of locational narrowing:

- first 'Downing street' could be said to pick out the narrower concept 10 Downing street

second 10 Downing street in the context of the above utterance could also be said to pick out a narrower concept along the lines of bedroom of 10 Downing street

Accordingly:

b) The prime minister came out of number 10

Search

DISTRIB	WORD/PHRASE	TOKENS REG1	PER MIL IN REG1 [100,000,000 WORDS]
1	DOWNING STREET	673	6.73

I looked at the first 100 occurrences

1	A1J	rule, the more likely it is that he will eventually reach <u>Downing Street</u> . On other issues, crucial victories
2	A1J	are "tensions and suspicions" between Lambeth Palace and 10 <u>Downing Street</u> , but he points out that t
3	A1W	crime and vandalism, debt and family break-up." A <u>Downing Street</u> spokesman said yesterday that "the
4	A27	given by the Prime Minister and Mr Denis Thatcher at 10 <u>Downing Street</u> to launch the Harold Macmillan
5	A2A	behind bars at Number 10 From Dr JONATHAN MILLER NUMBER 10 <u>Downing Street</u> is not Buckingham
6	A2A	the Prime Minister wants to erect across the Whitehall end of <u>Downing Street</u> , sent a buzz of speculativ
7	A2A	will also have a steel screen which will leap out of the <u>Downing Street</u> tarmac as an added defence agai
8	A2J	the waist-high barrier and high-profile police presence which has effectively sealed <u>Downing Street</u> from
9	A2X	has to invent enemies too? Sure. That gate across <u>Downing Street</u> ... the dismissal of the IRA as monst
10	A3C	leader, Mangosuthu Buthelezi, held talks with Margaret Thatcher in <u>Downing Street</u> yesterday as the Pr
11	A3S	, took the politic and patriotic route and wrote to 10 <u>Downing Street</u> to find out the Prime Minister's fav
12	A3T	internal discord on the exchange rate between Sir Alan Walters in <u>Downing Street</u> , and Mr Lawson in th
13	A3W	"regal" gates to be erected at the end of <u>Downing street</u> ('Psychiatrists explore hidden meaning of That
14	A3W	Prime Minister's 21 per cent. Mr Kinnock would be in <u>Downing Street</u> with an overall majority of 28 sea

15 A44 the story that it would refuse was leaked, apparently from **Downing Street**. Researchers from the Imper

16 A4G upset markets yesterday of a renewed difference of opinion between the **Downing Street** neighbours ap

17 A4R theories into practice --; why not assign the security arrangements at **Downing Street** to a private secu

18 A4V be on the safe side Mrs Lawson was stationed in 11 **Downing Street**, giving her husband a convenient r

19 A56 flat by the Department of Education, apparently on instructions from **Downing Street**. However, the pro

20 A59 . At that moment the terms of the truce between the **Downing Street** neighbours will be conveniently fo

21 A5K past director of Conservative research department, who is joining the **Downing Street** policy unit, John.

22 A5R declaring "58 per cent Don't Want Pershing" at a **Downing Street** reception in 1984. It was a coup not c

23 A5W to try to make Labour electable. You don't reach **Downing Street** by pretending you've travelled the roa

24 A66 his character?" She added: You don't reach **Downing Street** by pretending you've travelled the road to l

25 A66 . The nation's foreign policy remained highly personal, with **Downing Street** bypassing the Foreign Office

26 A66 in May 1979, proclaiming on the steps of Number 10 **Downing Street** the healing words of St Francis of

27 A66 and Whitehall and an unusual mood of despondency in Number 10 **Downing Street**. Callaghan told Joel

28 A66 embodied in the public-school, cricket-loving Edwardian philanthropist who occupied 10 **Downing Street**

29 A67 left office with their prestige lower than when they had entered **Downing Street**. On Mrs Thatcher, the j

30 A68 appeared in The Tiger Rag and a copy was sent to **Downing Street** and duly acknowledged. When John.

31 A68 archbishop disliked a nomination, he coolly referred it back to **Downing Street**. But with the coming of L

32 A68 her first bishop to do homage. The civil servants in **Downing Street** played it humorously. They warned

33 A68 Queen was about to meet an eccentric. David Hunt from **Downing Street** told Lascelles that Ramsey had

34 A68 meet. They talked in the Cabinet Room at No. 10 **Downing Street**. Ramsey, formerly put off by Eden's c

35 A6F He summoned the Dean of Westminster, Eric Abbott, to **Downing Street**. We do not know what Eric Abk

36 A6F a Cabinet Minister or US President --; about eighty staffworking in **Downing Street** of whom the great n

37 A6F who have executive powers vested in them collectively. Number 10 **Downing Street**, in the words of a f

38 A6F policies, was dismissed. Earlier he had been described by **Downing Street** officials as only "a semi-detac

39 A6F the top. A party leader who hopes to reach 10 **Downing Street** has to devote much time to party manag

40 A6F Prior frequently had reason to complain about hostile leaks from 10 **Downing Street** when he was in cha

41 A6G familiar tabloid headlines as Mrs Thatcher convenes seminars of experts at **Downing Street** to cope with

42 A70 not convinced. At a meeting with Opposition leaders in 10 **Downing Street** later that night, he appeared

43 A7H half hour interview with Prime Minister John Major at No 10 **Downing Street**. But reaction was typically

44 A7T the fall-out. There were angry calls from Buckingham Palace and **Downing Street** and, in the House of C

45 A7W step-by-step assault on the softly-softly approach to Europe being peddled by **Downing Street**, the form

46 A7W superannuated Sumo wrestlers" he was, in effect, accusing **Downing Street** of being out of date --; eve

47 A88 of Order couldn't help visualising the scene in Number 10 **Downing Street** a week last Thursday, when t

48 A8H substance. But neither course was considered prudent by Beijing and **Downing Street**. Under the glitz, tl

49 A8K rival. The optical fibre cable recently laid to Number 10 **Downing Street** joined a network which the gro

50 A8K of five Conservative MPs yesterday met the Prime Minister and left **Downing Street** convinced they had

51 A8X , Dr Helmut Kohl, yesterday killed any lingering hopes in **Downing Street** that the Federal Republic wou

52 A8X have uncovered 120 furniture contracts, including orders destined for 10 **Downing Street**, which have b

53 A8X 59, dissenters may disagree they, too, reinforced the **Downing Street** mood by prudently going to earth

54 A8X parliament's democratic powers. The only cause for rejoicing in **Downing Street** as a result of the new V

55 A8X provided further evidence of the widening schism between the church and **Downing Street**. It called for

56 A8X education. Dr Vincent and Dr Jones delivered the message to **Downing Street** after Mrs Thatcher refuse

57 A96 contracts worth between £100,000 and £4 million awarded by ministries and **Downing Street**. They are

58 A96) she said there were no direct telephone line between 10 **Downing Street** and the head of government (

59 A9N Conservative Party has caused bad blood among the Thatcherites; the **Downing Street** bunker is too wa

60 AA1 month with Mr Jonathan Porritt, director of FoE. A **Downing Street** spokeswoman yesterday sought to p

61 AAB and the other, later, to tackle democratic control. **Downing Street** strategists planning their tactics as th

62 AAF Panama and last summer, Mr Ford visited Mrs Thatcher at **Downing Street**. In an interview last October

63 AB6 ." What can this mean? DERANGED woman held in **Downing Street**. Police swoop. Read all about it. The

64 ABE Friends of the Earth, was invited for talks at 10 **Downing Street**. Environmentalists were no longer "the

65 ABE , William Waldegrave, the health secretary, is unpopular in **Downing Street**. This is partly because of his

66 ABF , will shortly sit down with the new head of the **Downing Street** policy unit, Sarah Hogg, to write the first

67 ABG services. Lord (Victor) Rothschild, former head of **Downing Street's** think-tank, died. Scales of justice D

68 ABG , quite enough of them to put Mr Kinnock safely into **Downing Street**. As the main parties ponder the fat

69 ABG marginal seats. If Mr Kinnock is to make it to **Downing Street**, the party needs to win almost all of them

70 ABG monetary union. It was clearly intended as a warning to **Downing Street**. Mr Cash is a leading Euro-scep

71 ABG became public property. By the end of a decade in **Downing Street**, he was as essential to the Thatcher

72 ABG therefore hidden. If ministers or others who are attacked by **Downing Street** at such meetings object, th

73 ABH man who was said to have used his great power as **Downing Street's** anonymous twice-daily briefer to l

74 ABJ Syrians to agree to these. He returned triumphantly; but **Downing Street** undermined the mission before

75 ABJ Richard Ryder, as go-betweens, shuffling between Mr Heseltine and **Downing Street**, to settle the detail

76 ABJ his new policy adviser, Sarah Hogg, to ensure that **Downing Street** was putting its own ideas in to the r

77 ABU Sarah Hogg, head of Mr Major's policy unit in **Downing Street**. They make a powerful trio. The Treasury

78 ABU the Treasury and on Thursday 31 January I went over to **Downing Street** for Cabinet. Both Norman Teb

79 ABU the whole review. The argument continued up the stairs to **Downing Street's** reception rooms --; where

80 ABU together. The Cabinet's Social Security Committee met in the **Downing Street** Cabinet room for the first

81 ABU had feared. A week later I was called back to **Downing Street** by Margaret Thatcher and told that I was

82 ABU early at the Cabinet Office, just round the corner from **Downing Street** in Whitehall. A meeting of the P

83 ABU Lawson v Fowler Row. The following Monday we met at **Downing Street** in an attempt to sort it all out. I

84 ABU never heard a complaint that any paper was held up at **Downing Street** because the Prime Minister had

85 ABU brought the evening to an end and then she returned to **Downing Street** for a few hours' work on her b

86 ABU . As we talked at the reception in the garden behind **Downing Street**, Patrick told me that, instead of a c

87 ABU to Number 10 as Jim Callaghan's Principal Private Secretary. **Downing Street** is a sure stepping-stone to

88 ABU the new Conservative Government in 1979, Ken Stowe moved from **Downing Street** to become Perman

89 ABU morning debate. As we left Number 10 that evening, **Downing Street** had become thick with reporters a

90 ABU the tunnel. All the predictions were that the meeting at **Downing Street** between newly elected political

91 AC2 certainly not stand in the way. The result of the **Downing Street** meeting was an enthusiastic statement

92 ACN days later, Mark received a phone call from 10, **Downing Street**, asking for permission to publish the D

93 ADB he was Lisa Stansfield looks forward to the Eighties No. 10 DOWNING STREET. Letter from Westminster I

94 ADB to the question of why his name had such appeal for **Downing Street** during the eighties has an undram

95 ADB idea intellectual respectability. By the time that Mrs Thatcher entered **Downing Street** --; after a Winter

96 ADB submitted the name of the person chosen by his committee to **Downing Street**, where it was rubber-sta

97 ADB their role. One of the little pleasures of life in **Downing Street** is the opportunity it affords to dish out ba

98 ADB influence: jobs. For reasons best known to themselves. **Downing Street** declines either to list or number

99 ADB they can lose the post for the most bizarre reasons; **Downing Street** myth has it that Richard Cobb faile

100 ADB the twenty years between 1960 and 1980, the tenancy of **Downing Street** changed between Labour and