



Living with Uncertainty
Working Paper 2
***Metaphor, reconciliation and the
dynamics of empathy***

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Metaphor, reconciliation and the dynamics of empathy

.. I feel that's given me an --
an empathy.
and,
...(2.0) that's a gift that I --
I treasure.

Jo Berry, fourth meeting with Pat Magee, 2001.

At the time of writing this final chapter, it is ten years since Jo Berry and Pat Magee first met, and the twenty five years since the Brighton bombing killed Jo's father. When the bomb went off in 1984, Jo and Pat were complete strangers, unaware that they were on opposite sides of a political conflict with a long history, and that they were about to be connected by an act of violence. Today¹, the final stages of devolved power have been agreed in Northern Ireland between former loyalist and republican enemies; the conflict has evolved into a kind of peace, for the time being at least. How stable this peace will be remains to be seen; it seems stable enough currently not to be disrupted by occasional acts of violence. It is to be hoped that the stability of the peace is strong enough to absorb the tendency to violent action that runs through all societies, particularly when young people are underemployed or disenfranchised, and that nothing acts to fan the old conflict back into flames and violence.

Alongside these wider social changes, Jo Berry and Pat Magee have reached a kind of stability in their complicated relationship. While meeting and talking together is always stressful and exhausting because of the emotions evoked, the impact of the early, most powerful, meetings has been worked through to a calmer phase. Jo and Pat have proved themselves to be unusual and special people through their repeated willingness to engage with each other and to allow their talk together to be scrutinised and analysed.

This penultimate chapter summarises what has been revealed about the conciliation process, and the dynamics of empathy within that process, by employing metaphor analysis.

Summary of metaphor analysis

Metaphor has been investigated as discourse activity, integral to talking-and-thinking and understood as a complex dynamic system on multiple socio-cognitive dimensions. Metaphor analysis combines close scrutiny of metaphors with analysis of lexical, syntactic and rhetorical choices in immediate dialogic action, and, on a longer timescale, the contribution of metaphors to narratives, justifications and explanations as they are presented and re-presented.

The process of metaphor analysis began with the identification of metaphors in the transcribed conversations. Each metaphor was examined for its role in local discourse activity. The identified metaphors were assembled into semantically-linked groupings around key discourse topics, producing systematic metaphor trajectories across the conversationsⁱⁱ, including framing metaphors for key topics. Distributional analysis showed episodes of talk with metaphor clusters or metaphor absences. These three levels of metaphor analysis--local, emergent and distributional--were combined in hermeneutic and interpretive processes to understand how metaphor was used by Jo Berry and Pat Magee as they talked together over the years and how it contributed to their developing empathy.

How metaphor contributes to the conciliation conversations

Metaphor has played an important role in helping each person to come to understand the Other more deeply and more fully through the conciliation process of talking-and-thinking together. The Other, who was distanced and dehumanised through the conflict and the violence, comes to be known through and with metaphor in the discourse activity of the conversations.

The study has found that metaphor contributes to the conciliation process and supports the development of empathy in the following ways:

- Metaphor motivates and guides participation in conciliation.
- Metaphor enables discourse encounters with the Other
- Metaphor allows access to the emotions of the Other, and is also affectively protective.
- The poetics of place demonstrates how symbolic and metaphorical interaction between experience and physical place activates emotional resonances, and implications for post-conflict reconciliation.

Each of these is now summarised.

Metaphor motivates and guides participation in conciliation

Jo Berry's guiding metaphor for the process that we have called here 'conciliation' was *I can build a bridge across the divide* (extract 6.2). She voiced this metaphor to herself long before she met Pat Magee, and it contributed to the development of her ideas as she visited Ireland and tried to arrange a meeting. It continued to be used throughout the conversations: picked up and adapted by Pat; complemented by other *CONNECTION* metaphors; extended to talk about other meetings related to other conflicts.

The idea of *building a bridge* offers an excellent example of how metaphor functions in talking-and-thinking, and is best understood as discourse activity. Despite its concrete nature, *building a bridge* was not an image metaphor for Jo, in that she reported no visual images linked with the words, nor was it particularly specific, in that she reports thinking of no particular type of bridge or divide. The words of the metaphor were what tied it to her developing ideas of conciliation; the level of the metaphor, neither too general nor too precise, provided the best fit in terms of flexibility and usefulness to support Jo's thinking and to work in dialogue with Pat.

Jo also understood, from soon after her father's killing, that she *wanted to bring something positive out of* this negative experience, and what she brings from the conversations and meeting is some peace for herself through new ways of understanding the causes of violence, what she calls *the gifts of Brighton*. Metaphor serves here to summarise the abstract idea of turning a negative experience into a positive one, emphasising the unexpected good that she has found. Together with the *building a bridge*, these metaphors seem to have supported Jo's participation in the conciliation process by giving her a positive long term vision of what might be possible.

Pat Magee's metaphors for the process have been more changeable, perhaps reflecting the way he himself has made multiple adjustments through the process. From initially offering *a platform* to convey *the republican message*, the process became *a breaking down of barriers*, and most recently a means of *restoration of loss*. The one metaphor that stands out as consistently important to Pat is the idea of *being open*. He values Jo's openness and tries to reciprocate by *being open* himself. Again, the metaphor serves as to guide participation in the conciliation process, not so much as a goal but as an attitude of mind to attain.

Metaphor enables discourse encounters with the Other

The study has paid particular attention to the dialogics of metaphor: not just how individuals use metaphors, but how metaphors work between participants.

As has been found in other types of discourse activity, metaphors serve particular functions in dialogue. Some metaphors are particularly vivid and memorable, so serve to offer opportunities to reach deeper understanding of the Other's experiences and argumentation, and to be able to return to build on this in subsequent talk, as demonstrated by systematic metaphor trajectories. Some metaphors also work through simulations and somatic markers to help share the perceptual experiences of the Other. Metaphors often feature in codas to narratives, offering the Other a packaged and memorable summary of what happened and what was felt about what happened.

The particular discourse activity of post-conflict conciliation conversations has featured metaphors in other dialogic roles. The appropriation of metaphors across speakers marked small, and more significant, developments of empathy. Highly negative metaphors were used to construct alternative dystopian scenarios that enabled participants to come together in dismissing possible attitudes and values: to agree that being *open* was better than being *locked into bitterness*, for example. In this way, metaphor contributes to solving a key problem of reconciliation conversations-- how is it possible to find any commonality with the Other across alterity opened up by violence? In the flow of discourse activity, metaphors can create an alternative discourse space where participants can align with each other. This discourse space is constructed through language, where talking-and-thinking can take new directions.

Metaphor allows access to the emotions of the Other, and is also affectively protective

The importance of the affective in metaphor as discourse activity has been repeatedly and emphatically demonstrated by this study. Most of the metaphors in the conversations do not just contribute to talking-and-thinking about ideas but also reveal something of the emotions, attitudes and values of those who use them.

Many of the topics discussed in the conversations were difficult for Jo and for Pat. Painful memories were recalled and relived in telling to the Other; listening to the stories of suffering is also hard to bear. Jo had to cope with revisiting the terrible time around her father's killing while still living with his absence. Pat had to deal with the effect of taking responsibility for the suffering that he was faced with. Simple metaphors of *MOVEMENT* and *JOURNEYS*, of *PARTIAL SEEING*, and of *CONNECTION* and *SEPARATION* helped to express deep and difficult feelings. The same metaphors offered ways of crossing the divide between Jo and Pat, and of entering into the Other's perspective, through appropriation and shifting.

The absence of metaphor in the emotionally powerful bare narratives of chapters 7 and 8 demonstrated how metaphor is crucial in distancing and protecting speaker and listener from the most visceral experiences of emotional pain. While metaphor allows access to the emotions of the Other, it is also affectively protective in distancing people from the trauma of relived memories.

The poetics of place

In these particular post-conflict conversations, the interplay of metaphor with physical places has been an important source of affective impact. Through the poetics of place,

the emotional resonances of geographical sites significant to participants have been brought into the dialogue to be experienced by the Other. Traumatic human experiences are linked into the places where they happened--city streets, army barracks--and the places where the experiences were emotionally assimilated--city streets again, car parks, kitchens. The connections between the, often literally, concrete and the affective develop symbolically and eventually come to work as metaphor.

While metaphor theory has stressed the origin of much metaphor in the body and common bodily experience (Gibbs, 2006; Lakoff and Johnson, 1999), the poetics of place pushes embodiment out into the environment, demonstrating our need to retain connection with the specificity of the larger physical world (Merleau-Ponty, 1962; McGilchrist, 2009). The actualities of the conflict tie emotions into particular physical reality. In the case of conflict in Ireland, the reality was urban territories and fighting on the streets. Loyalists and republicans were living in separated areas of cities like Belfast, so that roads and areas become metonymically associated with opposing sides of the conflict. British soldiers sent to stop or prevent fighting became the third enemy in the conflict, trying to take over the streets, with all the associations those streets had come to contain.

The particular embodied realities of Jo and Pat's experiences of violence echo through their conversations. It seems probable that the poetics of place will be significant in discourse activity following violence or conflict. There are social implications for how changes to environments can contribute to moving on from conflict, but there are also implications for reconciliation dialogue. Visual images of places may be helpful if sensitively used, since they are likely to activate emotional and symbolic meanings, bringing them into the open to be adjusted, rendered less

toxic or less painful. The actual physical places in which people meet for post-conflict conversations matter. From Jo and Pat's talk, these places must, above all, and in contrast to conflict situations, feel *safe*.

A dynamic model of the development of empathy through post-conflict conversations

The model of empathy set up in the first chapter and the dynamic model sketched out in chapter 2 are combined and extended from the findings of the research into Jo and Pat's conversations, and displayed in figure 10.1.

[FIGURE 10.1 HERE]

Figure 10.1 A dynamic model of the development of empathy through post-conflict conversations

After preparing to meet, the data have revealed how Jo and Pat engage in developing empathy moment by moment in the conciliation process, and how empathy emerges on a longer timescale as new stabilities in their understandings, attitudes and feelings as a result of talking together. The left hand side of figure 10.1 shows the discourse activity as alternating periods of continuity talk and perturbation talk. This is where the local action of empathy happens, seen in this book as arising from various gestures of empathy. The centre of the diagram shows empathy as emerging from local activity, building and developing as time goes by, through continuous accumulating understanding and through sudden revelations or changes. The bottom right of figure 10.1 shows the stable outcomes of the process of engaging in empathy.

In operating at these different scales, empathy is like any other complex human cognitive and affective process that concerns others--loving and hating, worrying about, taking care of, teaching. Each of these involves small local actions that give rise to and come out of, longer term emotions, feelings and decisions. And, because the process involves relating with another person, it is, like these other processes and as Jo and Pat repeatedly demonstrate, always dialogic, although not necessarily symmetrical; the parties involved may act and feel quite differently but they are connected by the process they are involved in until one or other opts outⁱⁱⁱ. Emerging empathy is thus to be understood in terms of connecting with the Other, as in the banner shape that represents the nature of emerging empathy in the middle of figure 10.1. The use of the word 'connecting' directly results from the metaphor analysis and the importance of the poetics of place; it feels appropriate to describe empathy metaphorically in terms of physical contact, particularly in a context where empathy attempts to repair a conflict that has violently separated people from each other.

To understand how connecting with the Other has been done in the reconciliation conversations, gestures of empathy were collected and analysed. The analysis produces three categories of gestures of empathy, that seem to contribute differently to emerging empathy as connecting with the Other: allowing connecting; entering into the Other's perspective, and shifting how the Other is perceived. These more deliberate process of empathy work alongside the automatic empathic process that is now labelled 'direct affective connection'.

The final level in the dynamic model concerns long term changes to the understanding and connection between Self and Other. What is know about the Other accumulates, what is felt towards the Other stabilises and various outcomes are no

longer likely to be reversed. These affective and cognitive outcomes in the development of empathy are described as ‘emergent empathic stabilities’.

The research findings are now pulled together and the four levels of the dynamic model of empathy discussed.

Preparing for empathy

At the ‘entry level’ of empathy, participants need to be prepared for empathy. We have seen the different ways in which Jo Berry and Pat Magee prepared for meeting each other. They also mentally prepared differently. Jo was driven by her determination, personal ethics, and world view; she used metaphor to imagine process and outcome; she met other victims first which helped broaden her perspective; she learnt about the conflict which increased her openness to the possibility of empathy. Pat entered conciliation prepared to explain political motivations but the first meeting with Jo brought about sudden and dramatic change in his attitude to the process; he became more open and willing to talk about the personal as well as the political.

Preparing for empathy is important in advance of meeting but it continues throughout.

Each development in empathy is also a preparation for the next development.

The local action of empathy

The local action of empathy operates on a timescale of seconds and minutes and has been examined through Jo and Pat’s moment by moment talking-and-thinking together. Metaphor cluster analysis provided potentially significant episodes of discourse activity that were examined in particular detail. Just over half of all

metaphors occurred outside metaphor clusters, and each use was examined in the discourse activity.

The ‘gesture of empathy’ was introduced as a dialogic unit^{iv} of activity to describe local actions that are an affordance for connection with the Other. Every act of communication is, of course, in some way a gesture of empathy (McGilchrist, 2009) but the gestures of interest here are those that, as it were, take a step further towards the Other. Each gesture made by one participant has a possible dialogic counterpart action by the Other, even if this is only allowing the gesture to be made-- you can’t walk in the other person’s shoes if they do not allow it.

Gestures of empathy made in episodes of continuity talk were sometimes interrupted by sudden changes in discourse activity that shifted empathy to a new phase through some kind of perturbation. Such perturbations included the bare narratives told by Jo about her daughter’s reaction to her meeting Pat and by Pat about being detained by the British army as a young man; direct questions posed by Jo about Pat’s use of violence and his justifications for doing so; Pat accepting responsibility for the consequences to Jo of the violence; and Jo accepting a degree of collective responsibility for the political causes of the Irish conflict.

Collected together from the preceding chapters, gestures of empathy can be divided into three types, that each contribute differently to emerging empathy and connecting with the Other. These categories, and the role of metaphor in the discourse activity they include, are now summarised and discussed.

Emergent empathy: Allowing connection

These gestures of empathy give the Other access to one’s thinking and feelings about the past, the present and the future. They include:

- offering an explanation of one's feelings about events and situations to the Other;
- attempting to explain traumatic events and emotions to the Other;
- being willing to open oneself up to relive traumatic memories;
- being willing to try to explain reasons for engaging in violence;
- opening self to critical reflection on past choices and actions, and sharing that with the Other.

Giving the Other access to one's thinking and feelings involves being willing to recall and describe past events and situations that may have been extremely traumatic.

Explaining these to the Other is likely to cause renewed pain that must be prepared for and dealt with. A perpetrator has to be willing to try to explain what led to the violence happening, and this opens up multiple sources of difficulty. It will be painful for the victim to hear, and may make them angry or more hurt. Honest appraisal of decisions and justifications made many years earlier may face the perpetrator with what seems like an almost impossible choice, between standing by what was decided in the face of the personal pain it caused or re-assessing decisions and then having to live with the guilt. Allowing connection therefore benefits from personal strength and support from the Other, or from a mediator if present.

In the process of allowing connection with the Other, metaphor offers multiple alternative ways of expressing oneself, and of hiding and highlighting particular aspects of what is said (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). Metaphors that express affect (*pain, raw, betray, purge debt*) give the Other access to one's emotions and feelings. Contrasting metaphors used to construct alternative dystopian scenarios were particularly helpful in explaining stance or decision.

Emergent empathy: Entering into the Other's perspective

Gestures of empathy that involve creative understanding of the Other (Bakhtin, XX) attempt to understand the world view of the Other through what is known about their experiences and emotions. Entering the Other's perspective has been carried out in several ways, including:

- anticipating the effect of one's words on the Other, and mitigating them;
- acknowledging the Other's feelings, through choice of word or phrase;
- offering the Other a summary of what has been heard;
- adding to the Other's explanation or argument with one's own supporting contribution;
- speaking as if from the Other's perspective in the preface to a question.

Entering the Other's perspective is a more strongly empathic process since it involves applying what has been learnt about the Other to what one says and does. Pat Magee and Jo Berry show, throughout the data, a great deal of respect and care for the other's feelings while they are in conversation. Some metaphors enter the discourse activity as the 'discourse property' of one or other speaker, as it were from one side of the alterity; their affective or semantic content clearly marks them as belonging to the perspective of one speaker and so, when used by the other speaker, they offer a clear indication of creative understanding. Adapting, quoting or alluding to a metaphor brought to the discourse by the Other can demonstrate or suggest an entering into the Other's perspective.

Emergent empathy: Shifting the perceived relation of Self and Other

A group of gestures of empathy were found that seem to mark a shift in the relations between Self and Other. These include:

- repositioning the Other, formerly an enemy, as someone with a story to tell, and taking time and effort to listen to what the Other has to say;
- as ‘victim’, exploring the political causes of the conflict and taking some responsibility through social group affiliation;
- as ‘perpetrator’, acknowledging the dehumanising of the enemy, and taking time and effort to come to see them as a more full human being;
- acknowledging that both Other and Self have suffered from the violence of the conflict.

Gestures of empathy that allow connection and enter into the Other’s perspective change understanding of and attitudes towards the Other. Gradually or suddenly, perceptions shift. The gestures in this category are local, specific actions that position the Other and/or the Self differently. Changes in metaphor and appropriation of metaphor can mark this kind of gesture.

Emergent empathy: Direct affective connection

Bare narratives, and their descriptions of the emotions of grief, anger and fear, proved to have particularly potential for powerfully evoking automatic emotional empathy through perceptual simulations and somatic markers that allow some kind of experiencing of the visceral impact being described by the Other.

Emergent empathic stabilities

The fourth level in the dynamic model concerns long term affective and cognitive changes to the understanding and connection between Self and Other, described as ‘emergent empathic stabilities’. The emerging empathy detailed above leads to changes in the understanding and the alterity between Self and Other. It also leads to changes in understanding of the Self. What is known about the Other accumulates, various outcomes are not reversible, and what is felt towards the Other stabilises, although always open to further change.

Emergent empathic stabilities: Empathic learning

Through dialogue, Jo and Pat have come to know about each other’s history. They have experienced tellings and retellings of key events, and shared some of the emotions around these events. Their experience in dialogue has led to a familiarity with each other’s ways of using language and metaphor. We can describe this development as ‘empathic learning’.

Automatic or emotional empathy lets you learn about the Other’s feelings and emotions. There is much else that can be learnt: about their history and their social group affiliations; about their experiences and reactions to them; about their reasoning and justifications for action or decisions. The metaphor, developed mainly by Pat, that best fits the idea of empathic learning is of coming to see a full picture of the Other. Conflict and violence require and force limited and partial attention to the humanity of the Other; a *distorted image*, a *caricature* or a *glimpse* is all that can be permitted. Post-conflict conciliation fills in and corrects the image of the Other as a person with human emotions and responses to experience. The empathic learning they have

achieved means that simple labels, such as victim and perpetrator, are no longer sufficient. Each now knows the other as a specific person, with families and in the wider socio-cultural world (extract 10.1).

Extract 10.1 That's what it's all about

4-1163 Jo Pat said,
1164 that,
1165 he realised now that he could,
1166 he could have sat down with my dad and,
1167 had a cup of tea.
1168 and ..erm.
1169 those words just sort of shook me,
1170 and made me realise that,
1171 actually that's what it's all about.

Empathy may be work of the imagination but the more that is learnt about the Other, the more effectively that imagination can work.

Empathic learning in reconciliation needs to counter the effects of engaging in violence that continue to influence both perpetrator and victim. Once the Other takes shape as a person through empathic learning, it becomes increasingly difficult to keep them distanced and dehumanised.

The study has shown how dehumanising worked on multiple dimensions for Pat Magee: he experienced dehumanising at the hands of the British army; he engaged in dehumanising of IRA enemies; by disallowing the humanity of people like Jo's father who became a *cipher* or *legitimate targets* rather than *father or grandfather*, he feels to have lost some of his own humanity. The conciliation conversations have contributed to countering some of the effects of that experience.

Empathic learning has an enormous task in changing the ideas, attitudes and values of participants in reconciliation. Individuals have turned to violence and conflict as a result of a nexus of influences: visceral responses to danger and threats to territory; groups that offer to meet the human need for approval and acceptance; political promises to address social issues; long histories of difficult relationships between groups. The question arises for future research of how strong empathic learning generated by reconciliation has to be in any given context to outweigh these influences and their lasting effects?

Emergent empathic stabilities: Bridges across alterity

Empathic learning is accompanied in the post-conflict conversations by an attitudinal 'moving toward' the Other, marked by the expression of increasing commonalities, and described, in homage to Jo Berry's vision and determination, as 'bridges across alterity'. The bridges across alterity are manifested in the commonalities they now find with each other and their continuing, complex relationship.

Their conversations have revealed and developed certain commonalities with each other, or across their social groups, that cover values, attitudes, and judgements of behaviour. Pat admitted to sharing with his former enemies the tendency to dehumanising. Jo has said that she recognises a desire to hurt and blame inside herself, and that she cannot rule out the possibility that growing up in different circumstances might have led her to violence. Through their shared and individual journeys, Jo and Pat have come to agree that violence should not be necessary to solve political problems and injustices, and work together on various projects to advance that. It is in the pursuit of these new, shared goals that we find the most convincing evidence of success for the conciliation process they have engaged in.

The nature of the emergent relationship between Jo Berry and Pat Magee is intriguing. It continues to evolve. In 2003, they spoke of each other as *friends* but in 2009 found that label harder to accept when asked directly about the development of the relationship between them. As Jo said, “If friends are people who care about each other, then yes. But it’s more complex than that.” Pat speaks of “reaching a level of understanding with Jo”, of admiring and respecting her. Friendship seems at once appropriate and inappropriate as a description of the bridge they have constructed between them. The emotional ambivalence that Halpern and Weinstein (2004) described as accompanying post-conflict reconciliation is what makes ‘friendship’ inappropriately simple to describe Jo and Pat’s relationship; the killing of Jo’s father leaves an alterity that can never closed but must be worked into a form that can be lived with.

The feeling of emotional ambivalence was described by Jo (extract 10.2) recounting an incident when empathy suddenly switched into ambivalence as she became aware of the contradictions involved in understanding the Other. The incident is contextualised in terms of place in the opening line.

Extract 10.2 Like a *computer kind of dying*

4-1239 Jo we were sitting at a table,
 1240 and there was Pat ,
 1241 and somebody who’d,
 1242 been in the British Army,
 1243 and someone who’d been in the loyalist paramilitary.
 1244 ...and I just looked at,
 1245 three of them.
 1246 ...and just had this sense,
 1247 <X sort of X>

1248 looking into their eyes,
1249 all three of them,
1250 actually,
1251 ...I could've been all of them.
1252 I could be their sister.
1253 <X you know X>
1254 that ..erm.
1255 they were all right,
1256 from their perspective.
1257 and a--
1258 I think part of my,
1259 sort of,
1260 brain,
1261 ..just,
1262 sort of,
1263 went,
1264 you know,
1265 <@ couldn't cope @>
1266 <@ it was like a computer kind of dying @>
1267 because,
1268 ..it's very hard to think that it was,
1269 more about,
1270 the heart,
1271 I want to make sense,
1272 but it was like,
1273 a heart,
1274 ..empathy.
1275 <X because I understand it there X>
1276 but not necessarily with,
1277 my thinking.

For Jo, this kind of empathy--understanding the Others' perspectives 'from the heart', as she puts it--is not always compatible with rational or logical thinking. Coping with this ambivalence will remain as one of the difficulties of engaging in conciliation and developing empathy. When Jo and Pat reflect on their meetings, they mention both the rewards and the difficulties, the highs and the drained exhaustion they feel. But working and talking together feels to be valuable enough to outweigh the problems. The relationship is not just between the two of them but includes, as a third factor, the discourse activity that has enabled their empathy to develop and that continues.

Notes

- i. 8 March 2010.
- ii. The systematic metaphors emerged, it should again be noted, for the analyst and not necessarily for the participants.
- iii. In complex systems terms, Self and Other work as a coupled system where the activity of individual systems affects the emergent joint system.
- iv. For a complex dynamics approach, the term 'unit' is unsuitable and also annoyingly difficult to replace. It is unsuitable because it suggests an object or separable quantity, quite incompatible with the idea that all is dynamics and in flux; flow cannot be separated into units. What we need is a way to describe flow on a smaller level, perhaps in a fractal sense. This remains a problem to be addressed.

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Figure 10.1 A dynamic model of the development of empathy through post-conflict conversations

