
Reviewed by Bradley Smith, Columbia College

In Metaphor and Writing, Philip Eubanks makes two general contributions to scholarship on the discursive framing of writing. First, Eubanks contextualizes conceptual metaphor use for framing everyday language about writing by connecting the Conduit Metaphor to other conceptual elements. Second, Eubanks calls attention to the rhetorical dimension of figurative language use at the conceptual level. In order to accomplish these tasks, Eubanks analyzes the use of “writer” and “to write” in a corpus of texts drawn from interviews with professional writers and from texts that comment on writing effectively. The first of these two contributions provides the structure for much of the book, parsing out a number of different conceptual elements and ending with a defense of the Conduit Metaphor, based on its use in context. The rhetorical dimension also carries throughout Eubanks’ argument and functions as the connection between the different conceptual elements discussed.

In chapter 1, Eubanks posits that conceptual metaphors are part of a “rhetorical give and take” between different conceptual elements (conceptual metaphors, conceptual metonymies, graded categories, licensing stories, and conceptual blends) that help people define writing (23). After arguing for this rhetorical relationship, Eubanks discusses some of the different elements involved in the conceptualization of writing. Chapter 2 shows a common double bind that occurs in everyday discourse about writing: all those who write are not “writers.” Eubanks suggests that this double bind occurs because of the graded categories that people use to define the concepts “writer” and “to write.” He argues that the category “to write” has two prototypical forms: the pen-to-paper prototype (a transcription model) and the typical actions of a prototypical writer (35). Eubanks adds an additional bind in the third chapter, where he describes the tension between the general-ability view of writing (all writing situations require a similar and transferrable set of abilities) and the specific-expertise view (different writing situations require different sets of abilities that will not transfer from one situation to another).

Eubanks argues in chapter 4 that these binds occur because there are three different licensing stories for categorizing writing: the literate inscriber (the basic transcription of thoughts to paper), the good writer (the ability to exercise good judgment as a composer and thinker), and the author writer (writers who exemplify “a moment of becoming; a strong desire to express thoughts in writing; powerful, automatic, non-logical writing experiences; a commitment to truth-telling; and an exceptional love of reading and
words”) (79). According to Eubanks, these stories are hierarchical and largely nested and are thus interrelated, though some features attenuate at the highest level, the author writer level (62-63). Furthermore, these stories rely on two metonymies for their construction: Writing is Thought and Writing is Identity (63).

In chapter 5, Eubanks discusses the role that the metonymy Writing Is Speaking plays in the conceptualization of written communication. Specifically, Eubanks focuses his analysis on the concept of voice, connecting the concept back to the metonymies Writing Is Thought and Writing Is Identity and to the licensing stories discussed in chapter 4. This line of argument leads Eubanks to identify and define three different characterizations of voice, which correspond to the three licensing stories mentioned above: Writing As Transcription, Writing As Talk, and the Discovered Voice (104). Like their licensing stories, these characterizations of voice have a nested relationship (104). Chapter 6 returns to the metonymy Writing Is Identity and more fully examines its relationship to the concept of the Writing Self. Here, Eubanks states that the “naïve pairing of voice and self that writing scholars feel the greatest urgency to refute” did not often occur in the corpus examined (123). Instead, Eubanks found that writers created complex conceptual blends of self, altering their conceptualization of self in order to achieve rhetorical effectiveness (127)—even if it occurred as a conceptual erasure of self, in the case of technical writing (139).

Chapter 7 builds on Eubanks’ argument in “Understanding Metaphors for Writing: In Defense of the Conduit Metaphor,” published in College Composition and Communication (2001). The chapter posits that the “nearly unanimous condemnation the metaphor elicits” should be reexamined to account for the complex ways the metaphor’s frame is used in context (142). Eubanks suggests that the standard objections to the Conduit Metaphor fail to consider the “rhetorical constitution” of the metaphor’s frame, instead only examining the basic metaphor itself and that these objections fail to consider the Conduit Metaphor beyond a flat ontological assertion about language use (143). That is, the standard objections to the Conduit Metaphor leave out the dynamic nature of the metaphor’s use in context and its connection to the other conceptual elements discussed earlier. This chapter also describes the way that the Conduit Metaphor works with the metonymy Language Is Power and explores the rhetorical constitution of this combination. Eubanks concludes that the two are rhetorically connected because Language Is Power necessitates the need for the Conduit Metaphor, writing: “If we accept Language Is Power, we create a socially generated ethical need for the Conduit Metaphor,” because of its emphasis on clarity, directness, and truth (162-163). It is unclear, though, why another conceptual metaphor could not also meet this same ethical obligation.

In chapter 8, Eubanks discusses what he calls the “Other Conduit Metaphor,” which functions through a simultaneous embrace and denial of the Conduit Metaphor’s logic (171). In this way, the negative aspect of the
Conduit Metaphor frame—a description of the ways the Conduit Metaphor does not accurately describe written communication—works with its positive counterpart to define success in written communication. That is, the idea that writing is not a matter of simple transmission becomes a constraint that author writers must work to overcome (178). These constraints placed on the communicative act manifest, Eubanks argues, as elaborate conceptual blends designed to aid effective communication—for instance conceptual blends where authors evoke or erase the audience or aspects of the audience during composition.

In his final chapter, Eubanks reminds us that the book does not offer an exhaustive catalog of conceptual metaphors and other figurative language for written communication—that he has only examined one conceptual system in detail. Further, Eubanks reminds us that while much of our conceptual system is unconscious, we still have choice in the metaphors that we use to think about written communication.

The methods that Eubanks employs in this book are simultaneously a major strength and a weakness. Eubanks pulls from a rich and contextualized sampling of data, which allows him to study figurative language use in everyday discourse, instead of relying completely on introspection. This method is a step forward for researching how written communication is cognitively conceptualized. It represents a methodological shift that is occurring in cognitive linguistics but has yet to be widely adopted by writing scholars who study conceptual metaphor use. Yet, Eubanks only describes these methods briefly in his introduction, so that his data collection and analysis remain hidden, for the most part. A much fuller account of his analysis would have strengthened his argument greatly. This lack of discussion makes it difficult to follow the connections between Eubanks’ argument about the Conduit Metaphor and the passages he cites from the corpus as evidence of the Conduit Metaphor in practice. At times, the Conduit Metaphor is not readily apparent in these passages. For this reason, Eubanks’ argument about the Conduit Metaphor is in danger of breaking Ronald Langacker’s principle of restrictiveness, which suggests that conceptual structures “ascribable to speakers as a characterization of their linguistic ‘knowledge’ (or ability)” are limited to “those for which a straightforward acquisitional account can in principle be given” (Langacker 25). Thus, instances where the Conduit Metaphor is at work should be restricted to passages from the corpus where the metaphor is readily apparent.

Despite this limitation, the book will be quite useful to teachers of writing because it offers a good deal of insight into the conceptual domain of writing. This insight will aid teachers in understanding the mental operations that students are performing when they attempt to create “good writing.” Especially useful for teachers of writing is Eubanks’ analysis of the different licensing stories for writers and writing. Teachers who are able to consciously employ these stories in classroom settings will be able to assist students as they advance through the nested hierarchy that Eubanks
describes. Furthermore, after reading this book, teachers will also be better attuned to the tension and conflict between the different stories. Once that conflict is recognized, it can be defined and resolved as part of the pedagogical process. In addition, this book is an excellent resource for anyone who would like to follow Linda Adler-Kassner’s call for the activist WPA because knowing these figurative constructions and being able to consciously use them offers WPAs a way to reframe conversations that rely on the concepts that Eubanks has described.

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### Works Cited


*Reviewed by Kristina A. Gutierrez, University of Texas*

Literacy practices shift and morph with the rise of digital environments. In *Women and Gaming: The Sims and 21st Century Learning*, James Paul Gee and Elisabeth R. Hayes expand the conversation on literacy by focusing on women’s rhetorical strategies in production and design. Gee and Hayes illustrate how women gamers’ digital literacies enable them to produce multimodal texts that solve problems and invite involvement from audiences in popular culture. Gee and Hayes extend media theorist Henry Jenkins’ concept of “participatory cultures” defined as communities in which advanced designers engage in varying levels of informal mentoring of novice designers (5) to their analysis of women gamers’ multimodal consumption and production practices. Scholarship on multimodality within rhetoric and composition explores ways to extend students’ understanding of how their design choices are not only influenced by social contexts but also by the material affordances of modes (Kress 51, 87).

Gee and Hayes contribute to this scholarship by tracing the ways agency is manifested in digital environments via situated literacy and multimodality (128-29). This book fits into the framework of post-process with its emphasis on the situated, interactive, and public facets to literacy. However, Gee and Hayes go beyond traditional approaches which focus on analysis, interpretation, and consumption by also examining women gamers’ situated literacies and use of modes in production and design. Situated literacies include written, visual, verbal, and/or digital literacies that better enable individuals to “fit into” (or modify and/or resist) the ways of being and