



# COGNITIVE LINGUISTICS AND THE POETICS OF TIME: IS 9/11 A CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR, A CONCEPTUAL METONYMY OR BOTH?\*

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## 1. What is 9/11, linguistically speaking?

Intuitively, we might interpret 9/11 as a simple date. Like most languages, English has a tendency to abbreviate dates in this way, and 9/11 univocally refers to the eleventh day of September. However, the typical referent of this temporal expression is the 11<sup>th</sup> of September 2001. Furthermore, neither in speech nor in writing do we usually allude to dates by means of this kind of abbreviation. Dates written in their abbreviated notational form do not usually appear within full sentences. When dates are included in the body of the text, it is usual to have a more analytic paraphrase, as exemplified in:

(1) My birthday is on 18<sup>th</sup> December (spoken ‘the eighteenth of December’)

The time expression *9/11*, unlike the above expression, is highly entrenched in language. Indeed, orally, *9/11* is spoken with a ‘literal’ recitation of the figures: *nine eleven* and not with a ‘transformed’ reading. This leads to the feeling that something is being highlighted when that particular temporal reference is employed.

There are different ways of writing and saying dates in English, as style guides and most TEFL manuals propose. In general, and despite tendencies towards mixed usage in date format, two main variants are identifiable. Conventionally, in British

English, the date in example (1) could be written as: *18 December*, *18<sup>th</sup> December* (or even *18<sup>th</sup> December*, where typographically *th* is not a superscript) or *18<sup>th</sup> of December*. In contrast, American English users would prefer to write *December 18*, *December 18<sup>th</sup>* or *December the 18<sup>th</sup>*. In oral language, British English speakers will say *the eighteenth of December* while American English will opt for *December the eighteenth* or *December eighteenth*.

To return to our time lexicalisation *9/11*, it is evident that the format in question does not adhere to any of the alternatives above. We should not forget that language is chiefly iconic, so different meanings are grammatically verbalised in different ways. From the cognitive-linguistic perspective, and against the Chomskyan view, grammar and semantics are closely interlaced. If there is such a linguistic (in fact numerical) expression as *9/11*, a different meaning from just ‘the eleventh day of September’ is constructed. As we will see, *9/11* combines several levels of metaphorical/metonymic analysis. From this, we presume that *9/11* is a special case of expression with a particularly complex conceptual motivation, given that it combines several levels of metaphoric/metonymic analysis, as we will see later in this piece of research.

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In this case, the expression *9/11* refers to the ‘coordinated terrorist suicide attacks performed by Muslim fundamentalists in New York (USA) on September 11, 2001.’ Accordingly, a temporal (perhaps historiographic) locution is pointing to some external event. From the perspective of Cognitive Linguistics, this is an instance of cognitive or conceptual metonymy. Every time a speaker (or writer) utters the time expression *9/11*, s/he is meaning the serious episode that occurred on that date. Figuratively, where we would normally expect a conceptual metaphor, this cognitive operation anchored in an unusual pairing of form and meaning results in a particular conceptualisation of temporality by means of which we activate a TIME FOR EVENT metonymy<sup>1</sup>, or more specifically, DATE FOR SINGULAR EVENT<sup>2</sup>.

As is the case with metaphor, two domains participate in the internal dynamics of metonymic processes. Using the terminology introduced by Ruiz de Mendoza & Otal (2002), we can classify the domains under two distinct categories. In terms of the direction of the conceptual mapping, one domain acts as the source while the second domain will do the job of the target. The source domain is the point of access to the meaning construction process.

From another angle, metonymy involves a matrix domain and a subdomain, not to be confused with the notions of source and target. Let us clarify the difference. Metonymy has always been conceived as being a kind of connection between a “whole” and a “part”, albeit in Cognitive Linguistics, the array of metonymies is more richly detailed. The matrix domain corresponds to what we have traditionally

studied as the “whole” whereas the subdomain is a “part” of the matrix domain. The matrix is always, so to speak, whole and the subdomain is always part. The labels “source” and “target” belong to a different categorization, and relate exclusively to the direction of the mapping, i.e., a matrix domain can play the role of source or that of target, depending on the context.

In line with Ruiz de Mendoza & Otal (2002), and taking into account the classification above, there are two types of metonymy depending on the structural properties of the domains themselves: source-in-target metonymy (i.e. the source is a subdomain of the target) and target-in-source metonymy (where the target is now a subdomain of the source). Our TIME FOR EVENT metonymy *9/11*, in particular, is an instantiation of a target-in-source metonymy, whereby the matrix domain (*9/11*) is reduced to referring to a salient subdomain (the terrorist attack). Figure 1 illustrates the mapping, technically speaking, of a domain reduction:

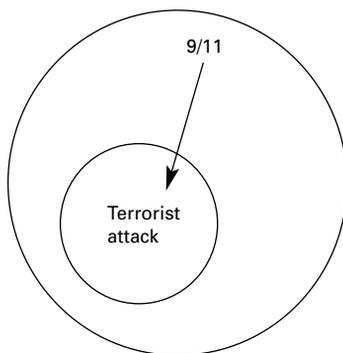


FIGURE 1: Domain reduction in the 9/11 metonymy

Evans (2004) inspects the notion of time in his book *The Structure of Time*, and posits a radial network<sup>3</sup> for temporality. Time is at the core of a radial network of semantically-connected senses. This position goes against the traditional view on lexical structure, which saw word meaning as inert and not capable of generating potential semantic expansion. Consequently, the concept of TIME is organized by means of a chain-like network of lexical concepts which point to different conceptions (more or less ‘meanings’) of the term when it is used in actual language.

Evans’s central objective is to explore the different ways of construing the word *time*, which he calls senses and which together conform the encyclopaedic meaning of the concept TIME. Time does not have a unified meaning. On the contrary, an

utterance will highlight a specific sense of the term. As said earlier, *9/11* is a temporal term and so can trigger a specific meaning within the radial network of time. Among the different modes of construing time, as proposed by Evans (2004), we find, for example, a Duration Sense (with durative aspect), an Agentive Sense (in which time is personified), a Measure-System Sense (where time is a unit of calculation), etc. The concrete sense that *9/11* evokes is the Event Sense. An Event denotes an action and refers to an experiential point in time. This is in particular what motivates the metonymy TIME FOR EVENT.

From the previous paragraphs, we progressively understand that *9/11* is not just a series of digits signalling a precise day in the calendar. It conveys more ‘meaning’. Note that historically notable dates are often referred to in this way (e.g. *23-F* is a significant date in Spain because of a coup d’état carried out on that day). Likewise, further Al-Qaeda mass murders are linguistically mentioned via their dates of execution. For example, in journalese writing, *7/7* stands for the London underground explosions on 7 July 2005 and *3/11* would stand for the Madrid train bombings on 11 March 2004. Whereas the latter may have less referential success in the English language, its Spanish counterpart *11-M* is sometimes seen.

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Now we are aware that the linguistic sign or category *9/11* metonymically stands for ‘the Islamic terrorist attack’. Of course, many events occurred on that day (newspapers and the annals of American history can evidence this), but only one is relevantly profiled. Mainzer (2002: ix), in his monographic book about the concept of time, accounts for the implication of that date for the history of mankind:

The end of the second millennium was merely a numerical occasion that left no significant traces on humanity. Even the date conversion of computer times was taken in stride by our worldwide information and communication networks. Instead, the widely anticipated catastrophes and dislocations took place at other times; September 11, 2001, was a far more consequential event than was January 1, 2000.

Moreover, it should be remembered that, on 11 September, there were in fact four impacts. Two aeroplanes crashed into two skyscrapers in New York City, another aircraft crashed into the Pentagon in Washington, and the fourth airliner crashed in Pennsylvania. The tendency, at least in English, however, is to reserve the tag *9/11* for the Twin Towers crash, given that it was the most disastrous and so the most prominent in cognitive terms. The World Trade Center destruction, because of the emblematical nature of the complex and because of the massive killing of citizens, has become more prominent in people’s minds than the rest of the attacks, and so *9/11* is more logically attached to this event.

This implies that not all encyclopaedic knowledge encapsulated in *9/11* is accessed: only the fatal incident in the World Trade Center buildings. Thus, the metonymic

operation serves the purpose of clarifying a referent which, otherwise, might be hard to recognize appropriately. As said before, the numeric acronym *9/11* would be the reference-point for one of the four airplane collisions that took place on that date.

This way of understanding that date somehow constrains its grammatical (or orthographical) rendering. *9/11* is the natural way to refer to the terrorist attack. The conceptual operation that we call metonymy is so powerful a tool that it has significant effects upon all aspects of language. In the terminology of Peña & Ruiz de Mendoza (2009), this conceptual metonymy, when triggered, would act as a licensing factor in the grammatical process that we describe. The particular meaning activated by the metonymy is reflected in the way that the temporal term is written (through numbers and not words). The influence of conceptual metonymy upon language has also been studied by Ruiz de Mendoza & Otal (2002), whose insights might be applied to some examples that follow.

For instance, some words may undergo a process of conversion (word class change) by means of metonymy. Such is the case of *to summer in Paris*, where there is an underlying TIME PERIOD FOR ACTION metonymy. The result in grammar is that the word *summer*, originally a noun, is transformed into a verb. Moreover, as noted by Ruiz de Mendoza & Otal (2002) again, metonymy may give rise to changes in the transitive or intransitive character of verbs. For example, *to walk* is commonly an intransitive verb; yet, it might be transitivised through the metonymy ACTIVITY FOR (CAUSED) EVENT in sentences like *He walked me home*. Also, some nouns can experience a change from countable to uncountable status due to metonymy. For example, in the utterance *There's too much immigrant in this country*, the noun *immigrant*, technically speaking a singular form, constructs the meaning of plurality as a result of the metonymic operation. The metonymy in question affects the morphological choice. And adjectives are perspectivised in different ways depending on the metonymy performed (e.g. *fast lane* vs. *fast driver*). In conclusion, metonymy usually constrains grammatical constructions.

We therefore observe that conceptual metonymy exerts an influence on the internal organization of language. Coming back to our case study, and in order to understand why the metonymy is possible only through the abbreviated form *9/11*, it would be helpful to compare the abbreviation under discussion with alternative versions that equally refer to the 11<sup>th</sup> of September. Let us imagine a situation in which someone was hired for a job vacancy on 11 September:

- (2) I started working for a new company on 9/11.
- (3) I started working for a new company on 11 September.

Whereas (3) could be a proper expression of that state of affairs, (2) is probably an infelicitous depiction of that situation unless there is some kind of intended relation with or reference to the terrorist attack. This type of abbreviation (with the format MM/DD<sup>4</sup>), is not usual in written language, and the most prototypical way of abbreviating dates is that in example (3), i.e. the day is represented numerically but the month is usually a full word (not a number). Let us say that there are different degrees or stages involved in abbreviation. The full version of a date would include the article *the*, the ordinal, and maybe the preposition (*of*), e.g. *the eleventh of September* (or *September [the] eleventh* in American English). Then, there are different choices, that is to say, alternative abbreviations that co-exist; some are longer than others and are used depending on the type of text. For example, *11 September* or *September 11* is a satisfactory abbreviation for written discourse. In contrast, the shorter equivalent (*9/11*) is not common except in speech. In (2), we see an abbreviation which is not easily integrated in written language. It is a structure that sounds strange in this type of discourse, or a “formless form of meaning” in Guerra’s terminology (personal communication). These “formless forms” are the result of ongoing discourse and serve the purpose of constructing the desired semantic effect. In the light of the findings of Cognitive Poetics, we can infer that in (2) the numeric abbreviation (not natural in this type of utterance) would involve a complex operation (metonymy) and convey the meaning intended by the speaker. If this were not the case, (2) would be an unacceptable sentence in English.

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Consequently, (3) reproduces a literal use of language while (2) is a sample case of metonymy, a metonymy which is activated through the use of an atypical form in relation to the type of text. These two ways of construing temporality reinforce the assumption that grammar (in its broad sense) and semantics are very much interconnected. The unique morphological formats of September 11th generate two different semantic readings, i.e. different spellings involve different connotations.

It seems sensible to conclude that, by some means, after the massive attacks, the temporal expression *9/11* was conventionalised used as a useful ‘wording’ to refer to them, and the understanding of *9/11* as a reference to the terrorist strike seems to be a strong default interpretation. Possibly, the use of that conceptual metonymy was, in turn, highly economical, linguistically speaking. A longer, more analytical rephrasing like *the awful terrorist attack(s) that took place on September 11* was felt to be rather heavily loaded with self-evident information, so an aseptic version was preferred socially. The label *9/11* seems to be a way of separating ourselves from reality. Apparently, we are using extraneous vocabulary (digits) in an efficient way to refer to a criminal offence. However, numbers are also part of everyday speech,

so this should not surprise us. Broadly conceived, human language may be said to contain not only words but also numbers. This means that meaning (and thought) is possible through the linguistic use of figures.

Figures are meaningful per se, because they indicate number at some level of abstraction (e.g. *five* or 5 indicate a specific amount of units different to, say, two or zero, which entails absence). However, we can observe that 9/11 has an added meaning triggered pragmatically, due to the particular linguistic context of the expression.

Interestingly, the lexicalisation of 9/11 derives from American English. We know that, when a date needs to be abbreviated in written language, especially in American English, the month precedes the day. The fact itself that the terrorist strike took place in the United States and that the news was covered most immediately by the local or national press agencies might be the reason why the expression was conventionalised as 9/11 and not 11/9, which would be its British English equivalent. In addition, as will be explained later on, this way of transcribing (and speaking of) dates has become the default format in order to refer to other Al-Qaeda terrorist attacks in American English. Similarly, look at typical Spanish expressions like *el día D* or *por hache o por be*, which are parallel constructions. It seems reasonable to assume that neither graphemes nor figures possess much meaning in themselves; in truth, letters and numbers are merely access routes to meaning, and are likely to have full meaning only in use, i.e. in context.

Here one might consider the different degrees of distance between domains (Dirven 1993). Roughly, the conceptual domains of TIME and VIOLENCE are poles apart, which precisely motivates the euphemistic intention. A lengthy wording of the semantic content encapsulated in the time phrase 9/11 like that introduced initially ('co-ordinated terrorist suicide attacks carried out by Muslim fundamentalists in New York (USA) on September 11, 2001') would be openly direct, evocative and painful for some listeners.

Our hypothesis is based on the fact that this comprehensive paraphrase has become a kind of sociolinguistic taboo, so English speakers have conventionalised 9/11 as a politically-correct wording. When the terrorist attack happened, there was an instant need to talk about it in the language of mass media<sup>5</sup>, in such a way that a novel expression had to be linguistically produced. Unlike an explicatory version, 9/11 seemingly includes little semantic content because it consists of a sole numeric abbreviation. Consider similar processes in which metonymies have been widely used to avoid presumably indecent words. Let us examine why the word *váter* once replaced *retrete* in Spanish. The term *váter* is a loanword from the English *water*, as

a reduced version for water closet (*WC*). *WC* is the abbreviation of *water closet* (a closet where there is water), so there exists a metonymic part-for-whole relationship. In fact, not only the metonymic operation but also the use of a foreign word in Spanish hides the seemingly indecorous meaning of the word. The social taboo is of a different nature in the *WC* example. *9/11* is used to minimize the impact of a longer expression which might recreate the heartbreaking mood of that day (like *the terrorist attack*). The lexicalizations *váter* or *WC* in Spanish are used for the sake of politeness.

Lastly, we should like to raise a point about the way the terrorist strikes are construed in Spanish and English. As we have seen before, the English language uses a strictly numerical term (*9/11* or *7/7*). By contrast, Spanish is prone to operating with alphanumeric tags, e.g. *11-S* or *7-J*. The fact that these two attacks were executed in the Anglo-American context makes English speakers cope with them through a figure, given that the use of a digit allows speakers to somehow distance themselves from the tragic experience. Meaning emerges from the conceptualizations that we speakers generate on the basis of our experience, and we articulate language somehow from our experiences in the world. Then, using the special notation *9/11* helps to reduce the personal and collective awareness of this violent act of terrorism. However, we must note that the Madrid bombings are usually referred to alphanumerically as *11-M* in both the Spanish and the Anglo-American background<sup>6</sup>, given its lexicalization in Spanish.

Nonetheless, metonymies generally have strong referential potential and the devices that speakers tend to use are simply psychological operations aimed at hiding the negative connotations. As illustrated in example (2), the time expression *9/11* has proven to carry a high deictic potential, and the same is true of *7/7* and *11-M*.

## 2. *9/11* as the output of a metaphor and metonymy combination

In this section, we will discuss how the phrase *9/11* has undergone a further cognitive elaboration. In the corpus we have analysed, *9/11* no longer refers to the calamity which took place on September 11. The expression has gone through a process of generalisation. Consider the following examples:

- (4) We would have to draft a formal declaration of war -as we should have against the Taliban, bin Laden, and Saddam Hussein- against those countries that harbored or even aided the next *9/11-like* cell. (Our italics)
- (5) Vice President Dick Cheney is reported to have instructed USSTRATCOM to draw up a contingency plan “to be employed in response to another *9/11-type* terrorist attack on the United States”. (Our italics)

These quotations show the productivity of the numerical expression *9/11* in referring not directly to the New York attack but to hypothetical terrorist offensives. In both cases, the phrase is used adjectivally and in combination with a suffix (*9/11-like*, *9/11-type*). We might be witnessing the emergence of a resemblance metaphor (Grady 1999), in which there is a likeness relationship or a perceived similarity between *9/11* and future terrorist assaults. The metaphor is possible as a result of comparison, by means of which new acts of terrorism are conceptualized on the basis of a singular terrorist strike, the one that took place in the World Trade Center Complex. *9/11* has developed into an Idealised Cognitive Model or ICM (Lakoff 1987). Our experience of the attack is now 'packed' into a cognitive or conceptual structure which is linguistically encoded in the phrase *9/11*. The use of that expression facilitates mental access to all the encyclopaedic information available in our brain about that event. As Holbrook (2007) indicates, experience is a prerequisite for meaning construction. Many temporal expressions (e.g. the time adverbs *now*, *tomorrow*...) materialise in speech because their meaning has to be adjusted to the place and time of actual speech. Words like *now* have variable meaning and depend greatly on the temporal frame where the speech act is produced, and only in that frame do they acquire their correct meaning. Unless they point to the real context or situation of the linguistic act, time expressions would not have any deictic strength.

In line with the discussion above, the temporal term *9/11* seems not to refer to the 11<sup>th</sup> of September, 2001 as such, and its meaning has been analogically extended to denote "a new terrorist attack" which might take place on a different occasion and even in a different location. If we wanted to construct the radial network of the concept *9/11*, we would need to account for a number of metaphorical and metonymical projections that take place when a speaker produces this particular linguistic expression.

In basic terms, if we had to write a dictionary entry for the notational expression *9/11*, a primary sense would be exclusively calendrical, to be exact, 'the eleventh day of September'. The second sense would already include some extra information, so *9/11* would be equated with 'the eleventh day of September, 2001'. A third sense would answer for the metonymic operation DATE FOR SINGULAR EVENT, and the definition for *9/11* would be approximately 'the Islamist terrorist attack orchestrated by Al-Qaeda in 2001'. A fourth entry would be (semantically) more schematic due to an analogical metaphor. *9/11* would turn out to mean just 'a terrorist attack'.

Therefore, as the examples that follow will illustrate, there may be a more elaborate metaphorical operation, given that a new conceptual projection comes into sight, that which connects the numeric term *9/11* and the domain of TERRORIST ATTACKS. The

next utterances demonstrate how this world knowledge is starting to be metaphorically transformed in such a way that we are now able to reason analogically about prospective terrorist outbreaks by means of a single term like *9/11*. The expression under discussion works on the basis of an analogy-based metaphor that maps crucial aspects of the *9/11* attacks onto other potential attacks of similar magnitude and disruptive social and psychological effects, as can be seen in the examples:

- (6) God forbid *another 9/11*. (Our italics)
- (7) British and Israeli military planners are waiting in limbo for a *second 9/11*. (Our italics)
- (8) Washington anticipates *a new 9/11* within six months. (Our italics)

In these cases, we understand new terrorist attacks in terms of a previous one. This particular piece of language (*9/11*) reflects a mental configuration that we have about reality. Our construal<sup>7</sup> of a (second) *9/11* is based on our experience of the first and authentic *9/11*. Because we have empirical access to *9/11*, we are able to categorise new similar scenarios as *9/11*'s.

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This is not a special characteristic of the *9/11* time expression. In fact, we may have parallel expressions such as *a second Hiroshima*, where the new event is reminiscent of a well-known episode and by means of which the location stands for a singular event that took place there. We may also hear in English *a second Hitler*, where a certain action of a leader seemingly evokes Hitler's policies. These are all cases of paragons (Lakoff 1987), including the use of *9/11* in expressions like a second *9/11*. *9/11* is another version of this metonymic pattern, where the date stands for a singular episode of history. Even so, the novelty in our examples is that the metonymy is not based upon a location or a personage, but it is constructed upon the concept of time.

Technically, this could be an example of what Goossens (1995) calls "metaphonymy". Ruiz de Mendoza & Otal (2002), in particular, would treat this as a "metonymic reduction of the metaphoric source". A *9/11-type terrorist attack*, *a second 9/11*, *a new 9/11* or *another 9/11 attack* all suggest a repetition of the pattern that makes the event notorious. Thus, we have the metonymy DATE FOR SINGULAR EVENT (because *9/11* stands for an event that took place in the *9/11* time-frame) and then an analogy-based metaphor. The metonymy is activated in the source domain of the metaphor and so is prior to the metaphorical correspondences.

The name *9/11* separates from its referent (the real *9/11* and, in turn, the terrorist attack) in order to designate a similar imaginary event (a second *9/11*). Following examples (4), (5) and (6), let us illustrate the mapping operation visually:

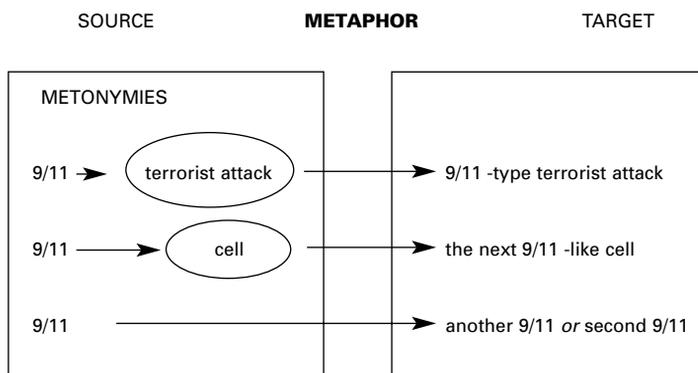


FIGURE 2: Metonymic reduction of the metaphoric source

In the preceding diagram, we observe a combinatorial procedure integrating metonymy and metaphor<sup>8</sup>. The source domain of the metaphor is the *9/11* ICM and the target domain (more abstract because it is as yet unreal) is a potential terrorist attack carried out by suicide criminals. But the source domain of the metaphor is previously complicated by means of references to the temporal expression *9/11*, so the products of the metonymies turn out to be the sources for the metaphoric mapping. As the examples (4), (5), (6), (7) and (8) corroborate, the expression *9/11* appears to be a well-entrenched lexical concept which, in some situations, might not refer to the terrorist attack of 2001, but to a comparable strike at any other time<sup>9</sup>. *9/11* has undergone a process of generalisation (Dirven & Verspoor 1998).

The notion of *synergic* or *sociohistoric* cognition introduced by Bernardez (2007) is of great applicability in sustaining this proposal. In line with his theory, *9/11* is already a fully accessible category which has been linguistically and socioculturally exploited to refer to either the *9/11* attack or to a similar one. As we said earlier, this conceptualization of the terrorist offence makes *9/11* a special case of paragon (Lakoff 1987). Here, *9/11* stands for the terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11 plus their social, political and psychological effects, and then all of this structure maps onto possible future attacks with comparable impact.

Turner (1996) might help us to clarify why *9/11* has turned into a new cognitive model. Turner introduces the technical term *narrative imagining* to define a principle of categorisation fundamental in human reasoning. A narrative is a 'mini-story', a mental skeletal structure that allows us to establish an analogical projection between a known experience and a new event through the filling in

with the new details. A narrative condenses basic information about an event, which enables the speaker to construct a new cognitive model on the basis of a previous one.

In this respect, this notion seems tremendously significant for our analysis. We agree that the expression *9/11* is a mental construct. The September 11th events shape a whole story, a parable materialised via the special morphological composition ‘*9/11*’. This expression allows us to operate in language and thought with its meaning. But in addition, it tolerates further projections. All examples from (4) to (8) show that this special narrative could serve as a form of calculation and preparation for another possible terrorist strike. Stories have a pattern involving performers, objects, episodes, intentions, etc., all of which are essential for fabricating a certain mental model. In the case of the *9/11* narrative, knowledge of these elements will help to avoid future attacks.

### 3. Other cognitive operations underlying 9/11

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#### 3.1 Time as a circle

In addition to the cases of conceptual interaction described earlier, there are other cognitive operations that may arise from the use of the expression *9/11*.

Temporality is often construed in terms of unidirectional and cyclical motion towards a starting point. As already said, the terrorist attack is conceptualised via a numerical expression consisting of a month plus a day, but in the forthcoming examples, the use of such a tag as *9/11* makes us think about a possible return to a same date, an idea is reinforced by the lexical items which collocate with *9/11*. This linguistic *modus operandi* reminds us of a *TIME AS A CIRCLE* or *TIME AS A CYCLE* metaphor<sup>10</sup>, a conceptual mapping which has been investigated by Klein (1987) in Toba language, by Dahl (1995) in Malagasy, and by Radden (2004) in relation to English utterances like *History always repeats itself* or *Our shop is open round the clock*. The following instances correspond to this view of time as circular:

- (9) If there should be *a repeat of 9/11*, the United States will hold any countries responsible who are proved to have aided or sheltered any of the guilty. (Our italics)
- (10) Cheney’s proposed “contingency plan” did not focus on preventing a *second 9/11*. (Our italics)
- (11) *Another 9/11* would be a watershed event. (Our italics)

When examining the previous utterances, one may have the impression of a return to a subsequent *9/11* even in the aftermath of the actual *9/11*. Temporality in these cases is understood by virtue of a recurrent or cyclic timeline. This construal is seemingly motivated by the circular features of a clock and by the cyclical nature of a calendar. Days and months repeat each year. The examples show evidence of that conception of time, and that is why a future terrorist strike is being referred to as *a repeat of 9/11* (9), *a second 9/11* (10) or *another 9/11* (11).

This reading of time in terms of circularity works quite well in English with years and is specially boosted by the fact that years are metaphorised as cyclic time units, so events repeat annually. Other instances which exemplify this cyclical feature of time in English are the following:

(12) Applications are welcome *year-round*.

(13) We celebrate our wedding *anniversary* on the 14<sup>th</sup> of October.

This TIME IS A CYCLE metaphor appears to be socioculturally entrenched in our thought, mainly due to our recognition of cyclic patterns in nature and our reaction to them (Dahl 1995). In more general terms, we could say that all civilisations have tried to understand what time is, and the primitive man already had a certain consciousness of time. Time was not perceived as linear in the origins of humankind. Quite the opposite, time was dissected into events that take place cyclically.

According to Lamb (2008), the hominid was obsessed with the migratory cycles of animals and weather conditions since the awareness of these recurrent seasons guaranteed survival. It did not matter whether time had a beginning or an end – more important was the acknowledgment of the temporal cycles that ruled human life.

For example, the Mayan peoples were fascinated with time (and with *times*, in the plural). They were fine astronomers and observers of the cyclical rotations of heavenly bodies. They even reflected their fascination materialistically, in the form of temples, which marked the passing of time<sup>11</sup>.

This compulsive attitude towards the notion of temporality is also applicable to the modern industrialised citizen (Dahl 1995), except for the fact that time is linear. The individual is subject to the ticking of the clock and endeavours to plan time as efficiently as possible both at work and in personal life (indeed, many institutions offer courses about successful time management, which confirms that time continues to be a crucial parameter also for modern man and that the attention we pay to different times is critical for an effective organisation of our life.

Undoubtedly, these behaviours are part of our experience as beings in the world and have contributed, more particularly, to the construction of the metaphors of circular time and of linear time.

### 3.2 Time as a container

In the initial section of this paper, we also mentioned another conceptual operation involved in the construal of *9/11*. We established that *9/11* is the result of a TIME FOR EVENT metonymy. In the light of the latest research by Evans (2004), time points towards an internal experience of something nearly unknowable of the external world. In line with Ruiz de Mendoza (1999), time is so abstract a domain that it becomes really hard for us to talk about it. As a result of its abstract nature, time is by itself unlikely to act as a source domain for a conceptual metonymy. We need to stick to subdomains of time, which correspond to its divisions in terms of years, days, hours, etc. That is the reason why we refined the concept of metonymy and stated that the metonymy which is activated is DATE FOR EVENT TAKING PLACE ON THAT DATE. However, and in accordance with the previous explanation, prior to the understanding of this metonymy, we must trigger the TIME IS A CONTAINER metaphor, where a containment image schema is found.

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Time becomes more accessible through distinctive units like days, and days can be referred to by means of dates. Dates, in turn, are associated with events. Briefly, the process is as follows: (i) at a preconceptual level, we activate the container-content schema, where time incorporates days, (ii) a day is understood via a date, and (iii) a date is additionally construed as a container of events. As a result, *9/11* becomes a straightforward point of access to the events that happened on that day.

### Conclusion

In this research, we have provided a hypothesis about the linguistic behaviour of a special numerical expression: *9/11*. Under normal circumstances, *9/11* triggers a conceptual metonymy which connects a date with the heart-rending terrorist attack perpetrated by Al-Qaeda on the World Trade Center, New York, on September 11, 2001.

As the examples analysed throughout the paper corroborate, the phrase *9/11* appears to be a well-entrenched lexical concept which, in some situations, might not refer to the terrorist attack of 2001, but to a comparable strike at any other time. That is to say, we can use the term *9/11* to explicate prospective terrorist attacks in an analogical fashion.

After the Twin Towers destruction, American speakers of English created the calendric term *9/11*, a new lexical unit with a highly metonymic potential. Nevertheless, the current degree of conventionalisation is such that the term has become a generic label to subsume other states of affairs. By means of two cognitive operations (metonymy first and then, metaphor), the tag *9/11* has been semantically extended and now includes a further meaning component which is far more general, thus forming a radial network (Lakoff 1987) of related concepts, as noted in a previous section.

The sociohistoric knowledge summarised in the term *9/11* has been diachronically transmitted to us, i.e. we have inherited the tag and the form *9/11* is now a lexicalisation and allows us to deal with it effortlessly. Many people (reporters, politicians, American citizens...) have contributed to the enrichment of that lexical concept, so our knowledge about *9/11* has come to us in a historically distributed fashion and is now reasonably fixed.

In conclusion, it can be seen how the domain of TIME (because, in the last analysis, *9/11* is a temporal expression) has a creative character (Guerra 1992) and is capable of producing emergent meanings alien to the notion of temporality. TIME therefore seems to be the basis of further conceptual projections, which might suggest the availability of TIME in English as a source domain, as has been explored by the authors in other pieces of research in the same line (Martín & Guerra 2010).

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Given that time is an abstract domain, it does not usually activate metonymies, as indicated by Ruiz de Mendoza (1999). This idea will be explained further in the last section of this paper.

<sup>2</sup> Apart from the metonymy, we observe an underlying metaphor which is more general and which depends on the pre-conceptual CONTAINMENT image schema. TIME is seen as a container of days and DAYS, in turn, contain EVENTS.

<sup>3</sup> The term "radial network" was first introduced by Brugman & Lakoff (1988). A

radial network is a way to handle polysemy in cognitive-linguistic terms. These networks are constituted by the interrelated senses of a certain lexical item. The nucleus of the radial network is the primary sense, from which we derive the rest of the senses through metaphorical and/or metonymic processes.

<sup>4</sup> American English speakers normally write the month before the day.

<sup>5</sup> This was, in fact, a need to perform an act of categorisation. This means that the term *9/11* was initially an ad hoc category (Wilson 2004), a provisional label which then became entrenched in English.

<sup>6</sup> The analogical equivalent *3/11* is rather infrequent in English.

<sup>7</sup> The term *construal* is a central notion in cognitive theories (Langacker 1996, Croft & Cruse 2004, Palmer 1996) and points at a double direction: (i) 'construal' has to do with 'construct'; and (ii) 'construal' is related to 'construe', an English verb meaning 'interpret'.

<sup>8</sup> This interactional pattern has been studied by Ruiz de Mendoza & Otal (2002) and also in more detail by Ruiz de Mendoza & Díez (2002).

<sup>9</sup> This brings *9/11* into line with the treatment that Ruiz de Mendoza (2010) gives to paragons as metonymic reductions of the metaphoric source.

<sup>10</sup> These two metaphors are technically called *image-schema based metaphors*. Image schemas (Johnson 1987: 126; Lakoff 1987: 267) are primitive tools which allow us to understand abstract concepts in terms of simple configurations or depictions of the external world.

<sup>11</sup> The Mayans also designed a sophisticated calendar as a result of their interest in this concept. Incidentally, given that we are discussing the issue of dates, one date that has been in the news recently in relation to the Mayans is 21 December 2012, which many have apocalyptically mistaken as the end of our era. A Mayan prophecy envisages that 21 December 2012 will see a great event, but this is not the end of the world, because time for the Mayans, as said before, is not rectilinear but circular. What the Mayan prediction means is that 21 December 2012 will indicate a change in time, i.e. the end of a time cycle.

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