The Role of Metonymy in Collocational Choice

Willie Jones

When we know a language well we are likely to recognise (if only intuitively) that certain collocational associations are acceptable while others are not, yet we may not appreciate that the suitability of such partnerships depends, even now, upon where the words came from in the first place. When words move out of their original domains or habitats they often do so as metaphors or metonyms, and since at the heart of every metaphor lies a metonym, which will be related to fellow inhabitants of the original domain, this inter-relationship will continue to limit each term's freedom of association. Such terms are only likely to co-occur with fellow members of their original habitat, both presupposed and entailed, of which they are the representative metonymic agent. This was so when the terms were first coined and remains so even after usage may have led their surface meanings to undergo changes. The writer looks at four word-sets of ostensible synonyms which demonstrate the argument.

1. The Argument

Although we are always coining new words, or finding new things for old words to do, we realise as soon as we consider the question of collocation that words are not promiscuous: they are very careful about the company they keep. We also come to see that this is because many of the old and new coinages first entered into common use as metaphors or metonyms (which, over time, we tend to forget ever were metaphors, let alone metonyms, in the first place), and that metaphors work only if, in their new habitats, they are surrounded by a sufficient number of familiar features for them to seem at home;
these features will only seem familiar if they map onto the network of metonymic relationships in which the metaphors are originally embedded and to which they are still connected.

It follows that when these everyday terms are metaphorical in origin, they will still depend for their effectiveness on the founding metonyms without which they could not function, for we would not see the relevance of the metaphor. From this it also follows that we shall need to have some grasp (which may only be intuitive) of the way in which that part of the metaphor (whether idiom or phrase) which is there on the surface, is, through its working as a metonym, related to the unspoken fellow parts, presupposed or entailed, that motivate and control its usage.

We may note in passing that neuro-science is discovering that such cross-referencing of analogical relationships within and across domains is a process by which human beings extend the reach of their understanding, a process that appears to be fundamental to the workings of the human brain, and essential to the brain's ability to master and deploy language as a system of signs.

2. On Gamuts, Spectrums and Compasses

When Professor John Sinclair, editor in chief of the Cobuild project, spoke to an audience at Hokkaido University several years ago he told us that while he and his co-editors were working on the Birmingham Corpus which supplies Cobuild with its lexicon, they came to appreciate how strictly limited are the ways in which words may combine: collocations, they had come to see, are bounded, and as his example of a word that occurs rarely in the Corpus, Professor Sinclair selected the word 'gamut', which, at that point, had turned up only three times; each time it collocated with the verb 'to run', while it co-occurred with 'from' and 'to': you ran a gamut from one end of a sequence to its further end, the two ends at some distance from each other. Yet he claimed not to know why these particular choices would
be deemed appropriate, nor had he apparently thought it worth taking the trouble to find out.

Yet the *Concise Oxford* would have provided him with the basic facts; a musical encyclopaedia would have told him more. Whereas today's *tonic sol-fa* covers an octave, the common scale during the Middle Ages had six pitches, and there were basically three such hexachords, although they extended into seven overlapping hexachords, depending on which note you started from; the lowest hexachord began on what today we would think of as the bottom line of the base staff — G, or gamma — which was also known as ‘ut’, and the scale ran ut-re-mi-fa-so-la, these terms derived, by metonymy, from the opening syllables of a Latin hymn.

Thus, just as the first two words of the alphabet — *alpha, beta* — came to represent the entire range of letters from *alpha* to *omega*, and just as the word *Credo* came to stand for the entire text of which it is the opening word, so ‘gamma’ + ‘ut’ came to represent the entire scale of which it was the lowest note. At the same time, those likely to use ‘gamut’ will know that you can either run a gamut or cover one, since they will know that a ‘gamut’, by metonymic extension, moves quickly from one end of a scale to the other (in musical runs), and that if you spread your fingers over the keyboard or sing do-re-me-fa-so-la-ti-do you will be covering an octave.

The choice of *run* to describe this action is a metaphor (of a catachrestic kind), based, one supposes, upon similarity of action between a voice singing a scale or fingers moving quickly over the keys and the legs of animals moving in the action of running; but this is in itself a metonym, since moving your legs quickly is an action that is representative of, and selected from, the total event — in this case *speedy* movement — of which it is the causally determining part. You do not, that is to say, ‘walk’ a ‘gamut’ or ‘crawl’ one (or if you did it would imply a serious lack of manual or vocal dexterity); similarly, the spreading of your fingers to *cover* a scale, and your ability to do so,
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will imply command over whatever the range is that you are (metaphorically) talking about.

_Cobuild_ (1999) itself defines the word thus: “the gamut of something is the wide variety of things that can be included within it”, and quotes as an example “I experienced the gamut of emotions: shock, anger, sadness, disgust, confusion”. Yet, since these are all emotions at one end of the scale only, this example suggests that neither the writer nor the compiler knew what a ‘gamut’ is, and both could be charged with misusing the term. Of course, as often happens, the word may be undergoing a semantic change, abetted by dictionaries such as _Cobuild_ which are only interested in “Real (that is, synchronic) English”. Even so, would such a definition help a reader to appreciate what Dorothy Parker was implying when she wrote of a cinematic performance by the actress Katherine Hepburn that Miss Hepburn’s acting “ran the gamut of emotions from ‘a’ to ‘b’’? This was meant to be a deadly insult, since the opposite end of the alphabetic scale from ‘a’ is ‘z’. What Miss Parker’s remark entails, thanks to the presuppositions at the heart of the metonymically derived metaphor, and what she expects her reader to infer, is that Miss Hepburn’s range as an actress is grossly limited: that she is hardly worthy of being considered an actress at all.

A term which is nowadays often used in a way rather similar to the way we might use ‘gamut’ is the word ‘spectrum’, but since it comes from a domain quite different from that of ‘gamut’, its metonymic partners (that is to say, its metonymically derived and founded presuppositions and entailments) differ, too, and exercise their own control over the terms which will collocate with it should we use it as a metaphor. Whereas ‘gamut’ comes from the musical domain of scales perceived by the ear, ‘spectrum’ comes from the visual domain of things perceived by the eye.

A ‘spectrum’ was originally a picture or an image (as of a ‘spectre’), and it was not until the late seventeenth century that the word was
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taken over, by metonymic shift, to refer to colours refracted through a prism, after which it came to be used as a metaphor to refer to ranges or bands of phenomena displayed by many kinds of thing other than colours; not only, that is, to rays of light, but also to rays of sound. Finally, by metaphoric development, it has come to be used to refer to a range of anything: topics, emotions, political opinions.

Although *Cobuild* deals far more helpfully with 'spectrum' than with 'gamut' (it is a far more familiar word), and illustrates its use with metaphors, it does not admit that they are metaphors, or that the word's collocational companions suit it because of the term's pre-metaphorical sense and the company it kept as a metonym in the far-off days of its lexical genesis. Since they cite as examples "the whole spectrum of emotions" and a questionnaire which "covered a broad spectrum of topics", we can see that 'gamut' and 'spectrum' may share certain collocational companions, but we could not replace "spectrum" with "gamut" in another of their citations, "both ends of the political spectrum". We might perhaps speak of "the whole gamut of political opinions" (running from extreme right to extreme left), though we would not be likely to cover a gamut of topics since a range of 'topics' is not viewed as scalar. Nor, and this is the point over which I may seem to be labouring, would we be able to "run a spectrum" or "view a gamut".

While we can speak of a 'spectrum' as wide or broad or narrow, we would not be able to do so if we were speaking of a 'gamut'; nor can we analyse or measure one: a 'gamut' is set: whatever scale we are using, its limits will be fixed before we start. When we select 'spectrum' rather than 'gamut' (or 'range' or 'band'), our choice will control our subsequent choice of the adjectives, verbs and prepositions that we need to accompany it. And which of these terms we ultimately decide to use will depend on the wider compass of the text that we are composing: we shall choose the metaphor to suit the wider semantic environment of our discourse.
I have just (deliberately) used another metaphor that we might choose in place of 'gamut' or 'spectrum': the word 'compass'. Today, 'a compass' signifies the circular instrument with a magnetic needle that we use to find our bearings. This is derived, both by metaphor and metonymy, from that two-pronged device with which we draw a circle — John Donne's 'stiff twin compasses' — which is plural in form because this in turn was derived from an instrument used to measure our paces, our walking steps. 'To compass' was simply, in the first instance, to measure a distance by pacing it, and we may see how pacing out a distance (as a Regimental Sergeant-Major would use his stick to measure as soldier's stride) could come to coincide with the drawing of a circle from an account that John Evelyn wrote of a visit in 1644 to the Luxembourg Gardens in Paris: "The gardens are neere an English mile in compass, enclosed with a stately wall, and in a good ayre". So it is that we can encompass (or surround) something, and if surrounded by our foes we can be compassed round about by them (or with them).

Since notions of inclusive circularity and measured distance control the collocational adjuncts of the word 'compass', appropriate prepositions are 'within' or 'beyond'. If I say that a task is "within my compass", I am likely to mean "within the scope, the circumference, of my talents"; if it is a task that I cannot manage, it will be "beyond my compass". We can also speak of a 'large compass' or a 'small compass', while we can also 'read a compass', along with other things that we cannot do with a 'gamut' or a 'spectrum'. And that we cannot do so will be because of the conditions set by the metonymic associations that were embedded in the terms' original references when they were first applied as metaphors.

3. Of Purposes, Goals, Aims, Objectives, and Intents

Should we consider the words 'goal', 'aim', 'purpose', 'objective' (and 'intent'), and their plural forms, which often take on slightly
different nuances, we discover that this set is a very fuzzy one, and that the term 'purpose' seems, in many modern instances, to have become more or less conflated with 'aim', since, as with 'aim', we can have a 'purpose' and accomplish our 'purpose'. Yet should we select 'purpose' rather than 'aim' as the term we need, we shall have to change many of the terms that collocate with it. And we shall need to do so because 'purpose' comes from the term *propositum*, which signified a proposition that we wished to make or assert, rather than anything that we took aim at and wished to hit.

We have already internalised it, made it our own, as a state of affairs that we desire to bring about; we have it within us as an originating principle, as an internal guide rather than an external target: it is something we possess before we begin. And, so, although we may 'achieve' our purpose, we do not usually 'pursue' it or 'reach' it. At the same time, something can 'serve a purpose' or be 'put to good purpose', or be done 'for a purpose', none of which could be said of 'goals', 'aims' or 'objectives'. While we might ask "What is that to the purpose?", we would never ask "What is that to the aim/goal?" Nor could we use 'aim' (or 'goal') in such phrases as 'to little purpose', 'for all practical purposes' or 'on purpose', all of them phrases that imply notions of prior deliberation and rational choice, which is why we might 'see or find no purpose in life' or decide that something had 'outlived its purpose'. Something may 'fit our purposes' or 'frustrate' them. If we have a 'purpose in life', that is what we want to do with our lives, what we wish to make of our lives, and our purpose is already within our possession; if, on the other hand, we have an 'aim in life' that is something that lies outside ourselves, it is something that we do not yet possess, and towards which we direct our attention and our actions.

We select appropriate prepositions, too. When something is irrelevant to our task, it is 'beside the purpose', and a purpose can lie 'behind' an action. When we speak of 'purposes' in the plural, rather
than the singular ‘purpose’, our ‘purposes’ can be ‘fixed’ or ‘firm’, and because they are the causes of actions that have a basis in the making of choices they can be combined with a preposition like ‘for’ when something may be done ‘for military or religious purposes’. When we do not have the courage to act on our beliefs, or fail to stand up for our principles, we may find ourselves accused of being ‘infirm of purpose’.

The etymology of ‘goal’, however, is not known, and while the processes of metonymy have shifted it into areas where we might not have expected to find it, its primary meaning has always been “the terminal end of a race”, so that if footballers pitch goalposts, in order to demarcate a playing area (now known as ‘a pitch’), that is because the kicking of the ball between the posts comes at the end of a run and is the end-purpose of that run. But, by a metonymic side-step, the space between the pitched posts has become the goal-mouth, now usually reduced to ‘goal’, and when a player has legitimately propelled the ball into the goal mouth, that achievement is called, by another metonymy, a goal: you score a goal.

The word ‘score’ itself comes from marks scored (cut, that is, with a knife, on a stick) to record (before there were score books) the tally or total of ‘goals’ (or ‘runs’ should the game be cricket) that have been accumulated by the two sides. And whereas in football you ‘score’ a goal, in a race you ‘start towards’, ‘make for’ and ‘reach’ or ‘arrive at’ your goal. Metaphorically, which is how we use the word ‘goal’, we set or fix a goal for ourselves (rather than pitch it), since the basis of the metaphor is a race not a football game: we establish a fixed or settled spot to which we intend to run. If we wish others to understand our goal, we may ‘define’ it and tell them how we mean ‘to work towards’ it. With luck we shall ‘reach’ our goal, but we may also, alas, ‘miss’ it or ‘fall short’ of it. Our goals may, among other things, be ‘short-term and immediate’ or ‘long-term and distant’. They may be ‘realistic and attainable’ (within our compass) or ‘over-ambitious and impossible’ (outside it).
If we have an 'aim', sometimes a synonym for 'goal' as well as 'purpose', it is a target that we wish to 'hit' rather than a post we desire to 'reach'. Yet as there is a certain fuzziness about the categories, certain terms can collocate with both 'goal' and 'aim'. We can 'achieve' or 'fail to achieve our aim'. We may 'fall short of' our aim or we may 'over-shoot' it, and if we now say that a footballer 'takes a shot at' the goal, this may be a cross-over from 'aim' to 'goal': by analogy, taking aim with a bow and an arrow or a rifle is transferred to taking aim with one's boot.

The term 'aim' itself comes from a word that meant 'to direct a missile'—a stone or a javelin—and so, by a typical metonymic move, the action of aiming has been transferred to the object at which we were aiming; and since, should we be aiming at a deer, for instance, our aim may be on the move, we can 'pursue our aim'. Yet we can also 'pursue our goal', which generally speaking will not be on the move, although it might be receding, never to be reached. Once again, a linguistic move may have taken place between fuzzy sets, because they are fuzzy.

In place of 'aim', we may sometimes use the term 'objective', another tricky word, though, since it retains the notions of objectivity, externality and disinterestedness which are still possessed by the term 'objective' when it is used as an adjective. But whereas the term 'aim' comes from the throwing of a missile in order to hit something, the term 'objective' comes from a word meaning "to throw or place something in front of yourself", which might, of course, become an obstacle (if standing in the way of your aim) as well as an object to contemplate or scrutinize objectively, an object of consciousness, and something, like a goal, that we might wish to attain.

We can understand how 'objective' differs from 'aim' when we consider its usage in one of its usual habitats, the world of military strategy and tactics. While the aim of one's military strategy will be to defeat the enemy, a military objective will be a feature of land, a
town or a bridge, or whatever it is that one wishes to capture or relieve (if besieged by an enemy), and it may be a tactical step in a process rather than the end product itself. We ‘set forth’ our objectives as we do our goals, and we also ‘work towards’ them. If our ‘objective’ is a military one, we may ‘capture’ it, which we would not be doing if it were a goal, and if we wish to ‘reach’, ‘attain’, ‘gain’ or ‘win’ our objective, this will only follow upon a carefully prepared plan and the carrying out of a particular course of action.

While an ‘objective’, like a ‘goal’, is external, an ‘intent’ or an ‘intention’, like a ‘purpose’, is internal: a notion, desire or hope that is present in the mind, and the mind is directed towards whatever we might wish to see ‘brought about’ or ‘come to pass’. It derives from a word meaning ‘to stretch’, a sense still present in a verb like ‘to intensify’ and its cognates. Since it suggests total concentration upon the concept that is the focus of our thought as well as the directing of the mind towards an object, it cannot strictly be used as a synonym for ‘aim’ or ‘goal’, since it is more like the movement of the mind when it stretches itself to fix on an ‘aim’ or ‘goal’ whose attainment will enable the mind’s intentions to be ‘realised’.

Although, as the phrase “to all intents and purposes” suggests, ‘intents’ and ‘purposes’ have much in common, they are not interchangeable: an ‘infirm intent’, for instance, would be a contradiction, since while we hold it, it is stretched tight, fixed, though, at a later date, we might ‘abandon’ our intent. Since it is a mental construct, we can ‘hide’ or ‘reveal’ it or ‘avow it’, while our ‘intentions’ (with an ‘s’) can be ‘good and honorable’ or ‘petty and mean’. We can have ‘every intention’ of doing something or ‘no intention’ whatsoever of doing so.

I might consequently say that my purpose in this piece is to present a case in support of the view that collocational choices are controlled by metonymic relationships; my goal is to argue my case as well as I can; my aim is to persuade you that there may be some truth
in what I say; my objectives are a series of analyses of examples, and if I can, one at a time, capture their nature, they may help me to achieve my aim. All of these terms might be shuffled, but if they were so shuffled, both precision and nuance would be lost.

4. Of Fields, Disciplines, Domains (and Habitats)

Another set of words whose members might, in certain places, be substituted for each other is that of ‘fields’, ‘disciplines’, ‘domains’ and ‘habitats’, and one might say that a scholar’s purpose would be to work in a particular ‘field’ of research, which he had already decided would be worth cultivating (and worthy of his effort); his goal would be to cover as much of the ‘domain’ as he could manage in his working lifetime; his aim would be to make a significant contribution to his ‘discipline’: his objectives would be to overcome (or conquer) some of the specific problems within his ‘field’ or ‘discipline’ that have remained unsolved.

In my editorial work, I often come across the word ‘field’ in the sense of ‘specialised area of study or research’, yet those who use the term do not always recognise its origins as a metaphor. One writer wished “to learn a field”. Although we can, while working in the field, learn how to plough it, or sow it, or reap it, we cannot in itself learn it, although we shall need to learn “the rudiments or techniques of the discipline we follow” (or to which we submit ourselves), as a farmer has to learn how to use his plough. Since we say “the farmer is working in the field” (a bounded space), it becomes natural to ask “what field do you work in?” If, however, a farmer is “working his field” without the preposition ‘in’, it means that he is ploughing it, harrowing it: “What is your field?” An area of academic study is thought to be an area within a boundary, which is why we can work, or work in, a field but not learn it.

While academics work ‘in’ a field metaphorically, certain kinds of sportsmen still play ‘on’ a field literally, and the prepositions change
because long ago a field was an open space; only later did it come to refer to a closed space (‘space’ presumably being the metonymic link). The space, or place, where men fought in deadly earnest ‘on the field of battle’ has, by metonymic shift, become ‘a field of play’ where men meet each other in mimic warfare. While “there is a lot of activity in this field” would imply that you were probably talking about an academic study of some kind, “there is a lot of activity on the field” would imply that you were talking about a game, football, cricket, baseball. A simple change of preposition, a relic of metonymic origins, quite changes the type of field we are speaking about. Should we say of a soil scientist that he is “in the field”, we would be saying that he is not in his laboratory: he would be “on a field trip”, where ‘on’ co-occurs with ‘trip’. When soldiers have ‘a field day’, they take part in outdoor exercises; when you or I have ‘a field day’, a metaphor, this implies that our day has been very active and may have been productive.

The word ‘field’ is singularly rich in derivatives, both metonymic and metaphoric. We may come across ‘gold fields’, or ‘oil fields’, where the metaphoric leap seems to have been inspired by the harvest or crop that we obtain from them of things that we value; and although we think of fields as horizontal, should we consider them to be grounds (upon which sheep may safely graze), they can also function as the vertical background for a display of heraldic signs (against which lions may pace or rear).

At the same time, while golfers, horses and runners do not play on a field (they follow courses), the term ‘field’ can refer to a group of contestants taking part in a race, as we speak of a ‘field of horses’, perhaps by metonymy because when at home race-horses live in a field, which is thus a container for the thing contained; yet we also speak, by an analogic metonymy, of ‘a field’ of human runners, who, should they be marathon runners, never go near a field, and the horse or runner in front is ‘leading the field’.
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We can extend the metaphor and say that a certain university has “a strong field of specialists in cancer research”; if we said that it “leads the field” in certain areas of cancer prevention, such a usage would presuppose that we believed universities to be in competition with each other to be the best in their chosen fields.

We may also use the verb ‘to field’ when we speak of any kind of sporting club (or university) ‘fielding a team’: when, that is to say, the club (or university) puts a team into, or onto, a ‘field of play’. Furthermore, the team can be designated ‘strong’, ‘weak’, or whatever adjective might be suitable. In a ball game such as cricket one of the two teams bats while the other ‘fields’; a player on the field is a ‘fielder’; and when he takes the ball into his hands he ‘fields’ it. We can develop this as a metaphor when, in a debate or meeting, a person answering questions ‘fields a question’, which implies that he has caught it cleanly and dealt with it effectively. We can also speak of a ‘field of vision’ or ‘a field of fire’, when in both cases the term implies a range or span of space that comes within the range of our guns (longitudinally) or our eyes (latitudinally).

A word that is sometimes used with a meaning similar to that of ‘field’ is the term ‘discipline’, as you might ask of an academic, “What is your discipline?” The term, however, would imply a larger area than a field, which would be a limited area within a ‘discipline’. You would not, though, ask this question of a sportsman. In all its various uses, the term derives, by metonymy, from the Latin word, discipulus, a learner (a student or pupil). We now have a set of terms, all with slightly different emphases, but all requiring a common context. What a learner learns becomes his discipline. The controls, rules and regulations of a particular discipline are its disciplines. A teacher must exercise (or impose) discipline upon (or over) his pupils, in the form of a demand for obedience or submission to the teacher’s will. If the pupil misbehaves, the teacher may discipline (that is to say punish) him (a verb that appears to be derived straightforwardly from the
preceding nouns).

If we consider the verbs that collocate with ‘discipline’ or its cognates, we find a great many. If we are pedagogues, we seek to ‘keep discipline’ and attempt to ‘maintain’ it. A wide range of verbs suggests that ‘discipline’ may become ‘slack’ or may need to ‘tightened’, as if ‘discipline’ were a set of bonds or bands into which the learner had to be strapped. We can also ‘promote’ ‘discipline’, or we can ‘undermine’ it, as if it were something in daily danger of growing weaker or disappearing altogether without constant vigilance. Every one of these usages seems to depend upon the original, pragmatic and unstable relationship of a dominating teacher and his potentially rebellious pupil.

When a discipulus is not rebellious but follows his teacher willingly (and eagerly), he becomes that teacher’s ‘disciple’, or follower, and so, where we ‘work’ in a field, we ‘follow’ a ‘discipline’, and we tend to follow our teacher’s ‘lead’. Sometimes a ‘discipline’ can be easy, sometimes ‘hard’, sometimes ‘strict’. Should we apply the first two adjectives to a ‘field’ we should have to add that a ‘field’ was easy or hard ‘to work’, or ‘to plough’; but we could never in any situation call a ‘field’ ‘strict’. To ‘teach a discipline’ (with the indefinite article) would be to instruct a learner in the methodology of the ‘field’; to ‘teach discipline’ (without any article) would be to attempt to instruct your pupil in the rules of behaviour to which you desire him to conform (to be obedient).

5. Yield and Its Synonyms

The Kenkyusha Dictionary of English Collocations (1995) defines collocation as “the habitual association of words”, which I take to presuppose that such words belong to a common habitat — a word that, like ‘domain’, has its own set of associated relationships; but these will not be at all the same as those which attend upon the more courtly kingdom of a ‘domain’ (from dominus, lord): they will be more
like those of a geomorphological environment. Not only sentences, of course, but extended texts can also be thought of as habitats, and the theme of a text is the environment in which certain terms will be able to root themselves and flourish while apparent synonyms will seem out of place, unsuited.

We realise this most clearly when we come across examples of words that seem inappropriately placed, which do not quite belong in the places where they appear. In Sapporo subway trains, for example, the Japanese term *yuusenseki* is not translated into English as 'priority seat', but as "Please yield this seat to... (the) elderly, (the) disabled, women with children, pregnant women", each category illustrated with its own distinguishing icon.

While the verb 'to yield' originally meant 'to pay compensation' or 'repay a debt' (as well as meaning 'to bear fruit'), it has for much of its life meant "to give way to pressure", even "to acknowledge defeat in battle", which, in this particular context, would imply that anyone whose claims to sit in the seat are weak (or non-existent) must submit to another's superior force (moral, legal or military), and it summons up (for me) images of the disabled or elderly wielding their crutches or sticks, demanding that those less entitled to the seats should 'yield' to those to whom the seats are due.

My fantasy is a consequence of my inferring both what is presupposed and will be entailed by the word *yield* if the utterance, as a speech act, is to succeed in its aim. It is a single word spoken at a particular moment, but that moment is the knot in a sequence of moments which ties together what comes both before and after: it is that part of a whole which enables the reader or hearer to re-construct the completed operation of which it is the causally determining or symbolically defining part, both its *raison d'être* and its *sine qua non*; and I take this to be a metonym. The demand to 'Yield' presupposes a contest over a conflict of interests in which the speaker is the acknowledged victor (for whatever reason), and entails, if the defeated
person is playing by the rules of the game, that he will indeed concede victory and give up whatever the contestants have been fighting over as a thing that both may wish to possess.

Should we therefore decide to look in a *Thesaurus* for synonyms that might be more suitable, we shall find (as our students find) a great number of verbs that we might suppose (as our students suppose) that we could use instead, yet many of them would not suit the situation in which the sentence is 'uttered', and they would not do so because each belongs to a specific habitat, with all its local limitations; and those limitations will depend upon contingencies that we can think of as metonymic, since the verb is the link that binds together its own network (or common domain) of contiguous relationships that are causal as well as cognitive.

The *Thesaurus* which I consult most often provides an impressive list of synonyms for yield — surrender, relinquish, deliver, deliver up, hand over, part with, render, render up, release, renounce, forsake, forgo, abdicate, resign — yet what we need to know, and what it is not the purpose of a *Thesaurus* to tell us, is that each of these verbs is a member of its own proper habitat or domain, within which it still associates, on a habitual basis, with fellow members of that domain or habitat. Each of these verbs refers to the culminating (though not the concluding) act in a story: each presupposes a sequence of prior events, and entails events that will follow if its 'force' is successful. The verb to surrender, like to yield, meant 'to give back' (as did to render, which we would never think of using here), and as it would also, in this context, suggest that we are being forced or coerced into giving (back) to the true owners what is rightfully and statutorily theirs, it is thus similar in its implications to the verb to yield, and would probably, like yield, be considered too powerful, too over-determined a metaphor, involving as it inevitably does notions of conflict and, for one of the parties, defeat.

The verb to deliver + up would also be inappropriate for reasons
which partly over-lap with those which set limits to the use of to yield and to surrender, since defeated generals deliver up their swords (or the keys of a city) to the conqueror. It might thus just be possible to deliver up a seat to someone who had the right to use it should we have no such right, but as the verb presupposes conveyance it, too, would seem a far-fetched metaphor, even with the preposition. We should not, however, be able, in any circumstances, to use deliver without the preposition since its original meaning was 'to liberate', so that when midwives deliver babies and postmen deliver letters or parcels, they presumably set them free — from womb or post office — and present them (by carrying them) to their rightful owners. If I were delivering a seat, it would in fact be called 'a chair' (another collocational constraint), and I would be the delivery man conveying it from a furniture store to a purchaser.

Prepositions are, obviously, extremely important verbal partners of the verbs that they accompany (with which they co-occur) since they act as metonymic signposts to the source of the term's usage. As a clerk at the railways station hands over a ticket (or we hand over our wallet to someone who has mugged us), so we may hand down a treasure from one generation to another, or hand on a message from one person to another, or hand out a set of something to a set of persons, or hand in an assignment to our teacher. Prepositions have kinetic specificity, and it would be hard to hand over (or hand in) a seat, while, just as a poor man may part with a treasured object so we in our turn might part with a chair if it was a treasure that poverty had forced us to pawn, sell, or give away, we would not part with or give away our seat in a train, although we might give it up.

Although one of the original senses of to render, like to yield, was 'to give back', and though their subsequent uses have diverged, they are still constrained by their original contexts: you render thanks for a benefit that you have received; you render to Ceasar the things that are Ceasar's, giving him back what is his own. When a criminal
forfeits his freedom on going to prison, he might be thought to render it up, as if freedom were a gift he owed to a superior. When he has served his sentence, he is released from prison, as you might release, or let loose, a bird from its cage, thus restoring his freedom. A man may renounce or give up his beliefs, and while we might give up our seat, it is unlikely that we would renounce it, since to renounce something means to speak against what we might formerly have believed, unless it was a seat such as a throne, which, by metonymy, signified an office, and we were the temporary holder of that office. We might relinquish the seat, since to relinquish something is to withdraw from it, to leave it behind or let go what was formerly ours, although we would be unlikely to do any of these things willingly. And though we would be relinquishing the seat for reasons, we should not be relinquishing it to anyone.

A man (or a woman) may forsake the path of duty but not a seat since the origin of 'sake' is the sense of a quarrel: you would not be quarelling with your seat; if you abandoned or deserted your seat, you would be failing in your duty to defend it. A man may forgo (or give up, or set aside) a pleasure that he believes he ought not perhaps to indulge in. A King (or a ruling Queen) may abdicate his (or her) title, since this would mean to disown it or divest oneself of it, but none of these would apply to seat, unless, again, that seat were a throne, and you yourself were the monarch, in which case you might. A man may resign his position or resign from his company, but not from his job, which he would relinquish (or give up).

All the words of this particular set take their meanings from the sets of relationships in which each would first have been used, relationships, in these cases, to do with people and their obligations and duties to each other, all of which we shall presuppose from the single feature that each of these verbs indicates—and I take that operation to be in principle metonymic, one detail calling to mind all those other details with which it is in some sort of contiguous and
causally significant relationship. Of course, the only really safe choice would probably be the all-purpose phrasal verb ‘to give up’, since it does not have the rich luggage of implied relationships that most of the other terms carry around with them.

6. Conclusion

I must stop here, although I might, obviously, go on forever: language is an everlastingly fertile field; yet I hope to have provided enough material to demonstrate that when we select certain words from certain sets we must co-select words that co-habit with them, and that our collocational choices will almost certainly depend upon the historical and rhetorical evolution of each of the words that we chose. To understand this fully we shall, in addition (a very big addition), need to have considerable general and specific knowledge of the particular culture in which such metonymic and metaphorical transferences spontaneously, and almost effortlessly, occur.

NOTES

1. This essay is a much shortened and radically restructured version of a rather rambling paper read in Sapporo on May the 24th, 2002, at the Annual Conference of the Modern English Association, that was itself the reworking of an earlier essay on the same theme published in The Journal of the Faculty of Humanities, Hokkai Gakuen, No. 5, October, 1995: ‘Sources of Collocational Choice’.
2. Umberto Eco’s word.
3. I follow Eco and most modern rhetoricians in holding that although synecdoche may be the more inclusive trope it is a figure of uncomplicated hierarchical relationships, that while all metonymies are synecdoches not all synecdoches are metonymies, and that it is metonymies which are so interesting (and so very important).
4. Although I have assumed all along that my use of ‘domain’ and ‘habitat’ needs no explanation, I should nonetheless have wished to analyse them. Limitations of space have meant that I have also had to omit another group
of words that offers a field for a further linguistic harvest: "review and survey, examination and scrutiny, investigation and analysis" — various forms of some of which activities I have been attempting to carry out in this paper.


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