

Metaphor as a Non-Literal Meaning in English Common Use

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ABSTRACT

Analogy and similarity are considered as the foundation of metaphor in English. Metaphor is the process of linguistic replacing in which we put one linguistic element instead of another linguistic element.

Whatever the case, the metaphor, as Raja Aeed (1979:157) says, "is the process of linguistic creating leads to the continuation of language youth and its freshness".

By its virtue, the lexical entries increase in the dictionaries in number and richness. The English linguist Geoffrey Leech regards metaphor as one of the most means of semantic transfer productive because it increases in meaning and transfers in semantics. Metaphor in English reflects the use of a refined language and it is more than only linguistically decoration, but up to the ascent methods of expression of mysteries of the soul. Metaphor is as Leech says: "the means by which he takes his revenge on language for the 'sereotyped idea' which have 'prevailed over the truth' ". (Leech, 1985: 215).

1. The problem of metaphor:

From the point of view of the speaker, the problem is to explain how s/he can mean something different from the word and sentence s/he utters.

What are the principles that enable speakers to formulate, and hearers to understand metaphorical utterances? And how can we state these principles in a way that makes it clearer along with stating how metaphorical utterances differ from other sorts of utterances in which speaker meaning does not coincide with literal meaning (Searle, 1979:78).

2. What is metaphor?

The word metaphor consists of two Latin roots: 'meta' which means over, and 'pherein' meaning 'to carry, to bear'; thus literally meaning 'to carry over'. Metaphor can be defined basically as "a figure of speech in which a name or a descriptive term is applied to a person or object to which it is not literally applicable thus implying a comparison" (Hartmann and Stork, 1972: 140).

The metaphorical statement and the corresponding similarity statement cannot be equivalent in meaning because they have different truth conditions (Searle, 1979: 90).

In addition, "the notion of similarity plays a crucial role in the analysis of a metaphor, or the metaphorical utterances are dependent on the context for their interpretation" (Ibid: 93).

Indeed metaphors are closely linked to parables and proverbs. Thus, if someone says:

- A stitch in time saves nine

He generally "means it to apply metaphorically to the situation in hand. Whatever explains the understanding of these sorts of utterances is likely to explain metaphor, and it will not be a semantic theory however constructed" (Levinson, 1983:151).

Furthermore, Sperber and Wilson (1986: 236) affirm that "a good creative metaphor is precisely one in which a variety of contextual effects can be retained and understood as weakly implicated by the speaker".

Moreover, they assure that "metaphor thus requires no special interpretive abilities or procedures: it is a natural outcome of some very general abilities and procedures used in verbal communication (Ibid: 237).

A simple way to look at metaphor is to see it as a breaking down of the normal literal selectional restrictions that the semantic components of words have in a sentence. When we talk about, for instance, a window on the future, we have to ignore some of the semantic components of the word *window* -for example, that is a concrete object- and just take the fact that windows are things that allow us to look from enclosed space outwards. The metaphor could also be seen out of a window. The metaphor lies in the suppression of some of each word's semantic features (Kuiper and Allan, 1996:173-4).

All languages contain metaphors. A lot of them are used in our own language. Wright (1999:8) adds that "a metaphor uses an idea to stand for another idea".

Aitchison (1999: 142), comments on metaphor and illustrates that it "is an inevitable part of day-to-day language, as in:

- That marriage is **dead**.
- Henry is **fighting** a grim **battle** with illness.
- the dollar tumbled to a new low".

Furthermore, Löbner (2002: 50) says that "metaphor is: concepts, notions, models, pictures from one domain, the source domain, are borrowed for the description of things in another domain, the target domain". He adds that it "yields a new concept in the target domain, a concept that is similar to the original concept of the source domain in that it contains certain elements, although not all, of the source concept".

A new manner is explained by Halliday (2003: 20-1) who supports that "metaphor is an inherent property of higher-order semiotic systems, and a powerful meaning-making resource". Besides, he claims :the process of metaphor is one of reconstructing the patterns of realization in a language – particularly at the inference between the grammar and the semantics".

In the case of *expire*, projecting the notion of dying onto the life-cycle of, say, a credit card, allows an immediately intelligible parallel to be drawn between death and the end of the period of usability of the card (Aronoff and Rees-Miller, 2003: 258).

Aronoff and Rees-Miller (Ibid: 458) express their idea related to metaphor in which they indicate that:

metaphors are ways of enabling a single utterance to communicate many thoughts (the range of interpretations licensed by the metaphor), and thus are an instance of the highly productive nature of literary language. In this account, metaphor is not specific to a literature but is a possibility in every kind of communication. Nevertheless, it may be that literature uses general characteristics of communication for particular experimental ends; Sperber and Wilson propose that the size and vagueness of the range of interpretations generated by a literally metaphor is a cognitive state which is experienced as "esthetic" (a "poetic effect" in their terms).

Essentially, metaphors and similes only differ in the presence or absence of an explicit comparison (*like, as*). A more recent approach to metaphors considers them as examples of flouting the cooperative principle (Brown and Attardo, 2005: 14).

Besides, (Hurford et al, 2007: 331) support the idea that metaphors are conceptual (mental) operations reflected in human language that enable speakers to structure and construct abstract areas of knowledge and experience in more concrete experiential terms.

According to this view of metaphor, speakers make use of a familiar area of knowledge, called the source domain, to understand an area of knowledge that is less familiar, called the target domain.

There is a kind of conceptual mapping operation in which aspects of knowledge in the more familiar source domain are placed in correspondence with aspects of the less-familiar target domain in order to structure the target domain in a way that makes it more accessible to human understanding (Ibid).

A metaphor, therefore, is a figure of speech where two entirely dissimilar words or phrases are brought together to suggest a similarity. It has brought together two entirely unrelated things and made sense with it.

Let's consider this example:

- His office was a hell.

In this example, it is understood immediately that his office had some of the features of a hell. Mainly, it is imagined, he could not leave his office peacefully. Why it was a hell is unknown, but that would be clear from the context—perhaps his manager forced him to stay at the office, or he was afraid of the troubles. It is unknown, but the rest of the story would tell us. What is important here is that in five simple words, a lot is understood about his environment where he works, how he felt and how he behaved. In this example, "hell" is a metaphor.

3. Comparison theory of metaphor:

Similes and metaphors connect each other. 'As' and 'like' are usually used with a simile, while omitting them leads to a metaphor that is a condensed simile, a shortcut to meaning. A metaphor creates a relationship directly and leaves more to imagination. So,

simile is something that is like another different thing. With metaphor something is another different thing.

Essentially, there is a claim which states that metaphors are derived from explicit similes. As a result, one can hold that both of the following sentences are equivalent, and there are no prominent problems related to metaphor at all beyond the problems within the semantics of similes:

a- A company is a ship.

b- A company is like a ship.

One could keep that 'a' and 'b' share the underlying syntactic structure and both of them share the semantic interpretation. By linking 'a' and 'b' "the claim can be made that the problem of understanding metaphors is not really distinct from the problem of understanding some specific kinds of 'literal' uses of language, namely those in similes" (Levinson, 1983:151). In brief, it could be shown that the difference between 'a' and 'b' is as follows: the similarity in 'a' is a literal one, while it is figurative in 'b' (Ibid).

A simile states that A is like B, A metaphor states that A is B or substitutes B for A. Where a metaphor asserts that the two objects in the comparison are identical on the point of comparison, a simile merely asserts similarity. For this reason a metaphor is generally considered more forceful than a simile.

The metaphor category also contains these specialized types:

- allegory: An extended metaphor wherein a story illustrates an important attribute of the subject.

- catachresis: A mixed metaphor used by design and accident (a rhetorical fault).
- parable: An extended metaphor narrated as an anecdote illustrating and teaching a moral lesson, such as Aesop's fables.

4. The significance of metaphor:

Indeed, historically, metaphor was considered only a rhetorical device: a way of embellishing (or adorning) the language to make the presentation of an idea more beautiful, effective and vivid. A majority of speakers uses metaphor all the time, but they don't realize that a lot of idiomatic expressions that are used in our speech involve metaphors. In various means of communication, there are certain examples of metaphor: people are liquid, life is a journey, moods are weather, a company is a

ship, peaceful dove, a doctor is a butcher, etc.

Generally, "metaphors are a way of life. No wonder, then, that different ways of life engender different metaphors, and that all understanding in life depends on, and even crucially presupposes, an understanding of metaphors" (Mey, 1993: 62).

In addition, "one contextually acceptable way of using language to convey something other than what is actually said is by means of metaphor" (Lyons, 1981: 215).

Moreover, Wright (1999:8) clarifies that metaphors are significant because:

very often the metaphorical use of a word is common today than its literal use. For example, we know that farmers *plough* their fields, but you can *plough through* a long novel or report; you can *plough on with* your work; you can *plough money into* a business; profits can be *plough back into* a company; a lorry can *plough into* a row of parked cars. Using *plough* in its literal farming meaning is now much rare than all its other non-literal uses. But it is important for you to know the literal meaning. Often the literal meaning creates a picture in your mind and this pictures makes the other meaning easier to understand.

5- The link between context and metaphor:

Most metaphors do occur in contexts of expressions used literally. It would be very hard to understand them if they did not (Searle, 1979: 91).

Besides, Lyons (1981: 215) claims that some linguists prescribe "the metaphorical interpretation interpret a metaphorical utterance in its literal meaning, because of utterance to pragmatics".

Yet, one cannot give the accurate meaning which is provided by the speaker, for example:

- Walls have ears. (Fromkin and Rodman, 1988: 235).

Pragmatically speaking, *all* metaphors are wrong as long as they are not 'contextualized', i.e. placed within the proper situation of use, and 'revitalized' continuously with regard to their applicability or non-applicability. Only the context of situation that

we want to characterize metaphorically can determine the usefulness of a particular metaphor (Mey, 1993: 64).

On the other hand, Scollon (1998, 83) highlights metaphor and says:

we must use our metaphor with caution, asking of each in turn not only what is being highlighted, but also what is being obscured. The metaphors of communication based upon messages, channels, and contexts tend to keep the focus on the message itself. That is, when context is used as a metaphor to mean 'what is around' (but what is not in) the communication, our attention is diverted from the social aspects of communication.

So, metaphor itself is a device that is used sometimes in a certain context. It is considered so common in English. The transfer of a name or descriptive term to something to which it is not in strictness applicable. This name, given by the transfer, is called metaphor (Al-Abbasi, 2004: 53).

6- The role of metaphor in language:

Two positions are concerned in using metaphorical language. The first is the classical view which can be subjected to Aristotle. Where metaphor is regarded as abnormal language and thus needs special forms of interpretation. Literal language theory has adopted this version. "According to this, metaphor is a form of anomaly, or deviation, which hearer recognizes as such before

employing strategies to construct the figurative, or non-literal meaning" (Finch, 2000: 170).

The second position is called romantic. It is opposite to the classical view in which it does not require special methods for interpreting metaphors; it is "an integral part of language and thought. From this standpoint there is no real distinction between figurative and non-figurative language since all language is essentially metaphorical"(Ibid: 171).

7- General types of metaphor frequently found in everyday language:

Three main types of metaphor are distinguished by Lakoff and Johnson (1980:5). These are:

7.1- Structural metaphors:

Structural metaphors are cases where one concept is metaphorically structured in terms of another (e.g., ARGUMENT is structured in terms of WAR). Structural metaphors often involve using a concept from one domain (WAR as a physical or cultural phenomenon) to structure a concept from another domain (ARGUMENT as primarily an intellectual concept, but with cultural content) (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980: 461).

Structural metaphor means that 'A' is 'B', as in:

- An argument is a container.

This metaphorical concept, i.e. argument, "develops through the mapping of one kind of experience onto another" (Finch, 2000: 171).

7.2- Oriental metaphors:

The second type is called orientational metaphors which do not structure one concept in terms of another. Instead, it organizes a whole system of concepts with respect to one another. We call them "orientational" metaphors because most of them have to do with spatial orientation: UP-DOWN, FRONT-BACK, IN-OUT, ON-OFF, DEEP-SHALLOW, CENTRAL-PERIPHERAL. These spatial orientations arise from the facts that we have bodies of the sort we have and that they function as they do in our physical environment. Orientational metaphors give a concept of a spatial orientation like, HAPPY IS UP. The fact that the concept HAPPY is oriented UP leads to English expressions like "I'm feeling up today." (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980: 461-62).

Orientational metaphor arises "from our awareness of own bodies and the way it functions in a predominantly physical environment"(Finch, 2000: 171-72). On our physical awareness of in/out, front/back, on/off, and near/far, similar metaphorical correspondences are constructed on this basis. So, "these correspondences allow us to project our orientation onto situations and things around us" (Ibid).

Some examples of orientational metaphors are as follows: conscious is up, health is up, having control/force is up, more is up, high status is up, good is up, virtue is up.

Such examples of orientational metaphors reveal some interesting facts about language. First, they show that the use of metaphorical language is syntactic and not random or haphazard. all the metaphors involving UP are positive in some way or evoke

general well-being when viewed against our cultural knowledge and understanding. Second the systematic nature of the metaphors reflects the fact that they are rooted in physical and cultural experience (Hurford et al, 2007: 335-36).

7.3- Ontological [Physical] metaphors:

Ontological is the third type of metaphor. It is used to "comprehend events, actions, activities and status" (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980: 30). Physical [Ontological] metaphors involve the projection of entity or substance status upon something that does not have that status inherently. Such conventional metaphors allow us to view events, activities, emotions, ideas, etc. as entities for various purposes (e.g., in order to refer to them, categorize them, group them, or quantify them). For example, we find physical metaphors such as:

- My fear of *insects* is driving my wife crazy.(referring)
- You've got *too much hostility* in you. (quantifying)
- The *brutality of war* dehumanizes us all. (identifying aspects)
- The *pressure of his responsibilities* caused his breakdown. (identifying causes)
- Here's what to do to ensure *fame and fortune*. (setting goals and motivating actions) (I bid: 461).

We need to be able to qualify, specify, and identify groups of such metaphors in order to conceive things in the first place. 'Race' is a given example as a discrete entity in which object had been conceptualized by an event in time:

- Are you going to the race? (Finch, 2000: 172).

"The term *ontological* is derived from the Greek root *onta* 'the thing which exists' + *-logy* 'the science of' " (Hurford et al, 2007: 336).

8- Live or dead metaphor:

Live metaphors are offered and accepted with consciousness of their nature as substitutes for their literal equivalence. A metaphor is called dead when the "speaker and hearer have ceased to be aware that the word used is literal"(Fowler, 1926: 349). Cooper (1986:119) adjusts the statement in accordance, thinking that "the more we forget that it is being used instead of a literal equivalent, the deader is the metaphor".

It seems that the process of distinction between dead and live metaphor in Fowler's typology is mental depending upon the degree of consciousness/unconsciousness of the speaker and reader. From this angle, it is appropriate to consider it as a 'mental classification'.

Clearly, if sentences like, '*How do you spend your time these days?*', are identified as metaphorical, then it will prove difficult to find any uses of language that are literal. Many linguists, however, would deny that this use of *spend* is metaphorical. The position adopted by many semanticists is that this is an example of a faded or dead metaphor. The idea is that metaphors fade over time and become part of normal literal language (Saeed, 1997: 16).

9- Differences between metaphorical and literal utterances:

In the case of literal utterance, speaker's meaning and sentence meaning are the same. In order to understand the utterance, the hearer does not require any extra knowledge beyond his knowledge of the rules of language, his awareness of the conditions of utterance and a set of shared background assumptions. But in the case of metaphorical utterance, the truth conditions of the assertion are not determined by the truth conditions of the sentence and its general term. In order to understand the metaphorical utterance, the hearer requires something more than his knowledge of language, his awareness of the conditions of the utterance and background assumptions that he shares with the speaker (Searle, 1979:84-5).

The hearer must have another principle. The basic principle on which all metaphors work is that the utterance of an expression with its literal meaning and corresponding truth conditions can, in various ways that are specific to metaphor, call to mind another meaning and corresponding set of truth conditions (Ibid).

10- Characteristics of literal utterances:

Searle (1979:81) pinpoints three main characteristics in literal utterance. These are as follows:

- First, the means what he says, that is literal sentence meaning and speaker's utterance meanings are the same.
- Second, the literal meaning of a sentence only determines a set of truth conditions relative to a set of background assumptions which are not part of the semantic content of the sentence.

- Third, the notion of similarity plays an essential role in any account of literal predication.

Metaphor involves quite indirect kinds of interpretation, and the ambiguity and unparaphrasability characteristic of many literary texts is an example of the multiplicity and indeterminacy of interpretations (Aronoff and Rees-Miller, 2003: 447-48).

11- Characteristics of metaphorical utterances:

According to Searle (1979: 96) the metaphorical utterance meaning is indeed derived from the simile, "Sally is like a block of ice," but then both the metaphor and the simile are cases of *hyperbole*; they are exaggerations.

Furthermore, there are three elements distinguished by Searle (Ibid: 83-4). These are as follows:

- First, there is the subject expression "S" and the object or objects.
- Second, there is the predicate expression "P" that is uttered and the literal meaning of that expression with its corresponding truth conditions, plus the denotation if there is any.
- Third, there is the speaker's utterance meaning "S" is "R" and the truth conditions determined by that meaning.

12- Some mistakes of the comparison theories and semantic interaction of metaphor which are summarized by Searle:

The endemic vice of the comparison theories is that they fail to distinguish between the claim that the statement of the comparison is part of the *meaning*, and hence the *truth conditions* of the metaphorical statement, and the claim that the statement of the similarity is the *principle of inference* or a step in the process of *comprehending* on the basis of which speakers produce and hearers understand metaphor. The endemic vice of the semantic interaction theories is the failure to appreciate the distinction between sentence or word meaning, which is never metaphorical, and speaker or utterance meaning, which can be metaphorical (Searle, 1979: 86).

The comparison theory is just muddled about the referential character of expression used metaphorically (Ibid: 88).

One of the assumptions behind the semantic interaction is that metaphorical meaning which is a result of an interaction between an expression used metaphorically and other expression used literally is that all metaphorical uses of expressions must occur in sentences containing literal uses of expressions. The semantic interaction view is not that it falsely presupposes that all metaphorical occurrences of words, but rather that even the metaphorical occurrence is within the context of literal occurrences. The comparison view tries to explain metaphor as a relation between references, and the interaction view tries to explain it as a relation between senses and beliefs associated with references (Ibid: 91-92).

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