

COGNITIVE APPROACH TO METAPHORS

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ABSTRACT

Metaphors are no different from what can be done with literal speech. But this does not make the metaphor theoretically ineradicable or irrelevant. In some cases, I argue, metaphors allow speakers to convey content that cannot be fully and clearly expressed in words. As such, these cases serve as counterexamples to the "Principle of Expressivity," the idea that anything can be said. In fact, I would argue, the point is about perception as well as communication: metaphors sometimes provide us with a single cognitive input that has certain properties. Ultimately, I think that thinking about metaphor is useful because it draws our attention to patterns and processes of thought that play a pervasive role in our ordinary thinking and speech and can stretch our basic communicative and cognitive resources.

Key words: *metaphor, cognitive approach, traditional metaphors, general-level metaphors, image metaphors.*

Philosophers have often been ambivalent about metaphor. Hobbes (Chapter 8) argued for the exclusion of metaphors from rational discourse because, he says, they are "manifestly false." And Locke (p. 3, ch. 10) the figurative use of language serves only "to inculcate false ideas, to excite passion, and consequently to divert from just judgment, therefore "metaphors are the real trickers." Later, logical positivists such as Ayer and Carnap argue that because metaphors such as "How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank" involve category errors, they have no real meaning or verification conditions. Since the 1960s and 1970s, philosophers and linguists have taken a positive interest in metaphor.

We can see that the historical account of metaphors has already encompassed cognitive interpretation, as in the last fifty years scholars have contributed significantly to the modern approach to metaphors. Looking at recent interpretations, Lakoff and Johnson (1980, 1999) can be considered the first proponents of metaphors, as they argue that metaphors are conceptual because many ways of thinking and acting are essentially metaphorical. (Evans and Green, 2006: 44). Descartes' rationalist approach is evident in formal approaches, such as Chomsky's generative grammar or Montague's law, where language can be studied as a formal or computational system independent of the nature of human experience or the human body. Lakoff's (empiricist) conception is based on the importance of human experience, the centrality of the human body, whereby human mind and language "cannot be examined in isolation from the human embodiment" (Evans and Green 2006: 44). Cognitive linguists have argued that metaphor is central to human language (Evans and Green 2006). The basic idea is that metaphors (metaphorical expressions) are based on our physical experience, and the simplest language for analyzing synchronic metaphors is to begin by providing a literal background. However, new research suggests that much of our everyday language is figurative (Evans and Green 2006: 287). Gibbs opposes this view (1994:75) because he divides traditional literalism into literalism, actual literalism, conditional literalism, and contextual literalism, and explains that they are not metaphorical. He also adds that some concepts, such as space and time without motion, cannot be described without metaphor.

There are three main mechanisms for interpreting linguistic expressions as new metaphors: the extension of traditional metaphors, general-level metaphors, and image metaphors. The most interesting poetic metaphor uses all of these in a superimposed manner. Let's start with examples of extensions of traditional metaphors. Dante begins the Divine Comedy thus:

*In the middle of the road of life
I found myself in a dark forest.*

The Path of Life evokes the sphere of life and journey, and thus the traditional LIFE IS A JOURNEY metaphor connects them. "I found myself in a dark forest" evokes the notion that if it's dark, you can't see which way to go. This evokes traditional metaphors for the theme of vision, such as "I see what you're getting at," "his claims are unclear," "the passage is unclear," etc.

This means that the speaker does not know which way to go. Since the "Life is a journey" metaphor suggests that routes are life goals, the speaker must not know what life goals to pursue, meaning he has no direction in his life. Metaphors transport images, feelings, values, thought patterns, etc. entrenched

in our cultures, as Mittelberg (2007:34) states based on Dirven, Wolf, Poltzenhagen; Kövecses (2005) also accepts this view. Furthermore, metaphor is based on similarity; but it is based on cross-domain correlations in our experience, which give rise to the perceived similarities between the two domains within the metaphor. These two domains lead to the many interpretations outlined below; we would only like to mention here Ricoeur's theory of metaphor, which is based on icons (standing for something) concerning cognitive notions, and he adopts Wittgenstein's proposal (1958), namely "seeing as" (mentioned by Mac Cormac). Lakoff and Johnson also say that all concepts are literal and none can be metaphorical; but even our deepest concepts (time) are understood and reasoned about via multiple metaphors, so they conclude that, in short, metaphor is a natural phenomenon (1980:247)

At this point, we can mention W. Bedell Stanford's conclusion about metaphor: The essence of metaphor is that a change or expansion of meaning occurs in a word. According to Lakoff and Johnson, the essence of metaphor is to understand and experience one kind of thing in terms of another, and we act according to how we imagine things (1980: 5). The problem is that the difference between metaphor and simile is explained with a series of examples:

Her cheeks are like red roses. (simile)

Her rosy cheeks... (metaphor)

Her cheeks are like a red rose. (simile)

Her rosy cheeks ... (metaphor)

metaphors force us to wonder, to compare, to look at similarities, and then to consider whether or not to confirm the metaphors (Marconi, 1997:76).

Summary.

Mac Cormack (1985: 149) asserts that metaphors lead to changes in the way we perceive the world, and these conceptual changes lead to changes in the way we act in life. Metaphors seem to be such a popular and normal part of language that it is difficult to understand any grammar that fails to analyze the relationship between metaphor and communication rather than obeying the rules of grammar (Mac. Cormac 1985: 32).

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