

Metaphor: A Key Ingredient in Common and Literary Discourse

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Abstract

In The present paper, I have reviewed the argument that metaphor is a key ingredient linguistic device in common as well as literary discourse, adding a recent view which holds that the human mind is fundamentally a literary mind and no human thinking can take place without story, projection and parable. Next I have also examined critically the analytical models suggested by I.A Richards, G.N Leech and Chomsky. I have demonstrated the operation of metaphorical enrichment by analyzing and interpreting a number of metaphorical expressions both colloquial and literary. I have also proposed a procedure for analyzing complex metaphor. For this purpose, I choose the well-known metaphor, “or to take arms against a sea of troubles” In Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* Act III. Sc I.

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For the purposes of communication, the use of metaphoric language it’s all important. “A metaphor is a shift carrying over of a word from its normal use to a new use”. Metaphors may be of two kinds:

1. Sense metaphors
2. Emotive metaphors.

In a sense metaphor the shift is due to a similarity or analogy between the original object and the new one. In an emotive metaphor the shift is due to a, “Similarity between the feelings the new situation and the normal situation arouse”. The same word in different contexts may be a sense – Metaphor or an emotive one. Metaphor, says Richards “is a semi surreptitious method by which a greater variety of element can be brought into the fabric of the experience. With the help of a metaphor, the writer can crowd into the poem much more than would be possible otherwise. The metaphorical meaning arises from the inter-relations of sense, time feeling and intention.

Both autogenetic and phylogenetic evidence points towards a key ingredient of metaphorizing in language. Hans Horman has noted that, above all Wegener, and following him Langer have dwelt on the importance of metaphor in the genesis of genuine symbols. “If someone says for the first time, ‘The brook runs swiftly’, the hearer is forced by the context of ‘running’ to forget that legs are originally included in the use of word ‘running’” (226) R.A Waldron has observed that metaphorical uses shared by several languages are so common along the diachronic dimension that “they provide some testimony to the universal element in human cognition” (178). The last statement regarding human cognition enables us to move on to the remarkable thesis developed by Mark Turner in *The Literary mind* subtitled, ‘the origin of thought and language’. He holds that all mental activity of human is characterized by what we may call literary competence, which consists of a few operative factors, active in all types of language use whether it is common discourse or literary. In Turner’s model, metaphor in a cognitive sense comes under *projection*: He also deals with what he calls direct projection in basic metaphors like ‘*Life is a journey*’. His discussion of the phrases “intellectual progress” and “mental journey” is particularly interesting because he makes a distinction between conventional and less conventional expressions (87-88).

Proceeding from this position we set up two levels of expressive effect, literal and metaphorical. Although just like ‘conventional’ and ‘less conventional’, the two levels cannot be clearly demarcated in all cases. We intuitively know which is which. The exact line of demarcation between the two levels will vary from language to language and also the proneness of various classes of metaphors to sink into the literal level. But the dictionary will serve as a rough guide to literality and metaphoricality of an expression.

Metaphorizing is an integral part of human competence for creative use of language and is manifested in common discourse as well as literature and new metaphors are generated in conventional as well as literary register. Therefore, setting aside the demarcation for a moment we can classify metaphors in to Living, dead (or fossil) and sleeping (or faded) metaphors. Morning (for youth), evening (for old age), garden (for happy state), Night (for death) are examples of living metaphors used in every day communication. In poetry these words are often used with metaphorical force. We must not forget that the poet is also a creator of new metaphors. Consider for example the following:

“History has many cunning passages, contrived corridors”
(T.S.Eliot ‘Gerontion’)

“Even so distant, I can taste the grief”
(Philip Larkin, ‘Deceptions’)

Waldron mentions the following words as dead metaphor in which the original metaphor is lost while the metaphorical meaning is still understood in a literal sense: *object* (‘something thrown in the way’) *magazine* (‘a store house’) and *complicated* (folded together) *Grash* (to comprehend) is sleeping metaphor and *Comprehend* (to ‘seize with the hand’) is a dead metaphor. Waldron further remarks: “the distinction between a dead and sleeping metaphor is of course partly a question of linguistic awareness (178-79). This shows how metaphorization plays a significant role in the lexicon and usage of a language. It is also worth pointing out here that in literary discourse a writer may refill or recharge a dead or sleeping metaphor and give it a renewed life.

Let us look at some examples in which a dead or hackneyed metaphor is revived. Consider the following line by Dylan Thomas:

The force that through the green fuse drives the flower.

The word *fuse* (as noun) came through metaphorical transfer from Latin *Fuses*, meaning ‘spindle’ via Italian *fuso*. It refers to a cord-like device that carries the flame to the other end for detonating an explosive. The word operates within literal bounds. But in the above line about the plant energy that moves like a spindle to the flowering point and sets the bud ablaze, the term metaphorical meaning is revived. ‘Nothing *Gold can stay*’, Robert Frost recharged the word ‘subside’ with fresh metaphorical power in: “Then leaf subsides to leaf”. The word comes from Latin *Subsidere* (sub + sideres), meaning ‘to sit down’.

Some major analyses of metaphor are based on the assumption that likeness is at the root of both metaphor and simile, that there is no essential difference between the two. “In fact it is sometimes assumed that simile is metaphor’s poor relation offering only the ‘barebone’ of the transforming process in the form of a limited analogy or comparison, whose ‘range’ is narrow, because predetermined. (Hawkes,3)

Here it is important to examine two theories of analysis which are based on the assumption that a metaphor is like a simile.

The first pioneering work is to be credited to I.A Richards. In his book, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (1936) he proposed two terms, tenor and vehicle which are employed in the analysis of metaphor. He says the meaning of a metaphor arises out of the interaction between tenor and vehicle. Tenor is the general drift or the underlying idea or the subject of metaphorical expression and vehicle the words used to convey the analogy. The metaphorical meaning “is not attainable without the co-presence of the vehicle and tenor.”(100)

Adding the concept of ‘ground’ to tenor and vehicle (which he handles in his own way) G.N Leech presents a three – stage analysis of metaphor in his *A Linguistic Guide to English Poetry* (153-56). Let us look at his procedure as illustrated in his analysis of the following line:

The Sky rejoices in the morning’s birth (taken from Wordsworth’s *Resolution and Independence*). In the first stage the literal and figurative uses are separated:

L: The sky.....the morning’s.....

F:.....rejoices inbirth

At the next stage the author asks us to construct tenor and vehicle, by postulating semantic elements to fill in the gaps of the literal and figurative interpretations. The picture that emerges is represented in the following way:

Ten: The sky (looks bright at): the morning’s (beginning)

Veh: (animate) rejoices: (animate)’s birth

The final stage requires us to state the ground of the metaphor; the ground is stated by Leech in the following words:

Here are two separate comparison; that between brightness or clearness of the sky, and a person’s rejoicing and that between dawn and birth. The second is the simpler: the connection is plainly that both are beginnings – dawn is the beginning of life. The first comparison rests on a common place metaphorical link between visual brightness and ‘brightness’ in the sense of cheerfulness, happiness, liveliness, on a less superficial level, these metaphors, which attribute life to inanimate things are justified by Wordsworth’s philosophy of nature. (156).

It should be noted here that the tendency to humanize the non-human world by metaphoric means is a fundamental trait of the human mind, because truly speaking; there is no communication between man and the non-human world.

The models of analysis offered by I.A. Richards, Leech and many other scholars are heavily oriented to subject/predicate division and they are also unable to account for and discover methodically the unstated element of the metaphor. The approach suggested by transformational generative grammar does take us some way forward, but it suffers from serious drawbacks and appears to have been discarded by many analysis of metaphor.

A much discussed example from literature comes from a line in ‘Hamlet’ for which Shakespeare is sometimes criticized. It occurs in Hamlet’s soliloquy in Act III Sc.I

“To be or not to be, that is the question:
Whether ‘tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,

Or take arms against a sea of troubles
And by opposing end them.”

Hamlet is trying to decide which is the nobler course of action, suffering the blows of fortune or fighting them. The third and fourth lines both employ metaphors: ‘outrageous fortune’ is described in terms of ‘slings and arrows’, and ‘troubles’ are describe in the terms of ‘a sea’. The subjects (or tenors) of the metaphors are ‘fortune’ and ‘troubles’, the figurative terms (or vehicle) which describe them are ‘slings and arrows’ ‘a sea’. The obvious attraction of metaphor is that it makes an idea vivid. Thus, Hamlet’s ‘troubles’ are only his personal feelings of unhappiness, but by associating his feelings with such large and chaotic subjects as warfare and the sea, the individual experience is linked with vast and important aspects of life –almost making a huge statement about human experience.

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