

Conceptual Metaphor: A Thing of Language as Well as Thought

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The by-now classical theory of conceptual metaphor

- Some things in life are not easy to make sense of because their notions lie beyond the knowledge base of an average speaker or are too abstract to be grasped firmly.
- Metaphor becomes handy. It offers speakers a way to make sense of one thing in terms of another: Source Domain (SD) to Target Domain (TD) projection.
- The choice of an SD is based on experience: The SD tends to be more observable, less abstract, hence easier to conceptualize (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 1999, among many others).

What TIME is it?

- Definition: Classical mechanics? Newtonian mechanics? Relativity?
- Nature: The Greeks (Kronos)? Mayan (cyclicity)? Judeo-Christian (linearity)? Taoism (both cyclical and linear)?
- Does it even exist (Leibniz, Kant)?

The theory goes...

- Speakers project an element from an SD to the TD of TIME.
- That SD has shown to be mostly SPACE cross-linguistically due to 1) its universality; 2) its easy observability; and 3) its close relationship with TIME.
- Cultures then differ in their conceptualization of the way in which TIME is understood in terms of SPACE.

These views see metaphor as a thing of thought—“of thought” for short.

We will argue that metaphor does something else, too. That function is called the function of language—“of language” for short.

“Argument is war”

Argument (TD)



War (SD)



Which is more “experiential”?

“They were fired up right *out of the gate*.”



Target domain

Source domain



We therefore ask

- If the TD is not less familiar than the SD, why would the speaker invoke a metaphor? (Cost and Benefit)
- Would this suggest another motivation for metaphor to exist?
- The *really* classical theory: stylistic, ornamental. (But what is ornamental about “out of the gate?”)

Let's argue.

Argument: Verbal, non-physical, non-violent



War: Physical, violent, with weapons, resulting in winning/losing, even casualty



“From the tipoff” vs. “out of the gate”



- One *player* from each team in tipoff.
- Ball lands in one player’s hands.



- All horses stand ready.
- All horses push open the gate simultaneously.
- All horses play the same roles.
- Hence the abruptness of the starting of the game.

So, we propose

- Metaphor helps the speaker to *direct* (*control?*) the way a thing is seen and interpreted.
- The reason for that directing is to make the speaker see that thing *differently*.
- The difference seems to be that the metaphorical seeing helps the speaker to get across her message more *effectively*.

“Of thought” and “of language”

For want of a better term, we will call the classical views of metaphor as metaphor of “of thought” and our view as metaphor of “of language,” in the sense that effectiveness has to do with how language is used in a particular context by a particular speaker for a particular purpose.

Effectiveness

- In saying something, the speaker intends to convey a message (M).
- M can be conveyed in a range of ways.
- Metaphor is one of these ways.
- It helps the speaker to convey M more effectively: leaving more impact on the hearer.

(c.f. *Expressiveness*, Chen 1993)

Complementary to the classical theory

“Of thought”:

A metaphor enables speakers a way to understand a thing more easily (by seeing it as something else).

“Of language”:

A metaphor enables speakers a way to understand a thing more effectively.

“Of thought” vs. “of language”

“Of thought”:

- About a thing that is either impossible or very difficult to understand;
- Resulting metaphor is more received by either all or most of the speech community;
- More context free;
- Neural binding.

“Of language”:

- The thing to be understood may not be difficult to understand in the first place;
- The metaphor is more novel, individualized;
- More context imbedded;
- May not be bound neurally.

A possible categorization

Clearly “of thought”: those that are accepted by (almost) all speakers of a language (or even of all languages), due to shared experience.

- Metaphors about TIME
- Spatial metaphors (computer technology)
- Conduit metaphors
- Metaphors of personification
- Dead metaphors

Rather clearly of language

Those metaphors which are not accepted as the “definition” of a notion but are created on the fly, in a particular context. They tend to be novel, as is the case with “poetic metaphor.” Their SDs are not always expected to be shared by a large number of the speaker population.

- *You're a coat hanger.*
- *He was an in and out Ann Coulter.*
- *The hardware is a beast.*

A sampler of Shakespeare

O, she doth *teach the torches* to burn bright!
Her beauty hangs upon *the cheek of night*,
Like a rich jewel in an Ethiop's ear.

—*Romeo and Juliet*

Their *understanding*
Begins to *swell*; and the approaching *tide*
Will shortly fill the *reasonable shore...*

—*The Tempest*

A sampler of Shakespeare

That memory, *the warder of the brain*,
Shall be a *fume*, and *the receipt of reason*
A *limbeck* only.

—*Macbeth*

“A man may break a word with you, sir,
and words are but wind.”

—*The Comedy of Errors*



If you are beginning to assume we are serious (Shakespearian) scholars, be surprised!

IT'S A SPACE HEATER
FOR MY SIDE OF THE BED
IT'S MY EMBASSADOR
TO THOSE WHO WALK
BEHIND ME
IT'S A BORDER COLLIE
THAT HERDS SKINNY
WOMEN

OOPS!

MY BUTT IS BIG

AND ROUND LIKE THE LETTER C
AND TEN THOUSAND LUNGES
HAVE MADE IT ROUNDER
BUT NOT SMALLER

AND THAT'S JUST FINE.

IT'S A SPACE HEATER

FOR MY SIDE OF THE BED

IT'S MY AMBASSADOR

TO THOSE WHO WALK BEHIND ME

IT'S A BORDER COLLIE

THAT HERDS SKINNY WOMEN

AWAY FROM THE BEST DEALS

AT CLOTHING SALES.

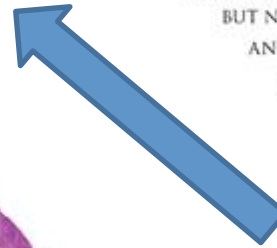
MY BUTT IS BIG

AND THAT'S JUST FINE

AND THOSE WHO MIGHT SCORN IT
ARE INVITED TO KISS IT.

JUST DO IT.

NIKEWOMEN.COM 



In between, of both (thought and language)

- Some metaphors are clearly “of thought,” others rather clearly “of language.”
- Many others seem to be of both. Back to Shakespeare (because of Lackoff).

Shakespeare Sonnet 73

(of thought and of language?)

That time of year thou mayst in me behold
When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang
Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,
Bare ruin'd choirs, where late the sweet birds sang.
In me thou seest the twilight of such day
As after sunset fadeth in the west,
Which by and by black night doth take away,
Death's second self, that seals up all in rest.
In me thou see'st the glowing of such fire
That on the ashes of his youth doth lie,
As the death-bed whereon it must expire
Consumed with that which it was nourish'd by.

This thou perceivest, which makes thy love more strong,
To love that well which thou must leave ere long.

“Of thought”: Lakoff

First quadrant: Life → autumn

Second quadrant: Life → twilight

Third quadrant: Life → amber of dying fire

Last couplet: theme (make merry before it's too late)

Lakoff (2008: 257): “A year, a day, and a fire all share an image schema: a waxing-and-waning cycle of intensity—starting from nothing, slowly growing, reaching a peak, slowly declining in intensity, finally dwindling again to nothing.” They are “combined by neural binding.”

“Of language,” too?

The speaker wants his readers to understand (appreciate) old age more effectively by creating three metaphors, each of whose time span being shorter than the previous one (season, a fleeting part of day, amber) so that death seems gradually more eminent, even during the course of the 14 line sonnet.

LIFE metaphors: both, too?

LIFE IS A JOURNEY

- Cogling discussions: February to March 2013.
- Dozens of posts, touching on a variety of aspects of the metaphor.
- It seems that the metaphor exists in a large number of languages.

But life is not ONLY a journey.

For the pessimist and the unhappy

full of holes, nuts, a joke, hard moments, noise, abuse, pain

For the optimist and the happy

royalty, joy, a sunset, a fun ride

For the philosophical

an open book, a stage, a mirror, a casino, a highway

For the opportunist

a special occasion (Hallmark), a messy boot camp (A website), a crime (RAP group), Suite (a hotel) Yoga, Reality Show, science experiment, a Ball Game (baseball)

A little inspiration

Life is a song—sing it.

Life is a game—play it.

Life is a challenge—meet it.

Life is a dream—realize it.

Life is a sacrifice—offer it.

Life is love—enjoy it.

[http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/
keywords/life_is_a.html](http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/keywords/life_is_a.html)

So, it seems...

LIFE is X, whereby X = a noun.

- Life is a brick/a desk/a computer/a reception.
- Life is cognitive linguistics.
- Life is an ICLA conference.
- Life is a conceptual metaphor.

Why LIFE?

- Everybody lives a life.
- No one seems able to define what it exactly is (except in the biological sense: between birth and death).
- LIFE is ambiguous, meaning different things to different people, or different things to one person at different times and on different occasions.
- Therefore it lends itself to be anything in any domain/frame/script/narrative.
- These metaphors, hence, seem to be both of thought and of language.

Summery

- Classical theories of metaphor focus on how it offers a way of thought: enabling speakers to conceptualize one thing in terms of another. Metaphor is thus seen as a way of knowing the world, making sense of things that are not transparent and immediately observable. (ease in conceptualization)
- Those theories seem to have missed another function of metaphor, that it helps speakers to control the way a thing is seen and conceptualized so that that thing can be presented and understood more effectively: to help drive home the point, to help produce more impact about the message on the hearer. (effectiveness in communication)

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