

THREE ASPECTS OF METAPHOR

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Abstract

On the basis of the classical view on a metaphoric utterance stemming from Aristotle, there is proposed a kind of the systematisation of some concepts of metaphor. The approaches considered seem to be almost incomparable because of the difficulty in finding common ground for such a comparison or even certain correspondence between the ways in which the very notion is perceived and defined by various authors.

As a starting point of our considerations the following list of metaphors not altogether chosen at random might serve:

- a) *splash* of the sky;
- b) dark *welter* of dreams;
- c) brown rain-storm *brushing* the landscape;
- d) don't be a road-*hog*!
- e) sky-*scrapper*;
- f) we had an all-night-long *brainstorming* session;
- g) the *evening* of life;
- h) the *cry* of silence;
- i) the caterpillar *knelt down*;
- j) his wife is an *angel*.

The term *metaphor* referring to certain linguistic phenomena was first applied by Aristotle in a metaphoric way since in Greek it meant to carry something from one place to another. The phenomenon itself is, according to the Greek philosopher, accompanied by three others, namely:

- transposition (changing the place of a word)
- transformation (changing the meaning)
- similarity.

The underlined words in the above examples do not appear in their normal context of use. Their unusual occurrence brings about the transformation of their meaning. The transformation, however, is not arbi-

trary but results from the relation of similarity between the members of metaphorical expression.

Here the first two, transposition and transformation, are adopted as a kind of lens through which a quick look is made at some theories of metaphor. The third could be replaced by a much more general term of relation of which similarity is one possible case. However the original term of similarity is preserved and it serves the same purpose thus constituting the third lens. The Aristotle's concepts bear general character and other writers upon the subject develop them to various degrees and are much at variance with one another. Despite this the trichotomy seems to offer a shade of chance to find terms in which the so-far helplessly incompatible theories of metaphor might be compared. These three aspects open up the possibility to classify different accounts of metaphor, of which this paper tries to take advantage.

1. Metaphor as a transposition

In his *Poetics* Aristotle writes that the characteristic feature of metaphor is a transference of a word into a place in which it usually does not appear. What is peculiar is that this operation concerns names only and is limited to the cases specified in the definition:

“Metaphor consists in giving the thing a name that belongs to something else: the transference being either from genus to species, or from species to genus, or from species to species, or on ground of analogy.” (Poetics, 1457b).

Nevertheless this conception of metaphor seems to be very broad and comprehends what we call synecdoche, metonymy and expressions of meaning extensions.

The fourth category of Aristotle's typology is the most interesting. It conceives metaphor as a mathematical proportion. The example of this is g) *the evening of life* where analogies are stated between two of the four terms: *evening/old age* and *life/day*. Between four terms a few¹ analogies may be stated of which some are metaphorical.

¹ For example, G. A. Miller gives eight proportions of analogies, and R.J. Sternberg eleven.

The definition of metaphor based on the fact that an expression is placed beyond its normal context of use takes into account the method of its formation on the one hand and the method of its interpretation on the other. In both of them the transfer of the word constitutes one of the steps only. In J. Searle's pragmatic account of metaphor the transference of an expression is the source of defective utterances. Such a replacement violates the rules of speech acts or conversational rules and/or results in evident falsity of the sentence. All these consequences play the role of a sign for a hearer to skip the sentence literal meaning and to seek for another meaning which the speaker intended to convey. Searle has distinguished between sentence meaning which is always literal and utterance meaning being the meaning of the speaker which can be metaphorical, ironical, but also literal. This strategy forms the first step in the inferential process of reconstructing metaphorical meaning.

2. Metaphor as a transformation

Another definition of metaphor reads:

Metaphor is a linguistic expression in which meaning of the word changes.

The words underlined, like *welter*, *brushing*, *cry*, *angel*, lose their standard meanings, their meaning is transformed. The character of this transformation can be twofold: enlargement or split of meaning.

Enlargement is tantamount to widening the extension of a word. *Splash* refers not only to the sound of liquid falling noisily in drops or waves but additionally to some aspect(s) of the existence of the sky, and the act called *brushing* has something to do with both: hair and landscape. And this is really the case with the so called dead metaphors. Dead metaphors' main feature is that they are "always alive", i.e., they are used in everyday language. Repeatedly used they gained conventional, and from a standpoint of a user as much fixed as literal meaning. Common English speaker does not wonder what the meaning of such expressions as: *dog's life*, *the apple of his eye*, *to show one's teeth* could be. (What is interesting neither does Polish or French speakers). However the gross of dead metaphors are in fact not susceptible to any straight translation as, for example, Polish *Ona go rzuciła* - *She threw him*. (*She left him*) or *Zrobił ich na szaro* - *He made them grey*. (*He perplexed them*). Undoubtedly, the lack of possibility to interpret widely such metaphoric idioms justify their rather unpleasant name. Their meaning is stable, in order to understand them no creative effort is re-

quired. Comprehension is as automatic as with purely literal expressions with no new meaning emerging.

It is obvious that in this respect living metaphors are different. Their meaning is not determined but consists of more or less apt interpretations. The claim that the heart of metaphorical phenomenon is the extension of meaning of linguistic expressions may be legitimate in a diachronic approach and to dead metaphors alone. The criticism of such an account was briefly expressed by D. Davidson: "to make a metaphor is to murder it". The sky really has its own splash, rain sometimes brushes the landscape and caterpillars can kneel down. The unique sense of metaphor fades away, it merely tends to introduce a new term into the language.

Furthermore to expand meaning is to cause that a new item starts to be conveyed by it; something lying beyond its range is now included. For example, the meaning of the word "vehicle" was being expanded as carriages, bicycles, cars, carts, tramways, buses, etc. were appearing. In science it is a common practice to expand the meaning by borrowing a word of everyday speech as, for example, "coal" applied in reference to a chemical element which in turn has different allotropes like diamond and graphite, thus the primary meaning of "coal" is broadened. Of course, all these things possess so many significant features in common - all of them carry people or goods, or are composed of the same kind of element - that they immediately receive these names.

Split can be understood in two ways:

- 1) In standard context a word has meaning¹, and in a metaphorical context meaning², e.g., to brush¹ is to clean or smooth with a brush; to brush² - to block the view of something with vertical lines. The context imposes another meaning and such expressions do not differ from ambiguous words. But there does arise a vital pragmatic difference between ambiguous and metaphoric expressions: the meaning of the former is given while that of the latter must be discovered by interlocutors.
- 2) The split can consist in a word having two meanings at the same time, literal and metaphoric meanings come up in the same context. Metaphor holds two thoughts of different things together in simultaneous performance upon the stage of an expression or, in different terms, it yields two ideas for one. These two levels of meaning inspire the interactive description of metaphor and decide about its unexhaustive interpretation vane. The representative for such an approach is the following definition: metaphor is a synthesis of elements possessing normal (conventional) meaning and a new meaning imposed by the context of metaphorical use of the word. (Le Guern).

Also these concepts meet with critic. D. Davidson repudiates the claim that any figurative meaning is present in metaphor. In its metaphorical role the word refers to everything it refers in its literal role. We can know what “splash of the sky” means only because we know the ordinary, literal meaning of the words: “splash” and “sky”. Hence metaphor is not based on the difference between two meanings but on the difference between standard and exceptional usage of words. “Metaphors mean what the words, in their most literal interpretation, mean, and nothing more.” (Davidson).

Searle on the one hand agrees with Davidson and maintains that sentences and words have exclusively literal meanings which cannot be further transformed. What is more, in the proper metaphorical expression only due to the fact that the expression has not changed its meaning we have a metaphor at all. On the other hand, this does not imply that metaphorical meaning is deprived of a carrier - this role is played by the utterance of the speaker. The meaning of a metaphor is the meaning which the speaker intends to convey, it is the utterance meaning. Theory of metaphor should, according to Searle, find out the rules determining the net of relations between the sentence and utterance meanings, the latter sometimes being metaphorical. The ground is the way in which one thing resembles the other.

The position in which there does not exist other than literal level of meaning have some consequences connected with the possibility to translate metaphors into literal language. Davidson claims that sometimes any attempts to paraphrase a metaphor fail, but not because what it says is too novel, but because there is nothing to be paraphrased, e.g., *splash of the sky*, *dark welter of dreams*. Nevertheless, Searle defends paraphrasing albeit he is aware of its deficiencies. As in a metaphorical expression what the speaker wants to express is different from what he really says, in order to describe this phenomenon we need two sentences: one uttered metaphorically; and the other expressing literally what the speaker means. For example,

(MET) *Sally is a block of ice.*

(PAR) *Sally is unemotional.*

Even if the paraphrase is inadequate, it must express most of the speaker's meaning since it has the same truth conditions. Searle admits that some metaphors do not have any adequate paraphrase as they fill in the “semantic gaps”, for instance: *The ship ploughed the see*. Moreover he provides the following argument: paraphrase is a symmetrical relation and if paraphrase is a bad paraphrase of metaphor then the metaphor is bad paraphrase of the paraphrase. This last statement does not

seem to solve the problem.

John Searle represents rather 'slackened' version of the substitution view. According to the extreme version any metaphorical meaning in a given context can be always expressed literally. (One of its variation is an opinion that every metaphor is a contracted comparison. Instead of *Joan is an angel* we can say *Joan is like an angel*. This has driven some researchers, like Bickerston or Whateley, to the conclusion that the metaphor can be dispensed with or that it is a linguistic deviation. Still another approach is that paraphraseable metaphor is not at all a metaphor. It is worth noticing that applying the same criterion we can call a metaphor a contradictory couple of expressions: the one for which there exists a paraphrase, and the one for which there is none.

3. Metaphor as a similarity

Aristotle suggested that metaphors should be made not of remote notions, but of closely related and homogenous. The process of metaphor creation is connected with the principle of similarity, which is especially apparent in metaphors based on analogy. In case of other types distinguished by the Greek philosopher the similarity means to be a part of the same concept.

"Metaphor is the trope of resemblance par excellence. It is defined specifically by the role that the relationship of resemblance has in the transference from initial idea to new idea." (Ricoeur, 173)

Quite obviously the notion of resemblance lies behind the view named by Max Black *interaction view of metaphor*. In most general terms, at least two elements of metaphorical expression interact in order to produce new meaning. (Such a broad definition of the interaction view allows to comprise John Searle's approach although the philosopher himself repudiates it and says that interaction view treats metaphor as verbal opposition or interaction between semantic content of the expression used metaphorically and the literal context within which it appears. Novel meaning results somehow from the similarity of these two elements.) Such theory must find the answer to two fundamental questions: What kind of entities are the elements of metaphor? and What does the relation between them consist in?

For better understanding the first question let us introduce horizontal and vertical structures of metaphor.

Metaphor has vertical structure when the relation occurs between extra linguistic elements like referents, ideas or properties.

Metaphor has horizontal structure if the linguistic constituents of metaphorical utterance are considered as being related.

First three views presented below represent verticality of metaphor, the other two are horizontal. Horizontal structure may be also view as a super-structure for the vertical one.

Common properties of things and situations to which the metaphorical expression refers

Jerzy Pelc reduces similarity to the set of common features within the so called metaphorical triangle. For instance, in metaphor *Sun's hair* the metaphorical triangle is formed by the following expressions: W - sun's hair, W₁ - hair, W₂ - sun rays. The referents of expressions W₁ and W₂ share some properties: length, colour, shine which altogether constitute the basis of comparison. The elements set together here are the referents of names: one used metaphorically, the other its literal counterpart.

In semiotics originating from Peirce metaphor is classified as an icon. The relation of this type of sign to its significant relies on co-possessing certain property, quality or feature. As Kenneth Burke puts it metaphorical expression stands in two semantical relations. At first metaphorical expression performs literally as a principle determining the subject or situation. Next it performs indirectly, iconically, pointing at another similar subject or situation. Here similarity of structure, place, quality, situation or feelings come on the stage.

"Shared characteristics" of ideas: tenor and vehicle

Richards strays away from real world and prefers to speak about ideas. To say something metaphorically is to present one idea under the sign of the other. For Richards underlying idea is a *tenor* and a *vehicle* is the name of the idea under whose sign the first idea is apprehended. The idea of tenor is described through the features of vehicle, for instance, in g) *evening* is a vehicle and *old age* is a tenor, hidden sense. However sometimes the other idea bears no name in the language e.g. a) *splash of the sky*. The criterion of metaphoric expression is that a word introduces two interacting ideas. Interpretation or explanation of a metaphor is possible only when their shared characteristics is discovered. Shared characteristics of vehicle and tenor exceeds the boundaries of similarity

or mere resemblance between them. It involves common attitude to them and knowing one through the presence of the other.

The theories briefly sketched above take into account a single word used metaphorically. Metaphor emerges from one word having twofold nature: it refers to two different things, concepts or ideas.

The following accounts, on the contrary, view metaphor as a whole complex expression, sentence or utterance.

Similarity of properties: referent and relatum

George A. Miller intended by his analysis to convey psychologically real process of communication by means of metaphor. He claims that due to the similarity occurring between S and P in the expression "S is P" tension arises between our image of reality and the text information about it. Finding the basis for similarity which the speaker presumes is for the hearer problem of interpretation. G.A. Miller believes that there are two concepts lying behind metaphorical sentence: the notion spoken about - *referent*; and the concept to which the referent refers - *relatum*. In the sentence above S is a referent and P relatum. The hearer must transfer the features of relatum P onto the referent S. Relatum is a wide notion which involves general knowledge and determines where to, how and why referent is to be classified. The information the hearer receives is a statement of similarity between referent and relatum. Referent and relatum are concepts. Nevertheless the similarity between referent and relatum does not concern concepts but features. G.A. Miller renders the simplest metaphor as the following formula: if x is a referent, y relatum and F, G properties, then

$$BE(x,y) \quad (F)(G) \{SIMILARITY[F(x)G(y)]\}$$

Similarity remains solely an intuitional term, while similar properties according to Miller should be conceived very broadly: they are not limited to truth conditions, semantical markers nor other logical properties. The author does not go any further in determining similarity.

In order to grasp the assumptions hidden behind this approach let us consider metaphorical sentence *Nora is an angel*. Miller claims that the set of properties Nora shows cannot be directly related to the set of properties shared by angels. Here some other set of properties is necessary to mediate between them. Thus similarity involves quite a complicated and in fact impossible task of searching for a set of properties to which the set of Nora's properties and the set of angels' properties are related. The whole approach seems unintuitional.

Commonplaces associated with focus and frame

Max Black contribution differs appreciably as regards the structure of metaphor. Whole sentence is a metaphor and only linguistic entities are capable of constituting it. Hence ideas etc. are not a significant trait of metaphorical structure. For example, the sentence:

Green caterpillar knelt on the leaf

consists of two metaphorically valid categories of expressions: those uttered metaphorically which are called focus; and those used literally - frame. Whether a word is used metaphorically, i.e., whether it is a focus, depends entirely upon the context whose element is a frame and all this is determined by language principles. Black tries to avoid linking the interpretation of metaphor with the notion of similarity. Similarity is at best a vague term (or even an empty name). Similarity descends from subjective perception rather than objective observation. Moreover this is a metaphor that creates similarities and not vice versa.

Frame and focus interacting together form novel meaning of metaphorical expression. Focus does not act on the basis of its lexical meaning but on the system of associated commonplaces ("common knowledge, common misinformation"). The system of commonplaces may include half-truths or mistakes but the important thing for metaphor effectiveness is that they should be readily evoked by the member the same language community.

As Searle noticed it is not logically necessary that every metaphorical application of an expression should call for the company of literally used ones. Russell's nonsensical sentence: *Quadrilaterality drinks procrastination* may play the role of counterexample (possible interpretation is a description of post-war disarmament conference of four parties²).

² At the end of "Metaphor" M. Black turns from focus, frame and associated commonplaces to principal, subsidiary subjects which should be regarded as system of things and a system of associated implications characteristic of the subsidiary subject and applied to the principal one. In "More About Metaphor" he develops this version introducing another term of "implicative complex". He describes there how the metaphorical utterance works "by projecting upon the primary subject a set of associated implications, comprised in the implicative complex, that are predictable of the secondary subject." (p.28) As such they would belong to vertical order.

Potential range of connotation of subject and modifier

One can find similar horizontal structure at M. Beardsley. His point of departure is the theory of attribution constituting part of "Aesthetics". Attribution is a linguistic expression requiring at least a subject and a modifier. The former denotes a class providing at the same time its characteristics; the latter modifies this characteristics, for example, *a little cat*, *little* -modifier, *cat* -subject. Whenever an attribution is indirectly³ self-contradictory, and the modifier has connotations that could be attributed to the subject, the attribution is metaphorical. It is important here to say connotations and not similarity or anything shared by the two elements. The author speaks about a whole range of connotations, connotations that are "liberated" by figurative use of language. We are not able to understand metaphor if we neglect those connotations of modifier which cannot be reduced to ordinary features of the thing- cultural connotations. The metaphor used by Aristotle: *You are free as a sacrificial animal* may serve as an illustration: one cannot guess its meaning without some knowledge of Ancient Greece where only a sacrificial animal was allowed to move freely. Beardsley treats the problem still more thoroughly admitting even potential ranges of connotations and thus suggesting that there may exist connotations waiting to be discovered by some unexpected context. Attributions which now seem nonsensical may always become plausible.

To summarize thus far, since the clarity of metaphor decreases in the light of large array of approaches I appeal to three instantaneous phenomena which bear closely on metaphor, namely transposition, transformation and similarity and urge that they are actually sufficient notions to attempt to set different conceptions of metaphor together. The whole task, however, aims toward finding the gist of the theory of metaphor and this paper constitutes an initial step.

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³ The simplest type of direct self-contradiction is oxymoron (noisy silence, colourless red). In metaphor contradiction should be more indirect.

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