

## TRANSLATION AND METAPHOR

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"Metaphor is ubiquitous to all linguistic activity and essential to social life and conceptual life"

*Gunther Kress*

The oral language is a unique systematic organization that possesses elements, which allow us to define it like so. When we talk about elements, we refer to words and sounds through which we produce phrases, sentences and texts to express our feelings and the ways in which we conceive the world that surrounds us.

We use language to communicate with others. However, there exists a social conventional model that without doubt is governed by the norms of conduct, which let us denote and connote the multiplicity of circumstances and events (e.g. social, political, educational, economic) that form part of our daily lives giving us the opportunity to enjoy the reality.

Man behaves according to his setting, and plays different roles taking into account the situation into which he acts. In the house, he is the father, the homemaker, and the husband. In the office, he is the office clerk and is under the authority of others. In the church, he may be the priest or another Christian. At the university, he is a professor or a student.

Man is by nature a symbolic animal. All his conduct is symbolic. Symbolism forms part of our daily lives. When a sculptor gives the clay the form he wants, he puts all his sensibility into it through his tact; the painter works with colors to create order in the chaos. Musicians put in the pentagram

melodious chords to form delightful rhythms.

Thanks to God clay, colors, and music; literature also exists, which in its heart carries the poetry to give the writer the opportunity to use the word significantly so that we all can enjoy it like tasting a delicious fruit.

Metaphor is in charge of that exciting task. Hidden in the depth of Semantics, metaphor travels to the heart of language giving splendor, force, life, and beauty to our way of expressing the reality. When the words hit the target through metaphor; the ordinary objects, the futile situations, and the most explainable circumstances may be manifested with all their complexity.

The following example shows how words play an important role if we use metaphor: "By the eye of the needle of every day's time, pass not only the biblical camel but also a great number of ordinary mental comparisons". In this way, we can consider metaphor not like a language adornment but indeed as, the bone, the nerve, and the soul of expression.

The translation of metaphors always implies taking semantic risks into account, there are many factors such as ideological, social, psychological, cultural, etc. as well as those of time, space and setting involved in the metaphorical translation process that go far beyond the bare words to give translation a different sense from what is established in the mere syntactic organization of the sentence.

As G. Kress affirms: "Metaphor could be considered as any type of figurative expression that works at all levels of language, from the largest textual unit to the smallest, phonological units". In "Juan Salvador Gaviota", Richard Bach makes use of an amplified metaphor carried out through the whole novel to describe the act of perseverance of the seagull for its capability to learn to fly fast.

A metaphor is a comparison, which extends beyond what is usually expected. One object is compared directly to another in a way that could not be physically possible. Metaphors often throw up a surprising or an amusing picture in the reader's mind. An example is 'a window of opportunity'

Strictly speaking, metaphor occurs as often as we take a word out of its original sphere and apply it to new circumstances. In this sense almost all words can be shown to be metaphorical when they do not bear a physical meaning; for the original meaning of almost all words can be traced back to something physical.

If we take smaller units of language, we can also notice that in English, just to set an example, prepositions perform a metaphorical task according to the use, usage or setting in which they can be employed. This circumstance has to shift our thinking to consider meaning from different angles.

According to G. Kress, this preposition/metaphor is basic to cultural classifications, and there is an ideological struggle to force one point of view upon another. In this way, if we take the prepositions "up" and "down" we will realize that it is better to belong to the upper class than being down in the lower

one. Heaven is up, hell is down; the head and the heart are up, our ankles and feet are down.

The phrasal verbs may also be considered metaphorically. In the following pairs of sentences, some of the two-word verbs have a literal and non-literal meaning. (Taken from Warhowsky, *Spectrum* 5, A Communicative Course in English page, 98).

**A.**

- I saw 50p on the pavement and I picked it up (to lift something up from a surface).
- I picked up Spanish quite quickly when I was living in Madrid (to get a language by chance).

**B.**

- In Britain we always put out the milk bottles for the milkman. (To put something outside the house).
- Put out your cigarette before you go into class (to make a fire stop burning).

**C.**

- I looked up the road but I couldn't see him (to look in the distance).
- She looked up the word in her dictionary (to try to find a particular bit of information)

**D.**

- Kate! Are you downstairs? Could you bring up my bag (to raise)
- She brought up three children on her own (to educate).

When translating a metaphor it is very important to take into account the setting (space, time, context, circumstance, etc.) in which the metaphor takes place in order

not to overlook the cultural aspects that are molten in the act of speech. Thus, culture could be regarded as an art entity that goes far beyond the linguistic activity to become something, which has to be contextualized into the target language. Otherwise, the translation of a metaphor would turn out to be a simple task lacking lots of the human components of how man conceives his reality, his feelings, his environment, customs, traditions, beliefs, religion and so on.

A Metaphor has basically a twofold objective: literal and pragmatic, let us take a popular phrase heard in the lyrics of a "vallenato"<sup>1</sup> to exemplify what has been said above. "Cuando se emborracha se le moja la canoa". Literally, it may be understood that a canoe whose owner is negligent when drinking, gets wet by being left in the rain, however, in the pragmatic side of the interpretation what it is implied in the text goes beyond the printed words to perceive a different sense about it.

The words "drink", "wet", and "canoe" produce an image. That image gives sense at the pragmatic level of language forming the figure to describe a reality that is different from what is established with simple words. This image has to do with certain circumstances fulfilled under certain conditions. To express that a man, who is married, dressed up with tie and suit, wearing a big moustache, behaves in a strange way when he gets drunk, showing another aspect of his personality to the point that he is considered as a homosexual.

In a situation like this, a footnote is always necessary to explain what it is all about, to

<sup>1</sup> A Vallenato is a popular sort of music that expresses the daily experiences of the people at the Colombian Caribbean Coast.

get readers informed of other details, which are not present in the text, but which exist in the culture.

To teach how to use Metaphors is not an easy task in any language, but we think that Reading and Writing when teaching a foreign language could be the most suitable skills to start working with. "WordRoutes Web Worksheets... A simple guide to English" gives the following ideas to use metaphors: (Taken from Internet site [www.wordroot.co.uk/works/metaphor/htm](http://www.wordroot.co.uk/works/metaphor/htm)).

1. Here are some metaphors. Add some of your own and write a short poem which includes a few metaphors.

Satsuma sun	Two faced girl	Eyes were deep pools
Plough through his homework	A stinging remark	Gave a warm response
It broke her heart	The anthracite horses	Gave a stony glance

2. Design a short piece of comic strip with amusing illustrations for some of your metaphors as if taken literally, e.g. "She threw him a stony glance" (rocks hurled from girl's eyes), "the teacher replied with a stinging remark". (Pupil saying "ouch!"). You may want to offer some of these as illustrations for your school or university magazine.
3. Consider the metaphors in the following sentences and change them to similes by adding 'like' or 'as' to the comparison.

- She watched the tourists jump down from the coach, gulping in the scenery greedily. The

sheep, startled for a moment,  
got back to their debate, the  
mountain slept on.

- Sebastian stopped at the water's edge. The glassy sea beckoned invitingly, perhaps there was just time for a quick dip!
- 4. For homework: Find some poems, which contain metaphors and write one of your own to describe a winter's scene. Resources: Dylan Thomas' *Under Milkwood* packed full of metaphors.
- 5. Newspaper or magazine text - get pupils to scan for examples of metaphor.

### A final word

A Metaphor is a good strategy to enrich the expressive power of language. Metaphors are also present in the scientific field to help us understand the complex and abstract matter of the word of everyday life; in that way, we can capture the concepts of science more easily.

The following lines taken from linguistic processes in social cultural practice, G. Kress citing Boden (page 72), provides an example in the way metaphor serves to bring abstract matter into a more apprehensive language. "The movement of electrons in one direction means that the atoms can be considered as a tiny rod. Atoms of course are not rods". But the words tiny rod which constitute the metaphor help us understand in a concrete way the abstract concept of atoms.

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