EXPLORING THE SEMANTIC BOND BETWEEN METAPHOR AND FIGURES OF THOUGHT

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Abstract:
Metaphor is considered as an umbrella term that covers the use of figures of thought. It is subordinated to various linguistic devices. This subordination often varies with diverse theories. The way different figures of thought are grouped and analysed depends on the theory which is adopted. The task of setting these figures in a certain theoretical framework seems to be difficult. This paper therefore comes to shed light on the semantic link between metaphor and figures of thought.

Keywords: Metaphor; figure of thought; semantic link; linguistic device.

1. Introduction

The word 'metaphor' is derived from the Greek verb 'metaphora': 'meta' meaning 'over', and 'phora', 'to carry' or 'to transfer' (Hawkes, 1972). It refers to a particular linguistic process whereby aspects of one item are transferred to another item (Birch, 2009). Thus, metaphor and meaning transference are seen as synonyms in terms of etymology. The former is usually taken to be an all-embracing term including other figures of thought (Benzoukh, 2016).

Figurative language is that language which does not mean what it literally states (ibid.). However, the language, which uses words in their normal sense as they appear in the usual practice of language, is said to be literal (ibid.). Figurative language and literal language are "two ends of a scale, rather than clear-cut categories" (Leech, 2014: 147).

The different forms of 'transference' are called figures of thought. These figures turn the language away from the literal meaning and towards the figurative one (ibid.). There is a common agreement among linguistic theorists that there is more than one figure of thought. Hawkes (1972) considers simile, synecdoche and metonymy as the most common versions of metaphor. Mooij (1976) maintains that among the most significant figures of thought distinguished in traditional rhetoric are euphemism, hyperbole, irony, metaphor, simile, metonymy and synecdoche. Hatch and Brown (1995) maintain that figurative language is described in terms of its categories which are simile, metaphor, synecdoche, metonymy, allusion, personification and so forth.

2. Metaphor and Simile

If one goes back to the traditional view, mainly Aristotle's theory, two main semantic categories stand out: metaphor and simile (Benzoukh, 2016). Similes are to be used just as metaphors are used; they are slightly different (Mooij, 1976). Aristotle (1406) assimilates simile to metaphor (ibid.). The former is an explicit comparison (unlike metaphor where the comparison is implicit) recognizable by using markers such as 'like' and 'as' (Cuddon, 2013).

Metaphors maintain that the transfer of meaning is possible or has already occurred ('the bonnet of the car'), whereas similes suggest transference and make it clear by means of their markers ('The piece of steel covers his car's engine as if it were a bonnet covering a girl's head') (Hawkes, 1972).

3. Metaphor and Oxymoron

Leech (2014) considers oxymoron as the primary category of figurative language. Oxymoron is a traditional figure of thought that "combines incongruous and apparently contradictory words and meanings for a special effect" (Cuddon, 2013: 669). It refers to a meaningless expression which confronts the reader in the first stage of the process, whereas metaphor refers to the second stage that of interpretation (Leech, 2014). Therefore, the two figures of thought (oxymoron and metaphor) are involved in the similar act of understanding: oxymoron is metaphorically interpreted (ibid.). For example, 'A human elephant' can have two metaphorical interpretations. The first is that 'A human being is like an elephant in the length of his memory', whereas the second claims that 'An elephant is like a human being in a certain humanizing behaviour'.

4. Metaphor and Metonymy

This binary opposition is proposed by Roman Jakobson (1956) who introduces his own distinction between the two axes of language, syntagmatic and paradigmatic (Cuddon, 2013). The first axis is deemed to be a horizontal line where one word is related with another through contiguity; while the second axis is a vertical line where meanings can be replaced one for another (Widdowson, 1996). Jakobson extends this model to metaphor and metonymy with other literary devices in turn subordinated to them (Cuddon, 2013).

Language disorder operates on the basis of the two axes of language in different ways: those who suffer from a 'continuity disorder' use metaphors and the others suffering from 'similarity disorder' use metonymies (ibid.). Jakobson states that "metaphor is alien to the similarity disorder, and metonymy to the continuity disorder" (ibid: 543). Thus, contiguity of thoughts is regarded as the basis of their association and substitution. Within this framework, metaphor is subordinated to metonymy and is thus explained through contiguity (Pankhurst, 1997).

The term 'metonymy' is derived from the Greek word 'metonymia' with 'meta' meaning 'change' and 'onoma' referring to 'name' (Hawkes, 1972). Metonymy is a figure of thought in which the name of a thing is transferred to take the place of another thing with which it is associated (ibid.). Among the common instances are 'the Crown' (a concrete symbol) for the Monarchy (an abstract institution) and 'Dickens' (an author) for his works.

5. Synecdoche and Metonymy

The process of metonymy is clearly related to that of synecdoche (Hatch and Brown, 1995). The latter involves the substitution of a part for the whole, or vice versa (Gardes-Tamine & Hubert, 2002). Examples of synecdoche include 'heads' to refer to the number of sheep in a cattle, 'roofs' for houses and 'a living being' for a particular person. According to Lakoff and Turner (1989), there is no difference between synecdoche and metonymy.

The classification of a variety of categories of figurative language appears to be useful, since when we read any work about figures of thought, we should know the different metaphors included under the general term, 'Metaphor' (ibid.). All figures of thought are considered as diverse forms of meaning transference, involving the response of the reader/listener.

6. Conclusion

Metaphor is the blanket term which is often used to refer to various figures of thought. It is considered as the umbrella that covers the use of figurative language. The present paper came to figure out the nature of the link between metaphor and the commonly used figures of thought. We attempted to present an overview on particular aspects of metaphor; those aspects seem to be of a great importance to understand the bridge between each figure of thought and the other.

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