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Metaphor

Over the years philosophy and linguistics, anthropology and psychology, folklore and literary theory and criticism have formulated theories of metaphor. At their root is the etymology of this compound word that derives from the Greek *meta* ("over") and *pherein* ("to carry") and the distinctions that Aristotle made. He considered four kinds of transference of meanings to be metaphorical: from the general (genus) to the particular (species), or the other way around; between two particular forms; or as a matter of analogy in which two things stand in the same relation to each other as two others things. Two other sub-forms of the metaphor are the synecdoche, from the Greek *synekdechesthai* ("to receive jointly"), in which meaning is transferred from the part to the whole, and metonymy, also derived from Greek, in which the transference of meaning occurs between two associated objects. Three basic ideas are implicit in metaphor and its theories: categories, transference of meanings, and the unity that language formulates in its consequence. Secondary issues, in order not in significance, concern the purpose and use of metaphor and its distribution among the modes of discourse and representation in society.

These sets of ideas as they motivate theories, or inherent in metaphor, sustain the grip metaphors have on language and culture. They point to the semantic fields in language, which, in turn, correspond to cognitive categories of culture. By examining two types of aphasic disturbances, a selection deficiency and a contiguity disorder, and relating them to metaphor and metonym, respectively, Roman Jakobson and Morris Halle, suggest the biological basis of metaphoric thought. Yet each community of speakers could construct its own systems of classification. Categories of thoughts and fields of meanings are implicit in the metaphors that connect them. At the same time, the metaphors used in a particular language follow rules of appropriateness for the transference of meanings. Claude Lévi-Strauss' famous dictum "animals are good to think with" established the distinction and potential analogy between humans and animals. Yet the use of animal

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metaphors for humans, as well the metaphoric attribution of human qualities to animals, is subject to cultural rules. In several European languages the shift from feline to a canine metaphor for the female of our species will transform terms of endearment to abuse.

Societies may have dominant semantic fields that generate their metaphors. The world of sport, for example, dominates the metaphor of American business and political discourse. The principle of seniority has such a rule over the language of religion and social order in many traditional societies. These may be "root" or "organizational" metaphors that help order reality.

Following appropriate transference rules, a metaphor brings to bear upon a particular situation, person, or action the combined load of two semantic fields, and thus increases the rhetorical impact of the phrase. Such a verbal intensity is more appropriate to poetic discourse in performance or ritual. Nevertheless, metaphors often occur in daily discourse, as they are rooted in the cultural categories within which speakers construct their conversations. The preponderance of metaphors in the context of poetic discourse, contiguously, has given room to the impression that they are a deviant form of language, contrasted with literal language. Indeed the relation between the two may be subject to social and religious history. The pressure on the chest that felt like a mare riding on top of a person generated the literal description of "nightmare" that went through a metaphoric stage before becoming a word for a bad dream. However, while literal language can become metaphoric, the literalization of a metaphor could easily end up in a joke. When Clever Hans, of the brothers Grimm fame, was told to cast an eye on a girl but instead threw at her the eyeball of an animal, he did not win her heart. It may be possible to explicate but not to undo metaphors because they are intrinsic to language. The formation of categories is necessary for thought, but the transference of meanings across them is in the nature of language.

(See also *category, genre, humor, iconicity, indexicality, meter, names, oratory, poetry, proverb, relativity, style, voice*)

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