

STOCKHOLM WORKSHOP ON METAPHOR—

Identifying metaphor: some non-typical and problematic cases

A. INTRODUCTION, DEFINITION AND MIP

Metaphor involves thinking or speaking of one thing (Topic) as though it were another thing (**Vehicle**), when there is some similarity or analogy (*Ground/Mapping*) connecting the two things. E.g. “The past (Topic) is a **foreign country** (Vehicle); *they do things differently there*” (Ground/Mapping)

Or linguistically/pragmatically:

Metaphor occurs when a unit of discourse (vehicle-term) is used to refer unconventionally or colligates in an unconventional way. And when this unconventional act of reference or colligation is understood on the basis of similarity or analogy, involving the conventional referent or colligates of the unit (vehicle) and the actual unconventional referent or colligates (topic).

Unconventional reference and metaphor

- It seemed* that a word was an object.....a **golf-ball** of a thing.
The **golf-balls** emerged from his mouth. (Golding *Darkness Visible*, pp.18-22)



Unconventional colligation and metaphor

- A life subdued to its instrument;
The gills **kneading** quietly
(Ted Hughes 'Pike')



Pragglejaz and Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP)

- Read the entire text/discourse to establish a general understanding of the meaning
- Determine the lexical units in the text/discourse
- For each lexical unit in the text, establish its meaning in context, i.e. how it applies to an entity, relation or attribute in the situation evoked by the text. Take into account what comes before or after the lexical unit.
- For each lexical unit determine if it has a more basic [conventional] contemporary meaning in other contexts than the one in the given context. Basic meanings tend to be more concrete and physical, more precise and historically older.
- If the lexical unit has a more basic current/contemporary meaning in other contexts, decide whether the contextual meaning contrasts with the basic meaning [unconventional] but can be understood in comparison with it [similarity/analogy].
- If yes, mark the lexical unit as metaphorical. (Steen 2007: 88-89)

Comparison--similarity and analogy

Metaphor and similarity

His tractor of blood stopped thumping

He held five **icicles** in his hand (from Charles Causley 'Death of a Poet')

Icicles



long, thin, tapered,
cold, stiff

Metaphor and analogy

- RU The hydrogen atom is a miniature **solar system**.
(Example from Rutherford via Gentner 1982)

Relation between sun and planets is analogous to the relation between nucleus and electrons:

nucleus: electrons : : sun : planets

- FF94 **the rags** of my self-respect.

Similarly:

rags : Y :: X : self-respect
rags : [clothes] :: X : self-respect

B. TEXTS FOR ANALYSIS

1. Mankind is a club to which we owe a subscription. (G. K. Chesterton)
2. Make hay while the sun shines. (English proverb)
3. *A Cat*

She had a name among the children;
But no one loved though someone owned
Her, locked her out of doors at bedtime
And had her kittens duly drowned.

In Spring, nevertheless, this cat
Ate blackbirds, thrushes, nightingales,
And birds of bright voice and plume and flight,
As well as scraps from neighbours' pails.

I loathed and hated her for this;
One speckle on a thrush's breast
Was worth a million such; and yet
She lived long, till God gave her rest. (Edward Thomas)

Questions A:

Is the relevant unit for identifying a metaphor always a lexical item? (See especially 1 and 2). Can whole poems be regarded as metaphors? In 3 is the description of the cat's life and the reactions to her behaviour the Topic of this poem? Or could it be regarded as a Vehicle for some other meaning? To put it another way, is the poem really about a cat?

4. But at last a taxi, and a very **expensive** female, in a sort of silver brocade gown and ospreys in her bonnet. (D.H. Lawrence, *Aaron's Rod*.)

Question B:

How does one interpret the phrase 'expensive female'? Do we give this a metaphorical or metonymic interpretation or neither?

5. By land, by sea, and even by ski: The multipurpose plane that would make James Bond **green** with envy (and it can even fold up to fit in a garage)
<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-2191003/Lisa-Akoya-Aqua-plane-make-James-Bond-green-envy-prepares-sale.html#ixzz36s4tLFr1> retrieved 8/7/2014
6. I don't know if I am depressed or just sad and hormonal, the doctor said it is expected in pregnancy to feel a bit **blue** at times, but it was never like this with my first, and its not at times its all the time. <http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Depression/Pages/Symptoms.aspx>, retrieved 9/7/2014

Question C:

Are 'green' and 'blue' metaphorical lexical items in 5 and 6? Do we interpret them by comparison—similarity/analogy-- as MIP/the definition above suggest we should?

7. Love was a battle in which each party strove for the mastery of the other's soul. (D.H. Lawrence, *Aaron's Rod*.)
8. 'Love is life,' said Jim fiercely.
 'It's a vice, like drink,' said Lilly.
 'Eh? A vice!' said Jim. 'Maybe for you, old bird.'
 'More so still for you,' said Lilly.

 'No, but perhaps it's a disease. Perhaps we are all wrong, and we can't love properly,' put in Josephine. (D.H. Lawrence, *Aaron's Rod*.)

Question D:

In 7 and 8 are these descriptions of love metaphorical? Or do the characters, Lilly, Jim and Josephine (and Aaron in 7) actually believe they are true statements? And what might one character think about the other characters' assertions about love? That they are untrue? Or that they are metaphors? And what might the reader think?

9. Then **the creature** stepped from mirage onto clear sand (William Golding, *Lord of the Flies*)
 (Note: The narrator is taking the point of view of Ralph, who mistakes a procession of choirboys across the beach for a creature).

Question E: Ralph mistakenly believes, we assume, that this is one creature, rather than a continuous line of choirboys all dressed in black. How do we understand the word 'creature'?

10. *Snow*

In the gloom of whiteness
 In the great silence of snow
 A child was sighing
 And bitterly saying: 'Oh,
**They have killed a white bird up there on her nest,
 The down is fluttering from her breast!**
 And still it fell through the dusky brightness
 On the child crying for the bird of the snow. (Edward Thomas, 'Snow')

Question F:

How does this compare with example 9? Does the child believe that the snow is birds' down/feathers? Is it a truth for her and a metaphor for us? How might the story of the tooth fairy/Father Christmas etc. compare with the myth of snow as the white feathers of a dead bird? Are myths a form of metaphor?

11. The carpet had an oriental tree on it. (A.S. Byatt, *The Virgin in the Garden*)



12. She located a man becoming a stag....stretched sinews, hardening distorted feet, spreading rib-cage...and opening **muzzle-mouth** under a human brow. (A.S. Byatt, *The Virgin in the Garden*)



Questions G:

11 and 12 are verbal descriptions of artefacts that represent respectively a tree or a man transforming into a stag. (The latter is based on the Roman poet Ovid's story of Diana and Actaeon. Diana is bathing, and Actaeon who is out hunting accidentally catches sight of her naked. She transforms him into a stag and he is torn to pieces by his own hounds.) Is any visual representation, whether realistic, like a photograph, or highly stylised, like the icons for men and women on toilet doors, a metaphor for what it represents? In that case, when we also have a verbal description of it, like the 'tree' in 11, should we treat that as a metaphor?

In the case of 12, both the original story and its pictorial representation invite us to imagine a world in which it is possible for a man to be transformed into a stag. In this hypothetical world, for a man to have a mouth which is half stag's muzzle can be literal. But is this hypothetical world, in a sense, a metaphorical one? Compare this with the way we interpret

She with her odd little *museau*, not exactly pretty, but very attractive. (D. H. Lawrence's *St Mawr*) (Note: *museau* is the French for 'muzzle, animal's snout').

- 13.

My heart leaps up when I behold
 A rainbow in the sky:
 So was it when my life began;
 So is it now I am a man;
 So be it when I shall grow old,
 Or let me die!
 The Child is **father** of the Man;
 I could wish my days to be
 Bound each to each by natural piety. (William Wordsworth)

Question H:

Are apparent paradoxes like 'The child is father of the man' sometimes given a metaphorical interpretation? If so, what might that interpretation be in this case? In what sense, then, can this be regarded as the 'cross-domain' mapping, which metaphor is traditionally thought to involve?

14. The document needs to be **justified** before submission.
 15. **The dream darkness** beneath....that rose slowly towards me, watching. (Ted Hughes, 'Pike')
 (N.B Hughes is referring to the pike, the large freshwater fish)

Question 1.

14 might be seen as a reversal of the conceptual metaphor JUSTICE IS STRAIGHT. In 15 'the dream darkness' might be seen as a metaphor for the Pike? Is it the case that metaphorical Vehicles are more concrete than their Topics, as MIP suggests?

16. Over all sorts of weather, men, and times,
 Aspens must shake their leaves and men may hear
 But need not listen, more than to my rhymes.

Whatever wind blows, while they and I **have leaves**
 We cannot other than an **aspen** be
 That ceaselessly, unreasonably **grieves**,
 Or so men think who like a different tree. (From 'Aspens', Edward Thomas)

Question J:

Are the bolded lexical items metaphorical or literal or both? What is the effect of any ambiguity?

17. My father was a sort of taxi-driver; in fact he was a chauffeur.
 18. He is a sort of combination of sociologist and anthropologist.
 19. This land crocodile is a sort of lizard which feeds upon the sweetest flowers it can find.
 20. A sort of sigh passed though those men crowded together as they looked with strange faces at the murderer. (Somerset Maugham, *The Man with the Scar*)
 21. Our own boat is a sort of country cottage for us, with the added advantage that if you want to, you can look out of your bedroom window at a different view every morning.

Question K:

Some uses of *a sort of* seem to function as signals of approximation, some of metaphor, some of hyponymy. Which of these apply to examples 17 to 21? Are there any in which the functions are unclear? Does it matter if we cannot distinguish these functions? Does that indicate anything about the boundaries of metaphor, approximation and hyponymy?