

METAPHOR IN CRITICAL COMMUNICATIVE SITUATIONS

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This article deals with metaphor in critical communicative situations. The critical communicative situation is defined here as such condition when the available and ready-made linguistic means within the standard inventory are not felt to be adequate to express the intentions of the speaker. The cognitive value of poetic metaphor can not be judged in isolation from its communicative function. Art is no distortion of reality in the pejorative sense but rather a distortion of conventionality. The need to talk of things in a new way is experienced not only by poets. Linguistic creativity is allowed in everyday speech that is incessantly in reached with new expressions.

Key words: Metaphor, critical communicative situation, Pidgin English, hyperbolization, metaphorical transfer

A critical communicative situation may be defined as such a condition when the available and ready-made linguistic means within the standard inventory are not felt to be adequate to express the intentions of the speaker. In other words, the subjective intentions clash with the possibilities of an a priori existing code accepted by the linguistic community. The insufficiency of a given linguistic code may be due to a variety of causes of either a subjective or objective nature.

However, in linguistic practice the following three types of critical situations tend to occur frequently: an abrupt and massive contact of different ethnic and language communities, a rapid advance in a field of human activity (especially in a discipline of science accompanied by a large-scale terminological extension) and an emotionally justified need to communicate about familiar

things in a new way. All these situations are notable for an acceleration of language dynamism in which metaphor plays a major part.

The insufficiency or inadequacy of the linguistic code probably finds its most dramatic manifestation in instances of abrupt and massive contact of different language communities due either to military conquests (e.g. the Mongolian invasion of China) or in situations of ethnic diversity and commercial contacts (e.g. in Southeast Asia at the end of the Middle Ages and at the beginning of the New Era). These circumstances are favourable to the pidginization of the language that is chosen as the vehicle of interethnic communication.

During the process of pidginization the inventory of basic non-derived elements is drastically reduced and simultaneously the productivity of rules regulating the combinatorics of these elements increases in order to keep the reflexive adequacy of the language at a satisfactory level. Such a shift may be illustrated with examples from New Guinean Pidgin English. As far as vocabulary is concerned its main source is English, but many basic English lexemes have not been incorporated into its lexicon. They have been replaced by more transparent descriptions, e.g. *arapela mama* (lit. the other mother, i.e. aunt), *ai i tudak* (lit. too dark eyes, i.e. blind), *taim bilong biksan* (lit. time belonging to the big sun, i.e. drought), *gras bilong paul* (lit. grass belonging to the fowl, i.e. feathers).

At the same time, the balance between affixal derivation and composition changes in favour of the latter, cf. Pidgin English *lait bilong klaut* (lit. light belonging to the clouds, i.e. lightning), *han diwai* (lit. hand of a tree, i.e. branch), *skru belong fut* (lit. screw belonging to the foot, i.e. joint of the foot). Many of the instances of composition have a metaphorical basis, not only in Pidgin English but also in other languages such as Malay.

However, imagery in lexical metaphors is no by-product. As mentioned in the preceding chapter, it is very helpful from the communicative point of view because it increases the semantic transparency of the new lexeme and makes its interpretation easier to those who have to rely only upon its internal form for understanding.

Another type of critical situation favourable to the rise of metaphor is the rapid growth of science. Virtually all branches of science abound in metaphorical terms such as *big bang*, *black hole* and *chain reaction*. Slovak examples include *meteorický dážď*, *jadro a obal atómu*, *kanál*, *šum* and *prah*. V. V. Petrov explains the rising interest in metaphor in science as a consequence of the character of present-day research problems and the increasing complexity of interrelations between scientific laws and reality.¹

¹PETROV, V. V. Nauchnye metafory. Priroda i mekhanizm funkcionirovania. In *Filosofskie osnovania nauchnoi teorii*, p. 206.

Thus, scientific metaphor fulfils a heuristic function pointing out new facts and helping to discover new properties of the phenomena. In this respect, scientific metaphor is reminiscent of a model bearing down on the structural analogies, transparency and systematicity of relations. Metaphor is present in the first phase of scientific investigation where new hypotheses appear in the phase of true creativity. Its further destiny depends upon the intuition and geniality of its creator and upon its predictability. However, even a scientific metaphor has to be intelligible, which means that it must be used in accordance with the following two demands: (1) It must be meaningful to a user of the language without recourse to further experience, and (2) it must be somehow imbued with novel meaning.²

A different type of critical situation favourable to a high incidence of metaphor is the realm of poetry. The poet feels the need to speak about all things in a new way and to impress emotionally. Poetry presumes an originally coded message, and yet a poetic work cannot be regarded as a manifestation of the poet's whim. Poetic originality is limited on the one hand by the intention of the poet and on the other by a certain level of intelligibility on the part of the readers. The poet cannot realize his intention in a totally original form without risking his intelligibility but must pay attention to the ability of the recipients to decode his message. That is why he has to choose such means of expression that are neither entirely new nor entirely conventional if he wants to remain a poet. Thus, poetic speech may be characterized as a compromise between intelligibility and originality. Poetic tropes are an ideal means to achieve this end due to their duality giving rise to a new image based upon familiar linguistic carriers.

When comparing poetic metaphor to other types of metaphor, i.e. scientific and lexical metaphors, one cannot ignore the former's greater freedom. Metaphor in science as well as in vocabulary is fairly constrained – the former through functional analogy and a high degree of structuration and the latter mainly through its high degree of transparency. Metaphor in science is appreciated according to its cognitive contribution, while in vocabulary it is high intelligibility that plays a key role. On the other hand, poetic metaphor is subject to considerably milder restrictions. This is because metaphor, in addition to cognitive and communicative functions, also fulfils an affective function. In a way, it is the highest type of metaphor because the creative freedom in poetry is not subject to so many restrictions as in science or vocabulary.

² MARTIN, J., HARRÉ, R. Metaphor in science. In *Metaphor: Problems and Perspectives*, p. 96.

In poetry there is enough space for the hyperbolization of metaphor consisting of the application of a prototypical feature of the vehicle to the tenor with which an unbiased observer may ascertain the presence of the said feature albeit to a much lower degree than one would be willing to admit solely upon the basis of the poet's metaphorical statement.

The force of poetic metaphor does not consist only of the hyperbolization of the feature chosen as the basis of a metaphorical transfer but also of the conceptual distance between tenor and vehicle that is usually greater than in the case of a lexical metaphor. That is why poetic metaphor may be characterized as an improbable likeness and poetic style as something notable for its reduced transitional probability in the text. In this respect, D. Walsh (1938) is right when maintaining that poetry represents the ideal of linguistic precision. Continuing on the same lines, K. K. Zhol states that art outstrips science in its cognitive appreciation of reality.³ To be sure, precision is not understood here as a numerical expression of quantity; rather, metaphor is one of the means used to express what is hard to express without it. This no doubt extends to human feelings, views and attitudes as well as to phenomena that are not directly accessible to human senses.

The cognitive value of poetic metaphor cannot be judged in isolation from its communicative function. Only from this point of view can one correctly understand C. E. Burkland's statement that all art, in varying ways and degrees, is a distortion of the real for the purpose of expressive statement.⁴ Truly enough, art is no distortion of reality in the pejorative sense of the word but rather a distortion of conventional, worn and shabby conceptions of experience. Instead of distortion one should speak of a digression that can be achieved due to loosely defined rules of linguistic combinatorics upon the level of autosemantic linguistic units, i.e. upon the level of sentence and syntagm. This is a permissible and even inevitable digression from the point of view of an extension of the expressive capacity of language because new cognition can only be achieved if we are ready to break away from what is old, "distort" convention and in this sense perhaps view each scientific hypothesis as a "distortion".

The lexical changes provoked by a substantial change of the environment discussed by B. Biggs are another instance of creative manipulation with language. He has paid attention to several environmental features and to canoe and coconut culture. For example, "*whara*" (pandanus in the tropical homeland) was used to refer to a variety of plants with similarly long leaves such as *whara-riki* "small pandanus", *whara-nui* "big pandanus" and *whara-*

³ ZHOL, K. K. *Mysl, slovo, metafora*, p. 143.

⁴ BURKLAND, C. E. Presentation of figurative language. In *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 41, pp. 383-390.

keke "strong pandanus". *Roto* (originally) "lagoon" acquired the meaning of "lake" or "swamp", and *awa* originally "channel, reef pass" has changed to mean "river".⁵

Another important feature of metaphor, in addition to its hyperbolicity and conceptual distance of its components, is its considerable concreteness. Metaphors condense meaning and call forth a wealth of connotations and associations without strictly delimiting them. At the same time concreteness is an important emotional factor and contributes to the creation of images.

The need to talk of things in a new way is experienced not only by poets. Linguistic creativity is alive in everyday speech that is incessantly enriched with new expressions. This is due to the very essence of oral communication and to the variability of circumstances under which it takes place. Social conventions often compel us to refer to things indirectly. This is the case of euphemisms when a need arises to mention something unpleasant. Likewise we may tend to use exalted expressions when talking to persons whom we hold in high esteem or when talking about them. Such a situation gives rise to many new expressive means. One may get emotionally involved at the opposite pole as well, which leads to vulgarisms and curses. Both vulgarisms and euphemisms are very common in slang, which is a typical urban feature always specific to one or another social group (especially young people such as students and soldiers). According to K. Sornig, slang appears in certain communicative situations exposed to some sort of stress or even pressure, i.e. in circumstances when a new consciousness and identity take shape.⁶ In other words, these are critical situations which young people reject what they consider to be petrified conventions and try to realize their intention to differ from their elders. Since each generation feels the need to form their own attitude to life, one cannot be surprised by the temporal inconstancy of slang – critical situations tend to repeat themselves but are always solved in a new way at the linguistic level.

Slang cannot be characterized as something original merely as the result of the efforts of its users. Further features are exaggeration and eccentricity as well as humour and aversion towards monotony⁷ and all factors favour metaphorization. Metaphors in slang do not play the part of catachresis and their cognitive contribution is secondary when compared to their emotive function. This is confirmed by the well-known fact that it is often the most familiar words that are innovated, cf. Slovak *tekvica* "gourd", *melón* "water

⁵ BIGGS, B. New words for a new world. In *Austronesian Terminologies: Continuity and Change*, pp. 21–29.

⁶ SORNIG, K. *Lexical Innovation: A Study of Slang, Colloquialisms and Casual Speech*, p. 62.

⁷ MISTRÍK, J. *Štylistika*, pp. 387–390.

melon", *veža* "tower", etc. (used in the meaning of 'head') and *kopa* "heap", *záplava* "flood", and *more* "sea" in the meaning of 'much' or 'many'. Slang metaphors are frequently pejorative and this effect is achieved by taking the metaphorical vehicula from the world of animals and applying them to the domain of human beings, cf. the expressions *papuľa* "muzzle" instead of *ústa* (mouth), *pazúry* "claws" instead of *nechty* (nails), *žral'* "glut" instead of *jest'* (eat), *zdochnúť* "peg out" instead of *zomrieť* (die), *koza* "goat, hussy" instead of *hlúpe dievča* (silly girl), or the German *Fuchs* (fox) in the meaning of 'clever person', the American *coyote* in the meaning of 'coward' and the Indonesian *buaya* (crocodile) in the meaning of 'scoundrel'.

Although slang is to some extent related to argot, metaphors in the former are more transparent and intelligible than those in the latter. The language of advertisements likewise abounds in metaphors that are however bent on positive evaluation despite the fact that the latter are usually hidden behind seemingly matter-of-fact unbiased information; its purpose is by definition transparent and quite obvious to everybody.

There are other types of critical situations that favour the appearance of metaphors in speech. Maybe a mentally ill person, a schizophrenic, lives in a chronically prolonged critical situation in which each seemingly negligible event may turn into a new difficult problem requiring an adequate and new linguistic equivalent. R. Johnson sees in schizophrenic metaphors the result of a higher than normal psychic activity as is the case with artists who are highly unusual to connotative nuances, but the schizophrenic may believe his metaphors more than the artist believes his own.⁸

Likewise children up to a certain age pass from one critical situation to another because they have to solve communicative problems resulting from a gradual but relatively fast integration into the world of their elders. This compels children to be communicatively creative, which is no end in itself but only a means of extending their expressive abilities. Children are usually not aware of their linguistic creativity and use it only as a solution of an actual problem and may finally abandon their innovation. Since they are unable to distinguish the literal from the metaphorical, it would be a mistake to speak of full metaphors in children's speech. To be quite precise, however, the dividing line between the literal and metaphorical could be characterized as individual and has to be analysed at the level of pragmatics.⁹ This agrees with the fact that metaphor is based upon an encyclopaedic and extralinguistic knowledge of the world that is not identical for all members of the same linguistic community.

⁸ JOHNSON, R. Imaginative sensitivity in schizophrenia. In *Review of Existential Psychology and Psychiatry*, 4, pp. 255-264.

⁹ MÜHLHÄUSLER, P. Towards an explanatory theory of metaphor. In *Ubiquity of Metaphor*, p. 73.

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