

Metaphor

- At school we learn that metaphor is an assertion that something IS something else:

**My lawyer is a shark**

- Compare the simile form of the same statement:
  - My lawyer is *like* a shark (often simile is viewed as a poor cousin of metaphor)
  - This distinction does not stand close scrutiny

- Metaphor does not necessarily have the verb “to be”
- An iron curtain has descended across Europe
- Nothing “is” anything here.
- Metaphor is often associated with literary or poetical use:
  - Religion is the opiate of the masses
  - The cold truth of death
  - Etc etc etc etc
  -

Metaphor is a common component of everyday speech but takes some time to uncover:

- *You see metaphors everywhere you look*
- Metaphor is common *component of* everyday speech but *takes* some time *to uncover*
- People *use* metaphors in their speech and
- Metaphors *appear* all the time in day-to-day language
- Metaphors *make* poetry better

# Conceptual metaphors

The modern era of metaphor analysis started in 1980 with the publication of **Metaphors we live by** (Lakoff and Johnson):

- Metaphor is a cognitive phenomenon that has a linguistic manifestation
- Many metaphors can be organised into cognitive metaphors, a bit like virtual classes in C++:
  - LOVE IS A JOURNEY (we *went* our separate ways; our relationship *is going nowhere*; we *split up*)
  - ANGER IS A HOT PRESSURISED FLUID (he *flipped his lid*; she *exploded* in rage)
  - UP IS GOOD (he *rose* through the ranks; *down and out*; fell out of favour)

# Common conceptual metaphors

- CHALLENGES ARE OBSTACLES (*pass* an exam; *drop* out)
- THE MIND IS A CONTAINER (get it *into* their heads; in one ear and out of the other; they won't retain this for long)
- COMMUNICATION IS TRANSFER (get the message *across*; content *delivery*)
- EDUCATION IS ACQUISITION (*get* a good education; the *gift* of education; *take* a paper)... compare EDUCATION IS PARTICIPATION
- UP IS GOOD (*top* of the class; *highest* achievers; *drop* out of college)
- SOPHISTICATED IS UP (*high-level* study; *higher* education; *capstone* project)
- MEDICINE IS A BATTLE (*beating* cancer; *fighting* gum disease)

# The *Level* metaphor

- Special case of SOPHISTICATED IS UP
- Implies discontinuity of inter-level difficulty and equality of intra-level difficulty
- constructive?

# The factory metaphor

- Arguably *SCHOOLS ARE FACTORIES* is a conceptual metaphor
- Original purpose of secondary education was to provide docile and dutiful workers for factories
- Many aspects of schools mirror real factories...
- This metaphor encourages a “batch” view of students together with quality-control paradigms (“defective batch”) and a *wastage* view of successive levels

# Nursery metaphor

- Nursery metaphor: Students are plants
- Some good features (nurturing; also a plant has certain amount of agency)
- But again arguably a case of the factory metaphor

- Mr Gradgrind:

“NOW, what I want is, Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else. . . stick to the Facts, Sir!”

# Communication metaphors

- By far the most common is the *conduit metaphor*: COMMUNICATION IS TRANSFER.
- This metaphor supports THE MIND IS A CONTAINER.
- These are pervasive and corrosive in education.
- Epstein: “Your brain does not process information, retrieve knowledge or store memories”

# The Foundation metaphor

- Part of the SOPHISTICATED IS UP conceptual metaphor.
- Bereiter:

“But the insidious effect of the foundation metaphor does not stop there. No builder would construct a foundation without having a pretty clear idea of the building to be erected upon it; only a subcontractor would do that. Beginning students, having no way to foresee the eventual structure of knowledge, are therefore cast into the role of subcontractors”

# Metaphor in word problems

The status of the statements in word problems is unclear. Gerofsky observes that we can rephrase word problems without altering their ontological status:

- Before: *Every year, Stella rents a craft table at a local fun fair. She has a deal for anyone who buys more than one sweater ...*
- After: *Every year (but it has never happened), Stella (there is no Stella) rents a craft table at a local fun fair (which also does not exist). She has a deal (no such deal can possibly exist) for anyone who buys more than one sweater (but there are no people, or sweaters, or prices)”*