

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 container metaphor

- THE MIND IS A CONTAINER is a very common 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 (who does not exist) 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 in reality there are no people, or sweaters, or prices)”*