EDIT GAÁL

DICTIONARIES AND METAPHORS: A CONSIDERATION OF THE PRESENTATION OF METAPHORIC USAGES IN A SELECTION OF DICTIONARIES

Abstract: This article is based on an element of an ongoing research project concerning the part played by metaphor in the study of meaning. It considers the metaphorical application of a selection of commonly used lexical items as presented in a number of dictionaries purporting to fulfill differing semantic functions. It points to the tendency in dictionaries to rely on institutionalised metaphoric usages and questions the necessity to go beyond such coverage.

1. Dictionaries, metaphors and non-native speakers

Dictionaries fulfill a specific function for speakers and learners of languages. They are a reliable resource when a problem crops up, and when a fast and effective linguistic "first aid" is needed, and provide adequate, i.e. syntactic, semantic and pragmatic information about lexical units. However, there is a domain of language where they prove to be more or less inappropriate, and that is figurative language, such as metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, idiom, etc., which are widespread phenomena in natural languages. As Jean Aitchison (1994) says we are not consciously aware of the large amount of figurative language we use in everyday conversations. She quotes one survey that estimated on average over five examples of figurative language per 100 words spoken (H. R. Pollio, 1977). This high frequency of the usage well symbolizes the linguistic creativity of language users and also human thinking in which man sorts, classifies, and compares contexts. Metaphoric and idiomatic usage of words is often problematic for non-native speakers and it leads them to turn to a dictionary. Consequently, the topic of this article is inspired by a common and practical problem; namely whether users can expect dictionaries to provide metaphors, or metaphoric usages of words. I also wanted to explore how the different dictionaries label metaphorical meanings.

In order to look into the problem and find an answer I have selected a number of words as the subject of my analysis. The words selected are limited in number but two groups of them belong to lexical domains of the human body and animals which are often referred to in relevant literature (see Aitchison, 1994; Lipka, 1992; Lakoff&Johnson, 1980 etc.) as the main resources of metaphors in languages. The choice of the third lexical field, flowers, is more random, but is based on the fact that its members belong to a basic area of human knowledge about the world and are commonly used lexical items in English. The latter was a decisive consideration in the selection of the lexical items in the other two domains as well. My preference fell on the following words: chest, lung, shoulder; donkey, duck, lion; and daisy, lily, rose.

2 General description of the selected dictionaries

The four dictionaries on which I based the analysis are the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (LDCE) (Second edition, 1987); The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English (COD) (Seventh edition reprinted in 1987); the Cambridge International Dictionary of English (CIDE) (First edition, 1995); and the CD-ROM version of The American Heritage Dictionary (AHD) (Third edition, 1994). My choice fell on the above dictionaries not only because they are among the most frequently used ones, but also because they were compiled for different purposes and consequently present, besides a basic core, different layers of English vocabulary. COD concentrates on Standard English, LDCE puts more emphasis on colloquial English and CIDE focuses on the learner of English and presents the vocabulary from this perspective, while AHD naturally has a preference for American usage.

The general aims of the Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English (COD) are as J. B. Sykes states in the Introduction "The words, phrases, and meanings given are those current in the English of the present day – either in living use, or familiar through their occurrence in frequently quoted literature of the past, ... the dictionary seeks to record what is found to exist in the educated use of modern English". Undoubtedly, this small, but updated edition contains more quotations and illustrative sentences than the former editions, though it is more conservative in its approach than LDCE, CIDE or AHD. It is relatively small in size, but because it is based on the OED and its Supplements, it is still widely accepted as an authority on the English language.

The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (LDCE) uses the findings of modern linguistics to give a more precise description of the

language (Lipka, 1992). As the editorial director claims in the General introduction "The Longman Citation Corpus ... has been expanded and updated by adding a further two million words of randomly gathered computerized text from current British and American newspapers, and another half a million words of citations covering 15,000 neologisms, gathered by human editors, and then computerized.". It is an undeniable fact that besides its other numerous specific features, the LDCE demonstrates the use and meaning of words in extensive contexts.

The Cambridge International Dictionary of English (CIDE) is built around the enormous software resource of the Cambridge Language Survey of 100 million words, both written and spoken. In the Foreword it is clearly stated that their "first concern in writing CIDE has been clarity and simplicity" and that "a specific innovation of CIDE is that each entry is for one core meaning" and "within each entry is a rich range of information...". It is basically aimed at learners and users of English as a Foreign Language using the results of language research and analysis.

The American Heritage Dictionary (AHD), is "an original venture with etymological information and usage notes, based on the deliberations of a panel" (Lipka, 1992.). Having used the software version of this dictionary for a while I have chosen it as a resource in this article because besides its useful features, such as showing syllable structure, listing synonyms and antonyms, and presenting words in context etc., it serves as an interesting diverse resource with its preference for American English.

There are two relevant issues we need to look into prior to the analysis of the metaphorical meanings of the words selected. The first one is what linguists assume to be the main requirements of dictionaries and the second is what is meant by metaphor in the linguistic sense of the word.

3 The main requirements of dictionaries

Linguists generally agree that dictionaries store valuable lexical, semantic, phonetic and syntactic information about the wordstock of a language (Leech 1981, Lyons 1977). But they also emphasize their limits. Dictionaries record a language, especially its vocabulary, in the state of a given time that will neccessarily be out-of-date by the time of the publication. Another restriction is the size that will define the principles of selection and the lexicographic conventions the team follows and the corpus they use. Some linguists (Aitchison 1994, Lyons 1977, Campbell 1975) conclude that it would be impossible to expect more from dictionaries than they can actually provide. However, there have been attempts to develop new concepts for dictionaries. I wish to mention one of them, which Katz

and Fodor (1964) suggest in "The Structure of a Semantic Theory". It is of special interest as they claim that one of the two components of a semantic theory of a natural language is a dictionary and that a dictionary entry besides the "grammatical portion" has "a semantic portion which presents each of the distinct senses the lexical item has in its occurrences as a given part of speech". With the help of semantic markers and distinguishers they branch the possible senses of a word and state that in this way all the senses of a word can be encompassed. The method which they presented looks convincing, but leaves one issue out of consideration and that is the metaphoric usages of words which constantly add new senses to the core meanings of words. As Campbell (1975) argues metaphors have no specifiable maximum meanings and it follows "that dictionary entries, of either the Katz-Fodor or the traditional variety, will come nowhere near the goal of listing every sense a lexical item can bear in any sentence".

4 Linguistic concepts of metaphors

Here the question naturally arises what are metaphors, and although they are very frequently used in discourse, why are they so special and difficult to be encompassed linguistically? Metaphors have always excited linguists and many agree that metaphor is as ultimate as speech itself, and speech as ultimate as thought. Richards (1965) claims no less than that "metaphor is the omnipresent principle of language". There have been several attempts to define what a metaphor is. According to Max Black (1979) a metaphor formula is "to say something and mean another". Leech (1974), following I. A. Richards' terms, postulates that "every metaphor has the following form: X is like Y in respect of Z where X=tenor, Y=vehicle and Z= ground". As Richards (1965) states "the co-presence of the vehicle and tenor results in a new meaning ... which is not attainable without their interaction. The vehicle and tenor in co-operation give a meaning of more varied power than is ascribed to either." In other words, metaphors are based on the notion of similarity that is expressed implicitly; i.e. a metaphor only includes two elements, the tenor and vehicle, and does not state explicitly what the ground of the comparison is.

If we take an example, the metaphor 'the mind is an ocean', we can see that 'mind' is the tenor and 'ocean' is the vehicle. The ground of comparison is all the meanings of the two words that can be related to each other and combined into a new expressive, meaningful image, such as the human mind is as deep and vast, almost boundless or infinite to human beings as the ocean is, or the mind is the cradle of human creativity as the ocean is that of life, etc. The possible interpretations of a metaphor are not defineable in

number as a metaphor does often not involve a single semantic feature or 'tertium comparationis', but rather a complete situation, i.e. a prototypical scene.

A similar opinion is given by Campbell (1975) when he writes "... I have preceded the various meanings of metaphors with "something like" or "meanings such as".". He also argues that there is no specifiable maximum number of meanings to a metaphor and bases this view on the Freudian concepts of "condensation", "displacement", and "over-determination". "Condensation" means that a symbolic form and its content can be abbreviated, that there can be a fusion of forms themselves by intersection, contraction, elision, suppression, and many other devices. "Displacement" means the substitution of one form or meaning or symbolic value for another, and "over-determination" means that the same form may have more than one import, that references that could be traditionally taken only as alternatives are simply co-present as the import.

Wheeless (1971) argues that metaphor may be classified as "symbolization of complex-like thought for the individual or for a number of individuals participating in a particular culture and it contributes to concept development and eventual conceptualization". In metaphor two terms with accompanying images and/or attitudes are associated in such a way that a new meaning is elicited.

Jean Aitchison (1994) claims that metaphors are an intrinsic part of a human's lexical ability, and postulates a prototypical metaphor in which "the items compared are likely to be dissimilar, in that they come from different semantic fields, and similar in that they share obvious, minor characteristics". One of her examples is 'His boss is a dinosaur', where boss and dinosaur are very dissimilar, one being a human, the other an animal, but the comparison mobilizes our additional knowledge of dinosaurs, namely that they are extinct and enormous. Lyons (1977) also states that metaphors are very frequent in language usage and creation and are not restricted to the formation of compound lexemes. In fact quite to the contrary many simple lexemes can be used metaphorically. Quite often, if particular extended usages have become conventional, they are classified as 'dead' metaphors. Lipka refers to the same phenomenon when he speaks about institutionalization, stating that it is "the integration of a lexical item, with a particular form and meaning, into the existing stock of words as a generally acceptable and current lexeme".

5 Dictionary definitions of metaphors

After looking briefly at a few models of metaphor given by linguists, it might be interesting to see if the definitions of the word 'metaphor' given in the four selected dictionaries tie in with the linguistic theory. COD gives a rather vague and generalized definition, which seems to imply that metaphors are mostly transitional units of the language presented in the dictionary and not very important aspects of the meaning of a lexeme. It says that a metaphor is "Application of name or descriptive term or phrase to an object or action to which it is imaginatively but not literally applicable." (p 636). CIDE defines it as "An expression which describes a person or object in a literary way by referring to something that is considered to possess similar characteristics to the person or object you are trying to describe." (p 890). The meaning provided by LDCE shows a significant similarity with the definition in CIDE when it says that a metaphor is "An expression which means or describes one thing or idea using words usually used of something else with very similar qualities without using the words 'as' or 'like'."(p 654). The most obviously linguistic approach to the definition of metaphor is given in AHD when it writes that a metaphor is "A figure of speech in which a word or phrase that ordinarily designates one thing is used to designate another, thus making an implicit comparison". In spite of the differences all four definitions succeed in grasping some essential features of metaphors, i.e.: they compare two things in an implicit way, the image created is novel and they have enormous expressive power, but fail to mention that they are common in everyday communication and are used deliberately for picturesqueness or unconventionality and they are one powerful tool of the extension of vocabulary.

6 The analysis of the words selected

As I have mentioned earlier, the choice of words within each lexical field for this study was random. I did not base the selection on any previous expectation of mine of the possible number of metaphorical meanings I would come across in the selected dictionaries. I consider these words to be very common, among the first ones that a speaker of English would recall in the lexical fields of animals, body parts and flowers.

After studying the given meanings in all four dictionaries, as a first general impression, I was surprised to find that all of them had metaphorical meanings listed in one or more, even if not all, dictionaries. This can be traced back to the fact that they all belong to the basic vocabulary of the language and their meanings are likely to have undergone certain

modifications or extensions in the course of time. In the analysis I consistently use the term 'metaphorical meaning or usage' by which I understand all those senses or meanings of the words listed in the dictionaries which can be used in the typical model of a metaphor; 'something is (like)/(as) something else'.

Based on the data gained, there seem to be two basic lines of thought for analysis. One is how the different dictionaries deal with metaphorical meanings: what do they include and under what labels; the other is the connection between the number of metaphorical meanings enlisted in the given resources and the prototypical elements of the basic meanings of the words.

Taking the first line of thought, one difference we can see is in the treatment of metaphorical meaning between the Cambridge International Dictionary of English (CIDE) and the American Heritage Dictionary (AHD) and the other two dictionaries.

CIDE does not absolutely neglect figurative usages, but, consistent with its main aim, focuses more on the clear definition of the basic meaning of the words than on their other senses. It selects metaphoric usages according to one main criterion whether the meaning has undergone full institutionalisation as a lexical unit, or not. Under the entry 'duck' CIDE gives only one metaphorical meaning: '*Br dated infml someone you like Come and sit beside me, duck. (as form of address) ·Be a duck and (=Please) get me a glass of water*', the one that all the other dictionaries notify in a way as well. On the other hand, CIDE occasionally gives metaphorical usages of words that other dictionaries do not record, like with 'duck': · ' *(infml) if you take to something like a duck to water, you discover that you have a natural ability to do it and like it very much: He took to fatherhood like a duck to water.* ' and with 'lily': ' *(Am slang disapproving) lily-white can also mean CAUCASIAN'*.

AHD lists less metaphorical usages than any of the other dictionaries. There are two words in the examined stock: 'lily' and 'lung', which have no metaphorical meanings given at all, and under the entry 'donkey' only the commonly recorded meanings: '*Slang. An obstinate person*' and '*Slang. A stupid person*' are listed. All the others list donkey jacket, donkey's years and donkey-work. While the number of metaphorical meanings is few, AHD records meanings that are unique compared to those in the other resources. 'Duck' has meanings like '*An amphibious military truck used during World War II.* ' and '*An amphibious truck used in emergencies, as to evacuate flood victims*', and under the entry 'rose' meaning 9 is '***roses**. That which is marked by favor, success, or ease of execution: Directing this play has been all roses since the new producer took over.* '

The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English (COD) and the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (LDCE) treat the metaphorical usages of the examined words in a similar way to each other concerning the number and content of meanings. Taking one example, the word 'duck', the meanings in COD: *'3. ducks (colloq.) darling, attractive thing, 4. duck's egg (cricket) – batsman's score of 0* 'and in LDCE: *'3. (infml) a person one likes, 4. (cricket) the failure of a batsman to make any runs at all'* are practically the same.

The other difference in the treatment of metaphorical usages by the dictionaries is if they label them or not, and if so, what labels are used. In many cases COD, LDCE, AHD and CIDE do not use any labels for metaphorical usages, they seem to consider them to belong to the common core of words that Randolph Quirk (1973) defines as the "neutral or unmarked variety of English, bearing no obvious colouring that has been induced by attitude". Such examples are 'lily' in COD: *'2. person or thing of special whiteness or purity'*, or 'chest' in LDCE: *'(the amount contained in) a large strong box in which valuable objects are kept, goods packed, etc.: a chest of tea'*, or 'shoulder' in AHD: *'6.a The angle between the face and flank of a bastion in a fortification'*, or 'lion' in CIDE: *'A lion is someone who is important or successful and is very enthusiastic and energetic about what they are doing: He is one of the young jazz lions (=people who are starting to become important and successful) on the New York music scene'*.

The labels commonly used in all four dictionaries are 'slang', 'colloquial', 'ironical', 'literary', 'humorous', 'informal', 'figurative' or the name of a register, e.g.: in COD 'cricket' in *'duck's egg (cricket) – batsman's score of 0'*. Some labels overlap each other in meaning, like colloquial and informal, or are very close, like ironical and humorous. Obviously the use of terms is arbitrary in the sense that it reflects the preferences of different teams of lexicographers but does not reveal basic theoretical distinctions. It is also a natural consequence of the fact that English vocabulary is extremely rich in synomyms. But all the labels have one common feature: they refer to the different varieties of the language providing guidance on the pragmatic aspects of language use, i.e., the situations in which the given usages are appropriate, or are likely to be found and the kind of stylistic colouring they will add to the speaker's message. The approach is linguistic, though pragmatic rather than semantic, and that is why no labelling as metaphor can be found, but actually a lot of metaphorical usages are recorded in the dictionaries examined.

The other line of thought for analysis is the question as to whether there is a connection between the number of metaphorical meanings enlisted in the given resources and the meanings of the words. What follows here is my

own discussion of the scrutiny of the treatment of selected words in four dictionaries.

The lists of words with the metaphorical meanings show a striking difference in their number even at the first look. If we calculate the mathematical average of the occurrences of metaphorical usages, we find that the lexical field of flowers has the lowest rate: 1.16. Here the range of recorded meanings is between 0 and 2. The words 'lily' and 'daisy' had entries with no recorded metaphorical meanings in two dictionaries, CIDE and AHD. The averages are higher with the two other lexical fields, but even between them the difference is significant: body parts – 2.25 and animals – 4.16. The range of occurrences is 2–10 with animals and 2–6 with body parts.

These figures of the averages and ranges of occurrences are quite revealing, but evidently cannot give a basis for drawing any general conclusions as the examined number of words is not large enough to be statistically significant. However, the results merit a question as to what might cause these relatively significant differences in the case of the selected twelve words.

It seems to be quite obvious that the lexical field a word belongs to will indicate the tendency of more or less metaphoric usages. But there are differences within the lexical fields themselves, so there must be some other factor that influences the word's aptitude for metaphoric usages. In a metaphor the items compared, i.e.: the tenor and vehicle have some minor characteristics that serve as the ground of comparison. Consequently the metaphorical usages I found listed in the dictionaries must reveal the elements of meanings that are taken as the ground. To find out if these minor characteristics, or any additional knowledge about these words have any connection with the number of recorded usages, I have decided to analyse the words which have minimum or maximum number of records and compare them in pairs within each lexical field. They are the following: rose and daisy, shoulder and lung, and duck and lion.

In the lexical field of flowers the word 'rose' scored high, had two recorded metaphorical usages, while 'daisy' had only one. COD writes that 'rose' also means ' *gather life's roses – seek pleasure*', and ' *path strewn with roses – life of delights*'; LDCE records ' *be not all roses – (infml) to include some unpleasant things*' and in AHD under the headword there is '***roses** That which is marked by favor, success, or ease of execution*'. The conclusion from the above usages is that 'rose' is seen as something representing beauty, causing delight, enjoyment and all the possible associations with beauty (that in fact can be numerous) might be exploited in the metaphors where the vehicle is the word 'rose'. The only metaphoric usage of 'daisy' is as it is

defined in COD: *(sl) first rate specimen of anything* or in AHD: *Slang. One that is deemed excellent or notable.* We have the additional knowledge about this flower that it grows in short grass, and as such, it is below our eyesight. (Very interestingly this piece of knowledge is recorded in a metaphorical way in the etymology of the word form: AHD: Middle English *daisie*, from Old English *d?ges ¶age*: *d?ges*, genitive of *d?g*, day; see **agh-** below + *¶age*, eye; see **ok^{w}-** below.) But in spite of its position, this small flower strikes the eye as something outstanding with its yellow disc and white rays against the green background of the grass.

Among the selected body parts the word 'shoulder' has the most, three metaphorical usages recorded. In COD it is defined as ' *(fig.) body regarded as bearing burden, blame*' and '*part of mountain, bottle, tool, etc., projecting like human shoulder*'. LDCE records a usage as a verb: '*accept (a heavy responsibility, duty, etc.,)* '. In the case of the usage referring to the body regarded as bearing burden, it is extremely difficult to distinguish the metaphoric and metonymic usages. But obviously one characteristic taken into consideration with these usages is based on the common knowledge that the size of the shoulders directly refers to the physical capacity, and consequently to the psychical capacity of a person. The other is the shape of the given part of the human body that is visually significant and memorable. 'Lung' has two metaphoric usages: '*Good lungs – ability to use exhaled air to produce strong voice*' and '*Lungs of London etc. – parks and open spaces in or close to great city*' (COD). Both refer to a large amount of air for different purposes.

In the semantic field of animals 'duck' has the following usages recorded in COD: '*ducks (colloq.) darling, attractive thing; duck's egg (cricket) – batsman's score of 0*' and LDCE focuses on the verbal metaphorical usages: 'to push under water' and 'to try to avoid difficulty or unpleasant duty'. A duck, wild or domestic, is a bird we have extensive knowledge about; we know about its habits, habitat and value.

The definitions of usages of 'lion is summarised well in AHD: '***a.*** *A very brave person.* ***b.*** *A person regarded as fierce or ferocious.* ***c.*** *An eminent person*'. They also clearly explain the minor characteristics we take as the ground in a metaphor.

7 Conclusion

From all this it can be concluded that the extent of the meaning of a word plays a decisive role in the number of metaphorical usages recorded. What minor charateristics are selected, or what additional knowledge is considered, to function as the ground of a metaphor mostly depends on the

extent and way of the word's integration into culture. In the case of words with a higher number of metaphorical usages the meanings seem to be more deeply rooted in culture, there are more associations built with them than in the case of words with fewer usages.

Finally, I should like to summarise the findings of this essay. Firstly, the dictionaries examined do note metaphoric usages of the selected words, but under labels, other than metaphors, which relate them to the different varieties of the language. I assume that this treatment originates traditionally from the basic aim of dictionaries, i.e., to give practical (pragmatic) guidance for users and learners of a language. The dictionaries record only fully institutionalised metaphoric usages, which is understandable if we consider that it is impossible to encompass "the varying meanings of words when metaphor can so easily ring changes both semantic and syntactic" (Campbell, 1975). Secondly, I also try to argue that the number of metaphorical usages is dependant on the extent of the meaning of the actual word, and also on the extent of its cultural integration. The work of lexicographers is not all roses but obviously they shoulder the task and do what is possible within the limits of a dictionary. I also tend to believe that dictionaries should not be expected to attempt to specify metaphoric meanings. As we all share the same linguistic ability concerning a natural language, we do not need more information than dictionaries can traditionally provide in order to produce and understand metaphors.

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