

The Writer's Craft, the Culture's Technology

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PART II

TEXTUAL AND TECHNOLOGICAL TRANSITIONS

Visual Representation of Phraseological Metaphor in Discourse: A Cognitive Approach

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Abstract

The paper deals with the creative aspects of textual and visual saturation in a multimodal discourse. It explores the benefits of the cognitive approach to the stylistic aspects of language in use and focuses on perception and comprehension of the textual and the visual. The perception of an image, whether it is lexical or phraseological, is a cognitive process, which creates a mental picture in one's imagination, a kind of visualisation in one's mind's eye. A visual representation of the image serves to create a new mode of narrative, which is both visual and textual. Comprehension and interpretation rely on the ties between the visual and the verbal, as well as the knowledge of the sociocultural background and the symbolic implications. The visual representation of instantial stylistic use of phraseological units has a semantic function: it enhances and interprets the image, creates a new meaning and sustains figurative thought.

Key words: phraseological unit; instantial stylistic use; extended phraseological metaphor; visual representation; stylistic awareness

In this article I am concerned with some aspects of metaphorical thought representation and the creative use of phraseological metaphor in verbal and visual discourse. I rely on the achievements of cognitive linguistics, which have made successive contributions to the understanding of metaphor and thought, and the explorations of metaphor as a major mode of conceptual organization. Studies of cognitive scholars in the 1980s and the 1990s have established



metaphor as both a figure of thought and a linguistic entity (see Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Paprotté and Dirven 1985; Lakoff 1986; Lakoff and Turner 1989; Gibbs 1990; Gibbs [1994] 1999; Steen 1992; Steen 1994; Kövecses 2002 and many others). Cognitive study has added a new dimension to discourse analysis and narrative comprehension (see Emmott [1997] 1999; Freeman 2000; Burke 2003). The use of metaphor has been recognised as part and parcel of cognition, a revealing cognitive mechanism. I fully agree with Steen (1994: 3; Steen 2002: 386) that metaphors need to be investigated from the cognitive linguistic point of view, not only that of literary criticism, as it has been the case traditionally. Cognitive linguistics has emerged as a modern form of semantics (see Steen 1994: Ch.1). In semantic research it is crucial to see what happens to metaphorical meaning and follow its change and development in discourse, including visual representation.

My aim is to explore the linguistic meaning of metaphor, especially its semantic aspects: the instantiation and development of meaning in discourse, the emergence of new associations or their chains, resulting in the creation of successive sub-images, coupled with the visual development of metaphorical meaning. Metaphor identification, comprehension and appreciation becomes more challenging and also more interesting when metaphor is represented by a phraseological unit¹ (PU), not separate words. Gibbs notes that contrary to the traditional view that idioms, clichés and proverbs are frozen semantic units or dead metaphors, the evidence from cognitive linguistics and psycholinguistics indicates that many of these conventional expressions reflect metaphoric thought that is very much alive and part of everyday conceptual systems (Gibbs [1994] 1999: 436).

Let me turn to an example of verbal and visual extension of phraseological meaning as represented in Mark Twain's humorous sketch 'A Burlesque Biography'. The meaning of the PU *a family tree* is based on a common metaphorical mapping. In its base form² the PU is a conventional phraseological metaphor, available to users of English. First the PU appears in core use³, that is, in its most common form and meaning. As the example shows there is no change in phraseological meaning in the text, the figurative thought is not developed, neither is it sustained:

a family tree⁴

Then for the next two hundred years **the family tree** shows a succession of soldiers – noble, high-spirited fellows, who always went into battle singing, right behind the army, and always went out a-whooping, right ahead of it.

M. Twain, *A Burlesque Biography*, p. 178

In cognitive psychology the image is generally viewed as a mental representation, as a picture in the head. As Steen has pointed out, when processing metaphors, readers are able to construct at least three different kinds of mental representations: a linguistic representation of the meaning of a metaphor, a conceptual representation of the referential content, and communicative representation of the message it is attempting to convey (Steen 1994: 168).

In discourse a phraseological image may be extended over longer stretches of text, as it is in this sketch. The next paragraph contains instantial stylistic use⁵. A creative expression of a new idea is achieved by an instantiation of an extended metaphor. The metaphorical meaning is sustained, creating sub-images, which become part of the associative metaphorical network sustained on the basis of the image of the PU:

This is a scathing rebuke to old dead Froissart's poor witticism that **our family tree never had but one limb to it, and that that one stuck out at right angles, and bore fruit winter and summer.**

M. Twain, *A Burlesque Biography*, p. 178

If the PU *a family tree* is in core use, it has only one meaning – a scheme of one's genealogical succession of ancestry. The base metaphor⁶ stems from similarity and affinity of the two objects, i.e. both have a trunk and branches. In the given context only one branch or 'limb' is singled out, the only one which 'stuck out at right angles, and bore fruit winter and summer'. The latter metaphorical extension is actually an allusion to another PU – *a family (fruit) tree*⁷.

Discourse comprehension and analysis imply identification of instantial metaphorical meaning, which arises in a particular instance of a unique stylistic application of a PU and results in significant changes in its form and meaning determined by the thought expressed. The instantial use of phraseological metaphor is one of the ways to reflect a novel turn of thought in discourse. The



words ‘poor witticism’ act as a cue, prompting and supporting the metaphorical network.

Through instantial use the PU *a family tree* acquires the meaning of ‘a gallows’ and turns into a contextual euphemism, resulting in the euphemisation of the text. In this sketch the meaning of ‘a gallows’ becomes the semantic centre of the sketch. This meaning practically covers the whole sketch (Twain 1961: 178-82), thus sustaining metaphorical thought.

The image of the family tree has been extended and we see it in our mind’s eye: we imagine it by forming a mental image. It is what I would call mental visualisation. Actually we have to visualise each time when we perceive or think of an image. We visualise figurative meaning in our thoughts, as thought and imagination go together, creating a mental picture, even if there is no visual representation in the text.

In the sketch the extended metaphor of the family tree is followed by a pictorial illustration. The visual lends a new dimension: it further develops and reinforces the image, which the figurative meaning has evoked:



It is not an illustration of the base form of the PU as it can be found in a dictionary entry, it is a case of creative visualisation. The visual is, as it were, a continuation of the

M. Twain, *A Burlesque*
Biography, p. 178

verbal text. The possibilities of novel extensions of metaphor in text have been pointed out by many

cognitive linguists (see Lakoff 1986: 218-9). However, the visual offers new opportunities. The visual representation of instantial meaning enhances, develops and sustains thought and language. The textual information is supported by the pictorial perception.

The drawing helps to bring out one of the metaphorical meanings of the second component of the PU *tree* (which is a polysemous word), namely, *a gallows* (Webster’s New Universal Unabridged Dictionary [1983] 1989: 1945). Another dictionary formulates this meaning as follows: “a device used to hang a person,

has one upright post and a projecting crosspiece” (New Webster’s Dictionary 1988: 1642). By punning on the two meanings of the component *tree* Twain extends the image of the base metaphor. The semantic role of visual representations lies in sustaining and developing figurative thought. The illustration speaks a visual language of its own, accentuated by the caption *our family tree*, which acquires the effect of a coda. Thus, the understanding of some metaphors require an extended and attentive focus processing (Steen 1994: 245). For full understanding of metaphor in use both the verbal and visual comprehension are important together with conceptual knowledge.

The PU *a family tree* is further extended in the sketch, creating a metaphorical chain, which calls for a sustained mental vision in one’s mind’s eye:

I will remark here, in passing, that certain ancestors of mine are so thoroughly well-known in history by their *aliases*, that I have not felt it to be worth while to dwell upon them, or even mentioned them in the order of their birth. Among these may be mentioned Richard Brinsley Twain, *alias* Guy Fawkes; John Wentworth Twain, *alias* Sixteen-string Jack; William Hogarth Twain, *alias* Jack Sheppard; Ananias Twain, *alias* Baron Münchhausen; John George Twain, *alias* Captain Kydd; and then there are George Francis Twain, Tom Pepper, Nebuchadnezzar, and Baalam’s Ass – they all belong to our family, but to a branch of it somewhat distinctly removed from the honorable direct line – in fact a collateral branch, whose members chiefly differ from the ancient stock in that, in order to acquire the notoriety we have always yearned and hungered for, they have got into a low way of going to jail instead of getting hanged.

M. Twain, A Burlesque Biography, p. 182

With the sub-image of ‘a collateral branch’ that is ‘distinctly removed from the honourable direct line’ Twain establishes a semantic and stylistic tie with the base metaphor of the PU. Semantic and stylistic cohesion and coherence are made possible because PUs are stable cohesive word combinations with a figurative meaning. The extended phraseological metaphor is sustained across five pages. The sub-image conveys a new instantial euphemistic meaning. However, only at the very end of the paragraph does the non-euphemistic meaning ‘hanged’ appear as a sudden revelation of the plain and bitter truth, disclosing the meaning of the instantial metaphor – ‘a gallows’, which remains in the centre of events described in the sketch. The final paragraph contains a reiteration of the non-euphemistic ‘hanged’:

My own history would really seem so tame contrasted with that of my ancestors, that it is simply wisdom to leave it unwritten until I am hanged.

M. Twain, A Burlesque Biography, p. 182

The sketch reveals how the base metaphor of the PU *a family tree* undergoes instantial semantic and stylistic changes in discourse: it is extended across the whole sketch to sustain figurative thought. The extended metaphor is also linked with other stylistic features – pun and euphemism. In cognitive processes “figures of thought do not exist in isolation from one another” (Gibbs [1994] 1999: 449), and hence in language tropes are combined, they interact with each other. The individual tropes do not work independently, they are functionally related to each other to provide not only figurative coherence to the text that cannot be explained merely in logical or causal terms (Gibbs [1994] 1999: 454) but also semantic and stylistic cohesion. In discourse the language is alive, new meanings are created and sustained. It is essential to develop an understanding of the discursual dimensions of phraseological metaphor, including visual discourse. This example brings out the role of visual representation in the extension of the image of a metaphorical PU in discourse. Illustrations open up a possibility to create a visual impact. The extended phraseological metaphor is enhanced and developed by a pictorial illustration of the instantial image. This example shows that extended phraseological metaphor reflects extended figurative thought.

Another way to assist mental visualisation of figurative thought is the instantial use of PUs in stage remarks in plays. Instantial use reveals information about the attitude, which the character has to convey more accurately. Here it has a paralinguistic function: it gives precise instructions for the actor or actress how to enact the scene. For instance, Shaw is known for his meticulous stage remarks in which he frequently resorts to stylistic use:

to give someone the cold shoulder

He sits down next to the Newly Born who pouts and t u r n s a v e r y c o l d r i g h t s h o u l d e r t o h i m, a demonstration utterly lost on him.

B. Shaw, Back to Methuselah

The interaction of tropes is not only a phenomenon to be observed in discourse but also in the base form of PUs, which brings out the complexity of phraseological meaning⁸. This PU has both metaphorical and metonymic

features in the semantic structure of its base form. A new meaning is additionally created in text. This way instantial use offers a new vision, which is different from core use. The non-verbal enactment is another mode of the presentation of message and the visualisation of thought.

A merger of verbal and non-verbal communication is a feature of the discursal use of PUs. “How elements in visual and verbal modes interact on the page is a central issue in multi-modal texts” (Goodman 1996: 69), that is, in texts which use features from more than one semiotic mode of communication simultaneously. It is revealing to follow the ways in which visual and verbal representation can interact within a text, reinforcing the message or creating additional meanings (see Goodman 1996: 38). As a rule, a pictorial illustration follows the stretch of text or appears in the middle of it. Yet it may also precede the text, as is the case in ‘The Thurber Carnival’, bringing the literal meaning to the fore:



an old bird

Question. After a severe storm we found this old male raven in the study of my father, the Hon. George Morton Bodwell, for many years head of the Latin Department at Tufts, sitting on a bust of Livy which was a gift to him from the class of '92. All the old bird will say is “Grawk!”

Answer. I am handicapped by an uncertainty as to who says “Grawk”, the raven or your father. It just happens that “Arrk” is what ravens say. I have never known a raven that said anything but “Arrk.”

J. Thurber, The Pet Department

An old bird is a metaphorical PU used to denote someone who is too experienced and shrewd to be taken in. The picture of a bird and the question addressed to the Pet Department are non-figurative, they both feature an old raven sitting on a bust in the direct sense of the word. However, the answer involves parallel perception and the reader is simultaneously aware of figurative thought and the literal meaning. Phraseological pun is a way to stretch imagination and reflect experience beyond the possibilities offered by a PU in core use. Moreover, the pun has turned visual: the pictorial representation

becomes part of the process of change and development of thought in discourse.

Change and development of phraseological meaning is not merely a feature of literary discourse, it is a mode of figuration that is also common in various types of newspaper texts which easily combine verbal and visual representation. Let me examine the PU *to put one's best foot forward* which appears in the headline of a news item ***The Queen puts her best (bare) foot forward*** in THE TIMES (22 April, 1999, p. 1). The headline is instantial use due to the insertion of the epithet *bare* which is put in brackets. This is very unusual as the base form never contains any brackets. The brackets become a semantic technique. Moreover, the instantial component *bare* brings out the literal meaning of the component *foot*, which results in phraseological pun as part of the process of semantic change in the instantiation of the phraseological metaphor. The pun is enhanced by a big photograph of Queen Elizabeth with one of her shoes off (with one bare foot):



To put one's best foot forward is a polysemous PU. One of the meanings is 'to make the best possible showing'⁹. When the Queen celebrated her 73rd birthday in Korea she had to remove her white court shoes, entering a traditional house in her stockinged feet to observe the local customs. The literal meaning of *shoes* is spread throughout the news item: the Queen is kicking them off and wriggling her feet back into them again. The phraseological pun permeates the text, creating a visual narrative and contributing to its coherence and cohesion.

The last paragraph mentions 'the Queen's momentary scowl at being wrong-footed', that is, at being put in an unexpected or difficult situation (Collins Cobuild English Dictionary for Advanced Learners [1987] 2001: 1816). One aspect (having no shoes on) stands for the general feeling of the Queen at being put at a disadvantage. This is a metonymic link effected by associations of contiguity. The successive

change from one figurative mode to another – metaphor – pun – visual pun – metonymy – reveals the complex interaction of different tropes (see Gibbs [1994] 1999: Ch. 10).

The pun is further visualised in a cartoon placed at the end of the news item:



The caption ‘I think we should get her a pair of shoes’ is nonmetaphorical¹⁰, however, in this context the cartoon reinforces the visual pun. This sequence constitutes a kind of narrative strategy, which reflects the development of figurative thought and a continual return to literal meanings in the realisation a PU-based pun. The PU is sustained verbally and visually throughout the news item.

Phraseological metaphors may be sustained and visualised not only in news items and articles of a general type but also in serious specialist articles, as, for instance, a financial article ‘Send Your Money Home’ in *TIME* (29 September, 1997, p.44) dealing with interest rates, stocks and mortgages. The semantic focus of the article is the conceptual metaphor of *home*. The idea of home as a desired place to live in is manifest in the use of three phraseological units, which have one common component *home*, occurring within the limits of a short article. The first lines read as follows:

Your home has always been your castle, and is used to double as a piggy bank, until a classic late-’80s bust crushed the notion of housing as an investment.
Time, 29 September, 1997, p.44

The article actually deals with the nonfigurative meaning of *home*, discussing the existing homes and home prices, and the idea of a house as an investment. The article ends with another PU with the component *home*, creating a frame construction and acting as a coda:

A house as an investment is a pitch that hasn’t opened many doors lately. But today, **home isn’t just where the heart is; it’s where the smart money is too.**

Time, 29 September, 1997, p.44

The base form of the PU *home is where the heart is* has a positive meaning: your true home is in the place you love most¹¹. In the text the PU is used in the

opposite meaning. The PU is extended by a parallel construction, which conveys the message of the article: a house is a good investment now.

The visual focus of the article is a graphic: the drawing of a house placed in the middle of the article, containing information on home prices in various states in the USA. As the article is financial, the house is drawn in austere lines, not like a dream house in home adverts. The graphic gives the necessary financial information to persuade the reader of the sound investment, yet it reveals creative thinking:



The graphic is of stylistic and cognitive interest. Usually phraseological puns have one or several components, which are used in their literal meaning(s). In this case the pun is created through an associative link between *a home* and *a house*. The graphic has an unusual headline: **Home \$weet Home** which is a case of instantial use of a popular PU. The sweetness of home (the dream of a house of your own)

is enhanced by a visual representation of the dollar sign \$, which is always seen as a symbol of wealth and money. The symbolic meaning is incorporated in the semantic structure of the PU: it becomes part of the meaning of the PU in the given instantiation.

For the identification of the instantial graphic implications it is also important to know the cultural background: the use and the symbolic meaning of the currency sign. Graphic properties are generally used to represent the extra linguistic world in an accurate manner (see Goodman 1996: 184). The visual effect works together with the verbal in the creation of a visual pun.

The use of a symbol is one of the visualisation techniques. The graphic representation is inextricably linked with the content of the article. The symbol \$ has a semantic function. The visual creation stretches the usual system of

typography and affects the relation between the visual and the verbal. The use of the dollar symbol has a special visual effect that adds a new visual and semantic dimension to the text, a dimension, which is not available in standard writing.

Cognitive linguistics has shown that one conceptual metaphor may be expressed in many variations of linguistic organisation (see Dirven 1985; Steen, 1994: Ch.1.2). This newspaper article has made use of three metaphorical PUs containing the component *home* and a visual representation to reflect the semantic development of the conceptual metaphor *home*. Visual comprehension is facilitated by the metaphorical context.

In conclusion, the paper deals with the creative aspect of textual and visual representation of figurative thought. Extended phraseological metaphor is one of the figurative modes whereby people conceptualise their experience. It provides for the development and sustainability of metaphorical thought and language in discourse. Visual representation helps to disambiguate instantial stylistic use. The cognitive approach promotes the comprehension and interpretation of phraseological metaphor in verbal and visual discourse. Mental visualisation of instantial stylistic use is part of cognitive performance, enhanced by a visual representation of the extended image. The visual reinforces mental representations, and sustains and develops the message expressed by the PU, lending a visual dimension to the text. Extended metaphor calls for greater stylistic awareness, which involves a conscious perception and understanding of significant changes in form and meaning, associative links and their networks, stylistic cohesive ties and the creation of a new meaning in discourse. My conclusion is: as thought develops, the phraseological metaphor develops too. Extended phraseological metaphor reflects extended figurative thought.

End Notes

- 1 The phraseological unit is a stable, cohesive combination of words with a fully or partially figurative meaning. For my understanding of the basic terms in phraseology see Naciscione 2001.
- 2 *The base form* of a PU is the form to which other forms can be related and with which they can be compared. It is the dictionary form and meaning, recorded as the head form. The base form is stored in the long-term memory of the language user as a language unit, which is accessed when a discourse situation calls for it.



- 3 *Core use* is the use of the PU in its most common form and meaning. In core use the PU does not acquire any additional stylistic features in discourse and does not exceed the boundaries of one sentence.
- 4 I have indicated the forms of PUs for emphasis: base forms are marked bold and underlined; instancial elements are spaced and underlined; replaced elements are underlined double and spaced; cues are marked with a dotted line.
- 5 *Instancial stylistic use* is a particular instance of a unique stylistic application of a PU in discourse resulting in significant changes in its form and meaning determined by the context.
- 6 The base metaphor is the metaphor, which is part of the image of the PU in its base form. The base form is stored in the long-term memory of the language user as a language unit, which is accessed and retrieved when a discourse situation calls for it.
- 7 *A family (fruit) tree* – a fruit tree bearing different varieties of the same fruit grafted on to it (Chambers 20th Century Dictionary [1983] 1987: 455).
- 8 The semantic structure of phraseological meaning frequently includes a number of tropes. For the formation of phraseological meaning and types of phraseological abstraction see Melerovich 1982; Dobrovolsky 1998; Naciscione 2001.
- 9 See Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary (1989: 713).
- 10 It is significant to explore the aspects of human cognition which are grounded in everyday bodily and perceptual experiences that form the nonmetaphorical part of thought and language (Gibbs [1994] 1999: 79).
- 11 See Cambridge International Dictionary of Idioms (1998: 195).

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