

INTRODUCTION TO SOCIOCULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC ANTHROPOLOGY

COURSE

BY

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DATE

Use of Metaphor to Influence Thought

Introduction

Metaphor is a rhetoric device that is widely used across cultures. Metaphors are figures of speech concerned with systems of ideas, and these systems are constructed specially. Metaphors allow fields of thought to organize others. In addition, metaphor is an important tool in poetic imagination. According to Paprotté and René (1985, 36) metaphors are characteristics of language through written words rather than actions or thoughts. Metaphors are pervasive in people's lives on day-to-day basis; hence, they characterize language, thought, and action. The manner in which people think is metaphorical in nature.

When it comes to the use of metaphors, variation occurs not only in linguistics but also within the same/similar cultures; culture influences mainly the complexity of conceptual-metaphors through embodied experiences. Usually, the best command of metaphor is closely linked to the context of linguistic. As well, it relates to the cultural context. Individuals associate certain qualities with some objects or creatures. The qualities arouse some emotions or creations, although they may have little or no scientific basis for such associations. The emotions or the qualities are usually different, because people are of diverse cultural backgrounds (Lili 2014, 102).

Metaphors influence the way human beings think. Most people will not understand new concepts or grasp them poorly; hence, the need to relate them to objects, animals, or things that already exist. In cognitive linguistics, it is argued that people use metaphors to express their ideas and that people's thinking is influenced by metaphors. There are two principal views of metaphorical thinking: the relativist and rationalist view. According to

rationalists, individuals possess innate-cognitive abilities that usually oversee how people use metaphors (Sun 2010, 178). However, relativists insist that metaphors are representatives of people's ways of thinking. This shows that the argument that is there on the use of metaphors and human thinking is based purely on the ability of people to think and the existence of truth (external truth).

There exist both conceptual and literary metaphors. Metaphors are important in people's lives, and they come from primordial feelings or sensory inputs. They influence the way individuals think. Thoughts are based on bodily experiences. It is vital that people understand metaphors before using them. However, metaphors will be correctly used in the context of their origin. For instance, a Chinese metaphor may not be applicable in the western societies, as they may be interpreted differently. In yet another perspective, in every society, there are language gaps with regard to vocabularies. Consequently, metaphors are used to fill these gaps to help people conceive new concepts or ideas (Lili 2014, 105).

English and Chinese Metaphors

Taking the bat and the beaver as examples, the beaver is very common in North America, but it is unknown in China. The beaver is used in English language as a metaphor. In English language, when a person is described as an eager beaver, he or she is anxious to have something done. A person works very hard and is quite impatient. In China, on the other hand, people do not have such associations. In the Chinese view, beavers are just animals, which are not common to them. In a similar way, in the West, bats are associated with negative characteristics and qualities. For instance, it is common to hear such metaphors as "as blind as a bat," "a bit batty," or "as crazy as a bat." These are common expressions in the English language that are unheard of in the Chinese language. In the West, the mention of the word "bat" evokes emotions of an ugly creature, perhaps a creature that sucks blood. To the

Chinese, on the other hand, a bat is associated with good fortune. It gives one a sense of well-being, happiness, and a variety of positive qualities (Sun 2010, 175).

In another example, in the Chinese language, the word “dog” may sometimes have a derogatory meaning. The word “BUTAIS,” means to act as a snob, and it is used to refer to unscrupulous and cruel people. This metaphor is deeply rooted in the ancient-Chinese culture where dogs are considered inferior and servile things. In the English language, however, the animal has positive meanings attached to it. In the Western world, dogs are considered as friendly and faithful to humankind. Taking the case of America, they consider dogs to be part of families. The metaphor “love me, love my dog” clearly indicates how Americans have egalitarian ideas in relation to dogs. In the English language, it is common to hear such phrases as “top dog,” “lucky dog,” or “a clever dog”. These phrases are used to show that a person is superior or lucky. Metaphorically, the word “dog” is also used in proverbs in the English language. For instance, there is a proverb that says “every dog has its day.” The phrase implies that in English, dogs are used to describe human beings. Another proverb states, “like a dog with two tails”. Such proverbs are unheard of in the Chinese language (Lili 2014, 102)

Cultural differences are seen in the way people make use of language. Considering sayings and idioms would help one understand how metaphors are used in diverse languages. In the Chinese language, there is a saying about fetching water by monks. The saying goes like “one monk, two buckets; two monks, a single bucket, three monks, no water.” This saying means that less work is done when many hands are involved. In the English language, there is a saying “many cooks spoil the broth”. This saying carries a similar meaning as the one in the Chinese language. There are several other metaphors in the English and Chinese languages that have similar meanings (Paprotté, and René 1985, 40). For instance, in the

Chinese language, there is an idiom “Cast pearls before swine”. A similar idiom in the Chinese language is “play music to an ox”.

Conclusion

It is a great thing to have mastery of metaphors. Metaphors cannot be learned from other people, but effective use of metaphors shows that a person is a genius in that he/she has an intuitive perception of dissimilar and similar. Things are made clearer by the use of metaphors through resemblance. Rather than considering metaphors as merely figures of speech, one should also consider them as a mode of thoughts. Systematic use of metaphors in expressions of linguistic shows the operations of an individual’s mental structures and the workings of cultural models. Consequently, metaphors inspire and serve as graphic devices to convey ideas of a speaker or writer in an amusing and implicit way. Individuals may have difficulties getting the taste of metaphors and enjoying them because of cultural diversities. However, meaningful and vigorous metaphors trap a reader or listener into deep thought, and they find it delightful when they are immersed in it.

References

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