

# Metaphor & Literature: a multi-modal approach

## 1. From rhetoric to cognitive sciences.

Metaphor is a rhetoric trope for orators holding a public speech in Athens during the classic period, IV-V sec. A.D. It was thought to be a language embellishment in order to convince the audience but still, lack of mental content. Metaphor's structure implies a comparison in which a word or phrase primarily used for one thing is applied to another p.e., "life is a high hill". Metaphoric expressions do not use "like" or "as" but rather, they apply a direct comparison between their terms. That make of them of a stronger effect on the audience in such a way that they must think of the equivalence between the metaphoric terms p.e., a (life)= b(high hill).

Starting from the '50's, the progress that was making in the scientific research determined the passage from the study of behaviorism to consciousness and from the discourse about behavioral attitudes to the mental functions of the consciousness. That was the time of the so-called Cognitive Turn (or, Revolution) with a great influence as well as to the progress of cognitive psychology, cognitive linguistics, neuro-psychology and neuro-linguistics. Scientists on the above disciplines reject the behaviorist thesis to explain human life but they suggest that humans belong some psychological and neurological features able to explain their actions and thoughts. Humans, they say, belong "consciousness" they are not just behavioral automata. Additionally, the scientific theories about consciousness have had a great impact on the philosophical research about humans and human life.

How should we understand then, metaphor under the new circumstances? American psychologists and philosophers, George Lakoff & Mark Johnson state their approach by taking the study of metaphor under a cognitive perspective. In fact, in the first chapter of their book<sup>1</sup>: «Metaphor is for most people a device of the poetic imagination and the rhetorical flourish... We found, ..., that metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action». It is possible thus to think about metaphor in terms of a mental content for human consciousness. In addition, we are akin to consider that mental content as a structure that abides together a lexical representation to an iconic\* one. Metaphor is thought then, to be a mental representation with icon-lexical content. This is at last a multi-modal approach to metaphor namely, an icon-lexical approach to metaphoric content.

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<sup>1</sup> George, Lakoff & M.Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, εκδ. Chicago Univ. Press, Chicago 1980, page 3.

\*I refer to "iconicity" for metaphor in terms of a neuro-psychological notion that refers to the natural resemblance or analogy of the iconic representation 1. to the lexical content and 2. to the world or rather our perception of the world.

## **2. The icon-lexical content of the metaphor.**

According to what has just said when we read a literary text to understand a metaphor means to access an icon-lexical representation in mind.

The binding of the lexical to the icon content for the structure of the mental representation in metaphor can be as follows: 1. letters/words that they are linked to symbols, 2. words that they are linked to perceptual experiences<sup>2</sup>. The lexical content is of two types: letters and words. The icon content is of two types: 1. symbolic representations, 2. perceptual representations. The icon content of the first type take letters/words in connection to their symbolic representation while, perceptual representations take letters/words in connection to the sensory stimuli of the perceiver.

## **3. Reality and literature**

We like to expand the previous consideration about the icon-lexical content of metaphor to literature critics. We suggest then, that literature deals with the world on the one hand and imagination on the other. World refers to the external objects we can experience in everyday life while imagination refers to the internal objects of our experience. So, how does metaphor in a multimodal approach, as above, interfere with the world and the imagination in literature? That's the issue of our concern we'd like to treat here under a cognitive perspective. In particular, we invite people with cognitive, philosophical and literature interests to discuss about the way the icon-lexical content of metaphor is related to the world and to imagination. What kind of reality does the reader possess when he/she access the icon-lexical content of the metaphoric expression? Finally, in what way the readers' attitudes in a multimodal approach to metaphor are related to creativity and why is that so important for people?

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<sup>2</sup> Perceptual experiences undergo phenomenological explanation so, perceptual representations also relate to the world as a resemblance or an analogy to the latest.

