

Reply to Romero and Soria

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Reply to Romero and Soria

I think the notions of 'context-shift' and 'language-shift' (a special case of context-shift) can be used to account for a wide array of semantic phenomena. Thus I once suggested to Robyn Carston that standard instances of metalinguistic negation such as Larry Horn's example, 'I did not buy tométoes, I bought tomatoes', could perhaps be handled by viewing the speaker as pretending that those are two different words with different meanings (rather than two different pronunciations of the same word). This would be a case of shift to an imaginary context — a context in which there are two distinct things : tomatoes and tométoes, and two different words for them.

Romero and Soria think *metaphor* can be handled by appealing to context-shift. According to them, the metaphorical vehicles are given new senses — senses which make them applicable to the metaphorical targets. Those senses are the senses that the words have in the context to which we shift, when we interpret a metaphor. Such senses are not arrived at by loosening the literal meaning of the words. « Metaphoric interpretation », they write, « is by no means a case of loosening. » It is a case of transfer : we go from the literal meaning of the words to some other meaning that is systematically related to it, namely the meaning the words have in the shifted context.

More specifically, Romero and Soria write that metaphorical interpretation

involves the analogical ability by which the interlocutors make a coherent partial mapping of a set of features from source domain to target domain to obtain a metaphorically restructured target domain. This mechanism affects the context from which we must interpret the utterance; in particular, it generates a new context of interpretation. This new context can be seen as a result of changing the parameter of language included in the actual context of utterance. When we identify a metaphoric use of language, we are prompted to change the meaning of some constituents of the sentence metaphorically used.

In Foster's flying fish example, which they discuss at length, the apparently imperturbable English character is compared to the sea, which presents an even, uniform and opaque surface when seen from a distance, but reveals an internal life full of colour and dynamism when one looks beneath the surface. Seen from a distance, the sea "is of one color, and level, and obviously cannot contain such creatures as fish. But if we look into the sea over the edge of a boat, we see a dozen colors, and depth below depth, and fish swimming in them." Similarly, the English character reveals unexpected features when one looks closer: "The depths and the colors are the English romanticism and the English sensitiveness — we do not expect to find such things, but they exist." This mapping from the source domain (the sea) to the target domain (the English character) is completed by equating the fish swimming below the surface to the English emotions, "which are always trying to get to the surface, but don't quite know how." Thus completed, the mapping provides the metaphorical context in which, Romero and Soria argue, we are to interpret the metaphorical sentences at the end of Foster's passage:

For the most part we see them [the emotions] moving far below, distorted and obscure. Now and then they succeed and we exclaim, 'Why, the Englishman has emotions! He actually can feel!' And occasionally we see that beautiful creature

the flying fish, which rises out of the water altogether into the air and the sunlight. English literature is a flying fish. It is a sample of the life that goes on day after day beneath the surface; it is a proof that beauty and emotion exist in the salt, inhospitable sea.

In this passage, elements of the target domain (the English character) are systematically described in terms of the source domain. For an emotion to be overtly expressed is for it to 'get to the surface'. Since the English emotions typically do not get expressed, we can only 'see them moving far below, distorted and obscure'. And so on and so forth.

According to R&S, metaphor starts with a conceptual conflict, due to the fact that vocabulary appropriate to one domain (the source) is used in talking about some other domain (the target). This conflict triggers a specific process of metaphorical interpretation. The first phase of metaphorical interpretation consists in setting up a mapping from source domain to target domain, which leads us to view the target domain through the lenses provided by the structure of the source domain. Once the mapping is in place, each relevant element in the source domain is associated with a corresponding element in the restructured target domain. This association creates a new, metaphorical context. In that context, each expression designating a relevant element in the source domain acquires a new semantic value, in virtue of which it refers to the corresponding element in the target domain. Thus R&S tell us that 'flying fish', in the sentence 'English literature is a flying fish', refers to "the only aspect of the apparently imperturbable English character that rises over the rest and glides showing a beauty and dynamism incomparable to any other". Similarly, 'salt and inhospitable sea' in the sentence 'beauty and emotion exist in the salt, inhospitable sea' refers to the English character qua imperturbable and apparently unhospitable to emotions. The vehicles (expressions from the source domain) therefore convey 'ad hoc concepts' corresponding to elements in the restructured target domain, i.e. elements of the target domain viewed through the lenses provided by the source domain.

Although I tend to agree with the overall picture, I have two objections, admittedly more technical than substantial. First, R&S's criticism of the view that metaphor proceeds through loosening seems to me exaggerated (at least when they claim that metaphor is « by no means » a case of loosening.) Second, their appeal to the notion of context-shift seems to me insufficiently motivated.

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According to Romero and Soria, metaphor is an imaginative exercise in which we restructure a domain via a mapping from a source domain. As a result, we see the target domain 'through the lenses' provided by the source domain. This clearly involves loosening: by using words that have their primary application in the source domain, the speaker forces the interpreter to adjust the meaning of those words so as to make them applicable to the target domain, and that involves filtering the inappropriate features so as to retain only what is common to the two domains. Romero and Soria say that, in the metaphorical context provided by Foster's analogy between the sea and the English character, 'flying fish' means something like 'the only aspect of the apparently imperturbable English character that rises over the rest and glides showing a beauty and dynamism incomparable to any other'. But in this paraphrase what 'flying fish' specifically contributes is: 'something that rises over the

rest and glides showing beauty and dynamism'. *That* can be got through loosening, by abstracting from the fishy nature of the flying fish, and retaining only the properties it has in common with English literature (in the metaphorical context). The further idea that the thing in question is 'an aspect of the apparently imperturbable English character' comes from the rest of the metaphorical mapping.

Romero and Soria object that 'rise over' does not literally apply to the English character: 'English literature cannot literally rise over something'. They conclude that the loosening account is only partly right : we get rid of certain inappropriate features (having to do with the fishy nature of the flying fish) but what we retain are not abstract features common to the two domains, but something else :

It is true that we select some properties of the normal concept and forget others and, in this sense, we can admit loosening. But this process of loosening cannot [select] the properties of the concept related to the metaphoric vehicle that can be attributed literally to the target because there are no such literal properties which can be applied to the target. We decide what part of the concept can be attributed to the target of the utterance, because this part will be able to change its meaning and be applied to the target. Metaphor does not only reduce the information of the concept represented by the metaphoric vehicle, but also changes the information associated with the remaining part so that it will fit with the target. Thus, we construct an ad hoc concept with a different application and not with a wider application.

I think this goes too far. I do not accept that none of the properties encoded by the source expression literally apply to the target. Analogy making proceeds by extracting commonalities — so there *must be* commonalities, and it is those commonalities that are primarily retained in the selection process.

Beside its beauty and exceptional character, the relevant property of the flying fish, Foster tells us, is that it 'rises out of the water altogether into the air and the sunlight'. This contrasts with two other sorts of fish: those that remain far below the surface and can only be seen 'distorted and obscure', and those that succeed in getting to the surface but do not rise out of the water. The three-terms scale is preserved in the mapping: most English emotions go unexpressed, some are fugitively expressed, and English literature is a public, durable display of emotion and feeling. Even if we have trouble verbally expressing the features common to flying fish and English literature, still they are there and they justify the metaphor. They also justify talk of loosening, since through the metaphor some, though not all, of the properties of the source are ascribed to the target.

What R&S's criticism shows is not that loosening is not involved in metaphor; it is centrally involved. But it is not all there is to metaphor. As Fauconnier and Turner have argued, four mental spaces are involved in metaphorical mappings: not only the source domain and the target domain, but also a 'generic space' containing the abstract structure common to the two domains, and a 'blended space' in which features from both domains mix and emergent features show up (Fauconnier and Turner 2002). The extraction of generic structure is a form of loosening, but the apparition of emergent features is a form of enrichment, and the imaginary mixing of features from both the source and the target is the most characteristic property of metaphor. That property is, indeed, irreducible to loosening.

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Contrary to Romero and Soria, I am not sure the notion of 'language-shift' (a species of context-shift) is appropriate in dealing with metaphor. If we use it for dealing with metaphor, what will prevent us from using it also in dealing with metonymic transfer? After all, when the waiter associates a customer with the meal he has ordered and uses the name of the meal to refer to the customer, it would be possible to describe the situation as involving a shift to a new, 'metonymic context' in which the words, say 'ham sandwich', mean something different from what they mean in a standard context. But I think the notion of language-shift is best reserved for those cases in which tacit or explicit reference is made to some speaker or language user, to whom the speaker defers in his use of the words. No such thing seems to be involved in the sort of example discussed by R&S. To be sure, this makes their use of language-shift a possibly interesting extension or broadening of the notion, but I find this extension insufficiently motivated.

Language-shifts account for the some of the cases in which an expression means something different from what it standardly means. This is accounted for by saying that the speaker uses the expression with the sense that it has in some other context (a context in which a different language is spoken). In both metaphor and metonymy, an expression conveys something different from what it standardly means, but we do not need the to postulate a language-shift to account for this. We (more or less) know how to get from the literal meaning to the conveyed meaning. In metaphor, the correspondence established between the two domains makes the expressions appropriate to the source domain applicable (via the mapping) to the target domain, modulo loosening. We do not have to imagine a context in which the metaphorical meaning would be the literal meaning of the words.

Note that the notion of language-shift is more powerful than what we need to account for metaphor. When a language-shift is involved, there need not be any semantic commonality between the literal meaning of the words and their meaning in the shifted context. But in metaphor there always is some commonality, precisely because the metaphor relies upon an analogy between the source domain and the target domain rather than upon a deferential shift of language.

References

Fauconnier, G. and Turner, M. (2002), *The Way We Think : Conceptual Blending and the Mind's Hidden Complexities*. New York : Basic Books.