HISTORICAL APPROACH TO METAPHOR

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Lucrarea dată reprezintă o abordare teoretică a studierii unor particularităţi ale figurilor de stil (metaforei) la niveluri lingvistic, literar, sociocultural şi estetic. Rolul limbajului literar în calitate de limbaj specializat cu conţinut propriu şi o serie de caracteristici specifice variază în dependenţă de sistemul lingvistic. Totuşi, indiferent de limbă, o mare parte din trăsăturile sale specifice este explicată prin influenţa factorilor istorici, culturali, sociali şi politici asupra limbajului literar al comunităţii lingvistice.

The English metaphor derives from the 16th c. Old French métaphore, which comes from the Latin metaphora, "carrying over", in turn from the Greek μεταφορά (metaphorá), "transfer", from μεταφέρω (metapherō), "to carry over", "to transfer" and that from μετά (meta), "between" φέρω (pherō), "to bear", "to carry".

The metaphor has generally been understood as a figurative expression which interprets a thing or action through an implied comparison with something else. Aristotle, who is usually considered the originator of 'comparison' theories of metaphor, described metaphors in the Rhetoric as elliptical similes – comparisons of 'things that are related but not obviously so' without using 'like' or 'as'. According to Aristotle, the best or 'most well liked' type of metaphor transfers its meaning from one subject or 'register' to

another through the principle of analogy. As Aristotle observes in the Poetics, these metaphors often depend on logical relationships between multiple terms. The metaphor 'old age is the evening of life', for instance, relies on the relation between a set of terms describing day and another set describing age. The idea of metaphor can be traced back to Aristotle [2, p.27]. He defines "metaphor" as follows: "Metaphor is the application of a strange term either transferred from the genus and applied to the species or from the species and applied to the genus, or from one species to another or else by analogy." For the sake of clarity and comprehension it might additionally be useful to quote the following alternative translation: "Metaphor is the application of an alien name by transference either from genus to species or from species to genus or from species to species, or by analogy, that is, proportion. Aristotelian approaches to metaphor remained largely unchallenged until 1936, when I.A. Richards offered what philosopher Max Black has termed an 'interaction' views of metaphor. Critiquing both Aristotle's notion of metaphor as special or ornamental use of language, and his assumption that metaphor involves the mere substitution of one term for another, Richards claimed that metaphor relies on a complex interaction of thoughts, rather than a process of linguistic substitutions. To explain how a metaphor functions as a 'double unit', Richards introduced the terms 'tenor' and 'vehicle', which refer to the 'principal subject' and the name of the figurative term itself, respectively. (In the metaphor 'Juliet is the sun', for example, 'Juliet' would be the tenor and 'sun' the vehicle.) Richards' theory of metaphor as the product of an interaction between vehicle and tenor was later refined by Max Black in his 1962 book [4, p.77], Models and Metaphors. In this volume, Black suggested that a metaphor acts as a 'filter' in which two or more subjects interact according to a 'system of associated commonplaces' (a shared set of cultural responses) to produce new meanings for the entire phrase or sentence. In the metaphor 'Tom is a fox', then, not only is 'Tom' viewed in terms of cultural associations of foxes as sly creatures, but 'fox' is also reinterpreted through its juxtaposition with a human male.

In the late 1970s, John Searle rejected both interaction and comparison theories of metaphor, and offered an understanding of metaphor based on the 'speaker's utterance meaning'. In Expression and Meaning, his 1979 study of speech act theory, Searle criticized earlier approaches to metaphor on the grounds that they tried to locate the meaning of metaphors in the sentences or metaphorical expressions themselves. Instead, Searle suggested, we must examine the slippage between the speaker's meaning and the sentence or word meaning. In other words, metaphorical utterances work not because a certain juxtaposition of words produces a change in the meaning of the lexical elements but because the speaker's meaning differs from their literal

usage. Thus phrases like 'It's getting hot in here' or 'Sally is a block of ice' function as metaphors only in certain contexts with specific truth conditions: there is no single principle according to which metaphors operate.

Despite divergent theories of the ways in which metaphors operate, twentieth-century approaches have almost uniformly attempted to broaden traditional conceptions of metaphor as special use of language, offering an understanding of metaphor as a fundamental cognitive process or structure. In short, metaphor came to be seen as 'the omnipresent principle of language' (Richards), as a basic pattern of organizing and concertizing experience. No longer simply the domain of rhetoric or literary studies, metaphor has, over the past three decades, become a central topic of debate for fields like psychology, linguistics, philosophy, and the cultural studies of science.

Indeed, historically, metaphor was considered only a rhetorical device: a way of embellishing (or adorning) the language to make the presentation of an idea more beautiful, effective, and vivid. However, scholars have come to acknowledge the almost universal presence of metaphor in all our speech and even thought, coming to much broader conclusions about the nature, function, and power of metaphor in human culture. Detailed analysis of the current theory of metaphor reveals that metaphor is a part and parcel of our thought processes. It's neither unique nor restricted to any 'special usages' in literature. As Lakoff and Turner claimed in their seminal paper titled Metaphors We Live By (1980) [3, p.3], studying metaphors may be one of the more fruitful ways of approaching fundamental logic. We, unfamiliar readers, cannot fully appreciate the significance of metaphor unless we first consider the theoretical underpinnings of the concept and what current scholars in philosophy, psychology, and cognitive scientists have to say about it. Apart from that, and as a pretext, over viewing the omnipresence of metaphors in our life will help us realize just how broad the topic is, rather than being restricted, as traditionally thought, to the area of effective language skills.

While speaking about metaphor we must always remember: the force of one and the same metaphor may be different. In some cases the emotive charge may be very strong; in others it may be weak. It depends on the use of a metaphor in one and the same function. Due to the overuse of the metaphor it may become hackneyed, trite and loses its freshness and brightness.

When looking at what is a metaphor, it may be easier to understand if viewed as a figure of speech. It is an expression that is used to denote something, not from a literal meaning, but a similar, figurative meaning. It is using symbols in place of reality. We use metaphors and symbols in the English language every day. Poetry and entire novels can get very creative in their use of metaphors and symbols, to provide parallels of meaning in a non-

literal way. The use of metaphors by authors is a way for them to illustrate a point without coming right out and saying it. It is a tool used to get you to really think about something, to find new meaning in it and to see it from a different angle. It is ways to have the reader enter a different sphere, a different way of thinking. When we ponder on what is a metaphor, we realize that metaphors are tools to tell a story. The use of metaphors is also a method to teach you something at a deeper level. The use of metaphors also helps an author illustrate a point in the language of the everyday life.

References:

1. ARISTOTEL. *Poetics.* Greece, 335 BC, p.104.
2. BLACK, Max. Ithaca and Cornell N.Y. *Models and Metaphors*. University Press, 1962, p.267.
3. LAKOFF, George and MARA, Johnson. *Metaphors We Live By*. New York, 1980, p.256.

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