

REFLECTIONS ON THE METAPHORICAL MOTIVATION FOR PROVERB MEANING

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In this study proverbs and metaphors are perceived as models of cognitive economy and as adjustment of cognitive patterns to the needs of communication.

It seems that the maker of a proverbial sentence frequently selects metaphors as categorization tools of our experience. Quite often we rely on models of the concrete world to conceptualize abstract phenomenon. We have spatial conceptualization of abstract world, e.g. A man is wolf to a man.(atrocious = wolf).

The structure of proverb represents a kind of compromise in which the needs of production, perception and memory are all partially satisfied.

This kind of analysis helps us to understand the way in which humans link words together in their minds.

We would like to suggest that there is a motivation principal for such syntactic properties of proverbs and that is the learnability principle.

1. Introduction

In this paper we will take a closer look at proverbs, metaphors and colors.

Proverbs are brief, memorable, and intuitively convincing formulations of socially sanctioned advice. They are compact packets of information whose effect, in actual use, is to frame the way you look at a situation.

Metaphors are considered to be an important mode of understanding and a way of structuring our experience.

Colors are important in mankind's perception of the world. Consequently it is not surprising that colors will find their way into language in the form of color

metaphors. Given the importance of color in human sight, color metaphors are particularly striking.

In this study proverbs and metaphors are perceived as models of cognitive economy and as adjustment of cognitive patterns to the needs of communication. Thus cognitive science provides our best prospect for revealing the secrets of the proverb.

Proverbs provide economical and selective linguistic codes for events and situations. They put a great deal of conceptual power in a small, condensed package framed with specific sentence structure

Following definitions of proverbs contribute to such a view.

According to K. Burke (1957) "*Proverbs are strategies for dealing with situations*". We usually select metaphoric proverb with appropriate imagery to suit the character of the situation which is often repeated.

According to R.W. Gibbs (1994;309): "...*proverbs give significant insights into the poetics of mind because they reflect how our metaphorical conceptualization of experience bears on particular social situations.*" ... According to Cram (1994), "*Proverbs are not used to reason about the world but are used as formulae to impose categories and meaning upon events...*"

According to R.P.Honneck (1997;92)"*Proverbs are approximate fits to situations. Their literal meaning is a probabilistic capture of the primal experience.*"

Proverbs can be viewed as problem solving situations and as a part of our constellation of conversational strategies. They provide a verbal model of some real life situation. If we want to frame social reality with logical relations such as:

"*Act immediately* ", we can use metaphorical expressions like the following:

Strike while the iron is hot. (English)

Mold while the day is soft. (Swahili)

Cook the pumpkin while the fire is alive. (Hebrew)

physical experience > perception ---> mental model ---> linguistic model

literal meaning > logical relations; transformation, association, elaboration > figurative meaning
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The assumption is that specific situations and events which appear frequently attempt to develop their own organization of verbal means such as proverbial sentences based on metaphors which are usually supported by the rules of the economy of language. The high frequency of most communicative situation compiled with the natural desire for brevity influences the structure of proverbial sentence. (short, formulaic form).

2. What makes proverbs so eminently storable in the brain and so readily retrievable from it?

2.1. Binary structure, parallelism and symmetry

It has been assumed that the syntactic model of proverbs is constrained with certain factors other than grammatical principles. We would like to suggest that there is a motivation principal for such syntactic properties of proverbs and that is the learnability principle. As it has been already said the majority of proverbs illustrate the simplest binary relational structure. Binary structure is often accompanied with symmetry and the principle underlying symmetry is parallelism. Symmetrical figure is one, which consists of equal and uniformly arranged parts.

In such model it is necessary to appreciate the relation between the two halves of the sentence which are almost identical and it seems that part B is a mere reflection of the part A. We can call it a mirror image structure, e.g.

A	B
Blue eyes,	true eyes.
New <u>kings</u> ,	new <u>laws</u> .

Each part includes one significant word (kernel element) and these words are linked by various degrees of similarity which fluctuate between the equivalence of synonyms and the common core of antonyms. Actually, they make a network of interconnected words, e.g.

A **house** is not a **home**.

Where there is **smoke**, there is **fire**.

When the **cat's** away, the **mice** will play.

The **highest** standing, the **lower** fall.

United we stand, **divided** we fall.

Many are *called* but **few** are *chosen*.

Big fish eat little fish.

In this context, learning of the proverb can be defined as the process by which one unit of information becomes connected in memory with another unit of information. The learner's first task is to commit the first part of the structure to memory. The second part is more or less structured in the same way, e.g.

Like father,

like son.

Besides semantic similarity these two halves are interrelated on the basis of sound similarity (rhyme, assonance, consonance) and word repetition. So information activated in the first part (A) are still available at the next stage (B). This model suggests that word selection in proverb structure is based on the process of progressive activation. We match the portion we have heard with the word in our mental lexicon that appears the most likely candidate. Usually it is a word that might get activated in the word association process

Synonyms: *Home - house*
 Antonyms: *big - small*
 Superordination: *tree - apple*
 Collocations: *black mood.*

When a language user masters his vocabulary he organizes it into memory structures in such a way that whenever a particular concept in that structure is activated, the whole structure becomes activated and available to attention.

When the CAT is away..... the mice will play.

The structure of proverb represents a kind of compromise in which the needs of production, perception and memory are all partially satisfied.

This kind of analysis helps us to understand the way in which humans link words together in their minds. This geometricization of proverbs serves us to find out common denominator of proverb structure. And it is in the similarity or contrast of these two entities that we must seek the structural principle of proverbial language.

The relation between learnability and proverbial structure appears to be an interesting fact. It seems that parallel structure; symmetry, sound similarity and associative links enhance the learnability of such sentence patterns. According to T. Odlin (1986:139): "*Humans like to process information according to consistent patterns.*"

Considerations of learnability and memorability suggest that the syntax of proverbs is not so arbitrary as many analyses indicate. Grammatical, semantic and phonic markers are all logically independent of one another, but it turns out that there is a high degree of correlation among them leading to some kind of universal structure.

Its phonetic structure fits into its binary form, too.. Proverbs are constrained by phonetic structure (rhyme, assonance, consonance, alliteration) in order to be memorized easily. Quasi musical repetition is used (*Blue eyes, true eyes; Measure is treasure; Might is right.*).

Sequence of temporal events in syntax has an effect on recall from memory, e.g. *Soon ripe, soon rotten.* (ripe>rotten). Typically, activation goes slowly when the sentence order doesn't match up with the temporal order of events in the sentence.

The results of the analysis show that proverbial sentences based on literal meaning show a tendency towards phonic devices like rhyme, alliteration, repetition of words (*So many countries, so many customs; All men must die; A friend in need is a friend indeed.*) while metaphoric proverbs (*Eagles do not catch flies; Walls have ears*) show a tendency towards the usage of imagery and in the same time they do not show an inclination towards acoustic effects. Sample of proverbs (literal) which are not easily imagined in terms of other sensory and storage media require to rely more on the synthetic frames and specific stylistic features than high-imagery (metaphorical) sentences. In previous works all proverbs were treated as equal from the point of view of stylistics or any other kind of linguistic analysis.

According to Hernadi and Steen (1999) "*While phonetic and syntactic regularity makes the production of proverbs enjoyably economical, it is semantic energy and pragmatic potential that makes their mental reception enjoyably invigorating.*"

3. The metaphorical motivation for proverb meaning

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) suggest that conceptually we live by metaphors, that much of rational thought involves the use of metaphoric model. Metaphoric sentences derive from the human tendency to organize perceptual information.

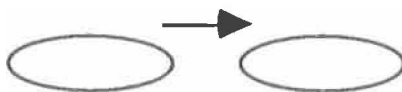
Metaphorical proverb comprehension requires a large number of memory structures, memory interactions, and mental operations.

- Usually the meanings of proverbs are not predictable from the meanings of their component parts. Proverbs have a status of one meaningful unit (one image schema). According to Gestalt approach global or holistic structures are perceived more readily than their components. Proverbs are easy to evoke, recall because they are making part of holophrases (multi-word units). Similar to musicians trying to memorize one unit.

- It seems that the maker of a proverbial sentence frequently selects metaphors as categorization tools of our experience in order to achieve some strategic goals like avoiding direct reference, shifting the responsibility of his claim to past traditions and unquestionable natural phenomenon, (double indirectness: it is the word of the wise, we). It is obvious that we rely on models of the concrete world to conceptualize abstract phenomena. e.g. *Even the black cow gives white milk* Common objects and events such as stones, dogs, wolves, cows... are used as an input and as an output we have more abstract, general meaning. We have spatial conceptualization of abstract categories via basic image schema, e.g. *A man is wolf to a man (atrocitly)*. Metaphor involves mapping across different cognitive models. When two domains or conceptual fields like *man-wolf* are once put into correspondence they produce a metaphor. We apply common attributes of the wolf to man. These two words share common features like atrocitly. It seems that a metaphor is the result of the general tendency in language towards cognitive economy.

Proverbs serve to summerise, integrate and economically code a large number of superficially distinct events.

Within the framework of a cognitive approach to metaphor, it has been described in terms of transfer from one cognitive domain (donor) to another (recipient) domain.



We don't have to labor hard in order to store and retrieve the cross domain associations evoked by them. Proverbs blending multiple domains can be particularly effective and sometimes even amusing, e.g.

After black clouds, clear weather. (meteorological domain blended with human destiny), It is highly effective logic of a highly selective mental process of cross-domain blending.

One important function of metaphor is then to structure abstract domains by means of projections from more concrete domains.

Concrete LITERAL statements are not only a rich source of information, but the real world that they refer to has a more transparent and specifiable logic than abstractly stated words and ideas

The study of metaphors of linguistic actions which refer to colors and their functioning may thus contribute to a clearer understanding of how physical experience is projected onto linguistic action.

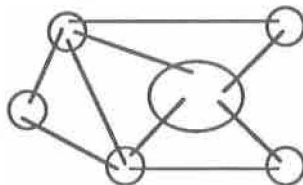
Because of their imagery metaphorical proverbs are easily recalled from our memory or mental lexicon. Inputs that are concrete tend to be recalled better than more abstract inputs (Honneck: 1997; 165).

4. Colors and metaphors

The color spectrum is an objective fact: it is "out there" waiting to be dealt with cognitively. Metaphors dealing with colors make an interesting field of research.

We describe ourselves and our behavior using colors. When we are happy we are "tinkled pink" and greet the world "with flying colors". Envious people "turn green", and cowards are "yellow" in the face of danger. Sometimes we see "pink elephants", or we might be in "a brown study". We call our language "blue" when we speak in a profane way. In political rhetoric color is often used to convey a message.

It is obvious that color terms in phrases and proverbs have additional meaning besides its reference to the color itself. Words dealing with colors are connected to other words by shared features. There is a network of associated words for each color item based on perceived similarity and general memory information. The activation of a single word spreads its network of associated words.



BLACK is associated with the following words: DEATH, DARKNESS, EVIL, BAD LUCK, e.g.

A black hen lays a white egg. (black=bad)

The black sheep of the family. (black=disgrace)

Two blacks don't make a white.

The devil is not so black as he is painted.

*The pot calls the cattle black.
After black clouds, clear weather.
Black will take no other hue.*

Devil=black

These words tend to go together in our experience.

Metaphoric language has its preference regarding colors. Mainly basic color terms are used in metaphors; some colors are used more frequently than others. Black, white and red are the most frequent having the largest map of experience.

5. Conclusion

As a final conclusion it might be said that the initial verbal formulation, long term-mental storage, and frequent public retrieval of proverbs are facilitated by such prosodic, grammatical, and semantic features of memorability as alliteration, rhyme, repetitive syntax and intuitively persuasive troping across different conceptual domains.

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*Danica Škara: Razmišljanja o metaforičkoj motivaciji značenja u poslovicama***S a ž e t a k**

U ovoj studiji poslovice i metafore se promatraju kao modele kognitivne ekonomije i kao prilagodba kognitivnih obrazaca potrebama komunikacije.

Čini se da stvaratelj poslovične rečenice često odabire metafore kao kategorizacijsko oruđe iskustva. Često se oslanjamo na modele konkretnog svijeta za konceptualizaciju apstraktnih pojava. Postoje specijalna konceptualizacija apstraktnog svijeta, primjerice, čovjek je čovjeku vuk (okrutnost=vuk).

Struktura poslovice predstavlja svojevrсни kompromis u kojemu se udovoljava potrebama produkcije, percepcije i sjećanja.

Ova vrsta analize pomaže razumijevanju načina kako ljudi spajaju riječi u svojem umu.

Sugerira se kako postoji motivacijsko načelo za takva sintaktička svojstva poslovice a to bi načelo bilo načelo učljivosti.