

changing worlds & signs of the times

Selected Proceedings

from the 10th International Conference
of the Hellenic Semiotics Society

EDITORS

Eleftheria Deltsou

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Metaphor as a Hermeneutical Design of the Mental Phenomena: The role of narrative speech in the cognitive field of the Philosophy of Mind

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Abstract

Language is a multi-dimensional and rule-guided activity. Many philosophers and scientists considered “Metaphor” as a linguistic phenomenon, a figure of speech in which one thing is represented as something else. Being that so, the role of metaphor is usually confined in the margins of life activities that lack its interactive and interpersonal process that fundamentally shapes our ways of perceiving and understanding the world. The aim of this paper is to examine some of the uses of metaphor in the philosophy of Mind, by giving an alternative account on how the concepts might be understood. Metaphors play an important role in science as a tool of innovation and discovery, providing a way of novelty by connecting unfamiliar facts to familiar experiences. By showing its importance in several epistemic fields we are using the narrative speech in addition to the Wittgensteinian phrase “agreement in judgments”, intending not to expel the scientific theories in epistemology, yet to illuminate some other aspects in the exegetical context.

Keywords

hermeneutics , linguistic phenomena , metaphor , mental phenomena , narration , philosophy of mind

Linguistic activity is the expression of thought and thoughts represent our ability of understanding the world. By considering the structure of language we could understand the structure of reality (Martinich, 1990, p. 3). The notion of *Metaphor* as a linguistic phenomenon is a figure of speech with heuristic features, on which one thing is represented as something else. However, is the metaphoric process just so?

Talking about metaphor according to the traditional philosophical way we are thinking of it as if it frequently inhabits the margins of discourse as well as if its potential incivility generates concerns for its management. The very idea of our transportability of words, notions and features could be a threat to the philosophical "Worldview", in the sense that certain ideas might not only be out of place but mostly out of control. Accordingly, the role of metaphor in such environment is usually confined in the margins of life activities that lack its interactive and interpersonal process that shape fundamentally our ways of perceiving and understanding the world as well (Fiummara, 1995, pp.12-18).

On the contrary, other voices call for alternative messages towards the importance of metaphoric function, by sketching the meaning of mental concepts, not only in denying their physiological data but rather in pointing to the direction that metaphors play an important role in science as a tool of innovation and discovery, providing a way of novelty by connecting unfamiliar facts to familiar experiences (Ortony, 1980).

My aim in this paper is to show that metaphor is a prominent and illuminating factor in the epistemological field of the Philosophy of Mind by examining some of the metaphoric uses on how concepts might be understood with the help of the narrative speech. Mainly, whether there is any disciplinary topic to talk in terms of how metaphor prevails upon the narrative speech or how the common form of communication, may adopt the metaphoric process in the so called narrative function.

Some remarks on Philosophy of Mind

Philosophy of Mind is the branch of philosophy that includes the philosophy of psychology and the area of mental phenomena such as consciousness, perception, personal identity, memory etc, (Guttenplan, 1994, pp.20-25). Mentioning a synoptic account of the three (there are more) main philosophical theories on how we might explain the mental facts according to the dictum how we suppose to connect mental facts with material ones.

These issues theoretically arouse since Descartes' period and his so called dualistic theory about the mind – body problem. As follows:

1. The realistic reading holds that there is no such a problem of connecting abstract entities along with material ones because generally their meaning depends on truth conditions.
2. The aspect of empiricism holds that everything mental is reduced to material – physiological function.

3. The a priori condition contingent upon the existence of the mental and its consequent imposition on the matter. This has been supported by the common idealism and transcendental idealism (connected with logic). I am suggesting the Kantian philosophy for such an aspect of idealism.

Many philosophers agree that despite the well formed theories of the above premises, the whole argument about the mental states and their consequent propositional expression evokes skeptical claims. Could we say that there is something technical in it by suggesting the meaning-formation theory as Nietzsche's ingenuity kept telling us not to be attracted by the bewitchment of words? Likewise, we could admit that it is a common habit in philosophy to lay out theories about mental phenomena or the meaning of concepts in such a manner that renders narration an indispensable condition of their formation. Such an activity might be the case towards the interdisciplinary dialogue with the literary process that uses the scheme of narrative speech. That is what I have in mind to show.

There is also a strong tendency in philosophical milieu to deny the role of narrative speech into the philosophical theories, in the sense that while using narration we might easily suspect that all these stories about concept formation do not belong to the field of a philosophical reasoning, for they lack the objectivity and the criterion of their proper use. For them, metaphor as well as its narrative character is a strange phenomenon for philosophical analysis by its very nature on abolishing the inference of the arguments which ought to be verified by truth conditions. I mean the theory of Verification supported by the Logical Positivism (Ayer, 1959).

The main issue

According to Lakoff and Johnson (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) – theorists of the *embodied mind* – the above statement is considered as completely false because our perceptual system is at most a metaphoric one. Embodied mind, according to them, is the interrelation between the mind's mental activities and body's physiological functions. Many bodily activities/operations that are happening and interconnecting at the same time with mental ones easily facilitate the process of mental operations. Their theory sounds as if it offers an adequate account on the cognitive area, on the basis that it does not neglect important epistemological factors of using metaphor as the primary hermeneutical tool of meaning. In fact, we may say that holding such a hermeneutical plan we owe to maintain that many epistemological premises being permeated by the metaphoric process because of the motley of our language, mostly in the philosophical process. For example the role of logic in the theory of meaning is a necessary and non contingent factor.

Whereas I am talking about narrative process, I am not suggesting the features of narrative condition such as linear or non linear narration or even the narrations about descriptions, story-telling etc. For them many thinkers say that philosophical explanations do not belong to such field. What I am interested in is not just the scientific

or analytical procedure contingent on the logic of a systematic conceptual calculus. I'm talking of what bears to our mind the emergence of some other facts, acoustic or tactile such as rhythm, unusual sounds, rime, facial movements, gestures, pauses, forgotten images, old fashioned arguments happened tacitly or explicitly plus the scientific reasoning while coming in such a way totally different than the usual way we're talking in the typical academic epistemology. We narrate them all via our feelings and emotion as well.

The story is about something else not of a strict and formal argumentation in the scientific process but of a weird coincidence or a joint – a connection between an unexpected fact and our well ordered prevailing thoughts the verifiable facts we are convinced of. It could be happened some strange connection between hypotheses – law like situations and previous fixed concepts used as patterns or kuhnian paradigms in shaping new ones. A new paradigm is a set of narration about interpretations of its meaning.

Remember the usefulness of the proverbs. In one of my articles I wrote about the notion of the proverb concerning Professor Cora Diamond the resolute reading of Wittgenstein's literature.

“Agreement in Judgments”

Before coming to the crucial content of the above phrase, let's say first few words about his critique literature. The so called *standard* interpretation/reading, introduced by P.M.S. Hacker and David Pears as: The world is made up of simple objects which can combine into facts, and language is made up of names which can combine into propositions. These two types of combination mirror each other and the fact that they do so is what says that proposition has meaning. Logical forms which are the common element between the act of representation and the thing that is represented are the possibilities of combination of the above relation, and here comes the famous showing/saying distinction which contingently depicts some metaphysical aspects. According to my reading the showing (condition) tends implicitly towards realistic perspectives.

The other reading is the so called “resolute” reading which has been mainly supported by Cora Diamond and James Conant. We call their aim as a therapeutic tension if we realize the real meaning of nonsense which Wittgenstein ascribes in the *Tractatus*. They claim that if we've got the need to understand the meaning of the concepts then we'll throw away the ladder and we'll start philosophizing. Their thought is that the *Tractatus* combats as illusory the idea of an external standpoint on language: a vantage point from which we can provide a metaphysical account of connections between language and the world. Thus, the *Tractatus* delivers us from the illusion that we can do philosophy in a traditional way through its representation of nonsensical sentences which, to the extent that they seduce us, equip us to lead ourselves out of our state of illusion. This somehow echoes existentialist in character (Crary & Read, 2000).

A crucial notion in the *Tractatus* is the idea of “nonsense”, whereas Wittgenstein says that a combination of words we are tempted to utter in philosophy is nonsense. That notion does not mean that we know what the words attempt to say and that *that* cannot properly be put into words. It means instead that those words do not say anything, that they have not *yet* been given any significant use (Crary & Read, 2000, pp.1-18).

Back to our point; when we use the phrase “agreement in judgments” we generally mean that we have got an act of judging by which we explicitly or tacitly reveal similarities or analogies of concepts, comparing each other in understanding the content of a fact with the other members of the community sharing the above deeds. A judgment could be a set of specifications or features and these are standards on the basis of which to assign the degree to which the object satisfies the criteria of judgment. In addition the term of *criteria* means the specifications a given person or group sets up on the basis to judge whether something has a particular status or value, i.e. whether something exists or we use it correctly. By setting the criteria of a judgment we mean the act of discriminating or separating cases, of identifying by means of differences (Cavell, 1979, pp.5-7).

Such functions of the terms are exposing themselves in language in order to be a consensus between the linguistic users sharing a common form of life. Any act, any function is capable of being uttered in a narrative action by sharing common elements (acceptable ones) with others which permit the narration to be understandable. For those who’re talking about objectivity I see no particular reason for supporting their claim, because the common habit of the shared activities of the community members secures tacitly the act of understanding. The Wittgensteinian dictum about the “agreement in judgments” should not require to be used just in order to secure the meaning by means of the verifiability conditions according to the positivistic theory of the Vienna circle. It should be used when we’re running out of explanations when the explanations are coming to an end and so our spade is turned and we’re keeping ourselves in silence. This silence might be a valuable one showing to a tacit agreement. That is the agreement in the form of life. I’m just asking why not this happening in our case? In Wittgenstein’s words:

“If I have exhausted the justifications... then I am inclined to say. This is simply what I do. Explanations come to an end somewhere. Well how do I know how to continue? If that means, have I reasons? The answer is my reasons will soon give out. And then I shall act without reason” (Wittgenstein 1958, § 211,217). According to Wittgenstein there’s a background of pervasive and systematic agreement among us, which we had not realize or had not known we realize. These are conventions, if not rules.

Metaphor and concept formation

What I keep from Wittgenstein is the role of necessity in the accepted practices in our common forms of life, mainly in his *Philosophical Investigations*. This might be a tacit acceptance of the significance of narration. We share narrative features while using

narration and many of them are of indeterminate meaning. Why not doing the same in science? Daniel Dennett wrote about consciousness that the notion of the *self* is a mere fiction by ending that talking about an alleged entity of the self or of the *selfness* is a risky thing – a vast phenomenology of hermeneutics: “the chief fictional character at the center of that autobiography is one’s self” (Dennett, 1986, pp.275-88). William James wrote about the same. Surely, such a story has its deep roots in Humean skepticism if not in Stoic philosophy. There is also a parallel image in Quine’s “indeterminacy of sense”, that there is no fact of the matter as to which is the correct theory. Quine and many thinkers have strongly criticized these aspects in the sense that their starting point has been an a priori one (Arrington & Glock, 1996). Why not telling that something could be that way or the other? Any argument has its place in a familiar context being uttered in the language game of a form of life. The role of the “*a prioriness*” or not belong to our shared beliefs - things that we make narrations about.

According to Stanley Cavell the problem in philosophy is not about the problems in concepts but in texts because in every text there’s a hidden narration (Cavell, 1979) and I might agree with Chomsky’s claim that scientific theories of the mental can be constructed in areas where there is an almost total absence of connections between cognitive capacity and physical structure of the brain. Why not call this as *a quasi metaphoric fact*, i.e. a starting point to form, to explicate or justify the meanings of the concepts? I am just guessing.

Fiction has all the traits of the metaphoric and narrative function, so is there any particular reason to reject an alternative reading by using some of fictional features? For example we can use the concept of metaphor in parallel with the therapeutic attitude along with narration, by looking at metaphors not just as having linguistic utterances carrying a hidden meaning to substitute a literal one but using the metaphoric process as a possession of a serious ontological status which has in fact therapeutic perspectives. My purpose is not to claim that metaphor has an advantage over the literal utterance in the narrative process. On the contrary, what it takes for a language to be meaningful is not metaphysics of meanings, but rather human beings acting together, sharing reasons on the existence or not of mental phenomena according to common habits and deeds in a common world (Sakellariadis, 2012).

Tracing back to the unexpected or astonishing fact we join when the concept formation is taking place, we observe that the role of agreement in judgments could be the consensus to the very fact on some necessities among so many others. Such necessities could be exposed themselves in language as conventions, rules or samples, no matter how tacit or explicit are. Whatever knowledge the act of philosophizing brings forth cannot be brought out by setting forth a claim for a rational sample or a well-formedness of an argument, even the clear cut premises and so forth. For such a claim could never come into question: it could never arrive at words which beg for the issue to be possibly open to question.

This is one of the reasons of doing philosophy; its claim could be seen as a therapy. Philosophers in searching truths or meanings realize that mostly fall into the trap they make for. That's the importance of recognizing the necessities by the philosophical activity – a philosophical matter. Meaning is not just content in semantics; it is the product that results from the process of interpreting. The important question in understanding metaphor is not how metaphorical meaning might differ from literal meaning but rather how the interpreting discourse metaphorically differs from its literal interpretation. Ordinary or multi-faced meaning is the result of the interpretation and interpretation may be of literal or metaphorical character. “Literal” or “metaphorical” do not apply to the meaning but to the ways of how we determine the meaning. Interpretation also makes the discourse metaphorical and an adequate account of metaphor will require an account of difference between literal and metaphorical interpretation. In many linguistic practices the word “applying a concept” might mean something “quite vague” while in literature is a common place that one concept is applied to another. In science, though, metaphor has still a risky role despite the existence of the cognitive models consisting the scaffolding of scientific innovations.

If we follow the Cavellian thought, the so called appeal to criteria could be another description of the same fact when the communication is going to be threatened or lost at all. We need to remind ourselves the role of necessities. The importance of metaphorical function shows exactly this point. If it has to be an ontological status for metaphor I cannot see any particular reason not to support the notion of metaphor and the narration of it. I am very skeptical about the claim that metaphor is a literally interpreted expression using to get us to see one thing as another; this is not a sufficient condition of an expression to be a metaphor. This reliance on percepts is untenable. There is no particular reason to think of meanings that allegedly lie behind the words: i.e. such meanings would be entities that *interpret* themselves (privileged point). What it takes for a language to be meaningful is not metaphysics of meanings, but rather human beings acting together in a common world.

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