Utilization of Metaphor as a Method of Language Teaching

Ofelya Poghosyan
Yerevan State University

Many linguists have focused on different aspects of metaphor. Metaphor is the use of a word or phrase to indicate something different from (though related in some way to) its literal meaning, e.g. *She has a heart of stone*. The term "metaphor", (as the etymology of the word indicates) means transference of some quality from one object to another; the transference of meaning from one word to another. Being one of the most important stylistic devices, metaphor, decorates speech, making it expressive and emotionally coloured.

However, metaphor is not confined to its ornamental function only. The ability of metaphor to explain the unknown in terms of the known makes its use in the sphere of intellective communication not only possible but also necessary. It is here that metaphor acquires a cognitive function and serves as a basis for conceiving and describing facts established in the objective reality. Moreover, it suggests a completely new piece of information and clarifies the mechanisms through which the latter originates (Gibbs, Steen 1992). Otherwise stated, metaphor is declared to have a specific power of novelty.

As a speech phenomenon metaphor has been studied more than once since ancient times. Different linguists have tackled the problem from different standpoints stating its vital importance in literature (especially in poetry), philosophy, and even in different fields of social and natural sciences.

The role of metaphor is very important in the language of science. Scientists use metaphors to solve different scientific problems. On the basis of scientific discoveries different metaphorical models have originated and those models, in their turn, play an important role in suggesting this or that new model (conception) of the world. The example of this phenomenon can be found in Newton's works.

It's well known how Newton discovered the law of gravity. The young student of Cambridge University was on a visit in his native village where he happened to see an apple fall from a tree and began wondering what force made the apple fall. It was then that the great scientist discovered the law of gravity force that attracts objects towards each other in space, and pulls them towards the centre of the planet on the earth.

Newton examined the attraction of one mass by another and showed that one massive sphere (as in the example with the apple) attracts another one as if the whole mass were in the centre.

The law of gravity force helped the scientist find the solution to many other problems. Later he also demonstrated that the gravitation pull of the earth extends as far as the moon and keeps it in its orbit. He demonstrated that this pull is in accordance with the same law as that by which a stone falls to the ground, or if anyone jumps, he finds himself on the ground.

Thus, proceeding from this example, it can be stated that a metaphorical phenomenon to explain the unknown in terms of the known can give rise to the solution to different scientific problems.

In the present article an attempt is made to show the educational value of metaphor, the role it plays in the teaching process.

Metaphor influenced the further development of pedagogical thinking. Experiments have shown that any metaphorical expression prompts the reader to contemplate and look into the reason why this or that connection between certain elements of metaphor has become possible.

As a language concept it has been considered an indispensable means of creating the picture of language world. Meanings which already existed in language began to be rebuilt on the cognitive basis, and all that made it possible to create different new concepts.

Metaphor helps the scientific enterprise, in educational or pedagogical aspect – to explain a principle or theory. With the help of metaphors new methods, theories and hypotheses are easily introduced. Examples of the same phenomenon are found in the observations and experiments by Benjamin Franklin in the field of electricity.

Formerly people did not have the first idea about fire and once, quite by chance, they noticed that as a result of friction of two hard materials some sparks appeared. Thus, this phenomenon, as something already known and familiar, helped the scientists explain that energy occurred in certain particles (electrons and protons) and hence in larger bodies, since they contain these. Later this idea helped to explain why and how lightning (flash in the sky produced by natural electricity passing between clouds or from clouds to the ground) strikes.

Philosophers regard the pedagogical aspect important for the cognitive status of theories, means of explanations, interpretations and, therefore, important for science itself (Taylor, MacLaury 1995).

Thus, it is natural to believe that if metaphor explains the unfamiliar in terms of the familiar, then it can be very useful for a student, let alone for a theorist, as it develops the learners' ability to gain a deep insight.

The use of metaphor in the teaching process is very important, of course, but it must be done very carefully.

The following examples help us to demonstrate how metaphor can influence the teaching process making the introduction of the new material clearer, brighter and more interesting for the learners.

Guiding the lesson on the themes of reading and listening, writing and speaking, teachers often conclude that most of the students don't understand the true nature of those undertakings, because they consider reading and listening to be passive activities. Meanwhile, they are believed to be as active as writing and speaking. How can these difficulties be overcome?

Some methodologists think that reading and listening are passive as compared with writing and speaking, but many others consider both of them to be active undertakings (Adleran 1975).

It is believed that the writer or speaker must put out some effort, but no work needs to be done by the reader or listener. Reading and listening manifest a process of receiving information from someone who is actively engaged in giving or sending it. It is wrong to suppose that receiving information is like receiving a blow or a judgment from court. On the contrary, the reader or listener is much more like a catcher in a game of baseball. Catching the ball is just as much an activity as pitching or hitting it. The pitcher is the sender in the sense that his activity initiates the motion of the ball. The catcher is the receiver in the sense that his activity terminates it. Both are active, though the activities are different. Nothing is passive here but the ball. It is the inert thing that is put into motion and stops, whereas the players are active, moving to hit or catch.

The same process takes place while writing and reading. The thing that is written and read, like the ball, is the passive object common to the two activities that begin and terminate the process.

Thus, if we tell the students that the relation of the pitcher and the catcher in this example is the same as that of a writer and a reader, they will understand the phenomenon much better because such kind of explanation will help the learners acquire the unknown in terms of the known.

The educational value of metaphor in the above mentioned example is quite obvious. The example below proves the same.

According to their reading skills readers can be good, average and poor. If anybody wants to find out exactly how well he reads and how much improvement he achieves as he goes along, he must make careful measurements. Reading is a very complex mental process involving many different skills two of which: speed and comprehension, are fundamental.

Measuring the development in reading is comparable to measuring a child's physical growth. If we want to know how fast our child is growing, we periodically weigh and measure his weight. Then we make comparisons in terms of exact units: pounds and inches. We must do the same sort of thing in evaluating the development of our reading.

Thus, the student will understand that physical growth is judged in terms of height and weight and teachers can explain to them the facts on the basis of known ones. Hence, development in reading can be judged in terms of progress in two basic skills: speed and comprehension.

The educational aspect of metaphor is well expressed in the following example as well.

Guiding the lesson and trying to help students to develop their writing skills, we tell them that any piece of writing has to be planned. The students don't usually know how to make a plan. Thus we tell them, *"Think of a week-end trip which you can't just blindly go on ahead on Saturday morning not knowing what's going to happen. Instead, during the week, you make plans. You make up your mind when you want to start and when you want to be back; you decide where you want to spend Saturday night and what you want to do on Saturday morning; you get yourself a map and find out which route to take; you spot a place to eat lunch and another to eat dinner; and you work out a different route to go back on Sunday afternoon and evening. When you are through, you have a plan. You know where to start, where to go first, second, and third, and where to end."*

Writing works the same way. The thing to do is to plan ahead, to map beforehand what *word-trip* you are going to take. Know your starting point and know your next way stations, and be quite sure you know where you're going to land at the end. Your plan is in words and sentences you have in your mind and that plan generally consists of the start, the main in between stops, and the end.

The attempts to use metaphorical approach as a method are employed in language teaching process and many English teachers state that the results of their experiments are quite effective.

From the cognitive linguistic view, metaphor can be defined as understanding one conceptual domain in terms of another one. Different metaphorical models emerged on the basis of scientific discoveries and new "understanding" has appeared in terms of these new conceptions of the world.

Examples of the above mentioned can be observed when we talk and think about life in terms of journeys *(He is without direction in his life. I'm at the crossroads in my life. She's gone through a lot in life.)*; about arguments in terms of war *(He attacked every weak point in my*

121

argument. His criticisms were right on target. I have never won an argument with him.); about theories in terms of buildings *(Is that the foundation for your theory? The theory needs more support. So far we have put together only the framework of the theory.)* and many others. A convenient short-hand way of capturing this view of metaphor is the following: *conceptual domain* (A) is *conceptual domain* (B), which is what is called **conceptual metaphor** (Kövecses 2002). A conceptual metaphor consists of two conceptual domains, in which one domain is understood in terms of another. Thus, for example, we have coherently organized knowledge about theories that we rely on in understanding buildings. So we need to distinguish conceptual metaphor from metaphorical linguistic expressions that come from language or terminology of the more concrete conceptual domain (i.e., domain B). Thus, the above mentioned expressions that have to do with *life, argument, theories* and that come from the domain of *journey* (for *life*), *war* (for *argument*), *buildings* (for *theories*) are linguistic metaphorical expressions, whereas conceptual metaphors that they display are: LIFE IS A JOURNEY; ARGUMENT IS WAR; THEORIES ARE BUILDINGS.

The two domains that participate in creating a conceptual metaphor have special names. The conceptual domain from which we draw metaphorical expressions to understand another conceptual domain is called **source domain**, while the conceptual domain that is understood this way is the **target domain** (Kövecses 2002).

Thus, life, arguments, theories are target domains, while journeys, wars, buildings are source domains. The target domain is the domain that we try to understand through the use of the source domain.

In conclusion, in the present article an attempt was made not only to focus the readers' attention on the cognitive function of metaphor, but also to show that the use of metaphors, metaphorical expressions can serve as a certain method in the language teaching process.

References:

1. Gibbs, R. and Steen, G. (1992) *Metaphor in Cognitive Linguistics.* Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
2. Taylor, J.R. and MacLaury, R.E. (1995) *Language and the Cognitive Construal of the World.* Berlin: Gruyter.
3. Adleran, M.J. (1975) *How to Read a Book.* New York: Simon and Schuster, Inc.
4. Kövecses, Z. (2002) *Metaphor.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Փոխաբերության կիրառումը որպես դասավանդման մեթոդ

Գրականության մեջ փոխաբերությունը հաճախ կիրառվում է որպես ոճական հնար՝ ընթերցողի վրա գեղագիտական ներգործություն ունենալու նպատակով: Այդուհանդերձ, ի շնորհիվ իր հիմքում ընկած ճանաչողական գործառույթի, փոխաբերությունը կարող է հաջողությամբ կիրառվել լեզվի ուսուծման պրոցեսում՝ սովորողի/ուսուցանողի ստեղծագործական միտքը զարգացնելու և լեզվի դասավանդման արդյունավետությունը բարձրացնելու նպատակով: