

The Role of Lexical Metaphor and Grammatical Metaphor in the Ibert Miller's Poem: "The Ear is an Organ Made for Love"

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ABSTRACT

This paper offers an exploration for the textual role of i.) lexical metaphor (LM), and ii.) grammatical metaphor (GM) in the linguistic realization of one poem written by the contemporary black American poet: Ethelbert Miller. Such an exploration has been done by identifying, assessing, and comparing the textual function of these two different types of metaphor in the realization of semantic message and the aesthetic function in the data. Data analysis shows that this poetic text makes use of LMs and GMs, a fact indicating that both types of metaphor undertake a constitutive text-creation role. In this particular text, LMs are found in all the sentences of the poem, and they outnumber GMs. Hence LMs are more contributory to the semantic load of the text as a whole; and to the delivery of the poet's message of lamenting the loss of hearing people everywhere speaking lovely language.

Keywords: *Lexical Metaphor, Grammatical Metaphor, Ibert Miller's Poem*

1. Introduction

This paper is the first attempt the researcher is aware of that offers an exploration for the textual role of i.) lexical, and ii.) grammatical metaphor in the linguistic realization of one poem written by the contemporary black American poet: Ethelbert Miller. Such an exploration has been done by identifying, assessing, and comparing the textual function of these two different types of metaphor in the realization of semantic message and the aesthetic function in the data.

2. Lexical Metaphor

In the theory of rhetoric, lexical metaphor (Hereafter: LM) is defined as "a figure of speech in which a name or a descriptive word or phrase (*the figure*) is transferred to an object or action (*the ground*) different from, but analogous to that to which it is literally applicable" (SOED: 2002, brackets added). The aim of the transferred analogy is to suggest a figurative likeness between the ground and the figure on the point of comparison.

(1)

All religions, arts, and sciences are branches of the same tree. (Albert Einstein, 1937: 9)

Example (1) above offers one instance for an LM, given the fact that religion, arts and sciences (the ground) are not literally "branches (the figure) of" the same "tree". By figuratively asserting that they are, Einstein uses the analogy between the branches stemming from one tree and the relatedness between religions, arts and sciences for the

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purpose of imparting the idea that the latter fields of knowledge stem from one and same root or origin in relation to each other.

Lexical metaphors offer a powerful tool for meaning-realization to all language users, especially poets who use them creatively and unconventionally.

3. Grammatical Metaphor

In the first edition of his book: *Introduction to Functional Grammar* (1985a), Halliday introduced for the first time the concept of Grammatical Metaphor (henceforth: GM). This same concept was subsequently enlarged by Martin (1992; 1993) and Martin and Rose (2003; 2008). According to Halliday (1985, 1994, 2003), a GM substitutes one **word class** or **grammatical structure** for another, resulting in a marked, compressed expression, which he considers to be the single most distinctive characteristic of written language.

(2)

a. *The fifth day saw them at the summit.*

a'. *On the fifth day they arrived at the summit.*

b. *Guarantee limited to refund of purchase price of goods.*

b'. *We guarantee only to refund the price for which the goods were purchased.*

c. *I don't suppose she came.*

c'. *She probably didn't come.*

(Halliday, 1985b: 51-2)

In (2) above, the metaphorical clauses (*a, b, c*) are GMs derived from the literal reworded clauses (*a', b', c'*) by representing one type of grammatical process in the grammar of another. The **processes** in (*a', b'*) are typically expressed in the English clause by the **verbal group** (*they arrived; we guarantee; the price for which the goods are purchased*); whereas in (*a, b*), they are expressed by the **nominal group** (*the fifth day saw; guarantee limited; purchase price of goods*), which typically denote **entities** rather than **processes**. Likewise in the clause of (2.c), the mental (cognitive) process of “not supposing” is used to express the modality of “probability”.

This means that GMs are marked expressions which depart from the norm by expressing meaning through a different wording at the interface between the grammar and the semantics – a process which offers a powerful resource to the overall meaning-making potential. Halliday (2003: 22-3) summarizes this process in the following terms:

A meaning that was originally construed by one kind of wording comes instead to be construed by another. So, for example, processes are congruently construed as verbs; in a *carwash*, however, a process is realized in the form of a noun. But nouns congruently construe entities, not processes; so something that started off as a ‘doing’, namely *wash*, is being reconstrued as if it was a ‘thing’.

Consequently, both LMs and GMs are meaning-productive, and that the essential difference between them is one of **realization**. LMs shift the wording to mean something else (e.g. the meaning of *rose* is metaphorically transferred to mean: *naturally beautiful*); whereas GMs transfer the meaning by expressing it with a different word class or a grammatical structure (e.g. the GM possessive structure: *Mary's laughter* is used instead of the typical target participant-plus-process structure: *Mary laughed*). In other words, an LM uses the same expression (e.g., *rose*) to realize a different content (*naturally beautiful*); whereas a GM expresses the same content (e.g. *Mary laughed*) by using a different expression (*Mary's laughter*) (Halliday, 2003: 22). It is important to note here that written language has a high lexical density and is packed with grammatical metaphors (Halliday, 2003: 132).

The identification of GMs always involves their textual **rewording** into the non-metaphorical versions; either directly – if the metaphorical form has become the norm – (e.g. *he has a long nose*, versus: *‘his nose is long’*), or by analyzing the clause; rewording it in congruent non-metaphorical form; then analyzing the reworded version (Halliday, 1985b: 51-2; 1992: 348).

In addition to their wide use in meaning creation, metaphorical expressions can reveal how the language-users understand the world, and their traditional conceptualization of it. Significantly, innovative poetic metaphors may enrich, widen, or transform traditional metaphors as well as creating novel ones (Lakoff and Turner, 1989: xii).

It is important to stress in this respect that all languages possess the same potential for re-construing reality in another form by offering a new perspective on experience through the metaphorical organization of meaning, hence the global drive towards social change, and towards more democratic formations of knowledge (Halliday, 2003: 132, 423).

4. Data

Given that this research-paper is specifically designed to deal with modern African American poetry of E. Ethelbert Miller, it follows then that data-selection should satisfy the definite requirements of: i. being a piece of poetry, ii. written by the contemporary African American poet: Ethelbert Miller (Born: 1950). Accordingly, the researcher has selected the poem entitled “*The Ear is an Organ Made for Love*” for the purpose of textual analysis since it satisfies all the requirements above.

The Ear is an Organ Made for Love

(for Me-K)

It was the language that left us first.

The Great Migration of words. When people

spoke they punched each other in the mouth.

There was no vocabulary for love. Women

became masculine and could no longer give 5

birth to warmth or a simple caress with their

lips. Tongues were overweight from profanity

and the taste of nastiness. It settled over cities

like fog smothering everything in sight. My

ears begged for camouflage and the chance 10

to go to war. Everywhere was the decay of

how we sound. Someone said it reminded

them of the time Sonny Rollins disappeared.

People spread stories of how the air would

never be the same or forgive. It was the end 15
of civilization and nowhere could one hear
the first notes of A Love Supreme. It was as
if John Coltrane had never been born.

The selected poem above has been published in 2010. It consists of eighteen blank verse lines, with the dedication: (*for Me-K*). Orthographically, the poet does not follow the traditional style of starting the first words of all his eighteen verse lines with a capital letter. Instead, the first words of only the verse lines that start new sentences are capitalized. In other words, the poet adapts prose punctuation system to verse.

As for what has inspired the poet to compose this poem, E. Ethelbert Miller explains:

I wrote my poem “The Ear Is An Organ Made For Love” last summer when my friend Me-K was visiting me from South Korea. Riding around the city together we listened to the voices of people passing us. Many of their conversations were filled with profanity and what I defined as ugliness. So sad to “hear” our young people losing their tongues. Where is the new music that will save our ears? Where are the conversations of hope? So, after a few days, I sat down and wrote my poem.

(Handal, 2011)

4.1 Data Analysis

4.1.1 Textual Rewording

As mentioned in section (3) above, the identification of GMs requires rewording the text into plain non-metaphorical language in order to facilitate the identification of GMS. Accordingly, The researcher has paraphrased the poem in the following prosaic terms:

“This poem is dedicated to my South Korean friend: Me-K.

The first thing that we, black Americans, have lost was that we no longer could speak the pure language of love. The beautiful words of the great numbers of black American family-members - who have collectively left their homes empty by migrating from the US Southern States northwards - could not be heard any more. Instead, when those people spoke, they punched each other on the mouth with their harmful words. The vocabulary that expressed love disappeared from our speech. Women lost their femininity and could no longer speak the language that gave warmth and soothing. Tongues became too heavy by the overweight of profanity and the taste of nastiness of foul speech. The overweight of this foul language, like the harmful heavy industrial fog, invaded the air of the cities and stifled everything that one could see. The poet’s ears implored for disguise and for the chance of going to war in order to escape hearing the invading foul language that occupied all the surroundings. The language of humanity as a representative of civilization decayed everywhere. Such a decay induced some people to say that the great living Jazz musician: Sonny Rollins must have disappeared. Other people told stories of how we, human beings, could never regain the lost purity of the air that conveys the language of love and beauty, nor the ability to forgive. Civilization has ended, and nobody could hear the spiritual sounds such as those of the first notes of the great jazz quartet: A Love Supreme. It seemed as if the beautiful sounds of John Coltrane’s jazz music had never been born.”

4.1.2 LMs

The textual rewording above shows that this poem spells out at least the following twelve lexical metaphors:

(3)

- a. The great loss of lovely words from human speech is likened to the Great Migration of more than six million black Americans from the rural US Southern States to the heavily-industrialized cities northwards.
- b. The act of uttering rough words in mutual speeches is likened to the act of punching the addressees on the mouth.
- c. Women's loss of the ability to generate love and warmth via tender speech is depicted as their transformation into masculinity; i.e. their loss of femininity.
- d. The act of "making" is treated as the act of "giving birth to".
- e. Too much use of foul language is pictured as being as harmful to human beings as the spreading pollution of (industrial) fog.
- f. "Fog" that spreads and eventually "settles over cities" is seen as "an act of invasion and occupation by an evil force".
- g. The use of love language is equated to the existence of "a living civilization".
- h. Resort to camouflage is likened to the act of striving in order not to be recognized by the encumbering foul language users who are depicted as an invading army from whom one needs to conceal oneself to avoid the harm of their foul language.
- i. Songs of the jazz singer and composer Sonny Rollins is equated with sweet language sounds.
- j. Breathing pure air is likened to hearing lovely speech.
- k. The first note of the jazz album: A Love Supreme is considered as the representative of spiritual beauty,
- l. Jazz music of John Coltrane is made a symbol for beautiful speech.

4.1.2.1 Textual Role of LMs

The analysis offered in the previous subsection allows one to immediately discern the fact that four LMs (nos. 1, 8, 10 and 11) out of a total of twelve LMs (i.e. at 34%) in whole poem are actually based on events and personalities strictly related to African American culture. This evidence means that LMs can be culture-indicative, first; and that culture provides a rich collective source for image-creation from which the poet can borrow.

Moreover, LMs - especially those related to certain proper names - may transform into popular social symbols through the passage of time. So is the case in relation to the symbolization of the referents of such proper names as *Sonny Rollins*, *A Love Supreme*, and *John Coltrane* mentioned in the data.

In addition, and because analogies are often related to novel image-creation characterizing all memorable poetry, GMs can serve the function of offering new and succinct ways for the expression of meaning that enrich speech, as is the case with the use of the lexical items related to *punching*, *ear-begging*, and *camouflage* in the data. Such an office can increase the potentiality of the semantic load expressible by the verse lines, and the effectiveness in delivering the poetic message in less and more picturesque words.

4.1.3 GMS

At least seven GMs are identified in the data, wherein the dynamic “grammatical processes” are expressed as static “entities”. These are offered as (a) in the list hereunder; immediately followed by their non-metaphorical versions in (b).

(4)

- I.
 - a. *It was the language that left us first.*
 - b. We quit using (lovely) language.
- II.
 - a. *There was no vocabulary for love.*
 - b. We no longer used love-words in our speech.
- III.
 - a. *Tongues were overweight from profanity.*
 - b. Profane language became heavily used in speech.
- IV.
 - a. *Everywhere was the decay of how we sound.*
 - b. Language decay spread everywhere.
- V.
 - a. *The air would never be the same.*
 - b. The air changed forever.
- VI.
 - a. *The air would never ... forgive.*
 - b. People would no longer forgave.
- VII.
 - a. *It was the end of civilization.*
 - b. Civilization ended.

4.1.3.1 Textual Role of GMs

The textual analysis of the data has revealed that GMs are closely associated to the two aesthetic functions of foregrounding and personification. In the first function, the deviant grammatical structures are used in the text to highlight its thematic structure.

(5)

It was the language that left us first.

The cleft clause used in (5) above stresses its subject NP *the language* by postposing it first (Cf. Quirk *et al.* 1985: 504). Second, the conceptual entity *language* is given the attributes of some animate, moving entity that can “come” and “go”. This means that the structural foregrounding is fused with **personification** in this key verse line. Third, both the foregrounded and personified NP phrase of *language* are pivotal to the theme of the whole poem, which is the decay of lovely language due to the invasion of foul one. In fact, the meaning of **language** in this text encompasses only that tender and beautiful language of love. The opposite type of language is deemed to be “punching”, not “true speech”.

Besides, the textual analysis reveals another linguistic phenomenon concerning GMs - not mentioned in the literature so far, to my knowledge - and that is the possibility of its fusion with LM. This phenomena stems from the

linguistic fact that the structural incongruence inherently linked with GMs may well involve LMs appearing in the clause as well. In this case, the overlap between the incongruent clausal structure and the transferred lexical meaning can intensify the poetic meaning.

(6)

The air would never forgive.

In the example above, the analyst can recognize first the use of the grammatical metaphor in which the **process** of “forgiving” is ascribed to an **entity**: “the air”. Secondly, this forgiving entity is non-human; i.e., the non-human entity is personified. Thirdly, this non-human entity itself is a lexical metaphor in that it contextually represent here human beings who have lost the ability to produce lovely and tender language, and not the air that has changed from transforming the real language of love and forgiveness to its opposite.

The complex fusion of metaphors above is in fact further intensified by the compound structuring of one metaphor over and above the other in what can be termed as a “embedded metaphor piling”.

(7)

Tongues were overweight from profanity.

In the single verse-line above, the word “tongues” is used to denote i) languages; ii) the human muscular organs with their wide range of purposes; iii) and personified existential entities that can manifest the process of “becoming”, “changing”, and transformation. As for the word: “overweight”, it is used to convey the meaning of “overusing” profane language. Thus, speech profanity, i.e. the use of obscene language, is propounded as an entity that possesses “physical weight”.

These results beg the pertinent question: why are GMs tied up with aesthetic functions of foregrounding and personification? The answer to this question lies in the linguistic fact that all share the common lexicogrammatical feature of being deviations from the norm. In other words, the common office of deviation renders them all closely linked together.

4.1.4 Roles of LMS and GMs: Comparison

Data analysis shows that this poetic text makes use of LMs and GMs, a fact indicating that both types of metaphor undertake a constitutive text-creation role. In this particular text, LMs are found in all the sentences of the poem, and they outnumber GMs. Hence LMs are more contributory to the semantic load of the text as a whole; and to the delivery of the poet’s message of lamenting the loss of hearing people everywhere speaking lovely language. GMs are particularly used in clauses that show grammatical foregrounding and personification; they also co-occur in fusion with LMs.

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