On Linguistic Classification of Metaphorical Expressions
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0. Introduction

Recent flourishing research in metaphorical expressions (which include not only metaphor itself but other figurative expressions) has two main purposes. One is to reveal the nature of metaphor, that is, to ask what is the inner construction of metaphor. The other is to interpret the meaning or content which is expressed by metaphor. In this paper, I will attempt to classify some metaphorical expressions as one preparatory stage to carry out these purposes. It is by this kind of basic research that we can make a fruitful study of metaphorical expressions.

1. A brief survey of previous studies

Bickerton (1969:34-5) argues that many scholars of Rhetoric, instead of trying to elucidate and develop Aristotle's cryptic definition of metaphor, treated a metaphor as an ornament of rhetoric. He also indicates that Blair, who defined a metaphor as none other than a comparison that is expressed in abridged form, represents this attitude. Matthews (1971:423) points out the defect of this similarity theory. For example, in the sentence 'Macbeth murders sleep', he says, we cannot indicate what is similar to what. This traditional theory in Rhetoric cannot explain how a reader or a listener understands metaphor, nor distinguish metaphor from non-metaphor. Seemingly it may be true that a metaphor is a kind of comparison based on similarity, but a little further consideration will reveal that this idea is superficial and cannot grasp the nature of metaphor.

Ullmann (1962:212-20) considers metaphorical expressions as exhibiting semantic changes, and he classifies them into metaphor and metonymy. The former is further divided into four subclasses.

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{Similarity of senses} = \text{Metaphor} \\
&\quad \text{Animal metaphors} \\
&\quad \text{From concrete to abstract} \\
&\text{Contiguity of senses} = \text{Metonymy} \\
&\quad \text{Synaesthetic metaphors}
\end{align*}
\]
It is tenable to distinguish metaphor from metonymy according to the difference of their semantic properties. Nevertheless, the reason for subdividing metaphors into four is not explained, nor is their relationship clear. It will be said that there remains some influence of Rhetoric. According to Leech (1969:148-9), one of the reasons why a metaphorical interpretation is not wholly ad hoc is that any language has 'RULES OF TRANSFERENCE', which have a special function that derives one sense of a word from another. In other words, 'The figurative sense F may replace the literal sense L if F is related to L in such-and-such a way'. One of these rules can be shown as follows.

\[ F = 'the work(s) of L' \]

I love Bach. (= I love the work(s) of Bach.)

This kind of metonymic expression may be observed in many languages. However, it will be difficult to strictly formulate such a rule, because we have to take account of various factors. For example, unless we know that 'Bach' is a name of a composer, the above rule fails to be applicable, although Leech says that 'Bach' refers not to the man but to the music.

Of course, it is true that there appears a certain change or transference of meaning in metaphorical expressions as Ullmann and Leech suggest, but it is not so easy to specify its nature.

Bickerton (1969:38-9) claims that the expression 'iron discipline' is acceptable because an attribute 'hardness' is attached to 'iron'. On the other hand, 'steel discipline' is unacceptable because such an attribute is not given to 'steel'. In this explanation, he suggests, the sign marked by attaching an attribute becomes a metaphor. Then he should have explained why a certain attribute is given to some specific signs and not to others. Nida (1975:127) argues that in metaphorical expressions there is a diagnostic component and this component is reinterpreted. For example, in the sentence 'The idea struck me', the verb 'struck' is reinterpreted from a literal meaning 'sudden physical impact' to a metaphorical meaning 'sudden psychological impact'. In his explanation, as in Bickerton's, there remains the problem about the specification of a feature that is to be reinterpreted.

This theory of the assignment or reinterpretation of features
is concerned with the internal structure of metaphorical expressions. When a certain specific semantic feature is assigned or reinterpreted, however, we have to explain the nature of such a specific feature. Moreover, there remains the problem of clarifying the system of such an assignment or reinterpretation.

Thorne (1970:192) applies transformational generative grammar model to a stylistic study and claims that deviant sentences violating selectional restrictions are relevant to the essential recognition of poetry. Matthews (1971:424) utilizes Thorne's idea and suggests that the necessary and sufficient conditions to distinguish metaphor from non-metaphor depend upon the violation of selectional restriction. Metaphor, in his conception, is understood analogically from the counterpart which does not violate the restriction in question.¹)

It is not so simple and easy to distinguish metaphor from non-metaphor according to this criterion and to understand metaphor in this way. On this problem, there is a further consideration. I will not deal with it in this paper, although I have my own opinion about it (cf. Sakamoto, 1982). I shall confine myself to the problem of the essential classification of metaphorical expressions.

2. Horizontal and Vertical axes

One of the shortcomings in the previous studies is that they do not recognize the essential distinction between metaphorical expressions. It is very important, I think, to study metaphor in relation to other metaphorical expressions. To begin with, we have to clarify what is the similarity and the difference between them. And then, we should go further into the consideration of metaphor within the context of a language community. In this paper, I will present two axes of metaphorical expressions, a 'horizontal axis' and a 'vertical axis'. The former is a synchronic one, and consists of three basic types. They are metaphor, metonymy and simile. The latter is a diachronic one and consists of three main types. They are live, moribund and dead metaphors.²)

2.1. Horizontal axis I: Metaphor and Metonymy

Suppose that we have a metaphor 'sea horse' and a metonymy
'white sail', both representing 'ship'.

(1) The ship is a sea horse.
(2) The ship is a white sail.

We cannot differentiate (1) from (2) according to the syntactic properties of 'sea horse' and 'white sail' that can both be inserted into the construction 'The ship is a '. Their difference depends upon the semantic properties of their subjects and predicates. (1) is acceptable because metaphor joins two linguistic elements which originally do not have any semantic relation. On the other hand, (2) becomes anomalous because metonymy joins those which have some semantic relation. It follows from the above considerations that metaphor and metonymy should be distinguished by semantic criterion. Thus, we can express the relationship between (1) and (2) as follows.

\[
\text{Not-X} = \text{'sea horse'} : \text{Metaphor} \\
\text{X} \rightarrow \text{Next-X} = \text{'white sail'} : \text{Metonymy} \quad \text{X} = \text{'ship'}
\]

As has been said in Rhetoric, X and Not-X may be connected in terms of certain similarity. When there is similarity, however, there also is non-similarity. X and Not-X could be related on the basis of similarity or non-similarity, because similarity presupposes non-similarity. We should not confuse similarity with identity.

The poets in Dadaism or Surrealism created the very versification that joins two words which are least connected with each other, in other words, which are least similar to each other. This is an experimental versification that puts together two different objects in a sudden and striking fashion regardless of its result. When metaphors are used as a method too much, the inner structure of the poetic world may well be destroyed owing to the exaggerated remoteness of meaning. That is why the attempt 'écriture automatique' in Surrealism came to an end as an incomplete versification. Nevertheless, it came to be recognized that a metaphor in poetry is not a mere comparison between two objects based on similarity since that time.

The connection between X and Next-X is restricted to a narrow domain, because this metonymic connection depends upon some
semantic relation. Of course, it is difficult to clarify what the nature of this semantic relation is. Nonetheless, we can point out some special relations: spatial or temporal relations, whole and part relations, content and container relations, etc. (cf. Ullmann, 1962:218-20).

Jakobson (1956:90) also suggests that metaphor and metonymy have basically different natures. His study on aphasia tells us that in all aphasic disturbances either the ability of selection and substitution or that of combination and contexture is destroyed. These two types of aphasic disturbances are compared to metaphor and metonymy on the one hand, and to paradigmatic and syntagmatic dimensions on the other. This can be illustrated as follows.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Selection &amp; Substitution</th>
<th>= Paradigmatic dimension</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Metaphor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Metonymy</td>
<td>= Syntagmatic dimension</td>
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<td>Combination &amp; Contexture</td>
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The opposition of these two basic types is further discussed in relation to literature, paintings, cinema, etc. From these considerations, Jakobson says that it is most suitable to use metaphors for poetry and metonymies for prose.

2.2. Horizontal axis II: Metaphor and Simile

Traditionally metaphor and simile have been said to be distinguished from each other whether the words 'like', 'as', etc. appear or not. Then let us consider the following examples.

(3) John is a student.
(4) John is like a student.

For these two sentences, we can give both literal and metaphorical interpretations respectively.

(3-a) John is really a student.
(3-b) John is metaphorically a student.
(4-a) John is really a student.
(4-b) John is metaphorically a student.

There will be no problem about the interpretations (3-a) and (4-b). A context which gives the interpretation (3-b) is, for example, 'John is really a working man, but still preserves some
characteristics of a student'. (4-a) is the conjecture that is made by his appearance or attitude. If (3) and (4) have the same interpretation, namely (3-a) and (4-a) or (3-b) and (4-b), the only difference between them is the existence of the linguistic element 'like'. Let us call such an element an 'indicator'\(^3\). We should notice, however, that not all the expressions that have these indicators could receive metaphorical interpretations as is shown in (4-a).

Ullmann (1962:213) and Leech (1969:151) recognize three basic elements in metaphorical expressions. They are a 'tenor' about which we are talking, a 'vehicle' by which we are depicting a tenor, and a 'ground' which is the feature a tenor and a vehicle have in common. And then we would add an 'indicator' to them which indicates that a given expression is metaphorical. Setting up four notional elements of metaphorical expressions, we can distinguish the following five types of metaphorical expressions.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(A)tenor</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(B)vehicle</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(C)ground</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(D)indicator</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Examples

1. \textit{I wandered lonely as a cloud} : Wordsworth  
   (A) \hspace{1cm} \textit{my love's like a red, red rose} : Robert Burns  
   (A) \hspace{1cm} \textit{Love is a sickness full of woes,}  
   (A) \hspace{1cm} \textit{All remedies refusing:}  
   (C) \hspace{1cm} \textit{Shame is the Showl of Pink} : Emily Dickinson  
   (A) \hspace{1cm} \textit{The baby-carriage that goes on running down the blue shell}  
   (B) \hspace{1cm} \textit{Many have perished, more will} : Kunio Tsukamoto

Simile-1 has the most clear construction as a metaphorical expression. When the four elements are all manifested, enough implements for interpreting that expression fall into readers' hands. Hence the burden of the reader to understand this type
will be considerably lessened.

Simile-2 lacks a ground unlike Simile-1. The case is very different depending on whether a ground appears or not. In this example, the reader himself has to find out the ground in order to understand why 'my love' is 'a rose'. Furthermore, in [1], the indicator 'as' cannot be deleted, while, in [2], it is possible to delete the indicator 'like'. In other words, an indicator does not play such an important role in Simile-2. Thus, this type of simile is close to metaphor in its nature.

Metaphor-1 lacks an indicator, but has a ground like Simile-1. In the example [3], 'All remedies refusing' provides the ground why 'sickness' becomes a vehicle. As is shown in this case, when a ground is expressed in some way, the expression becomes easy to interpret. The burden of the reader to understand this type, like Simile-1, is not so heavy. We might say that this type of metaphor is akin to simile in its nature.

Metaphor-2 consists of a tenor and a vehicle, and this is the typical metaphor. This type has the nature that we observed in the section 2.1. In the example [4], the status of the phrase 'of Pink' may not be so clear. It is possible to identify this phrase as a ground, as in the example [3]. Nevertheless, it is too superficial to connect 'Shame' with 'Showl' by the color 'pink'. In this case, 'Showl' as an instrument to conceal something plays an important role, while, 'of Pink' plays only a subordinate role.

Metaphor-3 is a symbolic use of a language. The difference between metaphor and symbol is unclear. The term 'symbol' is also employed to indicate phenomena outside of a language. I will restrict the term 'metaphor' to refer to phenomena within a language. In this type, only a vehicle appears. Thus, the reader must supply by himself all the other elements in order to understand the given expression. Concerning the example [5], Kitajima (1974:15) says that 'blue shell' is a metaphor of 'life' and 'baby-carriage' becomes a metaphor of 'history' that leads to death while carrying a life. If we admit his explanation, what is the ground that connects these tenors with vehicles? We can point out, from the context, that 'blue shell' is the one that is perished and 'baby-carriage' is the one that perishes. We should notice, however, that the determination of a ground may logically precede that of a
tenor, as Leech (1969:157) suggests. Not because 'blue shell' is a metaphor of 'life' does it become what is perished, but because 'blue shell' is what is perished, it becomes a metaphor of 'life'.

From the above considerations, we can say that Simile-1 is a typical simile, Simile-2 is a metaphor-like simile, Metaphor-1 is a simile-like metaphor, Metaphor-2 is a typical metaphor and Metaphor-3 is a symbolic metaphor. Metaphor and simile could be classified based on the existence of an indicator. Basically they could be distinguished by this formal criterion, although this is not always the case. And also it should be noticed that an indicator marks the difference of categorical levels between a tenor and a vehicle. For example, the sentence 'The ship is like a sea horse' presents 'ship' and 'sea horse' as belonging to different categorical levels. On the other hand, in (1) 'The ship is a sea horse', these two elements are expressed on the same categorical level.

From the point of view of the interpreter, a ground plays an important role to understand metaphorical expressions. Thus, Metaphor-1 is easier to interpret than Simile-2. Simile-1, which has all the four elements, is the easiest to interpret, while, Metaphor-3, which has only one element, is the most difficult. Of course, the facility of interpretation cannot be decided uniquely. Nonetheless, it will be generally assumed that the more elements are manifested the easier the expression becomes. When the number of elements manifested is equal, as in the case of [2] and [3], the expression which has a ground (i.e. [3]) has the higher degree of facility.

2.3. Vertical axis : Live, Moribund and Dead metaphors

Jespersen (1922:432) claims that many metaphors have lost their freshness and vividness in the course of ages, and they have become dead metaphors which no one regards as metaphors any longer. It is true that metaphor represents the productivity that is essential to a language, but this productivity, when fixed to a language community, turns out to be an un-productivity. The expressions which have lost this productivity are called 'dead metaphors', 'idioms' or 'clichés'. It is not clear what kind of expressions these exactly refer to. In this paper, I will treat all those expressions as dead metaphors which were originally metaphors but cannot be
regarded as metaphors by almost all the members of a language community at a given time. Then we can set up a 'live metaphor' on the opposite pole to a dead metaphor. In our consciousness, whether a given expression is perceived as a live or dead metaphor is a matter of degree. Hence, we have to concern ourselves with the degree of metaphoricalness, which means 'to be metaphorical'. This term covers all the three basic types of metaphorical expressions, i.e. metaphor, metonymy and simile. In this paper, however, the investigation will be confined to metaphors.

Based on the attribute-assignment distinction, Bickerton (1969: 48) divides language expressions into the following four categories.

(i) 'literal' expressions (iron bar, black cat, etc.)
(ii) 'permanent' assignments (iron discipline, yellow rat, etc.)
(iii) 'temporary' assignments (green thought, steel couch, etc.)
(iv) 'meaningless' expressions (steel-mine, procrastination drinks quadruplicity, etc.)

He says that (iii) is usually called a metaphor. (iii) and (iv) are not different in their nature, but if it is justified by some context, (iv) changes to (iii). This is a synchronic change. It is natural to assume a change from (iii) to (ii). This is a diachronic change from a live to dead metaphor. That is to say, such a distinction of categories is not an absolute one, not because it is difficult to distinguish between these degrees of metaphoricalness, but because it is essentially impossible to do so. As a spoken language is continuous in its nature, so is the degree of metaphoricalness. In order to cope with this continuousness, we need the aid of the conception 'graded acceptability' as Leech (1974:213) suggests. He shows the case in which animal names are used metaphorically to refer to a man as follows.

```
    pig        MOST ACCEPTABLE(?)
    [rat
        ...
    platypus
        [stegosaurs LEAST ACCEPTABLE(?]

(5) Sam is an absolute
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He argues that if we take a metaphor as one kind of semantic transfer, a dead metaphor could be said to be a metaphor that has
gone all the way towards complete assimilation and a metaphor that
is on the way to complete assimilation might be called a 'moribund
metaphor'. It is possible to summarize the above two scholars'
representations as follows.

(i) literal expressions
    \begin{align*}
    & \text{live metaphors } \quad \text{MOST METAPHORICAL} \\
    & \text{moribund metaphors} \\
    & \text{dead metaphors } \quad \text{LEAST METAPHORICAL}
    \end{align*}

(ii) meaningless expressions

Literal and meaningless expressions are taken to be different
from metaphorical ones. A study about the relationship of these
three types of expressions will be needed, but in this paper, it
is sufficient to point out that there exists the degree of meta-
phoricalness between live, moribund and dead metaphors. Needless
to say, we can recognize this degree of metaphoricalness with
respect to metonymies and similes as well as metaphors, although
we have been concerned with metaphors alone.

3. Summary

The previous studies observed in the section.1 can be
summarized as follows.

\begin{align*}
& \text{Rhetoric} \quad \text{(1) Comparison based on similarity} \\
& \quad \quad \quad \text{(2) Change or transference of meaning} \\
& \text{Linguistics} \quad \text{(3) Assignment or reinterpretation of features} \\
& \quad \quad \quad \text{(4) Clash of features owing to rule violation}
\end{align*}

For the purpose of making the essential distinction between
metaphorical expressions, we set up horizontal and vertical axes.
Along the former axis, metaphor and metonymy are distinguished by
semantic criteria, and metaphor and simile by formal criteria.
These three types of metaphorical expressions can be said to be in
complementary distribution. That is to say, more than two types of
them never appear at once. A metaphorical expression which is both
metonymy and simile at the same time, for example, 'The ship is
like a white sail', never occurs. On the other hand, synaesthetic
metaphors, anthropomorphic metaphors, etc. are associated with a
special semantic field and they appear as metaphor, metonymy or
simile. For example, 'a sweet voice' is a synaesthetic metaphor,
'a pink tape' is a synaesthetic metonymy which means in Japanese 'a erotic music or voice that is recorded on a tape', and 'There comes your voice like a fragrance of lily' (Haruo Satô, Junjô-shishû) is a synaesthetic simile.\textsuperscript{5} In this way, these three basic types of metaphorical expressions are independent of each other, so they are in marked contrast with the other types of metaphorical expressions that take one of these basic types.

Along the latter axis, we considered the degree of metaphoricalness. From the point of view of the language user in a society, there are three types of metaphor. On the one hand, we have live metaphors filled with freshness and vividness, as Jespersen suggests. One representative of them is a poetic metaphor. On the other hand, there are dead metaphors which have lost their productivity as metaphors. One of them will be called idioms.\textsuperscript{6} Between these two extremes, there are intermediate metaphors called moribund metaphors. We cannot, of course, classify these types definitely, because their distinction is only a gradual one. It is important, however, to recognize this gradual distinction between metaphorical expressions in a language community.

From the considerations in this paper, we can present the following diagram.

\begin{center}
\begin{tikzpicture}
\node (metonymy) at (0,0) {metonymy};
\node (metaphor) at (1,0) {metaphor};
\node (simile) at (2,0) {simile};
\node (semantic) at (0,-1) {semantic};
\node (formal) at (1,-1) {formal};
\node (criteria) at (2,-1) {criteria};
\node (live) at (1,-2) {live metaphors};
\node (moribund) at (1,-2.5) {moribund metaphors};
\node (dead) at (1,-3) {dead metaphors};
\draw[->] (metonymy) -- (metaphor);
\draw[->] (metaphor) -- (simile);
\draw[->] (simile) -- (semantic);
\draw[->] (semantic) -- (formal);
\draw[->] (formal) -- (criteria);
\draw[->] (live) -- (moribund) node[midway,above] {gradual};
\draw[->] (moribund) -- (dead);
\end{tikzpicture}
\end{center}

4. Concluding remarks

I would not say that the classification proposed in this paper is complete and covers all types of metaphorical expressions. There remain many problems untouched. Nevertheless, I believe that this study can shed some light on the fundamental recognition of metaphorical expressions. From this basic study, there arise various important questions, e.g. how to distinguish metaphor from non-metaphor, how to interpret metaphors, how to consider metaphor in relation to other types of expressions, etc. I hope that this paper may be a starting-point for these further investigations.
Notes

1) Chomsky (1965:149) suggests this analogical method based on selectional restriction, although he does not present the actual system in these lines. Leech (1969:153-6) provides the actual procedure of how to analyse metaphors in relation to their literal counterparts.

2) These terms themselves are metaphorically expressed. For many other alternative terms labelled on these metaphors, see Black (1979:25-7).

3) Botha (1968:206) calls such an element a 'comparative particle'.

4) Levin (1977:30-2) calls these processes 'aggrammartization', which means that prima facie deviant expressions come to be brought into the range of the grammar.

5) For the detailed consideration about synaesthetic metaphors in relation to these three basic types of metaphors, see Sakamoto (1983).

6) On the problem concerning idioms and metaphors, see Sakamoto (1982).

References


