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## Metaphor in Funny Language

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### **Abstract:**

This article highlights different ways of metaphorical use in language and shows its potential in attracting the readers' attention. Language as a biological being lives its own life witnessing never-ending changes: falling outs and newly built elements. We enrich our language not only by new elements but also by new styles and reusing of existing sources. One of these ways which makes language more alive and active is metaphor. Metaphor nowadays is found in all the fields of life, education, medicine, policy and everyday life. Metaphor, in fact, reflects the relationship of language to culture and the world of ideas. Language, on the one hand, is a repository of culture; the traditions, proverbs, and knowledge of our ancestors. On the other hand, language is the mirror of the world of ideas. People reflect their new ideas in using language in new ways, even such devices as paintings and riddles. Metaphor has many shapes and is found in spoken and written language, graphics, cartoon or caricature, riddles, jokes and paintings to express novel shades of meanings, e.g., metaphor in newspaper photos, magazines or even in advertisements attracts the attention of readers and are memorized for a long time. Metaphoric use is also a way of enjoying the readers. It is used for both real and logical aims such as; warnings, advises, or invitations ...etc.

## المجاز في اللغة المضحكة

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### **الملخص:**

هذا المقال يسلط الضوء على طرق مختلفة للاستعمال المجازي في اللغة ويظهر إمكاناته في جذب انتباه القراء. اللغة ككيان بيولوجي يعيش حياته الخاصة، تشهد تغييرات لا تنتهي؛ فالسقوط والعناصر التي بنيت حديثاً، نحن نثري لغتنا ليس فقط بعناصر جديدة، ولكن أيضاً من خلال أساليب جديدة، وإعادة استخدام المصادر الموجودة. واحدة من هذه الطرق التي تجعل اللغة أكثر حيوية ونشطة هي الاستعارة. إذ تم العثور على المجاز في الوقت الحاضر في جميع مجالات الحياة والتعليم والطب والسياسة والحياة اليومية. والمجاز في الواقع، يظهر علاقة اللغة بالثقافة وعالم الأفكار. فاللغة، من ناحية، هي مستودع للثقافة؛ والتقاليد، والأمثال المعرفة من أسلافنا. ومن ناحية أخرى، فإن اللغة هي مرآة عالم الأفكار، إذ يظهر الآخرون أفكارهم الجديدة في استخدام اللغة بطرق جديدة، حتى عبر الأجهزة، مثل اللوحات والأحاجي. والمجاز له عدد من الأشكال، ووجد في اللغة المنطوقة والمكتوبة والرسومات والرسوم المتحركة أو الكاريكاتير والأحاجي والنكات واللوحات للتعبير عن ظلال جديدة من المعاني، على سبيل المثال، الاستعارة في صور الصحف والمجلات، أو حتى في الإعلانات، تجتذب انتباه القراء، وهي حفظت لمدة طويلة. الاستخدام المجازي هو أيضاً وسيلة للاستمتاع بالقراء. يتم استخدامه لكل من الأهداف الحقيقية والمنطقية مثل؛ تحذيرات، ينصح، أو دعوات ... الخ.

## 1- Introduction

The proverb 'A change is as good as a rest', shows that changing is an important principle in life. In everyday life, people try to make new things get adjusted to their life in changing the routine style that they already are used to. At home, from time to time, house wives try to change the style of sitting in the living room, new decoration or paintings cover the walls of the rooms. All these habits come by nature because human beings are new pattern-seeking creatures.

In language as well, people try to vary their styles in speaking or writing by finding new ways or colours for their daily speech. Speakers always search for what is new and unexpected in their speech. For variety in language, speakers look forward to two important principles in their speech; expectation and surprise, by means of something unexpected or unusual to attract the attention of the listeners. The principles of expectation and surprise have a great deal with figures of speech which in turn, much depend on the deviation of the normal patterns of language and arise the surprise of the reader or the listener.

The relationship between 'expectation' and 'surprise', on the one hand, and the principle of 'attractiveness', on the other hand, makes those two principles important in language variation in different fields e.g., teaching, learning, advertising, puzzles or jokes. This article treats metaphor as an effective and productive figure of speech with ability of blending two different ideas together to make new one.

The structure of the paper is as follows: The next section gives a brief overview of metaphor and different ways of structuring metaphorical expressions by using nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs. The applications of metaphors in several fields of language e.g., riddles, jokes and advertisements will be the concern of the third section. The fourth i.e., the last section presents some concluding remarks.

## 2. Theoretical and Structural Background

This section is going to introduce a theoretical background of how metaphors can be structured. The description will help to understand the machinery allowing speakers to produce novel and effective metaphors by using some strategies related to constructing metaphors from nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs.

### 2.1. Metaphorical Language

Metaphorical language history can be traced back to very old ages. Metaphors can be found in the Bible, the Qur'an, and other heavenly Books. Also it is easy to find metaphors in the writings and speeches of old poets, thinkers, and writers all over the world and in different languages. For example the idea of metaphor can be traced back to the oldest Sumerian writings, the Epic of Gilgamesh:

*(1) My friend, the swift mule, fleet wild ass of the mountain, panther*

*of the wilderness, after we joined together and went up into the mountain, fought the Bull of Heaven and killed it, and overwhelmed Humbaba, who lived in the Cedar Forest, now what is this sleep that has seized you? — (Trans. Kovacs, 1989)*

In the above example, the friend is compared to a mule, a wild donkey, and a panther is used to indicate that the speaker sees traits from these animals in his friend (A comparison between two or more unlike objects).

In the Poetics of Aristotle around (335 BC), metaphor was defined as: *'the application of a strange term either transferred from the genus and applied to the species or from the species and applied to the genus, or from one species to another or else by analogy.'*

Metaphor combines two terms, as I. A. Richards called them 'topic' and 'vehicle' to achieve the goal of understanding of one idea by another simpler one. The literal object which evokes the comparison is called the topic and the object which describes it is called the vehicle. The latter one is the term used metaphorically. These two terms have a relationship called 'ground'. So these two things or ideas must have similar character between them. The same explanation of metaphor was introduced by other writers as well e.g., Lakoff and Johnson but they used different terms. For Lakoff and Johnson (1980), metaphors take an idea and link it to another for better understanding and experiencing a concept 'target domain' (topic) in terms of another one 'source domain' (vehicle).

Since the focus of the of the present study is to identify and discuss the use of metaphors in funny language, the study will now try to introduce in the next paragraphs the way by which language users can shape their metaphors from nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs.

### **2.1.1. Noun-based metaphors**

Knowing the way of structuring metaphor is important to be introduced in this section as, it will be the base for the readers to know how to create new metaphorical expressions and how to use them in funny language which is the concern of the next section. Using nouns to create metaphors is a familiar way for language users. There are various ways by which language users can create metaphorical nouns. The main and the easy way to create metaphorical nouns is to produce the noun-noun metaphors by using linking verb (be) with a "Predicate Noun" sentence. For example, in the conceptual metaphor "TIME IS MONEY", in such a sentence, the linking verb "is" connects "time" to the noun that defines it, "money". This is an example of a Linking Verb with a Predicate Noun sentence. The noun "time" is in the predicate of the sentence, and "money" renames time; therefore, "time" is the Predicate Noun. Thus we can say that nouns are the most common form of metaphor in an implicit subject-object relationship even there was no real noun. Let's examine the next five examples:

(2) John **rains** all the guests at the party with attractive words. (John is a

cloud)

(3) John **drowns** all his revivals in the argument. (John is a sea)

(4) John was **barking** all the way. (John is a dog)

(5) John's mind needs to be **formatted**. (John is a computer)

(6) John walks **sheepishly**. (John is sheep)

In the above examples, although there were no real noun metaphors in all the sentences, we can understand the noun metaphor because it is the base for all metaphors.

Using nouns as metaphors is a kind of creativity, and in this sense we have to distinguish between noun productivity and noun creativity. Bauer following Lyons defines productivity as a rule-governed innovation, as opposed to creativity, which is said to be rule changing (Bauer (1983: 63).

### 2.1.2. Verb-based metaphors

Many verbs used in everyday speech are metaphors. Thus "cutting someone off", although commonly used, does not mean actual cutting. Speakers can create metaphorical verbs by using an alternative description of an action to add new meaning to the replaced verb. In other words, speakers sometimes use verbs which have more exaggerated meanings than others to describe actions. One may use the following utterances for threatening:

(7) I will kill you, I will cut your head.

The verbs in these utterances don't give the real meaning of 'kill' or 'cut' but instead they express the meaning of (to beat someone hard). Another way of creating metaphorical verbs is by using the verbs or their meanings with the undoer, which is often an inanimate thing. In this way the real action of the verb will be understood as if it was done by an inanimate thing which can hardly be the real doer of that action but it will make language more active. Let's examine the following example:

(8) The knife cuts my finger.

A deep look at this sentence will show that there is more than one metaphorical use in this sentence. The first one is the use of the verb (cut) as a metaphorical meaning for the real meaning (injure) as we explain above. The second metaphor is the use of the inanimate instrument (knife) as a subject for the verb 'cut'. It is known that a knife cannot cut things by itself without a doer. What is happening here is, the real action of cutting was understood as if it was done by its undoer 'knife' and this is logically wrong but metaphorically it is true. People use their mental ability and cultural background to understand metaphors such as the above one. The same case is correct with the following sentences:

(9) The king built the palace.

(10) The president built a bridge.

(11) The prime minister killed the terrorists.

(12) The explosion killed ten persons.

In the first sentence it is known that a king cannot build a palace by alone. What he did only, he gave the orders of building that palace. In all the other sentences the subject is not the real doer of the action but people understand the real meaning through the metaphorical meaning.

Another familiar way of creating metaphorical verbs is by using animal actions as verbs with human beings, as can be seen in:

(13) He was barking all the way. (Like a dog)

(14) He was warbling in the party. (Like a bird)

Dealing with human beings as instruments or machines also is considered as a way of creating metaphorical verbs as in the following sentences;

(15) His wife formats his mind. (He changes his mind and decisions)

(16) His mind doesn't work. (He cannot think properly)

(17) I will take a big tractor to plow the fertile fields of his mind.

(18) Don't speak with him; he'll take the word out of your mouth.

(19) They freeze all her abilities.

Thus, metaphorical verbs add depth to descriptions of actions. They also give more explanation than what the usual norms of language can do. They can express a lot of meanings in a short sentence like the following sentence by George Eliot: "Wear a smile and have friends; wear a scowl and have wrinkles."

### 2.1.3 Adjective-based metaphors

Metaphorically used adjectives describe metaphorical nouns and provide additional meaning to them. Some metaphorically used adjectives make a connection between a noun being described (tenor or target) and the thing we use to describe it (vehicle or source). When the noun is a metaphor in a sentence, the adjective is also very likely to be in the same sense as the metaphor. In other words, when speakers use nouns as metaphors, they most likely enhance the meanings of these metaphorically used nouns with metaphorical adjectives which have the same or near meaning. The use of metaphorically used nouns sometimes affects the use of other adjectives that describe the noun metaphor. When speakers use nouns (such as spider, lion or computer) as metaphors for describing things or people, they will imagine that these things or people have really changed to the nouns they used to describe them. As a result, they will use all the adjectives related to the noun metaphor with things they describe, for instance:

(20) A- The boxer was *a voracious tiger* in the boxing match.

B- The boxer was *aghast mouse* in the boxing match.

These examples are drawn from the conceptual metaphor "A Man is an Animal/Beast". In the first example, the adjective 'voracious' holds the same meaning of the noun metaphor 'tiger' which refers to the strength of the player during the match, so, it completes it. In the same way the adjective 'aghast' in the second example symbolizes "fear" and connects the meaning between the topic (boxer) and the metaphorically used noun

'mouse'. So using adjective metaphor makes the relationship between the topic and the noun metaphor stronger.

It is also possible to use the metaphorical adjectives to give a meaning that is contrast to the metaphorical nouns to create irony, this style is leading to humourous and funny language, such as in:

(21) The boxer was *a voracious mouse* in the boxing match.

In this example, there is an incongruity between the adjective and the noun metaphor because a small animal like "a mouse" cannot be "*a voracious*" like other wild animals. Metaphorical adjectives can also be used alone in a sentence without metaphorical nouns, containing the metaphoric sense of a normal noun, describing it in a way that adds interest. Some authors also use metaphorical adjectives to create a comic tension between the two images, as can be seen in:

(22) He was battish.

The metaphor in this example transfer some features from "a bat" to the subject of the sentence that he seldom comes out of his dark bedroom except at night like bats.

#### **2.1.4 Adverb-based metaphors**

Metaphorically used adverb is similar to metaphorically used adjective in that both of them add strength to their target/tenor. In some sentences, metaphorical adverbs make metaphorical verbs more obvious and add more depth to their metaphorical meaning. Even when metaphorical adverb is used alone without a verb in a sentence, it can also generate metaphorical tension in describing person's actions. Some adverbs from things or nouns can be used to transfer the metaphorical meaning of that adverb to the target/tenor. Like using of metaphorical adjectives with nouns, metaphorically used adverbs can be used either in a similar meaning with the verb to enhance and add depth to its meaning or to contrast its meaning for ironical purposes, as can be seen in:

(23) She walked sheepishly into the classroom.

(24) He ran musically, beating out the rhythm.

In the above examples the adverbs "sheepishly" and "musically" are used to add more depth to the metaphorical meaning of the verbs in these sentences because they explain the way of walking in (17) and running in (18).

### **3. Metaphorical Applications in Language**

As it is already assumed, the two terms 'tenor' and 'vehicle' of any metaphor must have at least one feature of similarity between them. But, what will happen if these two ideas are incongruous and have no familiar similarity between them except what the speaker assumes? This will lead to a humour in metaphor. Incongruity in metaphor which leads to humour might be defined as placing two things or ideas together in a way that does not fit expectations and leads to a laugh from the listener. In this way, one can use metaphor in riddles or jokes to make a funny language. Using

metaphors in funny language has not only the purpose of creating entertainment but also may have social and critical purposes. The writer/speaker may use funny metaphors to highlight important issues or to criticize bad issues in a society.

Using metaphor for making language funny depends on familiar metaphors in familiar contexts or new ones. Breaking the norms and patterns of metaphor generates surprise. Metaphoric surprise and humour, whether they were positive, neutral or negative in relation to its target, are most simply defined as a surprising incongruity that evokes laughter. The explanation of using metaphors to create funny language is in the next texts.

### **3.1. Metaphors in Riddles**

In riddles, speakers make use of metaphorical verbs or nouns, to delude the listener and mislead him in finding the right interpretation between the metaphorical use and the real use of a word. Sometimes metaphor is combined with metonymy to make the riddle more complicated, for instance:

(25) What can run but never walks, has a mouth but never talks, has a head but never weeps, has a bed but never sleeps?

The answer is 'a river'.

Here the use of the verbs (run, walk), which are related to animate things, with the river, which is an inanimate, will mislead the reader or the listener in solving this riddle especially when it combines with some metonymies like; head or mouth which are animate features given to inanimate e.g., the river.

Another use of the metaphorical verbs is the use two or more opposite action verbs with one object. It is known that what falls will be broken, and what doesn't fall will not be broken but, let's examine the following riddle;

(26) "What falls, but does not break, and what breaks but does not fall?"

This riddle has two verbs 'fall' and 'break' used metaphorically with two natural phenomena (night and day). It is known that night falls (nightfall-sunset) and day breaks (daybreak-morn). Because these two verbs (fall and break) have the "cause and effect" relationship, and are related to two close phenomena e.g., day and night, they are easily used in the riddle to mislead the listeners or the readers.

### **3.2. Metaphors in Jokes and Comedic Scenes**

As it is explained earlier, the use of metaphor with two incongruous ideas which have no familiar similarity between them except what the speaker assumes, will lead to a humour in metaphor. In any metaphor, there must be a kind of congruity between the "tenor" term and the "vehicle" term in order to achieve the main goal of metaphor by transferring the

features of the vehicle to the tenor. The main point in creating humour in metaphor is the playful use of the vehicle term and replacing it by another which is far from the real quality metaphorically ascribed to it. If one asks “what is the relationship between the soldier and the lion?” The answer is clear that the soldier (tenor) is as strong as the lion (vehicle). But if one would like to make a joke, he could ask the following question:

(27) A. What is the relationship between an official person in the government and a high pillow?

Everybody knows that there is no clear relationship or similarity between these two things because the (pillow) is not an expected metaphor like (a lion) which refers to the courage or strength. Here the incongruity between these different things will lead to a joke. The listener may not know the answer of such a comparison and the answer is coming from the speaker himself:

(28) Both of them break our necks.

This example comes from a familiar metaphor in Iraq meaning: the official in the government has the ability to break a neck of someone. Breaking a neck of someone means putting him in a problem and this problem will lead either to be imprisoned or to die hanging. The speaker combines the real meaning of -breaking a neck of someone- by a high pillow after a long sleep with the metaphorical meaning -putting him in a problem- to create funny situation. Although the use of the verb "break" was metaphorical, it is understood easily by listeners.

This kind of metaphor is used in creating funny language especially in comic scenes in films or plays when two characters make funny dialogues and misunderstand each other. The creative use of metaphor here attracts listeners and creates funny utterances because it is as Carter points creativity in language is a novel analogies or combinations between conceptual elements which have been previously unassociated (Carter 2004).

As we see above, for full understanding of an utterance, speakers need to use their cultural background or knowledge to interpret the hidden meaning of the utterance. So it is important to mention that cultural knowledge is required for the language to make an impact on the listener and to be at its greatest effect. The creative use of language to create novel utterances is a social, cultural and environmental phenomenon as well as a psychological process (Carter 2004). So, a creative act in one culture may not be so valued in another culture and misunderstanding of an utterance culturally will not achieve the goals of speakers in explaining his point of view but this misunderstanding will create funny language. The following example was taken from a comedian play;

(29) A- Eating bread is so hard nowadays.

B- Why don't you eat biscuit?

Again speaker B doesn't understand the metaphorical meaning of sentence A (our life is so difficult nowadays because of the increasing prices of everything). This misunderstanding of the metaphorical meaning of the utterance will create laugh, especially when the spectators know that speaker A is a very poor person.

So, using metaphors in creating humour depends on the thing being used and the degree of similarity between the tenor and the vehicle. Using such metaphors in a sentence requires from the speaker to add more explanations in the same sentence to make the metaphor clearer to the readers, as can be seen in:

(30) Her hair was a fierce lion's mane, never washed and sticking out in wild directions.

(31) Experience is a comb, life gives you after you lose your hair.

(32) Your conspiracy theory reminds me of a blind man in a dark room looking for a black hat that isn't there.

A novel way of creating funny metaphorical utterances is the use of some verbs like the verb "fly" with non-flying animals such as "elephants" or "pigs". In such metaphors the comparison between impossibility of doing an action is like the impossibility of the flying of elephants. For example: two friends were speaking about a third person called "John" who had taken money from speaker A.

(33) A. Do you think John will get back the money?

B. Yes. When you see an elephant flies in the sky.

( A and B burst into laughter)

The laugh of the speakers comes from a hidden meaning at the utterance of speaker B that "Elephants cannot fly". This comparison shows that the impossibility of getting the money from "John" is similar to the impossibility of the flying of elephants. The use of such metaphorical utterance forces B to infer the original form of the idiom and at the same time force A to interpret according to the intended meaning of B in this context. So we can conclude from such examples that the listener has to search for non-literal or indirect interpretation of utterances for full understanding of the metaphorical expressions.

### **3.3. Metaphor in Advertisements**

Advertisements, whether in newspapers, magazines, TV, or on shops, are a means of announcing about some important news or new products ...etc. Makers of advertisements try to attract the attention of the readers by using important actions, related to human life, and use verbs or words that have more than one meaning to give or reflex two meanings, real and metaphorical meanings. The previous studies (Abuczki Ágnes 2009) showed that advertisements, which use metaphors as a way of attraction, can be divided into seven groups depending on their source domain or the vehicle.

The first group uses spatial metaphors whose source domain is physical closeness and physical touch, for example:

(34) (the object) "Close to you".

(35) (the object) "Between your hands".

(36) (the object) "Under your order".

The second group represents the product to be sold as the friend of the shopping audience, for instance:

(37) "Your everyday companion". (Advertisement for cigarettes, tea, a journal, a book, etc.)

(38) The best friend to travel with in the summer. (Advertisement for a car.)

The third group applies journey as the source domain of the metaphor. For example:

(39) "Change to new ways".

(40) "Change your life".

This line suggests that if you choose to buy this product, your whole life will change for the better and you will take a good direction.

The fourth group is based on the universal body and sensomotoric experiences of human beings, as an example:

(40) "The way you move".

(41) "Quenches your skin's thirst".

The fifth group's source domain is heat, with passion and attractiveness as the target domains. The sixth group, sexual desire as the target domain is identified with hunger as its source domain. Therefore, women are seen and represented as tempting and attractive food for men.

The last i.e., the seventh group is built on a typical metaphorical correspondence which identifies "good" and "happy" with an upward movement.

Language play is an important factor in creating attractive titles for advertisements because it can lead to ambiguity of the "reader/listener" in understanding the right meaning of the advertisement. The principle of ambiguity, from the side of the reader, puts the reader in a position of curiosity to know what the right meaning of that advertisement is. It is worth noting that the principle of curiosity, which is an innate habit in human beings, is the basis which advertisers depend on in attracting the reader/consumer.

The operation of creating ambiguity in understanding an advertisement will impose on the reader/consumer, involuntarily, to search about that advertisement materially (by reading) and mentally (by thinking) as long as possible about that product or that news. As a result, the product/news will be memorable for the reader/consumer and, in this way, the advertiser will achieve his aim in attracting the reader/consumer to that product.

In language play, the advertiser must not go too far from the cultural

context because the latter can be a crucial factor in understanding the implied meanings in an advertisement. As Carter stated, advertising depends crucially on two principles: creative play with language and on the cultural discourses of society within which the language is embedded (Carter 2004).

So, in creating an advertisement, advertisers have to take in to consideration the cultural background of the reader/consumer because an attractive advertisement in one culture may be an unattractive one in another culture. In naming shops, as well, people try to choose a name that is memorable, as Toolan points out the jokey name and the shop sign become a memorable way in which the service-provider resists the consignment to invisibility (Toolan 2000a).

Advertisers can also create humour by using some ambiguous expressions with two interpretations, one of which is disastrous and the other is funny. For example this advertisement was in a newspaper in Yemen;

(Inkilap askeri fi Aden) انقلاب عسكري في عدن

(42) "A military overthrow in Aden."

In this sentence, The ambiguity depends on recognizing dual meanings created by the syntax of English "Inkilap" or "overthrow" is both a verb and a noun; "Askeri" can be either a noun ("a soldier") or a modifier with meaning ("military"). The reader first will understand the sentence as "a military coup in Aden", but, when he reads the full article he will find out that "a soldier falls down on earth" from a donkey during climbing a hill. This example shows how advertisers manipulate in choosing ambiguous expressions to attract the attention of the readers and/or create humour by expressing meaning implicitly and this will lead to misunderstanding of the listener.

#### 4- Conclusion

Metaphors, as mental tools, help people to understand abstract or unfamiliar concepts by linking them to concrete concepts in order to make the process of interpretation and understanding easier for people. This article showed the importance of metaphors in drawing the attention of the listeners to things that are more enjoyable than important for the speaker. Metaphors can make language use funny and pervasive by changing the emotions of the listeners about things, in a way which is more effective, pleasurable and memorable. This article also highlighted different ways of metaphorical use in creating funny language and showed its potential in enjoying and attracting the readers' attention. Finally, speakers use metaphors intentionally or unintentionally in everyday language to enrich their language with new styles of interaction.

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