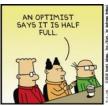**5SSEL026 – Language Construction**
Lecture 9
Metaphor in Translation

Metaphor pervades language. Every word, every construct is a negotiation toward meaning which starts with one person's idea and only ends when all parties to the conversation decide it ends. This is where Donald Trump both succeeds and fails spectacularly: he does not understand the role of metaphor, so he puts his ideas out into the world without negotiation or even thought about negotiation; those who believe he must be saying something significant will find significance even in *covfefe*; those who are seeking significance in more conventional ways have no way to negotiate toward meaning – to them, he's talking gobbledygook. One could almost say that his communication is a metaphor of communication.

If we analyse the opening cartoon, we can see metaphor working on several levels. There are the intentional metaphors of LIFE IS A CONTAINER and LIFE IS A CONSUMABLE[1]; there is the associative metaphor that the mouth-as-a-source-of-speech can be equated with the-mouth-as-a-destination-for-food; there is the self-referential metaphor of I AM MY JOB, and the other-referential metaphor of THEY ARE THEIR FEELINGS; and there is the social metaphor that control over the work equals control over the worker.

Next comes the lexical level of metaphor: *pessimist* and *optimist* form an oppositional pair, where both have been anthropomorphised to represent classes of people; both are said to *say* something, creating the metaphor that SPEAKING IS BELIEVING; *the* is used to represent an indefinite case of an indefinite class of object – quite a stretch for a definite article; in the final frame, other-reference acts as a metaphor for self-reference; and so on.

And there is an even deeper level which shows how significant metaphor is for humans: representations. There is a set of lines and colours we call Dilbert; another set is the pointy-haired boss; a third is Wally. There are small metaphors available to the in-group readers of this cartoon: Dilbert has an electronic device, Wally has a coffee, the boss has nothing; their shirts are a metaphor for the organisation they are in – it has no official uniform code, but clearly has an unofficial one; and they are in a(nother pointless) meeting. We draw meaning from the squiggles presented to us (including the squiggles we call writing), treating the representation as a metaphor for a real thing, even if the real thing represented is not, never was and never will be, an actual thing.

JAYNES' ANALYSIS OF METAPHORS
Julian Jaynes (1977)[2] describes a metaphor as consisting of four elements:
- The metaphrand: The thing to be described in terms of another thing;
- The metaphier: The other thing used to describe the metaphrand;
- The paraphiers: The attributes of the metaphier which make it suitable to describe the metaphrand;

- The paraphrands: the attributes of the metaphrand which correspond to the paraphiers (the paraphrands and paraphiers do not need to be the same thing).

For instance, **hot curry** has a metaphrand of **curry** and a metaphier of **hot**; but the paraphier of **hot** is temperature, while the paraphrand of **curry** is spiciness; the chemicals in the curry fool the taste sensors into behaving as if they have been exposed to a high temperature.

When creating metaphors in your language (or translating English metaphors into your language), be aware of the places where paraphiers and paraphrands are similar, and where they are different. Where English finds difference, your language could find similarity, and vice versa.

CREATING METAPHORS FROM EMPTY SPACE
Any object, process or idea in the universe can act as a metaphor for any other object, process or idea, that is what makes language so powerful. Even the total absence of anything can be used as a metaphor – because if nothing is named, it ceases to be nothing. So the suction necessary to create a vacuum in an atmosphere can be applied to a dust collection device (a vacuum cleaner), and the non-conductance of heat in a vacuum can be applied to a twin-shelled liquid storage device (a vacuum flask) – even though vacuums are not actually part of either of the objects.

In fact, both absence and space are very productive sources of metaphor (or as I call it, negotiation toward meaning). Even simple terms like **missing** are productive in unexpected ways: a missing person has not been removed from existence, just from common knowledge; object can **go missing** – implying their non-existent malevolent will is what has removed them from common knowledge; people can **be missed** – their location is known, but not proximate enough to the speaker; and objects or events can **be missed** – although they could have been noticed or considered relevant when they happened, they were only considered relevant later.

Metaphors of space are very common: we treat the space around us a canvas onto which we paint all kinds of events. Some metaphors rely on distance (e.g. FAR AWAY IS DISTANT IN TIME/EMOTIONS/RELATIONSHIPS/ RELEVANCE/etc.); some rely on direction (e.g. UP IS FUTURE/HAPPINESS/POWER/ SIGNIFICANCE/etc.); and some rely on movement (e.g. MOVEMENT TOWARDS THE SELF IS TIME PASSING/GROWING DANGER/INCREASING INTIMACY/BETTER UNDERSTANDING/etc.). Other topical areas and relationships with space are available, and you can decide exactly which metaphiers are significant in your language, and how they are significant.

SOURCES OF METAPHOR
While any object, process or idea can act as a metaphor, by far the most common metaphors in human languages are related to the senses, and to the cognitive mechanisms associated with the senses. For the purposes here, the five senses have been grouped into three groups:
- The visual and aural channels, between them the channels most associated with language, and therefore rich sources of both metaphrands and metaphiers;
- The gustatory and olfactory channels, which provide many metaphiers but fewer metaphrands;
- The somatosensory channel, which has been subdivided into actual touch sensations and sensations of closeness or distance, both of which contain some fundamental metaphiers (e.g. **feeling** and **placing**).

To these have been added three cognitive functions, as a sample of the many cognitive functions available to us:

- **Quality –** the different describable natures of objects, processes and ideas;
- **Quantification –** counting and measuring;
- **Conceptualisation –** the potentials we identify within objects, processes and ideas.

Cognitive functions are a good source of metaphrands which generate metaphiers which in turn become metaphrands, completing the circle.

All these potential sources or causes of metaphor feed into our linguistic cognition, allowing us to generate new metaphrand-metaphier correspondences which we can then share with others as part of our negotiation toward meaning.

TRANSLATING METAPHOR

Some metaphors appear to have the same value in more than one language; and some may even be universal, based on shared natural phenomena like gravity (e.g. MORE IS UP). However, in

most metaphors, there is no rule dictating the appropriate metaphier to use with a particular metaphrand. For instance, heaviness can be expressed with the quantitative *it weighs a ton*, the qualitative *gross*, the specifically interpersonal *you're too fat*, the visual *lumbering*, the tactile *burdensome*, the conceptual *dense*, and so on.

This gives you a lot of control over the metaphors in your language, and a powerful tool for distancing your language from existing languages. For instance, how would your language deal with:

- I was much struck with certain facts
- For centuries the driving issue was …
- This was not an encouraging opening for a conversation
- instead of having a gate it degenerated into mere geometry

You need an answer for at least one of these if your translation is going to work effectively …

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[1] This way of expressing a metaphor (always presented in capitals) was created by George Lakoff. See George Lakoff & Mark Johnson (1980). *Metaphors We Live by*. University of Chicago Press: Chicago, IL, USA.

[2] Julian Jaynes (1977). Consciousness. In *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind*. Penguin: London, UK, ch2.