

THE PROJECTION OF CONTEXTS: AN ALTERNATIVE TO GEORGE LAKOFF & MARK TURNER'S APPROACH TO POETIC METAPHORS

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Abstract

The wide variety of images and emotions evoked by poetic language are lost in the mappings which Lakoff & Turner use to interpret poetic metaphors. In contrast, I propose a reinterpretation of Richards' interactive theory based on the contextual character of meaning and the preeminence of the metaphorical expressions over metaphors. The meaning of words rises from the usual syntagmatic connections and by means of metaphorical expressions the source domain is projected onto the target domain. This approach does not diminish the variety and vividness of metaphorical expressions and serves to explain connotation and the difficulty of translating metaphors from one language into another.

Keywords: metaphor, mapping, interaction view, context, usual syntagmatic connections and connotation.

Resumen

La gran variedad de imágenes y emociones que evoca el lenguaje poético se pierden en los mappings que Lakoff & Turner utilizan para interpretar las metáforas poéticas. Por el contrario, en este artículo se propone una reinterpretación de la teoría interactiva de Richards basada en el carácter contextual del significado y la prevalencia de las expresiones metafóricas sobre las metáforas. El significado de las palabras surge de las conexiones sintagmáticas comunes y a través de expresiones metafóricas en las que el dominio de partida se proyecta sobre el de llegada. Este acercamiento no reduce la variedad y vivacidad de las expresiones metafóricas y sirve para explicar la connotación y la dificultad de traducir metáforas de un idioma a otro.

Palabras clave: metáfora, mapping, interacción, contexto, conexiones sintagmáticas comunes y connotación.

1. SHAKESPEARE AND MAPPINGS

LXXIII

That time of year thou mayst in me behold
 when yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang
 upon those boughs which shake against the cold,
 bare ruined choirs where late the sweet birds sang.

In me thou seest the twilight of such day
 as after sunset fadeth int the west,
 which by and by black night doth take away,
 Death's second self, that seals up all in rest.

In me thou seest the glowing of such fire
 that on the ashes of his youth doth lie,
 as the deathbed whereon it must expire,
 consumed with that which it was nourished by.

The cognitive theory of metaphor defends that figurative expressions appearing in poetic discourse rely on and extend the basic conceptual metaphors that govern everyday figurative expressions. Poetic metaphors can be seen as novel uses of the conventional conceptual metaphors that also underlie much of our everyday metaphorical language (Semino & Steen 2011:236). Lakoff & Turner (1989) use Shakespeare's sonnet LXXIII to illustrate and support their theory of metaphors. Their view is as follows. Metaphors are cross-domain mapping in conceptual systems, while metaphorical expressions are surface linguistic realizations of such cross-domain mapping. For them, the locus of metaphors is not in language, but in thought. Metaphors always involve the implementation of a well-defined mapping between entities in the source domain and the target domain. In conventional metaphors this mapping is automatically activated, without effort on our part. Poetic metaphors are more complex, since they occur as combinations of different but still basic conventional metaphors. It is only the poet's novel reelaboration and development of these basic correspondences which makes poetic expressions original and outside ordinary everyday language. Poetic metaphors may seem more complex because they are not conventionalized, but this complexity is only superficial and can also be resolved by mappings. Therefore, the understanding of new expressions or original images does not require any particular cognitive effort and is almost as instantaneous a process as is used for conventional metaphors (Lakoff 1994:49).

In reading Shakespeare's sonnet our first aim must be, according to Lakoff, to discover which conventional and basic metaphors the author uses, since we cannot

arrive at a correct interpretation of the poem without this knowledge. Lakoff & Turner's analysis of the poem produces the following basic metaphors:

1. PEOPLE ARE PLANTS	1.1. The body is the trunk of the plants.
	1.2. Arms are branches.
	1.3. Old age is the yellow leaves.
2. A LIFETIME IS A YEAR	2.1. Youth is spring.
	2.2. Old age is autumn.
3. A LIFETIME IS A DAY	3.1. Birth is dawn.
	3.2. Maturity is noon.
	3.3. Old age is twilight.
	3.4. Death is sun set.
4. LIFE IS A PRECIOUS POSSESSION	
5. THE LIGHT IS A SUBSTANCE THAT CAN BE TAKEN AWAY	5.1. More light means more life.
	5.2. Less light means less life.
	5.3. Night is the death.
6. NIGHT IS A COVER	6.1. The blanket covers the body as night covers the day.
7. STATES ARE LOCATIONS	
8. DEATH IS REST	
9. LIFE IS A FLAME	9.1. The flame of the candle is the flame of life.
	9.2. The early flaming up is the heat of youth.
	9.3. The steady flame is middle age.
	9.4. The embers glowing among the ashes are old age.
	9.5. The cold ashes are death.

We can only understand Shakespeare's metaphorical expressions if we are previously acquainted with the basic metaphors which sustain them, i.e., if we are able to build the scheme or mapping above. This mapping allows us to project concrete terms, such as fire, plant life or day onto the more abstract realms of life, death, time and so on. In *La metáfora. Ensayos Transdisciplinares* (2000) Eduardo Bustos supports an analysis of poetic metaphors in line with the approach provided by Lakoff and Turner. The author stresses that poetic metaphors and conventional metaphors are produced and understood by means of similar mechanisms. Thus, e.g., a poem by Quevedo can be reduced to conceptual metaphors such as LIFE IS A JOURNEY –in this particular case, a sea voyage– and A JOURNEY IS A DAY –departure being daybreak– (Bustos 2000a:287). The questions posed by Bustos's work are the same that we are trying to answer: what do these underlying metaphors suggest? How do they enrich the interpretation of the sonnet?

Some authors have questioned to what extent these basic metaphors are activated in order to interpret metaphors. McGlone (1996), for instance, has carried out some experiments to test Lakoff's Conceptual Metaphor View against Glucksberg & Keysar's Attributive Categorization View (Glucksberg & Keysar 1987, 1990) (Glucksberg 2003). According to Glucksberg & Keysar, metaphors are interpreted by creating a new category encompassing both the elements of the source domain and the target domain. In the case of Shakespeare's sonnet, we would need to create the category THINGS NEARING THEIR END comprising falling yellow leaves, birds singing at dusk, ruined choirs and the poetic self.

McGlone experiments strongly support Glucksberg & Keysar's viewpoint against the conceptual mappings postulated by Lakoff & Turner. In my opinion, however, neither theory gives a convincing account of the mechanisms by which metaphors are created and understood and both lead to similar difficulties. Either by establishing basic metaphors or new categories, the communicative and figurative charge of the metaphorical expression is lost and it becomes a pale, lifeless reflection of its former self.

Lakoff's mapping may reflect the core of the metaphorical expression, but some of its strength is lost. Lakoff & Turner (1989:33) make some interesting remarks about how each stanza points in different ways to the proximity of death. The torment of the passing of time, the central issue of this sonnet, is expressed by a variety of metaphors. However, mere conceptual mapping cannot reveal all the nuances of poetry. It has been argued that the greater poverty of the metaphor compared to the metaphorical expression could be surmounted by fully developing the underlying mapping. As an example, let us unfold the mapping PEOPLE ARE PLANTS.

PEOPLE ARE PLANTS	
TARGET DOMAIN	SOURCE DOMAIN
PEOPLE	PLANT
Youth	Plant flowering
Old age	Whitered plant
White-haired	Yellow leaves
Arm	Branch
Body	Trunk
Lung	Leal
Sang	Sap
Death	The reaping of plants

I do not think that Shakespeare was establishing a direct correlation between sap and blood or between hair loss and the falling of leaves. To understand his verses the psychological exploration of Shakespeare's mind is of little importance. Were this conceptual metaphor the cornerstone on which the poem stands, the fact is that little of it, and then only to a very limited extent, is relevant to an interpretation of the sonnet (Tsur 1999:344). Metaphorical expressions involve logical contradictions which are resolved by cancelling irrelevant features of the vehicle and transferring the remaining features to the tenor (Tsur 1992:209).

Lakoff & Turner's approach reduces in part metaphorical expressions to the inadequate, rigid implementation of interpretative schemes. The understanding of metaphors is simply a matter of using the correct key and everything automatically falls into place. Besides, these authors recognize that, although a knowledge of basic metaphors is essential to understand metaphorical expressions, this knowledge does not necessarily imply an understanding of the poem (Lakoff & Turner 1989:33). Cognitive approach underlines the relationship between metaphor in literature and metaphor in everyday language but it tends to underestimate the importance of totally novel metaphors which cannot easily be accounted for in terms of conventional patterns and conceptual metaphors (Semino & Steen 2011:236-237).

In my view, it is possible to defend an approach that gives priority to metaphors over metaphorical expressions. Rhetorical approaches could be useful when we analyse figurative expressions appearing in poetic discourse. Moreover, a literal paraphrase could be richer and more evocative than a rigid mapping of the type of A LIFETIME IS A YEAR or PEOPLE ARE PLANTS. All these metaphors appear in everyday language and have been widely used in literature. LIFE IS A FLAME may be a linguistically original expression but is utterly conventional at a conceptual level (Lakoff & Turner 1989:50). Why do Shakespeare's verses have such a strong impact on us if they are only the surface realizations of these ordinary metaphors? Lakoff and Turner claim that the very essence of poetic genius lies in the original combination of these basic correlations. In order to understand metaphorical expressions we have simply to project certain prelinguistic image schemas from concrete elements onto others which are more abstract. All the literary metaphorical expressions relating life to year are reduced to a single interpretative rule: A LIFETIME IS A YEAR.

In my opinion, the metaphorical expression must be given priority over any presumed basic prelinguistic metaphors. Were mapping to occur, it is secondary and derives from the metaphorical expressions already created by the poet. I questioned the existence of primitive or experiential linguistic concepts (Lakoff's mental concepts are also susceptible to syntactical analysis) which are essential to

the interpretation of all others. There are no primitive semantic concepts of prelinguistic origin. We tend to think otherwise because we mistake perceptual categories for linguistic meanings. To a certain extent, our perceptual categories must be the same as those of other superior animals. This information must influence our language but the linguistic meaning is a radically new level which cannot be understood without the structure of syntax. Despite Lakoff's insistence upon bodily experience on language structure (this insistence has led him to be seen as a follower of the new cognitivism), there is a close affinity between his views and Fodor's language of thought, although apparently these authors belong to two opposing schools of thought.

If there are no primitive prelinguistic concepts, we have to explain the overwhelmingly frequent use of terms from the semantic domains of journey, year or nature to refer to other domains. Instead of considering these domains as primitive or prelinguistic as does Lakoff, my view is that they are such common, rich and well structured semantic domains that their elements are easily projected to other domains. Journeys, plants and seasons are part of our everyday life and particularly fruitful in giving rise to innumerable relations with other domains. Without exception, all Lakoff's source domains present a well-structured character (Lakoff, 1994:84). This complex structure permits the projection of their elements onto human life. Let us consider the most commonly studied domains of JOURNEY and FOOD. The journey can be in one direction or in the other, uphill or downhill, long or short, open-ended or not, hurried or slow. Food can be abundant or scarce, eaten with enjoyment or unwillingly, good or bad, healthy or unhealthy. For similar reasons, the frequent use of nature cycles to build metaphors about life requires no further explanation. Nature is also a well-structured semantic domain that enables an easy projection of its elements onto any other realm, particularly that of human life. What is important here is not the connections between human life and plant growth, but what one wishes to communicate. In order to build metaphors, our choice of a particular element of a given domain depends on our aims.

From this point of view, conceptual metaphors are only *a posteriori* artefacts postulated by linguists after study of the large number of metaphors which use rich and well-structured organization of certain semantic domains. Lakoff's analysis must be turned around, since the real sequence is the reverse: thought metaphors are not previous to the large number of metaphorical expressions which presumably depend on the former. It is precisely by means of these metaphorical expressions and their frequent use of similar correspondences between two different semantic domains that one can postulate thought metaphors. We can encapsulate a number of metaphorical expressions in mapping such as A LIFETIME IS A YEAR, but this heuristic tool does not validate the presumption of prelinguistic metaphors.

Lakoff & Turner's theory assembles all the pieces into a coherent interpretative system. There is a catalogue of basic metaphors at the disposal of the reader. To correctly interpret any metaphorical expression, he has only to identify which interpretative kit to apply. The poet's words will give him the necessary clues to determine the underlying metaphors. However, in trying to determine the basic images behind the words we make the fundamental mistake of losing sight of the words themselves. Poems originate in a communicative intention and the poet's task is to choose the words and images best suited to this end. Using a critical comment by Lakoff on how certain literature teachers explain a poem by Frost, i.e., ignoring its metaphorical background, Tsur ironically declares that Lakoff makes a similar mistake, since his mapping is unable to correctly assess the specific characteristics of the expressions.

It is easy to plot interpretative mappings, but alone they are not sufficient. Any life can be compared to a plant, any love can be seen as a flame, but if we do not take into account the context, we will fail to completely understand metaphorical expression. A deeper analysis of the poet's aims in his choice of words is necessary in each case and there can be no shortcuts. This approach may not produce clear-cut conclusions but it is a little contribution to poetic metaphors comprehension. Lakoff's theory is clear and simple. However, the vividness of the metaphorical expressions is overlooked in his approach. In interpreting the metaphorical expressions as surface realizations of the conceptual metaphors underlying them, we are insensitive to context and lose sight of the richness of poetic language.

2. THE PROJECTION OF CONTEXTS TO EXPLAIN METAPHORS

Like Lakoff I consider that all metaphors, either conventional or strikingly original, originate in a simple mechanism. However, in my view no perceptual schemes or prelinguistic experience suffice to explain metaphorical expressions. In order to achieve this, we must resort to syntax.

In dealing with metaphors the way in which we interpret meaning is crucial. Words are meaningless without syntax and, therefore, semantics and syntax cannot be considered separately. I uphold that the meaning of a word is the sum of the most usual syntactical and semantic contexts in which it occurs. It is from these contexts that the hearer obtains the material to build the meaning of a word and his lack of knowledge of any major context will make the meaning incomplete for him. In order to understand the very essence of the meaning of words we must pay much

more attention to the real and linguistic contexts in which the word has been used than to its external reference. Consequently, a lexical item is the sum of its uses.

The extremist stand of Wittgenstein (1958:61) states that words have no meaning, only uses. We have learnt the meaning of words at different moments and in different places: from stories, at home, in the street, from books, etc. Our brain stores the uses by means of a hierarchy, ranging from the everyday to the more fanciful or insignificant. Primary and functional uses mingled with infrequent uses and all are active or latent when it comes to interpreting metaphors. As Toolan (1991:345) says:

[...] we learn and store lexical items, and even whole utterances, with contexts attached. The norm, in such expression-cum-context learning, will be for a range of contexts to be associated with any particular expression, and a range of expressions to be associated with any particular context [...] this picture relates difference in language understanding directly to variation in life-experience and memory.

In Dascal's terminology (1985:156), to arrive at the meaning of a word it is essential to be acquainted with its usual syntagmatic connections which always appear when the word is used. In metaphorical expressions the words not only carry their direct reference but also their usual syntagmatic connections. Therefore, the source domain is related to a large number of contexts in which we have heard the word used and with which we associate it. In interpreting metaphors we project contexts from the source domain onto the target domain. For us, words in metaphors transport a number of contexts from the domain in which they are usually used to another in which they are not. This projection of latent contexts provides the words with new and original meanings well beyond their everyday reference. Since contexts can also be textual contexts, the poet can make use of literary tradition. In this way, the whole body of literature, instead of threatening the originality of metaphorical expressions, tends to enrich them.

My interpretation of the linguistic meaning partly supports the interaction view (Richards 1936; Black 1979). According to Richards (1963:93), metaphors consist of a mutual loan and transactions of thoughts aiming at a comprehensive meaning. Richards' theory has been rejected as ambiguous and still in line with the dubious premises of the substitute approach. Richards' theory is seen as merely another version of this approach. However, instead of replacing metaphors by literal expressions, Richards suggests "systems of associated commonplaces." This proposal leads, nevertheless, to three major obstacles. Firstly, the definition of these commonplaces is unclear; secondly, the approach can only explain trivial and well-known metaphors; thirdly, metaphors become simply a matter of psychology due to

the non-lexical character of the “system of associated commonplaces” (Ricoeur 1975:125).

By interpreting metaphors as the interchange of “usual syntagmatic connections” we overcome the ambiguity of the interactive approach. This interchange involves not ethereal thoughts but very concrete contexts which provide words with their particular meanings. Contexts exist prior to any metaphorical expression and the novelty of this expression derives from the fact that it allows us to think of two different realms, i.e., two contexts from which the meaning of words arises. This approach provides an explanation for all types of metaphors, not only the trivial ones. By unifying the theory of metaphor with the contextual theory of meaning, where the links are lexical, the issue returns to the overlapping fields of semantics and syntax. Obviously, my proposal still retains some ambiguity in the interpretation of metaphors, but this is inevitable as contexts are never still.

If the meaning of a word is equal to its most typical contexts of use, the interpretation of metaphors only needs to underline the usual syntagmatic connections, which does not lead to invalid identification of references. Let us consider, for example, “Juliet is the sun.” This metaphor can be understood without the need for any basic and innate conceptual metaphors which are automatically triggered on reading these words. Nor is there a need to introduce Juliet and the stars of the Milky Way into a new comprehensive category. The most usual contexts of “sun” will provide us with the necessary information to understand the metaphor. We do not usually think of the sun as a “star of such and such a mass, composed of gases,” neither do we think of it as a star “150 million kilometres away from the Earth.” Most probably, contexts such as “the sun has risen,” “what a lovely sunny day!” or “if it keeps sunny, we’ll have a picnic” will come to mind. Romeo’s words invite us to associate Juliet with light, morning, spring, joy, the awakening of nature and daybreak. It is all these positively charged contexts which make Juliet special, not her being similar to a star. Our interpretation of the metaphor consists of a projection of the contexts normally associated with sun – ‘morning,’ ‘flower,’ ‘light,’ ‘happiness’...– onto Juliet. Juliet can be said to have been *elaborated* in terms of structure relating the lexical concept conventionally associated with the form ‘sun.’ Stern asserts:

When Romeo utters ‘Juliet is the sun,’ he not only wants to “call our attention” to a (particular) similarity between Juliet and the sun; he also intends to say something true about Juliet, to assert that she has a certain property (or set of properties) “corresponding” to the predicate ‘is the sun.’ (Stern 2000:24)

Discarding irrelevant features is simple.¹ Although words cannot be reduced to mere linguistic labels for worldly references, their literal charge is sufficient clue for the reader to select the relevant contexts of meaning. We cannot ignore the fact that some uses are more frequent than others. If we change Juliet to other term the meaning of ‘sun’ will change too because the usual syntagmatic connections will be different the unusual meaning of a word strongly depends on the particular context in which it is found. Joseph Stern gives the example “Achilles is the sun,” where it expresses Achilles’ devastating anger or brute force (Stern 2000:11). By virtue of changing the subject, we have a markedly distinct conception from the previous example.² Although the two occurrences of ‘is the sun’ have the same character, they have different contents in their respective contexts (Stern 2000:216). When we hear ‘Achilles is the sun’, –said Evans & Zinken (in press)– we remember contexts in which the sun gives rise to effects such as drought and harvest failure, which can lead to famine and death, and can cause pain due to overexposure to heat.

We would like to see another example, the end of the poem ‘Tulips:’

“My husband and child smiling out of the family photos;
Their smiles catch onto my skin, little smiling hooks.” (Plath 1965:20)

The explanation of Plath’s specific image made by Semino & Steen remembers the theory we defend here:

As verb, ‘to hook’ is often used to suggest involuntary dependence, as in the expressions ‘Some drugs can hook you almost instantly’ and ‘People hooked on horoscopes’ from the *British National Corpus*. As a noun ‘hook’ is also used in the idiomatic expression ‘off the hook,’ which indicates freedom from a particular duty, responsibility or unpleasant situation. All of this can help to explain why, although the specific metaphorical expressions are quite striking and novel, most readers are likely to agree that they represent the poetic speaker’s perception of the strength and inevitability of her relationship with her family, which she is made newly aware of every time she looks at the photograph. (Semino & Steen 2011:236)

In this way we understand the images evoked by Shakespeare. Words have invisible but effective links which must be taken into account to fully appreciate the emotions and ideas triggered by Shakespeare’s sonnet. Throughout the poem the

¹ “When Romeo utters ‘Juliet is the sun’, he not only wants to “call our attention” to a (particular) similarity between Juliet and the sun; he also intends to say something true about Juliet, to assert that she has a certain property (or set of properties) “corresponding” to the predicate ‘is the sun’” (Stern 2000:24).

² Stern (2000:12) stresses the importance that the same kind of difference of metaphorical interpretation can also arise where different tokens of one sentence occur on different occasions with different beliefs or attitudes associated by the speaker-hearer with the noun phrase.

ideas of death, ending and this “poignant diminishment of intensity” that Lakoff & Turner stress (but is absent in their schemes) echo in our minds. Nowottny (1965:77) analysed sonnet LXXIII too. In Shakespeare’s sonnet there is three related metaphors and the relationship between a declining, and a declining and a declining. But he emphasizes the structure is not the most important thing:

Though this kind of clarity and continuity, obviously, is a marked and carefully contrived features of this sonnet, it is equally obvious that to describe this clear and continuous ground-plan does not throw any light on the causes of the excitement we feel on reading the sonnet; there is nothing exciting in merely being told that the onset of winter and the coming of night and the dwindling of a fire are all examples of decline and that they metaphorically describe what the poet feels. If that is all, who cares? We care because of the way in which these examples are particularized. (Nowottny 1965:78)

Meaning is contextual in a double sense. The meaning of a word is made of the contexts in which it occurs and in the same way the unusual meaning of a word strongly depends on the particular context in which it is found. Metaphor in literature is different from metaphor outside literature, because of the way in which metaphorical expressions interact with one another and with other aspects of the literary text in which they occur (Semino & Steen 2011:234) Neighbouring elements may affect the meaning of a word minimally or dramatically. The large numbers of linguistic uses make it impossible for the hearer to keep all of them activated in his memory. It is the context which enables him to adequately select one or the other (Barsalou 1997:47-48). “Leaves” and “gold” have different meanings whether they occur on their own or together. The originality of the poet arises mostly from his ability to play with the protean meaning of words.

3. THE ADVANTAGES OF THE CONTEXTUAL THEORY OF METAPHOR

Usual syntagmatic connections explain word connotation. Words simply do not fall out of the sky. They have a past history which loads them with particular shades of meaning. The uses and contexts of a word have created its “potential range of connotations” (Beardsley 1958:461). The flavour of a word derives from the contexts with which we associate it. This is why a metaphor evokes much more than it says directly. The poet stimulates the hidden potentialities of words through original combinations. Poetic words can take us down to the deepest layers of our

memory giving rise to unexpected and emotive meanings. I think that the contextual theory protects the virtues of the metaphor from the, in some ways, helpful but harmful results of the conceptual schemes by Lakoff & Turner. Pleberio's lament after Melibea's tragic death at the end of *La Celestina* (De Rojas 1975:363-364) illustrates this:

‘(O vida de congoxas llena, de miseria acompañada! (O mundo, mundo! [...] Yo pensaba en mi más tierna edad que eras y eran tus hechos regidos por alguna orden; agora, visto el pro y la contra de tus bienandanzas, me pareces un laberinto de errores, un desierto espantable, una morada de fieras, juego de hombres que andan en corro, laguna llena de cieno, región llena de espinas, monte alto, campo pedregoso, prado lleno de serpientes, huerto florido y sin fruto, fuente de cuidados, río de lágrimas, mar de miserias, trabajo sin provecho, dulce ponzoña, vana esperanza, falsa alegría, verdadero dolor.’³

The irremediable sense of loss, the unbearable pain of a father before his daughter's corpse is heart-rending. In order to express this sorrow, the author uses a series of images with unpleasant connotations: tears, lies, serpents, thorns, etc. Pleberio's moving words make us see life and death from a particular point of view. However, the “true pain” of the father embracing his daughter's dead body lacks any external reference. It is the series of metaphors attached to this pain which provides it with a wide range of connotations. Deserts, garden full of serpents, etc. make the reader imagine these collateral scenes as background to the final expression of “true pain.” This pain inherits the emotional charge triggered by the elements mentioned previously and the intensity of its meaning is multiplied. Only by projecting all the contexts of these terrible scenarios with their anxiety, fear, horror, pain, death and sorrow can we understand Pleberio's broken heart.

In Chemistry, valence is a measure of the number of bonds formed by an atom of a given element. Valence can be defined as the number of valence bonds a given atom has formed, or can form, with one or more atoms. It is also known as valency or valence number. Metaphors can only be understood and their emotional charge fully valued if we keep in mind the contextual valences of words. To ignore these valences leads to inevitable contradictions when trying to explain creativity and word connotation. A brief list of the contextual links present in Pleberio's lament and simultaneously active in the reader's mind is ‘desert,’ ‘thirst,’ ‘death,’ ‘poison,’

³ ‘Oh life full of anguish and misfortune! Oh world, world! In my youth I thought that you and your acts followed some pre-established plan; but now, as I contemplate the whims of fortune, I see that you are a maze of errors, an awful desert, a lair of wild beasts, a child's singing game, a lake of mire, a thorny wood, a high mountain, a stony field, a meadow full of serpents, an orchard with blossom that gives no fruit, a well of cares, a valley of tears, a sea of misfortune, an uncompleted task, sweet poison, vain hope, false joy, true pain’ (Translation made by Francisco Mota).

‘thorn,’ ‘sang,’ ‘suffering,’ ‘tear,’ ‘pain,’ ‘sadness,’ ‘anguish,’ ‘labyrinth,’ ‘prison,’ etc. Simply interpreting metaphors as the implementation of either categorical or conceptual schemes dilutes the connotations. The strength of the usual contextual valences is weakened under the weight of these supraordinate schemes. In contrast to comprehensive categories and fragmenting mappings, the contextual theory of metaphors stresses the contexts of words and respects the emotional linking of two worlds by means of common features.

The multiple meanings of poetic words create innumerable semantic gaps in a literary text. In this respect, the metaphorical ambiguity must be seen as enriching the language since the literary message would not exist without the simultaneous presence of multiple meanings. This fact makes the role of interpretation extremely important. As readers we take part in an unpredictable act of communication and we choose the most suitable interpretative course (Eco 1981:384-385).

Metaphors are mechanisms which allow the meaning to remain open-ended. Each reader’s associations play an extremely important role in decoding the text. Contexts of use may not be the same from one reader to the other, who may have met the word in very different contexts. This leads to different interpretations of the same text. Juvenal Urbino, the fictional character of *El Amor en los tiempos del cólera* (García Márquez 1985:13-15), is reminded of unrequited love every time he smells the scent of bitter almonds. Visiting suicides he got to know the odour of gold cyanide and this leads him to inevitably link that scent with unrequited love. Consequently, the interactive theory recognizes the fundamental role played by the reader in the interpretation of metaphors and the individual nature of this interpretation. Although all metaphors have literal limits, interpretations are very unpredictable.

The contextual theory of metaphors based on the projection of contexts could help to explain why the poet chose a particular metaphor as opposed to other possible ones. Shakespeare’s sonnet compares human life to autumn turning into winter, to fading light and to a dying flame. Why does he choose these particular domains? Lakoff admits that his theory cannot predict the poet’s choice of source domain. It is hard to criticise his approach on this point, since such prediction is for the most part impossible. However, my proposal may shed some light on the mechanisms whereby a metaphor comes into being. I agree with Steen and Semino (2011:239) when they say that the poet selects metaphorical choices and patterns that contribute to convey particular themes, atmospheres and worldviews.

It is the original communicative aim of the poet that we must first consider. We couldn’t know the poet’s intentions, but I suppose the poet chooses the domain best suited to his ends. The usual syntagmatic connections provide us with some clues as to why one entity was chosen rather than another. The poet chooses the

metaphors that emphasize the contextual valence he is aiming at. As a general rule I suggest the following: the more intense and adequate the valences are in a given domain (depending on the poet's intentions), the more likely it is that that domain will be chosen.

There are, for example, many metaphorical ways of expressing anger. If we want to express this feeling as the result of an external cause, we will probably choose a metaphor in terms of heat. On the other hand, if we aim at expressing anger as a consequence of endogenous causes, the image of a rabid animal that all of a sudden attacks is our choice (Edwards 1997:262 n. 23). While rabid animals attack without previous provocation, water only boils after an external supply of heat has been applied, having no control over the process. In the first place the agent is active, in the second it is passive, the reaction being an inevitable result of external provocation. In either case responsibility is ascribed so differently that the two perspectives are not interchangeable without seriously affecting meaning.

Sonnet LXXIII emphasizes the inexorable passing of time against which we are defenceless. If Shakespeare chooses these elements (yellow leaves, cold, ashes, etc.) it is in order to express exhaustion, death, the end, destruction, loss and ruins. The poet projects a strictly human feeling of love onto this store of metaphysical words. As he nears death the poet's love for his loved one is intensified. *Tempus fugit* leads to a greater appreciation of *carpe diem*. This is typical of the love poetry.

Prediction is not always possible, since some source domains may be an obvious choice while others are arbitrary. However, Lakoff's contribution on this issue is of little help, since all domains are at the same level of choice for the poet. This is a result of his conceding priority to metaphors over metaphorical expressions. On the other hand, Edwards stresses the psychological aspect. The first step is the poet's communicative aim and he then creates the metaphorical expression to fit that aim. The predictive power of this second approach is still very inaccurate, but Lakoff's theory offers none.

Different theories and approaches have been proposed with regard to metaphor translation, each of which has tackled this problem from a different point of view. It is obvious that translating metaphors is a problematic task. Explaining the problems of translating metaphor goes beyond the bounds of this paper but I would like to point out some aspects of this matter which are related with the contextual theory of metaphor.

The difficulty of translating metaphor derives from the disparity of connotation and domains in different languages. The logical content and denotations of words are easily translatable from one language to another, but metaphors are mostly pure

connotation. The interpretation of metaphors is strongly culturally conditioned. Translating a text by simply attending to word denotations sacrifices the real meaning of the expressions since coreferential words do not normally have the same links and contexts of use in different languages. Metaphorical sense emerges through exploiting the set of associations that accompany linguistic elements in the consciousness of code users.

Let us consider, for example, one of Petrarch's favourite expressions: "capelli d'oro". It is easy to translate this metaphor into French or English, since connotation is not altered by the coreferential words in these languages. In French and English gold is a precious metal and the connotative links of the concept are much the same as in Italian. Now, suppose we are Utopians, i.e., citizens of More's fictional world of Utopia, translating this expression. Gold is worthless in Utopia. There, gold is only used in the manufacturing of worthless objects, such as urinals, chains for slaves and earrings for criminals (More:138-139). The contextual valences of gold in Utopia are the torture of slavery, urine, the shame of disgrace, shackles, murderers, etc, that is, rather different from "precious metal," "wealth," "fortune" and "valuable goods" of our society. A common concept, "gold", does not share the same connotative links in our society –'gem', 'jewellery,' 'wealth,' 'purity,' 'rarity'...– and in Utopia –'chain,' 'murderer,' 'slave,' 'chamber pot'...We can guess that a Utopian dictionary would, like ours, have an entry saying that gold is "a yellow malleable, ductile, high density metallic element, resistant to chemical reaction except by chlorine, bromine and aqua regia." If Utopians had had the knowledge, they would have even mentioned 79 as the atomic number of gold too. Is all this of any importance in creating and interpreting metaphors? Certainly not. It is the meaning human beings give to words that really matters, and this is made up of their usual contextual valences. This does not mean that all metaphors are untranslatable, but certainly in so doing our first goal must be to discover words or images as similar as possible to the connotative links of the original text.

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