THE EDUCATIONAL FUNCTION OF METAPHOR IN THE APHORISTIC SAYINGS OF PROVERBS

Eshmuratov Umidjon Temurovich
Termez State Pedagogical Institute
https://orcid.org/0009-0006-3338-8197
umidjon.eshmuratov@terdpi.uz

Abstract

Many proverbial sayings make significant use of metaphor not simply to enhance their rhetorical appeal but to convey essential meaning. By examining aphorisms that refer to human discourse, this article argues that a cognitive approach to metaphor not only sheds light on the didactic power of aphorisms, but also opens new avenues of intertextual analysis among the various sayings and collections of Proverbs. Such an approach high-lights, for example, the differing metaphorical schemas employed by the so-called Solomonic and Hezekian collections.

Introduction

Every definition of metaphor acknowledges at least two constitutive elements, the 'one thing' and 'another'. How, precisely, to name these elements, and thereby indicate their interrelationship, has been the pressing challenge for every theorist. Perhaps best known are the labels given by

I.A. Richards, namely, 'tenor' and 'vehicle', classifications that he himself admitted were 'clumsy', Studies of poetry, including biblical poetry, have been encumbered with the ambiguity of these terms.

The 'tenor' is the 'underlying idea', 'principal subject', or conceptual meaning signified; the 'vehicle' is the mode or figure by which the 'tenor' is expressed. Other concerted attempts at naming these two components include Max Black's distinction between 'the "primary" subject and the "secondary" one' [1], and the recent designations given by Paul Avis, 'occasion' and 'image'[2]. Missing from these various classifications, however, is an exact accounting of how these components interact or perform in a given context.

To fill this gap, cognitive literary theorists George Lakoff and Mark Turner have attempted to describe more precisely how metaphors work, not just in poetic language but also in everyday speech and rational dis-course across cultures. Like their predecessors, they distinguish two essential components; their innovation lies in identifying how they are related. Taking as an example the metaphor 'Time is a Thief, whereby the abstract category of time is personified, Lakoff and Turner describe how the two parts are related:

We use a metaphor to map certain aspects of the source domain onto the target domain, thereby producing a new understanding of that target domain. In this case, part of that mapping superimposes a

---

[1] 1979 'More about Metaphor', in Andrew Ortony (ed.), *Metaphor and Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press):

[2] *Das weise Wort und seine Wirking: eine Untersuchung zur Komposition und Redaktion von Proverbia 10,1–22,16* (WMANT, 83; Neukirchen–Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag).

© Ushbu material Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0) litsenziyasi asosida tarqatiladi.

metaphorical understanding of youth as a possession, which carries with it our normal feelings about possessions—that we have a right to keep them and that it would be unjust for them to be taken away.

The terms 'target domain' and 'source domain' not only acknowledge a certain parity of import between the metaphor and its referent, but also illustrate more precisely the dynamic that occurs when something is referenced metaphorically, namely, a superimposing or unilateral 'mapping' of one domain upon another.[3] Such 'transference' of meaning results in a new understanding of the target domain, in this case 'time', but not of the source domain (theft and possessions).[4] The source domain illuminates a new, crucial dimension of its target, but the reverse does not apply. Through the use of metaphor, 'time' is understood or perceived differently. Nothing new, however, is said of possessions or thieves.

Thus, according to Lakoff and Turner, 'metaphorical understanding is not a matter of mere word play; it is endemically conceptual in nature'. For the metaphor to work, an understanding of both domains must be gained before new insight is achieved. There must be a recognizable correspondence between the metaphor and its target domain that is acknowledged by both poet and reader; otherwise the metaphor remains indecipherable. Lakoff and Turner offer the example 'Death is a Banana', a metaphor devoid of rhyme and, more importantly, reason, an example of catechresis or the improper use of metaphor [3]. The effective metaphor, by contrast, stands on the ground of shared knowledge and builds on such knowledge in a way that elicits new inferences and connections.

On the one hand, if a metaphor is too enigmatic, it only 'puzzles' the

reader like 'strange words', to quote Aristotle. It remains idiosyncratic, or worse, catechretic. On the other hand, a metaphor that is too conventional or obvious packs no punch, such as lexicalized ('dead') and fully conventional metaphors. In a 'living metaphor', 'there is dissonance or tension…whereby the terms of the utterance used seem not strictly appropriate to the topic at hand'[4]. A banal metaphor, by contrast, exhibits so much similarity or near equivalency between its source and target as to be superfluous or mechanical. A good metaphor effectively weds together analogy and anomaly; it creates conceptual and emotional friction by which new meaning is achieved and, in the words of Aristotle, 'something fresh' is ascertained. The creative metaphor is a master of surprise but not a source of puzzlement.

Metaphor in Proverbs

If, according to Lakoff and Turner, metaphors help to 'create structure in our understanding of life'[5], then it should be no surprise to find the book of

Proverbs teeming with metaphors, both large and small: from female wisdom, daughter of God, to honeycombs and polluted springs. Moreover, since metaphors are, according to Mac Cormac, 'speech acts', which 'can be adjudged as felicitous or infelicitous according to whether the words used are appropriate to the act performed rather than to whether they are true or false', the performative character of proverbs invites metaphorical analysis[6] . More than dispensers of information, proverbs invite a response

[3] *More than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).

[4] *Metaphor and Religious Language* (Oxford: Clarendon Press).Watson, Wilfred G.E.

[5] *More than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor* (Chicago:

University of Chicago Press).1989

[6] MacCormac, Earl R. 1985 *A Cognitive Theory of Metaphor* (Cambridge, MA: The Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press).

© Ushbu material Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0) litsenziyasi asosida tarqatiladi.

from the hearer or reader. In short, metaphors teach by generating connections that would otherwise remain undetectable by the reader. They provide, to borrow loosely from Paul Ricoeur, a 'surplus of meaning', but not an infinite supply.

Interpreters are just beginning to appreciate fully the didactic deployment of metaphor in biblical literature. One notable attempt at understanding the rhetorical dynamics of 'aphoristic thinking' largely marginalizes the use of metaphor to non-paradoxical discourse [7]. But, as will be shown, it is the metaphor itself that can create the paradox. As a preliminary probe into the wealth of metaphors in Proverbs, I have taken a modest sampling of the aphoristic sayings with the following questions in mind: In what ways does the use of metaphor in a given saying prompt new insight for the reader/listener? Does the particular choice of metaphor and the manner in which it is deployed help to deter-mine what makes one proverb conventional, even banal, and another sublime? A metaphorical analysis not only sheds light on the didactic power of these terse sayings, but also opens new avenues of intertextual analysis among the various sayings and collections.

It must be said that of all the various corpora in Proverbs, the first nine

chapters have received the lion's share of recent literary study, and understandably so. The poets behind these various lectures revel in imaginative language to profile Wisdom's incomparable value and the dangers of folly and illicit conduct, much in the language of metaphor and metonym.

Moreover, as I have tried to show in an earlier study, Proverbs provide a meta-narrative for the book as a whole that culminates in the final poem, the acrostic in. This meta -narrative of moral formation begins with the figure of the son—the cipher for the reader—addressed by his father and it concludes with a male adult having married an economically productive woman, wisdom incarnated within the household. This narrative arc from dependent child to paterfamilias provides only the framework for the book; wisdom is also found in the middle, in the details. The first nine chapters are prefatory; they whet the appetite and orient the reader to the myriad sayings that follow. It is only appropriate, then, to give these sapiential nuggets their didactic due, as did the ancient compilers. One way is through metaphorical analysis.

The editors of Proverbs were quite explicit in the way they presented

their collections of sayings by situating them within a broad metaphorical schema. It is no coincidence that the prolegomenon of Proverbs, concludes with a profile of Wisdom's domicile in which a lavish banquet is prepare d for her would-be disciples. What does Wisdom re quire but to forsake immaturity and enjoy her feast? 'Come, partake of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed', she beckons.

So what is it about these small servings of wisdom, then, that packs such didactic, edifying power? Lakoff and Turner find proverbs, cross-culturally, to be the simplest form of didactic poetry. They 'instruct us in what to notice, how to understand, and how to conduct our lives'. Not only are they, by their very terseness, easily committed to memory, many of them achieve or heighten their didactic impact through their evocative use of metaphor.

Conclusion

Many of the aphorisms in the book of Proverbs revel in metaphor, and not simply for the sake of ornamentation or rhetorical flair. More often than not, it is the metaphor that delivers the proverb's message. Pedagogically, the metaphor is well suited to enhance proverbial instruction because, like the

[7] Williams, James G.1980 *Those Who Ponder Proverbs: Aphoristic Thinking in Biblical Literature* (BLS, 2; Sheffield: Almond Press).

© Ushbu material Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0) litsenziyasi asosida tarqatiladi.

proverb, metaphors are sparing of words yet capable of prompting reflection in ways that compel the reader or listener to regard a topic in a new or different light. In other words, metaphors teach, and they do so by reorienting the readers' perception.

One topic that pervades two major collections in Proverbs is human discourse. The sages valued 'fine' or 'judicious speech' and 'pleasant words',[87] a fact evident not s imply from the sheer number of sayings devoted to this subject but from the variety of metaphors enlisted. Through the deployment of various metaphors, appropriate discourse is shown to be priceless, life-sustaining, salutary, salvific, effective, delightful, awesome, overt, and wise. Collected from diverse contexts, these constituent aphorisms gain further nuance by engaging each other, sometimes paradoxically, resulting in a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts.

Taken together, these sayings fashion an irresistible world for human discourse, a world that beckons the reader to enter. In the Solomonic collection, the 'fruit of the mouth' finds its place on 'the tree of life' within an Edenic world of gushing streams and honeycombs that populate the landscape of appropriate discourse. 'Thorns' and 'firebrands', however, ravage the lush terrain, threatening its inhabitants. In the contentious fray of human discourse, judicious speech not only yields fruit, it also wields a sword.

Biblio graphy

1. Alster, Bendt 1997 Proverbs of Ancient Sumer: The World's Earliest Proverb Collections(2 vols.; Bethesda, MD: CDL Press).
2. Aristotle1954 Rhetoricand Poetics (trans. Rhys Roberts and Ingram Bywater; The Modern Library; New York: Random House).
3. Avis, Paul 1998 God and the Creative Imagination: Metaphor, Sym bol and Myth in Religion and Theology (London: Routledge).
4. Barucq, André1964 Le livre des Proverbes (Sources Bibliques; Paris: J. Gabalda). Black, Max
5. Brown, William P.1996 Character in Crisis: A Fresh Approach to the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testam ent (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans).
6. Bühlmann, Walter 1976 Vom rechten Reden und Schweigen: Studien zu Proverbien 10–31 (OBO,12; Freiburg: Universitätsverlag).Fontaine, Carole
7. 1982 Traditional Sayings in the Old Testament (BLS, 5; Decatur, GA: Almond Press). Fox, Michael 2000 Proverbs 1–9 (AB, 18a; New York: Doubleday). Lakoff, George, and Mark T urner
8. 1989 More than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).MacCormac, Earl R.
9. 1985 A Cognitive Theory of Metaphor (Cambridge, MA: The Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press). Newsom, Carol A.
10. 1989 'Woman and the Discourse of Patriarchal Wisdom: A Study of Proverbs 1–9', in Peggy L. Day (ed.), Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel (Min-neapolis: Fortress Press): 142-6

© Ushbu material Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0) litsenziyasi asosida tarqatiladi.