

BOOK REVIEWS

ILHA DO DESTERRO

REVIEWS/RESENHAS

Kövecses, Zoltán. *Metaphor in Culture: Universality and Variation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

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Zoltán Kövecses is Professor of Linguistics in the Department of American Studies, Eötvös Loránd University. He is also the author of *Language, Mind and Culture: A practical introduction* (2006), *Metaphor and Emotion* (2002) and *Metaphor: A Practical Introduction* (2000).

The author's major goal in this work is to develop a theory of metaphor variation, based on the cognitive linguistic view of metaphor. According to Kövecses, cognitive linguists who share the contemporary view of metaphor have carried out important studies concerning the universal aspects of metaphor. However, in the author's point of view, those same linguists have frequently ignored the many cases of nonuniversality in metaphorical conceptualization, both cross-culturally and within culture. Thus, Kövecses embarks on an attempt to develop an updated and more comprehensive theory of metaphor than the one originally developed by Lakoff and Johnson in their book *Metaphors We Live By* (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). His major reason for this

is to make such a theory more readily useful to people working on issues in the social sciences, and capable of helping us understand the role of metaphor in complex social-cultural issues such as emotions, politics, thought and moral, as well as highly abstract domains such as time and life.

The book is divided into an introduction and four parts. Part I consists of chapters 2 and 3 and deals with the issue of the universality of metaphor. Part II is formed by chapters 4 and 5 and takes up the question of dimensions of metaphor variation – both cross-culturally and within-culture. Part III consists of chapters 6 through 9 and is devoted to the issue of which aspects of metaphor are involved in the process of variation. Part IV, formed by chapters 10, 11 and 12, looks at the causes that result in variation, together with creativity, which is seen by the author as a special kind of variation.

In the introductory chapter, Kövecses presents his major goal and, in order to justify it, he displays a list of questions concerning the issues of universality and variation in metaphor which, according to him, should be approached by a theory of metaphor. He briefly discusses the components of the linguistic cognitive view of metaphor and points out how metaphor is understood according to that perspective. Metaphor is not an exclusively linguistic phenomenon, but a

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multifaceted phenomenon that involves not only language but also our conceptual system, social-cultural practices, as well as neural and bodily activities. The author informs us that Lakoff and Johnson are among the first linguists who revolutionized the theory of metaphor with their seminal publication *Metaphors we live by* (1980). Its major contribution was the claim that metaphors are conceptual in nature, that is, that they reside in the conceptual system, and not just in language. According to those two authors, we understand abstract concepts – target domain – in terms of a concrete domain that has been experienced by us – source domain. Another important contribution to the contemporary theory of metaphor, also by Lakoff and Johnson (1999), is the notion that the metaphorical thought is embodied. That means that our abstract thought, largely defined by metaphor, is the result of the way the human body, with its physiology, constrains the way we think about abstractions such as time, emotion, morality and politics.

Kövecses points out that these new ideas concerning metaphor are embedded in a larger framework of philosophical claims made by Lakoff and Johnson (1999) that suggest that:

1. Thought is largely unconscious. This means that we cannot help thinking in the way we do.
2. Abstract concepts are largely metaphorical. This means that most of our nonphysical (social, psychological, etc.)

reality is conceptualized via physical reality, that is, in terms of physical domains of experience.

3. The mind is embodied. This means that concepts derive their meaning through sensorimotor experience – either directly or indirectly (via metaphor).

The author emphasizes the second proposition, but he points out that the other two are just as crucial for a fuller understanding of the nature and significance of metaphor in culture.

In chapter 2, the author discusses some of the major ideas and recent developments of the cognitive linguistic theory of metaphor, in an attempt to lead us to understand why many people who are familiar with this new view often expect that conceptual metaphors should be largely or mostly universal. Kövecses addresses the *embodiment hypothesis* (Lakoff, 1987), which states that metaphorical thought is based on correlated experiences such as the correlation between the intensity of a physical activity or emotional state and the production of heat by the body – a phenomenon that cannot be avoided due to our physiology. The author also presents a model that attempts to explain how this correlation is activated in the brain. The assumption, according to recent neuroscientific research, is that there are two groups of neurons (the source and the target) which are located in different parts of the brain and are connected by neural circuitry (mappings). The two ensembles of neurons are activated at the same time due to the connections

between them. In addition, Kövecses presents data that suggest that linguistic expressions may indicate the existence of such neuronal connections.

In chapter 3, the author goes on discussing the universal aspect of metaphor. He presents case studies that involve potentially universal metaphors on which work has been done in several unrelated languages. Kövecses emphasizes the fact that the same conceptual metaphors for emotions such as happiness and anger were found in investigations carried out in such diverse languages as English, Chinese, Hungarian, Zulu and Polish. The same happened with time metaphors, usually conceptualized in terms of space. The author based his explanation of the universal aspect of the investigated metaphors on the physiology of our body. However, he observes that the metaphors found to be shared by several cultures are highly abstract generic-level metaphors. Thus, in the second part of the book, which begins in chapter 4, Kövecses turns to the investigation of culturally fully embedded conceptual metaphors in order to look at the question of whether they maintain the potentially universal status.

In chapter 4, the author approaches the issue of metaphor variation in the cross-cultural context. He claims that the variation that conceptual metaphors display at the specific level is not the only kind of variation that can occur and he discusses several others. One of them is the case in which a culture uses a set of different source domains for a par-

ticular target domain, or, conversely, a culture uses a particular source domain for the conceptualization of a set of different target domains. One of the reasons for this, as Kövecses notes, is the fact that the source domains available for the conceptualization of a target domain may not be the same in different cultures. Another situation involves cases in which the set of conceptual metaphors for a particular target domain is roughly the same in two languages/cultures, but one language/culture shows a clear preference for some of the conceptual metaphors that are employed. Finally, there may be some conceptual metaphors that appear to be unique to a given language/culture. These require that both the source and the target be unique to the culture.

In chapter 5, Kövecses, based on the claim that metaphors reveal and, in some cases, constitute human experience, turns to the hypothesis that metaphors - both of the linguistic and of the conceptual kind - vary according to social divisions such as gender, class, ethnic groups, subculture, etc. He presents several examples that support his hypothesis. It is also emphasized that the physical environment in which a language variety is spoken appears to have an impact on metaphor variation. The frequently observed imaginative "vigor" of American English, as opposed to British English, for example, is said to be due to the new landscape the settlers encountered, the many new activities they engaged in, and the frontier experience in general. The author points out that cross-

cultural variation and within-culture variation are aspects of the same general issue. Both deal with social and cultural divisions that are likely to produce metaphor variation due to people's divergent experiences in social and cultural life.

Chapter 6 is the first of the 4 chapters that constitute the third part of the book, in which the author discusses the aspects of metaphor involved in variation. The eleven components of conceptual metaphor, all of them, according to Kövecses, involved in variation, are: 1) source domain, 2) target domain, 3) experiential basis, 4) neural structures corresponding to 1 and 2 in the brain, 5) relationship between the source and the target, 6) metaphorical linguistic expressions, 7) mappings, 8) entailments, 9) blends, 10) nonlinguistic realizations, 11) cultural models. The eleven components are involved in variation in, basically, two different ways: either as producers of variation or as components affected by it. As the author points out, the different framings of the source and target domains and the blending seem to be responsible for variation, whereas other components such as the relationships between the source and the target, mappings, entailments, metaphorical linguistic expressions and nonlinguistic realizations seem to be affected by it.

Chapter 7 is concerned with the ways shared conceptual metaphors are expressed linguistically in different languages. The author uses the analyses of two conceptual metaphors shared by speakers of English and Hungarian –

namely TIME IS MONEY and LOVE IS A JOURNEY – in order to address four questions: 1) how particular figurative meanings are expressed by means of one or several conceptual metaphors in different languages, 2) whether abstract meaning can be expressed literally at all, 3) what the subtle details of the differences in the linguistic expression of the same conceptual metaphor are, and 4) how particular cultural contexts in which conceptual metaphors are embedded influence the linguistic expression of these metaphors. In order to approach the first question, Kövecses reports a comparative study carried out in English, Hungarian and Arabic. In this study the following pattern was identified for English and Hungarian: the two different languages used words (different word forms) that have the same literal meaning, the same figurative meaning and that belong to the same conceptual metaphor. However, when those two languages were compared to Arabic there was a change in pattern: the different word forms (different languages) presented different literal meanings for the same figurative meaning and the same conceptual metaphor. As regards the second question, Kövecses suggests that abstract meanings can only be expressed in a figurative way, regardless of the language or the historical period. He shows, by means of psycholinguistic experiments, that although some linguistic expressions referring to abstract domains are taken as literal, their metaphoric and metonymic status is revealed in a less conscious level.

In answer to the third question, the author found that there are many ways in which the expression of the same conceptual metaphor differs from language to language. These ways include differences in the degree of elaboration, the degree of conventionalization (degree of stylistic neutrality), specificity of metaphor and scope of metaphor (referring to the number of target domains a specific source domain applies to).

In discussing the relationship between the linguistic expressions of conceptual metaphors and the cultural context in which they are embedded, Kövecses concludes that two languages (or varieties of the same language) may have the same conceptual metaphor, but the linguistic expression of the conceptual metaphor may be influenced or shaped by differences in cultural-ideological traits and assumptions characterizing the different cultures.

In chapter 8, entitled *Metaphor in Social-Physical Reality*, the author turns to another aspect of conceptual metaphors, namely, their ability to be realized in social-cultural practice and institutions. Kövecses argues that there are several possible ways of nonlinguistic realizations of metaphors – called “instituted models” by the anthropologist Bradd Shore (1996). In such cases, both the source and the target domains and the entailments of the source domain can turn into social-physical reality. In other words, the conceptual domain occurs not only as a concept or as a word but also as a more or less tangible thing or

process in our social and cultural practice (i.e., as a social and physical object, institution, action, activity, event, state, relationship and the like). A rather common example in our culture would be the visual representation of a source domain through dance, painting, sculpture, gestures, cartoons, etc. Kövecses claims that the metaphorical aspect in question can be used as methodology for cultural analysis. He uses a study of the American culture to demonstrate how we can use metaphor analysis of cultural practices such as cinema, arts, media discourse, symbols, politics, etc. in order to find the conceptual patterns that characterize and shape the people’s minds.

In chapter 9, the last chapter devoted to the metaphorical aspects involved in variation, the author introduces a new notion, which, according to him, plays a crucial role in the attempt to describe and characterize the human conceptual system: that of “cultural models”. Cultural models, as Kövecses points out, are best conceived of as any coherent organizations of human experience shared by people. They exist for both concrete and abstract concepts, as well as for those that fall somewhere between the two extreme ends on the scale of abstraction. The issue of the nature of the relationship between cultural model and conceptual metaphor can only arise in the case of cultural models for concepts at or close to the abstract end of the scale. The author’s major interest in this chapter is to attempt to establish the contribution of metaphor to the content of cultural models and how those

models emerge. Following a theoretical discussion, Kövecses suggests that abstract concepts can only emerge metaphorically. Thus, the cultural models in question can only emerge from metaphor. The author explains the process in the following way: systematic connections in the brain are activated by physiological processes, they are conceptualized by means of conceptual metonyms and metaphors and then evolve to cultural models. Cultural models can be responsible for metaphor variation, since they can vary from culture to culture.

Chapter 10 constitutes the first chapter of the last part of the book, in which the author discusses the causes of metaphor variation. Kövecses suggests that many of our metaphors vary, basically, due to two major reasons: our experiences as human beings vary and the cognitive preferences and styles we put to use for the creation of abstract thought also vary. The author mentions a number of aspects of the world that can cause metaphor variation. Among those, he mentions the human body, the physical environment, the social aspects of the environment in which we act, the communicative situation, our individual history, our personal concerns and interests. As far as the differences in cognitive styles are concerned, Kövecses notes that, in spite of the fact that human beings share bodily experiences on which the universal metaphors are based, different peoples may be attuned to different aspects of their bodily functioning in relation to a target domain, or that they can ignore or downplay certain aspects of

their bodily functioning. According to the author, several studies have shown that there may be preferences for different figurative processes (metaphor x metonymy) in different cultures as regards the conceptualization of a particular domain.

In chapter 11, Kövecses points at the creativity of the metaphoric process, as well as that of blending (Fauconnier and Turner, 2002) as being additional causes of the innumerable divergences found in figurative thought in different cultures and subcultures. As far as metaphoric creativity is concerned, the author claims that people that make use of novel metaphoric expressions do it based on conceptual metaphors that are common to all members of a culture. Creativity is achieved through the use of four strategies: extension, elaboration of one element of the source domain, questioning, and combining (which results in complex conceptual metaphor). As regards blending, the author points out, it constitutes an additional and important cognitive process that greatly enhances the potential for creative thought. According to that theory, there are three different mental spaces at work: one filled by elements of the source domain, one taken by the target domain, and a third space where the blending of the structures of the two domains takes place and which results in a structure that did not exist before and that allows for creativity.

The author begins the last chapter of the book, chapter 12, by placing at the fore some of the ways in which the study of

metaphor and that of culture are connected. Among those considered crucial by him are: – the conventional metaphorical system of a culture preserves and lends stability to a particular culture; and – given that cultures can be thought of as sets of shared understandings, creativity in figurative thought can provide cultures with the potential of change and new experience. After that, Kövecses calls attention to three large systems previously discussed and which, he believes, play an important role in an account of the universality and variation of metaphors. The systems are: bodily experience (embodiment), social-cultural experience (context), and cognitive preferences and styles. The author then turns to the coherence that exists between conceptual metaphors and each one of the systems involved and to the fact that the three systems can be jointly at work in the creation of a particular metaphor and thus display a high degree of overall coherence. However, Kövecses also shows us, by means of examples, that in some cases there may be conflict or contradiction between a metaphor and the system involved. It would be the case of the expression “*Our fears are fueled by acts of terrorism*”, in which the word *fuel* suggests heat and contradicts both the conventional conceptualization and the physiological embodiment of FEAR, based on “cold”, not “heat”.

The chapter is ended with a list of propositions that, according to the author, summarize the metaphor view presented by him throughout the book. The view of metaphor he arrives at attempts

to deal successfully with the fact that some metaphors are potentially universal and the fact that some metaphors vary cross-culturally and within culture.

Although Kövecses’s book provides a brief review of existing cognitive metaphor theories and concepts, it is aimed at readers who are already familiar with the contemporary view of metaphor. The book provides a highly informative overview of metaphor and culture, though the author does not address the issue of culture and primary metaphors. Kövecses’s ideas are well argued and supported by a wealth of data and specific analyses, which contribute to a clear understanding of the topics explored by the author. *Metaphor and Culture: Universality and Variation* is far from exhausting the issue of metaphor variation, but it is undoubtedly a great contribution to the cognitive approach to metaphor since there seemed to be a gap in the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) as far as this issue is concerned. Cultural variation in metaphor had not been seriously addressed by Lakoff and Johnson or other linguists who share the cognitive view of metaphor. The book can also contribute to the understanding of different cultures through the investigation of one of the most complex and challenging problems as far as metaphor studies are concerned, namely the issue of metaphor and variation in the world’s languages and cultures.

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by Ricardo Luiz Teixeira de Almeida

Figurative Thinking and Foreign Language Learning, written by professors Jeannette Littlemore and Graham Low, addresses the issues of figurative lan-

guage and the challenges it poses for foreign language learners. The perspective taken in the book aims at combining the achievements of researches that investigate figurative language in use, exploring its linguistic aspects, with those coming from a more cognitive approach, associated with the theory of conceptual metaphor, introduced by Lakoff and Johnson (1980).

According to Littlemore and Johnson, the aim of the book is to consider what foreign language learners for the most part need to learn, to review the empirical evidence concerning teaching and/or learning figurative language, and to develop a set of instructional and self-help ideas, which we group under the umbrella term 'figurative thinking' and which we try at various points to illustrate with real-life examples. (Littlemore & Low, 2006, p. xiv)

The book is successful in achieving these goals; however, as acknowledged by Littlemore and Graham, throughout the text figurative language is reduced exclusively to metaphors and metonymies, due to the fact that there is very little, if any, research on other figures of speech and thought and their relevance for the field of language learning. In spite of this, it undoubtedly represents a clear contribution to the way we think about and design tasks related to language learning, by focusing on the importance of both linguistic figures and "figurative thinking" in the process of learning and speaking a language.

Figurative thinking is thus a central concept in the book. It was adapted from Gibbs (1994) and treated by the authors as a pedagogic construct. It refers to a query routine which non-native speakers might profit from while trying to make sense of unknown expressions which are assumed to be figurative. The idea is that since they are not native speakers they will not always be able to process figurative language automatically and will indeed benefit from applying a more analytical approach to making sense of such expressions.

According to the authors, the book may be divided into three parts. The first one, which includes Chapters 1 to 4, explores the main background concepts and processes considered to be relevant to their theme. In Chapter 1, a definition and a discussion of the notion of figurative thinking are provided. Entitled "What is 'Figurative Thinking'?", Chapter 1 is also intended to review and discuss briefly the state of the art in metaphor and metonymy studies, highlighting the relevant aspects of these figures to language education.

However, it is in Chapter 2, "Why is Figurative Thinking Important for Foreign Language Learners?", that the connection between figurative language and foreign language learning is in fact established. This is done with an emphasis on vocabulary development, indicating the importance of figurative thinking to the understanding and learning of meaning extension, focus-

ing specifically on the areas of synaesthesia, idioms and similes.

Chapter 3, "Psychological Processes Underlying Figurative Thinking", begins by exploring the processes involved in the understanding and production of metaphors by native speakers and then moves to the strategies that foreign language learners use to make sense of metaphors in the target language. The psychological processes investigated are: noticing, activation of previous knowledge, associative fluency, analogical reasoning, and image formation. The pedagogic use of these processes is then illustrated by two anecdotal examples of foreign language learning contexts.

Closing this first section, Chapter 4, entitled "Developing Learner Autonomy in Figurative Thinking", approaches, from a realistic perspective, some issues concerning the possibilities of promoting learner autonomy. Although desirable as an educational goal, the degree of autonomy which can be developed by a foreign language learner when it comes to working with figurative language seems to be limited by several factors, such as: lack of knowledge of the basic senses of the words, the cultural nature of encyclopedic knowledge, the amount of time and effort involved in the process of interpretation, lack of predictability of the derived senses, among others. The authors seem to conclude, correctly in my view, that this is an area where the scaffolding provided by the teacher is of major importance, and that the desired student's autonomy

can only begin to develop if there is an awareness of such difficulties involving the interpretation and production of figurative language.

The second part, consisting of Chapters 5 to 9, deals with figurative language and thinking and the role they play in the development of each aspect of communicative competence. The model of communicative competence adopted is that of Bachman's (1990), which views communicative language ability as consisting of a combination of language competence and strategic competence. Since language competence is defined by Bachman's model as containing four elements, namely grammatical, textual, illocutionary and sociolinguistic competences, Chapters 5 to 8 explore the relationship between each of these components and figurative language, while in Chapter 9 the focus is on strategic competence.

Chapter 5, "Figurative Thinking and Sociolinguistic Competence", introduces the theoretical model of communicative competence and then discusses how figurative thinking can help promote sociolinguistic competence by addressing cultural related issues. The most important claim is that figurative language helps the learner enter new discourse communities, since it often functions as a clue to what counts as natural in a given culture. Issues related to cultural, social and linguistic variation are addressed, and though Bachman's (1990) notion of "sensitivity to naturalness" is presented as desirable goal, it

does not mean that students should be convinced to adopt the values of the target culture. What they need to do is to understand them, since "using a conceptual metaphor is not the same as believing it" (Littlemore & Low, 2006, p. 97).

"Figurative Thinking and Illocutionary Competence", Chapter 6, deals with the ways that figurative language serves what Bachman calls ideational, manipulative, heuristic and imaginative functions, and how learners may be helped to perform them. The importance of figurative language to the development of these functions is quite clear, since metaphor contains not only information but also an evaluative component, which can be used both for self-expression and for persuasion, and if playing with language is a central part of the imaginative function, then there is no doubt that it will largely involve figurative language. As far as the heuristic functions (using language to expand our knowledge of the world) are concerned, the use of metaphor to help promote learner understanding in formal educational contexts shows how powerful figurative language can be. The authors, as is done throughout the book, have outlined a number of techniques which can be used to help students in this area of communicative competence, though they point out that there is little empirical research in this area.

In Chapter 7, "Figurative Thinking and Textual Competence", Littlemore and Low suggest that figurative thinking can help the development of this component

of language competence by aiding the detection of figurative clusters, leading to an awareness of the role that figurative language plays in topic transition and showing how overarching conceptual metaphors can structure discourse. The implications for foreign language learners here include the fact that developing strategies for raising metaphoric awareness may lead in some circumstances to improve students' critical thinking.

Chapter 8, "Figurative Thinking and Lexico-Grammatical Competence", moves away from functions and textual abilities and focus on the relationship between figurative thinking and grammar. Arguing that "many of the phenomena that language educators regularly treat as grammatical have a strong metaphoric or metonymic component" (Littlemore & Low, 2006, p. 156), the authors remind us that although current senses of grammatical words tend to reflect their earlier and more concrete senses, the process of grammaticalisation makes it difficult to perceive such phenomenon, but employing metaphor can be very useful in reestablishing the relationship between the senses. Approaching the categories of demonstratives, prepositions, phrasal verbs, aspect and modality as well as the notion of grammatical metaphor (Halliday, 1985; 1994), they conclude that metonymy and metaphor are involved in important grammatical phenomena that learners need to understand and that in several cases, such as with phrasal verbs, giving conceptual

accounts can reduce the arbitrariness of grammar and increase learner motivation.

The last chapter of this section, "Strategic Competence" (Chapter 9) focuses mainly on the role of figurative thinking in the use and development of compensation strategies, that is, the attempts made to communicate when one is faced with gaps in the knowledge of the language. Together with what was discussed previously, this chapter shows the importance of figurative thinking for both transactional and relationship-building goals.

Part 3 consists of only one chapter (Chapter 10), "Promoting Figurative Language Competence in the Foreign Language Classroom", in which the authors conclude the book, discussing how figurative language can be incorporated into methodologies of language teaching as well as evaluating how it is in fact dealt with in actual language teaching materials.

Throughout the book, Littlemore and Low suggest activities designed to draw the learners' attention to figurative language and how its knowledge contributes to the development of the several aspects involved in communicative competence. The tasks also encourage an analytical approach which includes providing the learners with opportunities to play with the target language, testing their hypothesis, as a very powerful tool for the promotion of learning. The book is unquestionably a precious contribution for researchers and teachers, both for its emphasis on the neces-

sity of approaching figurative language from several different theoretical perspectives and for its suggestions of possible ways of focusing metaphor and metonymy in language teaching. If one acknowledges that metaphor and metonymy are central aspects of both language and thought, than one will agree that figurative language must be dealt with explicitly in the classroom, and this book surely sheds some light not only on the why but also on the how this could be done.

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