I. FONDEMENTS

THE METAPHOR BETWEEN SPLENDOUR AND FRAILTY

Alexandru GAFTON
"Al. I. Cuza" University of Iași
algafton@gmail.com

Abstract:
Metaphor generally has a positive connotation in the consciousness of communities, particularly due to its imaginative virtues and partially to its capacities to suggestively and allusively render contents which are hard to comprehend by means of the elements of the ordinary code. However, the appeal to metaphors connecting the instrument and the creative organ of human civilisation to entities which possess the perfection of nature is a sign of difficulty in understanding a complex reality rather than of comprehending a concept.

The analogies by which it is sent to a referent are generally a precarious way to equate attributes, because it does not bring more knowledge to the receiver, but only a rather abusive extension of class, as the new member does not become known – its attributes being suggested not shown –, but subordinated to a class presumed to be known.

Key words: Senses, thinking, language, conceptualisation, metaphor.

1. The process of naming the elements of reality is not preceded by the knowledge of it (not even to a partially satisfying extent) – which is not generally and usually, but absolutely valid in any scientific field. This process nevertheless is always and clearly preceded by the actions of reality elements on the senses, by their perception some way or another.

On the one hand, reality cannot be grasped by senses in its entirety because it presents itself to them in prohibitive manners, so that senses render reality in accordance with their own tools and in their own way, being specialised, i.e. segregating, decomposing reality based on their functional structures. Then, the various components of reality are hierarchised at the level of analysers, according to features taken in themselves, to their

BDD-A31572 © 2020 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:02:03 UTC)

particular bundle, to their conjunction with the environment and their functions, to the possible dynamics of previously stored experiences. On the other hand, the brain's processing of data sent by senses occurs selectively, as data are weighed and typologized, which develops one's ability to retain them, and possibly to compare and hierarchise them, to become aware of them and use them. Data retention and storage may lead to the transformation of events into experiences, to the accumulation of states, to the correlation between experiences and states, to some of them conditioning the others, to the appearance of habitualness and memories – with their transformation into ideas –, ultimately to their association and to the emergence of processes by which cogitation may occur without an immediate starting point from outside, but only within the brain's physico-chemical complex of metabolites, electrolytes and enzymes, which is in fact responsible for everything the brain produces.

The encounter of data provided by senses with those already stored from previous experiences may generate conflicts which the brain tends to solve by attaching small importance to or even ignoring the new sensations. Identifying the similarity between the stimuli of the moment and the old ones and automatically resorting to acquired information, it is often possible to offer answers that have been successfully used at least once; this happens because the manner in which the brain is organised and functions favours the tendency to work based on already existing patterns, reducing to and enclosing the data provided by senses within these patterns and treating reality accordingly. Furthermore, the brain actually tends to reduce processed realities to signals and to instrumentalise them, thus replacing or imitating reality. If the new sensations have enough force – in that they are significantly different from the already stored and learnt state –, they may acquire the ability to modify prior knowledge, entailing an entire complex of restructurings and learning, as well as the creation of new classes and categories, but with high energy consumption, therefore potentially inefficient.

It is therefore to be understood that the impression which reality makes on the senses may generate reflexes and learning, with effects on behaviours, whereas the empirical contact with reality may lead to its being intuited, even to a certain level of understanding and conceptualising it. It is only the transition of reality into thought, when the former is realised by and reflected in the latter, that can make extra-thinking bring along extra-knowledge – by shaping the information provided by senses, using the means

BDD-A31572 © 2020 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:02:03 UTC)

and ways of thinking, because, it its turn, along the path from the variety of reality to the uniformity of notion, thinking performs selections and reductions. Just like the senses, which are not fully penetrated by all the symptoms and signs of the entire spectrum of reality, which do not process in order to convey absolutely all data they receive and operate selections of these and of the results of their processing, thinking has no ability to receive all the nuances of the impulses sent by senses, does not process every single information it acquires, as its outcomes come after a selection both on the material to be worked and on some of the results of processing this material.

Thinking – which is capable of selective-fascicular intuitions and of processing by cogitation and reflection, producing a mental correspondent that generates conceptions and perspectives likely to induce conducts capable of being modified – processes these data, partly in the same direction, partly in accordance with the functional needs of its own structure.

Narrowing the range of impressions and sensations by defining and typologizing, thinking comes to judge everything from its own structural-functional perspective; therefore, many of the presumed errors of the senses spring, as we have seen, from the disaccord between the relative amplitude of senses and the narrowness of thinking, between the different means and ways of processing the material. The results of thinking thus become refined states, which return to the senses, at the level of the component which they have developed in response to the appearance of the thought-senses circuit. As these results are incommunicable, the body has created, by means of thinking, its own instrument of communication – language. Through its attributes – the ability to self-preserve and tendency towards autonomy – language gets to perform its own reductions and even to oppose thinking by taking on the role of reflecting reality.

2. Observing and assimilating the fact that reality may be signified not only by itself or by one of its symptoms, but mediated as well, by means of other realities, i.e. avoiding the direct referent-reflector-symptom relationship, and that sign is likely to determine the other's thoughts and behaviours enable the human being to understand that the sign can be counterfeited and rectified. Furthermore, the intense use of the symbol and its encoding as a sign bring about the ability to convert impressions, representations and intuitions into concepts, and the latter into elaborate sound flows, codified within a system of signs which apparently is

BDD-A31572 © 2020 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:02:03 UTC)

increasingly liberated from the materiality of reality, while referring rather to the senses than to thinking.

Within the process of designation, the senses and intuition have been playing the dominant role – even when it comes to the most serious and fundamental sciences; adjustment – in terms of content, not of form – which follows the knowledge of the designated reality, is possible and can be achieved only in later stages.

This means that the process of designation does not conclude the operations that human beings exert on reality – cognitively and linguistically –, as it lies at the beginning of the contact with the designated reality and continues throughout the increasingly deep interaction with it. This process does not unfold under the control of reason and consciousness either, for it is somewhat natural, in the nature of things, and it is imposed on man by necessity.

Like any structure endowed with some sort of materiality, once established by usage – i.e. by the community's acknowledgment and endorsement – the name tends to stabilise at the formal level. If phenomena equivalent to a cataclysm do not occur, the formal changes it will undergo will be located in the phonetic and morphological compartments, but functionally it will be able to evolve relatively easily, with consequences in terms of the semantic and value content. This is not only the place on which the modifying actions from thinking and language are exercised, but also the means by which language adapts and possibly evolves.

As with any system, linguistic changes at this level are mainly due to reality changes – which impose themselves on senses and thinking, being the factors that can directly operate on language –, then to changes in thinking and, thirdly, to language internal reorganisations – which are the result of the adaptation to external requirements and of consistent self-adjustments. Having enough means and ways, the semantic level adjusts to reality changes reflected by senses and thinking, to changes in thinking and, possibly, to those required by language reorganisations. Therefore, after the process of designation has occurred and the word has been established by usage, the continuous rethinking of reality, the incessant reconsideration of thoughts and the contextual exercise may generate changes in content and in word values.

3. As previously shown, reality imposes itself on senses in its own manner and the senses perceive it in their own selective fashion, transmitting it thus to thinking, which, in turn, operates on the material received from the

BDD-A31572 © 2020 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:02:03 UTC)

senses, decoding and processing it within the boundaries set by its very ways of formation and functioning, performing its own selection and shaping the data according to its functional structure. The transition of the product of thinking into language takes place by means of a process proper to language, during which the forms and contents of thinking and language partially merge. Similar to the manner in which senses process reality and thought process sensations, language may distort thinking, representing it as it can, not as it really is. Constrained in such a manner, thinking comes to be expressed through language, entering the gravitational game between senses and language, with the former tending to impose themselves by force of evidence and the letter likely to subordinate and reorientate by virtue of its capacity as a conveying organ.

Since it is dual, language behaves accordingly, as an instrument and an organ, being oriented not only by a relationship adapted to thinking and society, but mostly towards its own construction and consolidation and towards the growth of its systematic coherence. By manifesting its own needs, limits and functions, which make it process the material it has to render, language fails to become a reliable intermediary, a tool for conveying reality in intelligible forms, faithful to the way in which it is captured by thinking.

This aspect may be aggravated when neither senses, nor thinking manage to capture reality in ways easy to transfer to language. Thus, although thinking can hardly comprehend how a black hole functions, but it deduced its existence mathematically and perceived it indirectly, the phrase comes to exert pressures, generating various suggestions because the values and use of the phrase components are better learnt than those required by this scientific metaphor. It is easier for the speaker to start from what is known and extend it (often incorrectly) – forming a new concept from language, i.e. based on the ancient thinking stratum, not from the values embodied by the new thought, which would require a new term – than to make the effort of understanding the concept and then of adopting the linguistic convention.

4. In general, this type of denomination refers to realities about which too little is known at the moment of designation, as language is treated as a tool (a fact noticed in many cases in which scientists coin such names, with much detachment, not only certain of language failures, but also of the fact that true understanding comes from the exercise of thinking and that language is merely a tool that should not have any form of control). The suggestion one

BDD-A31572 © 2020 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:02:03 UTC)

starts from is only a game of allusions that does not substitute, in any way, the subsequent need to understand reality unequivocally and conceptually.

Thus, the English term designating the cyclic rise and fall of the sea level, *tide* (*tīd* 'time, period') served as a starting point for denoting the differentiable feature of the Moon's force of attraction on the Earth (combined with the effect of rotational motion), which is powerful in the Earth area facing the Moon (because it is exerted more strongly on this one than on the opposite). Therefore, physicists set all the other attributes of the tide (periodicity, ebb-flow etc.) aside and retained and emphasised only the secondary and implicit effect of the gravitational force – differentiability. Based on this, they came up with the phrase *tidal force*, with reference to the way in which gravitational force acts when a massive body (such as a black hole) distorts or even destroys a smaller body (such as a star) by exerting the differentiable force of attraction.

Some other terms, which have become well-established and which are based mainly on Greek and Latin words, have emerged in more direct manners. Thus, *chromosome*, *cell*, *enzyme*, *prokaryote*, *Holocene*, *enantiomers*, *electron* convey nothing to the receiver and explaining the meaning of the component elements ('coloured body', 'small chamber', 'ferment', 'before the kernel', 'wholly new', 'opposites', 'amber' – all etymological explanations requiring indicative explanations in varying degrees) points to the metaphorical and narrowly descriptive character of these names as well as the distance between that reductionist perspective and the complexity of the reality thus named, being imperative to describe the concept accurately and expressively. The advantage of such names lies in their great ability to impose themselves and circulate; this process is extremely productive in sciences (where the word devoid of sensorial marks is the one that is really useful because it is highly capable of conveying concepts, sensations), as the intense use turns the metaphor into a word, i.e. into a vehicle that is partially free of the sensoriality which has generated the metaphor.

In fact, the issues regarding the formation of scientific language show, even when it comes to nuances, that many controversies are particularly due to language, which influences conceptualisation; science often means a struggle with the language, because typologies and terminology select reality depending on language rather than clarify language based on reality and can in no way order reality or thinking, although they may seriously distort them.

BDD-A31572 © 2020 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:02:03 UTC)

By the manner in which it forms and functions, language is involved and gets involved in sensorial and cognitive processes, as conceptualisation processes require the material support of language.

Such terms as *evolution* (which originally referred to the development of something preformed and, hence, reflected a certain way of perceiving and conceptualising reality), *variability*, *mutability*, *change* (which are not synonyms or at least congruent) still cause misunderstandings among the naturalists (or biologists); their existence does not necessarily point to some confusion in thinking or to nuances that language is capable of, but to its plethoric indecisions, the similar contents of word scopes, their frail differentiation harming their real utility. This also shows why the idea is often less valued than the clear and intelligible expression, for, once the game of language has been learnt, the images painted in the linguistic universe easily persuade the senses (this way often imposes misconceptions or provides apparently operational tools).

Similarly, phrases like *folk etymology*, *multiple etymology*, *refinement* and *decline of words* and so on point out a certain narrow perspective, which, though corrected or only adjusted, has not been accompanied by the replacement of the linguistic transmitter. A judgement such as that generating a "folk etymology" phenomenon and its effects is not the exclusive attribute of the least educated (on the contrary, the etymologist is the most exposed), but is actually one of the ways in which the lexical-semantic compartment of languages functions. Then, changes in meaning by which words nuance or modify their contents cannot be considered "refinements" or "declines", be it only because the speaker's behaviour is not finalist, nor does the system orientation occur according to the metaphors the analyst applies.

This is why semantics and diachronic terminology works abound in situations which illustrate the collaboration, in language formation, of various processes that produce the so-called *metaphor*, *synecdoche*, *metonymy* and language functioning by selection and catachresis. In fact, this is how language functions: it selects elements deriving from the experience of senses and thinking, creates words that capture and convey parts of the reality felt to be thought, after which, through intense use, it liberates itself from many of the contained features and gradually gets to a conventionalised kernel. However, truly *neutral* terms do not exist because, as vast as this liberation process might be, language always retains traces of the word creation process,

BDD-A31572 © 2020 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:02:03 UTC)

through which impression, thought, perspective and usage imprint it, whereas the referential, cogitative and linguistic context gradually alter it. The resistance of the linguistic form shows that, in spite of reality and thinking, language does not easily give up forms, but, in order to preserve them, forces concepts and establishes conventions (a way of continuous selection, restructuring and transformation, which is essentially defining for language, for the notion-creating thought, deriving from the principles based on which reality functions).

5. Due to the set of deficiencies given by: a) the limited capacities of processing the material provided by senses; b) the difficulties in representation and conceptualisation; c) the imperfections of the connection with thinking, in the attempt to make linguistic communication functional and efficient, language tends to appropriate the unoccupied valences and functions, to develop its body, evolving in order to become capable not only of expressing but also of influencing thought, treating and modelling the material provided by senses and thinking according to its own nature and within its boundaries.

As language has not too much inclination towards concepts or too much ability to convey them in words, as they resulted from the interaction of mind with reality or with itself, linguistic communication comes to strongly rely on senses, and the visual, auditive image, the corporal, symptomatic reaction dominate communication to such an extent that they are too often the ones which avoid misunderstanding. Thus, language betrays its origin and the affective organic insert, for it tends toward rendering the lived, felt states, modelled, generated by experience and by imaginative and transfer processes. Furthermore, the consolidation of the linguistic content of words, alongside of the tendency to resort to already established words, makes language prevail in relation to thinking and reality, because, frequently, the choice of word is not dictated by the rigorous relationship between its conceptual content and reality, but by the relative correspondence between the content assigned by language and the manner in which the various socialised impressions have been assimilated at the level of language.

Language is meant to render the product of thinking in material and communicable forms. Partially due to its nature, mostly to the attributes given by its functioning, language has the tendency to assimilate and subordinate the signals provided by senses – sometimes even before they are processed

BDD-A31572 © 2020 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:02:03 UTC)

by thinking –, as well as the ability to take over most of the results of cogitative-cognitive processes. At the same time, it has the ability to use the material one has at one's disposal, organised according to one's experience (i.e. the entire set of experiences and linguistic, mental, cultural-social, historical skills etc. with which individuals have equipped themselves throughout their development), thus activating its conceptualisation "reflexes" and using its own resources, whose potential it may increase rapidly. In this way, language tends towards the substitution of thinking by replacing the concept with terms from previous experiences; thus, the process of passing through thinking or at least of validation from thinking is likely to decrease to the minimum. The tendency which constantly and vigorously dominates it is to organise itself, formally and functionally, as an organism rather than as the process it has to mirror.

It is, therefore, to be understood that the product of rational and linguistic processing of reality by the human being is deeply burdened by the tools of knowledge and expression – capable of creating micro-universes with an apparent existence – with significant consequences on the undeformed understanding of reality.

6. When thinking comes to intuit realities, language feels at will if it names using words which refer to the features, composition, functioning and interactions of some realities that have already impressed the senses, have crystallised in sensations and Proustian states, having the terms to suggest their entire sensorial system, therefore they are already acquired and functional. The process seems to be induced by the need to understand and appropriate reality, but those images mostly reflect the ways in which the referent indicated by the used image has been perceived and assimilated. Thus, designation is done by passing the attributes of a concept on to another, with implications on conceptualisation and on how the corresponding reality is considered. Just as thinking prefers patterns and reduces fresh sensations to some that are already stored and classified, so language reuses terms, thus reducing the new concept to an older one, often without having decoded the new reality by concept and, sometimes, even without having too well clarified the old reality by turning it into a defined concept. That is why, when knowledge gaps cannot be conceptually covered, they are linguistically covered, because – deriving from its relation to thinking – the naming process gives a sense of understanding.

BDD-A31572 © 2020 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:02:03 UTC)

Simplifying the sphere of notions by ignoring notes, the semantic content of words, by ignoring signs, and reducing the possible contexts result, among other things, in the increase of access to the concept and of the speed of word circulation. The price paid is the distortion of the concept, with pressures to modify perception of the referent accordingly, i.e. the establishment of the domination of mental and linguistic patterns.

Thus, science, for example, becomes difficult to think any other way than it has been conceived by analogy and expressed through language, with branches as a tree, whereas reality comes to have levels, like a ladder; the brain becomes a container, a processor, a universe; the body is reduced to a machine state; society becomes an organism; various other elements of reality and human constructs or constructs of the human mind become labyrinth, pyramid, path, a universe, society, mechanism, light, chemistry, star etc. and God. The conceptual and linguistic association makes thinking or the utterance of one of the element request completion through the other (the explained one asks for its explainer), i.e. the heuristic, suggestive, supporting attribute becomes a defining feature – amid the tendency to "know" reality at any cost; the usual image and the meaningful story (possibly with its ambiguous challenge called *moral*) is easier to retain and handle, for the storybook educates more than the philosophy and science ones.

7. Of the entire material supplied by thinking, language tends to preserve only the segments that are part of the network of concepts which have been clarified linguistically and anthropologically, i.e. not necessarily within the data of absolute knowledge, but within the limits of a mixture between the historical-social evolution and the results of modelling thinking and reality by language. Thus, language risks not rendering the full and real understanding of reality by thinking, but the manner in which it cuts the reality taken from the senses and from thinking. The tendency of language to process and convey the data provided by senses, as they appear at the level of analysers, somewhat short-circuiting thought (some of the cortical areas in which thinking has access to analysers are common to those of language), is possible due to metaphor and, in this way, perhaps the most obvious effect of language tendency towards autonomy and autarchy reveals itself.

BDD-A31572 © 2020 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:02:03 UTC)