

Anna BARAŃSKA-SZMITKO

University of Lodz, Poland

METAPHOR AND ITS COMMUNICATION CAPABILITIES IN TERMS OF IMAGE CREATION

The article attempts to determine how the use of metaphor influences the image of the author. The data were collected by means of an empirical study. Having read a column, the respondents defined the characteristics of the author's image and then wrote down text passages they believed communicated the indicated qualities of the columnist. The results show that quotes employing metaphors relate to defining the author as 'an interesting writer,' 'ironic,' 'witty,' or 'bluntly communicating their bold opinions.' This text defines the principles on which metaphor is based and determines the conditions that are responsible for the communicating of each of the indicated features of image.

Keywords: image, style, discourse analysis, image study, image study methodology, linguistic communication

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is a preliminary analysis and an attempt to answer the question of what capabilities in terms of image communication the use of metaphor in the text has; that is, how the way this stylistic device is employed determines the image features that are attributed to the author of the statement.

The results discussed below are part of a much more extensive study, the primary objective of which was to verify the image communication capabilities on the verbal level of the column statement. The adopted theoretical perspective of rational constructivism (Fleischer 2007, Fleischer 2008) also influenced the use of the empirical paradigm in the research approach, in which the respondents, having read a column, attributed to its author all their defining features and after that wrote out those text passages they believed represented those features. The corpus of quotations contained those which represent metaphors, and the readers associated them with such characteristics as 'an interesting writer,' 'witty,' 'ironic,' 'bluntly communicating their bold opinions.' The studies were not carried out in terms of the analysis of metaphor, but the number of quotations denoting its use.

Research perspective

The rational constructivism characterized by Michael Fleischer assumes that the 'message' is a construct created by the consciousness of the interpreter, and resulting from the perception of the expression that is of sign nature (Fleischer, 2007:

87–173; Fleischer, 2008: 9–46). Therefore, the image is understood as “an idea that one or multiple audiences have about a person, enterprise or institution” (Wojcik, 2009: 41), but at the same time it “is not an exact copy of the imagined object” (Budzynski, 2008: 11) due to the fact that “the perception process is both subjective and active” (Budzynski, 2008: 11). The image is then recognized as a construct created by the recipient as a result of receiving the message.

At the same time, one has to bear in mind the division between ‘talking’ which “comes down to what is said” and ‘communication’ that “refers to how it is said and what else – by that what and how it is said – it communicates.” (Fleischer 2012: 29, see Fleischer 2011: 14). Thus, for example, one can ‘say’ that he or she is a postmodern French literature expert who especially admires its most prominent writer William Shakespeare and his introduction of innovative narrative in “Jesus Christ Superstar”. One ‘said’ exactly those words in that sentence, but ‘communicated’ profound ignorance in the field of literary history. Therefore, the results discussed below are not based on the declarations of columnists about their characteristics, but on the observations of readers who attributed certain epithets to the author of the text that employed metaphor.

The research approach, and at the same time the data analysis, was based on the premise that “we are interested [...] exclusively in the possible impact of a given statement, the effect that the statement may have; [...] the influence [...] that involves (discourse participants), that is typical, commonly used” (Fleischer, 2008: 99). In practice, at the level of methodological solutions, this referred – most of all – to ensuring the empirical intersubjectivity of data (respondents contribution), giving up the intent category for the communication effect and – besides the qualitative data – taking into account also their quantitative dimension (see Fleischer on the subject, 2008: 49–111 Grech 2012: 11–26 and Siemes 2011).

Research process and conditions

The results concerning the image communication capabilities of the metaphor are a small part of a much broader research, but only the information that is directly related to the subject undertaken here is presented below.

In the first variant of the study, participants received an anonymous column to read, printed on A4 size paper. They did not know the further instructions. Following the reading, they had to carry out two tasks. The first one was to answer the question: “Based on the text of the column you have read, how would you describe the author of the text?.” The second one was to carry out the following request: “Please write all the words/sentences/passages of the text which correspond with the features of the column author that you indicated and which were the basis for the emergence of the feature.” The version containing a column written by a female writer provided the word ‘author’ in the appropriate form of Polish syntax.

In the second variant, participants were given the author’s identity by receiving a photocopy of the page of the magazine in which the text appeared, that contained the writer’s picture and their full name. Instead of words ‘the text’ and ‘the column

author', the questions included the full name of the columnist. Apart from the aforementioned modifications, everything else remained the same.

The aim of the first question was to (re)create the image of the columnist; the purpose of the second question was to create a corpus of quotations related to the specific attributes of the author, and the analysis of both of them allowed for the reconstruction of the verbal exponents used to communicate the given attributes.

In order to be able to compare the results, the genre of column was employed as a type of text that provides substantial freedom in terms of personality expression, subject discussed, stylistic features and composition used; but at the same time imposes certain rules (see the definition of column eg. in Wolny-Zmorzynski and Kaliszewski 2006: 85–109, Wojtak 2004: 202–237, Wojtak 2008: 109–121, Chudzinski 2008, pp. 345–360). Owing to that, each statement reveals a distinctly different personality, while the texts remain comparable. In addition, the column is a genre issued periodically, which made it possible to use a few texts by the same authors.

The study incorporated texts by four deliberately different columnists: writing about culture – Piotr Zaremba (“Uwarzam Rze”, “Sieci”, “W sieci”) and Krzysztof Varga (“Duzy Format”), and dealing with socio-political issues – Magdalena Sroda (“Wprost”) and Szymon Hołownia (“Newsweek”, “Wprost”, “Rezczpospolita”). The writers also differ in terms of their worldviews.

The respondents' group was formed of students of journalism and communication, as well as first and second year students of Polish philology at several Polish universities (University of Lodz, University of Warsaw, University of Wroclaw, Kazimierz Wielki University in Bydgoszcz, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan). It was assumed that their erudition and level of language competence were optimal for the research purposes. The students of subsequent years were not included due to the anticipated increased awareness of language, communication, and journalism genres, as well as of rhetorical figures.

The study was carried out over a period of several months and consisted of three time periods, the same for each columnist: spring 2012, spring 2013 and autumn 2013. In the course of the entire study the principle of proportionality – in terms of the number of participants and the columns of each of the authors read – was applied.

Results

The results presented and analyzed below refer to 504 surveys completed by 504 study participants, half of which relate to the variant in which the identity of the author was known, and the other half refer to the variant in which the text of the anonymous writer was read. As part of each variant, during each of the three time periods, one of the seven different columns of each of the four authors was read by three respondents (2 study variants x 3 rounds x 7 last columns x 4 authors x 3 readings = 504 surveys). The attributes assigned by the respondents to the columnists were characterized by great diversity (eg. 'intelligent,' 'believer,' 'anti-cleric,' 'inquisitive,' 'conservative') and significant number of exponents communicating them.

Preliminary calculations show that metaphor was used 66 times, and its employment was considered to be an expression of such image features as ‘ironic,’ ‘an interesting writer,’ ‘witty,’ or ‘bluntly communicating their bold opinions.’

The results of this analysis demonstrate that, regardless of the study variant, the exponents communicating specific image features are the same, and therefore, the division into variants was not included in the following quotations.

The above-mentioned quantitative data helped to establish which image features can be communicated by means of metaphor, and – interestingly enough – made it possible to determine the principles underlying the functioning of metaphor within each of its specific features, in other words, whether it is realized in the same way in the case of expressing the feature ‘witty,’ as it is in the case of the feature ‘ironic,’ ‘an interesting writer’ or ‘bluntly communicating their bold opinions.’

In the parentheses occurring after the examples quoted below the following details were provided: the initials of the author of the statement (PZ – Piotr Zaremba, MS – Magdalena Sroda, SH – Szymon Hołownia), the name of the magazine in which the text containing the quotation was published, as well as the number of the journal (year of issue after the slash) or the date of publication of the given copy of the journal. The square brackets comprise passages that were not included as part of the survey, but whose necessity was pointed out by the respondent in the form of an ellipsis, or the author of the study provided specific words that she regarded essential for the communication process.

Metaphor and the communication of the feature ‘ironic’

The greatest number, that is 22 out of 66 quotations, consists of column passages which include a metaphor, and which, according to the respondents, communicate the image feature ‘ironic.’ Data analysis demonstrated that exaggeration functioned as the main mechanism, accompanied by valuation. E.g.:

* he is *the pope* of Saint Miron’s Church (KV, DF, 22.03.2012) (this about Tadeusz Sobolewski, a literary critic, who was particularly fond of the Polish poet - Miron Białoszewski – author’s note)

* On balance, it gives the impression that the public debate in our country is something like a long break in that part of the junior high school where *the teenagers* were gathered because they could not cope with *the hormonal storm* (SH, N, 16/2012)

In the above-mentioned examples, the degree of one’s liking and appreciation for a poet was presented as being the pope of the church of that poet, whereas politicians and journalists were shown as teenage students, incapable of a serious assessment of the situation. The picture presented in the examples is metaphorical, one that exaggerates the scale of the described phenomenon.

It is interesting to note that almost one third of the passages written down in that group (7) on the level of the metaphorical vision of reality refer to associations connected with religion. This is evident in the first quotation, but also, e.g.:

* [A good example of the paradoxes of those series is ‘The Tudors’ broadcast by the BBC.] Undoubtedly, its creators (the host of nine directors and only one screenwriter, Michael Hirst) *do not kneel* before history (...) (PZ, UR, 16/2012)

* The whole of the country is still *a mined cemetery*, with us dancing in it (...) (KV, DF, 18.04.2013)

Perhaps sacred optics is a tool used to strengthen the message. As part of a taboo, which is associated with strong emotions, it promotes a valuation. It should also be pointed out that the characteristics of metaphor which communicate an ironic attitude in the author’s statements correspond with the characteristics of irony, in its key points: exaggeration is a common feature, which could seem to be praise, but in fact constitutes a negative assessment (see Habrajska 1994: 65, Paroń 2013: 133–134).

Metaphor and the communication of the feature ‘an interesting writer’

The second of the image features expressed (among others) by means of metaphor, is ‘an interesting writer.’ 19 out of 66 passages that were written down referred to that term. Metaphor as a demonstration of having skills of delivering content in an interesting way was indicated by the study participants, while the valuation did not take place at all or was impaired by a feeling of portraying a more complex issue in a simple way. Hence, the respondents pointed out a quotation which unambiguously sums up the complex, intertextual composition of a series:

* Wajda (a film director – author’s note) *put on a thread* [a lot of works that take place in Krakow: a lot of plays, short stories.] (PZ, S, 20/2013)

Or an illustration used to bring closer the essence of mercy:

* Imagine now that *on this cross hangs Anders Breivik* or a contemporary *paedophile priest*. It takes one sentence and they can hear Jesus say: “Today you will be with me in paradise.” (SH, N, 15/2012)

One can also show the greatness of an artist (Dorota Maslowska – a contemporary Polish writer) in terms of a cosmic occurrence:

* *the star of Maslowska exploded* (KV, DF, 26.09.2013)

It seems that when the potential of the pictorial representation of reality through metaphor is used, in the recipient’s opinion, in order to improve the communicativeness of the message, the reader would attribute the feature of ‘an interesting writer’ to the author of the statement. The assessment included in metaphor – if applicable – becomes secondary.

Metaphor and the communication of the feature ‘witty’

The third of the qualities attributed to columnists when they used metaphor in their texts is ‘witty’. The term was assigned 16 times out of 66, in the group of the quotations discussed. The respondents indicated such passages as:

* It is the talent that is the key here, if I may shoot out of *the cannon of banality* (KV, DF, 26.09.2013)

* After all, our *cinematography* has been able – for some time now – to massacre ruthlessly and brutally *every manifestation of genre cinema* (KV, DF, 29.03.2012)

* In our country we have very *few publishers whose graphic designers do not deserve a penal colony*. (SH, N, 18/2012)

Similar to the case of irony, valuation can be observed. So what is the difference between metaphor communicating the feature ‘ironic’ and ‘witty’? Or in other words: what made respondents attribute to the author the characteristics of being ‘witty’? It seems that the metaphorical picture is contrasting to such an extent that it produces a comic effect, thus weakening the power of an assessment. In one of the examples above, static, noble, elitist and serious cinematography brutally massacres, like a psychopathic killer-commando, taken from a B movie horror. Szymon Hołownia wants to send to a penal colony, not those who have directly committed the greatest crimes, but graphic designers who work at the nation’s publishing houses. The punishment appears disproportionate to the offence. In other words, those pictures are based not so much on the exaggeration of the features that are subject to criticism, but on the contrast between the depicted reality and its metaphorical version; and the contrast becomes a source of humour. In this way, the metaphor communicating a sense of humour simply performs the mechanism of producing a comic effect (see Trzynadlowski 1977: 381, cf. Grochala, 2006: 13; (Buttler [1968/1974] 2001: 68–95).

Metaphor and the communication of the feature ‘bluntly communicating their bold opinions’

Metaphor is also employed to communicate the image feature of ‘bluntly communicating their bold opinions.’ The respondents assigned this feature to nine out of 66 quotations containing metaphorical expressions. These are characterized by strong valuation. Moreover, the majority of them (7 out of 9) operate in the field of martial metaphors. E.g.

* I turned on the radio to finally listen to the Polish news and first was that there was an ongoing **bloody media fight** about who was the one that really led the strike in the Gdansk shipyard thirty-three years ago. (KV, DF, 29.05.2013)

* [Mister Obrebski, Ronda and Binienda (politicians – author’s note)] are the heroes of many battles, they have secret knowledge, use magic, avoid **death**, and when they **fail** – they disappear. (MS, W, 39/2013)

* The fact that politics is worth reducing to **personal scrimmage**, was noticed by commercial media in Poland definitely around 2006. (PZ, S, 15/2013)

* Feminists **have sat on the barricade** and do not know how to get down (SH, N, 19/2012)

Even the quotations that diverge from the image of a conflict or battles do refer to a political fight, e.g.:

* Somehow I find it easy to imagine (...) [that if Tusk's **regime** finally introduced a **state of war**, ultimately strangled freedom and ordered full censorship, Ziemkiewicz would not find the time for his **heroic, anti-regime** journalism, as he would suddenly remember that he had had an outstanding science fiction novel to write, to which] he would defiantly but entirely devote himself. (KV, DF, 10.05.2012)

Metaphorical pictures of combat are clearly significant for the construction – by the recipients – of the discussed image characteristics. It is worth noting that the assessment used is very strong and is applied by means of pejoratively marked vocabulary (e.g. 'fight', 'scrimmage', 'fail', 'regime')

Summary and conclusions

As can be seen, the metaphor can be used to communicate such features of the author of a verbal statement, as 'ironic', 'an interesting writer,' 'witty' and 'bluntly communicating their bold opinions.' At the same time, it should be emphasized that the most common communication effect the columnists (whose texts appeared in the study) achieved, referred to the first two of those terms. They related to – respectively – 33.33 per cent and 28.79 per cent of the passages that were written down (see Table 1). Metaphor as an expression of a sense of humour accounted for almost ¼ of the selected quotations (24.24 per cent). The least frequently discussed stylistic device was connected with an uncompromising attitude (13.64 per cent). It is worth pointing out, however, that metaphor used as a form of assessment ('ironic', 'bluntly ...'), accounted for nearly a half of the cases (46.97 per cent), and that the remaining valuations do not rule it out and often utilize it, but treat it as less important (the total of 53.03 per cent for 'an interesting writer' and 'witty').

Table 1.

Numerical distribution of quotations using metaphor in relation to the communicated characteristics. Source: own analysis.

communicated image feature	mechanism of metaphor functioning	no. of quotes	% of quotes
'ironic'	exaggeration + valuation	22	33,33%
'an interesting writer'	message simplification	19	28,79%
'witty'	contrast	16	24,24%
'bluntly communicating their bold opinions'	image of fight + strong valuation	9	13,64%

Metaphor as a means of communication of the above-mentioned image characteristics is not homogeneous: in the case of each of the analyzed features, it operates according to different principles. In the case of the epithet 'ironic', that mechanism constitutes exaggeration as well as valuation, and as to the attribute of

‘an interesting writer’ – it employs message simplification. In order to communicate a sense of humour, it highlights the importance of contrast, and to bluntly mark an attitude it appeals to the image of fighting, using pejoratively marked lexis. It should be pointed out that the mechanisms of producing irony and humour are convergent with the ones that are responsible for creating similar features of image.

Further research that will take into account more extensive analysis of all means of creating each of the above-mentioned qualities will enrich the conclusions.

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