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# Metaphor between philosophy and linguistics: Georges Kleiber's research into sense and reference and Paul Ricœur's philosophy of language

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« ... la métaphore, un acte de dénotation prédicative indirecte »

Georges Kleiber, 1984

## Introduction

George Kleiber opens his section of the Overture to *La Métaphore entre philosophie et rhétorique* (Charbonnel & Kleiber, 1999: 3) with the question of whether there is anything useful still to say about metaphor, given the vast literature on it. A 'yes' is justified by the interest of the human sciences in metaphor's "creative" side, as well as the relatively limited range of stable data it offers. Again, not everything about metaphor has "already been said by Aristotle", and with regard to its elements interesting work in the semantic re-interpretation of grammatical categories such as noun, verb and adjective is opening promising new research paths.

Kleiber's introduction provides the context to his article, so I will summarise it briefly here. His 1999 view is that the "last 30 years" of research into metaphor show four stages in the attitude of linguists:

- i)* a stage of "integrated semantic solutions" to the problem of identifying and interpreting metaphors from the 1960s (Black, 1962) to 1975 – the period that includes Ricœur's *The Rule of Metaphor* (1975/1978);
- ii)* a stage of "syntactical rehabilitation" from 1976 (Tamba) to 1981 revealing the existence of syntactical structures specific to metaphor;
- iii)* a shift, influenced by philosophers of language (Grice, 1979) from syntax and semantics to pragmatics (Kleiber's own *Recherches en pragma-sémantique* of 1984 belongs here, as well as a number of other articles);

*iv*) a further shift, within pragmatics, where the dropping of semantics as inappropriate for characterising metaphor has led to a global pragmatic explanation – the exact opposite of the integrated semantics approach.

These four stages “loop the loop” and sum up developments in research into metaphor in the last three decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### Kleiber’s position and argument in “Une métaphore qui ronronne n’est pas toujours un chat heureux”

« la question de la métaphore se place aujourd’hui résolument dans le domaine de la pragmatique. »

Georges Kleiber, 1984

In the radical reversal of attitude from what his section of the Overture calls an “integrated pragmatics” – a solution where metaphors are seen as “ordinary language statements” presenting no linguistic particularity or difficulties for interpretation – Kleiber places himself among those whose reaction to this solution is to want to save metaphor’s specific linguistic character (Kleiber, 1999:10).

From this position he introduces the central article of *La Métaphore entre philosophie et rhétorique* (Charbonnel & Kleiber, 1999) with its humorously apt title “Une métaphore qui ronronne n’est pas toujours un chat heureux” via two questions:

*a*) What is it that triggers a metaphoric interpretation? and with regard to the metaphoric process itself, *b*) How do we evaluate a metaphoric interpretation?

The article, as a well-evidenced reply to these guiding questions, is built around these two main points - presented in reverse order - and ends with some “new hypotheses”.

*a*) Kleiber’s first step is to start by *rejecting any purely semantic treatment* of metaphoric interpretation, where “semantic” is taken as a sense inherently linked to expressions presenting an “*a priori* intersubjective stability” (Kleiber, 1999: 84).

Discussed in detail is the issue of understanding metaphorical interpretation in terms of rules or a “code”, where what is at issue is “pragmatic inference” (Kleiber, 1999: 98); then of problems arising

from this such as mention of “metaphoric sense” and “figurative sense”, versus “literal” or “proper sense”, or “metaphoric reference” – terms he notes in passing in Ricœur, (Kleiber, 1999: 84) – without first establishing what is intended by these terms, and disputes over substitution or comparison to the point of misconstruing the metaphoric statement itself (Kleiber, 1999: 97). This first section of his article concludes with the later debates in the 1980s and 1990s over the question of rules or inference and what he sees as the self-entrapping arguments of Searle (1982) and others. He traces the source of confusion to theorists setting up a distinction between “creative” and “frozen” (lexicalised) metaphors (Kleiber, 1999:100): a distinction he sees resulting in erroneous and equivocal conclusions because “frozen” metaphors are treated in their original metaphoric state as “non-frozen”, creating confusion in the argument. Is there a solution to this dilemma? If the explanatory powers of semantics are to be handed over to pragmatics it first needs to be shown how these powers work.

There is also the problem of the “persistence of the notion of analogy” in nearly all works on metaphor (Kleiber, 1999: 101), and the non-semantic status of metaphoric sense – both of these problems ignored by many writers, so needing to be dealt with in the third section of his article, “new hypotheses”.

b) Kleiber’s second point – his original first question on what triggers a metaphorical interpretation – is that of semantic *deviance*, expressed in various terms by different writers, as the identifying factor in metaphor, with a sub-question on how to characterise this variously-named deviance.

Noting a wide concurrence on this point, including that of Ricœur(1975) and himself (Kleiber, 1993, 1994) in a long list of authors, Kleiber sorts the issues in both questions into a “relatively easy” dossier with a clear and positive result: *deviance* as the widely-agreed source of metaphoric interpretations. It consists of “the use of a *lexical category* for which it was not originally intended normally or literally” (Kleiber, 1999: 122).

Without going through the fine points raised by the many examples in the corpus, one can follow the line of Kleiber’s sorting-

out of a mass of metaphorical expressions that were too confusing for earlier writers to consider in the raw, and so were left to the solutions of a semantics based on the *a priori* rules. There is a huge work here of collecting, classifying, and building them into categories as *concepts* (Kleiber, 1999: 130) which support his positions and justify his rejection of the concepts of other writers that he finds purely theoretical, as with Ricœur's use of "metaphorical sense" mentioned above. This task of categorising depends on what emerges from the examples, and the interpretations and decisions he makes in each case. In an interesting step of methodological review, Kleiber then goes back to the issues in his own process: first the need to bring in further interpretive processes (Kleiber, 1999: 123) in order to distinguish metaphor's specificity and its difference from other "figured" processes such as metonymy, recalling that the essential is to characterise each kind of trope so as to see more clearly what kind of "displaced" categorical task is involved, then overall the need to explain from the specific *deviance* that emerges why different interpretive processes become disrupted.

This review of method, necessitated by the notion of metaphorical process as springing from its specificity as semantic *deviance*, inquires into the difficulties of the process of categorisation as such, taking an analytic approach to a pragmatic position that is more radical and more theoretically precise than that of the "global pragmatics" solution where, as Kleiber notes, metaphor is actually eliminated in being absorbed into ordinary language.

c) The article's final section asks what is the "categorical fault" – thus the fault proper to metaphor – that allows one to answer the two initial questions *a* and *b* on the identity and process of metaphor that are still only partially answered. These basic questions are enriched by two more:

- (i) Why is metaphoric interpretation made on the mode of resemblance?
- (ii) Why does deviance as the source of metaphor not result in the phenomena of metonymy or synecdoche? (Kleiber, 1999: 124).

In other words, how does the *deviance* in metaphor differ from that in these phenomena? Kleiber takes up these questions in an analysis that goes beyond the semantic and pragmatic positions to show the overall issue as one of *categorisation* itself (Kleiber, 1999: 133). Noting that the story is far from finished, and that more emphasis needs to be given to the aspects of image and figure in metaphor, he declares the investigation into continuing research on metaphor ongoing.

### Ricœur's The Rule of Metaphor: multi-disciplinary studies in the creation of meaning in language (1975/1978) and his later views on metaphor

“...the main problem of hermeneutics is that of interpretation.”  
 (“Metaphor and the Main Problem of Hermeneutics”)  
 Paul Ricœur, 1974

There is a significant difference between Ricœur's French title *La Métaphore vive* (Ricœur: 1975) which emphasises his lifelong interest in creativity (Ricœur 1971 a, and b), and the English title above (Ricœur, 1978) which relates this interest to a specific problem and field: the creation of *meaning*. To avoid repetition in discussing this work see (Dunphy-Blomfield 2012).

Charbonnel (Charbonnel & Kleiber, 1999: 2) gives a philosophical context to work on metaphor in the 1960s and 70s, showing this period as one of upheaval where the suddenly elevated human sciences, dominated by linguistics, promised new insights into knowledge and philosophy. Using Nietzsche to characterise this time of excitement (“truth... is a moving multitude of metaphors... the philosopher is caught in the nets of language...”) (Charbonnel, 1999: 3), she mentions the claimed special “lucidity” of the time as an illusion, and looks for the *issues* in the period's fascination with metaphor.

While this view fits aspects of the period well, Ricœur's work and the issues in it are focused on genuine lucidity. The historian Michel de Certeau, whom Charbonnel sees as seeking “liberation of the masses”, praised his judgment in resigning as Dean of the Nanterre campus of the University of Paris where the “events” of 1968 began

(de Certeau, 1997: 51). Assessing this historical moment and the interaction of those who took part in it remains a complex task.

*The Rule of Metaphor*, which grew from seminar courses in Canada, the USA, Louvain and Paris in the early 1970s (Ricœur, 1978: 3, 8) after this resignation, can be approached as a philosophical investigation carried out in an evolving cultural context. This allows for a comparison that can tolerate different referencing of terms used by both Ricœur and Kleiber, but in historical and cultural settings that are not the same – an issue that is wider than the question of metaphor.

The work's discussions of linguistics, some begun in earlier papers (Ricœur, 1971 a and b; 1974), form part of a driving argument that involves many authors, theories, movements, and positions. Apart from the possibility it offers to compare two works on metaphor – one from the viewpoint of contemporary linguistics, and one from the philosophy of language – I would see Ricœur's main contribution to linguistics now as his argument's original – even daring – linking of debate on the nature and function of metaphor to ontology (Ricœur, 1978: 43; 259-313): historically, from Aristotle to the role of potentiality in a modern philosophy of language, and philosophically, as indicating how linguistics – even a descriptive and anthropological linguistics based on usage as developed by Kleiber – can be seen as demonstrating an ontology of possibility or potentiality (Kleiber, 1991; Brentano, 1862 / 1981). As Ricœur did not develop this theme separately, which could well take another book, it will be for others to take it up – perhaps Rastier (*cf.* Rastier, 2008 *in* Frath, 2008a).

Ricœur's argument takes off from Aristotle, whose *Rhetoric* and *Poetics* “actually defined metaphor for the whole subsequent history of Western thought” (Ricœur, 1978: Studies 1 and 2). Aristotle's statement that “a good metaphor implies an intuitive perception of the similarity in dissimilarities” is clearly the origin of the “creativity” claim: Frath's neat phrase “How are we able to mean one thing while saying another and still manage to make ourselves understood?” (Frath, 2004: 1) is not so far from Aristotle's “Metaphor consists in giving the thing a name that belongs to

something else...” (*Poetics*, in Ricœur, 1987: 13). In classical Greece rhetoric brought together the art of persuasion, logic and pursuit of truth, while the end of this period marked its decline to a mere technique of “style”, and that of metaphor to the role of “ornament”- a state that persisted until the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Ricœur’s question “What, now, is the present status of the properly rhetorical status of metaphor?” leads (Ricœur, 1978: 32-43) to the connecting of “a semantics applied to a philosopher of the past” to a reading of Aristotle’s *lexis* through his *mimésis* in which “metaphor’s deviations from normal *lexis* belong to the great enterprise of ‘saying what is’” (Ricœur, 1978: 43). This ‘saying what is’ is the battleground of the concluding Study 8, Ricœur’s two-pointed debate with Derrida and Heidegger on ontology. In another of what Prandi calls Ricœur’s “subtle discussions” about ontology here (Prandi, 1999:199), Ricœur concludes Study 1 by connecting the power to ‘say what is’ to the “ontological function of metaphorical discourse” in which “dormant potentiality of existence (and) latent capacity for action” are “actualised”. The argument of *The Rule of Metaphor* is set out here as one leading from issues in Greek rhetoric with Aristotle to its conclusion with Derrida over issues in post-structuralist ontology.

From these opening studies, where Ricœur shows ‘that rhetoric terminates in classification and taxonomy’ by focusing on “figures of deviation, or tropes, in which the meaning of the word departs from its lexically codified usage”, failing “to explain the production of meaning as such”, to the final one, Ricœur takes a number of essential steps, summarised in (Dunphy-Blomfield, 2012). Study 3, the key study, follows the linguistic approach of Benveniste who distinguished between semantics, where “the sentence is the carrier of the minimum complete meaning”, and semiotics, “where the word is treated as a sign in the lexical code”, so provisionally sets up an opposition between a theory of the statement-metaphor and one of the word-metaphor. Ricœur sets up a parallel opposition to this one: one between a tension theory as in Max Black’s logical grammar (Black, 1962), and a substitution theory at the level of the word. With a view to the question of semantic innovation and the

creation of meaning in Studies 6 and 7, he then shows that the various aspects of their positions can be set out within the semantics of the sentence. Studies 4 and 5 then aim to integrate the semantics of the word with the semantics of the sentence so as to show that metaphor “produced at the level of the statement as a whole, focuses on the word. Turning from English-language philosophers to French structuralism, Ricœur analyses the “new rhetoric”, comparing the notions of “deviation” and “rhetoric degree zero” with those of “figure” and “deviation”, then of the concept “reduction of deviation” to demonstrate the inadequacies of the new rhetoric to get to a theory of the statement-metaphor.

Benveniste’s approach makes for one of the key issues of Ricœur’s book: a parallel progress from semiotics/metaphor of the word to semantics/ metaphor of the sentence which then allows for hermeneutics/discourse. Study 6 “The work of resemblance” takes up the question of the metaphor of the word used in Study 3 to engage with the central issue of production of meaning “for which newly invented metaphors are the evidence”, thus moving from the semantic field to that of hermeneutics, which includes poems, narratives and so forth. This leads to Study 7 on the notion of reference, and the central question of the extra-linguistic: does metaphor deal with the world or only with what is within the text? After many discussions of imagination, the question of truth raises the book’s second major issue: what is the truth status of metaphor? After a close discussion on reference with Frege, where Ricœur writes: “My whole aim is to do away with this restriction (of Frege’s) of reference to scientific statements” (Ricœur, 1978: 221), it is Jakobson who provides the solution from literature, where “the supremacy of poetic function over referential function does not obliterate the reference but makes it ambiguous. The double-edged message finds correspondence in... a split reference, as is cogently exposed in the preambles... to fairy-tales, for instance to the usual exordium of the Majorcan story-tellers:”Aixo era y no era” (It was, and it was not)” (Ricœur, 1978: 224). This is Ricœur’s own version of the tension-theory of metaphor: the metaphor comes neither from the name/word, nor from the sentence, but from a “split” in

the copula “is” – used or implied – in the sentence, creating a split in the reference. The third major issue in the book is how to understand this split. The answer is provided by a philosopher: Wittgenstein’s “seeing as”, where utterer and hearer/reader collaborate in holding two possibilities together (Ricœur, 1978: 200).

Ricœur’s articles on metaphor of the 1980s and 90s (*cf.* Dunphy-Blomfield, 2012: 521-522) don’t maintain or retract these major points, but emphasise the importance of imagination and psychology in metaphor as well as the place of the reader in identifying and responding to it. His strengthening of these practical aspects fits with his return to a philosophy of action in the second phase of his hermeneutics (Ricœur, 1986 b: 188).

### Comparing Ricœur’s semantic position with Kleiber’s pragmatic one

« ... l’important, c’est le face à face avec les sciences humaines. Il faut *faire* la philosophie et pas simplement la répéter. Nous avons des “objets” nouveaux – dans la linguistique, dans la psychanalyse, dans la “nouvelle histoire” etc. -, la tâche de la philosophie reste de poser la question transcendante: quelles sont les conditions de possibilité de ces nouveaux objets ? »

Paul Ricœur, 1986 a

The approaches of these two authors makes it difficult to compare their work on metaphor. Though they both consider the “tension” model of metaphor, Ricœur’s view of it is not that of Black, and Kleiber does not write directly of Ricœur’s theoretical work or do more than list his name with other authors who use the term. There is no real interaction, so a common understanding of this term cannot be determined.

a) *Kleiber’s view.* As Kleiber writes, discussion of metaphor is far from finished. Kleiber agrees with Ricœur and the vast majority of writers that metaphor is identified by a “*deviance*” in denomination. He disagrees with Ricœur’s “tensive argument” which resembles Black’s but contains an ontological turn not in Black. He disregards Ricœur’s principal goal of establishing an ontological argument (Studies 1 and 2, 7 and 8), developed as shown below from a point

taken from Jakobson (*cf.* Dunphy-Blomfield, 2012) in which metaphor hinges on the implied 'is' in the metaphorical statement, to be understood as 'is/is not'.

b) *Ricœur's view*. For Ricœur this tensive position is prepared and argued on the base of a parallel between Benveniste's linguistic model – a movement from word to sentence, and sentence to discourse – and a corresponding movement from semiotics to semantics, and semantics to hermeneutics.

Ricœur's procedure, relevant in discussions with structuralist linguists, is noticeably absent from Kleiber's arguments in 1999, so is not relevant to a linguistic approach coming from pragmatics rather than semantics.

c) *Pragmatics*. Philosophically the three examples in Section 2 above, relevant to a pragmatic approach to metaphor but not expressed in a climate dominated by semantics, are valid in a philosophy of action that has also identified itself as a philosophy of language and has proposed to relate the two approaches.

Could such a philosophy accommodate the pragmatic, empirical starting-point of anthropological linguistics?

Taking the trio scepticism, observation and description as the starting-point of philosophy (as Husserl aimed to do though he succeeded only in part), this idea seems workable. Ricœur describes his own work as philosophical anthropology, so the point could be tested in a different anthropological climate. As it stands, his work on metaphor like his philosophy belongs to a semantic approach, not consonant with that climate.

This raises the question of whether a dialogue could take place between the two approaches, not to recuperate one of them but to set up a wider field where the notions of meaning and "creativity" as "creation of meaning in language", as proposed in the English title of *La Métaphore vive*, could include them both.

d) *Ontology*. This is the central focus of Ricœur's book on metaphor. If his ontological task as shown in Study 8 is that of a modern form of potentiality / possibility (Ricœur 1978: 43; *cf.* Ricœur, 2011; Brentano, 1862 / 1981; Dunphy-Blomfield, 2012), Kleiber's could be described as an ontology of denomination and

categorisation: the “task of Adam” one might say, of naming what is there before him, and thus of setting out things’ relations to each other and the concepts that allow for this. Kleiber calls on this from the aspect of pragmatics at the end of his article. He writes elsewhere, with the same precision, on modality as the field of possibility (Kleiber, 1981, *Introduction*), so the ontological fields are related in considering the work of these two writers. Thus I see both authors, from opposite positions on a superficial level, meeting at this basic point of important argument connected to the basic, coherent ontology of each.

e) *Polysemy*. A more difficult issue is that of polysemy, discussed widely by Ricœur and propounded by Kleiber not only as a category, but as “a means of categorising the world, classifying the real” (Kleiber, 2008) – thus maintained as the source of metaphor and supporting my view of his ontology. This contrast could inspire a separate article, as would one on the converse theme: Ricœur’s focus on a Kantian view of the productive imagination in metaphor.

f) *Reference*. This is a central issue for both Kleiber and Ricœur, From their different starting-points each makes it the focus of his research into metaphor. As seen above, Ricœur’s careful arguments extend from Frege to Jakobson in order to arrive at the centre of an extended argument. Though not discussed here, Kleiber’s statement on reference in another context, that of anaphore (Kleiber, 1990: 200-201), is also wide-reaching, and clearly relevant to his discussion of metaphor here: “L’idée fondamentale qui a inspiré nos travaux sur les expressions référentielles depuis une dizaine d’années [...] est [...] l’hypothèse [...] que le mode de donation du référent est un des éléments déterminants dans l’appréhension des expressions référentielles”. This too is a theme that could be taken further in an encounter between the semantic and pragmatic fields.

g) *A final point is Ricœur’s hypothetical approach to Kleiber*. Allowing for differences between basic personal viewpoints, in both his 1998 debate with Jean-Pierre Changeux (Changeux & Ricœur, 2000) and that with Levi-Strauss in 1963 (*Esprit*, Nov. 1963 / Ricœur, 1992), Ricœur respects the position of the scientist and shows willingness to use it as the starting-point for a philosophical discussion. Levi-

Strauss showed by his confirmation of Ricœur's categorisation of his thought as a "Kantianism without the transcendental subject" that he understood his opponent's position and was not deterred by it, though he did not invite a synthesis. Like metaphor, this issue of relating objectivity and subjectivity instead of simply opposing them (*cf.* Ricœur, 1952 / 1965) is ongoing.

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