**Poetics: Poetic Language and Devices**

**figurative language I: Metaphor, Metonymy, Simile and Synecdoche**

figurative language vs LITERAL LANGUAGE

Figurative lang. uses FIGURES OF SPEECH – words or phrases used in non-literal sense for rhetorical effect (e.g. emphasis, vividness, clarification or complication of meaning).

**FIGURES OF SPEECH** – different forms (based on a word, phrase, word- and sound- patterning – e.g. repetition)

**TROPES – SCHEMES**

* TROPES – play on the ordinary, expected meaning of words
* SCHEMES – play on the ordinary, expected order or pattern of words

**TROPE**

* etymology: ‘tropos’ from Greek, meaning a turn, change of direction
* any rhetorical or figurative device that involves deviation in meaning, mostly within individual words

Q: How do we interpret meaning? How do we decide if something is meant literally or non-literally (figuratively/ metaphorically)?

e.g.: Figurative language is an umbrella term.

**Meaning is interpreted in three steps:**

1. **by decoding its literal meaning**
2. **then deciding if a literal meaning is possible – or likely**
3. **then by inferring its implied or non-literal meaning**

The process of discerning and adding meanings – **INFERENCING** (deducing; like reading ‘between the lines’).

**Signals of figurative language**

* Textual Signals
* Contextual Signals

Q: Consider these two examples – how does the meaning differ?

Approaching the enemy infantry, the men worried about touching off land mines. They were anxious that their presence would be detected prematurely. Their fears were compounded by the knowledge that they might be isolated from their reinforcements. The outlook was grim. *Regardless of the danger, the troops marched on*.

The children continued to annoy their babysitter. She told the little boys she would not tolerate any more bad behavior. Climbing all over the furniture was not allowed. She threatened to spank them if they continued to stomp, run, and scream around the room. The children knew that her spankings hurt. *Regardless of the danger, the troops marched on*.

(From Sam Glucksberg, *Figurative Language: From Metaphors to Idioms*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001. 18.)

CONTEXT is often essential for the understanding of metaphorical language.

**METAPHOR**

From Greek *metaphora* meaning to transfer or **carry over**. Metaphor occurs when a word or phrase in a text is clearly out of place in the topic dealt with but, nevertheless, makes sense because of some **similarity** or **analogy** between it and the topic.

A figure of speech in which one thing is described in terms of another.

**SIMILE**

A simple category of metaphor. Draws attention to similarity between to terms, things, situations. Uses **connective words** such as AS or LIKE.

**METONYMY**

From Greek meaning **name change**. Differs from metaphor in that whereas metaphor works on the basis of similarity or analogy, metonymy works on the basis of **association**.

**SYNECDOCHE**

From Greek meaning **taking together**. A sub-category of metonymy. Part represents the whole or vice versa.

**Analysing metaphors**

* **Tenor, Vehicle, Grounds**

A metaphor consists of two levels: the figurative and the literal. I. A. Richards (1936) proposed that the literal level should be called the TENOR (the thing meant/implied) and the figurative level the VEHICLE (the image/word/phrase that carries the implied meaning).

Two other terms are important in this context: GROUND and TENSION. The ground is what the tenor and vehicle have in common, what makes the metaphor ‘work’. Tension is needed so that the metaphor (or simile) can be recognized as such. If the tenor and vehicle are too similar, the comparison will be redundant (e.g. stone is like a rock; pen is a pencil).

* **Metaphors using different parts of speech**

**Noun** “Joe is a real **snake** when it comes to women.”

"She was drowning in a **sea** of feeling."

**Verb** “In the corner of the dim room a coffee percolator **snored** fitfully.”

“The wind **whispers** in the trees.”

**Adjective** “He made **catty** remarks about her performance.”

She had a talent for remembering **dirty** jokes.”

**Adverb** “The trees stand **nakedly** on the hillside.”

“The icy water flowed **sullenly**.”

* **Classification of metaphors**
  + A concretive metaphor
  + Animistic metaphor
  + A humanising metaphor (also known as an anthropomorphic metaphor or personification) – *prosopopeia*
  + Extended metaphor
  + Mixed metaphor (in extended metaphors; one tenor – different vehicles)
  + Dead metaphor (cliché)