

# Metaphors

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The metaphor is a widely used figure of speech both in literature and in everyday world. People use metaphors when talking about self, career, life history, feelings and beliefs. Some of the metaphors have gained the value of aphorism due to their large usage and cultural pervasiveness.

People often compare their life to a journey or to a step-by-step process that may be represented by a ladder; you may climb or you may fall, and then re-engage in the process of climbing, striving to reach the top. Many people use the ladder metaphor when they talk about their careers. Such metaphor is rather spatial, but may also be assimilated to a journey.

This metaphor I was also taught and in my opinion it is widely spread in many cultures. When referring to the ladder as a metaphor of life or career the meaning of progress, of taking small steps and of being aware of the risk of falling are involved. However, it conveys the subtleties also found in the semantic field of career or life, as they both may encompass progress, regress or stagnation. Nevertheless, metaphors seem to value the positive, since viewing career metaphorically as a ladder suggests mainly progress and taking safe steps forward.

The journey metaphor has been also applied to relationships; some people say that "my relationship is a journey", alluding in fact to the ups and downs, unusual or interesting turns of events.

Another metaphor related to progress in many areas of life is that of growing. People make reference to spiritual growth, emotional or professional growth. Such metaphor with a horticultural origin emphasizes the same meaning of development and progress, of enrichment. Usually

people use the metaphor in contexts of life experiences, referring to the growth certain experiences bring about. Another metaphor is that of imprisonment. I have heard it most often used in relation to expressing feelings – such as “ I feel imprisoned” (in a relationship, a profession etc.).

The most frequent meaning I am aware of for such a metaphor is that of lack of communication or/and emotional exhaustion. The metaphors I mentioned above may be easily identify in interviews. For instance the metaphors related to career may be more often heard in recruiting processes or in professional settings. But they are not limited to such contexts, of course. They may prove useful in opening interviews or in making the rapport to the interviewee, depending on the type and setting of the interview.

With such purpose the ladder metaphor may be used in an introduction in which the value of professional itinerary is described (important in opening an interview), and to make appeal to the needs of the individual related to constructing a career (in making the rapport). The interviewer could make use of this metaphor when explaining why career is important and how individuals relate to it.

The metaphor of imprisonment may be more frequent in clinical settings or in clinical interviews. It is very important in such contexts to clarify the meaning the person assigns to the concept. Rhodes and Jakes (2004) put forth a valuable example of how metaphor research may be used in clinical setting by illustrating the role of metaphor and metonymy in maintaining delusions for some of the patients.

However, these meanings assigned to metaphors may vary across families or cultures. For instance a family or culture in which the masculine values are predominant may use the metaphor of ladder or that of journey in professional context or when talking about career. The families or cultures that guide themselves after more feminine values use such metaphors referring to relationships and life events. In metaphor use there are certain universal aspects but also a great variability.

For instance, the metaphorical expression "to burn one's fingers" implying that someone was deceived by something, is referred to in Russian in the form "to burn oneself", or in Finnish "to burn one's fingers on something", but implies the same meaning in all cases. The metaphor "something is hard to swallow" having food as an origin and making reference to problems, has a different expression in Czech - "something is hard to digest" and Japanese - "something is hard to chew" (Callies and Zimmermann, eds. 2002)

It is very important to interpret the metaphorical language correctly especially when dealing with investigative contexts (social, clinical, professional etc.). In different types of interviews metaphors are important as they help establish the opening of the interview and rapport. Moreover, identifying the metaphors and the correct interpretation is important to determine true communicative intentions during the other stages of the interview. Metaphors are vital in communication and specific to socio-cultural contexts.

Bibliography:

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