

Metaphors of listening in mother tongue textbooks in Norway

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This article is a report from my ongoing dr.art. thesis: Communication about communication: conventional and creative metaphors of communication in six mother tongue textbooks used in Norwegian upper secondary schools - 1997-99. On this occasion I will not deal with creative metaphors, but concentrate on conventional metaphors and especially conventional metaphors of listening. My theoretical framework will be cognitive linguistics, and especially Reddy (1979), Lakoff & Johnson (1980, 1999), Sweetser (1992) and Cameron (2003). To explain my findings I draw upon Linell (1996, 1998) and his ideas about the written language bias, and Peters (1998) and his history of the idea of communication. Furthermore I find anthropological perspectives like Rogoff (2003) interesting as a framework for discussion.

Within cognitive linguistics Reddy was the first linguist to extensively analyse metaphors of communication. Lakoff and Sweetser have developed his theories, and Lakoff has become especially famous for titles like *Metaphors We Live By* and *Philosophy in the Flesh*. The titles suggest that metaphors are inevitable (we live by them) and that they are closely connected to the human body. This is also the fact with metaphors of communication. Our experiences with moving in space make it possible for us to talk about communication as a journey.

The conceptual theory of metaphor has been criticized for lack of conciseness (Clausner and Croft, 1997:260; Grady, 1997:270) and for putting too much weight on everyday human experience instead of culture in metaphor making (Croft and Cruse, 2004:203). Nevertheless the theory can explain phenomenon in language that it is difficult to explain otherwise. A cognitive linguistic approach to metaphor analysis implies that you look for a source domain and a target domain in identifying metaphors. When talking about communication we use journey as a source domain for the target domain of communication. Communication can be compared to walking along a path. When we *talk through something* we ask each other '*Where were we?*'. If we are going to tell something to somebody we might experience that *we lose the track* and we might find that we have to *go through it once more*. Or we might say more than we wanted because we were so eager and suddenly it was just *too late to stop*. If you are writing something you might experience *that the process of writing stops* and *you're stuck*. We know that good writers just *go on* anyway but others might choose to throw away what they have done and *start all over again*. Sometimes they never *reach the end* because they don't go on. The expressions in italics above are called *metaphorical expressions*, and a metaphor consists of metaphorical expressions that have something in common. In order to distinguish

between metaphors and metaphorical expressions in the following the metaphorical expressions will be marked in italics (*where were we*) and the metaphors will be marked like this Communication Is A Journey¹. The journey metaphor is a good example of a metaphor that can portray communication as cooperation between reader and writer, between listener and speaker. In order to find metaphors of listening I first chose to identify metaphors of communication. But first, something about how I found the metaphors and where I looked for them.

Methods and material

The problems connected to identifying metaphorical expressions have been addressed by many researchers, such as Gibbs (1999) and Cameron (2003). Cameron maintains that identifying metaphorical expressions is not unlike catching fish with a net. As we all know, the kind of fish you get is dependent upon what kind of net you use. I have followed the advice of Cameron and established categories based on the concept of family resemblance, which is the kind of category Wittgenstein (1953) suggests is suitable for talking about language use. Family resemblance means what it says, namely that members of a family resemble each other in one or more ways. Some members have some kind of resemblance, but all members do not need to resemble each other to constitute a family.

This methodology means that you have to read through the material many times, and when you do that, you find more and more metaphorical expressions. This can mean that it is difficult to stop reading and telling yourself that you have found enough expressions to establish a metaphor.

For identifying journey metaphors I looked for expressions belonging to the domain of journeys. Other metaphors had to do with feeding and digesting, and so I looked for expressions like spoon feeding, digest, swallow, etc. Some methodological problems are connected to the fact that it is hard to establish rules for what belongs to a domain. Is a burden part of the journey domain, or is it not, when we talk about books that are hard to read? In these matters I find support in Wittgenstein's flexible categories of family resemblance. As a working rule for establishing the metaphors the metaphorical expressions had to be used in all books and more than four times in each of them.

The material consists of 18 textbooks with more than 1700 pages. It is important to keep in mind that textbooks have a lot of illustrations and that there is not very much print on the pages in the books. Therefore the material is not as extensive as it looks. And I did not register all metaphors, only the ones that dealt with these topics: speaking, listening, reading and writing in different media (including the Internet).

¹ This is after Lakoff 1999. In Lakoff & Johnson 1980 the same metaphor was marked like this: *COMMUNICATION IS A JOURNEY*.

Results

We will present a list of metaphors showing the source domains for the metaphors of communication in the textbooks I examined. Most of the source domains are not connected to journey metaphors but to objects. This could mean that the emphasis is not on communication as a process but on communication as manipulation of different kinds of objects. Here it is important to have in mind that metaphors can be formulated in different ways. Lakoff puts it this way: Communication Is Feeding. I have tried to catch the listening process by formulating the metaphor in this way: Communicating Is Feeding And Digesting.

I will now comment on each of the metaphors and show what kind of metaphorical expressions that belong to them and further discuss if the metaphors include expressions that have to do with the nature of listening.

Communicating Is Feeding And Digesting

- He *fed them with fresh ideas*
- Sometimes you have to *spoon-feed people*.
- Give people time *to digest your ideas*
- He *swallowed it whole*

Within this metaphor there is a certain balance between feeding and digesting in the textbooks. This metaphor is also interesting because, according to Lakoff, it is less widespread than the other metaphors of communication mentioned here. The next metaphor for example, Communicating Is Sending And Receiving, occur in languages throughout the world (Lakoff, 1999: 241).

Communicating Is Sending And Receiving

- I got *my idea across* to him.
- We let them *take turns in speaking*.
- You can't just *cast such allegations*.
- The audience must be able to get *the main point*.

This metaphor is very widespread socially and I found many examples of it in my material. Reddy was one of the first to criticise it on the grounds that it makes us think that communication is easily accomplished and just a matter of sending a message through a conduit to a receiver who catches it and eventually unpacks it and understands it immediately. Reddy called it "the conduit metaphor" and wanted to replace it with the toolmaker's paradigm, where communication is looked upon as something you have to work hard for and something that needs activity from both speaker and listener. It should also be noted that there are very few expressions of listening within this metaphor in the material.

Communicating Is Hunting And Being Caught

This metaphor is related to the sending and receiving metaphor in that it shows the listener or reader as the rather passive prey of the hunter or fisherman.

- Does the author manage to *capture the reader*?
- How can we *hold the audience's attention*?
- Advertising means *aiming for the head and hitting the wallet*.
- *Get the reader hooked!*

The same is the case with the following metaphor.

Communicating Is Planting and Harvesting

- What do you think the poet wants *to grow from all of the words he has sown*?
- He *harvested much praise* for his book.

This metaphor will allow for metaphorical expressions that have to do with listening, even though they will suggest little activity on behalf of the listener. But there are very few expressions within this metaphor in the material as a whole, mainly because listening is not a very important subject in the textbooks.

Communicating Is Composing And Listening To Music

- You must *find your own tone* when you write.
- They might *lend an ear to* your argument.

This metaphor is more frequently used, especially when talking about poetry. Note also that one of the few metaphorical expressions that has to do with listening, namely 'to lend an ear to something', here is used about discussions.

Communicating Is Creating And Seeing Images

In this metaphor the writer is prompted to create images in the reader's head and the reader is told to try to recreate them in his or her mind.

- *Give a clear picture* of the situation.
- We must get the reader *to envisage the situation*.
- *Try to see things for yourself* when you read.

Some of the expressions portray the reader or listener as an active person, trying to envisage something, but most of the expressions in the material is sender-based and not occupied with listening activities.

Communicating Is Lighting And Seeing

- It's all about *casting as much light as possible on the subject*.
- It is important to *get your message across clearly*.
- After reading it for a second time *she saw the text with new eyes*.

This metaphor has two other metaphors connected to it: Explaining Is Lighting and Understanding Is Seeing. Metaphorical expressions like *expressing yourself clearly* and *sending clear messages* belong to these metaphors. Peters (1999:28) maintains that in our culture there is a wish for clear communication, and that this is a sign of a therapeutic discourse about communication where the most important thing is to eliminate semantic fog. According to Peters the other discourse is the technical one,

the one with sending and receiving. He also maintains that the two discourses, the therapeutic and the technical one, has dominated the discourse of communication after World War II. I will return to this question in my conclusion.

Communicating Is Creating Flow And Navigation

- It is important to *find the right sources*.
- *The language must be fluent*.
- *Let the questions flow freely*.
- It's unwise to just produce *a torrent of words*.

In the technical understanding of discourse it is important to make language flow easily so that there are no obstacles to communication. On the other hand the flow metaphor also underlines the importance of water and wetness and portrays this element as something positive in communication. *Dry words* are boring. *Juicy things* are nice to listen to and in order to think better you can '*legge hodet i bløt*'².

Communicating Is Producing And Packing And Unpacking And Consuming

This metaphor is also connected to the technical discourse with producing and consuming:

- Try to *get out* what you want to say.
- *The final product* is ready for submission.
- Right at the end you can *polish up your spelling and punctuation*.
- TV channels *package serious themes in in an attractive and light way*.

I found a lot of expressions related to producing and packing, but did not find any expressions related to unpacking, or to what can be compared to the act of listening. This is probably again due to the fact that listening is not well covered as a subject in the textbooks.

Communicating Is Constructing And Reconstructing

- This is how you *build up a narrative*.
- *Raise clear questions*.
- The first words *lay the foundations of the narrative*.
- The word *ingress* comes from Latin and really means '*entrance*'.

This metaphor, however, requires something more from the listener, who will have to do some building on her own to construct meaning. But then again, there are no metaphorical expressions about *reconstruction* in the textbooks. The aspect of listening is again almost absent.

Communicating Is Doing Handicraft

- Readers should be able to *pick up the thread of your essay*.

² The idiom '*legge hodet i bløt*' does not have an equivalent in English. In Norwegian it means to put your head in water to improve your thinking. The closest idiom in English will probably be '*rack your brain*'.

- You can *organise your material* in various ways.
- You can *weave in your own thoughts*.
- Try to see *a pattern in the text*.

There are a lot of expressions covering the process of creation. Many of them are from the domain of handicraft, like sowing, weaving or knitting. Not surprisingly there are very few expressions that have to do with listening. So what can be the reasons for this metaphorical silence on behalf of the subject of listening? Could it be that communication is metaphorized as manipulation of objects dealing with products rather than with processes? The next and last metaphor is the journey metaphor, and this one carries with it the possibility of giving listening more space.

Communicating Is Leading And Following

- *The author can take the reader to faraway places*
- *In the beginning you must take the reader by the hand and tell him where you are going*
- *Headings are signposts along the way*
- *It is important to follow when someone is talking to you*

As we have seen this is not a very dominant metaphor, compared to all the object metaphors we have discussed so far. Following someone is the same as listening to someone. I guess the reader will not be surprised to hear that there are very few metaphorical expressions from the domain of following and a lot from the domain of leading. Leading is more important than following. Speaking is more important than listening, at least in textbooks of Norwegian for upper secondary school in Norway.

Speaking Well Is Speaking Clearly?

As I mentioned earlier Peters (1998) maintains that there are two discourses that have dominated the discourse of communication after World War II., the technical one and the therapeutic one. Many of the metaphors above and a lot of the expressions in the textbooks seem to support that view. There are many expressions about sending and receiving and about lightening and seeing. Speaking well in textbooks is to speak clearly or to send appropriate messages that don't even need unpacking. But speaking well could also be to be able to listen and give the listener a more important role in the act of communication. But this is an aspect that is neglected in the textbook discourse about communication.

Linell (1996, 1998) discusses the phenomena of neglect of listening in view of the distinction between oral and written cultures and maintains that listening will be of less importance in the written world because "the written language bias" leads to a belief in fixed word meanings and ignorance of contexts and more dialogical perspectives.

There is reason to believe that the importance of listening is a matter of culture. The American professor of psychology, Barbara Rogoff, is interested in the cultural nature of human development and discusses silence as a cultural phenomenon

(Rogoff, 2003). In many societies, like in North American Native communities (Plank, 1994, after Rogoff) silence is valued and among the rural Malinka of French West Africa, speech is carefully used (Laye, 1959, after Rogoff). Rogoff also refers to Condon (1984) who in a guide book for Americans on how to understand the Japanese, makes a list of Americans' habits that the Japanese grumble about. This list shows that there is a difference between the two cultures as far as listening or silence is concerned. Japanese complain that Americans do not listen well but instead are overly eager to offer their own ideas or ask questions before hearing what others have to say. Condon puts it this way:

An American asks a Japanese a question and there is a pause before the Japanese responds. If the question is fairly direct, the pause may be even longer as the Japanese considers how to avoid a direct answer. The American, however, may assume that the pause is because the question was not clearly understood and hence he may rephrase the question (Condon according to Rogoff, 2003: 312f).

Condon (still according to Rogoff) also comments on the fact that when European Americans speak to someone and they don't answer immediately, they tend to think that the question was not clear enough. In my opinion this shows that European Americans have a firm belief in the metaphor Speaking Well Is Speaking Clearly and also that they have a belief in the words themselves regardless of the context they are uttered in. Not only European Americans but also Norwegian textbook authors seem to believe firmly in the metaphor Speaking Well Is Speaking Clearly.

It would be interesting to have a look at Japanese textbooks to see whether these contain more metaphors of both listening and reading. Rogoff finds that there is a difference between American and Japanese children's narratives, and that European American teachers find that the children's narratives appear unimaginative and sparse. The teachers do not always know the Japanese haiku tradition and its importance in Japanese culture. Through haiku, but also through other activities, the children are taught to observe and listen. Therefore they also develop the ability to read between the lines, also in oral communication. This is an ability that is of great importance in a multicultural society, but this is neglected in Norwegian textbooks, and probably in most other Western countries.

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