

RETHINKING THE CONNECTION OF METAPHOR AND TOPOS

MAREIKE BUSS & JÖRG JOST
RWTH AACHEN

1. Introduction

Having survived the «death of rhetoric» (R. BARTHES 1985: 115), metaphor has become the centre of intensive research by philosophers of language and linguists in the twentieth century. Nowadays it is widely accepted that metaphor is not reducible to «a sort of happy extra trick with words» (I. A. RICHARDS [1936] 1964: 90), but is rather said to be a fundamental principle of linguistic creativity with an invaluable cognitive function and heuristic potential. Topos or rather *commonplace* has, in contrast, a predominantly negative connotation in everyday and scientific language. Topos, which originally designated the place where to find the arguments for a speech, has become the cliché, the worn out phrase, or the stereotype. Nevertheless, there are numerous critical studies focusing on topoi in their heuristic and argumentative function.

Aristotle's *Art of Rhetoric* is one of the first and most important 'textbooks' for speech production. Following Aristotle, the purpose of rhetorical speech consists in persuading by argumentation. In this respect he defines rhetoric as «the faculty of discovering the possible means of persuasion in reference to any subject whatever.» (*Rhetoric* I, 1355b/14,2). Now, persuasion presupposes – as any perlocutionary act – that the utterances have been understood by the audience, in short: it presupposes (text) comprehension.¹ When analysing the first three phases of rhetoric – *heuresis*, *taxis* and *lexis* – two features in particular stand out on account of the role they play in argumentation: topos and metaphor, which are treated in the *heuresis* and the *lexis*.²

Metaphor works in a heuristic and aesthetic manner, while topos operates in a heuristic and logical manner. This difference is grounded in their respective characteristics, which will be discussed in the second and third sections of this paper. In the fourth section it is shown how metaphor and topos are based on common knowledge and how they are used in rhetorical text production.

2. Metaphor

In this section we outline our view of metaphor, which is based on the assumptions developed, largely by M. BLACK ([1954] 1962, 1977, 1979), within the framework of the so-called 'interaction view of metaphor' (2.1). In our opinion, Black has made a fundamental contribution to contemporary research in metaphorology, which is, in spite of some important subsequent additions (cf. M. HESSE 1963, 1983; P. RICŒUR [1975] 1997), still unsurpassed in its systematic treatment of the subject. We will discuss the cognitive function of metaphor (2.2) and give a typology of different kinds of metaphor (2.3). Finally, the aesthetic dimension of metaphor is treated (2.4).

¹ Even though Aristotle aimed at explaining the proper and skilful use of speech, the principles exposed in his *Art of Rhetoric* may also be applied to written text. Therefore we will use the term 'text' to refer to both spoken and written discourse; the term 'author' to refer to both speaker and author; and the term 'recipient' to refer to both, audience and reader.

² The *technē rhetorikē* distinguishes between five principal phases (*heuresis*, *taxis*, *lexis*, *hypocrisis*, *mneme*), with the first three being the most important for text production. A fine presentation of the *technē rhetorikē* can be found in R. BARTHES (1985: 85ff).

2.1 A Question of Demarcation: How to define Metaphor?

The classical definition of metaphor is to be found in Aristotle's *Poetics* (1457b/7), the basis for the traditional view of metaphor.³ In fact, as U. ECO (1983: 217f) has observed: «of the thousands and thousands of pages written about metaphor, few add anything of substance to the first two or three fundamental concepts stated by Aristotle.» Its main features can be schematically described as follows: (1) metaphor is a trope, i.e., a figure of speech that is to be found on the level of single words (*lexis*); (2) metaphor is the transposition of meaning from one word to another, the «*epiphora* d'un mot» (P. RICŒUR [1975] 1997: 24); (3) metaphor is a deviant and thereby *improper* use of words; and (4) metaphor simply replaces some equivalent literal expression and has thus just an ornamental function in discourse.

In modern theories of metaphor, however, things are different. The structural features of metaphor are redefined in the following ways: (1) metaphor is not a lexical but a discursive phenomenon; thus (2) the processual character of the metaphorical shift is emphasised; (3) the postulate of the improper use of words is contested and replaced by the assumption of the general metaphoricality of language; and (4) metaphor is no longer a decorative ornament of speech, which can be substituted for by a literal expression, but is a genuine means of expressing something that cannot be said in any other way. Therefore, metaphor is said to have a proper cognitive function in language.⁴

Apart from emphasising the cognitive function of metaphor, the most important innovation of modern metaphorology consists, from our point of view, in defining metaphor as a discursive phenomenon. But what exactly does that mean? It means that metaphorical meaning is not inherent to the metaphorical expression, but that it is rather the result of the metaphorical interaction between a «focus», i.e., the metaphorically used expression, and a «frame», i.e., the phrasal context (M. BLACK [1954] 1962: 28). This definition of metaphor has far-reaching consequences for the notion of language in general, for it is recognised that linguistic meaning is solely generated *in use* and that the metaphorical alteration of linguistic meaning is a fundamental principle of linguistic creativity. Against this background the opposition of 'metaphorical' and 'literal' is not to be seen as an ontological difference but as a merely pragmatic distinction, which marks the different degrees of familiarity with linguistic uses (cf. M. HESSE 1980, 1983, 1987; B. DEBATIN 1995): «The clear distinction between literal-dominant and metaphorical-derived meaning is replaced by a distinction of degree, capable of varying in accordance with different contexts» (B. DEBATIN 1995: 110)⁵.

In logical terms, we can describe the metaphorical process as a case of *paradox predication*: attributes which properly belong to one class of things are assigned to another class of things (cf. P. RICŒUR [1975] 1997: 115). Aristotle already drew attention to this logical dimension of metaphor by characterising it as the «application of a strange term either transferred from the genus and applied to the species or from the species and applied to the genus or from one species to another» (*Poetics* 1457b/7). These three types of metaphor can be called – in G. RYLE's terms (1949: 16) – genuine «category-mistakes». However, the

³ Cf. P. RICŒUR ([1975] 1997: 19-34), who discusses in detail the Aristotelian definition of metaphor, emphasising that its interpretation in the rhetorical tradition does not necessarily follow from the different passages of the text. It is incontestable, however, that the Aristotelian definition of metaphor as found in his *Poetics* and *The Art of Rhetoric* has been fundamental in placing metaphor within the doctrine of tropes (cf. R. BARTHES 1985).

⁴ The difference between traditional and modern theories of metaphor is here presented in a schematic and simplified way and therefore does not deal with all aspects of the historical development. For detailed historical-systematic examinations cf. P. RICŒUR [1975] 1997; U. ECO 1983.

⁵ We are responsible for translations from works for which a German title appears in the *References*. Otherwise we have availed ourselves of the published English translations.

fourth type – often referred to as ‘proportional’ or ‘analogical’ metaphor – refuses to fit into these patterns, as the feature of *similarity* shows up. Following Aristotle, this kind of metaphor is created on the basis of *similarity*: you have «to grasp the similarity in things that are apart.» (*Rhetoric* III, 1412a/11). We shall discuss below whether this similarity precedes or is rather itself the result of the metaphorical process (cf. section 2.4).

2.2 The Cognitive Function of Metaphor

We said that metaphorical meaning is a result of the interaction between focus and frame, defining the former as the metaphorically used expression and the latter as the (literal) phrasal context. But at this point we have to make our description of the metaphorical process more precise: «Metaphors do not make two ideas interact, but two systems of ideas.» (U. ECO 1996: 1321). This conception – a chief claim of the interaction view of metaphor – can be traced back to I. A. RICHARDS’ seminal work *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* ([1936] 1964). It was further developed and elaborated by M. BLACK in several writings, where the two systems are first called «systems of associated commonplaces» ([1954] 1962) and later on «implicative complexes» (1977). The implicative complexes associated with the focus and the frame consist of sets of common beliefs, opinions or ideas the members of a language community are largely (and often unconsciously) committed to – in short: *common knowledge*.⁶ This account of the metaphorical process is based on the assumption that linguistic meanings are intersubjectively constituted conglomerates with blurred margins – a kind of fuzzy set – and is thus diametrically opposed to the widely accepted semantic view that conceives of meanings in terms of quasi-ontologically given, psychological entities.

Black characterises the metaphorical process as an *interaction* of two implicative complexes:

- (i) the presence of the primary subject [i.e. the focus; M.B./J.J.] incites the hearer to select some of the secondary subject’s [i.e. the frame’s; ; M.B./J.J.] properties; and (ii) invites him to construct a parallel «implicative complex» that can fit the primary subject; and (iii) reciprocally induces parallel changes in the secondary subject. (M. BLACK 1977: 442).

Let us illustrate how metaphor functions by analysing Chamfort’s sentence «The poor are the negroes of Europe» (cf. M. BLACK [1954] 1962: 26). (i) The primary subject ‘negro’, referring in our example metaphorically to a stratum of society, prompts us to look for similarities between black Americans and poor Europeans; (ii) we have thus to reorganise the implicative system associated with ‘poor Europeans’ to a certain extent by e.g. drawing parallels between ethnic and social discrimination: poor Europeans and black Americans share in common social stigma and discrimination by the society they live in; (iii) but this reorganisation not only affects the implicative system of ‘poor Europeans’ but also the system of our ideas concerning ‘black Americans’. Metaphor hence changes and extends our knowledge about the world by focusing on new aspects of something already known. In this connection, M. BLACK ([1954] 1962) has compared metaphor to a «filter» (39) or even to a «screen» (41): the metaphorical expression selects and transforms the things we are speaking about. So in our example, the ‘negro-metaphor’ «suppresses some details, emphasizes others – in short: *organizes* our view» of poor Europeans (M. BLACK [1954] 1962: 41), while simultaneously stressing a new aspect of discrimination against black Americans. Therefore, the metaphorical process does not involve merely projecting features commonly associated with the primary subject upon the secondary subject, but changes the implicative complexes associated with both of them.

⁶ The notion of common knowledge and its relation to metaphor and topos is discussed below in section 4.1.

Throughout our explanations we have described metaphor – metaphorically – in terms of a visual device: you *see* something through metaphor, it works like a *filter* or like a *screen*, and it *focuses* on new aspects. This kind of metaphorical description of metaphor has a long tradition, going back to Aristotle, who claimed its chief merit was to «set things before the eyes» (*Rhetoric* III, 1410b/10 ; cf. also 1412a/11). Such a feature is not accidental: it emphasises the creative power of metaphor, which yields particular new *insights* into the world – i.e., the above-quoted Aristotelian ‘similarity in things that are apart’ – that might not be seen at all through any other medium. This is what we call the cognitive function of metaphor.

2.3 Typologising Metaphor

M. BLACK (1977: 439f) has identified two characteristic features constitutive of metaphors: «emphasis» and «resonance». Emphasis describes the degree of non-substitutivity, i.e., the degree to which a metaphor can be paraphrased or substituted for by a literal expression *without losing the particular insight it is conveying*. An absence of emphasis in a metaphorical expression is therefore a criterion for its ‘weakness’, while the «failure of substitutivity» (A. C. DANTO 1981: 179) indicates its novelty and ‘strength’. Resonance, on the other hand, denotes the extent of possible background implications borne by a metaphor; that is, the more interpretations a metaphor allows for, the more we can call it resonant.

Availing himself of these two criteria, B. DEBATIN (1995: 100ff) has elaborated a schematic typology of the different kinds of metaphor: (1) Metaphors with only little emphasis and resonance are called ‘lexicalised’, ‘dead’ or ‘frozen’ metaphors. Generally, they are so commonly used that the members of a language community typically do not perceive them as metaphors any longer (take, for instance, the expressions «cherry lips» or «table-leg»). (2) Metaphors showing an average emphasis and resonance or only a high degree of one of the two features are called ‘conventional’ or ‘weak’ metaphors. Consider the saying «No man is an island»: this metaphorical expression is highly emphatic, for the primary subject ‘island’ cannot be substituted for without losing its specific background implications; on the other hand, it is not strongly resonant because its use and range of possible interpretations are relatively restricted and conventionalised. (3) ‘Live’, ‘innovative’ or ‘strong’ metaphors – «This is the mole-/gray mouth of the year.» (A. SEXTON, *Eighteen days without you, December 3rd*) – are characterised by high emphasis and high resonance: they represent things in a novel light and thus express something that cannot be shown in any other way; at the same time, they open up a wide range of possible interpretations and hence stimulate the recipient’s mind. Because of their high cognitive and heuristic potential, they are constitutive elements of both literary and – more surprisingly – even scientific discourse.⁷ It is important to notice, however, that these distinctions between the different kinds of metaphor are not (ontological) distinctions of *kind* but only (pragmatic) distinctions of *degree*.

2.4 The Aesthetic Dimension of Metaphor

A major point of contention in metaphorology concerns the question whether the similarity between the two implicative systems is created in the metaphorical process, or whether

⁷ As one of the first M. BLACK (1962) has pointed out the parallelism between the use of metaphor in discourse and the use of models in science; subsequently M. HESSE (1963, 1980) has largely contributed to introducing this topic into philosophy of science. For a concise presentation of the connection between metaphors and models cf. U. ECO (1996: 1320).

metaphor only discovers an already existing similarity and ‘sets it before the eyes’. To answer this question in a satisfactory manner, we have to fall back upon our metaphorological typology as established in the preceding section.

With respect to dead metaphors, which are not even perceived as metaphors any longer, it seems obvious that they do not create any new similarity or insight into the world. They nonetheless allow for ‘resuscitation’ when used in novel or unusual contexts. U. ECO (1983: 255f) lists several possibilities for bringing dead metaphors ‘back to life’; e.g. advertising often avails itself of this possibility in order to create interesting linguistic effects and to capture the attention of consumers.

Things are different with respect to conventional metaphors, however, for it is largely accepted that they have a considerable heuristic and hence cognitive potential. But instead of contending that they create absolutely novel similarities, it would be more precise to say that they work on already existing similarities within the common knowledge of a given culture. It is important to underline that these similarities have to be thought of not as ontologically given but as culturally produced similarities, which are only predicable of two implicative systems within the categorical framework of a given culture: «And thus the metaphor *posits* [...] a proportion that, wherever it may have been deposited was not before the eyes; or it was before the eyes and the eyes did not see it, as with Poe’s purloined letter.» (U. ECO 1983: 234). Since conventional metaphors are deeply rooted in the categorical network of common knowledge, their interpretation will in principle be accomplished rather effortlessly.

Both creating and interpreting live metaphors requires, in contrast, a much higher intellectual and imaginative effort, for they produce strikingly novel, yet *unheard of* similarities. M. BLACK (1977: 454) has formulated the – what he calls – «strong creativity thesis» as follows:

Some metaphors enable us to see aspects of reality that the metaphor’s production helps to constitute. But that is no longer surprising if one believes that the ‘world’ is necessarily a world *under a certain description* – or a world seen from a certain perspective. Some metaphors can create such a perspective.

In our opinion, the creative potential of seeing the world from a new perspective is not only a facultative but rather the very constitutive feature of live metaphors and this is why they are said to have the power of redescribing ‘how things are’. Nonetheless, even the most creative metaphorical innovation necessarily operates within an already existing framework of cultural and linguistic traditions:

And yet, these first tropes [i.e. absolutely novel metaphors; M.B./J.J.] themselves arise because every time there is an underlying semiotic network. Vico would remind us that men know how to speak like heroes because they already know how to speak like men. Even the most ingenious metaphors are made from the detritus of other metaphors – language speaking itself, then – and the line between first and last tropes is very thin, not so much a question of semantics as of the pragmatics of interpretation. (U. ECO 1983: 256).

U. ECO (1996: 1320) has claimed that the interpretation of live metaphors functions as abductive reasoning: given a live metaphor (*Result*), you have to construct a hypothetical framework from which to infer a plausible interpretation (*Rule*), since no univocal contextual clues allow for a valid interpretation; then you interpret the metaphor so as to fit into the previously constructed hypothetical framework (*Case*). Even if there are no *univocal* contextual clues for interpreting the metaphor instantaneously, one can always put forward interpretative hypotheses on the basis of the given context, whether that be a speech, a poem or a piece of scientific writing. Thus – as U. ECO (1996: 1320) has pointed out – «even a metaphorical interpretation ought to be recognized as valid only if the general con-

text in which the metaphorical sentence appears does not contradict it (i.e. the general context should act as the universe in which the Law [i.e. the *Rule*; M.B./J.J.] figured out by abduction cannot be falsified).»

The invention of live metaphors is – like their interpretation – a highly creative process and also in many respects analogous to abductive reasoning. It requires, following Aristotle, the capacity of recognising ‘similarity in different things’. But does this mean ‘recognising *already existing* similarity in different things?’ P. RICŒUR ([1975] 1997: 251) would contest such an assumption: «de pouvoir de la métaphore [est] de briser une catégorisation antérieure, afin d’établir de nouvelles frontières sur les ruines des précédentes.» Hence a live metaphor is created on the basis of the intuition that there might be a similarity between two different things which does not exist prior to the creation of the metaphor. That is the reason why creating good metaphors is – in Aristotle’s words – «the token of genius» (*Poetics*, 1459a/16) or – following G. RYLE (1949: 27ff) – a matter of «knowing how», the irreducible remainder of skilful performances that cannot be explained. And since there are no rules for discovering similarities, the invention of live metaphors can neither be reduced to method nor taught or learned, but requires «an eye for resemblances» (*Poetics*, 1459a/17). This creative imagination is the aesthetic dimension of metaphor.

3. Topos

While we have analysed metaphor under the aspects of its cognitive function and its aesthetic dimension, we will discuss some aspects of a general notion of topos, employing the four structural features as defined by L. BORNSCHEUER (1976) (3.1). Then we discuss the rhetorical functions of topos, i.e., its heuristic and its argumentative function (3.2). Finally, the presentation of topos as a ‘technical’ phenomenon will permit its distinction from metaphor as a more aesthetic device (3.3).

3.1 A Question of Demarcation: How to define Topos?

In contrast to metaphor, topos is never explicitly defined by Aristotle. However, in *The Art of Rhetoric* Aristotle calls topoi general features, «which may be applied alike to Law, Physics, Politics, and many other sciences that differ in kind, such as the topic of the more or less» (*Rhetoric* I, 1358a/21).⁸ Following CH. STETTER (1997: 370), the topos is «a place of common belief, where orator and audience meet each other.» In the *technè rhetorikè*, the topoi bear a double function: on the one hand, they are ‘search locations’, which the author has to come across in the process of *heuresis* in order to find proper premises for structuring the argumentation.⁹ Additionally, the term denotes its concrete realisation as the premise of the so-called «rhetorical syllogism» (*Rhetoric* I, 1356b/8), the enthymeme.

Using topoi as premises in enthymemes presupposes that they really do reflect the common opinions about things and facts in a given society. L. BORNSCHEUER (1976) calls

⁸ It is necessary to distinguish between ‘formal’ or ‘general’ and ‘material’ or ‘specific’ topoi. Formal topoi are those of the ‘possible and impossible’, the ‘real and unreal’ i.e. the ‘factual’ (‘existing/non-existing’), and of the ‘more or less’. (*Rhetoric* II, 1392a/4; cf. also R. BARTHES 1985: 142f). Material topoi reflect the predominant notion of things and facts in a given society, such as happiness and misery, wealth and poverty, friendship, virtue, vice etc. In contrast to formal topoi, they form a more empirically shaped material (cf. CH. STETTER 1997: 370ff).

⁹ R. BARTHES (1985: 138) describes the inventive process as follows: «Il faut se représenter les choses ainsi: un *sujet (quaestio)* est donné à l’orateur; pour trouver des arguments, l’orateur “promène” son sujet le long d’une grille des formes vides: du contact du sujet et de chaque case (chaque “lieu”) de la grille (de la Topique) surgit une idée possible, une prémisses d’enthymème.»

this their ‘habituality’, which is beside ‘potentiality’, ‘intentionality’ and ‘symbolicity’ a central structural feature of a general notion of *topos*. Coming from the Aristotelian term *endoxa*, he defines ‘habituality’ as an internalised *habitus* of a given society, with respect to language, communication and behaviour. The Greek term *endoxa* (latin: *probabilia*) describes the predominant or shared opinions of a given society. Aristotle defines these ‘generally accepted opinions’ in the following way: «Generally accepted opinions [...] are those which commend themselves to all or to the majority or to the wise – that is, to all of the wise or to the majority or to the most famous and distinguished of them.» (*Topica* I, I 100b/18).

The second structural feature of a general notion of *topos*, the ‘potentiality’, takes account of Aristotle’s aim «to discover a method by which we shall be able *to reason* from generally accepted opinions *about any problem* set before us» (*Topica* I, I 100a/18; our emphasis). A range of possible problems so broad as to take into account any potential problem requires a highly flexible usage of the topical material. The (almost) unlimited applicability is made possible through recourse to the *endoxa* of a given society. Thus, at its very starting point every *topos* is «‘per se’ undetermined and general; in a certain context of problems, however, it opens up specific argumentational prospects for a whole variety of interests.» (L. BORNSCHEUER 1976: 99). The selection of the proper *topos* and its skilled application to a specific situation is therefore left to the author alone. The transmission of the general and undetermined *topos* to a specific argumentation is hence its third structural feature: its ‘intentionality’ (cf. L. BORNSCHEUER 1976: 102f). The ambivalence of the *topos* is thereby turned into a specific contextual argumentative force.

The fourth and final structural feature of a general notion of *topos* is its ‘symbolicity’ (L. BORNSCHEUER 1976: 103ff): any *topos* can take the form of a short phrase or mnemotechnic verse. In such a specifically concretised form it is at the disposal of the members of a given social group.

3.2 Rhetorical Functions of *Topos*

The rhetorical function of *topos* is on the one hand established by its own heuristic quality to serve as a place where to find the premises in the *heuresis*, and on the other hand by its application to the creation of arguments. In rhetorical discourse the author persuades by argumentation. The logical device in argumentation is the enthymeme, i.e., the rhetorical syllogism. It has the logical form of a deductive syllogism, consisting of one or more premises and a conclusion, but differs from the latter in two respects: (1) it is a ‘shortened’ or ‘truncated’ syllogism in which either the premises or the conclusion are not explicitly stated, i.e. *nonexplicit assumption* (cf. D. WALTON 2001: 93). (2) the premises are grounded in generally accepted opinions – the *endoxa* – and are hence only probable, not necessarily true.

With regard to the first characteristic of the rhetorical syllogism, the nonexplicit assumptions eventually have to be completed by the recipient himself. In this manner, the recipient is involved in the argumentative process of reasoning that the author develops: «One truncates the syllogism, leaves out premises taken for granted – in short: one cancels text, opening up a scope for thinking.» (CH. STETTER 1997: 375). This accounts for what R. BARTHES (1985: 132f) calls the «plaisir à l’enthymème»: «L’enthymème n’est pas un syllogisme tronqué par carence, dégradation, mais parce qu’il faut laisser à l’auditeur le plaisir de tout faire dans la construction de l’argument».

The very possibility of truncating the rhetorical syllogism derives from the fact that it is grounded in the *consensus omnium* of a given society, i.e., in what Aristotle calls the *endoxa*. For – according to CH. STETTER (1997: 372) – «if the *topos* is to fulfil its topical function, its validity must not be questioned in the current procedure.» The author may hence take

for granted either the premises or the conclusion and need not state them explicitly in his discourse. These nonexplicit assumptions underlying the enthymeme, however, are not true, as they have to be in philosophical reasoning – they are only probable. Even though rhetorical argumentation may thus not meet the standards of logical reasoning because of the ‘weakness’ of its premises, it performs its function of convincing the audience by means of probable and hence *plausible* arguments. The probable (*eikos*) is thereby classified as a possible premise in the enthymeme – beside the ‘certain indications’ or ‘evidence’ (*tekmeria*) and the ‘signs’ (*semeia*). The *eikos* belongs to the class of human certainty (in contrast to epistemic or scientific certainty) and is based on ideas which have been developed on the basis of experience and induction (cf. R. BARTHES 1985: 134f).¹⁰

A very simple example will demonstrate how the enthymeme functions. Let us take a generally accepted opinion about what it means ‘to relax on your holiday’. You will agree that it means ‘having nice weather’, probably sunny weather, being in a nice place, one preferably different from where you live, eating well and a lot of different specialities, too. So if you have this field of *topoi* you have the place from where to get your arguments for promoting Spain as a spectacular place for holidays, or for promoting real estate in Spain.

In summary, *topos* can be described in its heuristic function as a ‘search guide’ for finding arguments, and as a ‘probative aid’ in argumentation: «Le lieu est à la fois une formule de recherche et une formule probative.» (W. A. DE PATER 1965: 147f)

3.3 Topos as a ‘Technical’ Phenomenon

Topos plays an important role in the *techne rhetorike*. The Greek notion of *techne* or the Latin notion of *ars* represents a capacity, ability or a (practical or theoretical) skill based on certain knowledge about rules (cf. H. G. GADAMER [1960] ⁵1986: 320ff). Our modern notion of art, strongly influenced by the Romantic aesthetics of the nineteenth century, corresponds only partly with the classical notions of *techne* or *ars*, which are preserved, however, in some idiomatic expressions such as ‘a piece of scientific writing has to be *state of the art*’.

We have said that the *topoi*, or commonplaces, are the places where the author can find the material for the enthymeme’s premises. In the phase of *heuresis*, the author *visits* these commonplaces, guided by the question «What has to be said?» (cf. R. BARTHES 1985: 37). After the material has been located for the argumentation, it has to be selected and transformed into arguments. These two steps have one thing in common: they are based on propositional knowledge about the heuristic process and can thus be made explicit. Or in the words of G. RYLE (1949: 27ff): they are the «knowing that» of the heuristic process. This is why the heuristic process of finding arguments can be methodised. For this purpose, there are commonplace lists and books that classify and exemplify the use of commonplaces. Even Aristotle develops a methodology of using *topoi* as ‘search guides’ in the *Topica*, while he teaches their use as ‘probative aids’ in the *Art of Rhetoric*. The use of *topoi* is therefore learnable to a certain extent – and that is why Aristotelian rhetoric is a *techne*. But *heuresis* does not entirely involve a mere ‘knowing that’ which can be methodised and mechanically applied to different empirical cases.

¹⁰ R. BARTHES (1985: 134f) outlines two different aspects of the Aristotelian probable (*eikos*): (1) It is not a necessary ‘general’ that can be described as «un ‘général’ humain, déterminé en somme statistiquement par l’opinion du plus grand nombre» (R. BARTHES 1985: 135); (2) the in principle possible ‘contrariness’ is due to the fact that «on ne peut prévoir d’une façon certaine (scientifique) les résolutions d’un être libre» (R. BARTHES 1985: 135). The *eikos* as a ‘human general’ differs from the epistemic i.e. scientific ‘general’ in two respects: (1) the latter is a *necessary* general, which (2) *does not* permit contrariness.

There remains something that can neither be learned nor explained, for the *skilful* use of topoi presupposes that the author demonstrates education, long-sightedness and knowledge of facts – in short creativity and the kind of talent Ryle calls ‘knowing how’: «A soldier does not become a shrewd general merely by endorsing the strategic principles of Clausewitz; he must also be competent to apply them.» (G. RYLE 1949: 31). And the competence to apply these strategic principles is nothing less than knowing *how* to apply them. This is why, on the one hand, the use of topoi in reasoning is rule-driven and methodisable, while, on the other hand, their successful use is eventually based on ‘knowing how’. Locating topoi and using them in an efficient and intelligent manner is hence not solely based on ‘knowing that’ but is also a question of ‘knowing how’. At the same time, topoi – in contrast to metaphor – can be methodologically taught and learned. Metaphor and topos do thus not depend on ‘knowing that’ and ‘knowing how’ in the same way, and the more ‘knowing how’ is required in performing a certain skill, the less it can be taught or learned.

4. Metaphor and Topos: There’s Method behind it

In this section, we first focus on common knowledge being the link between metaphor and topos (4.1). Afterwards we discuss the potential uses of both phenomena in text production (4.2).

4.1 Metaphor, Topos and Common Knowledge

As shown above, the topos – in its two functions as a ‘search guide’ and as a ‘probative aid’ – is based on the common knowledge¹¹ (*endoxa*) shared by all members of a language community. In communication, the *endoxa* can be taken for granted as a «*social apriori* given to the individual» (A. SCHÜTZ; P. LUCKMANN 1979: 282). Or in the words of H. G. GADAMER ([1960] 1986: 299ff), it is a matter of the respective prejudices being valid in a specific culture. L. BORNSCHEUER (1976: 95) defines it as «habitualised knowledge», which comprises all the «consciously or unconsciously internalised validity claims of tradition and convention», i.e., all «social experiences and memories as well as all action-shaping, future-oriented contents of meaning». The *endoxa* is hence not a static, propositional knowledge but

an implicit knowledge, which cannot be represented in a limited amount of propositions; [...] a holistically structured knowledge, whose elements refer to each other, [...] a knowledge which is not readily available to us since we cannot become aware of it whenever we wish and cannot consciously doubt. (J. HABERMAS 1981/I:450f).

This is what U. ECO (1996: 1318ff) calls *encyclopaedia-like structured knowledge*, which does not «record only atomic features but also stereotypes, frames or scripts and systems of instructions, organized according contextual selections, as well as items of expert knowledge (such as technical and historical information).»

Like topos, metaphor refers to common knowledge, yet in a different way. M. Black has been the first to emphasise the connection of metaphor and common knowledge by means of the terms ‘system of associated commonplaces’ and ‘implicative complex’. Thereby Black explicitly links up with the Aristotelian *endoxa*, in order to explain the functioning of metaphors (cf. section 2.2). P. RICCEUR (1974/75: 99) reproaches Black for the

¹¹ In this article, we employ the general term ‘common knowledge’ to refer to the cultural background knowledge the members of a language community share in common. Our notion of common knowledge is similar to what H. CLARK ([1996] 2004, 120f.) calls ‘communal common ground’: “Communal common ground is information based on the cultural communities a person is believed to belong to – from nationality and occupation to ethnic group and gender.”

inability of this conception to explain how live metaphors function, because these are genuine linguistic innovations and not a «mere actualization of the potential range of commonplaces or connotations.» His criticism seems to be problematic: first of all, Black does indeed take into consideration live metaphors when saying: «Metaphors can be supported by specially constructed systems of implications, as well as by accepted commonplaces; they can be made to measure and need not be reach-me-downs.» (M. BLACK [1954] 1962: 43; cf. also 1977: 442).

Moreover, every understanding – the understanding of any novel expression as well – is based on a recourse to the things one already knows. The *endoxa* – as a ‘social apriori’ – can be hence presupposed for all members of a language community: it is the ‘smallest common denominator’ of every linguistic understanding and thereby also of the understanding of metaphors. As pointed out in section 2.4, live metaphors also have to offer ‘points of contact’ in order to be understood – even if it is the author who provides the necessary contextual clues. For if there are no points of contact or contextual clues at all, the metaphor remains obscure and cannot be understood.¹² Therefore, the precondition for metaphorical innovation is always the reference to existing ‘traditions’:

The culturally delivered ‘stock of images’ of a language community is thus not a collection of dead metaphors, but as a metaphorical *topica* provides the potentiality out of which new and surprising metaphors can be generated again and again. (B. DEBATIN 1995: 225).

Now, even though neither Ricœur nor Black would deny that metaphorical innovation always operates on the basis of already existing linguistic traditions or ‘knowledge about the world’, they would, however, probably not go so far as Debatin and call it a ‘metaphorical *topica*’. For whenever referring to commonplaces i.e. *topoi* they usually underline the ‘worn out’ and ‘banal’ character of commonplaces (cf. M. BLACK 1977: 442; P. RICŒUR [1975] 1997: 114ff).¹³

If the comprehension of metaphor and *topos* is essentially grounded in their connection to common knowledge, their access to that knowledge differs in a particular way. With respect to metaphor, we have to fall back upon our distinction between live, conventional and dead metaphors (cf. section 2.3), for the three types of metaphor gain access to common knowledge in different ways: the meaning of live metaphors constitutes itself in the interaction of the primary and secondary subjects’ implicative complexes, which are then both subjected to a substantial change and reorganisation. Since the metaphorical process thus re-acts upon common knowledge and causes significant changes in it, we call the live metaphor’s access to common knowledge *bidirectional*. On the one hand, this *bidirectionality* results from the interactional character of the metaphorical process; on the other hand, the cognitive power of live metaphor is derived precisely from this *bidirectionality*. Conventional metaphor, while still showing the interactional aspect, no longer has the same cognitive and heuristic quality as live metaphor. Therefore, in this case we can speak of a *diminished bidirectionality*. The dead metaphor is, finally, entirely lexicalised: as the members of a language community normally do not notice any interaction of the two implicative systems, its access to common knowledge can be described as *unidirectional* in general; only in unusual uses may *bidirectionality* reappear (by means of ‘resuscitation’).

¹² Obscurity or opacity can have different reasons: either a text originates from a different culture and the reader either lacks the points of contact or misses the contextual clues necessary to comprehend it, or it can be an intended aesthetic effect e.g. in literature. U. ECO (1983: 232f) gives as a striking example the metaphorical paraphrases of the lover in the *Song of the Songs*.

¹³ In this respect, Black and Ricœur seem to be influenced by the current use of the term ‘commonplace’ in everyday language, which bears a pejorative connotation.

The situation of the topos turns out to be different: as we have seen, the topos' reference to the *endoxa* accounts for its validity in argumentation; common knowledge, however, is not changed when using topoi. With the topos one can therefore speak of a *unidirectional* access to common knowledge. In section 3.2, we gave an example of how topoi function in argumentation. In that example, one had to fall back upon common knowledge concerning 'holiday under southern sky' in order to guarantee the validity of premises and conclusion; but that knowledge remained unchanged. Topos thus shows – with regard to its connection to common knowledge – features similar to those of dead metaphor, while retaining a clear difference to the conventional and live metaphor.

4.2 The Uses of Metaphor and Topos

Both metaphor and topos are based on their connection to common knowledge. While live and conventional metaphors re-act upon common knowledge and *actively* transform it to a certain extent, dead metaphors and topoi only *passively* refer to it. These differences account for the different uses we make of metaphors and topoi in argumentative discourse.

While the recourse to topoi guarantees the persuasive power of an argument in rhetorical discourse (cf. section 3.2), the use of enthymemes prevents the argumentation from becoming banal: although the nonexplicit assumptions may be taken for granted, the recipient is nonetheless intellectually challenged by having to add the missing links of argumentation himself. In this way – to use Roland Barthes' words – *the pleasure of the enthymeme* develops, while any explicit formulation of the single links of argumentation lead to banality and boredom: «Explicitness is the enemy of this sort of seductive cooptation the enthymematic forms ideally exemplify.» (A. C. DANTO 1981: 170).¹⁴ Proceeding from these considerations, a parallel between the enthymeme (as a truncated syllogism) and metaphor has been drawn repeatedly: just as the recipient has to supplement the nonexplicit assumptions – normally the conclusion – in the enthymeme, one equally has to reconstruct the metaphor's implicit analogy or isomorphism of the two related implicative systems.¹⁵ Therefore, B. DEBATIN (1995: 22) characterises metaphor as an «*enthymeme in nuce*»:

According to Aristotle the specific enigmatic nature of an efficient metaphor causes an appreciative comprehension and learning situation. Here an 'aha'-experience follows a short astonishment. Metaphor makes learning easier, because it makes new and unknown facts pleasantly comprehensible by analogy and transmission. (B. DEBATIN 1995: 18; cf. also *Rhetoric* III, 1410b/10).

Now, the different types of metaphor show a varying degree of plausibility. Since the implicative systems of conventional metaphors show an obvious isomorphism, conventional metaphors are understood without further difficulty. In contrast, it is not immediately evident how one is to interpret live metaphors. Since their high resonance requires a much larger interpretative effort from the recipient, the range of possible interpretations is much wider and its producer cannot be sure the metaphor will be understood the way he intended it to. This is why Aristotle emphasises that only skilfully chosen metaphors will bring about the desired or intended effect on the recipients, «for one word is more proper than another, more of a likeness, and better suited to putting the matter before the eyes.» (*Rhetoric* III, 1405b/13). Even though metaphors can be used to express complex and difficult facts in a short and aesthetically pleasing manner, they have to be carefully chosen so as to accord with the facts, the situation and finally the potential recipients:

¹⁴ 'Clichés' and 'stereotypes' are topoi which haven taken on the form of an established phrase. We often use them in our everyday language without noticing a negative effect; in argumentative discourse, however, they are not acceptable and appear as 'trivialities.'

¹⁵ Cf. also A. C. DANTO 1981: 170f; M. PIELENZ 1993: 147ff; B. DEBATIN 1995: 20ff, 311f.

Proper and appropriate words and metaphors are alone to be employed in the style of prose; this is shown by the fact that no one employs anything but these. For all use metaphors in conversation, as well as proper and appropriate words; wherefore it is clear that, *if a speaker manages well, there will be something 'foreign' about his speech, while possibly the art may not be detected, and his meaning will be clear.* And this, as we have said, is the chief merit of rhetorical language. (*Rhetoric* III, 1404b/6; our emphasis).

Aristotle discusses the use of metaphor in that part of the *Rhetoric* which deals with the *lexis*, the 'phase of elaboration of speech'. Although *lexis* follows – structurally speaking – *heuresis* and *taxis* in the process of rhetorical text production, it is nonetheless crucial to rendering the argumentation comprehensible: «However, in every system of instruction there is some slight necessity to pay attention to style; *for it does make a difference, for the purpose of making a thing clear, to speak in this or that manner.*» (*Rhetoric* III, 1404a/6; our emphasis). Concerning the interrelation of *lexis* and comprehensibility Aristotle states: «In regard to style, one of its chief merits may be defined as perspicuity. This is shown by the fact that the speech, if it does not make the meaning clear, it will not perform its proper function». (*Rhetoric* III, 1404b/1). The proper function of a speech (or a text) consists in persuading the recipients of the speaker's (or the author's) arguments, which have to be on the one hand logical and on the other hand clearly formulated. The logical character of argumentation is primarily connected to *heuresis* and *taxis*: these are the two phases of text production in which (1) by recourse to the *topoi* the 'material' for the arguments is found (*heuresis*), and in which (2) this argumentative 'material' is logically structured and disposed (*taxis*). In the *lexis* the argumentation is finally elaborated and formulated in a clear and comprehensible manner. And this is why metaphor, being indeed «a cognitive instrument, at once a source of clarity and enigma» (U. ECO 1983: 234), is assigned to *lexis*, while *topos* makes up part of the *heuresis*. In this connection, it is important to consider that Aristotle did not conceive of *lexis* as the phase in which the already well elaborated arguments only had to be linguistically embellished.¹⁶ He rather conceived of *heuresis* and *lexis* as very closely connected: «We have therefore next to speak of style; for it is not sufficient to know *what* one ought to say, but one must also know *how* to say it, and this largely contributes to making the speech appear of a certain character.» (*Rhetoric* III, 1403b/2; our emphasis). The selection of the argumentative 'material' in the *heuresis* (*what* one ought to say) and its linguistic elaboration in the *lexis* (*how* to say it) are closely related, because neither of the two could ever make a text comprehensible on its own. Making a text comprehensible is thus based on logical means in the *heuresis* and on aesthetic means in the *lexis* – on *topos* and metaphor.¹⁷

5. Conclusion

Traditionally, metaphor was described as 'an ornament of speech', and *topos* was nothing more than a *cliché*, a kind of 'take-away-argument'. In our opinion, metaphor and *topos* have important functions in rhetorical text production: they both contribute to making texts comprehensible and persuasive. At the beginning of our paper, we pointed out the differences between metaphor and *topos* (cf. sections 2 and 3). Metaphor was shown to be an aesthetic phenomenon: both creating and interpreting metaphors are *abductive* procedures and require a high degree of imagination – the Aristotelian 'eye for resemblances'. The *topos*, in contrast, has a more 'technical' dimension: it is methodisable to a certain

¹⁶ R. BARTHES (1985: 155) has correctly pointed out that for a long time rhetoric was falsely reduced to *lexis* or *elocutio* with the latter for its part understood merely as linguistic embellishment. This is why P. RICŒUR ([1975] 1997:13) characterises the history of rhetoric as follows: «L'histoire de la rhétorique, c'est l'histoire de la peau de chagrin.»

¹⁷ Metaphor and commonplace as vehicles of comprehensibility are treated in J. JOST (2006).

extent and can hence be taught and learned. Therefore, topos is said to be essentially based on 'knowing that', while creating metaphors relies first of all upon 'knowing how'.

In the fourth section we outlined two fundamental features common to metaphor and topos. First, both metaphor and topos are essentially based on common knowledge. We characterised the metaphor's connection to common knowledge as being *bidirectional*: since metaphor as a cognitive instrument changes our perspective on 'how things are', it transforms common knowledge to a certain extent. The topos, as a 'probative aid' in deductive reasoning, also has recourse to common knowledge. Since it remains, however, unchanged, we have called the topos' access to common knowledge *unidirectional*. Secondly, we indicated the functions of metaphor and topos in *making texts comprehensible*. The former, functioning as an 'enthymeme in nuce', is capable of setting difficult matters in a concise and plausible manner 'before the eyes'. The latter improves comprehensibility due to its close connection to common knowledge and its logical use in rhetorical discourse.

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