

Feeling the extraordinary in ordinary language: familiarity and linguistic intimacy*

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ABSTRACT. The paper explores the concept of linguistic intimacy, questioning whether it is common to all linguistic phenomena or rather specific of figurative language. In particular, the paper investigates the idea that the feeling of intimacy depends on (linguistic) familiarity. Embracing a Wittgensteinian perspective, the paper claims that linguistic intimacy is connected to “aspectual familiarity”: the addressee is invited to see an aspect that the speaker considers meaningful to articulate, but difficult to share with others in ordinary language. Thus, especially via metaphor, the speaker uses ordinary language to invite the addressee to see aspects as something *new* or *unfamiliar* in the familiar (social) world they share. However, the interlocutor can only find by herself the *affective meeting point* where she has been invited by the speaker.

KEYWORDS. Linguistic Intimacy; Metaphor; Aspect-seeing; Familiarity; Affective coherence.

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In *Metaphor and the Cultivation of Intimacy*¹, Cohen first introduced the concept of linguistic intimacy, as the main point in using a metaphor in conversation. In that short essay, Cohen takes distance from previous theories of metaphor that found its primary function either in its cognitive power, as for his contemporary colleagues Max Black² and Nelson Goodman³, or just in its aesthetical qualities, as in the past for philosophers like Thomas Hobbes⁴ and John Locke⁵. Rather, he suggested «a point in metaphor which is independent of the question of its cognitivity and which has nothing to do with its aesthetical character», i.e., «the achievement of intimacy»⁶. He further defined it as a linguistic intimacy, because who pronounces the metaphor uses language to make a “concealed invitation” to the addressee. In feeling intimacy via ordinary language, «the maker and the appreciator of a metaphor *are drawn closer to one another*»⁷.

However, Cohen does not tell us the “how”, the “what” and the “where” of linguistic intimacy. In other words, we still need to understand *how* we can achieve intimacy via language: is linguistic intimacy something that we can achieve via any linguistic phenomenon, or just via metaphor? In the case, as Cohen argued, intimacy is very much specific of metaphor, we still need to answer the following questions: *what* are the interlocutors invited to do when the speaker pronounces a metaphor? And *where* are the interlocutors invited to meet the speaker who pronounces the metaphor? To provide an answer to these questions, the paper investigates the phenomenon of linguistic intimacy, with special reference to metaphor and its role in inviting us to achieve intimacy.

1 COHEN 1978.

2 BLACK 1954.

3 GOODMAN 1968.

4 HOBBS 1651.

5 LOCKE 1690.

6 COHEN 1978, 8.

7 COHEN 1978, 8, emphasis mine.

First, the paper presents the concept of linguistic intimacy (§ 1), as it has been first proposed by Ted Cohen⁸, questioning whether it is common to all linguistic phenomena, and presenting previous studies on the feeling of intimacy in the case of figurative language comprehension (§ 2). Second, the paper investigates whether the feeling of intimacy depends on (linguistic) familiarity, underpinning the idea that it is linked to “aspectual familiarity”: the interlocutor is invited to see an *unfamiliar* aspect which becomes *familiar* to her⁹. Finally, the paper argues that the speakers use metaphors to invite their addressee to see “unfamiliar aspects” of the (social) world via ordinary language (§ 3), and that metaphors are necessary to articulate them in order to reach an *affective meeting point* (§ 4), she can only find by herself.

1. How is linguistic intimacy achieved?

We sometimes experienced words hurting us in conversations with others, and much philosophical literature has recently focused on this phenomenon¹⁰. Less attention has been paid to those experiences when linguistic phenomena bring us together in a special way, by making feel us *intimate*, even when completely unfamiliar. In *Metaphor and the Cultivation of Intimacy*¹¹, Cohen sets three conditions to achieve linguistic intimacy:

- (1) the speaker issues a kind of concealed invitation;
- (2) the hearer expends a special effort to accept the invitation;
- (3) this transaction constitutes the acknowledgment of a community.

In Cohen’s view, these conditions are satisfied especially when in a conversation we talk metaphors. In pronouncing a metaphor, we are

8 COHEN 1978.

9 WITTGENSTEIN 1953, 1974.

10 LANGTON 2016; BIANCHI 2021.

11 COHEN 1978, 8.

tacitly inviting our interlocutor to do or make something, which requires her some effort. As in any speech act of invitation, the interlocutor might refuse the invitation, but as the invitation is “concealed”, the speaker is not socially compromised, and thus metaphors can be considered as a strategic way to invite and contemporarily “save the face”¹². However, especially when the invitation is “concealed”, the interlocutor might not notice it at all, because either she is not paying enough attention or she does not care. Not everyone can and is ready to catch the offer. However, when the tacit invitation is accepted, the interlocutors feel intimate, i.e., part of the same community¹³.

All three conditions «are involved in *any communication*, but in ordinary literal discourse their involvement is so pervasive and routine that they go *unremarked*»¹⁴. Thus, linguistic intimacy seems common to all linguistic phenomena, and not specific of figurative language as metaphor. However, *feeling* linguistic intimacy is something that cannot be achieved via literal language, as it needs to be remarked in some way or to struck and even puzzle us. A metaphor—Cohen argues—is not only remarked, but throws the interlocutors «into relief, and there is a point in that»¹⁵. The point of a metaphor is therefore to reach this *feeling* in bringing the interlocutors closer to one another, but first it needs to be noticed. Cohen must have had in mind novel metaphors, as most conventional metaphors go unremarked by speakers, precisely because they are so pervasive and routinary that they entered the lexicon of a linguistic community and acquired a status similar to that of literal terms¹⁶. Differently from conventional metaphors, novel metaphors struck us because they are completely new uses of ordinary language, surprisingly unexpected in the flow of conversation and thus catching our attention and interest.

However, we might wonder whether other non-literal or figurative

12 LAKOFF 1975.

13 See also Stanley Cavell's “claim to community” in CAVELL 1979.

14 COHEN 1978, 8.

15 COHEN 1978, 8.

16 CARSTON 2002; GIORA 2003.

uses of language might have the same effect on the addressee, catching her attention and drawing her closer to the speaker. While Cohen maintains metaphor as the main way to achieve linguistic intimacy, he provides not only clear examples of metaphors (“Juliet is the sun”), but also examples of humour, and especially jokes (“What is Sacramento? It is the stuffing in a Catholic olive”¹⁷). Jokes makes the teller and the hearer feel intimate, when it works, as they «deliver their twist compactly and all at once, without exegesis»¹⁸. In both the cases, metaphor and humour, people actively engage one another in coping with a piece of language that also requires information about one another’s knowledge, beliefs, desires, intentions, affective states and attitudes, to be grasped:

He must penetrate your [humorous] remark, so to speak, in order to explore you yourself, in order to grasp the import, for that import is not exactly in the remark itself. Furthermore, you know that he is doing this; you have invited him to do it; you have, in fact, required him to do it. He accepts the requirement, and you two become an intimate pair¹⁹.

Thus, both metaphor and humour are meant to acknowledge an intimacy and to build a (momentary) community. However, as we shall argue in the next sections, metaphor has a point to catch, while humour typically has no point to catch, as it is often based on the ability to see an incongruity without solving it²⁰. Thus, while metaphor is per definition a way to solve a semantic tension or congruency, by bridging two different conceptual domains (the source and the target), humour is rather a way to “messing up the cards” or just indirectly highlighting an unexpected incongruity²¹.

17 COHEN 1978, 10.

18 COHEN 1978, 11.

19 COHEN 1978, 9.

20 ATTARDO 1994.

21 Here we are taken for granted that metaphor and humor are distinct linguistic phenomena, but of course in daily interactions we can find many examples of humorous metaphors, we cannot talk about here for reasons of space.

We still might wonder why we could not achieve a linguistic intimacy via irony, or even sarcasm. The reason may be that both of them require a *negative attitude* toward the target—a situation to be criticized in the case of irony vs. a designated victim in the case of sarcasm²²—while linguistic intimacy sounds as a positive attitude. However, this is not the case in Cohen’s view, as both joke and metaphor could be used as a way to create intimacy with the aim of committing a “communicative murder”, which is felt even more cruel by the addressee:

Intimacy sounds like a good thing. [...] It is not, however, an invariably friendly thing, nor is it intended to be. Sometimes one draws near another in order to deal a penetrating thrust. When the device is a hostile metaphor or a cruel joke requiring much background and effort to understand, it is all the more painful because the victim has been made a complicitor in his own demise. Do not, therefore, suppose that jokes are always for shared amusement, or metaphors always for communal insight. Some of the most instructive examples will be ones in which intimacy is sought as a means to a lethal and one-sided effect²³.

However, as this derisory and scornful attitude is typical of irony and sarcasm, we might argue that the “communicative murder” is not directly perpetrated by jokes and/or metaphor themselves, but instead by their ironic and/or sarcastic uses²⁴. Thus, jokes are still used for amusement and metaphor for communal insight, but the offensive and hurting effect is provided by the ironic sentences where they are just mentioned and/or echoed²⁵. Moreover, the *affective incoherence* between a) the positive intimacy between interlocutors created by

22 GIORA 2003; ERVAS 2020.

23 COHEN 1978, 12.

24 As a reviewer rightly pointed out, the distinction between metaphors and its use is more challenging in other cases. For instance, in the case of slurs, metaphors used as slurs (ex. “vacca” in Italian) seem not to be used as insults, but rather be insults *tout court*.

25 See WILSON AND SPERBER 1992.

humor/metaphor, and b) the ironic negative attitude can be precisely the reason why people might suppress irony, especially when sarcastic and directed toward the interlocutor²⁶. So, rather than being a way to achieve intimacy, irony looks like a parasitic linguistic mechanism that exploits intimacy in order to achieve its own critical aims, especially when directed toward a person, her thoughts and/or the thoughts she could share with the social class she represents²⁷.

In sum, linguistic intimacy can be achieved by both literal and non-literal language, but in the first case it goes unnoticed, as it could not be *felt*, while in the second case it can be *felt* as something that can join the interlocutors in a (momentary) community. This is especially so in the case of metaphor and humor, as irony—especially in the case of sarcasm—might rather destroy intimacy, precisely by exploiting it, while this is not the aim of metaphor and humor. Furthermore, differently from humor, metaphor has a point in achieving intimacy. We might then wonder what the interlocutor is invited to do in order to grasp the point of a metaphor when achieving intimacy. The next section investigates whether metaphor invites the interlocutor to feel some “familiarity” in order to achieve linguistic intimacy.

2. Linguistic intimacy and the many senses of “familiarity”

The idea that, in pronouncing a metaphor, the speaker exploits (some kind of) familiarity to achieve linguistic intimacy is not new and it was also empirically tested by William Horton²⁸. In a series of empirical studies providing the participants with a set of stories where a character pronounced either a literal or a metaphoric utterance, he investigated whether feelings of intimacy between speakers and addressees are created through their mutual understanding of the

26 See e.g., ERVAS 2020.

27 COLSTON AND KATZ 2005.

28 HORTON 2007, 2013.

metaphoric expressions pronounced by the speakers. The results of the experiments mainly showed that the participants consistently judged the story characters as more familiar to each other when their interactions featured metaphoric utterances²⁹. Operationally, familiarity was measured by asking the participants whether they thought that the characters *knew each other*, and Horton found that participants attributed much more familiarity between interlocutors when a metaphor was pronounced rather than a literal utterance, even when the interlocutors seemed to fail in understanding it. His conclusion was that people infer some kind of social relationship depending on the language use³⁰: in the case of metaphor, a more familiar relationship.

Further experiments showed that participants were as fast to read metaphoric utterances as literal utterances in the context of familiar relationships between story characters, but were slower to read metaphoric utterances in the context of unfamiliar relationships between characters³¹. Interestingly, this pattern of results was especially found for novel metaphors, i.e., completely new and creative use of language, which cannot be understood via a conventional meaning attributed to a metaphor by a linguistic community (and not already lexicalised in a dictionary). Horton interpreted these results as a strategy to avoid social-risky behaviour: appealing to Kreuz's *Principle of Inferability*³² and, more generally, to Grice's *Cooperative Principle*,³³ we should expect people to pronounce utterances whose meaning can be easily grasped by the interlocutors and avoid utterances whose novelty or difficulty can seriously compromised the addressees' ability to understand us, thus causing possible misunderstanding and breakdowns in communication.

However, Horton's studies can tell us something about the relationship between metaphor use and attributed *social closeness*, but

29 HORTON 2007.

30 See also COLSTON AND KATZ 2005.

31 HORTON 2013.

32 KREUZ 1996.

33 GRICE 1989.

they cannot tell us anything about the *feeling* of intimacy experienced by the interlocutors who are actually involved in the conversation. This is the main reason why Andrea Bowes and Albert Katz³⁴ assessed linguistic intimacy by directly asking to participants, after reading the stories, to complete a test specifically intended to measure the participants' ability to identify emotions: the Reading the Mind in the Eyes Test (RMET)³⁵. Their series of experiments suggested that reading metaphor enhances the participant's performance on the RMET, which has also been widely used to measure theory of mind (ToM) abilities. Interestingly, metaphors but not their literal counterparts were associated with an emotional impact and a sense of interpersonal intimacy between interlocutors, especially in *affective contexts* (activated by the presence of affective words in the stories). However, although previous studies analysed RMET's relationship with the ability to perceive emotions, the potential links with more complex emotional abilities remain unclear³⁶.

Anyway, both the experiments by Horton³⁷ and by Bowes and Katz³⁸, explored a specific kind of familiarity, "social" familiarity or the extent to which the interlocutors know each other. In all these studies, linguistic intimacy is seen as an effect of this kind of (perceived) familiarity. However, as rightly pointed out by Horton³⁹, linguistic intimacy can also be modulated by *familiarity as conventionality*, i.e., the extent to which the figurative meaning is conventional in a linguistic community. However, familiarity can be said in many other ways, and thus linguistic intimacy might be affected also by the *meaning familiarity*, i.e., the extent to which participants feel familiar with the meaning of a stimulus⁴⁰; *familiarity as the subjective frequency* with which participants encountered a

34 BOWES AND KATZ 2015.

35 BARON-COHEN ET AL. 2001.

36 See MÉGIAS-ROBLES ET AL. 2020 for a review.

37 HORTON 2007, 2013.

38 BOWES AND KATZ 2015.

39 HORTON 2013.

40 CARROL ET AL. 2018.

stimulus⁴¹; *familiarity of experience*, i.e., the extent to which participants experienced a stimulus: for instance, “the lawyers are sharks” can be a very familiar metaphor, because its meaning is highly conventional, even though we might have no familiarity of experience with sharks, luckily. All these different senses of familiarity might modulate the understanding of the metaphoric utterances and thus the linguistic intimacy achieved by the interlocutors.

However, we wish to point out that there is another sense of familiarity specific to metaphor, that can lead to linguistic intimacy, even when people are completely unfamiliar to each other, or they do not know each other well. This sense of familiarity specific to metaphor is “aspectual familiarity”, i.e., the extent to which I see something *as something else*, or I notice an aspect as the point of using a metaphor. Marcus Hester⁴² already attributed this ability to see an aspect to the special “picture-thinking” of the poet when using metaphor, but in this paper aspectual familiarity is not confined just to poetic metaphors. As we shall argue, novel metaphor is just a paradigmatic case of the more general ability to see an aspect and to feel the unfamiliar or the extraordinary in ordinary language.

Though not directly connected to metaphors, the idea of aspectual familiarity was first introduced by Ludwig Wittgenstein⁴³ as the feeling that something looks “suddenly different” or unfamiliar, but then becomes familiar. In the *Philosophical Grammar*⁴⁴, he indeed introduces the experience of familiarity as the becoming aware of a difference in how someone appears to ourselves: «Someone meets me in the street and my eyes are drawn to his face; perhaps I ask myself ‘who is that?’; suddenly the face begins to look different in a particular way (ändert sich der *Aspekt* des Gesichts in bestimmter Weise), it becomes familiar to me; I smile, go up to him and greet him by name». Wittgenstein used the word *Aspekt* to refer to the immediate experience of an object that appears to ourselves as different from how

41 LIBBEN AND TITONE 2008.

42 HESTER 1966.

43 WITTGENSTEIN 1953.

44 WITTGENSTEIN 1974, 167.

it usually appeared. The “dawning of an aspect”—which is not confined just to visual experience (e.g., “aspects-hearing”, when for instance an unfamiliar voice becomes familiar)—refers to the phenomenological object, to the appearance of an object in ‘this and that’ specific way in the flow of experience.

The relevance of Wittgenstein’s “aspect seeing” in aesthetic perception has been then connected to metaphor by both philosophers of art and language⁴⁵ via the concept of *image*. In the *Philosophical Investigations* (thereof PI), Wittgenstein himself connected the concept of aspect to that of image: «The concept of an aspect is akin to the concept of an image. In other words: the concept ‘I am now seeing it as...’ is akin to ‘I am now having this image’»⁴⁶. The aspect has a peculiar status that can connect sensory experience and propositional thought: in Wittgenstein’s view, «It is as if an image came into contact, and for a time remained in contact, with the visual impression”, concluding that aspect-seeing is «half visual experience, half thought»⁴⁷. As we shall argue in the next section, metaphor is dual in that it has something to do with the meaning of words, but in their “image-exhibiting” mode or “aspect-revealing” mode. In this sense, seeing an aspect is precisely what we are invited to do in order to achieve linguistic intimacy when a metaphor occurs in conversation.

3. What are we invited to do in order to achieve linguistic intimacy?

In metaphor theory, there has been a heated debate between the view that metaphor is conceptual in nature⁴⁸, and the view that it is an image⁴⁹: in the latter, metaphor interpretation evokes mental images that can produce perception-like experiences. Embracing this view, a

45 ALDRICH 1958; HESTER 1966.

46 WITTGENSTEIN 1953, 213.

47 WITTGENSTEIN 1953, 197.

48 LAKOFF AND JOHNSON 1980.

49 DAVIDSON 1978.

more recent account of metaphor interpretation⁵⁰ claims that in some cases speakers retain the literal meaning of the metaphor, especially when novel, to evoke mental images, which might bring about new meanings and additional non-propositional effects. Consistently, previous experimental literature showed that participants rely on mental images when interpreting a metaphor⁵¹.

The new meanings can emerge from properties of the metaphor that cannot be reduced neither to the source conceptual domain of the metaphor, nor to its target conceptual domain. These emergent properties might be connected either to a conceptual combination of the target and the source, based on the participants' encyclopedic knowledge about the domains⁵², or to the mental images evoked by the metaphor⁵³. A conventional metaphor, as for instance "the legs of the table", is more likely to be an *image-permitting* metaphor, i.e., the mental image can be just accidentally evoked or permitted by the metaphor itself⁵⁴. After all, we do not need to imagine human legs to interpret the conventional metaphor "the legs of the table". A novel metaphor is instead more likely to require an image to be interpreted, and thus it is *image-demanding*: mental images are activated when certain concepts are accessed and then further imaginatively developed⁵⁵. For instance, the poetic metaphor "pearly dawn" ("alba di perla", in G. Pascoli, "L'Assiuolo"⁵⁶) brings us to imagine the color of the sky, to almost *see it as* being white and brilliant.

The reader might thus discover features she used to ignore⁵⁷, and sometimes her discovering new features in the target amounts to *create them anew* in seeing something *as something else*. Both the picturing function of metaphor and its creative power are well-known also in other philosophical traditions: from Aristotle onwards,

50 CARSTON 2010, 2018; WILSON AND CARSTON 2019.

51 CACCIARI AND GLUCKSBERG 1995; GIBBS AND BOGDONOVICH 1999.

52 GLUCKSBERG AND ESTES 2000; WILSON AND CARSTON 2006; VEGA MORENO 2007.

53 DAVIDSON, 1978; INDURKHYA 2006, 2007; CARSTON 2010.

54 GREEN 2017; CARSTON 2018.

55 CARSTON 2010.

56 PASCOLI, "L'Assiuolo", 1897.

57 ERVAS 2019.

metaphor has been connected to *seeing* something (metaphor indeed «sets the scene before our eyes»⁵⁸). Thus, metaphors have been considered as a way to point out, show, make us see an aspect⁵⁹, to provide a concept with an image⁶⁰, and beyond evoking perceptual features⁶¹, metaphors can suggest directions in which to look and see⁶². Also in linguistics, metaphors have been considered not only as a mechanism that can feed mental imagery, but also as a way to change the interlocutor's perspective⁶³ and/or to alter our own possibilities of thinking⁶⁴.

Differently from other linguistic phenomena, metaphor can thus be *an invitation to "see" something as something else* in ordinary language, and not just in poems⁶⁵. Indeed, metaphor can be the speaker's attempt to make the addressee see an aspect in looking something *as something else*, that is not there and needs to be evoked via language: we could not indeed see an aspect just by looking at something («I cannot try to see a conventional picture of a lion *as a lion*»⁶⁶). This is indeed the main difference with humor, that Cohen⁶⁷ missed in defining linguistic intimacy. Humor can be created via lexical, categoric and/or syntactic ambiguity, where two meanings are (accidentally) involved in interpretation, but one of them is usually very unlikely and thus canceled by default, differently from metaphor whose source and target meanings need to be worked out together and retained to a

58 *Reth.* 1410B33.

59 WITTGENSTEIN 1953.

60 RICOEUR 1978.

61 DAVIDSON 1978.

62 HAACK 2019.

63 STEEN 2008, 2013, 2017.

64 WILSON AND CARSTON 2019.

65 In the case of visual metaphors, of course, the visual or perceptual dimension is more present because both senses of "seeing" are there. The perceptual sense of "seeing" fades in the case of verbal metaphors, but still, what is important for the aims of this paper is the "second sense of seeing", the Aristotelian invitation to "see" something as something else in a "scene before our eyes".

66 WITTGENSTEIN 1953, 206.

67 COHEN 1978.

different extent⁶⁸. For instance, in Groucho Marx's famous joke:

One morning I shot an elephant in my pyjamas.
How he got into my pyjamas I'll never know.

the syntactic ambiguity in the first sentence is revealed and solve in the second sentence, by accepting the most unlikely reading, we cancelled when interpreting the first sentence, i.e., that the elephant actually was in the pyjamas.

It might be claimed that, in the *Philosophical Investigations*⁶⁹, Wittgenstein pointed out the phenomenon of aspect-seeing precisely referring to ambiguous figures, i.e., the well-known Jastrow's duck-rabbit illusion. However, as pointed out by Avner Baz⁷⁰, when approaching aspect-seeing just from ambiguous figures, we could miss the fact that «in the course of daily living we come across numerous things that *could* be seen as 'this' or 'that', but we don't take that as a good enough reason for so seeing them»⁷¹, nor for giving it expression. Ambiguous figures, and ambiguity in humour as well, are explicitly designed to be seen as "this" (a duck) or "that" (a rabbit) way, but it is not typical of seeing aspects via ordinary language that those aspects actually come in pairs, to flip back and forth between them to check whether we are able to see the two. In ordinary contexts, objects do not artificially present "this" or "that" aspect: on the contrary, there might be many aspects of an object we could see and just some among them that we might find meaningful to express or talk about with others. While humour points to ambiguous aspects without a point, i.e., as a non-sense, metaphor is a way to creates the duality by evoking an image, precisely to invite the others to see aspects and fill in the semantic distance with the object. Metaphors provide the speaker with the means to compose in a *coherent* picture the experiential domains that are said to be "in tension".

68 See e.g., GERNSBACHER AND FAUST 1991; GERNSBACHER ET AL. 2001; RUBIO FERNANDEZ 2007.

69 WITTGENSTEIN 1953.

70 BAZ 2000, 2020.

71 BAZ 2000, 99.

Thus, it matters for our understanding of linguistic intimacy to recognize the *particular way* in which aspect-seeing works in *ordinary contexts*. It is (just) a psychological phenomenon that we can see certain drawings “this” way or “that” («it’s a matter for science»⁷²). From a philosophical point of view, what is important is that «*grammar has room* for that phenomenon», but that room «wasn’t prepared quite for the ambiguous figures and schematic drawings»⁷³. Indeed, aspect seeing is not an isolated experience or mental state that one might entertain by flipping all alone from “this” or “that” aspect, but it is instead *embedded in a language-game*, where other people might play. However, the problem with articulating the aspects via the words “this” or “that” is that they can mean «many different phenomenological objects, the meaning of which cannot be successfully shown to others»⁷⁴.

Capturing the phenomenology of the aspect-seeing in our language was indeed a central problem in Wittgenstein’s philosophy: the phenomenological language of “this” or “that” or of the varying of aspects can be meaningful only when mediated by language-games. Wittgenstein himself provided examples of meaningfulness in a language-game: in the *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology* (thereof RPP), he pointed out that saying of a face in a picture: «I’ve *always* seen it with *this* face»⁷⁵ would sound dubious when taken as a perceptual report of what we ordinarily see, whereas «It has always been a face to me, and I have never seen it *as something else*» would sound apt⁷⁶. Thus, in a language-game we might want to articulate an aspect of our own experience in a way that it might be communicated to and grasped by our interlocutor. In the next section, we shall argue that metaphor can precisely be a way to successfully point to and thus make the interlocutors see the aspect we deem meaningful to articulate.

72 WITTGENSTEIN 1953, 193.

73 BAZ 2000, 100.

74 PARK 1994, 168.

75 WITTGENSTEIN 1980, 526.

76 WITTGENSTEIN 1980, 532.

4. Where are the interlocutors invited to meet?

Capturing an aspect via ordinary language might be difficult, because aspect-seeing concerns something that *happens* to the subject or that appears to the subject in “this” or “that” way in the flow of experience. The phenomenological language of “this” or “that” is the “language of possibilities”, as it refers to a range (or a *continuum*) of *experiential possibilities*, while ordinary language refers to discrete entities. In Wittgenstein’s view, phenomenology is Grammar in the sense that it provides the *rules for meaningful descriptions* of our own experience, which might differ from descriptions about facts and objects. In this section, we aim to point out that metaphor can be the bridge between the language of experiential possibilities and ordinary language. Metaphor, as an invitation to aspect-seeing, responds indeed to the fundamental human need to linguistically share experience with others, «to articulate our experience of the world, if that experience, and hence the world, is to become *ours*»⁷⁷.

Metaphors are indeed *necessary* to articulate everyday experience in ordinary language, and not just nice⁷⁸, nor just amusing, as in the case of humour. What we experience is indeed continuous, while our words belong to discrete systems and should be flexible enough to be used in specific contexts. As we do not have words for any possible experience, we might resort to metaphors to fill the gap by evoking the aspect to be seen. Metaphor is indeed necessary to communicate what is inexpressible in experience, by enabling the speaker to transfer those aspects of experience that are *unnameable*. The way we “reconstruct” the aspect-seeing experience in language *can thus be shared with others* and lead others much nearer to our perceived experience, even though subjective and self-related aspects might still be *untranslatable* (or leading to other metaphors to be expressed). Thus, when aspect-seeing

⁷⁷ BAZ 2000, 98.

⁷⁸ ORTONY 1975.

is embedded in the (metaphorical) language-game, aspects are in a sense *sharable*⁷⁹.

However, if metaphor can provide an access to the speaker's perspective on "this" or "that" experience, it is not clear how the interlocutor can find this access and "see" the aspect communicated via metaphor. In some sense, the interlocutor needs to tune in with the speaker to see the communicated aspect, as Baz pointed out⁸⁰: «the seeing of aspects, or rather its expression, puts our attunement with other people to the test, which means that can also provide the occasion for certain moments of intimacy, depending on how far that attunement is found to reach». However, there could be "aspect-blind" people, that cannot "see" the aspect: they can see the object, in the literal sense of "seeing", but they cannot "see" the aspect experienced by the other person she is talking metaphors with. Indeed, as Wittgenstein warned, the aspect-blind person is «someone who *lacks the capacity to see something as something*»⁸¹. It might then be difficult to achieve linguistic intimacy with "aspect-blind" people.

Why could some interlocutors not see an aspect? As Wittgenstein remarked⁸², «The aspects of things that are most important for us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity. (One is unable to notice something—because it is always before one's eyes.)». Thus, what is peculiar of the "dawning of the aspect" is the experience of *something unfamiliar*, rather than familiar: seeing-aspect can be difficult for others and there might be "aspect-blind" people who are not able to catch it, precisely because it requires to see something *completely new*, that makes the object *different*, as we have never seen it before in "that" way. However, precisely because it is unfamiliar and new, we

79 This does not mean that (always) first we perceive the aspect and (always) then we express it through a metaphor. As a reviewer argued, it is not the way we see things that determines the way we speak, but sometimes it is the way we speak and the concepts we use that determine the aspects we see. For instance, we do not know and we are not even required to know whether Pascoli saw the sky as a pearl, but he made us do it and we understand the metaphor nonetheless.

80 BAZ 2000, 99.

81 WITTGENSTEIN 1953, 213, emphasis mine.

82 WITTGENSTEIN 1953, 129.

perceive the aspect as something which is worth articulating, if we want it to become shareable and thus familiar in our (momentary) community⁸³. “Being unfamiliar” here does not mean that the aspect is something beyond ordinary and familiar experience, but rather something productive and creative that enriches our experience with novelty, even when experience might be literally seen as ordinary⁸⁴. The aspect we can grasp via metaphor is thus “something extraordinary in the ordinary”. As pointed out⁸⁵:

The point of seeing aspects lies in its being the place where we expand our experience of the ordinary and the familiar without, as it were, turning our backs on it; the place where we strengthen our bonds with the world by renewing; and the place where we go beyond habitual ways and established routes without giving up on intelligibility.

In the case of metaphor, the speaker’s goal is not necessarily to make the interlocutor believe a determinate set of propositions, which can be clearly defined in her mind, but rather to «alter the addressee’s possibilities of thinking»⁸⁶, via novel imagistic effects that can enlarge the borders of meaningfulness beyond our familiar experience. This should be the point of a metaphor where the interlocutors can meet, i.e., the point where they can bring about *a change in their possibilities of*

83 The aspect’s being shareable does not mean that the aspect is *de facto* shared: our interlocutor might not accept the invitation and/or might not come to the meeting point because she is not taking care about it or she simply miss it as “blind” people do.

84 Indeed, to “see” the duck-rabbit figure either as a duck or as a rabbit, we first need to know what a rabbit or a duck is. In other words, we need to master the respective concepts, because an aspect dawns when we can recognize an internal relation between what we perceive (perception) and what we know (concept) (see also PPF 247). In this perspective, aspects cannot be completely unfamiliar, and they are thus far from being completely unknown. As a reviewer pointed out, the unfamiliarity of the aspects can thus be considered as the “familiar unveiled, that resurfaces in certain perceptual conditions”. However, the novelty of metaphors is linked to a *new* way of “seeing” what is already experienced.

85 BAZ 2000, 99.

86 WILSON AND CARSTON 2019, 14.

thinking (in Wittgenstein's terms, «to bring a concept» to the world⁸⁷).

However, to the extent that metaphor is the expression of an aspect, it is an expression of an unfamiliar and "extraordinary" experience *in ordinary language*, and the addressees have no way of gaining access to "this" or "that" experience other than ordinary language⁸⁸. Thus, the extraordinary experience of the dawning of an aspect can only be shared by framing it in ordinary language ("the language of information", even though it is not embedded in «the language-game of information»⁸⁹). That is precisely the *framing function of a metaphor*: experience is expressed metaphorically in ordinary language, but in so doing some *new* properties emerge and become salient, while the rest remain unremarked. When we talk about a woman in terms of a Venice glass (as Ramesey did in 1672), we use ordinary language for a familiar object, as a Venice glass, to make the others see something *new* about women, something that is unfamiliar to our way to "see" women and is not usually associated with women in ordinary language. Thus, we need metaphors because they can expand what we can think and express in ordinary language, they can make us go in depth *into the familiar via the unfamiliar*: as Aristotle warned, «ordinary words convey only what we know already, it is from metaphor that we can best get hold of something fresh»⁹⁰.

Nonetheless, we might argue that every metaphor has a framing function, but that does not guarantee that our interlocutors notice the prominent aspect to see. For instance, conventional metaphors are so part of familiar conceptualization expressed via ordinary language, that novelty is very difficult to *perceive* or even no more *felt* by speakers: as previously argued, novelty comes from a perceived "disruption" of familiar experience or from something unexpected in

87 WITTGENSTEIN 1980, 961.

88 Someone could claim that metaphors are paraphrasable in ordinary language or said with other words, but the point here is precisely that metaphor cannot be reduced to literal terms without some loss (see BLACK 1954). A paraphrase then might precisely miss the invitation to "see" the aspect.

89 WITTGENSTEIN 1980, 888.

90 *Reth.* 1410B 11-14.

the flow of ordinary experience. In this sense, conventional metaphors are akin with literal language, which tends to present experience as ordinary and familiar, and so as unremarkable, as Cohen⁹¹ pointed out. It might be claimed that conventional metaphors let us “continuously” see an aspect and that is why we cannot *feel* it: there is no disruption in routine habits or nothing *new* in experience that is worth being noticed via conventional metaphors.

However, as Wittgenstein warned⁹²: «we must distinguish between the “continuous seeing” of an aspect and the “dawning” of an aspect. The picture might have been shown me, and I never have seen anything but a rabbit in it». While “continuous aspect-seeing” metaphors belong to the language-game of reporting a familiar experience in ordinary language, the “aspect dawning” metaphors belong to the language-game of the invitation to see an unfamiliar experience via ordinary language. While no particular attention or awareness is required to grasp familiar and routinized experience, the “aspect dawning” requires a *paying of attention* to be grasped: in Wittgenstein’s terms, it is «subject to the will»⁹³. Thus, pace Stephen Mulhall⁹⁴, there is nothing like “continuous aspect-seeing”, because aspect-seeing is something that we are *aware* of doing⁹⁵.

Also, it is not something that we can do for someone else: when we express an aspect via metaphors, we cannot see the aspect for our interlocutor, but just inviting her or give her a hint as to how she might bring herself to see the aspect. Metaphor is precisely the hint to notice the aspect, as the pointing to a place where to look in order to see the aspect. Thus, the speaker can only point to the place where to meet in order to feel intimacy, but the encounter is never guaranteed, especially when the addressee is not paying attention. When a metaphor is so familiar that goes unnoticed and passively accepted by the addressee, we cannot reach linguistic intimacy. Does it mean that

91 COHEN 1978.

92 WITTGENSTEIN 1953, 194b.

93 WITTGENSTEIN 1980, 899.

94 MULHALL 1990.

95 BAZ 2020.

we can come to see an aspect just via novel or poetic metaphors, as Hester⁹⁶ claimed? No, we can do that in ordinary language, also by *revitalising* a conventional metaphor, making it new again in conversation, using it to invite the addressees to see an aspect and point to the place where to reach “aspectual familiarity” and feel linguistic intimacy. Still, revitalization requires an extra-effort and a paying attention to some aspect that not everyone is prone to make.

At the same time, in the case of metaphor the ability to find something new or to see something unfamiliar in the familiar is not something that can always be “designed” or “decided on a paper”, as in the case of ambiguous figure. In most cases, it is rather something that happens when playing the language-game of aspect-seeing, and Wittgenstein provided examples of this experience precisely looking at how children play⁹⁷:

Here is a game played by children: they say that a chest, for example, is a house; and thereupon it is interpreted as a house in every detail. A piece of fancy is worked into it.

And does the child now *see* the chest as a house?

‘He quite forgets that it is a chest; for him it actually is a house.’ (There are definite tokens of this.) Then would it not also be correct to say he *sees* it as a house?

And if you knew how to play this game, and, given a particular situation, you exclaimed with special expression ‘Now it’s a house!’— you would be giving expression to the dawning of an aspect.⁹⁸

When (and if) also the addressee sees the house in that game, they feel both part of the same community. Feeling intimacy is thus something that *happens* when we draw attention to perceptual similarities that make us feel some “aspectual familiarity” via something unfamiliar, as for instance when we see a cloud as an elephant or as a giraffe, we are

96 HESTER 1966.

97 WITTGENSTEIN 1953, 206.

98 WITTGENSTEIN 1953, 206.

not used to see or we are not used to search for in the sky. To the extent to which we find something about that experience new and worth articulating in the language-game, we are playing with others and we are inviting them to make sense of that experience together. The interlocutors will then feel intimate because both of them have been able to see the extraordinary in the ordinary.

5. Conclusion: feeling linguistic intimacy

The paper explores linguistic intimacy, arguing that it can be achieved via “aspectual familiarity”, when the speakers use a metaphor to make the addressees see an aspect, or something extraordinary in the ordinary. In this sense, a speaker can solicit the addressee to change her way of seeing what is familiar via the unfamiliar, thus grasping the point of a metaphor to achieve together⁹⁹. Indeed, metaphor is not used with the aim of providing information, «but rather for what may be described as a *seeking of intimacy*», when conveying the aspect, as remarked by Baz¹⁰⁰. However, differently from Baz¹⁰¹, we might say that metaphor is not only the way the speaker seeks intimacy, but also the way the speaker can *feel* intimacy together with the addressee. Metaphors have indeed an *affective framing function*, as they reveal not only *what aspect* matters to the speaker, but also *what affective value* the speaker attributes to it¹⁰². The affective perspective provided by the metaphorical framing guides the addressee’s interpretation of the target¹⁰³, suggesting what she is paying attention to and what she is caring about. Indeed, in providing a specific affective perspective from where to look at the target, metaphorical expressions also provide

99 In dialogue with an interlocutor, the metaphorical point is not independent of the feeling of intimacy: in a sense, the interlocutors can find the “point” as a consequence of an achieved intimacy, but at the same time intimacy is also a condition to reach the point.

100 BAZ 2000, 108.

101 BAZ 2000, 2020, 6.

102 ERVAS ET AL. 2021.

103 See e.g., DEMJEN AND SEMINO 2020.

some implicit *evaluative connotations*, which might also depend on the *affective coherence* between the affective valence we attributed to what is metaphorically described and the affective valence of the metaphorical source we use to describe it¹⁰⁴.

Does the resolution of unfamiliarity guarantee linguistic intimacy? When the (semantic) distance is filled via metaphor, the metaphor itself might become familiar, and no more felt as new, precisely because the dawning of an aspect can just momentarily struck us («Ask yourself ‘For how long am I struck by a thing?’—For how long do I find it *new*»)¹⁰⁵. Also, we cannot be sure to offer the right insight to our addressees, nor we can paraphrase the metaphor without losing the insight. Too much effort in explaining where the meeting point is, might entail a loss in the feeling of intimacy. The interlocutor needs to come to the meeting point by herself, otherwise intimacy is lost: as for instance when improvising in music or in dance, there is a point where to meet, but everyone needs to recognize it and arrive there by herself. Of course, we have more possibility to find the addressee at the meeting point in the case of *affectively coherent* metaphors¹⁰⁶. Affective incoherence makes indeed global processes of sense-making more difficult to be carried out, neutralizing both general metaphorical and affective framing effects. The direct affective impact comes first¹⁰⁷ and determines the attitudes toward what is hinted to and “the searching style” of the addressee.

Thus, affective coherent metaphors make the addressees more prone to read, listen and see novelties, while affective incoherent metaphors made them less prone to make sense of the speaker. Linguistic intimacy is an *affective point*, where we can meet with the speaker, when invited to see “unfamiliar aspects” and make sense of them in ordinary language: indeed, «the game, one would like to say, has not only rules but also a point»¹⁰⁸. Metaphor is the invitation to the

104 CENTEBAR ET AL. 2008; ERVAS ET AL. 2021.

105 WITTGENSTEIN 1953, 210.

106 ERVAS ET AL. 2021.

107 ZAJONC 1980.

108 WITTGENSTEIN 1953, 564.

meeting point, but it is not metaphor per se that increases linguistic intimacy, nor familiarity, though both have a role in achieving intimacy. It is up to us, to our ability to feel something special and new, something extraordinary in the ordinary, if metaphors can make us achieve intimacy.

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