
COMPREHENDING METAPHOR: FROM TEXTBOOKS
TO TRADE BOOKS

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C.S. Lewis has pointed out the need for metaphoric language in speaking of intangibles.

"...very often when we are talking about something which is not perceptible by the five senses we use words which, in one of their meanings, refer to things or actions that are. When a man says that he grasps an argument he is using a verb (*grasp*) which literally means to take something in the hands, but he is certainly not thinking that his mind has hands or that an argument can be seized like a gun. To avoid the word *grasp* he may change the form of expression and say, "I see your point," but he does not mean that a pointed object has appeared in his visual field. He may have a third shot and say, "I follow you," but he does not mean that he is walking behind you on a road. Everyone is familiar with this phenomenon and the grammarians call it metaphor...it is a study for a lifetime."

(Lewis, p. 73-4)

But beyond using figurative language for intangibles, we resort to metaphor very frequently when we want to communicate effectively about things which we *can* see, hear, touch, smell or taste. Figurative speech has at least two functions:

1. it may make something easier to understand or,
2. it may make a perception more vivid.

In the first instance there is probably no need to highlight the metaphor. For example, "as light as a feather" probably is self-explanatory, providing that the reader or listener has had

TABLE 3

Trade Books by Grade and Category

	Realistic					T
	Fiction	Exposition	Poetry	Fantasy	Biography	
3rd grade	4	3	2	5		14
6th grade	7	1	3	1	2	14

TABLE 4

Incidence of Figurative Language by Genre (3rd grade)

	Simile	Metaphor	Hyperbole	Personification	T
Realistic					
fiction	19	55	18	21	113
Exposition	9	15	5	7	36
Poetry	32	47	45	27	221
Fantasy	37	65	28	27	157
Total	97	182	96	152	527
N pages of text 460	\bar{X} usage figurative language per page 1.15				
N paragraphs 1254	\bar{X} usage figurative language per paragraph .42				

TABLE 5.

Incidence of figurative Language by Genre (6th grade)

	Simile	Metaphor	Hyperbole	Personification	T
Realistic					
fiction	62	212	98	48	420
Exposition	3	8	1	1	13
Poetry	102	261	58	192	613
Fantasy	14	52	10	15	91
Biography	19	54	21	2	96
Total	200	587	188	258	1233
N pages of text 447	\bar{X} usage figurative language per page 2.76				
N paragraphs 1870	\bar{X} usage figurative language per paragraph .66				