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FIGURATIVELY SPEAKING: NON-LITERAL USES OF ENGLISH IN NON-LITERAL SITUATIONS

Christopher O. Awonuga

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1.1 Introduction

We do not know when and how human language originated. Different theories have been put forward to explain these phenomena, but they are all speculative, without any solid evidence to support any one of them. What we do know is that human language is the highest and most complex form of communication. Linguistics seeks to explain this complexity by describing how a language is internally patterned and used.

This study, then, is an exercise in linguistics; it aims at describing some of the ways in which English is used outside literature to achieve various stylistic effects.

1.2 Literal and Figurative Language

Before I go on in this paper, I would like to comment on my use of the terms "literary language" and "non-literary language". By literary language, I mean the language used in literary texts such as poems, short stories, novellas, novels and plays. Non-literary language refers to language used outside literary texts, such as in everyday situations.

In traditional academic analyses of language, linguistic expressions are divided into two classes: literal and figurative. The term "literal language" is used to refer to "words that denote what they mean according to common or dictionary usage" (Word

IQ.com) In other words, in literal language, words are used to mean what they refer to ("denote") without having additional meanings attached to them – for example, "It is raining." This sentence can only be interpreted in one way from this point of view. The typical meaning of a word in this respect is known as its denotative meaning.

By contrast, additional meanings are attached to words in figurative language: words do not just mean something; they also "connote" additional meanings. Thus, we talk of connotative or figurative meaning. Now, figurative language has to do with any statement that cannot be interpreted literally. For instance, the sentence, "The ground is dry" can be interpreted literally. But "The ground is thirsty" cannot, in the sense that we do not normally talk of the ground in animate terms. In other words, it is only animate beings, such as human beings and animals that can be thirsty. So, we say that an animate and human characteristic has been transferred to an inanimate object. This is also known as personification, or humanizing metaphor.

Figurative language thus differs from literal language in the sense that it usually achieves special effects or meaning. It achieves these effects through several techniques known as figures of speech or tropes. According to classical and traditional linguistics, there are more than two hundred and fifty figures. More recently, however, this number has been reduced drastically, with some linguists claiming that they are able to classify all figurative language as either metaphor or metonymy.

While the debate about numbers is going on, it is more profitable to pay attention to those figures of speech that are widely used in both literary and non-literary language today. Some of these are: simile, metaphor, personification, onomatopoeia, hyperbole, synecdoche, paradox and antithesis. These tropes are, in addition to being used in literary texts, also extensively used in non-literary language situations.

It is important to note here that in many modern academic analyses

of language, especially from the perspective of cognitive linguistics, the distinction between literal and figurative language is no longer rigid (Fauconnier and Turner, 2002:69). In the same vein, some practitioners of linguistic stylistics have pointed out that there should be no sharp distinction between literary and non-literary language, since literary language is a variety of language. For instance, Diller (1998:157-158) is of the view that literary language shares certain linguistic features with non-literary language and that, as a result, no special claim should be made for literary language (see also Awonuga, 2005:46).

This last point hints at the uneasy relationship that has existed between language and literature, especially since linguistic stylistics came on the scene in the second half of the 20th century. Literary critics and linguists interested in the study of literature view one another with suspicion. Literary critics claim that linguistics has nothing to contribute to the criticism of literary texts, while linguistic stylisticians retort that the practice of literary criticism is impressionistic and therefore unreliable, and that it needs to be enriched by the methods of linguistics.

In spite of the position of cognitive linguistics on the relationship between literal and figurative language, it is still useful to study the ways in which individual figures of speech are employed in language use, for they help us to see how rich language is.

1.3   The Concept of "Ordinary" Language

For several decades now, there has been the view that the language we use in everyday situations is "ordinary". The expression "ordinary language" is usually used in philosophy and logic "to distinguish between ordinary, unsurprising uses of terms and their more specialized uses in theorizing, or jargon" (Wikipedia). Thus, ordinary language philosophy or linguistic philosophy is a philosophical school that holds that there are philosophical problems as a result of failure by philosophers to realize what words actually mean (i.e. the denotative meaning) in a language.

This branch of philosophy is usually associated with Ludwig Wittgeinstein (especially in his later work), Gilbert Ryle, J.L. Austin, Peter Strawson, John R. Searle and Norman Malcom. Although Wittgeinstein and his students at the University of Cambridge had a great influence on ordinary language analysis, this approach actually flourished and developed at the University of Oxford in the 1940s, under J.L. Austin and Gilbert Ryle. According to Wittgenstein, language should not be ambiguous; it should mean what it says. This view agrees essentially with that of Bertrand Russell, an early analytic philosopher, who held that language is not significant for philosophy and that ordinary language is just too confused to be of use in solving metaphysical and epistemological problems.

Wittgeinstein's view is also similar to that of the British empiricist philosopher, John Locke, who believed that:

> *All the artificial and figurative applications of words that eloquence had invented, are for nothing else but to insinuate wrong ideas, move the passions, and thereby mislead the judgment; and so indeed are perfect cheats….they are certainly, in all discourses that pretend to inform or instruct, wholly to be avoided; and where truth and knowledge are concerned cannot but be thought a great fault.* [III, X, 34,146]. (Quoted by Landow, 2005:2)

As we shall see later in this lecture, Wittgeinstein's view that language should not be ambiguous cannot be sustained, for it is widely acknowledged in linguistics that every sentence that we speak in English is potentially ambiguous. We shall also see that ambiguity is one of the linguistic features that make language use interesting. John Locke's view of language is also not tenable, in view of the fact that language use is enriched by non-literal expressions.

The notion of ordinary language is also held by practitioners of linguistic stylistics through their promotion of the notion of

foregrounding. A term borrowed from painting,

> *Foregrounding refers to those elements of a work of art that stand out in some way. According to Russian formalist scholars at the beginning of the last century, the purpose of art and literature is to defamiliarize the familiar, and by defamiliarizing a work of art or a text we make it stand out from the norm [that is, everyday language] – it becomes foregrounded* (McIntyre, 2003:2. See also Awonuga, 2005: 45-48)

The main purpose of foregrounding is to show that certain linguistic structures stand out or are prominent against the background of everyday language, which is seen as normal, ordinary language. According to Jan Mukarovsky, a Czech theorist, communication is the primary purpose in everyday language. But in literature, foregrounding disrupts such everyday communication.

> *In poetic language foregrounding achieves maximum intensity to the extent of pushing communication into the background as the objective of expression and of being used for its own sake; it is not used in the services of communication, but in order to place in the foreground the act of expression, the act of speech itself.* (1964:19)

One implication of this statement is that literature is able, through foregrounding, "to present meanings with an intricacy and complexity that ordinary language does not normally allow" (Miall and Kuiken, 1994:2).

Mukarovsky concedes that foregrounding may occur in normal, everyday language, such as spoken discourse or journalese, but he adds that it occurs at random with no systematic design. This claim can be faulted on three grounds: (a) it is generally recognized in linguistics that spoken discourse, or conversation manifests a high degree of organization; (b) the claim of a special language for literature cannot really be sustained, since literature is just one of

the uses to which language is put; that is, literature is a variety of language; (c) no variety or dialect of a language is superior to another, just as no language is superior to another. For every language or variety has its peculiar uses.

1.4   Use of Figurative Language in Non-Literary Situations

Just as figurative language is widely used in literature or literary language, so is it also widely used in everyday or non-literary language. In fact, it has been pointed out that:

> *We may not always know it, but we think in metaphor. A large proportion of our most commonplace thoughts make use of an extensive, but unconscious, system of metaphorical concepts, that is, concepts from a typically concrete realm of thought that are used to comprehend another, completely different domain. Such concepts are often reflected in everyday language, but their most dramatic effect comes in ordinary reasoning. But unless one knows that the system exists, one may miss it.* (Lakoff, Web).

Thus, we use figurative or metaphorical language on a daily basis more widely than many people are aware of. This shows how rich and complex everyday language is.

The figure of speech or trope that has been discussed so far is metaphor. This is not surprising, in view of the fact that it as one of the most common of all the figures of speech that we have. As stated earlier, traditional rhetoric identifies more than two hundred and fifty figures of speech, but it is quite a few of them that are used regularly. The other common tropes, from the perspective of non-literary language are: simile, exaggeration, personification or humanizing metaphor, irony/sarcasm, hyperbole, metonymy and, to some extent, onomatopoeia. But the emphasis in this presentation is on metaphor and simile.

Both metaphor and simile are often mentioned together as examples of rhetorical figures. They both involve comparison, the

only difference being that in simile, the comparison is explicit through the use of "like" or "as" (for example, "Her face is like the sun"); while in metaphor the comparison is implicit (for example, "He is a gem"). Although some scholars and most dictionary definitions treat similes as simply a specific type of metaphor, it is still useful to keep them separate so that our consideration of them can be clear.

Having made this point, it is noteworthy that there are different types of metaphor. Some of these are: extended metaphor, mixed metaphor, synecdochic metaphor, dehumanizing metaphor and dead metaphor. There are some other types of metaphor, but their nomenclatures are yet to be universally accepted. These are: active metaphor, absolute or paralogical metaphor, experiential or learning metaphor, complex metaphor, root metaphor, conceptual metaphor, dying metaphor, implied or unstated metaphor. I shall concentrate on the first set of metaphors in this lecture (see Wikipedia for descriptions of the latter group of metaphors). It is therefore necessary for me to give a brief description of each of them.

Extended Metaphor or Conceit
Here, we have a principal subject with several subsidiary subjects or comparisons.

Mixed Metaphor
In a mixed metaphor, there is a jump from one identification to a second one that is inconsistent with the first identification. For example, "He stepped up to the plate and took the bull by the horns." There is a conflict in the qualities being compared and so the whole sentence fails to make sense.

Synecdochic Metaphor
Here, a small part of something is made to stand for the whole; for instance, "Aso Rock has denied the accusation," in which Aso

Rock is made to stand for the Federal Government of Nigeria as a whole.

Dehumanizing Metaphor

In this type of metaphor, animal characteristics or the characteristics of inanimate objects are ascribed to human beings in an attempt to ridicule their humanity. For example, "He is a pig," in which certain characteristics of a pig are ascribed to the tenor of the metaphor, that is, the object being talked about.

When we use language figuratively, we use it in an indirect manner, or non-literally. Here are some examples of indirect speech acts.

    a)   Sometimes it's a good idea to shut up.
    b) I wonder if you really should do all that talking.
    c) I wouldn't say more, if I were you.
    d) Remember that proverb, "Speech is silence, silence is golden."

All these utterances boil down to one big order: to close one's mouth, say nothing more, keep quiet.

We know that the speaker is talking non-literally if the utterance is contextually inappropriate, or through the speaker's tone (especially in the case of irony or sarcasm). Now, suppose the speaker utters the statement, "The door is over there" to the hearer. How does the hearer interpret the utterance? He has to know that it would be contextually inappropriate for the speaker to be merely reporting the location of the door, assuming that the speaker and the hearer both already know the location of the door, and this is not relevant to the conversation.

Proverbs

Proverbs constitute non-literal use of language. They "are traditional sayings having a fixed general sentential form and alluding to a common truth or general wisdom, with some (rudimentary) literary value, used to guide action, explain a situation, or induce a feeling or attitude." (Akmajian, *et al* 2004;

385). Here are some examples of proverbs:

a) Imperative (i.e. Proverbs couched in the form of a command)
    i)   Let sleeping dogs lie.
    ii)   Don't cry over spilled milk.
    iii)   Look before you leap.
b) Declarative (i.e. Proverbs couched in the form of statements)
    i)   He who hesitates is lost.
    ii)   Absence makes the heart grow fonder.
    iii)   Every cloud has a silver lining.

We now come to descriptions of some of the ways in which figurative language is used in non-literary situations. This range of use is very wide, for it covers all aspects of human endeavour. It is thus not possible for this discussion to cover this range. In view of this factor, the discussion is divided into two major parts: use of figurative language relating to parts of the body, to animals, to religion, to sports and to politics on the one hand; and ambiguity and English and the creation of humour on the other.

1.4.1   Use of Figurative Language in Relation to Parts of the Body

Parts of the body and activities associated with them feature prominently in the use of figurative language in non-literary situations. We shall consider each part briefly.

THE HEAD
You can bring something to a head
You can bang your head against a brick wall
You can bury or hide your head in the sand
You can find it difficult to make head or tail of something
You may be or stand head and shoulders above somebody or something

You can say something off the top of your head
You can have your head in the clouds
You can have a head for something
You can have your head screwed on the right way
You can be head over heels in love
You can hold your head high, or hold up your head
You can keep your head, or keep a clear, cool head
You can keep your head above water
You can head something off
You can take it into your head to do something
You can turn or stand something on its head
You can confront a problem head-on
Something can go to your head
Something can turn someone's head
Someone can be heading for something
People can put heads together.

HAND(S)

You can have your hands full
You can have your hands tied
You can lay/get your hands on something
You can play into someone's hands
You can take someone in hand
You can take something into your own hands
You can turn your hand to something
You can hand something over to somebody
You can do something by a sleight of hand
You can tell someone to turn/get his hands off you, or off somebody
Someone can get his hands dirty
Someone can be hand in glove with somebody else
Someone can eat out of somebody else's hand
Something can be in or off your hands

ARM(S)
You can keep someone at arm's length
Cost/pay an arm and a leg

FINGER(S)
You can get, pull your finger out
You can give somebody the finger
You can have a finger in every pie
You can have or keep your finger on the pulse (of something)
You can lay a finger on somebody
You can have your fingers in the till
You can put or stick two fingers up at somebody
You can work your fingers to the bone
You can finger somebody for something, or finger somebody as something

EAR (S)
You can be all ears
You can be out on your ear
You can be up to your ears in something
You can have   somebody's   ears, or have the ear of somebody
You can have or keep an or your ear, to the ground
You can play something by ear
You   can play it by ear
You can shut or close your ears to something
You can smile, grin or beam from ear to ear
Something can be easy on the ear

NOSE
You can have your nose in something
You can have a nose round
You can get up somebody's nose
You can cut off your nose to spite your face
You can keep your nose clean
You can keep your nose out of something

You can keep your nose to the grindstone
You can look down your nose at somebody or something
You can poke or stick your nose into something
You can put somebody's nose out of joint
You can turn your nose up at something
You can act with your nose in the air
You can nose about, or round, (for something)
You can nose something out.

EYE (S)
You can go into something with your eyes closed, or wide open
You can be up to your eyes in something
You can be the apple of someone's eyes
You can cast or run an eye or run your eye over something
You can clap or lay or set your eyes on something or somebody
You can have an eye for something
You can have eyes in the back of your head
You can have one eye or half an eye, on something
You can have your eye on somebody
You can keep your eyes peeled, skinned (for somebody or something)
You can make eyes at someone or give somebody the eye
You can look somebody in the eye (s) or face
You can see or look at something through somebody's eyes
You can shut or close your eyes to something
You may not see eye to eye with somebody
Someone can be all eyes
Something can happen before, or in front of somebody's (very) eyes
Somebody's eyes are, or can be, bigger than their stomach
Something can be for somebody's eyes only
One in the eye (for somebody or something)
With an eye to something, or to doing something
My eye!

FACE
You can face somebody down
You can be face to face with somebody, or something
You can have the face to do something
You can face up to something
You can pull or make faces or a face (at somebody)
You can put your face on
You can set your face against somebody or something
You can say something to somebody's face
Somebody's face may not fit
Somebody's face may be like thunder, or somebody has a face like thunder
What's his/her face (spoken)

CHIN
(keep your) chin up
You can take something on the chin

NECK
You can be up to your neck in something
You can get something in the neck
Neck of the woods

SHOULDER
You can look over your shoulder
You can put your shoulder to the wheel
You can have a shoulder to cry on
You can be shoulder to shoulder (with somebody)
You can shoulder a responsibility
You can shoulder blame for something

LEG
You can get your leg over
Someone may not have a leg to stand on

Leg it
Break a leg!

FOOT/FEET
You can be rushed or run off your feet
You can fall or land on your feet
You can get or have a, or your, foot in the door
You can have feet of clay
You can get or start off on the right or wrong foot (with somebody)
You can have or keep your feet on the ground
You can have or keep a foot in both camps
You can put your best food forward
You can put your feet up
You can put your foot down
You can put your foot in your mouth, or in it
You can put a foot wrong
You can set foot in, or on, something
You can set somebody or something on their, or its, feet
You can stand on your own (two) feet
You can foot the bill
You can be on your feet
Someone can have one foot in the grave
My foot!

HEEL(S)
You can take to your heels
You can be at, or on, somebody's heels
You can bring somebody or something to the heel
You can come to heel
You can be (hard or hot) on somebody's or something's heels
You can turn or spin on your heel
You can be under the heel of somebody

TOE(S)
You can toe the line, or toe the mark (AmE)
You can tread or step on people's toes

MOUTH
You can be all mouth
You can be down in the mouth
You can mouth off at, or about something
You can put your money where your mouth is
Out of the mouth of babes (and sucklings) (saying)

SKIN
You can do something by the skin of your teeth
You can get under somebody's skin
You may have got somebody under your skin
Something can make your skin crawl
Someone can be (nothing but or all or only) skin and bone
Someone's feelings may be skin-deep

THE IDEA OF EATING
You can chew on an idea
You can eat your words
Someone can eat out of someone else's hand
Someone can eat into something
Someone can bite the bullet
Someone can bite the dust
Someone can bite off more than he can chew
I could eat a horse
I'll eat my hat
Something can be hard to swallow

TEETH
You can cut your teeth on something
You can get your teeth into something

Something can set somebody's teeth on edge
An organization or law can have teeth

CHEST
Someone can have a tight chest
THROAT
Someone can have a tight throat
BRAIN
Someone can have something on the brain
Someone can beat his brains out

1.4.2 Use of Figurative Language in Relation to Some Animals

Figurative language is also used in relation to some animals. Here are a few examples.

CAT
You can be the cat's whiskers / pyjamas
You can let the cat out of the bag
You can be like a cat on hot bricks
You can be like a cat that's got the cream
You can look like something the cat brought in
You can play (a game of) cat and mouse with somebody, or you can play a cat and mouse game with somebody
You can put or set the cat among the pigeons
Someone may not have or stand a cat in hell's chance (of doing something)

DOG
You can dog someone's steps
Someone can be a dog in the manger
Someone can live a dog's life
Someone or something can go to the dogs
Someone may not have a dog's chance

Something can be a dog's breakfast or dinner

Something can be (a case of) dog eat dog

PIG

You can buy a pig in a poke

You can make a pig's ear (out) of something

You can have a pig of a something

You can pig out on something' or yourself on something.

Someone can be pig-headed

Pig might fly (BrE), or when pigs fly (AmE)

You can go the whole hog

You can hog the bathroom

You can hog the road

ASS

Someone can make an ass of himself

Someone can be said to be a perfect ass

1.4.3   Use of Figurative Language in Relation to Sports

It suffices here just to mention that African national soccer teams have animal names. For instance, we have the Indomitable Lions of Cameroun, the Atlas Lions of Morocco, the Elephants of Cote d' Voir, the Stallions of Burkina Faso, the Panthers of Gabon, the Black Mambas of Mozambique, the Squirrels of Benin Republic, the Sparrow Hawks of Togo, the Cathage Eagles of Tunisia, the Eagles of Mali and of course, the Super Eagles and the Super Falcons of Nigeria.

It is not clear why these countries chose to portray their national football teams in terms of animals. But what is clear is that all the examples noted above are metaphors meant to ascribe certain qualities associated with the animals in question to those soccer teams. There is no time in this lecture to analyse each of these metaphors. But I simply wish to observe here that some of the animals are quite ferocious, giving the impression of instilling fear in the opponents of those teams that have chosen to have such

fearful nomenclatures.

But it is worthy of note that many of those teams do not always live up to their adopted names. A good case in point here are the Super Eagles of Nigeria. Many times, they try to fly with only one wing and, at other times with no wings at all! So, it is not surprising that they have not always won their matches. Another interesting example is that of the Squirrels of Benin Republic. How could squirrels hope to confront lions, elephants, stallions, panthers, mambas and hawks, and be successful? No wonder the country is not a force to reckon with in football.

1.4.4   Use of Figurative Language in Relation to Religion

My focus in this section is on Christianity and the use of language. In this connection, we have the language of prayer, the language of sermons and the language of the Bible. For reasons of space and time, I zero in on the language of the Bible, specifically on the figurative use of language in it. From this perspective, similes and metaphors are used liberally in the Bible.

For instance, we have examples of simile in Psalm 19:4, 5, especially verse 5.

4. Their [the heaven's] line is gone out through all the earth and their words to the end of the world. In them hath he set a tabernacle for the sun.

5. Which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, and rejoiceth as a strong man to run a race.(Authorized King James Version)

There are two similes in verse 5: the sun in verse 4 is explicitly compared to (a) "a bridegroom coming out of his chamber," and (b) to a strong man about to run a race. The sun is personified through the use of these similes, the impression created being that it is a happy sun indeed. The word "bridegroom" suggests a man that is getting married. He comes out of his room feeling satisfied with himself at his elevation from a bachelor to a married man. The

idea of satisfaction is reinforced in the second simile by the imagery of a strong man who is about to run a race. He is happy ("rejoiceth") because he knows that the race is as good as won, since he is so strong. There is also the implication of confidence: he is not anxious because he does not fear the other participants in the race. So, the meaning of this stretch of language is that the sun comes out in the morning feeling radiant and feeling satisfied with itself.

In considering the use of metaphor in the Bible, I shall concentrate on John 6: 47-58:

47. Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life.

48. I am that bread of life.

49. Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead.

50. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die.

51. I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eats of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.

52. The Jews therefore strove among themselves, saying, How can this man give us his flesh to eat?

53. Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you.

54. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.

55. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed.

56. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him.

57. As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father; so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me.

58. This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna and are dead; he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever (Authorized King James Version)

In this passage, Jesus used two extended metaphors: (a) his body being bread; and (b) his blood being drink. He characterized Himself as "that bread of life" in verse 48, as "the living bread which came down from heaven" in verses 51 and 58, thus emphasizing the idea. In verse 53, he described this bread as his flesh and his blood as drink, and then went on in verse 54 to say that it is only those who eat his flesh and drink his blood that can have eternal life, thus reinforcing his statement in verses 50, 51, 54 and 58. In verses 49 and 58, there is an implicit comparison with manna, which the children of Israel ate in the wilderness on their way to Canaan, and the bread of life, which Jesus embodies.

In this passage, Jesus used figurative language to good effect, but the Jews that heard him did not understand the teaching, since they were from beneath and Jesus was from above (John 8:23). Jesus spoke from a spiritual, figurative perspective while they reasoned from a carnal, literal point of view. Even today, there are still many christians who fail to understand the deeper import of what they read in the Bible.

1.4.5   Use of Figurative Language in Relation to Politics

Figurative language is frequently used in politics and it has therefore formed an essential linguistic characteristic of that register.

Politicians use different types of metaphor. For instance, they use: (a) Nature-related metaphors; (b) Disease-remedy metaphors; (c) Violence-related metaphors; (d) Colour metaphors; (e) Game-metaphors; (f) Food-and Drink-related metaphors; (g) Sexual metaphors; and (h) Bible-based imagery, Biblical allusion and quotes. I shall discuss three of them briefly.

Disease-remedy Metaphors

These metaphors are quite common in political rhetoric. Three former British Prime Ministers – Mr. George Lloyd, Sir Harold Wilson and Mr. Harold Macmillan – were very fond of this type of

metaphor. Here are two statements credited to Sir Wilson:

(a) "It was a clean, antiseptic operation, from which Mr. Barber had barely recovered a year later."

(b) "Roy Jenkins tore him apart, calmly and clinically."

Colour Metaphors

Another former British Prime Minister, Sir Winston Churchill, used colour metaphors a lot. For example, in one passage, he talks of putting "slashes of blue on the absolutely cowering canvas". (Hudson, 1978: 131).

Food-and-Drink –Related Metaphors

Harold Macmillan was also fond of using metaphors drawn from food and drink. For example, in his maiden speech to the House of Commons in 1925, he had this to say:

> *If he [Ramsey MacDonald] thinks that he and his party have to offer us the true socialism a kind of mixture, a sort of horrible political cocktail, consisting partly of the exploded economic views of Karl Marx, mixed up with a little flavour of Gobdenism, well-iced by the late Chancellor of the Exchequer, and with a little ginger from the Member from the Gorbals – if he thinks this is to be the draught given to our parched throats and that we are ready to accept it, he is very much mistaken.*

(Hudson, 1978: 132).

Coming closer home, a study (Awonuga, 1988: 150-196) has shown that Chief Obafemi Awolowo used sixteen types of metaphor in his writings, namely, (a) War-derived metaphor; (b) Sleep-based metaphor; (c) Music-derived metaphor; (d) Game-metaphor; (e) Slavery-derived metaphor; (f) Nature-based metaphor; (g) Vehicle-derived metaphor; (h) Ship-related metaphor; (i) Growth-related metaphor; (j) Metaphors based on

the idea of withering; (k) Light-and-darkness-based metaphor; (l) Gambling metaphor; (m) Earthquake-derived metaphor; (n) Filth-based metaphor; (o) Bible-derived metaphor; and (p) Disease-remedy metaphor. I shall discuss, briefly, only two of these types of metaphor: sleep-based metaphor and Disease-remedy metaphor.

Sleep-based Metaphor

Here is an example of this type of metaphor from Chief Awolowo's writings:

> *…here is Nigeria's opportunity; if only she knew how to shake herself from her stupor, and bestir herself with grit and mental alertness to seize the opportunity by the forelock. It is our unshaken belief that she can and she will….* (Awolowo, 1966: 153)

The use of the words "stupor" and "bestir" is figurative in the sense that they are not referring to the idea of sleeping in a physical sense. Thus, what Chief Awolowo is saying here is that Nigerians should stop being apathetic and make full use of the opportunity they had to draw up a suitable constitution for Nigeria.

Disease-remedy Metaphor

Chief Awolowo used this type of metaphor a lot in his writings. The examples in this category have to do with conceptualizing socio-politico-economic challenges and their solutions in terms of diseases and their cure. Here is a representative sample:

> *At these initial stages of their [the then military rulers'] accession to power, I would urge them to bear in mind …that there is such a cancerous and fatal disease in public life known as TENACITY OF OFFICE.* (Awolowo: 1981: 161)

In this example, Chief Awolowo described the political evil of tenacity of office in terms of a terminal disease:cancer. The notion of a terminal disease is also suggested by the word "fatal". The impression created in this example, then, is that tenacity of office is

disruptive, in the sense that it gives rise to tension and civil unrest, both of which do not make for a healthy society.

Lakoff (1995), a professor of linguistics at the University of California at Berkeley, in a fairly recent study, examines the issue of metaphor, morality and politics. He identifies roughly twenty-four conceptual metaphors used by both conservatives and liberals in the United States of America. Chief among these, especially as used by conservatives, is the metaphor of Moral Strength; this metaphor sees the world in terms of a war of good against the forces of evil, which must be fought mercilessly. It also embraces a sub-group of other common metaphors for morality from the conservative perspective. These are: moral bounds, moral authority, morality is obedience, moral essence, moral health, and moral wholeness.

Lakoff also identifies the metaphor of the nation as family, as well as another set of metaphors for morality often used by liberals, such as the metaphor of Morality as Empathy, the metaphor of Morality as Nurturance, the metaphor of Morality as Happiness, the metaphor of Morality as Fairness, and so on.

In another study, Lakoff (1991) examines the issue of metaphor and war. Here, he discusses the metaphors often used by nations as justification for going to war with another nation, especially a weaker country. Some of these metaphors are: the metaphor of Cost-benefit Analysis, the metaphor of the State-as-Person, the metaphor of War as Violent Crime, the metaphor of War as a Competitive Game, and so on. Closely related to the metaphor of the State-as-Person is the notion of the Ruler-for-State, which is an example of metonymy, in which a part is used to represent the whole. Here, a political leader symbolizes the state.

Thus, the ruler stands for the state. From this point of view, we can refer to Iraq, by referring to Saddam Hussein. It is this metonymy that was invoked when a former President of the United States, George Bush, Snr. said, "We have to get Saddam out of Kuwait". With regard to the metaphor of Cost-benefit Analysis, a Prussian

general, Karl Von Clausewitz, perceived war in terms of political cost-benefit analysis. Every country has political objectives and the realization of these objectives may be achieved through war.

> *The political gains are to be weighed against acceptable "costs". When the costs of war exceed the political gains, the war should cease. There is another metaphor implicit here: POLITICS IS BUSINESS where efficient political management is seen as akin to efficient business management.....* (Lakoff, 1991: 2, Web)

It was some of these metaphors that George Bush (Snr.) used as justification for the Gulf War, and that his son, George W. Bush, used as justification for the invasion of Iraq in 2003. Saddam Hussein was seen as a villain who must be eliminated and the United States was the hero that had to go to the rescue of the victims – the Iraqi people.

1.5   Euphemism

Euphemism is another important feature of non-literal language. The word *euphemism* is derived from the Greek word **euphemo**, which means "auspicious", "good", "fortunate speech", or "kind". Etymologically, the eupheme is the opposite of the **blaspheme**, which means evil-speaking" (Wikipedia).The English word "blasphemy" has its origin in "blaspheme".

Euphemism refers to "the act or an example of substituting a mild, indirect, or vague term for one considered harsh, blunt, or offensive" (the Free Online Dictionary). From this point of view, euphemism is an instance of circumlocution, which means "to speak around" a given word, implying it without saying it. Now, there are thousands of euphemisms that are used in English, as they cover every area of human endeavour. For example, the words "idiot," "imbecile," and "moron" were once neutral terms for a developmentally adult of toddler, pre-school, and primary school mental ages, respectively. But the words soon acquired negative

connotations, and the phrase "mentally retarded" was used to replace them. But this phrase, too, is now considered rude and insulting, and so the expressions "mentally challenged," "with an intellectual disability," "learning difficulties," and "special needs" are used as euphemisms for "retarded." We have a similar progression with the following:

(a)   Lame   crippled   handicapped   disabled   physically challenged   differently abled.

   (b) Shell shock (World War I)   battle fatigue (World War II)
        operational exhaustion (Korean War)   posttraumatic
        stress disorder (Vietnam War).

Below are more examples of euphemism of the type being discussed here:

Euphemism	Replaced
Word or Idea	
Not exactly thin	fat
Not completely truthful	lied
Pass away, pass on, check out,	
Bite the big one, kick the bucket, bite the dust,	
Pop one's clogs, peg it, cark it, turn one's toes up,	to die
Buy the farm, cash in one's chips, fall off one's perch,	
Croak, go south, go west, join the Choir Invisible, etc	

Lethal injection	execution (by legal means)
Sanitary landfill	garbage dump
Chauffeur	driver
Domestic assistant	cleaner
Loss prevention officer	security guard
Fluid transfer engineer	plumber
Media distribution executive	paper boy (newspaper vendor)
Correctional facility	prison
Equine chiropodist	blacksmith
Vision clearance engineer	windowwasher
People living with AIDS	AIDS patients

Non-performing loan(s)   bad loan(s)

But euphemism does not only involve replacing an unpleasant word with a pleasant one; it also has to do with replacing unpleasant words even when the literal term for the idea replaced is not necessarily offensive. Three instances of this type of euphemism are provided by doublespeak, superstitious euphemisms, and religious euphemisms. Doublespeak is usually found in public relations and politics. It is common in bureaucracies, such as the military and large corporations. Doublespeak is deliberate, in the sense that organisations coin expressions to describe objectionable actions in terms that seem neutral or inoffensive. For example, when the military kill people deliberately, they talk of "neutralizing the target." But when the killing is by mistake, it becomes "collateral damage." When a soldier is accidentally killed by his own side, it is "friendly fire" that gets him.

Superstitious euphemisms are based (consciously or subconsciously) on the idea that words have the power to bring bad fortune –for instance, in talking about sickness and disease. Some people do not like speaking the words *autism* and *cancer;* they refer to cancer by "the big C."

With regard to religious euphemisms, euphemisms for deities and religious practices and artifacts are as old as language itself. For instance, when praying, Jews typically use the word *Adonai,* which means "My Lord." But in an informal, colloquial setting, "Adonai" is replaced with *HaShem*, literally "The Name, "as "Adonai" is considered inappropriate in this context. As far as the Jews are concerned, the name of God is sacrosanct and must therefore not be spoken. Pronouncing the name would be equivalent to calling oneself God.

1.6   Ambiguity

Ambiguity is another feature of everyday language, but it also occurs in literary language as well. But since it is in non-literal, everyday informal uses of language that I am interested in this lecture, I shall confine myself to the use of ambiguity in that context.

Ambiguity occurs when a word, term, notation, sign, symbol, phrase, sentence, or any other form of communication is capable of being interpreted in more than one way (see Wikipedia). This statement implies that ambiguity is quite pervasive. For instance, it manifests in spoken and written language, in sociology, social psychology, music, visual art, mathematical notation, and so on. But essentially, ambiguity is a property of linguistic expressions. Since ambiguity is a linguistic characteristic, it follows that the chances of our speaking ambiguous words, phrases and sentences are very high. A lot of the time, however, we are not aware that our speech contains ambiguities. But there are times when people deliberately use ambiguous words and/or expressions to achieve certain stylistic effects.

From the perspective of linguistics, then, there are two main types of ambiguity: lexical and structural, or syntactic. Lexical ambiguity is the more common of the two. Examples of such words found in everyday use of language are: "chip", "pen", and "suit" (nouns); "call", "draw", and "run" (verbs); "deep", "dry", and "hard" (adjectives). Two examples of ambiguous phrases are: "old men and women," and "Nigerian history teacher." We can interpret the first example in the following ways: (a) old men and old women; and (b) old men and women who are not so old. The second example also has two possible interpretations: (a) a Nigerian who teaches history; and (b) a teacher of Nigerian history, or someone (not necessarily a Nigerian) who teaches Nigerian history.

As mentioned above, we also have ambiguity at the level of the sentence, or syntax. Here are some examples:

    (a) The girl hit the boy with a book.
    (b) Visiting relatives can be a nuisance.
    (c) The chicken is ready to eat.
    (d) John looked up when he came in.
    (e) Ope ate the cookies on the sofa.

Each of these sentences is capable of more than one interpretation. The two possible interpretations of sentence (a) are: (i) The girl hit the boy, using a book as a weapon; and (ii) The girl hit the boy, who was holding a book. For sentence (b), we can have (i) Going to visit relatives can be a nuisance; and (ii) Relatives that visit can be a nuisance. Two possible interpretations of sentence (c) are: (i) The chicken in question is hungry; and (ii) The chicken has been prepared for eating. For sentence (d), we can have (i) John looked up as he came in; and (ii) John looked up as somebody else came in. Finally, two possible interpretations of sentence (e) are: (i) Ope ate the cookies that he found on the sofa; and (ii) Ope ate the cookies while sitting on the sofa.

Now, ambiguous phrases are often found as headlines in newspapers and other news reports. Here are two examples:

    (a) "British military worries over fat fighters." (*The Guardian*, Tuesday, August 4, 2009, p. 12).
    (b) "Many missed chances to catch kidnapping suspect" (Web).

Example (a) can be interpreted in the following ways: (i) British military authorities are worried about their fat soldiers or fat people in the military; and (ii) There are worries in the British military over fat fighters. In the first interpretation, the word "worries" is functioning as a verb while it is used as a noun in the

second interpretation. This difference can be syntactically analyzed in the following manner:

Subject	**Verb**	**Adverbial**
(i) British military	worries	over fat fighters

Modifier	**Modifier**	**Qualifier**
(ii) British	military worries	[over fat fighters]

The difference in the two interpretations of example (b) lies in the use of the word "missed" as both a verb and as an adjective.

Sometimes, examples of ambiguous headlines result in humour, as the following examples show:

(a) "Goalless Gomez needs time, says Bierhoff. " (*The Guardian*, Tuesday, March 31, 2009, p. 93)

(b) "FRSC gives ultimatum to abandoned car owners on highways" (*Sunday Punch*, May 10, 2009, p.9)

(c) "TV ads boost eating of obese children" (Scotsman.com)

(d) "Christmas kids will be shot at clubhouse" (Quoted in *Reader's Digest*, October, 2008, p.221)

(e) "Volunteers needed to help abuse victims" (Quoted in *Reader's Digest*, April, 2009, p.37)

The two possible interpretations of example (a) are as follows: (i) Gomez, a footballer has not been able to score a goal in a particular season; and

(ii) Gomez has no goal in life. For example (b), we can have (i) FRSC gives ultimatum to owners of cars abandoned on the highways; and

(ii) FRSC gives ultimatum to car owners who have themselves been abandoned on the highways. Two possible interpretations of example (c) are: (i) TV advertisements boost the eating habits of obese children, thus causing them to eat more; and (ii) TV advertisements boost other people's habit of eating obese children, thus suggesting cannibalism. For example (d) we can have: (i) Some kids known as "Christmas kids" will be shot, that is, killed, at a particular clubhouse; and (ii) A movie titled "Christmas Kids"

will be shot at a particular clubhouse. Finally, two possible interpretations of example (e) are: (i) Volunteers are needed to help victims of abuse; and (ii) Volunteers are needed to help in the abuse of the victims, with the implication of adding to the victims' predicament.

Ambiguity features prominently in conversation, and it usually leads to misunderstanding and, at other times, humour. The two examples below give rise to humour.

- (a) A man once got to work late. His boss yelled, "You should've been here at 8:30!" The man replied, "Why? What happened at 8:30?" (*Reader's Digest*, September, 2005, p.99. Adapted)
- (b) A young man was excited about the English Literature class he was taking at night school.
  "We're reading Shakespeare," he told a friend.
  "Great" the friend replied. "Which one?".
  "William." (*Reader's Digest*, October, 2008, p.39. Adapted)

In example (a), the boss' statement has two possible interpretations: (i) "You should've been here at 8.30 to see what happened"; and (ii) "You should've been here to start work at 8:30." The employee chose the former meaning, either deliberately or out of ignorance. Also, the question asked by the friend of the speaker in the second example could be interpreted in two ways: (i) "Which of Shakespeare's plays are you referring to?"; and (b)"Which Shakespeare are you referring to?" The speaker chose the second interpretation by saying "William." The response here is due to ignorance, for the first interpretation is the more common in this type of situation.

Apart from ambiguity, there are other ways in which English is used to create humour. Some of these ways are: spoonerism, malapropism, tongue-twisters and editing of popular sayings. We shall discuss each of them briefly.

1.7   Spoonerism

The word "Spoonerism" derives from the name of the Rev. William Archibald Spooner (1844-1930) of the University of Oxford, who was fond of mixing up words. Spoonerisms are words or phrases in which letters or syllables get swapped. They are also known as speech errors. They occur frequently in slips of the tongue, and their effect is to create humour. The following are examples of Spooner's own spoonerisms:

Spoonerism	Target Expression
Fighting a liar	lighting a fire
Our queer old Dean	our dear old Queen
Is the bean dizzy?	Is the Dean busy?
A half-warmed fish	a half-formed wish
You've tasted two worms	you've wasted two terms

Since Spooner's time, many other people, especially comedians in Europe and the United States, have been using spoonerisms to good comic effect. Here are some examples:

Spoonerism	Target Expression
Know your blows	blow your nose
Wave the sails	save the whales
No tails	toe nails
Soul of ballad	bowl of salad
Go and shake a tower	go and take a shower
	(Web, 2009)

1.8   Malapropism

This is another device used to create humour in English. It can be described as ludicrous misuse of words, especially through confusion caused by resemblance in sound. It came from Richard Brinsley Sheridan's 1775 Restoration comedy, *The Rivals,* in which was a character called Mrs Malaprop, a self-educated woman who was always substituting a word that sounded like the one she actually intended to use. This usually resulted in humour.

The following are some of Mrs. Malaprop's malapropisms:

(a) "…promise to forget this fellow – to illiterate [for "obliterate"] him, I say, quite from your memory."

(b) "He is the very pine-apple [for "pinnacle"] of politeness."

(c) "…she's as headstrong as an allegory [for "alligator"] on the banks of Nile."

(d) "…behold, this very day, I have interceded [for intercepted"] another letter from the fellow."

(e) "Sure, if I reprehend [for "apprehend"] any thing in this world it is the use of my oracular [for "vernacular"] tongue, and a nice derangement [for "arrangement"] of epitaphs" [for "epithets"].

Since Mrs. Malaprop's use of malapropisms, comedians and other people in Britain and the United States have been using malapropisms to jocular effect.

The immediate past President of the United States, George W. Bush, was noted for his malapropisms while in office. Below are some examples:

(a) "And the other lesson is that there are people who can't stand what America stands for, and desire to conflict [for "inflict"] harm on the American people."
(In Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, on July 28, 2003, Web).

(b) "I want to remind you all that in order to fight and win the war, it requires an expenditure of money that is commiserate [for "commensurate"] with keeping a promise to our troops to make sure that they are well-paid, well-trained, well-equipped."
(In Washington, D.C. on December 15, 2003, Web).

(c) "I was not pleased that Hamas has refused to announce [for "renounce"] its desire to destroy Israel."
(In Washington, D.C. on May 4, 2006, Web).

(d) "Anyone engaging in illegal financial transactions will be caught and persecuted [for "prosecuted"].
                    (In Washington, D.C. on September 19,

2008, Web).

(e) "I'm going to put people in my place, so when the history of this administration is written at least there's an authoritarian [for "authoritative"] voice saying exactly what happened." (Wikipedia) (Announcing he will write a book about "the 12 toughest decisions "he had to make, as reported by the Associated Press, Calgary, Canada, on March 17, 2009, Web).

These examples constitute a linguistic feature of Mr. Bush's distinctive idiolect while he was the President of the United States, an idiolect that has come to be variously described as Bushism, Bushspeak and the President's English. Apart from malapropism, other characteristics of Bushism are: spoonerism, neologism or the coining of new words – for example, "misunderestimated" (as in "They misundersetimated me."); confusion in the use of phrases and sentences, as in "There's an old saying in Tennessee – I know it's in Texas, probably in Tennessee – that says, fool me once, shame on – shame on you. Fool me – you can't get fooled again,"; and outright embarrassing grammatical infelicities – for example, "Rarely is the questioned asked: Is our children learning?" (see Wikipedia).

1.9   Tongue-Twisters

As mentioned above, tongue-twisters are also used to create humour in English. Three examples will suffice here.

(a) Chester Cheetah chews a chunk of cheep cheddar cheese.
(b) Six sick hicks nick six slick bricks with picks and sticks.
(c) Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers. A peck of pickled peppers Peter Piper picked. If Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers, where's the pack of pickled peppers Peter Piper picked? (Web).

Tongue-twisters are one of the few types of wordplay that exist not only in English but in every language. The aim in engaging in this

type of wordplay is to say the words as quickly as possible without making any mistakes. This often results in great fun.

1.10   Editing of Popular Sayings or Statements

The last type of humour-creating device in English to be examined in this paper is the practice of editing a well-known statement or saying so that there is a surprising twist to it. For example:

(a) "To err is human; to blame it on the other party is politics." (Phillips, 1994:111)

(b) "You can fool some of the people all of the time. You can fool all of the people some of the time. But you can't fool all of the people all of the time… that's what White House secretaries are there for." (*op.cit., p.137*)

(c) "You can lead a man to [the American] Congress, but you can't make him think." (Phillips, 1994:138).

(d) "Give a man a fish, and he will eat for a day. Teach a man to fish, and he will sit in a boat and drink beer all day." (*Reader's Digest*, October 2008, p.56).

(e) "Before you criticize someone, walk a mile in his shoes. That way, you're a mile away – and you have the shoes." (*Ibid.*)

In each of these examples, there is a humorous twist to a familiar statement or saying. In example (a), "to forgive is divine" has been replaced with "to blame it on the other party is politics." In the second example, an addition has been made to a well-known statement by a one-time President of the United States, John F. Kennedy, again to create the effect of humour. In example (c), we have a variation of the saying, "You can lead a horse to the river, but you cannot force it to drink. The effect is one of satire: members of Congress cannot think, the implication being that they are incapable of directing the affairs of the country. The variations in the third and fourth examples also bring about a humorous effect in each sentence.

1.11   Non-literary Uses of English and the Issue of Clichés

One argument that is usually employed by scholars against everyday language is that the figures of speech used in it are outworn and, therefore, stale and as a result not effective in conveying fresh images. In other words, they have become clichés. According to Leech (1969:147),

> *……Emerson draws our attention to the fact that the expressive power of everyday language largely resides in countless 'dead' metaphors, which have become institutionalized in the multiple meanings of the dictionary. Countless other metaphors are in various stages of 'moribundity', so that it would be a misrepresentation to treat them either as completely commonplace or as utterly unorthodox. …the literary metaphor* par excellence *is an image freshly created in the imagination of the poet,…*

In this statement, Leech is comparing non-literary uses of English with the use of language in literature. Everyday language is characterized by "dead" metaphors and "other metaphors which "are in various stages of 'moribundity'", that is, on their way to the grave, as it were, while the metaphors used in literature evoke fresh images. There are some comments that need to be made here. First, the comparison being made between non-literary and literary language is unfair. A language or a variety of language is adequate for the purpose that it is being used. Thus, the metaphors, and other figures of speech used in non-literary, everyday language serve the purpose for which they are used: communication. Second, it is clear from this paper that non-literary language is quite rich and pleasing to those who use it. Third, surprising stylistic effects are brought about in non-literary language as much as they are in literary language. The following example makes the point succinctly:

A woman is like a tea bag. You never know how strong she is until

she is in hot water.

*(*Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton, United States` Secretary of State, in *The Guardian, Wednesday, May 14, 2009, p.11)*.

The image created by the simile, "A woman is like a tea bag" and by the pun on being in hot water is quite fresh and vivid. A tea bag is in hot water literally while a woman (or even a man for that matter) is in hot water in a figurative sense. There are many similar examples to be found in non-literary language.

Fourth, as pointed out earlier in this paper, no language is superior to another language; neither is a dialect or variety superior to another dialect. Even the so-called "standard" language is just a variety of language, and it is not superior to other varieties (see Akmajian, *et al*, 2004: 283-284). So the impression being created by Leech and other scholars like him that literary language is superior to non-literary language, is unacceptable. After all, it has been shown that a good number of metaphors found in literary language tend to be idiosyncratic and, therefore, unclear. (See Simpson: 2004: 41-43).

1.12   Figurative Language and the Nigerian Second Language Situation

The English spoken in Nigeria has come to be described as Nigerian English. This type of English is one of the national varieties of English that have developed in the English-speaking world. As a result, we no longer talk of English in the singular form; rather we now talk of Englishes, World Englishes or English Languages, as each of these national varieties has distinctive linguistic characteristics that make it stand out as unique. Some other national varieties of English are: British English, American English, Canadian English, Australian English, Indian English, Ghanaian English and South African English. Each of these national varieties also has sub-varieties.

One of the linguistic features of Nigerian English is the use of figurative language. As shown above, examples of figurative language found in other national varieties of English, notably British and American English, are also found in Nigerian English, but there are also those that are peculiarly Nigerian. The following are instances of this phenomenon:

(a)   Choke up

This is a coinage usually found in the passive. It means "(to) be occupied" and is typically used by secondary school students and undergraduates. For instance, "I am so choked up with assignments that I must start waking by 3 a.m." (Jowitt, 1991:167)

(b)   Crack one`s brain

The Standard English equivalent of this appears to be "rack one`s brain (s)" and it means "make great mental effort", - for example, "I was cracking my brain trying to get at what that question meant" (Jowitt, *op cit*., p 173)

(c)   Ease oneself

This expression is commonly used as a euphemism for "go to the toilet."

(d)   "More grease to your elbows"

In British English, the compound "elbow-grease" is used as a jocular expression to refer to the sheer physical labour required in polishing, rubbing, and so on. In Nigerian English, "elbow-grease" has become "More grease to your elbows" and it is used to encourage someone to work or struggle harder, usually in a humorous way. (Jowitt, *op*.*cit*., p.187)

(e)   Scale through

This is the Nigerian English equivalent of British English "sail through", which means "move easily through". "Scale through" seems to be the result of confusing "scale", which means "climb" and "sail through". (*op*.*cit*., p.234)

(f)   "Be silly"

The utterance, "Don't be silly" is usually regarded as abuse by a good number of Nigerian speakers of English. So, it is not surprising to hear "Be silly" as a response to this friendly command.

(g)"Can I help you?"

A girl was once spoken to in this way by a receptionist, in my presence. She responded by saying, "No, you cannot help me. I know where I am going". She failed to realize that "Can I help you?" is actually the expression of a desire to be of some assistance, and not a question.

(h)My Friend

This collocation has become idiomatic in Nigerian English. It does not refer to one`s actual friend; rather, it is used to refer to anybody in sight. Thus, one can say to a complete stranger, "My friend, how do I get to Covenant University?" There is the story of two young men arguing over a matter. At one point during the argument, one of them said, "Look here, my friend," and the other replied, "I am not your friend my friend".

(i) "You cannot eat your cake and have it".

In British English, this idiom is rendered this way: "You cannot have your cake and eat it". And in American English, we have "You cannot have your cake and eat it, too". "You cannot eat your cake and have it" must have sounded more logical to Nigerian users of English.

(j)Under lock

The expression "under lock and key" is sometimes shortened to "under lock" in Nigerian English, as the following example shows:
A statement by the Commissioner of Information,…, said Governor Olusegun Mimiko took the decision to pay the money owed the

employees since 2005 "in order to put an end to the action that had put the institution under lock to the detriment of the students and the state". (The Guardian, Thursday, August 20, 20009, p.7)

(K)   In the Pipeline

This is an example of figurative language that is fast becoming established in Nigeria. There is the joke that every time people asked for something from Government, such as electricity and water supply, salary increase, better conditions of living, resource control, etc. the Government usually responded with "It's in the pipeline". When there was nothing forthcoming, some people became impatient and started blowing up pipelines to see what the Government could have put inside.

Nigerian English also manifests examples of malapropism:
(a)   "Firm reinstates [for "restates"] commitment to partner with oil companies on tax"
(*The Guardian*, Wed., July 15, 2009, p.45)
(b)   "They [supporters of Bode George] were also told that the Christian (sic) and Muslims among them would be taken on pilgrimage to Jerusalem and Mecca respectfully [for "respectively"]."   (*Saturday Punch*, Oct. 31, 2009, p. 8)
Now, the use of English in Nigeria raises a very interesting issue concerning clichés. As we saw earlier in this paper, there are metaphors and other figures of speech that are considered over-used and outworn. But many of these so-called clichés are still fresh in the Nigerian second language situation, as they are hardly used. In fact, many Nigerian users of English do not know those expressions. Here are some examples:

Expression   *Meaning (as found in Oxford Learner's
                  ***Dictionary of Current English*)**
a straw in the wind   a small sign of what

might happen in the future

Bang/knock your/their heads together:	to force people to stop arguing and behave in a sensible way
be the cat`s whiskers/pyjamas	to be the best thing, person, idea, etc.: he thinks he's the cat's whiskers (=he has a high opinion of himself)
break a leg! (spoken)	used to wish somebody good luck
cost/pay an arm and a leg	to cost/pay a lot of money
down in the mouth	unhappy and depressed
get somebody`s goat	to annoy somebody very much
Get your head down get my head down for an hour	1. To sleep: I managed to 2. To keep your head down
to give somebody his/her head what he/she likes without trying to stop him/her	to allow somebody to do
my eye! (BrE spoken) not believe somebody/something	used to show that you do

Since these expressions are hardly used in Nigeria, can they be described as clichés as far as the Nigerian second language situation is concerned? This is an issue that needs to be examined further.

1.13   Recommendations

Before I conclude, I have the following recommendations to make

1.   More work needs to be done on the identification, categorization and description of the essential linguistic characteristics of the language of politics in Nigeria so that we can

have a comprehensive view of this variety of English.

2. Work being done on the codification and description of the linguistic features of Nigerian English should also focus on the manifestation of examples of ambiguity and malapropism in the variety. Work done so far on Nigerian English has tended to ignore this aspect.

3. Greater attention needs to be paid to the teaching of informal uses of English in the English language classroom. It has been observed that Nigerian users of English, no matter their level of education, tend to speak the language like a textbook, in the sense that they use formal English in both formal and informal situations. This makes the use of English in Nigeria unnecessarily stuffy: and it therefore amounts to an inability to use the language appropriately.

4. The issue of a "Standard Nigerian English" needs to be attended to with vigour so that we can know those linguistic forms that constitute acceptable usage and those that do not. This observation has pedagogical implications for, at the moment, there is a lot of confusion in the English Language classroom, as teachers of English do not always know what to accept from their students. So, we need to ask the question, "Does this situation have something to do with the poor performance of secondary school students in examinations conducted by the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) and the National Examinations Commission (NECO)? We need to find out.

1.14 Conclusion

In this paper, I have highlighted some aspects of the use of figurative language in non-literary situations, namely, the relationship between literal and figurative language, the issue of "ordinary" language, the different types of figurative language used in various areas of human endeavour, the use of ambiguity, the use of English to create

humour, and figurative language and Nigerian English. It can also be seen from this paper that non-literal uses of English in non-literary situations are quite complex, interesting and fulfilling, in that they add colour to interpersonal communication.

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