

Figurative Language: “Seasons” Metaphors

Introduction to the On-Demand Lecture



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Figurative Language: “Seasons” Metaphors

Outline of the On-Demand Lecture

1. Review of my on-demand lecture on-demand lecture about figurative language
2. Role of figures of speech in everyday life: metonymy and metaphor
3. The “spring” metaphor as applied to Eastern Europe
4. Further analysis of the metaphor: “garbage” as an outcome
5. The metaphorical nature of our everyday activities



Figurative Language: “Seasons” Metaphors

Review: Figures of Speech



- >> Are familiar and easily recognized.
- >> Evoke the recognition of equivalences to which we are committed, e.g., “the war on terror,” or
- >> Suggest new more challenging equivalences, e.g., the “Axis of Evil.”



Figurative Language: “Seasons” Metaphors

Jacques Derrida’s
Photo is here.

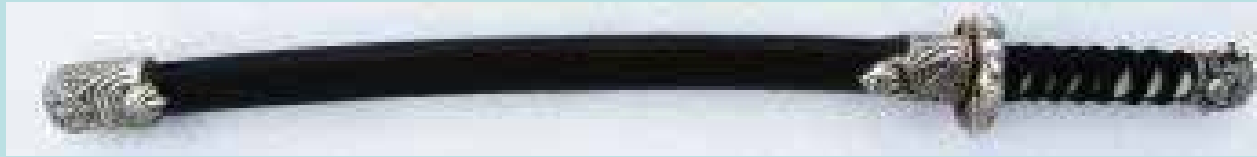
Derrida’s analysis shows us that inherent in figures of speech are philosophical commitments and theories of value

- >> These figures of speech are venerable and thus familiar.
- >> They do their *partisan work* under the guise of “neutrality.”
- >> They usually pass for the literal



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Figures of Speech: **Metonymy**



An attribute or feature is used to name or designate something else.

Example: “The pen is mightier than the sword.”



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Figures of Speech: **Metonymy (continued)**

>>Metonymy “emphasizes the whole, the entire domain shared by two terms, and its success as a trope depends upon how fully this idea of wholeness can be conveyed.”[\[1\]](#)

>>Metonymy “replaces or juxtaposes contiguous terms that occupy a distinct and separate place with what is considered a single semantic or perceptual domain.”

e.g., Homer will often be used instead of the Iliad: “you will read in Homer.”[\[1\]](#)



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Figures of Speech: **Metaphor**

Metaphor “states an equivalence between terms taken from separate semantic domains,”

e.g., “George the Lion,” when applied to a football player.





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Uses of Metaphor

>> Metaphor may be used as a means to convince: This is a “rhetorical” use of this trope.

>> Metaphor may also be used to produce new knowledge and improve one’s understanding of a situation: This is a “cognitive” use of this figure of speech.

>> This use of metaphor is especially productive in situations of great uncertainty, such as politics, because it produces a certain degree of understanding [2]



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Figures of Speech: **Metaphor (continued)**

>> Like metonyms, metaphors “structure not just our language but also our **thoughts, attitudes, and actions**” [3]

>> Metaphor is the first step in the construction of new understandings of the world.

>> Such restructuring often begins with a vague idea, such as an “axis,” that has long been neglected.



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Figures of Speech: **Metaphor (continued)**

>> This use of metaphor “creates new cognitive structures to interpret or re-interpret different aspects of social reality.”

>> The new cognitive structures change the entire picture of a situation, especially an uncertain one.

>> This, in turn, allows for “the development of policies which previously hardly could have been thinkable.”

[4]



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The “Spring” Metaphor in Politics

>> Since the 1950’s different seasons metaphors have been used to explain political changes in Eastern Europe.

>> For example, “thaw” and “spring” have been used, e.g., Prague “spring”





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The “Spring” Metaphor in Politics (continued)

>>The meaning of this metaphors can be described by decomposing the semantic elements and comparing the different domains, e.g., the weather and the political situation.

>>Lakoff and Johnson used these technique in their book, *Metaphors We Live By* [5]:

IDEAS ARE FOOD

LOVE IS WAR

LIFE IS A CONTAINER

This discussion is based on V. M. Sergeev, “Metaphor as an Instrument of Ontological Changes: ‘Seasons’ and ‘Weather’ in International Discourses,” paper prepared for presentation at the Annual International Studies Association Convention, 2005.



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The “Spring” Metaphor in Politics (continued)

The Thaw in Russia is not a spring, not even the beginning of a spring.

A layer of snow still covers the ground

The sunlight makes the layer thin, but plants can not grow.



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The “Spring” Metaphor in Politics (continued)

>> Spring comes and liberates the natural forces of growth
These forces produce food and the possibility of human
survival

>> Note the hidden meaning here: Spring comes, not
because of human will, but because the appropriate time
has arrived.

>> Natural biological forces, which push up the plants, are
not the result of human activity.

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The “Spring” Metaphor in Politics (continued)

- >> Spring and the thaw are not a product of conscious human activity.
- >> People simply use the products of the processes initiated by nature forces.
- >> This suggests the hidden assumption of **the inability of people to govern political processes.**

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The “Spring” Metaphor in Politics (continued)

In the case of Czechoslovakia in 1968, we can identify four roles:

1. The frost role belongs to the Soviet Union
2. The sunlight and warmth role belongs to the West
3. The “growth of plants” is a growth of democratic institutions
4. The people role is played by the people of the country

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The “Spring” Metaphor in Politics (continued)

>> There is an exciting aspect of the “spring” metaphor that is known to East Europeans.

>> The beginning of the spring is the worst season.

>> All garbage, which has been hidden by the snow, comes to the surface.



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The “Spring” Metaphor in Politics (continued)

>>Projecting this insight
on to political activity:

>>The first results of
spring are not flowers
but old garbage that
must be removed.



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The “Spring” Metaphor in Politics (continued)

Thus the criminal spin off of political change predicted by the metaphor is the exposure and removal of criminal forces (“garbage”)

This example shows the power of metaphorical thinking.



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Structural Thinking

>>The analysis of “seasons” metaphors also reveals a view of politics that differs from thinking in the Western Europe and the USA

>>In the West, people tend to have a structural view: relations between states of affairs are described in terms of causal linkages—Event A causes Event B

>>Change is seen as a result of the concrete actions of persons, actors who have a direct impact on events.



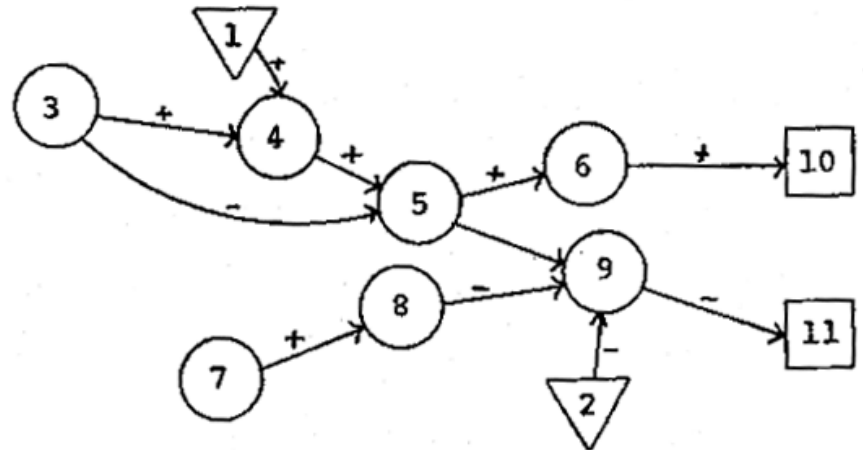
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Structural Thinking

>> Actors are in the middle of a situation.

>> Actors are responsible for change.

>> To support this type of representation, numerous metaphors of causation are used.





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Holistic Thinking



Victor Sergeev

- >> Victor Sergeev and I have studied thinking and reasoning in non-Western Cultures, such as the former Soviet Union, Iran, and China.
- >> When we began to study non-Western cultures with our analytical tools, we discovered something very strange.



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Holistic Thinking (continued)

>> Here is Professor Sergeev describing what he discovered, for example, when he studied the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962



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Holistic Thinking (continued)

“When we started our study of cognitive mapping, we considered it a great advantage, because it was possible to represent all sorts of political texts just in the same way. But after some reflection on the nature of these texts, I understood there is a great difference between American and Soviet texts. It’s possible to represent both types of texts using cognitive mapping, but you will find a very strange picture: Russian texts will be very simple. It would be practically impossible to follow the chains of causal relations...because all is separate.”



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Holistic Thinking (Continued)

>>After analyzing non-Western texts, we concluded that one had to take into account the ontological assumptions or “preunderstandings” that stand behind political texts.

>>For example, many Russian texts, as well as Maoist and Iranian texts, are based on “holistic” thinking.

>>In holistic thinking, a change of a political situation is seen in terms of a continuous process, without any intermediate steps.

>>Creative metaphors are widely used by the author.



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Holistic Thinking (Continued)



In this view, the main controllable variable is the intensity of the process.

Actors can intensify or inhibit the process through their actions, but their role is much less important than for structural thinking.

Here is Sergeev, again:

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“I tried to understand the semantic nature of ‘processual’ thinking. It seems to me this is a kind of deep holistic view of reality. And the processes are usually considered as a kind of entity in which you can include some actions. If you act in a certain way you can participate in the processes. And this is your involvement-- involvement in the holistic structure. That is extremely different from the point of view of rational action theory, where there is a strong distinction between [external] reality, mind, and action.”



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As a result of this research we have learned the following:

1. Cognitive structures affect our view of the world.
2. Such cognitive structures are cultural in nature.
3. Lying behind these structures is a pre-understanding about the world.
4. Preunderstandings are also cultural: In the West they are based on assumptions of causal relations which actors can manipulate to achieve desired goals.
5. Outside of the West, they are based on the assumptions of complex processes that actors cannot influence directly.



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“A pre-understanding is a kind of cognitive structure, but it is not an individual cognitive structure. It is a socially approved cognitive structure—really part of the culture. What type of ...there is a rather strict rule about what type of cognitive structure you use in certain situations. There is a kind of typology of situations—usually a certain type of cognitive structure is connected, which is a kind of ‘program’ to deal with concrete data....It is not a conscious thing but it’s a cultural pattern. So it’s very difficult for people who are in certain situations to change, consciously, the type of pre-understanding. Usually, he is accustomed to think in this situation in terms, in certain ways....This is a kind of subculture—it may be a groups subculture or a national subculture. In different cases it seems to be very different.”



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Summary of the Lecture

1. We reviewed the previous lecture on figurative language.
2. We discovered from Derrida that inherent in figurative language are philosophical commitments and theories of value.
3. We defined metonymy and compared it to metaphor.



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Summary of the Lecture (Continued)

4. We described uses of metaphor—both rhetorical and productive.
5. We talked about metaphor as the first step in the construction of new understandings of the world.
6. We explored the “spring” metaphor and its use to describe political developments in Eastern Europe.



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Summary of the Lecture (Continued)

7. We decomposed the semantic elements of the “spring” metaphor.
8. We found the hidden assumption in this metaphor: the inability of people to govern political processes.
9. We discovered a creative idea in this metaphor: in the spring the “garbage” comes to the surface and has to be cleared away.



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Summary of the Lecture (Continued)

10. We found that this metaphor has to be understood as an example of holistic, rather than structural thinking, which predominates in the West.
11. In the case of holistic thinking, actors can do little to change the situation—they can only try to intensify or slow the underlying process.



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Conclusion

Metaphors are used commonly in everyday life, but they also help us to understand political life.

However, the analysis of political metaphor sometimes requires us to go beyond the metaphor to examine the ontological “pre-understandings” upon which they rest.