

SEMANTIC DEROGATION IN ANIMAL METAPHORS: A CASE STUDY OF AESOP'S FABLES

Moushaffa Shahid, Maimoona Abdulaziz, Saira Waseem, Samana Batool

Abstract

Stories play a significant role in schema development as they can shape the reader's view. Children's fiction stories, in particular, have a significant impact on readers' inner schemas. This research has been carried out using a mixed-methods approach. This research has four objectives. Firstly, to explore Aesop's fables for animal metaphors Secondly, to highlight the use of semantic derogation in Aesop's fables Thirdly, to compare the readers' perceptions of the animal metaphors used in Aesop's fables. The samples have been taken from private schools, specifically from students at the primary level. How far does the animals' representation in Aesop's fables impact the reader's schema? The majority of literature readers have an impact on their schemas of animal representation in Aesop's fables, according to this study. It is possible that media and animated cartoons in which animal characteristics have been used still carry the derogatory perception of the animals as depicted in fables. However, in the other cases where the learner's perception of these animals differs from the fables, Aesop has no influence. There are some other influences such as cultural influence, media, animated cartoons, social media, domestic reasons, and other environmental factors involved.

Keywords: Semantic; semantic derogation; Aesop's fables; animal metaphors; qualitative analysis; language attributes

Introduction

Metaphors play a crucial role in our everyday language, providing insight into our thoughts, emotions, and beliefs. In particular, animal metaphors have been extensively used in literature, with Aesop's fables serving as a classic example. In this research, we have done a case study of Aesop's fables, which will examine the use of animal metaphors in Aesop's fables and explore the phenomenon of semantic derogation in these metaphors. "Semantics is the study of the relationships between forms and entities in the world; that is how words are literally connected to things" (Yule, 1996, p.4). "Semantic derogation" refers to the semantic shift that results in a word acquiring more negative associations or meaning. And case studies have been used for this research because they can establish cause and effect; indeed, one of their strengths is that they observe effects in real contexts, recognising that context is a powerful determinant of both causes and effects.

Case studies strive to portray "what it is like" to be in a particular situation, to catch the close-up reality and "thick description" of participants' lived experiences of, thoughts about, and feelings for a situation. They involve looking at a case or phenomenon in its real-life context.

Metaphors in fables have some attribute meaning that connects to our childhood schemas, which can be negative or positive. These schemas have been changed over time. But the stories that have been learned have had a great impact on schema development. As in fables, many animals are presented with derogatory characteristics, and it is noticed that semantic derogation is a huge

concern of linguists. “When a word’s meaning shifts and acquires more negative connotations, it can be referred to as semantic derogation” (Meyerhoff, 2006, p.57).

The stories or fables that use animal metaphors and how they are presented have a big impact on the readers. “Stories are the secret reservoir of values: change the stories that individuals or nations live by, and you change the individuals and nations themselves” (Okri, 1996, p. 21). “Stories bear tremendous creative power” (Eisenstein, 2011, p.1). Through them we coordinate human activity, focus attention and intention, define roles, and identify what is important and even what is real. According to Eisenstein (2011), it is critical to understand that these stories have an impact on the readers' actions in the world. The goal of this study is to analyse texts to uncover the underlying perception of animals in these stories and then carefully consider how they encourage us to act. If they encourage respect and care for the animals in society, then they need to be promoted, and if they encourage a negative perspective of animals, then they need to be resisted.

“Stories are cognitive structures in the minds of individuals that influence how they perceive the world.” “Stories we live by are stories in the minds of multiple individuals across a culture.” (Stribbe, 2015, p. 6)

Larson (2011: 75) describes how this metaphor not only echoed the competitive view of human nature previously espoused by economists such as Adam Smith, but gave it a new legitimacy:

"Once the metaphor was naturalised in this way, people could more easily defend it in the cultural realm: not only is competition found in societies, but we should actively promote it because it is the way the world works—it is natural" (Stibbe, 2015, p. 68). A metaphor, to put it simply, is a story that describes something as if it were something else. Metaphors "imply an identity between otherwise different things" (Martin, 2014, p. 78) or "work by applying one taken-for-granted field of knowledge and applying it to another" (Chilton & Schäffner, 2011, p. 320). However, they form such an important part of cognition and understanding of the world that authors such as Nerlich and Jaspal (2012, p. 143) claim that choosing the wrong metaphor "may arguably contribute to the extermination of our species."

Different research has been carried out in different areas of semantics. Such research has been done by Khan, L. A., Khan, Q., Ali, A., & Suleman, N. (2021) on “A Linguistic and Cultural Analysis of Animal Metaphors in Punjabi Proverbs” by using Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), which deals with the metaphorical nature of concepts. One of the major aims of this research is to represent cultural schemas regarding human traits and actions through the use of animal metaphors in Punjabi proverbs. That research found that animal metaphors had been predominantly used to denote face-threatening human attributes and actions. Shepherd (1978) contends that “symbolic images of animals enable humans to objectify qualities and traits” (p. 247).

Another study on semantic derogation in animal metaphors was conducted by using “a cognitive contrastive analysis of two males and females in English and Spanish” (Fontecha, A. F., & Catalá'n*, R. M, 2013) They use the Theory of Great Chain Metaphor by Lakoff and Turner

(1989). According to Lakoff and Turner (1989), the mechanism upon which the Animal Metaphor is based is the Great Chain Metaphor; this is understood as a kind of cultural model that locates the different forms of being (humans, animals, plants, complex objects, and natural physical things) in a hierarchy built upon the attributes and behaviours of each form. The term "metaphor" can be defined as understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in another. The purpose of that study was to report a contrastive cognitive analysis applied to two paired animal terms in English and Spanish. That research found that the words in these animal pairs are indeed metaphorically applied to people in both English and Spanish, though there are subtle but noticeable differences between the two languages; second, some kind of semantic derogation appears in both languages; overall, the main metaphorical meanings of the female terms connote worse qualities than those connoted by the metaphors of the male terms. These studies also highlight that there are differences in the degree and kind of semantic derogation found in the two languages.

Research has been done on animal metaphors and semantic derogation by Serbian university students to explore whether women think differently from men and what animal names are used for women as positive or negative. Moreover, animal imagery is used in many languages as one of the tools for constructing social identity and as "one of the main mechanisms that contribute to the diffusion and ingraining of folk beliefs" (Rodrguez 2009, p. 78). This author (2009, p. 94) also claims that:

"Animal metaphors not only have a cognitive basis, but are also culturally motivated, that is, they reflect the attitudes and beliefs held by a particular community towards certain animal species, and, therefore, may vary from culture to culture, in time and space."

The results of the research show that men and women use the same animal metaphors for the purpose of derogation. Another piece of research was done in 2014 that focused specifically on the use of cat metaphors in Malay and English proverbs. Deignan (2005) pointed out that in English, cat was used negatively to connote greed, in particular in the context of criticism of business activities. That study also aimed to examine the similarities and differences in the meanings associated with the cat metaphors in both Malay and English proverbs. The findings illustrate that the use of cats and other animals in the source domain of specific proverbs conveys meanings that are related to the hierarchical order of the respective animals within the Great Chain.

Another study looked at conceptual metaphors as a model for generating literary discourse, with the goal of demonstrating the generative power of the conceptual metaphor "A man is an animal or beast" in literary discourse. The corpus of examples for the analysis excerpted from Bulgakov's literary works illustrates the modelling potential of the conceptual metaphor. In that research, it is concluded that some of the established mappings of the "animal/beast" metaphor may be evaluated relative to the behaviour and social position of people, as well as the mirror image of the dualistic world shared by animals and men. One of the previous research projects focused on the use of animal metaphors, which put forth the mental images that the students have about the concept of the "Adventure of Democracy" unit, which is a part of the social sciences

lesson for the 6th grade. In the frame, metaphors are seen as constructions that shape what people think about the world and reality. The metaphors enable us to configure in a more comprehensive and concrete way the ambiguous concepts in our daily lives, and during this process, they play the role of a strong mental model (Orücü, 2012).

Purpose

The purpose of the study is to qualitatively analyse Aesop's Fables in terms of animal metaphors. The study will highlight animal metaphors that associate any kind of derogatory characteristics with these stories. These characteristics are used in relation to societal and cultural perceptions.

Problematic Statement

This research focuses on the problems with how animals' characteristics are being presented in Aesop's fables. It also deals with the impacts on children's schemas that are developing through their perception of these animals' metaphors.

Objectives

The objectives of this research are:

- To explore Aesop's fables for animals' metaphors
- To highlight Semantic Derogation in Aesop's fables
- To compare readers perception of animal's metaphors with those of Aesop's fables
- To investigate readers perception of animal metaphors used in Aesop's fables

Research Question's

Q 1. What kind of animal metaphors are used in Aesop's fables?

Q 2. Which animals have been presented with derogatory characteristics in Aesop's fables?

Q 3. What are the derogatory associative meanings are presented in Aesop's fables?

Q 4. How far does the animals representation in Aesop's fables impact on reader's schema of these animals?

Limitations

This research is performed using a mixed method and only deals with the age group of children, not adults. This research is also limited to children's literature, specifically Aesop's fables, and not adult literature.

Delimitations

Although more research has been done in this area, due to limited time, this research only focuses on the semantic derogation in Aesop's fables and its impact on the developing schemas of children through these animal metaphors.

Significance

This study focuses on the animate rather than the inanimate. This research is good for the writers to see how they should change the prototype of Animals. This research also highlights that writers should bring about change in Aesop's fables in order to change the perception of animals through these derogatory characteristics. This research is also beneficial to parents, who can gain a better understanding of their children's inner schemas. This research is also beneficial for the teachers because they can more easily understand the animal's characteristics in Aesop's fables than in any other genre of literature, such as novels, short stories, poetry, etc. This research is also important for the movie writers, because they should not associate derogatory characteristics with animals because the animated movies in which animal characters are portrayed also play a role in developing the inside schemas of these animals.

Research Framework

The type of this research is exploratory, and the purpose of this research is to find out the animal metaphors in Aesop's fables and the perspectives of literature readers in the English language. This research also highlights how these animals are presented in derogatory ways. What are the impacts of these characters on the readers' internal schemas? To explore these impacts, we have collected data using a closed-ended questionnaire on 30 children in primary school who have read these fables in English or the translated form of these fables. After taking the responses, we have done the qualitative analysis, and on the basis of the results, we will quantify the responses taken from the readers.

Research Type

This study will look into the reader's perception of animal metaphors and the Aesop's fables that highlight semantic derogation. To make this research rich, we will quantitatively analyse their responses from the perspective of the animal metaphors used in Aesop's fables.

Population and Sampling

The type of sampling used for this research is random sampling. The samples we have taken are from the population group of learners, specifically the learners of Aesop's fables.

Sample Type

The sample type of this research is the responses taken from the structured and closed-ended questionnaire for English-language fiction readers. These responses will depict the prototypes of the animals in their minds, which have been developed through the reading of translated versions of Aesop's fables.

Sample Technique

This research is based on a random type of sampling. This type of sampling has been used because it is easy to conduct, and in this way, there is a high probability of achieving the true representatives of this research. All members of the population group have independently given their responses about the animal metaphors, and the results are also not biased.

Sampling Criteria

The samples for this study were collected from primary school students and learners aged 4 to 12 years old. The sample selection for this research only deals with the text in English.

Sample Size

The precise number of participants from whom a questionnaire was collected is 30. The sample size used in this research is considered a standard size for achieving pure results. That's why this sample size is considered to be representative enough.

Tool(s) for data collection

The tool used for this research is a closed-ended questionnaire in which the questions are structured and the responses will be determined. Closed-ended questionnaires are used because, according to Cohen (2007) they are one of the most reliable ways to conduct research. As it is stated in his book:

Structured, closed questions are useful in that they can generate frequencies of response amenable to statistical treatment and analysis. They also enable comparisons to be made across groups in the sample (Oppenheim, 1992, p. 115). They are quicker to code up and analyse than word-based data (Bailey, 1994, p. 118), and, often, they are directly to the point and deliberately more focused than open-ended questions.

In general, closed questions are quick to complete and straightforward to code and do not discriminate unduly on the basis of how articulate the respondents are (Wilson & McLean, 1994, p. 21).

Tool(s) for data analysis

This research will qualitatively analyse the use of animal metaphors in Aesop's fables and how they are playing a role in developing the schemas of these animals in the reader's mind. Qualitative data analysis is used as a tool because it is often more flexible than quantitative methods, allowing for the examination of a wide range of variables and the perspectives of different readers.

Table.

Question number	Questions	Options	Number of responses out of 30
1-	What comes in your mind when you hear word lion?	Dangerous	26
		Bossy	0
		Brave	0
2-	What comes in your mind when you hear word monkey?	Funny	30
		Foolish	0
		Cute	0

3-	What comes in your mind you hear word Snake?	Evil	1
		Dangerous	28
		Beautiful and shiny	1
4-	What comes in your mind you hear word Donkey?	Stupidity	11
		Laziness	14
		Innocence	4
5-	What comes in your mind you hear word Fox?	Clever	28
		Helpful	1
		Pride	1
6-	What comes in your mind you hear word Dog?	Loyal	0
		Friendly	23
		Greedy	7
7-	What comes in your mind you hear word Tortoise?	Slow	28
		Hardworking	2
		Delicate	0
8-	What comes in your mind you hear word Mouse?	Small	22
		Cute	3
		Ugly	5
9-	What comes in your mind you hear word crow?	Intelligent	18
		Clever	10
		Annoying	2
10-	What comes in your mind you hear word deer?	Beautiful	29
		Thin	1
		Stupidity	0
11-	'Fearful'	Lion	30
		Fox	0
		Monkey	0
12-	'Funny'	Deer	1
		Donkey	2
		Monkey	27
13-	'Smart'	Crow	16
		Mouse	7
		Snake	7
14-	'Dangerous'	Scorpion	28
		Tortoise	1
		Dog	1
15-	'Greed'	Fox	16
		Dog	14
		Deer	0

16-	Evil	Snake	19
		Mouse	5
		Scorpion	6
17-	'Beautiful'	Fox	1
		Deer	25
		Lion	4

Description

Generally, in this analysis, it can be observed that, for each question, the maximum number of students gave the same response and fewer responses for other options. However, in questions numbers 4, 13, and 15, the distribution of responses is different because each learner has their own influences from their environment and schemas developed through the learning of Aesop's fables.

Discussion

Overall, this research has been qualitatively analysed and compared between the primary level learners' perception of animal metaphors and the animal portrayals in Aesop's fables. This study was conducted specifically on 7–12-year-old students because these fables have a greater impact on their developing schemas than on those of adults. As in Aesop's fables like "The fox and the crow" and "The ash, the fox, and the lion," the fox has been depicted as a cunning and clever animal. This representation of the fox has a strong impact on the children's schemas. For example, in questions 5 and 15, more than 50% of the students choose the option "clever" rather than other options. It means that Aesop's fables do have an impact on the learner's perception. Again, in Aesop's fables, the dog is represented as a loyal animal and also greedy in one of the famous stories, "Greedy Dog." In question number 6, the distribution of responses has been different because 7 responses have been taken from the students. It means the perception of a dog is the same as that represented in fables, which means students have negative impacts on their schemas and start associating derogatory characteristics with the animals as well. However, 23 students select "friendly," indicating that there are some other influences; for example, dogs are treated as domestic animals, so the learners' interaction with them as pets may be friendly, and this may not be a derogatory animal for the majority of students, as it is for other respondents.

In question number 7, a strong impact of semantic derogation of animal metaphors has been noticed because 28 students chose the option of "slow," although they also had the option of "hardworking" and "delicate," but they did not choose those options. For instance, in the fable "The Hare and the Tortoise," the tortoise is represented as a slow animal. This can be one reason that fables have a strong influence on learners' perceptions and why they choose this option. Mouse is an animal that is represented as a friendly and cute small creature in question number 8.

There has been variation in responses from students; 22 students choose the option of "small" because of their own observation of mice in their environment and because mice are also represented as small creatures in Aesop's fables. The mouse is depicted as a tiny creature, as in "The Mouse and the Lion," so that the lion can lay his paw on him and kill him. It means that environmental factors and the representation of animals in fables also impact the learner's prototype.

From the perspective of Aesop's fables, the crow is represented as both an intelligent and foolish animal. For example, in "Thirsty Crow," the crow has been represented as a clever animal, but in "The Fox and the Crow," it has been represented as a foolish animal. But the learners have their own perceptions, observations, and experiences. It has been analysed that in question number 9, 19 students choose the option "intelligent," and in question number 13, the majority of the students choose the option "smart" for the crow, which means that they relate the animal metaphor of the crow in "thirsty crow" with the real character of an animal.

In Aesop's fables, snakes, lions, and scorpions are represented as dangerous and evil. It means students also relate these derogatory characteristics to that specific animal in real life and as practised in society as their schemas are developed according to the use of animal metaphors used in Aesop's fables. For instance, in question numbers 14 and 16, overall, most of the dangerous choose the option "scorpion" as an animal. Then, the lion is presented as a dangerous and ruling animal in fables, and it has been observed that the reader's perception of this animal is the same as in those of Aesop's fables. For example, in question number 11, all students chose the option "fearful of lions." Then in question numbers 3 and 16, "snake is the option that more than 50 percent of students have chosen. It means the characteristics that have been given to the animals in Aesop's fables are really shaping the mental images of the learners, and their perception is nearly the same as that of those fables.

In fables, deer is represented as foolish and thin, for instance, in the "foolish stage," but the students' perception of it is totally different. As in question number 10, when more than 50% of students choose the option "beautiful," it means the schemas of learners are different from the animal metaphors used in Aesop's fables. In reality, the monkey is a very intelligent and funny animal, but fables represent them as a foolish character. Through this research analysis, it has been determined that the perception of readers is totally different from what is presented in fables. For example, in question numbers 2 and 12, nearly all of the students chose the option "funny for monkey," which is a different animal metaphor used in Aesop's fables. In question number 4, the distribution of responses is different for "donkey," that is, stupid, lazy, and innocent. Overall, the distribution of responses is different in question number 4. Donkey is portrayed in fables as a stupid and innocent animal. But 11 students choose the option of being stupid, and 4 students choose the option of being innocent. It means the prototype of learners is the same as Aesop's fables. But 14 students chose the option of laziness. This perspective is different, so there are some other cultural and social influences on how these animal metaphors have been practised in the learners' environment. This analysis revealed that most of the negative connotations are associated with "dog," "donkey," "snake," "fox," and "tortoise" because these

are presented derogatorily in fables. But the other animals' perceptions are different for the readers because of other environmental factors and media.

Conclusion

It is concluded that previous research has been done on different areas of semantics, such as the use of metaphors and animal metaphors in different languages and on semantic derogation. But no work has been done on the animal metaphors used in fables and the impact of these metaphors on the perception of the reader or the development of schemas in the reader's mind. Mostly the fables that are part of children's fiction This study discovered that the animal metaphors used in Aesop's fables have a significant impact on learners' schemas and that they associate the fable characters with real-life animals. It has been observed that in some questions, students select the option that represents different characteristics as presented in Aesop's fables. It means they are out of the influence of Aesop's fables and have other influences such as cultural influence, social media, cartoons, media, animated movies, and how these animal metaphors have been practised in society. But for those results that show the same image of animals as fables It means the movie industry and social media still carry these characteristics.

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