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Jun 6th, 9:00 AM - Jun 9th, 5:00 PM

Commentary on Santibanez Yanez

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Commentary on Cristián Santibáñez: "Metaphors and Argumentation"

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In his paper "Metaphors and Argumentation," Christian Santibáñez tackles an ambitious and significant project within argumentation: tracing possible relationships between tropes and argument. This is an ambitious project because it brings together key concepts from the rhetorical and logical traditions. Of course, the Renaissance both codified the taxonomies of tropes and figures that are commonly associated with rhetoric today, and also witnessed the strict split of logic from rhetoric made infamous by Peter Ramus. Santibáñez's project would have to be ambitious because that split remains strong in most contemporary thinking about the distinctions among disciplines. Of course, this is also the reason that his project is important. Contemporary argumentation research has emphasized the crucial relationships among logic, dialectic, and rhetoric, relationships that must be re-established in the face of a balkanized contemporary landscape. Santibáñez's project contributes to larger efforts to reintegrate the rhetorical canon, understanding style of language and invention of arguments as necessary and related constituents of argumentation.

But as Santibáñez asks, how are they related? Argumentation research has answered this question in a variety of ways, but sometimes it has been by presenting style of language as a delivery mechanism for arguments, or as noise which must be shut out in order to analyze them. Santibáñez challenges this perspective by showing how metaphors could operate as substantive elements of arguments, performing the role of the Backing. Santibáñez describes this function of metaphor by leaning heavily on the discoveries of cognitive linguists, Lakoff foremost among them, who have made tropes central to their semiotic theory. In a Whorfian attitude, Lakoff argues that the forms of expression of a culture, especially those which are most codified, can provide insight into the cognitive schemas of individual members of that culture and features of the culture as a whole. Santibáñez uses this notion from Lakoff to join metaphor to Backing. He seems to argue that since Backing is a premise that holds within a given argument field, and since a conceptual metaphor is a tacit relationship between two constituents that holds within a culture, the Backing would be a promising site to investigate in any effort to locate metaphor within reasoning. This seems like a reasonable, if preliminary, analogy. Since the classic linguistic form of a metaphor makes an equivalence between two terms using a state verb (e.g. Richard is a lion.), it is tempting to map metaphor to argument premise. Leaving aside the problem that the two terms in a metaphor will be "alien"

Cramer, P.A. (2007). Commentary on Cristián Santibáñez: "Metaphors and argumentation." In H.V. Hansen, *et. al.* (Eds.), *Dissensus and the Search for Common Ground*, CD-ROM (pp. 1-3). Windsor, ON: OSSA.

rather than "proper," as Aristotle puts it in *Poetics*, the syntax of a classic metaphor does seem to make a match. And it is this syntax that helps cognitive linguists describe the thoroughgoing conceptual metaphors than interest them.

Santibáñez's examples are thought provoking. He maps the conceptual metaphor "the economy is an organism" as it operates in the comments of a news actor, as reported in a news article, and he shows how the proverb "it takes two to tango" functions in Jacobs and Jackson's scholarly argument. In the first case, he interprets the conceptual metaphor as Backing for a larger argument and in the second, he explodes the proverb into a series of distinct propositions, showing how it can be treated as a condensed argument that serves as a "parallel inferential scheme". Given his examples, I am tempted to disagree with a conclusion which limits metaphors to argument Backing. While allowing that this may explain the "economy as organism" case, I find his explication of the "takes two to tango" proverb better explains how the argument analyst might treat conceptual metaphor—as a condensed argument. Yameng Liu has made this case in an article from *Argumentation* called "Argument in a nutshell: Condensation as a transfiguring mechanism in argumentative discourse" (Liu, 2004). This conclusion would also seem more in keeping with the theories of cognitive linguists, who want to remind us that these tropes that we traditionally treat as mere style are in fact abbreviations of complex reasoning.

If metaphor is condensed argument, then argument reconstruction becomes a method for explicating conceptual metaphors, as Santibáñez illustrates in his "tango" example. The challenge for the analyst in this case is to faithfully detail the many implied premises based on sometimes very scant textual evidence. This is precisely the situation that cognitive linguistics would predict for us. Since conceptual metaphors typically function as tacit understandings, we should expect them to go unstated or to manifest themselves in text in only the briefest of tokens. This situation is an extreme variation on the implied premise problem that routine argument reconstruction confronts. This does not have to be a daunting problem, as Santibáñez's own reconstructions illustrate, but it is worth noting how important interpretation will be when treating metaphors in this way.

Using argument reconstruction to explicate metaphors seems like an attractive as a way to rehabilitate them from their reputation as mere style, but it may shift attention away from the features that make metaphors distinct forms of expression. As Santibáñez does in his "tango" example, we are led to create literal equivalents for metaphoric expressions on the way to explaining how they work as or in reasoning. And this raises a basic problem for students of metaphor, the question of equivalence. If the "it takes two to tango" proverb is a "parallel inferential scheme" that can be mapped to an equivalent that is more local to Jacobs and Jackson's argument, then we may be left to conclude that the proverb is, in fact, mere style, an ornamental redundancy. In order to avoid this conclusion, we would need some way to account for the value, argumentative or otherwise, of the proverb.   Santibáñez begins to develop this account when he compliments Jacobs and Jackson for using the proverb to create a "graphic image" which can provide "strength" to the argument.

Of course, there is disagreement about the possibility of literal equivalence to metaphor in the first place. Black's interactionist perspective presents the most famous challenge (Black, 1955). For Black, the interaction of the two terms in a metaphor

creates a unique effect that cannot be adequately explained or performed by a paraphrase. So literal equivalence is not possible, however tempting it may be. Black's perspective would warn us away from drawing any easy equations between the "tango" proverb and the "parallel inferential scheme" at work in Jacobs and Jackson's argument. While it may be parallel, it cannot be equivalent. And this is good news for our attempts to account for the value of metaphor, argumentative or otherwise. If we accept Black's argument, then metaphor cannot be a mere redundancy. But we are still left with the question about its value.

In noting that metaphor can be a way to create a "graphic image" which can provide "strength" to an argument, Santibáñez gestures toward one answer to this question. If I say, "My brother is an ox." I have done something more than simply saying, "My brother is strong." Certainly one of the things I have done is to describe my brother in quite "graphic" terms, as Santibáñez emphasizes, something that I fail to do if I rely on the second sentence. I have used a concrete term (a noun in this case) rather than an abstract term (an adjective in this case) to characterize my brother, and presumably this provides the listener with a discrete image on which to build some understanding of my brother. Of course, it may also introduce ambiguity, as the listener may presume that he resembles an ox in many ways, not just in his strength. This ambiguity is a price we may have to pay for the tangibility that we gain from the metaphor. This is the tradeoff that is often noted in discussions of popular accounts of science, where metaphors are often used to explain technical and abstract subjects to general audiences (Fahnestock, 1993). If we acknowledge that metaphors can provide a "graphic image" that may help increase audience adherence, we are still left asking how integral metaphor can be in an argument. Is the metaphor an integral component of argument (i.e. Backing) or only a persuasive delivery mechanism for argument?

Though Santibáñez does not solve this problem, he has nicely framed it and has offered thought provoking examples. In order to solve this problem, we need to find cases where metaphor is wholly essential to an argument, where a literal paraphrase is not possible or clearly less adequate than a metaphor. With these sorts of examples, we could make a case for metaphor as integral component of argument. Of course, on the other hand the case for metaphor as a persuasive delivery mechanism is well established. Treating metaphors as condensed arguments offers an interesting solution to the problem because it allows us to acknowledge the well established role of metaphors as persuasive delivery mechanisms while simultaneously revealing their argumentative substance (Liu, 2004). Rather than trying to find metaphors within arguments (i.e. as premises), this solution finds arguments within metaphors.

link to paper

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