

Robert E. Haskell

Cognitive Science and the Origin of Lexical Metaphor: A Neurofunctional Shift (NFS) Hypothesis

Abstract

A long-standing and cardinal issue in the cognitive science and humanities research literatures on lexical metaphor is whether figurative language is derived from literal language. In examining this issue, research from a broad spectrum of studies in both cognitive science and the humanities is addressed with particular attention to findings from classicist research on ancient Greek texts, on the cognitive significance of the invention of the CREEK vocalic alphabet. These findings are related to current research on brain hemispheric laterality. It will be suggested that lexical metaphor was originally not a linguistic figure-of speech derived from literal language but only later came to be so conceptualized as the consequence of a neurofunctional shift (NFS) in hemispheric laterality, a shift that was precipitated in part by the invention and adoption of the CREEK vocalic alphabet. It will be further suggested that the prevailing view of metaphor as a linguistic figure of speech is the consequence of an inappropriate cognitive turn that resulted in a superimposition or back scanning of a modern alphabetic-based epistemology on to phenomena originating in a preliterate culture.

Metaphor has long been a subject of inquiry by investigators in the humanities (Black, 1962; Richards, 1936; Ricoeur, 1975; Shibbes, 1971; Turbayne, 1963; Wheelright, 1962), in psychology (Anderson, 1964; Bornstein and Marks, 1987; Haskell, 1987; Honeck and Hoffinan, 1980; Leary 1994; MacCormac, 19 85). Pollio, Smith and Pollio, 1990; Shanon,1988), in anthropology, (Crocker and Sapir, 1977; Fernandez, 1991), in communications (Reinsch, 1971; Osborn, 1967), and in the natural sciences (Dreistadt,1968). Its systematic lexical analysis goes back at least to Aristotle's (384-322 B.C) work on rhetoric and poetics (Baldwin, 1959; Cooper, 1960). Perhaps few other concepts have been the subject of such