

WINSTON S. CHURCHILL'S USE OF METAPHORS

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In Europe Winston S. Churchill is well known and remembered as a political and moral leader. In addition to his political career, he was also a stylistician, an able writer which was duly recognized by his Nobel Prize for literature. His works are not imaginative literature but chiefly historical and publicist treatment of political events, especially his memoirs of The Second World War.

In this paper we are not researching the literary value of his works, but we focus our attention on the linguistic expression, on his style of presenting his ideas. This paper is a section of a larger linguistic study of the style of Winston S. Churchill. The description of this is, understandably, beset with many theoretical problems and pitfalls. One of them is that semantics has not been established as a system of interlocking units or categories.

Leech (1973: 153ff) warns against the subjective elements in figurative interpretation. He insists (1973: 161) that there is no clear-cut boundary between compound metaphors and dead metaphors. This theory can also be used in the analysis of a non-imaginative literature such as Churchill's prose.

Unlike the poet, the author was not free from constraints, but just the opposite. Churchill had to react to the stimuli of the outside world and its vagaries. Consequently he had to be careful in distinguishing between the real and the fictitious, relying on the real. Nevertheless, he used metaphors in several distinct ways.

In this paper we are trying to present a tidier, though not finite or exhaustive classification of metaphors according to their situations. We are fully aware of the ambiguities and indeterminacy that lurks in the domain of semantics and stylistics. Nevertheless, a stylistic achievement of W.S. Churchill is worthy of analysis, and this is probably the first attempt.

1. The category of totality is probably the most general:

If we get emergency terms it means that the Italians will have given themselves up to us, *lock, stock and barrel* (Churchill

1960: 67). — To avoid the Tax upon the press... weekly newsletters were sent through the post. In the House of Commons, the Tories *fought every inch of the way* (Churchill 1962: 38).

Such metaphors may also denote large or small quantities, e.g.,:

(Hitler) His two hundred divisions on the Eastern Front could not hope to withstand *the Russian flood* when it was again released. Churchill 1960: 477, — In 1942... nearly eight million tons of the *augmented mass* of Allied shipping had been sunk (Churchill 1960: 20).

2. Metaphor denoting critical situation represent a leading area in Churchill's denominative fields. They reflect the extralingual reality that the author experienced and had to cope with. Such situations which they express may be described as those brought to a head, as a liminal and marginal event on the brink on state of dangerous nearness which provokes an absurd solution, is often beyond the control of the speaker, or is caused by a supernatural intervention. They are often hyperbolic, i.e., exceeding in degree the normalcy, representing an outstanding achievement or a great superiority in numbers. They may mean a summit or inevitable end of action, an uncertain result, e.g., a fight or wrangle, gunfire, a cruel fate, a grip, and a limitation in space or speed.

In this area as elsewhere, nouns cooperate with verbs and other parts of speech. All we can say is that Churchill's metaphors are cryptic comparisons with anything that surrounds man, anything that is human, social and natural.

The metaphors for crisis are the most numerous that we have unearthed from the samples of Churchill's works. Again, these metaphors may be subcategorized into negative or positive according to the speaker's) writer's evaluation. The negative aspect is more alien. Let us point out that many of the metaphors Churchill used are lexicalized and thus less vivid.

The fighting at Cassino was at *its zenith* (Churchill 1960: 378). — Lord Winchelsea had overstepped *the bounds of decorum* in an attack upon the Prime Minister (Churchill 1962: 31). — The arrangement for Command also seems most satisfactory to us than the previous deadlock (Churchill 1960: 152). — (The near explosion of their shells) Nevertheless I wished to remove any idea of "Overlord". We were *in it up to the hilt* (Churchill 1960: 263). — Until this was accomplished the Eighth Army had reached *the end of the tether* (Churchill 1960: 131). — A great variety of guns and rockets mounted in naval craft would join in *a crescendo of fire* (Churchill 1960: 462). — *The pace of events* now increased (Churchill 1960: 417).

Let us remember there is a synonym, *the march* of events, listed in dictionaries.

Hitler explained that this single invention was *the ruin* of the U-boot campaign (Churchill 1960: 23). — ...a counter-attack was clearly *a prelude* to harder things to come (Churchill 1960: 378). — Never, never, never believe that any war will be smooth and easy, or that anyone who embarks on that strange voyage can measure *the tides and hurricanes* he will encounter (Churchill 1948: 229).

The negative sense of the above sentence is signalled by the negative *never*, repeated three times, while the negative evaluation by the reader is the correlative *war* and the metaphors *tides and hurricanes*. The metaphors here are probably Churchill's invention.

There are also multiple metaphors that go through a larger context, e.g.:

... a few ranging shots directed on their batteries which are aiming at you. If they make no reply, after an appropriate interval *let them have a stiffer dose*, and at the same time tell them the weight of fire you are ready to direct if they persist (Churchill 1960: 425).

The correlated 'shots' is being varied by the concatenated 'a stiffer dose' and 'the weight of fire'. These metaphors also are Churchill's invention in that concatenation. Other non-lexicalized metaphors: ... an armistice on the basis of our principles of unconditional surrender... There are great dangers in trying *to dish this sort of dose up with jam* for the patient (Churchill 1960: 65). This, again is a multiple metaphor referring to three correlates: armistice, unconditional surrender, dangers.

Other metaphors denoting critical situations negatively are not covered by the current dictionaries, see Cowie et al. 1983, Leech 1980, Proctor 1978. With some amount of caution we can class them as characteristic of Churchill's style:

British, American, and Russian forces will all *hurl themselves* on the common foe (Churchill 1960: 372). — (Hitler) *hurled* the utmost German effort into this new and perhaps last hope (Churchill 1960: 188). — Another *crisis* had meanwhile *erupted* in the Eastern Mediterranean (Churchill 1962: 25). — ... low wages and lack employment had caused widespread unrest, which had been *fanned into riot* (Churchill 1962: 8). — For a moment it seemed that the old system might *flare again into life* (Churchill 1960: 159). — ... some other penalty like that which happens *if you pull the communication-cord without sufficient provocation* (Churchill 1948: 233). — Such a force could no doubt have *quenched* any mutiny *in blood*. Churchill 1948: 26-62. — (riots) ... They were *snuffed out* by a few hangings and sentences of deportation to the colonies (Churchill 1962:

48). — (The military commanders)... They will of course *weed out recalcitrant elements* (Churchill 1960: 421). — We should only land in the South of France if the Germans *cracked* (Churchill 1960: 298).

Positive crises, i.e., situations evaluated as positive by the speaker and listener:

Sheaves of telegrams from all parts of the world *poured in* upon me, and I started that night for the Army *in a blaze of triumph* (Churchill 1948: 294). — ... if Italy collapses the Germans could not bear the weight themselves. *Great prizes* lie in the Balkan direction (Churchill 1960: 362). — Now at a bound they were *at the summit of power* and influence (Churchill 1962: 36).

A faded metaphor evaluating positively:

The supreme importance of getting Italy to *fight with a good heart* on our side (Churchill 1960: 15).

3. A category of tension. From the semantic point of view, the category of tension comes to the field of crisis. Occasionally, however, it is hard to draw a demarcation line between the two. Since tension is often preparatory to crisis, it may be said that one shades off into the other.

As in the categories treated previously tension is expressed by lexicalized metaphor:

(Parliamentary Reform) It had been a useful *stick* with which *to beat* the administration of the younger Pitt (Churchill 1962: 5). — The artillery fire... reached a new intensity. *All hung in the balance* (Churchill 1960: 381). — the report of the Combined Chiefs of Staff Conference on the long-term policy ... without our being able *in the pressure of events* to study it, or discuss it together or with our advisers (Churchill 1960: 443). — ... he had galloped on ahead and in front the whole Boer forces *in the ardour of pursuit* (Churchill 1948: 351). — (The fierce guerilla) General Mihailović was its first foremost champion. *In the vortex of world affairs* their struggle was hardly noticeable (Churchill 1960: 360). — Everything turned on landing-craft, which held for some weeks all our strategy *in the tightest ligature* (Churchill 1960: 341). — Lord Hugh had already *held* the House of Commons *riveted in pin-drop silence* for more than an hour (Churchill 1948: 198). — (Europe 1915)... It was to be a long peace ... *flaring into* no major *blaze* (Churchill 1960: 3). — ... the growing Allied bomber effort based on Britain. In fighter aircraft especially the German *felt*

the pinch (Churchill 1960: 210). — The English political scene *succumbed to stagnation* (Churchill 1962: 3).

Non-lexicalized metaphors not covered by the pertinent dictionaries of idioms:

Crucial events impend in Europe (Churchill 1960: 372). — ...my *fears crystallized* more and more into *desperation* (Churchill 1948: 266). — Finally, the Dutch areas of the Cape Colony itself were *quivering upon the verge of rebellion* (Churchill 1948: 237). — (Policy, by-election) I sailed out therefore upon the adverse tide. Churchill 1948: 218.

Longman dictionary has: infoml: *swim/go against the tide*.

Agriculture as well as industry quaked at the end of the war (Churchill 1960: 10). — We ourselves had no ambitions in the Balkans. All we wanted was *to nail down these* thirty hostile *divisions* (Churchill 1960: 289). — I had cabled ... to General Wilson: This is the time *to play high. Improvise and dare* (Churchill 1960: 168). — Their *bullets sucking* to right or left, seemed to miss only by inches (Churchill 1948: 248). — If, on the other hand, newspaper or radio polemics and reproaches are indulged in the only effect will to be *rouse new flames of resentment* in the State Department (Churchill 1960: 152). — This was also true of Admiral John Cunningham who *held the naval cards*, and of Air Marshall Tedder (Churchill 1960: 335).

Longman dictionary of idioms has a different meaning, viz: *to hold one's cards close to the chest* = to be very secretive.

President Krueger and his Government would be prisoners in our hands... Perhaps with *these cards in our hands* we could negotiate an honourable peace (Churchill 1948: 263). — *The stakes are very high* on both sides now: and the suspense is long-drawn. Churchill 1960: 383. — The atmosphere gradually but steadily become tense, charged with electricity *laden* with the presage of storm. Churchill 1948: 220. This example shows also synonymy of adjectives, technical terms *charged* and *laden*. — I felt indeed I was *the earthen pot among the brass* (Churchill 1948: 198).

4. The category of phase of action represents stages of on action: an initial phase, the end, the last phase or result:

I thought this would have been accomplished before the end of the last year. I do not know what has been gained by all *the spinning out that* has gone on. (Churchill 1960: 371). — the

better side of the Pitt tradition was *handed on* to the future (Churchill 1960: 227). — At long last all our forces were reunited, and we began to *reap the harvest from our winter sowing* at Anzio (Churchill 1960: 471). — After weighing our arguments they were by no means *wedded to the plan* (Churchill 1960: 268). — One supreme object stands before us, namely to *cleanse the soil* of Europe from the filthy Nazi-Fascist taint (Churchill 1960: 367). The success of the 36th U.S. Division did not *bear immediate fruit* (Churchill 1960: 475).

See another example:

These measures soon *bore fruit* (Churchill 1960: 46).

5. **Position or place.** This semantic category is meant to be either the position in a hierarchy or a physical place:

The head of their 88th Division entered the Piazza Venezia *in the heart* of the Capitol (Churchill 1960: 476). In this example the first metaphor (the head) means a position in a hierarchy (Army), the second (heart) a physical place. Both are in contrast. It is certain that we shall not come in contact with the main forces at the top of *the leg of Italy* till December (Churchill 1960: 174). — The enemy had been defeated in pitched battle and our armies *had bitten off* 300 miles of *Italy's boot* (Churchill 1960: 134).

Here the two metaphors (leg, boot) are based on the shared knowledge of the well known shape of the Italian peninsula. This applies also to the metaphor (salt water) in the next example:

... at about ten o'clock I was on *salt water* in the steamship Induna (Churchill 1948: 294).

'Salt water' is actually a periphrase of 'sea-water' supported by the contrast with 'steamship'.

6. **Feelings, thinking, memory.** Feelings may be either pleasant or unpleasant, thinking may cover also memory, faith or pain. See on this point Stich (1974: 57). Metaphors not covered by the dictionaries:

Political equality of the Catholics was *a bitter draught* for them to *swallow* (Churchill 1962: 30). — (Champagne, brandy) He was informed by the donors that he was to share these *blessings* freely with me whenever opportunity arose (Churchill 1948: 230). — The steel sides of the truck tanged with *a patter of bullets* (Churchill 1948: 242). — (The train) and again we came

to a *jarring halt* (Churchill 1948: 246). — I started that night for the Army *in a blaze of triumph* (Churchill 1948: 294).

Let us note that 'blaze' could be used in another metaphor for critical situation or intensity. Cf. Cowie (1983): to blaze a trail = be a prisoner, pioneer, lead the way, in a field of research, or study.

Some of the younger ones started *a buzz of excitement* (Churchill 1948: 233). — It seemed to me *a rebuff* to fortune not to pick up *the treasures* (Churchill 1960: 167). — What happened in 1940, which few realized completely at the time and which is already beginning to *fade in memory* (Churchill 1960: 506). — What it must mean for any man... to be confined ... in a modern convict prison *strains my imagination*. Churchill 1948: 256-57. — Therefore it means to me we must *throw our hearts into* this battle (Churchill 1960: 399). — *My mind travelled back* over the years I thought of General Stopford waiting 3 days at the Suala Bay in 1915 (Churchill 1960: 123). — he could *adjust his mind* to the problem (Churchill 1948: 233). — I entirely agree with you that we must *not break faith* with Stalin about the ships (Churchill 1960: 356). — *I devoured* the file of *newspapers* which was placed before me (Churchill 1948: 293). — ... nothing *fades so quickly* as the memory of physical pain (Churchill 1948: 238).

Examples of lexicalized (faded) metaphors listed by the dictionaries:

Never had such a wish entered my mind (Churchill 1960: 206). — In fighter aircraft especially the Germans *felt the pinch*. Churchill 1960: 210. — No such *idea* had ever *crossed my mind* (Churchill 1960: 273).

7. **Intensity, highest property:**

The XIIIth Corps *bit more deeply into the strong enemy defences* across the Rapids (Churchill 1960: 465). — the co-operation of all three fighting services was *brought to a high pitch*. Churchill 1960: 429 — Bad weather could not *blot out* ... the inevitable *result of massed attack* on enemy communications (Churchill 1960: 201). — The Boers having encircled them ... to *block them in*. — The enemy had been *defeated in pitched battle*. — a pledge was to be *redeemed with blood* — *fever ripened* into pneumonia. — Germany *commands the air* — All Germans were the same. It was the Prussian officers that *provided the cement*. But fundamentally there was no difference between North Germans and South Germans, for all Germans

fought like fierce beasts (Churchill 1960: 316). — I was this time in charge of the Foreign Office, owing to Mr Eden's absence. I thus had *all the threads directly in my hands* (Churchill 1960: 419). — ... to supply a number of British ships to the Russians, instead of *breaking Italian hearts* at this moment, so *pregnant*, as it seemed to me, *with consequences* for the future (Churchill 1960: 336). — *Hard fighting* in Italy throughout the spring will provide for the main operation *a prefect prelude and accompaniment* (Churchill 1960: 378).

All these examples are listed in the current dictionaries of idioms. Intensity is a semantic category related to that of crisis and totality into which it may overlap as a concomitant feature.

8. **Social value or help.** A wider franchise would mean the beginning of the end of the old system of administration and patronage. Could the King's Government be carried on in absence of *these twin pillars of authority?* (Churchill 1960: 27). Cowie's dictionary has *pillar of society*, not of *authority*. Our friendship is my greatest *stand-by* amid the ever increasing complications of this exacting war (Churchill 1960: 487).

This article is not intended or planned as an exhaustive study, but rather as a glimpse into a neglected area of meaning denomination and style, as a portrayal of linguistic potentialities open for an author or authors. Winston S. Churchill could have used other metaphors to describe the situations he had to face and solve. We believe that alongside the linguistic norm or obligation there are potentialities, features inherent in language at large. Let us consider also our summarizing remark that among the metaphors Churchill used we have not found absurd communication, but all of them are on a rational basis. See also Leech (1973).

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