



SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN METAPHOR AND SIMILES IN ENGLISH

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Annotation: In this article discusses about similarities and differences between metaphor and similes in English

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The simile is one of the most ancient forms of speech. It is the handmaid of all early word records. It has proved itself essential to every form of human utterance.

Simile is a figure of speech involving the comparison of one thing with another thing of a different kind, used to make a description more emphatic or vivid(e.g. as brave as a lion)[1]

A figure of speech comparing two unlike things that is often introduced by like or as (as in cheeks like roses)[2]

Even though simile is a much less investigated means of figurative language than metaphor, the two go hand in hand in that by studying one we are in a way studying the other one at the same time. Both metaphor and simile are forms of comparison, which means that both have a third element with which something is compared. The most basic difference between them lies in how the comparison is carried out; simile usually operates with such specific markers as –"like a", –"as...a", –"as...as a" etc., while metaphor can be created both with such markers and without them. Generally speaking, a simile is a metaphor, but not all metaphors are similes.

Metaphor is a broader term. In a literal sense metaphor is –an imaginative way of describing something by referring to something else which is the same in a particular way. For example, if you want to say that someone is very shy and frightened of things, you might say that they are a mouse [3]. From a philosophical point of view, metaphor is the way of perceiving and shaping the world around us.

The opposition between metaphor and simile was first established by Aristotle. He suggested that the two patterns differ rather insignificantly, though he himself preferred the former one:

The simile, as has been said before, is a metaphor, differing from it only in the way it is put; and just because it is longer it is less attractive.[4]





The understanding of metaphor as an elliptical or compressed simile is common even in our day and age. As David Cooper says, similes are metaphors with the only difference that they use words such as –“like” and –“as”[5]

The associations that arise when we compare one object to another are rather individual, they are developed and reinforced under the influence of one’s background knowledge, specific worldview and intentions. This idea was convincingly proved by Edmund Husserl, a famous philosopher, in his Logical investigations, where he says that –“perception is an act that determines, but does not embody meaning”[6]

As a rule, we cannot identify all the aspects of metaphorical meaning that become prominent in each particular case, which does not allow us to oppose metaphor to simile.

Although Donald Davidson polemicizes with the idea that metaphor is an elliptic simile, he agrees that metaphor and its corresponding simile convey the same meaning:

We can learn much about what metaphors mean by comparing them with similes, for a simile tells us, in part, what a metaphor merely nudges us into noting. Suppose Coneril had said, thinking of Lear, –Old fools are like babes again; then she would have used the words to assert a similarity between old fools and babes. What she did say, of course, was –Old fools are babes again, thus using the words to intimate what the simile declared. Thinking along these lines may inspire another theory of the figurative or special meaning of metaphors: the figurative meaning of a metaphor is the literal meaning of the corresponding simile.

As we can see, there are many views on the nature of metaphors and similes, and there is apparently no uniform definition of either. I myself tend to believe that similes are part of metaphorical constructions and that they have some structural and semantic peculiarities in conveying metaphorical meaning. It is not metaphor that should be comprehended as some type of elliptical simile, but simile should be counted among various metaphorical constructions.

The most obvious difference between the two lies in the parallel –implicit – explicit||, while metaphor is an implied comparison between two unlike things, a simile is an explicit one.

To sum up, there are two main differences between metaphor and simile:

1. simile is a structurally fixed construction,
2. simile makes an explicit comparison, while metaphor makes an implicit one.





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