Fables and Figurative Language

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Graduate Programme in English Language and Literature,

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FABLES AND FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

Master's thesis

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1. Introduction

This thesis aims to investigate the presence and the significance of metaphors and personification in four of Aesop's fables used in teaching English as a second language. According to Raymond Gibbs (1994) and my personal experience as an EFL teacher, children have a great ability for figurative thinking (Gibbs 1994: 399). They often address and attribute characteristics of the animate to the inanimate and are generally able to think metaphorically about the things they experience long before they can define a metaphor. In order to explain the world around them, young children often compare themselves with animals. This is why, when teaching children, I often use fables, a text type rich in figurative language, to send messages about situations children can find in everyday life. When conveyed through stories, in this case fables, children are more likely to accept such situations, identify with the fable message and apply it in everyday life. As Gibbs states, the precursor in a child's metaphorical thinking is the common practice of pretend renaming, when children ascribe a different name to an object in order to make it represent something else and to use it with newly attributed features (1994: 404), such as the quite common mud-cakes, blocks of mud that become imaginary cakes during child's play. Thus, the metaphoric meanings in fables become features that children attribute to animals and then identify with the animal bearing a distinctive feature, as will be shown in the analysis.

After this introduction, in the second chapter I give an overview of some of the most important contemporary theoretical approaches to metaphor. We briefly discuss the notion of *conceptual metaphor* inaugurated by cognitive linguistics, and then we define the method of *metaphor identification*, which is frequently used to analyze metaphors in fiction, other written text types and spoken discourse.

In chapter 3 I proceed to elaborate on the methodology used in our thesis. Our study is based on four examples of Aesop's fables, and we used the method of *close reading* in order to identify the main characters as well as to isolate the main messages of each fable. Since the fables' characters are mostly defined by personifications, we used the method of *metaphor identification* developed by Steen *et al.* (2010) to identify all the metaphors and personifications used in the fables we selected for the analysis.

In the fourth chapter, we firstly analyzed the metaphors with regard to their meaning, that is, we tried to establish how the different characters get their meaning through metaphor. Then, in

the remainder of the text we applied this understanding of the theoretical framework to our practical experience of teaching English as a second language to children.

In the conclusion, we summed up all our findings and outlined some possibilities for future research.

2. Theoretical Framework

Rhetorical figures are a subject-matter most people learn about in school as belonging to the realms of literature and, most of all, of poetry. We learn their definitions and we learn how to identify them in literary texts as special forms of expressions that convey new layers of meaning which must be deciphered by those who read and interpret them. The most prominent and well known by a wider audience is metaphor. This limited, merely ornamental function of metaphor has been revisited since the end of the 1970s (Steen et al., 2010: 1), when the first important linguistic research appears, claiming that metaphor is much more important and present in our lives than has previously been acknowledged. One of the most prominent fields of linguistics that deals with metaphors and other figures of speech is called *cognitive linguistics* and is defined as "an approach to language study that aims to explore and understand the interactions between language, cognition and their intersections."[1]

According to the research of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1980) the most frequent, or the best known among the rhetorical figures, metaphor, is integrated in our everyday life and thoughts, or, as they put it, in our *conceptual systems* (1980: 3). They point out that this is not a matter of willingly using or applying metaphors but rather an automatic occurrence. They give examples as to how our mind functions metaphorically when we think of a particular concept, even though we would claim our use of the concept to be literal in its meaning (1980: 4). Therefore, a metaphor becomes not just a playful use of words, but a mechanism embedded in human thought processes (1980: 6). In order to give us examples of the metaphorical nature of concepts, Lakoff and Johnson use the concept of time, and the proverb TIME IS MONEY. The metaphorical interpretation of time thus refers to its value and the concepts used to underline this quality all come from vocabulary related to money (*to save* time, *to spend* time, *to borrow* time, etc., Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 8). This means that, much like in a poetic metaphor, in our unconscious use of

[1] https://www.cambridge.org/core/publications/elements/cognitive-linguistics

metaphoric concepts, we use or apply the vocabulary related to one term in order to explain another.

Metaphor identification, according to Steen *et al.*, means that we create a pool of examples that can be categorized, scientifically measured and not just interpreted (2010: 2), to the same degree and in much the same way as we measure other social phenomena such as stress, education, class, etc. But these authors also underline the fact that the humanities do not usually provide for methods and techniques of measurement, especially not of quality measurement (Steen et al. 2010: 3) and that what marks modern research approaches is interdisciplinary cooperation – i.e., the collaboration of linguists with experts in other cognitive and social sciences as well as cultural studies. Furthermore, it is stressed that a metaphor must be viewed in relation to something, and that it is 'metaphorical to some language user', meaning that it is metaphorical to the native speaker of the language at a determined point in time (*ibid.*, p. 7). Steen *et al.* give us a useful tool for the identification of metaphors within a text, which is quoted in the section on methodology in this paper, and claim that the identification of conceptual structures, such as those provided by Lakoff and Johnson, creates much more disagreement between researchers (2010: 8). This tool, developed by the Pragglejaz Group, identifies the *lexical unit* as a better term to be used instead of *word*, but they also acknowledge the limitations of this denomination, as it does not refer to lemmas only, but to idioms, phrasal verbs and other multi-word expressions, as well (*ibid.*, p. 16). Another crucial element for their method of research is the use of a corpus-based learner's dictionary, or more than one, for comparison (*ibid.*). Differently from the Pragglejaz Group, Steen *et al.* suggest that historical senses of the terms be excluded when searching for the basic sense of a word, as they are not relevant for or even known to contemporary speakers (2010: 17). The outcome of this whole analytic approach comes down to determining whether the meaning of an expression is metaphorical or not (*ibid*., p. 18).

The subject matter of this paper are metaphors and personifications in four of Aesop's fables, which means that we return to the rhetorical figure in fiction. Steen *et al.* dedicate a separate chapter to this category, and they provide for a wide range of definitions of metaphor specific to literature, such as Leech's claim that "a literary metaphor is a semantic absurdity" (2010: 87) or Tsur's theory that "metaphorical expressions exploit semantic feature to create literary effects" (Steen *et al.* 2010: 87). These claims promote the idea that literary metaphors are more creative

than those found in everyday speech, and thus superior in quality, contrary to what Lakoff and Turner (1989) stated, that 'metaphors are not in fact deviant and decorative, but an indispensable tool in both language and thought' (Steen *et al.* 2010: 88).

For the purpose of this study, we also need to investigate the theory behind another rhetorical figure, that of personification. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980) personification can be considered as a type of metaphor as well, specifically a rhetorical figure/metaphor in which nonhuman entities are given characteristics of human beings (1980: 33). That means that a personification encompasses a very wide category of metaphorical expressions which explain different phenomena through human (our own) experience and is especially efficient in the representation of abstract concepts (*ibid*., p. 34). Steen *et al.* take into consideration this standpoint but point out the lack of systematic analysis of personifications in natural discourse (2010: 101). As one of the outcomes of their research, they stress the fact that personification can assume different forms which they classify as different 'in conventionality, referential function and interaction with metonymy' (*ibid*.). The last point is further explained thorough examples in which actions and qualities are not attributed to people in general, but to human body parts, creating, as they claim, "a more active and immediate" narrative (*ibid.*, p. 102). Moreover, personification occurs when the discourse refers not just to obvious human elements, such as body parts in non-human entities, but also when abstract human characteristics or typically human actions are attributed to non-human entities (*ibid.*, p.103). Specifically, Steen *et al.* take into consideration the personification of nature, in which the meaning itself is not metaphorical but remains the basic meaning of the expression and what makes it a personification is the fact that it is not attributed to a person but to a plant (*ibid.*, p.105). In this paper we discuss the metaphors and personification of animals in several famous classic fables.

Given the fact that the method presented and perfected by Steen *et al.* (2010) is already widely accepted in modern linguistics, we aimed to investigate what kind of results it would bring when adopted on a corpus of texts used as a tool in teaching English as a second language to children.

3. Methodology

This study's main corpus consists of four examples of Aesop's fables very well known to the general audience and used by the author of the thesis in her everyday work in teaching English as a second language to children. The method used is that of *close reading* of the primary texts to identify the main characters' representations as being personifications. The purpose was to isolate the main messages of each fable. The method used in the research is that of *metaphor identification* developed by Steen *et al.* (2010) to identify all the metaphors and personifications used in the four selected fables. Steen *et al.* (2010: 5-6) introduce this method as a procedure set by the Pregglejaz Group in 2007, in which the term *lexical unit* instead of *word* is used:

1. Read the entire text/discourse to establish a general understanding of the meaning.
2. Determine the lexical units in the text/discourse.
3. a) For each lexical unit in the text, establish its meaning in context, i.e. how it applies to an entity, relation or attribute in the situation evoked by the text (contextual meaning). Take into account what comes before and after the lexical unit.

   b) For each lexical unit, determine if it has a more basic contemporary meaning in other contexts than the one in the given context. For our purposes, basic meanings tend to be:

   - more concrete; what they evoke is easier to imagine, see, hear, feel, smell, and taste;
   - related to bodily action;
   - more precise (as opposed to vague);
   - historically older.

   Basic meanings are not necessarily the most frequent meanings of the lexical unit.
4. If yes, mark the lexical unit as metaphorical.

Steen *et al.* claim that this method has produced 'fairly reliable results' and can therefore be considered valid, regardless of some weaknesses (2010: 7). This methodology is further explained in Chapter 2 (*ibid.*, p. 25) and in Chapter 5 (*ibid.*, p. 91) where the following scheme is applied for the analysis of every lexical unit considered to be a metaphor:

a. Contextual meaning – determining the usual context from a dictionary
b. Basic meaning – determining the basic meaning stated in the dictionary
c. Contrast – determining whether the lexical unit's basic meaning is different from the meaning in the text (Yes-No)

   Comparison – similar to contrast, giving the verdict on the analyzed lexical unit.

To find out the contextual and basic meaning in our examples of lexical units - words we consulted Macmillan online dictionary. As recommended by Steen et al. (2010: 46-49), in the following analysis we were guided by the WIDLII principle (When In Doubt Leave It In), which means that we included all the potential examples of metaphor in the analysis, including those of questionable metaphoricity, to determine whether they are metaphors or not.

The analysis aims to determine how different characters in the fables gain their meaning through metaphor. Afterwards, this understanding of the theoretical framework will be applied to the author's practical experience and expertise of teaching English as a second language to children.

4. Analysis

Following Steen *et al.* (2010: 92) the identification of metaphorically used words in fiction was predominantly straightforward. The only categories that could be considered somewhat problematic from the theoretical point of view were (1) directly expressed metaphors, (2) character descriptions, and (3) personification. In the corpus of examples, we found that in the selected fables, category (1) does not appear at all and in category (2) we found few examples, while in category (3) we found many examples.

4.1. Metaphors referring to character descriptions

In this category only a few examples are found. In none of the analyzed fables are characters described so much with adjectives as they are with verbs, mostly using lexical verbs in their basic meaning (the Mouse *cried*, the lion *laughed*, *let* the mouse *go*; a Crow *was sitting*, a Fox *observed* her, *looked up* and *said*; the Tortoise *said*, the Hare *replied*; the Grasshopper *begged, said, replied*, the Ants *stopped, chuckled, went on*), and less by adjectival or adverbial predicate, again in its basic meaning (the Ants were *busy*; the Hare was *amused*, the Hare was *far ahead*).

However, the following examples are rich in metaphorical meaning:

(1) If only her voice is as *sweet* as her looks are *fair*, she ought without doubt to be *Queen* of the Birds.

In example (1) we isolated 3 metaphorical lexical units. We will analyze them using the *metaphor identification method* developed by Steen *et al.* (2010: 4-5, 25, 91 *et passim*):

SWEET (adjective)

a. **Contextual meaning** – pleasant in smell, sound or appearance (Macmillan sense 2)
b. **Basic meaning** – tasting like sugar (Macmillan sense 1)
c. **Contrast** – YES. The lexical unit's basic meaning is different from the meaning in the text **Comparison** – YES. The contextual meaning differs from the basic meaning, and we can understand the concept of "being of a particular positive quality of voice" in terms of sweetness.

FAIR (adjective)

a. **Contextual meaning** – beautiful (Macmillan sense 8)
b. **Basic meaning** – if a situation is fair, everyone is treated equally and in a reasonable way (Macmillan sense 1)
c. **Contrast** – YES. The lexical unit's basic meaning is different from the meaning in the text **Comparison** – YES. We can presume that the comparison between these 2 concepts could be done based on the conceptual metaphor FAIR IS BEAUTIFUL.

QUEEN (noun)

a. **Contextual meaning** – the best example of something (Macmillan sense 3)
b. **Basic meaning** – a woman who rules the country because she belongs to a royal family (Macmillan sense 1)
c. **Contrast** – YES. The lexical unit's basic meaning is different from the meaning in the text **Comparison** – YES. Based on the conceptual metaphor THE RULER IS A NOBLE PERSON.

In the example (2) there is one metaphorical lexical unit:

(2) Coming and standing under the tree [the Fox] looked up and said, "What a *noble* bird I see above me!

NOBLE (adjective)

a. Contextual meaning – behaving in an honest and brace way that other people admire (Macmillan sense 1)

b. Basic meaning – belonging to the highest social class (Macmillan sense 2)

c. Contrast – YES. The lexical unit's basic meaning is different from the meaning in the text
Comparison – Based on the conceptual metaphor THE RULER IS A NOBLE PERSON.

In the fable *The Tortoise and the Hare*, in the last sentence, a kind of moral of the fable, we find the following metaphorical statement that describes the character of the turtle in the fable, but at the same time expresses a general, universally valuable truth:

(3) *Slow* and *steady* wins the race.

Although in this example there is no difference between basic and conceptual meaning of the lexical units *slow* and *steady*[2], at the level of the entire fable, it is clear that it is a metaphor. Conceptually, we can present it as PATIENCE IS SUCCESS. This meaning is also present in other sayings in English, for example *(all) good things come to those who wait*.

The lack of such examples illustrates the basic features of the fable as a text type. As we have already stated, characters are mostly not characterized by adjectives that describe them at the sentence level, but we get an idea of their characteristics at the level of the text as a whole. We can assume that this is because fables are a text type that functions as an allegory at the level of the text, and the characters are mainly characterized through personification, which is one of the main features of a fable as a text type.

At the end of this paragraph, we should mention that we found examples of metaphors that are not related to character characterization but refer to the circumstances in which the action takes place. As such examples are not the focus of our analysis, and Steen et al. (2010: 92) state that they can be analyzed easily and unambiguously, i.e. without theoretical difficulties, hereafter we analyze only one illustrative example of this subcategory:

(4) One *fine* day in winter some Ants were busy drying their store of corn, which had got rather damp during a long *spell* of rain.

[2] Slow – a slow movement or action does not happen fast (Macmillan, sense 1)
Steady – slowly and gradually continuing to change, move, or happen (Macmillan, sense 2)

FINE (adjective)

a. **Contextual meaning** – if the weather is fine, it is sunny and not raining (Macmillan sense 1d)
b. **Basic meaning** – if something is fine, it is good enough and acceptable to you (Macmillan sense 1)
c. **Contrast** – YES. The lexical unit's basic meaning is different from the meaning in the text

Comparison – YES. We can understand the concept of a beautiful day, appropriate for the gathering of food for the winter, in terms of a concept of quality and excellence.

SPELL (noun)

a. **Contextual meaning** – a period of time, usually a short one (Macmillan sense 1)
b. **Basic meaning** – words or actions that are intended to make magic things happen (Macmillan sense 4)
c. **Contrast** – YES. The lexical unit's basic meaning is different from the meaning in the text

Comparison – YES. We can understand that it refers to the length of rainfall and not the magic spell.

Based on the examples that we have cited and analyzed in this subcategory, we can notice the theoretical debate among linguists about the nature of metaphor in different text types. We have already stated that Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 3) claim that "[o]ur ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature", from which it can be concluded that they study literary metaphors in the same way as metaphors in everyday speech, considering that they have the same conceptual base as petrified or dead metaphors that are part of everyday communication and the average speaker no longer even perceives them as metaphors. Our examples show that metaphors in fables are not examples of high artistic creativity, but on the contrary, they are conventional metaphors, derived from ordinary everyday language, and that they are based on the typical underlying conceptual structures they share with metaphors that appear in everyday non-literary conversation. We can agree with Lakoff

and Johnson (1980), who define such metaphors as primary metaphors, while original metaphors that appear in other literary works are called creative metaphors.

4.2. Personification

According to Steen *et al.* (2010: 101-102), writers can choose to ascribe the action to the character or to focus on a specific body part that is involved in the action. In the personification examples from the chosen Aesop's fables, the first category is significantly predominant. Most of the personification examples are in reported speech introduced by the words "he said/she said":

(5) "There!" *said* the Mouse, "you laughed at me when I promised I would repay you: but now you see, even a Mouse can help a Lion."

(6) "Wait a bit," *said* the Tortoise; "I'll run a race with you, and I'll wager that I win."

(7) "For," she *said*, "I'm simply starving."

(8) "May we ask," *said* they, "what you were doing with yourself all last summer? Why didn't you collect a store of food for the winter?"

Besides the verb *to say*, other verbs of saying or thinking are used, or the so called *verba loquendi*:

(9) The Mouse, terrified, piteously entreated him to spare its life. "Please let me go," *it cried*, "and one day I will repay you for your kindness."

(10) „Oh, well," *replied* the Hare, who was much amused at the idea, "let's try and see";

(11) "The fact is," *replied* the Grasshopper, "I was so busy singing that I hadn't the time."

(12) Hare was soon so far ahead that he *thought* he might as well have a rest: so down he lay and fell fast asleep.

Examples of metonymy that include parts of the body appear much less frequently in the analyzed fables. In example (13), the fox wants to tell the crow that she knows how to sing, and he expresses this by metonymy (*voice* as a metonymy for *the ability to sing*). Then he continues by accusing her of being stupid, again through metonymy (*wits* as a metonymy for wise judgment in life):

(13) [T]he Fox, snatching it up, *said*, "You have a voice, madam, I see: what you want is wits."

When a metonymy clearly appears in the text, personification is often excluded from interpretation, as Steen *et al.* point out (2010: 102), or another possibility arises, that of so-called "metaphtonymy"

– “metaphor from metonymy” (Radden 2002 and Goossens 2002, quoted in Steen *et al.*). Since these two figures of speech complement one another and do not exclude one another, we have a possibility of a double interpretation, as both a metonymy and a metaphor/personification. This is seen in example 13, where *voice* is not only a metonymy, as stated before, but also a metaphor/personification.

According to Steen et al. (2010: 102), Leech and Short have noted that the verbs ‘are the chief carriers of metaphor’. This is demonstrated by all the above-mentioned examples as well as the examples that follow:

(14) The idea of so insignificant a creature ever being able to do anything for him *amused* the Lion so much that he *laughed* aloud, and good-humouredly *let* it *go*.

(15) And they *chuckled* and *went on* with their work.

(16) Fox *observed* her and *set* his wits *to work to discover* some way of getting the cheese.

(17) The Crow *was* hugely *flattered* by this, and just *to show* the Fox that she could sing she gave a loud caw.

(18) A Hare *was* one day *making fun of* a Tortoise for being so slow upon his feet

(19) "Oh, well," replied the Hare, who *was* much *amused* at the idea, "let's try and see"; and it *was* soon *agreed* that the fox should set a course for them, and *be the judge*.

(20) One fine day in winter some Ants *were busy* drying their store of corn, which had got rather damp during a long spell of rain.

(21) The Ants stopped work for a moment, though this *was against their principles*.

It is evident that personification is created on the basis of the verb forms *amused, laughed, let go, chuckled, observed, set their wits to work to discover, to be flattered, to show* + a subordinate clause, *to be making fun of, to be agreed* + a subordinate clause, *to be* + a nominal predicate, *to be* + an adjectival predicate, *to be* + an adverbial predicate and so on.

In all the examples from (14) to (21) the contextual meaning of the above-mentioned verbs and verb phrases is essentially the same as the basic meaning, with the single difference that it is applied to an animal and not to a human being. We can conclude that all these lexical units can be

considered metaphorically used and that this usage is based on personification (Steen et al. 2010: 105).

We conclude this part of our analysis with a complex example which blends personification with conceptual metaphors:

(22) "*If you spent the summer singing*," *replied* the Ants, "*you can't do better than spend the winter dancing*."

The anthropomorphised ants outsmart the Grasshopper with a witty retort consisting of two conceptual metaphors: WARMTH IS SAFETY and COLDNESS IS DANGER.

4.3 Personal experiences in using fables as a didactic tool

As Gibbs (1994: 401) says, "it should not surprise us to hear that children possess figurative thought, given their fascination with fairy tales". My students share the same fascination with fables which I use in teaching for several reasons. First of all, because they are much shorter text forms, furthermore, because characters are animals and children can easily identify with them, and finally, because the situations described in fables are relatable to children. As previously stated, I use fables in the classroom to convey messages and morals. In my experience, it is easier to teach children any kind of life lesson through stories, especially fables, because that is an indirect way to approach an issue, in which the child doesn't feel patronized. Children easily get the message and translate it to suit their individual situations. My students (6- to 12-year-olds) are unfamiliar with the term metaphor, but they are able to identify that something in the story is 'invented' or 'impossible', fictional, and they understand the message it carries.

Recently, I have worked on three fables from the four selected for this thesis with a group of students who were 11 to 13 years old. They were asked to describe the animals, say what comes first to their minds when they hear the name of the animal, and what human characteristics are associated with the animal. After hearing the fable, they were asked to write down the message they got and then the oldest students had to find a parallel with real life. That can be considered an example of how to identify in real life what is considered to be a metaphor from the fable. And the results I obtained are the following:

The lion and the mouse

When asked to define the lion, to find a metaphor for it, students said that the lion is brave, strong, fast, confident, self-assured, king of the jungle. Some of them said that the lion is a metaphor for people who think they can do everything on their own, they don't need help and don't believe that people who are not up to their standards could help them. The character of the mouse, on the other hand, reminded students of somebody who is scared, shy, harmless, weak, fast. They stated that a mouse represents a person who is kind and reliable and would help anyone no matter what. The messages students got from this fable were that: "looks can be deceiving", "it doesn't matter how big you look, it matters how big your heart is", "if you help somebody, one day you will be rewarded", "if you take pity on someone, they will respect you", "kindness and love always pay off", "if someone looks scary it doesn't mean they are bad", "people aren't always what they seem to be". When asked what the lion and the mouse could represent in real life situations, some students said "someone who looks poor, might actually be rich", "someone who looks dangerous is actually harmless", "someone who looks dangerous can actually be a good friend", "the lion could be a strict teacher, mice students scared of the teacher. But no matter how strict the teachers are they are always there for students to help them".

The Grasshopper and the Ant

Children perceived the grasshopper as a lazy musician, someone who comes up with excuses not to work and the ant as hardworking, and disciplined. The messages were "sacrifice today for tomorrow", "you need to work hard because you can't always rely on others", "you can't expect others to work for you", "laziness never pays off." As far as the comparison to situations in real life goes, students understood the following messages: "if you work hard you get better opportunities in life, you get better grades at school and probably a better future". One of the answers was particularly interesting as it involved national stereotypes such as the grasshopper symbolizing a person from Montenegro and the ant symbolizing people from Croatia going to Germany to work hard and provide for their families.

The Hare and the Tortoise

The hare was interpreted as someone who is vain, disrespectful, two-faced, arrogant, cocky and annoying while the tortoise is self-confident, doesn't give up, wise, old. The messages that the

students wrote down and got from the fable were that: “people don’t always have to rush in life because sometimes when you hurry you make mistakes you would not make otherwise”, “If someone makes you think they are better and more successful than you it shouldn’t discourage you. On the contrary, that should motivate you to work even harder and believe in yourself”.

So, it is obvious that the metaphorical meanings in the fables were all conveyed properly, were easily understood and were relatable, as we can see from the real-life references in the student’s answers. Therefore, I consider fables to be a valuable tool in teaching linguistic structures (vocabulary, grammar), but also life-lessons and values that need to be part of any educational process.

The Fox and the Crow

When introducing this fable, children are usually familiar with the metaphorical interpretation of the fox as cunning, insidious, clever, and sneaky, while the crow is perceived as naïve, dumb, without wits, as a victim of the fox.

I sometimes introduce this fable to older children, at the level of the seventh grade (age 13 to 14) of elementary school, and the messages they derive from the story are the following: “don’t believe everyone and everything you hear”, “think twice before you speak”, “don’t trust strangers”, “you never know if someone is trying to help or just wants to use you”, “you don’t need to prove yourself to someone so they can know you can do it”. Aside from the direct messages detected in the fable, the students were asked to come up with examples of these messages in everyday situations so they wrote the following: “My brother flatters me every time he wants something from me, but I am not as naïve as the crow in the fable”; “When someone in school wants to be the teacher’s pet they act like the fox and sometimes teachers fall for it”; “The fox is like me when I want something from my parents”; “In school some students act as the fox in the fable to get to copy homework when they don’t have it. They flatter and compliment the ones who have homework to get what they want”.

All the messages by these young adolescents are very important for their development at that age and are conveyed to them through what they perceive as a “little children’s story”, something that they have outgrown long ago. Therefore, as far as this fable goes, they have the feeling of reading something completely unrelated to them, while at the same time absorbing

extremely important messages, as we have seen in what they wrote down. This is to show that fables can be a very useful teaching tool not just for very young children, but for teenagers as well.

5. Conclusion

We can confirm that the fables taken into consideration for this analysis contain a relevant number of metaphors and are all structurally based on the model of the personification of animals in order to convey some important formational message to children.

The first conclusion we may draw is that the texts do not offer a particularly creative range of metaphors but rather rely on simple images transmitted through simple, everyday language which creates no difficulties to the young readers/listeners. Therefore, in the analyzed texts there are no examples of original metaphors.

The second conclusion that arises from this analysis is that personification in these fables relies almost entirely on the usage of verbal forms related specifically to human activity, which means that the figurative 'humanity' of animals is not derived from any descriptive aspect of their physical appearance, but from the animal's actions and statements, and most of the examples come from direct speech. This also means that, in the minds of young readers, a lion will always be pictured as a common, average, stereotypical lion in shape, color and size, but its behavior and speech will be that of a human.

The last conclusion is that the simple structure of fables makes them a perfect tool for teaching language, as they convey simple and clear messages, and give plenty of possibility to develop any fable into a discussion either on animals or on types of acceptable or unacceptable behavior.

From the didactic point of view, this study could be further developed so as to investigate other forms of speech that involve metaphorical meanings attributed to animals, such as proverbs and idiomatic phrases, which would be appropriate for older students and those with a higher competence of the language. As far as work with younger students is concerned, they can develop their linguistic skills by taking the basic model of the fable, a story in which animals behave like humans, and invent their own fables, and play with the characterization of animals within their own knowledge on the subject-matter, or their own experience with them (domestic animals, zoo-animals, forest-animals etc.)

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Abstracts

This thesis offers an analysis of metaphors in four of Aesop's fables often used in teaching English as a foreign language. First it provides for some of the latest and most influential theoretical approaches to metaphors such as the cognitive linguistic idea of the existence of a conceptual metaphor and the method of metaphor identification through close reading. The latter was adopted to identify metaphors and applied to all examples found in the four fables that were potentially identified as metaphoric. This approach was useful in defining the characters of the fables and interpreting the main message of each one of them. It consists of a close confrontation of dictionary definitions of each lexical unit present in the example. If the basic meaning of the lexical unit is different from the meaning influenced by the context, we can define it as metaphorical. The analysis has determined that all examples were metaphorical and it has also established that all the characters in the fables were primarily created through personification. The theoretical analysis has been further corroborated with examples from personal teaching experience which prove the value of fables as original material in teaching a foreign language.

Key words: Aesop, fables, metaphor, personification, teaching

Appendix[3]

THE LION AND THE MOUSE

A Lion asleep in his lair was waked up by a Mouse running over his face. Losing his temper he seized it with his paw and was about to kill it. The Mouse, terrified, piteously entreated him to spare its life. "Please let me go," it cried, "and one day I will repay you for your kindness." The idea of so insignificant a creature ever being able to do anything for him amused the Lion so much that he laughed aloud, and good-humouredly let it go. But the Mouse's chance came, after all. One day the Lion got entangled in a net which had been spread for game by some hunters, and the Mouse heard and recognised his roars of anger and ran to the spot. Without more ado it set to work to gnaw the ropes with its teeth, and succeeded before long in setting the Lion free. "There!" said the Mouse, "you laughed at me when I promised I would repay you: but now you see, even a Mouse can help a Lion."

THE FOX AND THE CROW

A Crow was sitting on a branch of a tree with a piece of cheese in her beak when a Fox observed her and set his wits to work to discover some way of getting the cheese. Coming and standing under the tree he looked up and said, "What a noble bird I see above me! Her beauty is without equal, the hue of her plumage exquisite. If only her voice is as sweet as her looks are fair, she ought without doubt to be Queen of the Birds." The Crow was hugely flattered by this, and just to show the Fox that she could sing she gave a loud caw. Down came the cheese, of course, and the Fox, snatching it up, said, "You have a voice, madam, I see: what you want is wits."

THE HARE AND THE TORTOISE

A Hare was one day making fun of a Tortoise for being so slow upon his feet. "Wait a bit," said the Tortoise; "I'll run a race with you, and I'll wager that I win." "Oh, well," replied the Hare, who was much amused at the idea, "let's try and see"; and it was soon agreed that the fox should set a

[3] The fables used in this thesis are quoted from Aesop. 1912 [2004]. Aesop's Fables: A New Translation by V. S. Vernon Jones. The Project Gutenberg eBook, February 27, 2004. https://www.gutenberg.org/files/11339/11339-h/11339-h.htm (February 8, 2023).

course for them, and be the judge. When the time came both started off together, but the Hare was soon so far ahead that he thought he might as well have a rest: so down he lay and fell fast asleep. Meanwhile the Tortoise kept plodding on, and in time reached the goal. At last the Hare woke up with a start, and dashed on at his fastest, but only to find that the Tortoise had already won the race. Slow and steady wins the race.

THE GRASSHOPPER AND THE ANTS

One fine day in winter some Ants were busy drying their store of corn, which had got rather damp during a long spell of rain. Presently up came a Grasshopper and begged them to spare her a few grains, "For," she said, "I'm simply starving." The Ants stopped work for a moment, though this was against their principles. "May we ask," said they, "what you were doing with yourself all last summer? Why didn't you collect a store of food for the winter?" "The fact is," replied the Grasshopper, "I was so busy singing that I hadn't the time." "If you spent the summer singing," replied the Ants, "you can't do better than spend the winter dancing." And they chuckled and went on with their work.