

**METAPHORS IN THE MODERN AMERICAN THERAPEUTIC DISCOURSE
IN THEIR PRACTICAL APPLICATION**

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The article explores the use of metaphors and stylistic figures in contemporary American therapeutic discourse, emphasizing their significant role in facilitating communication and understanding in counselling sessions. The narrative nature of therapy and the need for the therapist to be able to effectively decipher and rewrite the clients' harmful narratives are determined. Evidence is presented that contemporary American therapeutic narratives, replete with metaphors and stylistic figures, promote adequate expression of complex emotions and experiences, prevent defence mechanisms, and encourage mutual understanding. The major cognitive processes related to the understanding of metaphors in modern American therapeutic discourse and the advantages of their usage in therapy are considered, since metaphors themselves can help overcome emotional barriers, reveal the unconscious and express complex ideas succinctly and accessibly. In the article we analyse the mechanism of effective use of metaphors for obtaining meaningful information from interlocutors and achieving greater awareness of what they said, that is based on a four-stage model of metaphor application, which includes activation, deployment, synthesis and transformation, exemplifying it by the family therapy session conducted by a modern American psychotherapist Stephen Madigan. In particular, the expediency of DISTANCE, JOURNEY, BLINDNESS metaphors usage in the modern American therapeutic discourse for the study of difficulties and problems in relationships, as well as the correction of one's own views and awareness of difficulties, has been clarified. Overall, the article explores the cornerstones of metaphor application in contemporary American therapeutic discourse, whereas the case study provides a practical demonstration of how contemporary psychotherapists can use metaphors to facilitate meaningful conversations and help clients reframe their narratives and perspectives.

Key words: therapeutic discourse, narrative, metaphors, imagery, storytelling.

Багацька Олена, Дворянова Аліна. Метафори в сучасному американському терапевтичному дискурсі у практичному вимірі

У статті досліджено використання метафор і стилістичних фігур у сучасному американському терапевтичному дискурсі, наголошується на їхній виключно важливій ролі у полегшенні спілкування та розуміння під час консультування. Визначено нарративний характер терапії та необхідність для терапевта вміти ефективно розшифровувати та переписувати згубні наративи клієнтів. Представлено докази того, що сучасні американські терапевтичні наративи, наповнені метафорами та стилістичними фігурами, сприяють адекватному висловленню складних емоцій та досвіду, запобігають захисним механізмам і заохочують взаєморозуміння. Розглянуто основні когнітивні процеси, пов'язані з розумінням метафор у сучасному американському терапевтичному дискурсі та переваги їх використання в терапії, оскільки власне метафори здатні допомогти подолати емоційні бар'єри, розкрити несвідоме і виразити складні ідеї лаконічно та доступно. У статті проаналізовано механізм ефективного використання метафор для отримання значущої інформації від співрозмовників та досягнення більшого усвідомлення ними сказаного, що ґрунтується на чотирьохетапній моделі використання метафор, яка включає активацію, розгортання, синтез та перетворення, на прикладі сесії сімейної терапії, проведеної сучасним американським психотерапевтом Стівеном Медіганом. З'ясовано, зокрема, доцільність використання метафор ВІДСТАНЬ, ПОДОРОЖ, СЛІПОТА в сучасному американському терапевтичному дискурсі для вивчення складностей та проблем у відносинах, а також корекції власних поглядів та усвідомлення труднощів. Загалом, у статті досліджено наріжні камені використання метафор у сучасному американському терапевтичному дискурсі, тоді ж як ситуаційний аналіз надає практичний приклад того, як сучасні психотерапевти можуть використовувати метафори для сприяння розгортанню значущих розмов та допомоги клієнтам переосмислити свої наративи та погляди.

Ключові слова: терапевтичний дискурс, нарація, метафори, образність, сторітелінг.

Introduction. People tend to express themselves in coloured language, especially when they are in distress. the most vivid ways, using figurative and emotionally Therefore, stylistic devices are ubiquitous even in day-to-

day conversations. Therapeutic practice is not an exception but rather a natural environment for utilizing such multifaceted tools as imagery and stylistic figures.

It is justified by the fact that most of the contemporary approaches to counseling that are intertwined around phenomenology and hermeneutics view therapeutic conversations as narratives. P. Brooks indicates that therapy is inevitably of a narrative nature and a therapist should be aware of how this phenomenon works to be able to decipher it [1; 2].

P. Ricoeur goes on to state that in the aftermath of some events, every person has something to say, which means that our experience has a pre-narrative character and it is waiting to be shared [2, p. 217]. The ultimate narrative is meant to be interpreted, amplified, and analyzed. In addition, rewriting these pathological and detrimental conceptions becomes the major purpose of counseling sessions.

In this respect, based on the studies by G. Kalynkov, E. Weise and A. Peräkylä, I. Parker, we define therapeutic discourse as a conversational interaction between a therapist and a client, which allows achieving the pragmatic goals of therapy, namely, improving the mental state of the latter and changing the approach to describing problems, through linguistic means.

Narration can be identified both on a client's and therapist's side. In our previous works, we have elaborated on storytelling in therapeutic discourse and its auspicious effects. In this context, N. Kalina provides a vivid example of how storytelling can reveal some subconscious fears. By means of the excerpts from the book "Dictionary of the Khazars" by Milorad Pavić, a client realized his inner fear of women that lies behind his relationship problems [3, p. 47].

N. Kalina emphasizes that narratives are full of metaphors and such a method of world conceptualization makes a correlation between therapeutic discourse, poetry, and prose. A longing to convey overwhelming feelings often makes this narrative incomprehensible and confusing. Metaphor, in this case, allows to verbalize this reality, which is although a complicated but still well-ordered means of rendering a message [3, pp. 47–48].

We have also rationalized the reasons for considering metaphors during therapy:

1. Prevention of defense mechanisms.
2. Articulation of complicated ideas and concepts through shared symbols instead of vague notions.
3. Emotional engagement.
4. Avoidance of stigmatization in terms of using psychological terms for indicating illnesses.
5. Building rapport between a therapist and a client
6. Changes in client's metaphors may be a sign of a healing process [6, p. 25–26].

The work by R. Stott et.al. "Oxford Guide to Metaphors in CBT Building Cognitive Bridges" gives a chance to expand this list of benefits.

According to the authors, stories with metaphors provide a balance between keeping distance from oneself and resonating with the gist that hints at some issues [7, p. 8].

Secondly, the unconscious can often reveal itself through symbols and metaphors [7, p. 13].

Moreover, metaphors enable people to express their ideas in a relatively small number of words which is not always possible with literal language [7, p. 15].

Finally, metaphors allow to convey vivid emotions or experiences where literal language would be insufficient [7, p. 15].

Furthermore, the authors suggest a list of cognitive processes necessary for metaphor understanding.

1. Awareness of imagery. Imagery gives the chance to grasp the embedded meaning and metaphor domains.

2. Integration of verbal and imaginal. Working with metaphors enables a person to engage both mental processes and make them more adaptive and flexible.

3. Holding two concepts in mind. It can enhance problem-solving by allowing a client to explore various aspects of a problem more comprehensively. This enables them to connect, distinguish, or compare different aspects to arrive at more effective solutions.

4. Awareness of commonalities despite superficial differences. It is marked as an adaptive cognitive skill that draws clients' attention to the fact that they are not alone in their problems and that other people also might have similar experiences despite the major differences.

5. Flexible use of multiple meanings. If a therapist compares the recovery process from depression to preparing for a marathon, it would be an incomplete presumption as the latter presupposes specific actions at the end of this preparation. Lakoff and Johnson in their "Metaphors we live by" suggest expanding this case and using multiple metaphors. "Journey in the dark" is a compatible addition that conceptualizes the unknown that comes after the process of recovery. Therefore, it stands to reason when a therapist is able to juggle various metaphors instead of sticking to one particular expression.

Finally, R. Stott et.al. developed a model of metaphor use during therapy that comprises such elements as activation, elaboration, synthesis, and reframe. Firstly, a specific target domain connected with an issue is evoked, and it is bound to a respective source domain that is based on imagery. Both of the domains can be subject to elaboration by the therapist. Next comes a cognitive synthesis process, where elements of meaning from both domains merge, which bridges the gap between them. Ultimately, if the process is successful, the client will depart with a reframed viewpoint on the troublesome area. This frequently encourages a more in-depth examination of the connections and consequences of the metaphor, prompting additional development of both the source and target domains and fostering further synthesis. Additionally, a unique and memorable mental image will be entrenched in the client's mind, making it easily accessible for future reference and enabling quick retrieval of the essential meanings associated with it [7, pp. 19–22].

Consequently, our study is of high relevance in the field of linguistics as the view of different scholars on therapeutic metaphors needs consolidation, interpretation, and practical application. The purpose of our article is to dissect the cornerstones of metaphors used in therapeutic discourse, underline the reasons for their value, and elaborate on the model of therapeutic metaphors developed by

R. Stott. et al. sufficiently exemplifying it by a specific therapeutic session conducted by a modern American psychotherapist Stephen Madigan.

Materials and methods. Relying on the aforementioned information and our previous studies on metaphors in contemporary American therapeutic discourse, we explore a particular therapeutic session by means of contextual-interpretative, descriptive, and linguo-stylistic analysis what allows us to single out the stylistic elements that constitute its gist. The narrative therapy couple session by Stephen Madigan fell within the area of our special interest.

Discussion. The family therapy session conducted by Madigan is a vivid example of the effective use of metaphors by a therapist to elicit crucial information from clients and somehow personify their problem making it more lucid. By means of the excerpts of this conversation, it is possible to demonstrate the aforementioned model of metaphor use. To begin with, the clients, Eve and Joel, suggest that they “have kind of grown apart over the past 12 years.” The therapist responds with the respective question, “Was there something specific that helped contribute to putting a space between the two of you?” [8, p. 3].

1. **Activation.** In this very case, the therapist wants to draw a line between a family’s problem and the metaphor of distance. Therefore, the family estrangement becomes a tenor whereas space is a vehicle and the ground is the fact that the following concepts are compared on the basis of distance. It ensures the activation of imagery in Eve’s and Joel’s brains and they start associating their problem, in other words, a target domain, with the abyss between them, which prevents them from being close to each other. It encourages them to explore the issue in order to understand its roots.

2. **Elaboration.** The therapist’s question makes Eve and Joel delve deeper and analyze what lies behind the difficulties they are experiencing. They elaborate on the target domain in their minds, by trying to recall the period when their relationships flourished.

3. **Synthesis.** The spouses try to bear the two concepts in mind, namely physical distance and growing apart, in terms of togetherness and intimacy. Thus, they alternate between these simulations. They match elements between source and target domains as well as realize how this space forces them to lose connection and the sense of belonging.

4. **Reframe.** Eve and Joel acquire a fresh way of thinking about their challenges by thoroughly exploring and combining these elements. This new mental framework helps them to come up with innovative strategies for both their thoughts and actions. They will recall this metaphor whenever they encounter frustration or moments of disconnect.

Steven Madigan subtly leads the spouses to find the answer to the question of what “has got in the way of their relationship”. Eve highlights the point of distance again saying that previously when they communicated better she “felt closer to Joel.” Lack of proximity is often conceptualized in terms of trust issues, loss of interest as well as intimacy, and the presence of conflicts in any kind of close relationship. The farther the objects are in the real world, the more complicated it becomes to bind them, the same

happens with people. Eve admits that nowadays they coexist as roommates rather than partners.

It is worth admitting that the therapist does not impose anything on the partners, on the contrary, he gradually encourages them to open up and generate their narration of events from the past.

His following question also emphasizes relationships in terms of space since he talks about running away, which was typical of Joel.

T: What would that mean to you if you were able to feel free to say things to Joel with the knowledge that it wasn’t going to run away with the both of you and into an argument? What would that mean to you?

Eve: It would make me happier. I’d feel more content” [8, p. 5].

The distance is not the only reason for their dissatisfaction. The factor that aggravates the problem is viewed as a certain obstacle that does not allow the spouses to forge strong bonds. These are constant arguments that they “stumble on.” As G. Lakoff and M. Johnson indicated in their “Metaphors we live by”, love is a journey, which implies the concept of a road with its ups and downs, the process of the exploration of another person, etc. In addition, the journey always comprises movement. It corresponds to the session in question. The family’s relationships are conceptualized in terms of motion along the road with different stumbling blocks. One of the partners is ahead while the other one lags behind and cannot catch up because through the years the road surface was damaged and there appeared to be obstacles in the way. Moreover, the latter is probably bad at driving at all or experiences some technical problems that do not allow to approach the partner. In literal language, it means that the clients do not have inner mechanisms that are responsible for solving conflicts and maintaining a family hearth.

In a dialogue with Joel, they come to the conclusion that the spouses have lost their previous intimacy. This metaphor emphasizes the magnitude of the emotional disconnection in the relationship. It suggests that they have neglected something precious and integral to their connection.

Joel: Yes.

T: Where do you think it’s gone?

Joel: I don’t know or I’d go get it!

T: You would? Do you have any hunches as to where it’s gone? Both of you are convincing me that it’s still there but somehow it’s lost or it’s elusive. Do you have a sense as to how you might find the map to relocate it?” [8, p. 7].

They continue personifying the family’s problem. This stylistic device allows the couple to visualize its “elusive” nature and ponder about a map that will help to the lost attachment that “went somewhere”.

T: Do you have a sense that you’ve been blinded and you can’t find it?

Joel: I guess in a way, yeah.

T: Do you have a sense of what the cover-up is with?

Joel: I don’t know, it’s just...it’s been gone now for so long it’s really hard to.

T: Re-find it?

Joel: to backtrack and figure out where did it start veering off track.

T: But you both have a sense that it is there.

Joel: Yes, I do.

T: Is it on resuscitation? Or is just been somehow pushed out to the margins of your experience?

Eve: I don't know." [8, p. 7–8].

The following excerpt abounds in metaphors. The blindness metaphor suggests a sense of confusion and being in the dark in the face of the problem. Consequently, the partners' inability to look broader is foregrounded. What is more, the therapist hints that there might be a certain cover-up, which implies that the clients can conceal some thoughts or ideas.

Joel talks about how it's hard to backtrack and figure out where things started "veering off track." This metaphor suggests that there was a point where things went awry, like a vehicle deviating from its intended path.

A comparison between resuscitation and an attempt to revive their relationships seems very relevant as there is still a chance for their family to rescue what they once had and flourish in the future.

The "Margins of experience" statement helps Eve and Joel to accept that the issue might have been relegated to the periphery of their awareness, suggesting a lack of attention or focus on it.

Steven Madigan's persistent work enables the couple to confide in and trace this suppressed subconscious grudge that has "formed a wedge between them."

"Eve: I guess we also need to figure out how hard we're willing to work to get it back or to find it. Sometimes I think there's a lot of anger and resentment from the past five years that's hanging around which is making it difficult for us to get past that to move on.

T: Do you have a sense, then, that maybe anger is standing in the way of your love?

Eve: I think so, to a point." [8, p. 8].

It turns out that it is the anger that "keeps the two of them apart and away from their love". It is so threatening that both partners agree that there is a risk of its "taking down the whole family." Even Joel who was not that active during the first part of the session, admits that this feeling makes him feel miserable and he does not like being "detached from Eve".

It is noticeable how both partners make a transition from passive answers to generating metaphors by themselves, "a brick wall between us", and "turn back up." The therapist also continues unfolding the space metaphor.

"T: So, once it got a foothold?

Eve: Yeah.

T: And it began to grow bigger, take over more of the territory of your relationship, pushing out things like intimacy and love?

Eve: Oh, yeah." [8, p. 12].

Then Steven Madigan wants to delve deeper into the precursor of these arguments, "What gives it life? What fuels it? What keeps it alive?" He also uses different kinds of therapeutic discourses that were highlighted in the works by Ukrainian scholar G. Kalymkov. For instance, he applies the reset discourse that gives an opportunity to show the universality of a problem and compare oneself to other people [9, p. 102–107].

"T: When you detach yourself from your own relationship and look on to the world of other relationships, how does anger sneak its way into relationships in order to split them apart? What happens? What are some of the common themes?

Eve: Some of the things that cause the anger, like, money and kids and – is that what you mean?" [8, p. 13].

Later, he also engaged the I discourse in the conversation that is used to show that some topics resonate with a therapist, too. He is a father of two children, at the same time, the couple also wanted to have two children; however, it happened that they had triplets after their first son. The echo discourse is present in every other remark.

After involving the clients in recalling why they thought they would make great parents, the therapist encourages them to share how they met each other. It appears that they both had an overwhelming feeling of being "inseparable" and "knowing each other forever." Accordingly, the distance between them grew from the very close proximity to the gap that they are now trying to bridge.

The motif of movement and journey is also underlined in the excerpt where Eve utilizes the metaphor of "crossing paths", saying that they had a lot of common acquaintances but never had a chance to meet each other earlier. Anger is going to "put them in a hole" and this hole can become "a lot deeper." Anger made them "forget to remember", which is a pivotal quote in the whole session.

All in all, the metaphors DISTANCE, ROAD and BLINDNESS bear the main message of the whole session. The therapist artfully inspires the clients to focus not on negative aspects but rather start reconstructing the story of their relationship that has always been filled with joyful moments. They create the title "Love at first sight" and give the ground for the healing process. He ensures the spouses that their story is worth spreading.

"T: I'm wondering what it would be like to begin telling the stories of who you are and what you did and what it was like to the next generation? I'm wondering what it would be like for your children to hear some of these stories about who you were and why you were that way and why you felt this way about each other? I'm just imagining that that might be more of a preferred story?" [8, p. 24].

Finally, the therapist personifies the concept of their story and views it as an animate creature in order to facilitate the understanding of their further actions that constitute the basis of the healing process.

"T: I'm wondering how we can fatten up this story, give it some legs, give it some themes, some character development?" [8, p. 26].

The metaphors utilized in this therapy session change gradually. At first, they reveal the couple's deep-seated feelings of disconnection, longing for the past, and their awareness of barriers that have come between them. Later, when the clients admit their previous blindness, they start drawing on their past experience and realize that they have the mechanisms to bridge this distance and overcome all the hurdles. Hence, the therapist uses these metaphors to better understand the couple's emotions and to help them express and address their relationship issues.

Results. To conclude, the role of metaphors and stylistic elements in therapeutic discourse is prominent. Since the narratives are at the heart of counseling, therapists should be skilled in interpreting and reshaping these narratives. The significance of metaphors in therapy ranges from preventing defense mechanisms to fostering emo-

tional engagement and facilitating clients' self-expression. A family therapy session conducted by Stephen Madigan demonstrates how metaphors such as DISTANCE, ROAD and BLINDNESS assist in unraveling clients' relationship issues, leading to a reevaluation of their problems and the potential for healing and personal growth.

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