From Beowulf to BALEAP:
using literary analysis strategies in an EAP classroom

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Outline

Introduction:

Beowulf: metaphors and repetition

Part I: Metaphors and repetition in non-literary academic texts

Part II: Metaphors and critical evaluation of text's purpose/writer's stance/own critical position

Conclusion: Classroom applications

Beowulf and figurative language

þaér æt hýðe stód hringedstefna

ísig ond útfús æþelinges fær

álédon þá léofne þéoden

béaga bryttan on bearm scipes

maérne be mæste

A ring-whorled prow rode in the harbour;

Ice-clad, outbound, a craft for a prince.

They stretched their belived lord in his boat,

Ladi out by the mast, amidships,

The great ring-giver.

Beowulf. Trans. Heaney, S. (2000)

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Why teach figurative language to students of EAP?

Arguments against:

- Most students of EAP will not be required to read literary texts

- Most students of EAP are required to prioritise 'linearity over circularity; explicitness …over evocation; closing down of possible meanings rather than open-endedness; certainty over uncertainty' (Lillis 2001)

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Why teach figurative language to students of EAP?

Arguments for:

- Students should be introduced to a variety of genres

- Creative assignments are valued within the UK academia and are part of the University curriculum (Nesi and Gardner, 2012)

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Why teach figurative language to students of EAP?

'In Computer Science, our interviewee spoke of her reputation for setting "completely **whacky"** tasks, and in English studies another spoke of her course as a "**freak[ish]** module" because of its unusually creative writing assignments. Theatre Studies lecturers said that they encouraged students to "write **dangerously**"'

(Nesi and Gardner, 2012, 215, emphasis mine)

Figurative language and repetition in non-literary texts

Engineering and Sustainability
• Sustainability as weaving
• Sustainability as trading
• Sustainability as guarding
• Sustainability as observing limits

(Carew and Mitchell, 2006)

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Figurative language and repetition in non-literary texts

Computer Science

- Prototyping as a journey
- Software project as a game
- Software engineer experts as wizards
- System design as building a house
- Data, information and control as a liquid
- A computer as a human brain.

(Keen, 1996)

Figurative language and repetition in non-literary texts

Medicine (Sontag, 1978, 1988; Hodgkin 1985)

- Medicine as war
- Treatment as a military operation
- Illness as an external threat
- Disease as an invasion, an enemy, a killer
- Doctors as detectives
- Medical diagnosis as a police investigation

The function of metaphors in academic texts

Metaphors

- Help conceptualize difficult abstract ideas, e.g. time or sustainability (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980)

- Help explain abstract ideas in a compressed way (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980; Holme 2012)

- Shape and define how we think about concepts

- Reveal the text's ideological purpose and systems of value (McLaughlin, 1990; Goatly 2000, Holme, 2012)

Genetically engineered food and metaphors

- Frankenfood (Miller and Conko, 2004)

- Military metaphors (Pandey et. al, 2010)

- Pollution metaphors (Levidow, 2000)

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Genetically engineered food and military metaphors

Genetically Modified Food: Its uses, Future Prospects and Safety Assessments

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Abstract: In the context of the GM food regulations crop improvement via transgenic technology is a new stage of introducing novel food which supercedes over the conventional breeding. It was analyzed that worlds hunger, malnutrition problems, environmental pollution and phytoremediation in agriculture are the challenges for scientist as well as governments those can be combated by application of genetic engineering in crops.

Genetically engineered food and pollution metaphors

- consumer groups demand non-GM food, while supermarket chains try to provide clean food, i.e. free of any GM ingredients

- retailers seek a statutory tolerance threshold of inadvertent GM contamination, below which GM-derived food does not legally require a GM label, and this request is accommodated in law

- organic farmers protest that GM pollen may contaminate their own crops

(Levidow, 2000)

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Why teach figurative language to students of EAP?

1. a way for students to pinpoint the writer's position and to begin thinking about and unpacking the often implicit ideological assumptions or ideological purposes at work in a given text.

2. help students develop their own critical stance towards the text and the writer's argument

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Classroom applications: identifying text purpose and writer's stance

Tasks that…

1. draw students' attention to use of figurative language in a given text

2. elicit similar or additional instances from the text (to see if this is a common/repetitive linguistic feature)

3. ask to interpret metaphors—are they universal or culture-specific? positive or negative? what can they tells us about the writer's stance or ideological purpose of the text?

4. encourage to consider alternative possibilities to develop own critical position (Goatly 2000, Holme 2004)

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Conclusion

Figurative language…

1. extends beyond the confines of literature
2. is frequently found in a variety of technical and scientific texts

Figurative language analysis…

1. might facilitate the process of identifying writer's stance in an academic text
2. can help international students develop their own critical position.

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