

Figurative Language: Metaphors

Trying to figure them out

A metaphor uses (A) one thing or idea in our culture (B) to describe another thing or idea more effectively. The problem for language learners is that they sometimes don't know (A) one thing or idea because of vocabulary or culture. This method may help you in guessing the meaning of metaphors:

1. Isolate (by underlining) all of the words and grammar of (A) from the rest of its sentence. Isolate (B).
2. What does (A) describe? Does it describe a thing? an idea? a quality? an action? a state? a perception? a feeling? etc.
3. Do you have a similar concept or a similar metaphor in your culture?
4. Identify possible clues in the context (the same sentence, the same paragraph, a previous paragraph, a later paragraph; the related point) for (A).
5. Use context clues to guess the meaning.

Example with a word you probably already know: "The world's exploding population signals even more...."
Refer to the corresponding steps (numbers in parentheses) above.

- (1) A: *exploding*. B: *population*.
- (2) describes a quality or characteristic
- (3) yes [폭발적]
- (4) context clues:
 - (a) in the same sentence: *population, even more pains, already crowded*
 - (b) in a previous paragraph: "problems that will likely occur when so many people compete for..."
- (5) Guess. [A: expanding suddenly; A+B: the suddenly expanding population]

Example: "...signals even more growing pains for already crowded areas."

- (1) A: *growing pains*. B: *already crowded areas*
- (2) perception or feeling
- (3) yes [사춘기, 질풍노도]
- (4) context clues:
 - (a) in the same sentence: *exploding population, already crowded*
 - (b) in the previous paragraph: "problems that will likely occur when so many people compete for..."
- (5) Guess: [Answer: pains that a human (adolescent) or organization gets, mainly emotional. The intent of this one will be difficult to understand fully if Korean language does not have a similar concept. In this case, you can understand the author's basic point if you just consider the surface meaning of the known word 'pains,' and ignore 'growing.']

Example: "...many hard-pressed to support their present populations"

- (1) A: *be hard-pressed*. B: *to support*
- (2) state
- (3) 쪼들리다
- (4) context clues:
 - (a) less developed countries
 - (b) Abstract: problems; Par. 1: Even more troubling
- (5) [You will probably be able to answer it because of its context and the word *hard*, which means difficult. The answer is: "find it difficult."]