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SEMIO-COGNITIVE ANALYSIS OF FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

Research article

Bayramova G.M.<sup>1,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>ORCID : 0000-0001-9808-0894;

<sup>1</sup>Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences, Baku, Azerbaijan

<sup>1</sup>Azerbaijan University of Languages, Baku, Azerbaijan

\* Corresponding author (gunelf[at]mail.ru)

**Abstract**

Figurative language is currently a vague and highly controversial topic. We know that recent analyses consider figurative language as a means of conceptual innovation. In this regard, speaking with figures creates new paradigms of conceptualization. The article presents the result of the semio-cognitive analysis of some figurative expressions that present conceptual differences in different languages. Semio-cognitive analysis of common places and topos is important from the point of view of understanding the cultural reality. Figurative language is generally important for semiotics, especially cultural-oriented semiotics. The extrasemiotic nature of the sign is revealed above all in the culturally related elements of the sign. The purpose of the article is to highlight the differences in semiotic and cultural level of some figurative concepts according to the languages. The conclusion is that however common and shared the main concepts of languages are, the semiotic and cultural differences prevent their understanding in the same way.

**Keywords:** speech figures, secondary meaning, culture, semiosis, figurative.

СЕМИО-КОГНИТИВНЫЙ АНАЛИЗ ФИГУРАТИВНОГО ЯЗЫКА

Научная статья

Байрамова Г.М.<sup>1,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>ORCID : 0000-0001-9808-0894;

<sup>1</sup>Национальная академия наук Азербайджана, Баку, Азербайджан

<sup>1</sup>Азербайджанский Университет Языков, Баку, Азербайджан

\* Корреспондирующий автор (gunelf[at]mail.ru)

**Аннотация**

Образный язык в настоящее время является неопределённой и весьма спорной темой. Знаем, что недавние исследования рассматривают образный язык как средство концептуальной инновации. В связи с этим фигуративный язык создает новые парадигмы концептуализации. В статье представлен результат семио-когнитивного анализа некоторых образных выражений, представляющих концептуальные различия в разных языках. Семио-когнитивный анализ общих мест и топосов важен с точки зрения понимания культурной реальности. Фигуративный язык, как правило, важен для семиотики, особенно семиотики, ориентированной на культуру. Экстрасемиотическая природа знака проявляется прежде всего в культурно связанных элементах знака. Цель статьи состоит в том, чтобы выделить семиотические и культурологические различия некоторых фигуративных понятий в зависимости от языков. Вывод состоит в том, что, какими бы общими ни были основные концепции языков, семиотические и культурные различия не позволяют понимать их одинаково.

**Ключевые слова:** речевые фигуры, вторичное значение, культура, семиозис, образный.

**Introduction**

Figurative language, which appeared long before writing and was part of the natural language process, played an important role in the development and early evolution of languages. Currently, like denotative meanings, secondary and figurative meanings are seen as the primary way of conveying information. The recent approaches to the rhetorical figures are different. Some linguists compare speech figures to geometric figures. Garavelli, focusing on the features of the geometric figures, compares the speech figures with features and movements of dance, gymnastics, skiing, water-skiing, fencing. He notes: "It is easy to distinguish them (speech figures - G.B.), as well as the forms drawn by the images of motion, which are subject to precise rules, regardless of whether they are performed in countless stylistic variations" [5, P. 3]. The fact that the linguist compares the structure of these types of sports and their geometric trajectory to the figures of speech itself is a metaphorical comparison. On the other hand, the rhetorical figures seen today beyond the stylistic level, at the level of mental processes as a mechanism for forming basic concepts. In this sense, we can recall the cognitive metaphor theory of Lakoff and Johnson [8] and their followers.

At the stylistic level instead, Lorusso sees rhetoric as a "problem of norms" and sees a parallel between the concepts of "style" and "linguistics" and "rhetoric" and "semiotics." Semiotics is interesting in terms of speech practice, discursive memory, because the form of discursive memory, which is part of general knowledge, acts as a "material" for each speech act. Knowledge of speech practice is based on norms, and memory and traditions play an important role here. In this regard, *topos*, which are traditionally part of the invention, are a source of persuasive thinking [10]. It should be noted that the word "topicos" of Greek origin means - "common place" and indicates the rationale for the hypothesis to be proved in logic and rhetoric. When

looking at topos in terms of semio-cognitive analysis, their rhetorical nature is revealed. In addition, the semio-cognitive analysis of topos and rhetorical figures is important because it is possible to construct and imagine reality. In this sense, figurative language is important in its modern sense (beyond the knowledge of deviation as in the past) for semiotics, especially cultural-oriented semiotics.

The goal of the research is to reveal the differences of rhetorical figures at the conceptual level from the semiotic and cultural point of view. To achieve the goal, concrete rhetorical figures and expressions are analyzed in different languages, especially Italian and Azerbaijani.

### Methods and principles

The semio-cognitive analysis of rhetorical figures in the article is based on a complex analysis method, including comparative, descriptive, cognitive and semiotic approaches.

### Main results

It has been determined that a number of basic metaphorical and metonymical concepts take different forms in different cultures.

Such differences are first found in the meaning layer of the language.

The second such difference can be found in the morphological layer of the language.

On the other hand, it can be concluded that those differences between languages create difficulties in translation. This makes it interesting to consider rhetorical concepts and secondary meanings in language learning.

### Discussion

Eco notes that all the rhetorical and stylistic rules that exist in each language reflect the process of "hypercoding" [4]. Language accepts certain grammatical combinations, and these combinations are understood and accepted by everyone. On the other hand, figurative language takes these combinations as a starting point, and determines that these syntagmatic combinations must be worked out with special stylistic connotations in different situations [4, P. 188]. In these views, Eco seems to approach rhetoric from a traditional perspective. We should note that hypercoding can also manifest itself at the grammatical level, for instance, in Italian, the using of the future tense form as the present tense form indicates the certainty of the event that will happen. In the sentence "Milan gioca domani contro Juventus" ('Milan will play against Juventus tomorrow'), the future tense suffix "erà" of the phrase "giocherà" is abbreviated. It is possible to observe the same situation in the Azerbaijani language. In the sentence "Prezidentlər sabah görüşür" ('The presidents meet tomorrow'), the suffix of the future tense form "əcək" 'will' of the word "görüşür" 'meet' is abbreviated. While talking about the future in a language, the using of the present tense form is hypercoding and gives the secondary meaning - decisiveness and confidence.

According to T. Daddesio, most modern hypotheses about semiotics are based on sign theory without taking into account the neurological and psychological processes to which semiosis is connected. The same trend can be observed also in Eco's some views. Daddesio noted that, sign theory which is created without taking into account non-semiotic units, cannot be considered acceptable. He said: "We are supposed to be content with the internal structure of the sign. However, semiotics do not express their absolute rejection of external factors. The appeal to extrasemiotic factors sometimes appears at the decisive moment of the hypothesis" [2, P. 23]. Elements of the sign connected with culture, in fact indirectly perceives the extrasemiotic nature of the sign.

Semiotics is closely related to rhetoric in the study of meaning. Traditionally, textbooks on semiotics include topics related to rhetorical figures, especially metaphor and metonymy. Sometimes under the name of metaphor the whole figurative language and the secondary meanings are understood. When examining the semantic and cognitive features of figurative meanings in the Azerbaijani language, interesting points emerge. Among them, metaphorical and metonymic concepts attract attention. According to the cognitive metaphor theory, the role of metaphorical concepts has been emphasized in our understanding of the world [8]. Numerous expressions created by metaphorical concepts such as "body is a container", "emotions are liquids in the container", "love is fire", "anger is fire" etc. are already known in linguistics. Comparative analysis of such metaphorical concepts in different languages is of interest. In many cases, the same metaphorical concept acquires a different iconic effect in a different language. For example: what should the translator do when he translates the phrase "başından tüstü çıxdı" into Italian, which corresponds to the metaphorical concept "anger is fire" in Azerbaijani? Here he has two ways: either a literal (i.e. non-metaphorical) translation - "è molto arrabbiato", or finding a suitable version in Italian - "è fuori di sé". But in this case the symbolic (iconic) effect of the original is lost. That is, it is difficult to present the metaphorical association "başından tüstü çıxdı" 'blood that boils and comes out like smoke from the head' = "hədsiz qəzəb" 'extreme anger' with the same iconic effect in Italian.

Many studies in cognitive linguistics consider metaphor as a cross-domain relationship, and metonymy as a relationship between the same cognitive domain. The semiotic aspect of the metaphor arising from the similarity relationship manifests itself not in the relationship between signifier and signified, but in the sememe identity. Here, metaphor means the substitution of one sememe for another. This is reminiscent of the replacement of one or more semantic symbols by innovative amalgamation. Metonymy is a substitution based on a logical connection. Some studies went further in this field and tried to confirm metaphorical-metonymic connections in figurative expressions. R. Mendoza and colleagues studied various figurative expressions that reflect the metonymic construction of source or target domains in metaphorical linking. The authors' example of "don't bite the hand that feeds you" is of interest from the point of view of our research. In this idiomatic expression, which includes the source field of the concepts "animal", "bite" and "hand", the last concept (hand) metonymically acts as an agent in the sense of "feeder". "This source field, constructed from a metonymic point of view, creates a metaphorical connection with the target field in a figurative sense in the form of "Don't turn against a person that supports you" (through a simple metaphorical association as *human* instead of *animal*; *be against* instead of *bite*; *supporter* instead of a *feeder* (hand), - G.B.) [11, P. 321-357]. Note that, as in the above example, the symbolic effect changes during translation into another (in our case in Azerbaijani) language. The translation of the expression as "yediyn qaba tüpürmə" ('do not spit in the bowl you eat' - literal

translation) as its equivalent in Azerbaijani will change the source fields here such as “animal”, “bite”, “hand”. It is interesting that the expression “sputare nel piatto in cui si mangia” in the Italian language exactly coincides with its equivalent in the Azerbaijani language.

S. Traini's analysis of the secondary meaning of the language sign also is interesting. For example, the word ‘house’ means ‘building for living’. However, the pronunciation of the first letter of the Italian word “*casa*” ‘house’ with the breathy ‘c’ (like the sound [h]) in the Tuscan dialect of the consonant ‘c’ [k] will bring about to a new connotative meaning. Making such “additions” to the language system gives it connotative value and cultural content. In this case, a secondary meaning emerges. Similarly: “*beer*” - 1. at the denotative level = alcohol obtained as a result of fermentation of hops; 2. at the connotative level = to be peculiar to the Germans. Connotative possibilities can arise in different styles, tones, levels, idioms, dialects, and so on [14]. The essence of figurativeness here is that the contextual mapping in the examples repeats the formula in the metaphorical mappings. Thus, for any Italian, the pronunciation of the word “*casa*” as [haza] will create the metaphorical association of “Tuscan”. The concept of “*beer*” in the second example will first create a metaphorical mapping of “being German” in the representatives of any non-German nations. These two examples can be viewed as purely culturally based metaphorical associations.

Damiani writes that a non-rhetorical natural form of language cannot exist because rhetoric reflects a cognitive ability that helps to choose specific forms that can express the world around us. In other words, figures are a ‘device’ that is a means of interpretation. Language has a figurative character, because it is this quality that allows to express the structure of reality through “imagination” [3, P. 72].

It is well known that rhetoric is not an art of persuasion as a system of secondary meanings, but aims to convey information. From this point of view, the importance of the analysis of rhetorical figures, semiotics and culture from the joint point of view is undeniable. The main suggestion of this modern trend is that rhetorical forms play an important and inevitable role in the construction of reality. In this regard, the fact that figures reflect reality according to cultures and even religious views should not be overlooked. For example, the contradiction caused by the juxtaposition of “*vino*” ‘vine’ and “*acqua*” ‘water’ in the phrase “*Chi non bevi vino, Dio neghi anche l'acqua*” in the Italian language cannot preserve its antithesis and conceptual function in the translation into Azerbaijani. Thus, in the experience of the Azerbaijani language, which does not share a similar theological linguistic “space”, “*wine*” was not traditionally promoted, nor was its conceptual value measured with the conceptual value of “*water*”. For the Italian conceptual environment, the semiotic capacity of the concept and its conceptual comparison, even the preference of the first one, is understandable and natural [1, P. 12].

According to Pierce, who in the early stages of his career, put forward an idea that went hand in hand with cognitivism, our knowledge of ourselves is not directly acquired. The only real evidence of this knowledge comes from our observations about the impact of our thoughts on the outside world. We do not have direct access to thought, because we can know about thinking only from signs, and the manifestation of thoughts can be revealed by the meanings of signs. In this sense thoughts are signs, and as a result, cognition can be understood in a semiotic sense.

Metaphor becomes the object of study of semiotics in terms of being conventional and iconic. Since metaphor is associated with the different and unusual use of words in a language, the metaphorical sign goes beyond the semiotic structure of the language system [12, P. 341]. From a semiotic point of view, iconicity and iconography is a encyclopedic and cultural knowledge. Iconography is taken as the basis of the interpretations here. Without iconography, it would not be possible to associate signifiers with signified. Metonymy is also manifested not only in language but also in other forms and plays an important role in various types of meaning creation. J. Littlemore points out that it is possible to expand cognitive linguistics approaches by taking into account the role of metonymy in language and other forms of expression of the complex, dynamic, cultural nature. For example: In Japanese “*Manga*” cartoons, often the absence of a character's hands metonymically means that the character is in a difficult situation and is used to achieve iconic effect. British Sign Language's gesture for 'car' (turning the steering wheel) also refers to metonymic thinking [9, P. 15]. It is necessary to note that the term "encyclopedic knowledge" or “cultural knowledge” are terms used to refer to a "set of interconnected knowledge" possessed by a subject or group of society.

We can note that some scholars [6], [7] have tried to reduce figures of speech (as metaphor, metonymy, and synecdoche) to one mental process. If two or three years ago the concept of metaphor was reflected in all articles, theses, and monographs, today the “fashion” has changed. Today, metaphor has been replaced by metonymy [11], [13]. On a cognitive level, of course it is difficult to distinguish the functioning mechanism of metaphors from metonymies and other figures. Today, cognitivists continue researches on the processing of figurative language in the human mind.

### Conclusion

Throughout human history, figures of speech have played an important role in studying the specific characteristics of different cultures. Analyzing the interrelations of figurative language, sign and thought in the aspect of different languages reveals interesting facts. The predominance of figures in our thinking suggests that human cognition has been closely associated with them, especially metaphor, metonymy from the very beginning. The conclusion is that the semi-cognitive characteristics of the rhetorical figures of the semiotic system of different languages can be different. This is mainly determined by cultural factors.

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**Конфликт интересов**

Не указан.

**Рецензия**

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**Conflict of Interest**

None declared.

**Review**

All articles are peer-reviewed. But the reviewer or the author of the article chose not to publish a review of this article in the public domain. The review can be provided to the competent authorities upon request.

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