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By way of introduction: A contrastive perspective on figurative language

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1. Introduction

In recent decades, linguistics has witnessed a rising interest in figurative language. The inspiration for this kind of research may be connected to the rise and development of cognitive semantics, which has made metaphor one of its key notions. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, in their seminal work titled *Metaphors We Live By* (1980, modified and republished in 2003), denied the conviction that figurative speech is an aberration or anomaly that speakers use only in a limited number of special contexts. Lakoff and Johnson postulated that metaphor, together with metonymy, are actually pervasive ways of thinking and common cognitive tools that motivate a remarkable amount of our language (2003/1980: 3). Their findings have been developed by numerous authors, who have contributed to the Conceptual Metaphor Theory with both empirical research into various languages, as well as elaborations on the theoretical issues.¹ Furthermore, it has been observed that metaphors and metonymies may vary among languages: the ways speakers use non-literal language is not universal, but to a large extent it depends on the culture, including the background of the speaker, or the specific context of language use (Kövecses 2005: 292–294). The aim of this volume is to present various examples of research into figurative language from the cross-linguistic perspective. However, first, we want to focus on the notion of figurative language as such, and notice how its understanding in linguistics has changed over the past decades. Next, we will focus on the

¹ It would be impossible to list here all the works that have contributed to the development of the Conceptual Metaphor Theory. A presentation of its current state, including the accepted theoretical assumptions, can be found, for instance, in Geeraerts and Cuyckens (2010).

cross-linguistic research into figurative language in contemporary linguistics. Finally, the topics undertaken in the subsequent chapters of this volume will be shortly presented and discussed.

2. What is figurative language?

Linguistic expressions can be defined as figurative when their intended meaning differs from their literal meaning (Cruse 2006: 63). Laurel J. Brinton (2000: 153) explains the nature of figurative language as a kind of semantic anomaly which resides in the violation of selectional restrictions concerning the compatibility or combinability of words. For instance, the sentence *The rooster laid an egg* violates the requirement for *lay an egg* of having a [FEMALE+] subject. When violations of selectional restrictions are interpretable, they are treated as instances of figurative language. Such a situation can be observed in the so-called figures of speech, which traditionally have been studied by rhetoric. These include, for example, *oxymoron*, which contains an explicit contradiction (e.g., *silent scream*); *tautology*, which refers to expressions that are true by definition (e.g., *free gift*); *synesthesia*, which is a combination of expressions referring to two sensory domains (e.g., *sweet sound*); *metonymy*, which consists in naming something by using a word associated with it (e.g., *the church* = religion); *synecdoche*, which is the act of referring to something by naming a part of it (e.g., *a new face* = a new person); *personification*, which attributes human qualities to non-human or inanimate entities (e.g., *The idea grabbed me*); and *metaphor*, which describes one thing in terms of another (e.g., *heart of a problem*) (Brinton 2000: 154–156). As we can see, figures of speech understood in this way are purely linguistic phenomena, whose special semantic properties are the result of an untypical combination of words. Furthermore, it is often assumed that figurative language is something appropriate for literature, especially poetry, where it serves the ornamental and expressive functions, but something definitely unwanted and generally avoided in non-literary texts, which should be based on literal language (Evans & Green 2006: 289). Andrew Ortony (1993: 2–3) claims that the tradition of perceiving figurativeness as an anomalous, abnormal, or deviant use of language has its roots in the Aristotelian rhetoric, which has permeated and influenced Western philosophy. As the author notices, Aristotle argued that metaphors are ambiguous and obscure, and warned against mistaking them for genuine definitions, which should always be literal and unambiguous.

However, it seems that the distinction between what is figurative and what is literal is far from obvious since the notion of *literalness* itself has a number of different interpretations in linguistics. For instance, Raymond W. Gibbs (1994: 75) distinguishes four basic definitions of literal meaning:

1. *Conventional literality*, which is understood as the opposition of poetic language, exaggeration, and indirect meaning;
2. *Non-metaphorical literality*, or directly meaningful language, in which one word is never understood in terms of another;
3. *Truth-conditional literality*, which assumes that language can refer to objectively existing objects and that linguistic expressions can be objectively true or false; and
4. *Context-free literality*, in which the literal meaning of a word equals its meaning as independent of any situational context.

Vyvyan Evans and Melanie Green (2006: 289–293) elaborate on the dichotomy between literalness and figurativeness, showing the problematic nature of distinguishing between the two types of speech. When it comes to the understanding of literal language as conventional language, on closer inspection of ordinary speech, we discover that, in fact, people often speak figuratively in everyday communication. The exemplary sentence *Things are going smoothly in the operating theatre* shows that an operation, although an abstract entity, can be described figuratively, as if it were undergoing motion. Next, the claim that literal language equals non-metaphorical language fails in the case of certain abstract categories. While it is possible to describe someone's bravery either literally, by saying *He is brave*, or metaphorically, by saying *He is like a lion*, it is hardly possible to refer to the experience of time or to human emotions without any metaphorical language. Furthermore, the truth-conditional definition of literal language assumes that it is possible to distinguish between literal sentences, such as *It's raining in London now*, which can be objectively true or false, and figurative sentences, such as *It's raining in my heart*, which cannot be objectively true. However, this criterion fails in the case of speech acts, such as *I pronounce you husband and wife*, which fail to describe situations but which function as acts of changing the world: as a result, such utterances cannot be evaluated as true or false at all. Finally, the assumption that literal language means context-independent linguistic expressions fails if we realize that, in fact, even when we produce simple sentences, we make certain background assumptions and use some encyclopedic knowledge about the world, which determines the way we describe various situations.

As mentioned at the beginning of this introductory chapter, a new light on figurative meaning has been cast by cognitive semantics. In line with the assumptions presented by Lakoff and Johnson (2003/1980), as well as their numerous followers, metaphor and metonymy, traditionally viewed as figures of speech, are the question of thinking rather than merely a matter of words and linguistic expressions. Such an approach to metaphor and metonymy seems to answer the problem of the indeterminacy of literal language: since we often think metaphorically, non-literal language appears in various contexts, including both literary and non-literary texts. Cognitive linguists write

about metaphor as a conceptual phenomenon, understood as a mapping from the source domain onto the target domain, and used systematically to reason about the target domain. This mapping is not purely abstract or arbitrary, but it is shaped and constrained by a person's bodily experiences in the world (Barcelona 2000: 3–4; Lakoff & Johnson 2003/1980: 246). Conceptual metaphors are often conventionalized, which means that it is not necessary for people to be aware that a given expression is motivated by metaphor. Basically, they are used by speakers automatically and unconsciously (pp. 211–213). When it comes to *conceptual metonymy*, the term may be defined as “using one entity to refer to another that is related to it” (p. 35). Another common view, widely accepted in cognitive linguistics, holds that metonymy is “a cognitive process in which one conceptual entity, the vehicle, provides mental access to another conceptual entity, the target, within the same idealized cognitive models” (Radden & Kövecses 1999: 19–21; cf. also Barcelona 2000: 4). Metaphors and metonymies understood as ways of thinking are reflected in all types of language use, including non-literary contexts of ordinary conversations as well as literary contexts, where they are often used in a creative, novel way (Lakoff & Turner 1989: 214–215).

3. Contrastive studies into figurative language

As a branch of language studies, *contrastive linguistics* focuses on the comparison and contrast between two or, in some cases, more languages. This approach to linguistics allows academics to conduct a detailed comparison and, as a result, to reveal multidimensional correspondences between the studied languages. What is important, although this branch of linguistic analysis belongs to theoretical linguistics, it has numerous practical applications. It is assumed that the theoretical knowledge concerning, for instance, grammars of two languages will be useful for foreign language teaching, translating a text, and constructing a bilingual dictionary, and that it can also help us understand people who speak and think in foreign languages and facilitate intercultural communication (Dirven & Verspoor 2004: 247).

Any contrastive study between languages requires a common point of reference, which is something shared by both compared sides, and which allows researchers to identify differences in the two or more studied languages. That common ground is called *tertium comparationis* (Krzyszowski 1990: 15) or equivalence (Gómez-González & Doval-Suárez 2005: 28). Actually, in any comparison, there are at least three components: two *comparanda*, that is, two compared objects, and one *tertium comparationis*, which in Latin means “the third part of the comparison.” Depending on the adopted *tertium comparationis*, various types of cross-linguistic analyses can be conducted. As Tomasz Krzyszowski observes

(1990: 15–16), “since language is a complex hierarchical structure, operating at various levels of organization, and since it manifests itself as texts produced by its users, every aspect of language at every level of organization, as well as every text and its constituents, can undergo comparison with equivalent elements in another language.” In today’s linguistics, contrastive studies seem to include a variety of linguistic issues. In addition to comparing linguistic structures in the fields of phonology, morphology, and syntax, the *tertia comparationis*, or types of equivalence, may encompass such issues as borrowings and language transfer, language use in different communicative contexts, cultural motivation behind language use, as well as conceptual metaphors used in compared languages (Cetnarowska et al. 2016: 9).

It should be emphasized that studying the similarities and differences between various languages in the use of conceptual metaphors and metonymies has a very practical dimension. When teaching and learning foreign languages, one of the problems that both teachers and students face is how the same figurative meaning is expressed in the students’ mother tongue and in the foreign language (Deignan et al. 1997). The research conducted in this area reveals that the literal meaning of an expression with a figurative meaning can be either the same or different in the two languages. For instance, in some cases, the same metaphorical meaning in two different languages is expressed by equivalent words with the same literal meanings, while in others, the same metaphor is expressed in two languages by different words whose non-metaphorical meanings are divergent. Another common contrast concerns words that have the same literal and figurative meanings in the two languages, but whose figurative readings are based on unrelated conceptual metaphors (Kövecses 2003: 312–313). One of the roles of contrastive studies into figurative language is to aid people in overcoming such difficulties in the process of language acquisition by helping them understand the differences and facilitating the correct use of the figurative expressions (Boers 2003).

When it comes to the cross-linguistic perspective on figurative language, an interesting example of contrastive analysis is offered by Zoltán Kövecses (2005). For instance, his research reveals that the conceptual metaphors for LIFE used by speakers of Hungarian and American English differ: while Americans understand life mainly as A GAME and A PRECIOUS POSSESSION, Hungarians conceptualize it first of all as A WAR OR A COMPROMISE: “Where most Americans were talking about life as being *the most precious commodity, something that we have to cherish and take care of, something precious underestimated by others; valuing and admiring life; a wonderful, beautiful, and dear thing*, most Hungarians were talking about life as *battles that have to be won, people having to fight throughout life, people always having to prove and fight, which is exhausting and tiring most of the time*” (Kövecses 2005: 84). The author explains that these differences result from different cultural and historical backgrounds of the speakers: people

who settled down in the United States of America could make their careers and pursue their dreams in a free country of new possibilities, whereas Hungarians had to defend their country and fight in numerous wars throughout history.

Further examples of contemporary contrastive research into figurative language concerning English, or published in English, may include the comparisons of death metaphors in English and Spanish (Marín Arrese 1996), Polish and German (Płomińska 2014), and English and Polish (Kuczok 2016). Next, there are cross-cultural studies of figurative references to selected taboo terms, such as *a prostitute* in English, Turkish, and Italian (Duda 2016). Among recent contrastive analyses concerning figurative language, we also find a comparison of animal metaphors in English and Polish (Kiełtyka 2016), and of selected body parts, namely: the mouth in English, Danish, and Spanish (Nissen 2011), or the mouth plus the tongue in English, German, and Hungarian (Tóth-Czifra 2014). Furthermore, contemporary studies include comparisons of metaphors of emotions in various languages, for instance, of happiness in English and German (Stefanowitsch 2004) and English and Russian (Pavpertova 2014), or of disgust in English and Lithuanian (Sirvydė 2007) and English and Polish (Kuczok 2015). There are also cross-linguistic investigations into the role of metonymy in word-formation processes in English, Russian, Czech, and Norwegian (Janda 2011) or in English and Polish (Kuczok 2014). Moreover, we can find studies that compare metaphors in languages belonging to geographically and historically distant cultures as well as to different language families; for example, a study into selected orientational metaphors based on the up-down distinction in English and Chinese (Chun 2002), a study into idioms and proverbs in a number of languages, including English, German, Russian, and Japanese (Dobrovolskij & Piirainen 2005), or a comparison of the use of metaphor and metonymy in English and Malay phraseology (Charteris-Black 2003).

4. The contents of this volume

The present monograph consists of three parts. Part One, *Figurative meaning in grammar and vocabulary*, contains three chapters. In Chapter 1, Maria Brenda concentrates on prepositional semantics as she analyses figurative sense extensions of the spatial preposition *at* in terms of the conceptual metaphor of coincidence. She begins her discussion by stating that most spatial prepositions are polysemous in nature, constituting semantic categories organized around the category prototype based on family resemblance. After discussing the issue of the metaphorical extension of the prototype, as well as the notion of conceptual metaphor, Brenda continues her analysis by elaborating on two general metaphors which constitute the basis for the conceptualizations of the preposition *at*, namely, the EVENT STRUCTURE metaphor and the TIME

IS SPACE metaphor. Furthermore, following Kokorniak (2007), the author lists four Polish equivalents of the spatial preposition *at*: *w*, *na*, *przy*, and *o*, which is the starting point of her analysis of how Polish speakers conceptualize metaphorical relations encoded by the English preposition *at*. Even though the same general metaphors can be found in the conceptualizations motivated by the Polish prepositions *w*, *na*, *przy*, and *o*, these conceptualizations rest on different submetaphors. The results of Brenda's analysis confirm this claim, as the author concludes that Polish and English speakers can make use of different elements of space, that is, of points, lines, planes, and figures, to refer to the same abstract concepts.

Based on Langacker's Cognitive Grammar (1987) and Lakoff and Johnson's Conceptual Metaphor Theory (2003/1980), in Chapter 2, Katarzyna Rudkiewicz discusses English preposition *for* and its Polish equivalents. After listing numerous senses coded by this preposition, such as "reason," "duration," or "destination," the author analyzes *for* from the point of view of the meaning schema, as she provides particular metaphorical extensions which affected its meaning, namely, the TIME IS SPACE metaphor, the ACTIVITY IS A JOURNEY metaphor, and the INFLUENCE IS TRANSMITTED ENERGY metaphor. Furthermore, Rudkiewicz claims that the choice of Polish equivalents of *for* is motivated by the same meaning schema, which organizes their semantic content, being at the same time a *tertium comparationis* in the contrastive analysis. To prove her assumption, after providing the list of possible Polish prepositions serving as equivalents of *for*, the author elaborates on particular counterparts: *przez*, *po*, *dla*, *za*, *(po)mimo*, *na*, *jak na*, *do/od*, and *z(e)*. On the basis of her analysis, Rudkiewicz concludes that a shared schema for English and Polish prepositions can be identified. In her opinion, it is the schema of a path with a variously conceptualized landmark, along which the energy transfer occurs. What is more, she claims that Polish equivalents of *for* function within a common network of meanings thanks to the presence in their semantic structures of a common element which determines the choice of the equivalent in a particular context and, at the same time, allows for a group of prepositions to be represented in English by a single equivalent, namely *for*.

Kateryna Bondarenko discusses standard and substandard terms related to men and women in English and Ukrainian. The study is based primarily on English and Ukrainian general and slang dictionaries. Many terms, used particularly in slang, can be characterized as metaphorical, with the metaphor HUMANS ARE ANIMALS being particularly common. Other metaphors include, among others, HUMANS ARE OBJECTS or HUMAN BEING IS FOOD. The analysis shows that gender-marked terms are much more frequent in slang varieties, in both English and Ukrainian. According to the author, many of the slang terms referring to women seem to stress the ability or inability to give birth to children; in addition, terms related to women, unlike those referring to men, are very frequently

connected with physical appearance, often with some sexual connotations, while intellectual properties or social status are usually neglected.

Part Two, *Figurative meaning in discourse*, contains three chapters. In Chapter 4, set in the context of academic discourse, Issa Kanté discusses the WORK FOR AUTHOR metonymy in English and French, with special emphasis paid to the issue of anaphoric reference, that is, the pronoun used after the metonymic construction WORK (TEXT, CONCEPT) FOR AUTHOR, and conceptual prominence. His study is based on two comparable corpora (English and French), composed of linguistic papers published in two selected linguistic journals. It can be observed that WORK FOR AUTHOR metonymic constructions can be detected in both English and French, albeit with a different frequency, depending on the verb used in the sentence. When such constructions are used, focusing and defocusing strategies can be noticed; consequently, the presence of the author in the text is concealed. The possible reason for this might be the desire to sound more objective in the argumentation. In addition, Issa Kanté discusses less obvious realizations of WORK FOR AUTHOR metonymy, such as sentential relative (... , *which...*) as well as constructions that do not involve typical metonymic mappings, but share with them certain effects (such as concealing the author's presence), for instance, the impersonal constructions used in the passive voice.

Chapter 5 by Łukasz Barciński concentrates on the figurative language in translation. The works under scrutiny include surrealist poetry by David Gascoyne and American postmodern fiction by Thomas Pynchon. Barciński discusses extensively various approaches to metaphor, including theories by Paul Ricoeur (1975), George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (2003/1980), and Jacques Derrida (1972), and couples them with a discussion on recent advancements within translation studies. The author performs a contrastive analysis, with the use of a poststructuralist approach to meaning and interpretation (e.g., Derrida's concept of *undecidables*), of excerpts of David Gascoyne's poem "Salvador Dali" and its two Polish translations by Tadeusz Pióro and Agata Hołobut, as well as of excerpts of Thomas Pynchon's novel *Gravity's Rainbow* and its Polish translation by Robert Sudół. Barciński arrives at the conclusion that the source text ambiguities (related to various metaphorical juxtapositions, that is, cases in which metaphors mutually affect each other), in general, are quite problematic for the translators, as instances with no readily available target language counterparts are quite common. In such cases, there is frequently a limited preservation of source text ambiguities in translation; sometimes a translator may choose to employ various compensatory strategies, such as choosing a counterpart which, while only partially equivalent to a source language element, may function well at a higher metaphorical level, or creating completely new ambiguity in the target language text. The author argues that the translators under study use different strategies of coping with source text ambiguities and achieve varying success levels of rendering them in the target language.

In Chapter 6, Jarosław Wiliński presents a metaphostructural study of sports terminology in the context of business, as he conducts a quantitative corpus-based analysis in order to find possible distributional differences between particular sports terms. The author aims at identifying which source domain lexemes derived from different sports are strongly attracted to or repelled from the target domain of business; he claims that such lexemes can be distinguished and that they instantiate various metaphorical mappings. The chapter adopts the concept of metaphostructure and the Conceptual Metaphor Theory to study a set of sports terms taken from the magazine section of *Corpus of Contemporary American English* from the years 1990–2012. After introducing theoretical and methodological notions, the author concentrates on the BUSINESS IS SPORT metaphor. The findings of his analysis reveal that some sports terms are more frequently encountered in business discourse than others. They fall into particular semantic classes of metaphors, namely, BUSINESS IS RACING, BUSINESS IS A BOXING BOUT, BUSINESS IS A BASEBALL GAME, and BUSINESS IS A FOOTBALL GAME. Interestingly, the findings show as well that certain sports terms associated with the above-mentioned sports disciplines are also among the most strongly repelled lexemes of business. After discussing the occurrence of sports terms in the context of business, the author compares the results with the ones of his earlier study of sports terminology in the domain of politics. He lists and analyzes two groups of lexemes with the largest type frequency, namely, the ones instantiating the conceptual metaphors POLITICAL CAMPAIGN IS A RACE and POLITICAL ELECTION/DEBATE IS A BOXING BOUT.

Part Three, *Figurative meaning in communication*, contains three chapters. Krzysztof Kosecki departs from the traditional contrastive analysis of two languages and focuses instead on the comparison of two different systems of communication, namely, phonic and signed languages. The author focuses on the figurative meanings; to be more precise, he deals with the realisation of figurative meanings in phonic systems (mostly in English and Polish, but other languages, e.g., Italian, are also referred to) and signed systems (on the basis of Polish Sign Language and British Sign Language). The author discusses main types of metaphors, such as orientational, ontological, structural, image, and primary, showing that all of them are present in both systems of communication. For example, the orientational metaphor HAVING CONTROL IS UP is common in phonic languages, but it appears in British Sign Language as well, where the sign for “boss” is the sharp movement up of the dominant hand with its index finger extended. In addition, similarities of this type can also be detected in the case of metonymic expressions, such as PART FOR WHOLE, realized both in phonic languages and in signed languages (cf. the sign for *house* in Polish Signed Language, which is actually iconic of the sloping roof of the house). Kosecki argues that the scope and complexity of conceptual processes which underline the use of figurative language can be seen as one of the major common points between phonic and

signed systems of communication. Thus, figurative meanings are pervasive not only in phonic languages, but in signed ones as well. Naturally, there are differences, too: in the case of phonic languages, the figurative meanings usually appear in entire expressions; in the case of signed languages, by contrast, only certain parts of signs (such as, e.g., the shape of the hand) can rely on extended meanings.

In Chapter 8, Łukasz Matusz concentrates on animal metaphors (zoosemes) and their usage in insulting. The author focuses, among others, on the level of universality of insulting constructions that employ various animal metaphors. In other words, Matusz addresses the question to what extent different categories of animals used dysphemistically (i.e., as insults) are cross-linguistically and cross-culturally universal and to what extent they are language- and culture-dependent. The results of the study indicate that there are indeed some visible tendencies present in many languages. Thus, for example, the canine, bovidae, as well as suidae metaphors (i.e., centered around *dog*, *cow*, and *pig*, respectively) show a high degree of universality, as all of them are widely used as insults in many languages. Naturally, cases of cross-cultural peculiarities, that is, instances of the lack of consistency in the usage of dysphemistic zoosemes across languages, also appear, numerous examples of which can be found in the chapter under discussion. The author underlines that animal metaphors, particularly those connected with mammals, display a strong tendency toward semantic pejoration, that is, they are often used as insults with reference to humans. In addition, Matusz makes a tentative conclusion that dysphemistic zoosemes may well constitute the majority of human-related animal metaphors.

The chapter by Monika Zięba-Plebankiewicz discusses the influence of language on the expression of impoliteness in computer-mediated communication (CMC). The author provides an explanation of the way this relatively new form of communication works and compares it with face-to-face conversation, providing advantages and disadvantages of both of these forms of exchanging ideas. Zięba-Plebankiewicz also offers an extensive discussion of the notion of impoliteness by listing Culpeper's (2005) impoliteness strategies, such as bald on-record impoliteness, positive/negative impoliteness, off-record impoliteness, withhold politeness, or mock politeness. In her study, Zięba-Plebankiewicz concentrates on the asynchronous mode of CMC, the discussion board in particular, as she analyzes posts following chosen Polish and English online articles in terms of Culpeper's impoliteness strategies. The results of the analysis show that Polish users apply much more impolite expressions than the English ones. The prevailing strategy in Polish discussion boards is the one of using taboo words and calling names, while in the English ones, it is the one of mock politeness, together with emphasizing one's relative power by condescending, scorning, or ridiculing. The author also analyzes the results with reference to the metaphor

DISRESPECT IS CLOSENESS, as she argues that impoliteness shortens the distance between the interlocutors.

5. Conclusion

To sum up our introductory remarks, it is worth pointing out that the topics of the chapters included in this monograph represent a wide range of problems related to figurativeness, viewed from the cross-linguistic perspective. First of all, the studies into language structures and vocabulary, various types of discourse, and different communicative situations reveal that figurative thought and language are present in all those contexts. Second, as the authors of the chapters show, metaphors and metonymies constitute important tools that facilitate understanding of complex or abstract notions, description of reality, and communication between people. Definitely, the traditional view of figurative language as a purely ornamental device, typical mostly of literary texts, cannot be held in the light of the observations and studies presented in our book. Finally, we would like to thank all the contributors to this work for sharing their individual approach to the selected aspects of figurativeness in the contrastive perspective. We hope that this volume will be a source of inspiration to anyone interested in the contemporary linguistic discussion on figurative thought and language.

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