LANGUAGE IN DIFFERENT CONTEXTS

TURINYS

I. Žodis ir kontekstas / The Word in the Context

MULTIMODAL REPRESENTATION OF FIGURATIVE THOUGHT

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ABSTRACT

Cognitive Stylistics is part and parcel of Cognitive Linguistics, exploring figurative language and figurative meaning construction in discourse, multimodal discourse included. Cognitive Stylistics views stylistic patterns (metaphor, pun, allusion, personification etc.) not only as patterns of language but first and foremost as patterns of thought. In the cognitive stylistic framework, stylistic pattern forms a structure of thought, a cognitive inference tool, applicable in novel figurative thought instantiations.

The key traits of multimodal discourse need to be viewed from the cognitive perspective: multimodal discourse applies stylistic techniques from more than one semiotic mode of expression; the verbal works together with the non-verbal in construction of new meaning in figurative conceptualisations, revealing patterns of thought that may be manifest in different semiotic representations.

Multimodal representation not only reveals how language functions; it also features development and sustainability of figurative thought both visually and verbally and discloses creation of new meaning in metaphorical and metonymic conceptualisations.

Key-words: *cognitive stylistics, stylistic pattern, multimodal discourse, semiotic mode.*

INTRODUCTION

My approach to expression of figurative thought in discourse is cognitive stylistic. As an integral part of cognitive linguistics, cognitive stylistics explores figurative meaning construction, focusing on ways of stylistic instantiation of figurative thought in verbal and visual discourse.

A cognitive stylistic approach is based on the view that:
- cognitive stylistics is a part of cognitive linguistics that focuses on stylistic features of figurative thought and language, and patterns of their expression;
- figurative language is a characteristic of the human mind (Gibbs, [1994] 1999); hence, figurative language reflects figurative thought;
- metaphor and other stylistic patterns first and foremost occur in thought, not in language.

121

Thus, cognitive stylistics researches stylistic features of figurative language and thought, and modes of their representation.

1. MULTIMODAL STYLISTICS

The stylistic aspects of multimodality have been explored for several decades. Research reveals that it is a vast area of study that has marked several paths of development. Nørgaard believes that multimodal stylistics has moved along two lines: 1) a cognitive approach, focusing on the cognitive impact of multimodal literature (e.g., page layout, typography, semiotics of paper), and 2) a social semiotic approach, following the tenet that common semiotic principles operate in and across different modes (2014, 471). I agree with Gibbs that "no single theory may be capable of explaining *all*[28] aspects of the complex phenomena that are metaphorical language and thought" (2013, 32). Indeed, studies on multimodality also include extensive research on a number of other multimodal media that regularly resort to stylistic use, e.g., illustrations, cartoons, advertisements, photographs, films, gestures, and many others. General theoretical issues need to be addressed which help to understand multimodality irrespective of the empirical material the research is based on. One of these is comprehension and identification of stylistic patterns in multimodal representation. A fruitful approach has been suggested by Forceville, who holds that in multimodal metaphor target, source, and / or mappable features are represented or suggested by at least two different sign systems or modes of perception (2008, 463). This is applicable to other stylistic patterns, too.

Another important notion that has not received due attention is multimodal discourse and its defining features. I would argue that multimodal discourse applies stylistic techniques from more than one semiotic mode of expression. The verbal works together with the non-verbal in construction of new meaning in figurative conceptualisations, revealing patterns of thought that are manifest in different semiotic representations (Naciscione, 2010, 253).

To illustrate, some examples of figurative use in multimodal discourse follow, starting with the announcement of a royal birth.

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[28] Italicised by Gibbs.

122

Figure 1. *Metro, 22 July, 2013.*

Figure 2. *The Daily Mail 23 July, 2013.*

Oh boy![29] functions in a figurative sense. It is a phraseological unit (PU) that in this context is used to express excitement. The direct meaning of the word is present as Kate has given birth to a baby boy, a prince and a precious heir (Fig. 1).

This visual representation is the simplest case of a visual pun while the second cover page (Fig. 2) is more interesting linguistically due to replacement of the name *Prince Charles* by the use of the pronoun *one*, which is royalese[30], and hence formal and socio-linguistically marked. The clash of register (cf. *grandpa* is colloquial) produces an effect of irony, implicitly backed by the reader's assumed knowledge of Prince Charles' past cases of use of *one* in public, which caused satirical comments by the British press, especially the tabloids.

Visual representation may not be supported by the verbal (Fig. 3). The following is a case of visual allusion with no verbal clue to guide the observer[31].

Standing in front of this installation, the observer perceives its figurative meaning, as "all perceiving is also thinking", argues Arnheim ([1954] 1974, 5). He sees vision as active exploration. The human mind perceives and interprets the image with all its conscious and unconscious powers (op. cit., 461). Thus, vision is not passive; it is

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[29] The royal baby is called Prince George Alexander Louis, one day to become King George VII if he is lucky in the line of succession.

[30] Today, use of royalese is either for ironic or jocular effect. Margaret Thatcher pronounced the immortal words "We have become a grandmother" in 1989 upon the birth of her first grandchild.

[31] The visual may communicate without words. For implicit messages in visual representation, see Naciscione (2010, 188–189).

Figure 3. Jānis Piķis. *The Gate of Honour*

a powerful sense. The observer is attracted by the shape of the fir tree marked by green neon lights; it evokes thoughts and associations. The outline stands metonymically for a fir tree that is no longer there; it has been sawn down. The idea is to promote respect for the environment and a mindful, caring, forest-friendly attitude to nature.

The author designed this outdoor art installation (2011) as a tribute to all past, present, and future Christmas trees. To fully understand this case of visual allusion, we need extra-linguistic, social knowledge. This factual information is available only on the other side at the foot of the installation, including its name: *The Gate of Honour*. This artwork is part of a whole group of creative Christmas trees that have been displayed in Riga during the Christmas period for some years.

The visual representation *Putin and Crimea* (Fig. 4) is an illustration of Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014. It features a Russian tank (a metonym for Russian troops) with Putin as the mastermind and executor of the annexation. The referendum

Figure 4. *Jimmy Margulies. Putin and Crimea. 10 March, 2014.*

124

carried out in Crimea in 2014 is a perfect example of fake democracy with voting carried out at gunpoint, or rather at tankpoint. The text "All those in favour joining Russia, raise their hands…", meaning "vote for", forms a visual pun because the man standing in front of the tank has raised his hands as a sign of surrender. The actual visual information is persuasive: "Hands up!". We are led to infer that the Crimean man is a metonym for the people of Crimea.

Usually a pun involves a play on two meanings – direct and figurative – of a word or a PU. This visual representation is a rare type of pun when two figurative meanings are at play: *to raise one's hand/hands* – to agree, be in favour of, and *to raise one's hands* (pl.) – to surrender.

Multimodal discourse reveals the importance of visual literacy as a cognitive skill. Goodman comes to the conclusion that "creative multimodality reveals how language functions" (2006, 244). I would argue that, importantly, multimodal discourse also reveals how thought functions; hence, the relevance of perception, comprehension and interpretation of the stylistic, political, and cultural message of the visual and the verbal.

2. MULTIMODAL DISCOURSE: CASE STUDIES

Theoretical approaches draw on case studies of figurative multimodal representation from different sources and languages, featuring creation of new meaning in instantial metaphorical and metonymic conceptualisations.

For instance, the cover of *The Economist* (1-7.02.2014, the week preceding the Olympic Games in Sochi) features a striking multimodal representation of Putin as a winning figure skater (Fig. 5). The impression of a winner is enhanced by the title "The Triumph of Vladimir Putin". We see red roses strewn on the ice as a sign of appreciation of his performance. His desire to look great is also portrayed by use of photomontage, accentuated by the classic profile of the conqueror's head. Perceptual awareness prompts us that the impression of Putin's tall figure has been achieved by the technique of a composite photograph, realised by image-editing software[32]. Multimodal representations apply techniques from several semiotic modes of expression.

Multimodal discourse frequently conveys implicit messages that are not directly expressed in text. Visually Putin looks the perfect image of a winner, representing Russia, with the colours of the Russian flag appearing symbolically[33] in his belt. The true situation is revealed by his skating partner with the metonymic inscription *Russia* on her back: she has slipped on the ice and is falling through it. The actual failure is obvious. The whole picture is based on visual allusion to the metaphorical PU *to skate on thin ice*: although the PU is verbally absent, it is visually and semantically present.

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[32] Interestingly, Putin's new modified image conveys a true personal feature: he is left-handed, as is seen in the fact that his left hand is raised in the gesture of winner.

[33] When analysing symbolism in the conceptual metaphor framework, Forceville views symbol as a special kind of metonym (2013, 252).
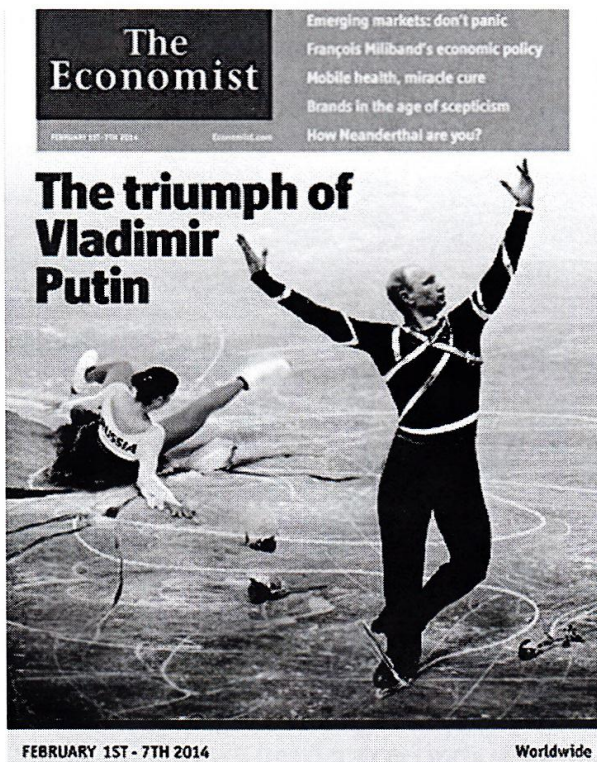
Figure 5. *The Economist*, 1-7 Feb., 2014

The figurative thought of failure has been sustained in the cover story (p. 7) that discloses Russia's weakness with its corrupt and crumbling state-directed economy. In the verbal analysis, Putin emerges as a skater with feet of clay[34] (as a sub-headline puts it), which makes skating impossible, let alone a skater's triumph on ice. The sub-headline establishes a semantic and stylistic link with the visual representation of figurative thought on the cover page. Thus, a multimodal representation may sustain a figurative thought[35]. I agree with Bormanis that "multimodality can also be viewed as extended language in use" (2010, 75).

Multimodal discourse is a complex form of visual creativity where

Figure 6. *Sestdiena, 21-27 March, 2014.*

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[34] *Feet of clay* is a metaphorical PU, based on an allusion to the Bible, namely, to the dream of the King of Babylon, recounted in *The Book of Daniel*. The PU is used to refer to a serious weakness, especially in people or countries of prominence.

[35] For more on sustainable development of figurative thought, see Naciscione (2014).

the verbal may be applied as only one mode of expression of figurative thought. In multimodal representation, discourse acquires a new quality, portraying a whole situation or process, and reflecting aims and interpreting values. Figure 6 presents a multimodal record of the results of Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014. It is a visual figurative account of facts, events and experiences.

The focus of the picture is the Brown Bear, the national symbol of Russia[36], who has turned into a dangerous and ferocious force. The two meanings of "hungry" are apparent: the Bear is not only physically hungry as is stated verbally; he is also metaphorically hungry for more power and new territory; each territory is presented in a separate beehive. Some basic geo-political knowledge of the situation in Russia and Ukraine in 2014 would instantaneously associate the Bear with Vladimir Putin.

The Bear has seized Crimea, a sweet and valuable prize. Salivating with insatiable lust for more, will his voracious appetite take in neighbouring Ukraine (and the frightened bees depicting its people)? What, then, of Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania and Poland (as the colours of their flags symbolically indicate on their beehives): will the Bear cross the line (the fence metonymically standing for the border) with NATO on it? The observer notes that the fence is no longer as stable as it once was, with a cross instead of the letter "T" and the last letter "O" replaced by a hole.

Putin's true essence is also underscored by his huge size and the cap the Bear is wearing. It is a military-style *ushanka* of the Soviet Army with a red five-pointed star set on the front as a symbol of Communism. The ear flaps of the cap have been tied on top in the shape of the imperial crown worn by the Russian tsars until 1917, denoting his desire to restore the tsardom of the Soviet Union with himself as the great ruler.

The meaning of a multimodal representation emerges at the interface of the figurative and the literal that cannot be viewed separately. Bormanis introduces the notion of multimodal meaning that is construed by holistic processing of multimodal contents. This calls for a holistic approach to the semantic and stylistic complexity of multimodal discourse (Борман, 2012, 323-331). Research on multimodal meaning will continue to seek out ways in which people conceptualise the world and their experiences, conveyed multimodally by both linguistic and non-linguistic means.

CONCLUSIONS

Multimodal representations are frequently loaded with meaning. Each particular element contributes to the general semantic and stylistic impact, all constituting multimodal meaning. Semantic and stylistic saturation discloses the semantic and stylistic capaciousness of multimodality, the ability to present thought concisely in a small space by use of significant visual details alluding to abstract notions, experi-

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[36] The bear as part of Russian culture is the national symbol and the logo of Russia's ruling party "United Russia". At the same time the bear is commonly known and seen as a fearsome predator.

ences, events and facts. The figurative thought conveyed by multimodal representation enables us to observe, draw inferences, and reason.

Multimodal discourse may incorporate verbal and visual use of various stylistic patterns, e.g., metaphor, metonymy, pun, allusion, as well as other semiotic modes, for instance, use of symbol. They all create a network of multiple figurative strands that forms a coherent and cohesive account, constituting a mode of representation of figurative thought. Multimodality reveals how thought functions. A cognitive perspective provides further opportunities to explore creative instantiations of figurative thought in multimodal discourse.

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